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### Impact of a Bullying Prevention Program at a Southern Middle School

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IMPACT OF A BULLYING PREVENTION PROGRAM AT A SOUTHERN MIDDLE  
SCHOOL

By  
Shannon Elizabeth Fischer

A Dissertation Submitted to the  
Gardner-Webb University School of Education  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Doctor of Education

Gardner-Webb University  
2019

## Approval Page

This dissertation was submitted by Shannon Elizabeth Fischer under the direction of the persons listed below. It was submitted to the Gardner-Webb University School of Education and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Gardner-Webb University.

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## **Dedication**

To all children . . .

“Educating the mind without educating the heart is no education at all.”

Aristotle

To all women . . .

“There is no limit to what we as women can accomplish.”

Michelle Obama

To my daughter . . .

Be brave. Be powerful. But above all else, be yourself.

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank those who have lovingly supported me throughout the process of completing my doctoral work and dissertation. It would be too difficult to name every individual who has helped me on this journey. Those who have helped me along the way know who they are and know that I will be forever grateful. I would like to give special thanks to my supportive husband Andrew who has always believed in me and encouraged me to be the best version of myself. To my in-laws, my parents, Mark, and Dale, I could not have done this without your endless support. And to my energetic and fearless daughter Corrine, thank you for showing me what true joy looks like. You are my inspiration.

## **Abstract**

IMPACT OF A BULLYING PREVENTION PROGRAM AT A SOUTHERN MIDDLE SCHOOL. Fischer, Shannon Elizabeth, 2019: Dissertation, Gardner-Webb University.

The Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (OBPP) was purchased by a southern school district to combat bullying and raise perceptions of school climate. The purpose of this quantitative study was to determine the effectiveness of the OBPP in combatting bullying in a school for the 2015-2016 school year. Bullying data were compiled and compared using the OBQ from 2012, 2013, and 2014 to create the Middle School Bullying Survey administered in the fall of 2015 (presurvey) and the spring of 2016 (postsurvey) to reassess school climate, prevalence of bullying, and effectiveness of the OBPP. For Research Question 1, using chi-square tests, results showed no statistically significant associations in perceptions of students regarding being bullied at school before and after the implementation of the bullying prevention program. For Research Question 2, using descriptive statistics, results showed that both sets of participants reported bullying incidents to their parent/guardian more often. For Research Question 3, using chi-square tests, results showed no statistically significant differences between perceptions of girls and boys before and after the implementation of the bullying prevention program. For Research Question 4, using descriptive statistics, results showed that bullying happened more often at the gym, in the hallway, and during recess. For Research Question 5, using chi-square tests, results showed no statistically significant associations in perceptions of eighth-grade students and teachers on the social and physical environments from the end of 2015 to the end of 2016, as determined by the South Carolina Department of Education Annual Report Card Summary Evaluation Results.

*Keywords:* bullying prevention program, bullying, school climate, education,  
southern schools

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

### Background of the Study

According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES, 2015), one of every four students ages 12 through 18 reported being bullied during the 2013 school year. Bullying infringes on basic human rights; Olweus (1993) stated, “Every individual should have the right to be spared oppression and repeated, intentional humiliation, in school as in society at large” (p. 48). Schools are institutions designed to educate students. Teacher instruction and student learning can only occur in an environment that is safe for both staff and students alike. School climate “refers to the quality and character of school life. It is based on patterns of school life experiences and reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching, learning and leadership practices, and organizational structures” (National School Climate Center, n.d., p. 5).

The goal of the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (OBPP) and bullying prevention programs was to reduce bullying behavior to create a safe environment advantageous to student learning. Bullying prevention programs were generally effective, with modest impact in decreasing bullying and victimization (Bauman & Yoon, 2014). The OBPP was implemented district wide during the 2011-2012 school year. This researcher focused on a chosen middle school within that school district.

Table 1

#### *Survey Used per School Year*

	School Year	Survey Instrument Used
Year 1	2011-2012	Olweus Bullying Questionnaire (OBQ)
Year 2	2012-2013	Olweus Bullying Questionnaire (OBQ)
Year 3	2013-2014	Olweus Bullying Questionnaire (OBQ)
Year 4	2014-2015	
Year 5	2015-2016	Middle School Bullying Survey

After school year 2013-2014, the school district no longer funded the yearly purchase of the Olweus Bullying Questionnaire (OBQ) and results. The OBPP was still utilized at the middle school, so a new method of surveying students was deemed necessary and was developed, based on the OBQ, and administered during the 2015-2016 school year.

The Olweus Bullying Team oversaw weekly school-wide lesson plans from 2011 to 2014. For the 2014-2015 school year, the school's in-school suspension (ISS) teacher oversaw school-wide lesson plans. During the 2015-2016 school year, the middle school guidance team was responsible for school-wide weekly lesson plans.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Eriksen, Nielsen, and Simonsen (2014) defined bullying as an act of committing intentional and repeated physical and/or emotional aggression toward another person or group of individuals. These acts of bullying include cases of humiliation, teasing, name-calling, threatening, harassment, taunting, social isolation, and gossiping (Englehart, 2014; Eriksen et al., 2014). Bullying in school has been a pressing issue that has caused growing concerns because of the various negative effects it has on victims, perpetrators, and people surrounding them (Eriksen et al., 2014).

This phenomenon is a problem for students, teachers, parents, and administrators because of the different side effects it can have on the people affected by the situation (Bauman & Yoon, 2014). Specifically, students who are bullied and students who bully suffer many negative effects of bullying. Some negative effects to students for being involved in bullying include violent behavior, depression, poor self-esteem, and poor academic performance (Englehart, 2014; Hymel, McClure, Miller, Shumka, & Trach,

2015). Therefore, prevention of bullying has been a common topic of discussion in different public and private agencies concerned about the ill effects of bullying on children.

Researchers have emphasized the persistence of bullying in middle school with statistics showing that at least 70% of students have claimed to have known someone who has been bullied (Hymel et al., 2015; Lester, Cross, Dooley, & Shaw, 2013). With the high occurrence of bullying in school, leaders of all 50 states in the United States have enacted policies, laws, or both to combat bullying and to protect children (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2017). Bullying influences a substantial number of students in America. The impact of the problem was that effective bullying prevention programs might reduce physical and emotional violence and harassment in schools if proven effective (National School Climate Center, n.d.; Olweus, 1993; U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2017). If the problem was not addressed and bullying was not successfully prevented, students who engaged in bullying behavior and their victims would continue to experience negative consequences (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2018).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this quantitative study was to determine the effectiveness of the OBPP in combatting bullying in a middle school for the 2015-2016 school year. The goals of the OBPP were to reduce existing bullying problems among students, prevent the development of new bullying problems, and achieve better peer relations at school (Olweus & Limber, 2007, p. 1).

## **Research Questions**

The research questions of the study were aligned to address the purpose of the study (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Therefore, the research questions of the study were the following:

1. To what extent is there an association in the perceptions of students regarding being bullied at school before and after the implementation of the bullying prevention program?
2. To what extent did students who indicated that they were bullied report incidents to others before and after the implementation of the bullying prevention program?
3. To what extent is there a difference between the perceptions of girls and boys before and after the implementation of the bullying prevention program?
4. To what extent is there an association in the locations of bullying reported before and after the implementation of the bullying prevention program?
5. To what extent is there an association in the perceptions of eighth-grade students and teachers on the social and physical environments from the end of 2015 to the end of 2016 as determined by the South Carolina Department of Education Annual Report Card Summary Evaluation Results?

## **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework through which this study was viewed was Bandura's (1989) social cognitive theory. This theory was widely used to explain factors relating to bullying and in understanding bullying behavior. Through social cognitive theory, Bandura proposed that cognition played a role in determining human behavior. There is

continuous interaction between the social environment, internal stimuli, and behavior (Swearer, Wang, Berry, & Myers, 2014). The social environment involves witnessing the behaviors of others, while internal stimulus refers to one's own cognitions and feelings (Bandura, 1989; Swearer et al., 2014). Consequently, any attempt to understand an individual's behavior must involve an analysis of all three aspects described in social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1989; Swearer et al., 2014).

Researchers have used social cognitive theory to explain bullying behaviors. Through this theory, Swearer et al. (2014) asserted that bullies learned violent behaviors through observational learning and reinforcement. Research has shown that children exposed to violence, such as in the home or in dangerous neighborhoods, are more likely to bully.

Even though researchers strongly linked the observation of bullying to bullying behavior, the role of cognition must also be considered. Children opposed to bullying are less likely to become bullies, even after having observed bullying or violent behaviors (Swearer et al., 2014; Thornberg, Pozzoli, Gini, & Jungert, 2015). Consequently, children who are most likely to engage in bullying have been exposed to bullying and other aggressive behaviors, have a pro-bullying attitude, interact with others who indicate that bullying is acceptable, and overtly or covertly reinforce bullying behaviors (Swearer et al., 2014).

Leaders of bullying prevention programs can consider social cognitive theory and its rationale for bullying behavior. They can utilize cognitive-behavioral components to help children recognize the faulty logic that leads to bullying behavior. This logic can include beliefs or attributions about the causes of an event that influence responses, self-

blame, or perceptions of hostile intent during the event (Bauman & Yoon, 2014). For bullying programs to be effective, program developers, teachers, and school administrators must address the underlying factors that lead to bullying behaviors in children.

### **Limitations**

There were several limitations and delimitations of this study that must be addressed. The first limitation was that data for this study were secondary data. These data were collected using the OBQ, which did not have psychometric data to indicate its validity or reliability. This questionnaire was designed to measure the effectiveness of the OBPP; therefore, data gathered from this study could not necessarily be used to compare the effectiveness of this bullying program to another bullying program.

Another limitation of this study was the period in which this program was implemented. The program was being evaluated based on an implementation within 1 school year. Therefore, the results were dependent on conditions that occurred within that span of time.

Another limitation to the study was the possible researcher bias because of being a counselor at the school during the time the data were collected. Therefore, this researcher ensured that sources of bias were acknowledged by listing past experiences, preferences, and opinions related to the topic of the study before conducting data collection. By listing these sources of bias, this researcher avoided having these biases influence findings of the study.

### **Delimitations**

This study was delimited to a specific bullying program and timeframe: the OBPP

for the 2015-2016 school year at a southern middle school in northwestern South Carolina. Although leaders implemented many bullying prevention programs throughout the United States, this researcher focused on the OBPP. This delimitation was considered when making inferences about the effectiveness of this program, as schools with different grade levels which served different demographics of students could achieve different results.

### **Deficiencies in the Literature**

The specific problem of this study was that the efficacy of one anti-bullying program (e.g., OBPP) in a middle school located in the state of South Carolina remained unknown. Because of the considerable number of disparate anti-bullying programs in the United States (Lee, Kim, & Kim, 2015), conducting studies on specific programs to reveal the efficacy was necessary. Despite OBPP's popularity, few studies have been conducted on the efficacy of the program on a middle school in the state of South Carolina. A gap in the literature existed in the use of the OBPP in the southern hemisphere of the United States. Without a proper evaluation of the program, school leaders and policy makers may be unable to determine whether their purchase of the OBPP serves their school's needs to reduce bullying. Therefore, studies should be conducted on specific anti-bullying programs, as the efficacy of one such program on a given geographical location or educational context (such as positive- or negative-inclined school culture; high- or low-performing schools; elementary, middle, or high schools, among others) may help school leaders from similar locations or contexts choose among the many anti-bullying program options they have available (see Gregory, 2016).



## **Audience**

The intended audience for this study was stakeholders of bullying prevention programs. The specific stakeholders included (a) students, (b) parents, (c) teachers, (d) school administrators, and (e) government legislators. The students, who could be victims or perpetrators of bullying, could be an audience of this study because of the involvement in the phenomenon of interest, which was bullying in schools. From the study, victims and perpetrators of bullying could learn about the importance of bullying prevention programs for all parties involved. Moreover, the parents of students could be a part of the intended audience for the study because of the importance of the role of parents in the issue of bullying. Parents could learn from the findings of this study to gain more information about the role of preventive programs in improving overall school climate and frequency of bullying reports. Teachers and school administrators were prominent members of the intended audience of this study because they implemented the different preventive programs for bullying. Therefore, teachers and school administrators were among the first individuals who could provide experience-based opinions about the effectiveness of the programs. Finally, legislators were also prominent members of the intended audience of this study because of the power to develop and modify laws that might have a significant impact on the issues related to bullying, especially in school. Therefore, based on the findings of the study, legislators might decide to modify or create a law to make it more effective and aligned with student needs and other stakeholders of the issue.

## **Research Design**

The research design for this study was a quantitative pretest/posttest study, which

focused on establishing similarities and differences of specific factors for one group before and after an intervention or the introduction of an experimental factor (see Edmonds & Kennedy, 2016). An experimental design was used to “test the impact of a treatment (or an intervention) on an outcome, controlling for all other factors that might influence that outcome” (Creswell, 2014, p. 156). The intervention considered was the OBPP. In this design, this researcher investigated the differences between pretest and posttest variables (see Edmonds & Kennedy, 2016). This research design was appropriate for this study because the research questions were focused on identifying the differences in perceived school climate and instances of bullying before and after the intervention. In this manner, this researcher determined the effectiveness of the program, which was determined through the improvement in the school climate and a decrease in the prevalence of bullying.

### **Definition of Terms**

**Bullying.** Bullying refers to a type of aggression in which the perpetrator intentionally and repeatedly inflicts harm on a target with lesser power (Bauman & Yoon, 2014).

**Bullying prevention programs.** Bullying prevention programs are programs implemented in schools to prevent and intervene in bullying behavior. These programs often include parent meetings, teacher training, specific discipline practices, and peer activities (Bauman & Yoon, 2014).

**OBPP.** The OBPP was created to diminish bullying in schools and offer procedures to assist students and teachers to work together to recognize bullying, respond to bullying situations, and prevent further bullying (Olweus & Limber, 2007).

**School climate.** School climate refers to the perceptions of teachers and students about social and physical environments of school life. The National School Climate Center (n.d.) stated, “It is based on patterns of school life experiences and reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching, learning and leadership practices, and organizational structures” (p. 5).

**South Carolina Department of Education Annual Report Card.** The South Carolina Department of Education Annual Report Card is a grading system used to reflect the current performance of a school, which is the measure of school climate and safety needs (Education Commission of the States, 2013).

### **Summary**

In this study, data from the OBQ were evaluated to determine the effectiveness of the OBPP in combatting bullying in a middle school. Program effectiveness was determined by improvement in the school climate and a decrease in the prevalence of bullying. In this chapter, a background of school bullying was provided, along with an explanation of the study problem and purpose. Additionally, this chapter contained information about the research questions guiding this study, associated hypotheses, and the theoretical underpinnings for the study.

Chapter 2 includes a review of the literature relating to bullying and bullying prevention as well as an in-depth discussion of social cognitive theory. Chapter 3 details the methodology of the study. Chapter 4 includes the results of the study, and Chapter 5 concludes and summarizes the findings of the study.

## **Chapter 2: Review of Literature**

### **Introduction**

The general problem of this study was the continuing occurrence of bullying in schools across the United States, despite the existence of numerous intervention programs and policies designed to combat this specific issue (Lee et al., 2015; Yeager, Fong, Lee, & Espelage, 2015). Bullying is currently seen as a public health problem that adversely impacts the life outcomes associated with both victims and perpetrators of bullying (Bosworth & Judkins, 2014; Lee et al., 2015). Bullying is also a global problem; researchers have estimated that 33% of children are involved in bullying, and 20% are involved in cyberbullying (Ellis, Volk, Gonzalez, & Embry, 2016; Zych, Ortega-Ruiz, & Del Rey, 2015). With that in mind, school leaders and policy makers have utilized anti-bullying interventions to eliminate bullying from schools to protect their students from negative effects of bullying to maximize their chances for academic achievement and success in life. Some examples of such programs include the OBPP, Open Circle, and Steps to Respect: A Bullying Prevention Program; however, school leaders and policy makers may find it difficult to discern the right choice for their schools. Each program is distinct from the others, which adds complexity to the process of evaluating efficacy in terms of outcomes (Lee et al., 2015).

The specific problem of this study was that the efficacy of one anti-bullying program (the OBPP) in a middle school located in the state of South Carolina remained unknown. Due to the considerable number of disparate anti-bullying programs in the United States (Lee et al., 2015), researchers should conduct studies on specific programs to reveal the efficacy. Despite the popularity of the OBPP in recent years, few studies

have been conducted on the efficacy of the program on a middle school in the state of South Carolina. A gap in the literature existed in the use of the OBPP in the southern hemisphere of the United States. Without a proper evaluation of the program, school leaders and policy makers might not determine whether their purchases of the OBPP served their school's needs to reduce bullying.

The goal of this study was to evaluate the efficacy of the OBPP on a middle school located in South Carolina, which was purchased by school leaders to reduce the current rates of bullying in their school, curtail new instances of bullying, and foster a positive culture within the school (see Olweus & Limber, 2007). The gap needed to be filled because school leaders in that geographical location needed to evaluate the different anti-bullying programs available to them to determine what worked best for their needs. Due to the diversity of such programs, researchers must treat each as distinct from one another, which may require diverse ways of evaluation (Lee et al., 2015). By addressing this gap in the literature, a more complete understanding occurred regarding the efficacy of the OBPP in middle schools in the southern United States. Moreover, insights were developed regarding how to evaluate the effects of the OBPP on a school reliably.

This chapter is divided into nine sections, namely background to the problem, conceptual framework, bullying and cyberbullying, anti-bullying programs in the United States, the OBPP, the results obtained by the OBPP in the United States, and finally a summary of the chapter as well as a transition to the next chapter.

### **Background to the Problem**

A substantial number of students in America are affected by bullying. According to NCES (2015) statistics, 25% of students aged 12 to 18 years reported being bullied

regularly during the 2012-2013 school year. Bullying has occurred at least once a month in 37% of all public schools, with up to 28% of middle and high school students reporting being victims of bullying (Gray & Lewis, 2015; Robers, Kemp, & Truman, 2013).

Scholars have estimated these numbers from students have faced negative physical, mental, and social outcomes that can hinder their academic success and, subsequently, their futures (Álvarez-García, García, & Núñez, 2015). Scholars have agreed about the link between bullying and negative psychological outcomes, such as depression, lack of emotional regulation, and trauma (Bosworth & Judkins, 2014; Palladino, Nocentini, & Menesini, 2015; Vaillancourt, Hymel, & McDougall, 2013; Waseem et al., 2014; Wolke & Lereya, 2015). Researchers have viewed the effects of bullying on victims as lasting a long time, even lasting a lifetime for some if mental health professionals have not specifically addressed the issues (Vaillancourt et al., 2013).

The noted effects of bullying on the mental health of individuals present further difficulties due to the well-established link between the psychological trauma incurred by bullying and the outcomes associated with trauma for students (Waseem et al., 2014; Wolke & Lereya, 2015). Scholars have indicated that bullying victims have not only faced the experience of being bullied over a limited amount of time (i.e., until they are no longer in proximity to their bully), but have also undergone suffering that goes beyond just the physical due to the trauma they experience (Sigurdson, Undheim, Wallander, Lydersen, & Sund, 2015; Vaillancourt et al., 2013).

The existence of trauma in these individuals allows the adverse effects of bullying to remain across a long time and exposes them to the negative life outcomes associated with trauma, especially among adolescents (Sigurdson et al., 2015; Vaillancourt et al.,

2013; Wolke & Lereya, 2015). Some examples of such outcomes include poor school adjustment, sleep difficulties, anxiety, depression, posttraumatic stress disorder, substance addiction, or abuse as well as a higher likelihood of violence and crime (Benbenishty, Astor, Roziner, & Wrabel, 2016; CDC, 2018; Espelage, Low, & Jimerson, 2014; Takizawa, Maughan, & Arseneault, 2014; Waseem et al., 2014). The negative life outcomes faced by such students diminish their chances of being meaningful contributors to society. They are exposed to a reliance on government institutions, such as the justice system, social services, or mental health services, which then present further risks to their development (Chaplo, Kerig, Bennett, & Modrowski, 2015; Ford, Grasso, Hawke, & Chapman, 2013; Fox, Perez, Cass, Baglivio, & Epps, 2015; Underwood & Washington, 2016).

In addition to the increased risks for negative outcomes incurred by victims of bullying, perpetrators face similar effects that adversely influence their psychosocial outcomes and abilities to regulate their emotions and behaviors (Bosworth & Judkins, 2014; CDC, 2018; Cornell, Shukla, & Konold, 2015). Many bullies undergo the same negative outcomes associated with bullying victims, such as antisocial personality disorders, behavioral problems, and other externalizing symptoms (Copeland, Wolke, Angold, & Costello, 2013; Sigurdson et al., 2015). Researchers have theorized the reasons behind the similarity of outcomes between victims and perpetrators of bullying as stemming from the increased risk of bullying victims to become bullies themselves, especially among male students (Cornell et al., 2015; Lam, Law, Chan, Zhang, & Wong, 2017).

Victims of bullying may develop the sense that bullying is simply a part of life

that they themselves must engage in once they meet people weaker than them and so continue the vicious circle of bullying, however inadvertently. The exact reasons for bullying victims becoming bullies are yet to be understood completely; however, bullying must be eradicated in schools because scholars have shown that everyone involved in bullying incurs negative outcomes (Copeland et al., 2013; Lam et al., 2017; Sigurdson et al., 2015). This means that by working toward the eradication of bullying, school leaders, teachers, and policy makers are not only protecting the rights of bullying victims and securing their future but also are doing so for the bullies. They can remove an option they may erroneously view as necessary without considering how it negatively impacts the effects on their victims as well as on their own lives.

For instance, bullies may engage in aggression against weaker peers because they mistakenly think it is the best way to prove their superiority (Slonje, Smith, & Frisén, 2013). If school leaders teach potential bullies that bullying is not an acceptable way of proving one's superiority, students may engage in more productive behaviors toward the same goal. This process can allow potential victims the safety and freedom to pursue their own goals in school effectively (Slonje et al., 2013). Therefore, all students in the school will have the best chance of attaining academic success by having a safe environment. Leaders should foster a positive school culture to empower students to achieve their full potential and become meaningful contributors to society in adulthood.

Bullying represents a serious threat not only for victims, perpetrators, or even students in America but also for the future of America. The negative outcomes associated with bullying are numerous for both victims and perpetrators, and these include negative psychosocial outcomes that are difficult to overcome without



professional help, such as trauma, mental health disorders, behavioral problems, and externalizing symptoms (Slonje et al., 2013; Vaillancourt et al., 2013). In turn, scholars have observed these outcomes as increasing the likelihood of those afflicted to negative life outcomes, such as poor school adjustment, depression, posttraumatic stress disorder, substance addiction, and violent or criminal behaviors (Benbenishty et al., 2016; CDC, 2018; Espelage, Low et al., 2014; Harris et al., 2013; Waseem et al., 2014). These outcomes represent an added drain to the resources on the federal and state level; the afflicted individuals are more likely to require assistance from government programs later on in life as well as to be entered into the justice system (Chaplo et al., 2015; Fox et al., 2015; Stimmel, Cruise, Ford, & Weiss, 2014; Underwood & Washington, 2016).

American students represent the future workforce of the United States; therefore, school leaders and policy makers should address issues that adversely impact the academic achievement of students. Addressing issues like bullying can provide U.S. children with the best possible chance to pursue their goals and fulfill their dreams. Students can become meaningful contributors to American society (Fox et al., 2015; Underwood & Washington, 2016).

### **Conceptual Framework**

The concepts of school culture and climate serve as the framework for this study, given the reliance of anti-bullying intervention programs on the importance of school leaders, teachers, and staff in ensuring a safe environment of learning for their students (Bosworth & Judkins, 2014; Clifford, Menon, Condon, Gangi, & Hornung, 2012; Thapa, Cohen, Guffey, & Higgins-D'Alessandro, 2012). Jain, Cohen, Huang, Hanson, and Austin (2015) defined school climate as the physical and social conditions within the

learning environment at a given time. Gruenert and Whitaker (2015) defined school culture as the resulting environment that organically arose through the history of thoughts, actions, and behaviors of past and present individual members who, in turn, influenced the thoughts, actions, and behaviors of present and future individuals in the school.

To relate to cases of bullying, the concepts of school culture and climate can be seen to imply that perpetrators of bullying are not solely at fault for cases of bullying in a given school. Rather, these bullies may be an expression of a specific school culture that prioritizes matters and issues over bullying. In such cases, school leaders may view bullying as less important to address over issues of low standardized test scores, which may embolden perpetrators to commit aggressive acts (Gage, Prykanowski, & Larson, 2014; Leadbeater, Sukhawathanakul, Thompson, & Holfeld, 2015; Shukla, Konold, & Cornell, 2016; Steffgen, Recchia, & Viechtbauer, 2013).

The concepts of school culture and climate are discussed as the lens to study bullying prevention. For the purposes of this study, the term school culture is used exclusively, as many of the conditions in school climate are influenced by school culture and not the other way around. Additionally, school culture is a more entrenched phenomenon because it is difficult to build and maintain, but the benefits of a positive school culture are more reliable and long lasting (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015). To understand the literature reviewed and provide a context for the program evaluation of the OBPP, the concept of school culture is discussed in more detail.

**School culture.** The concept of school culture was developed from organizational culture theory, which originated from the search for why specific

organizations succeeded while others failed, despite being similar in many respects.

Organizational culture theorists explained the difference by postulating that organization leaders developed a culture over time that could influence how specific actors thought, felt, and behaved within the organization (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015). For instance, an organization with a strong culture of customer service may have bonuses for employees who have consistently good customer feedback scores (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015). Such incentives may encourage employees to ensure their customers' satisfaction, as this behavior is rewarded.

These incentives may not always be tangible, as social rewards (e.g., approval and commendations) may also be received from peers and supervisors (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015). Over time, the recurrence and cultivation of certain beliefs and behaviors within the organization should result in a culture that influences how individual employees think and behave, notwithstanding their respective cultures before entering the organization (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015). This process allows individuals of diverse backgrounds to join an organization and still be able to fit in with the organization's purpose.

School culture functions in similar ways to organizational culture, except for one key difference, namely that schools generally are nonprofit organizations. Thus, the culture of schools differs from business organizations because schools are much less concerned about making a profit and more concerned with providing a desired service to the local population (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015). This aspect can result in difficulties for those who evaluate the success of a school, given that evaluating student learning is more difficult compared to measuring the profitability of a business organization (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015).

School culture can profoundly influence how individuals within the organization think and behave. For instance, during the period of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 (2002), most academic institution leaders reported focusing more on their academic requirements to meet the ambitious standards enforced by NCLB on reading and math scores in standardized tests (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015; Hough, 2014). In such school cultures, other aspects of student development may be less valued. Some examples of these aspects include personality development and physical fitness; researchers have claimed both have reduced negative effects among students and may have resulted in higher academic achievement by decreasing stress and anxiety (Felter, Butzer, Olson, Smith, & Khalsa, 2015; Mega, Ronconi, & De Beni, 2014; Sardinha, Marques, Martins, Palmeira, & Minderico, 2014). Researchers have found that noncognitive skills, such as mental resilience or grit, can be more likely to predict future success compared to high scores on standardized tests (Borghans, Golsteyn, Heckman, & Humphries, 2016; Dumfart & Neubauer, 2016; Mega et al., 2014; Reraki, Celik, & Saricam, 2015; Rimfeld, Kovas, Dale, & Plomin, 2016).

To produce students who are well-rounded individuals and not just excellent test takers, school leaders must create and sustain a culture that values the holistic development of their students. That kind of school culture is produced by all members of the school community, including the principals, teachers, students, and even parents of students (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015). Thus, solutions that focus solely on one aspect of school culture may often fail in the long term due to the school culture remaining unchanged.

The conceptualization of school culture was especially useful for this study as it

helped situate the problem in schools as well as solutions. By understanding that a school's culture could only be changed slowly and with the cooperation of all members of the school, problems could be solved by delineating the roles specific actors within the school culture can play, rather than focusing on individual roles and actions; these were subject to the norms inherent in school culture (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015). For example, leaders who develop a school culture that values cutting costs without decreasing standardized test scores may appear good, but this may lead to teachers who are unhappy with their pay, thereby jeopardizing their abilities to do their jobs well (Cornell et al., 2015). This issue can then result in high teacher turnover of exemplary teachers, which can negatively influence academic achievement (Feng & Sass, 2018). By understanding that everyone in the school contributes to a school culture, scholars and policy makers can work together to bring about the specific school cultures they wish to cultivate to ensure the success of their organization.

Regarding the effects of a positive school culture on cases of bullying, several scholars have found evidence for the link between school culture and bullying. For example, researchers have found students from schools with a positive culture are less likely to have faced bullying and other forms of peer victimization (Bosworth & Judkins, 2014; Clifford et al., 2012; Steffgen et al., 2013; Thapa et al., 2012; Wang, Berry, & Swearer, 2013).

**School climate.** School climate involves the influence of the school on the students, as reflected in their social and physical learning conditions and performances (Gruenert, 2017). Moreover, school climate refers to the quality and characteristics of the physical and social environments of an educational institution (Gruenert, 2017). This

concept differs from school cultures, which refers to the shared values and beliefs of members of the educational institution (Gruenert, 2017). The protective effects of a positive school climate against bullying may be explained by the effects that occur on the individual level, that is, on the school members who can do the most to combat bullying. As Gruenert and Whitaker (2015) maintained, all members of the school community have roles to play in creating and maintaining a positive school climate.

For example, a school climate wherein constant teacher support and vigilance against bullying was evident was seen to decrease the likelihood of bullying among a population of elementary students (Lam et al., 2017). This aspect would seem intuitive to most researchers and perhaps even to educated laypersons; however, the ability of teachers to utilize their skills to combat bullying in their classrooms may be compromised if teachers perceive a lack of organizational support for such measures or if they are overstressed and swamped with other tasks that reduce the time or attention they could spend on identifying and combating issues directly related to their teaching, such as bullying (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014).

Teachers want to teach. Across the United States, new teachers graduate every year, despite the numerous challenges that come with being a teacher, such as low pay, high stress, high emotional commitment, being undervalued, and the difficulty of instructing students today (Darling-Hammond, 2017; Hiver, 2015; Maaranen, Pitkäniemi, Stenberg, & Karlsson, 2016). These issues mean that teachers are generally motivated by more than just financial or personal rewards (Long, Souto-Manning, & Vasquez, 2016). Instead, they are often motivated by idealism, and they believe that the teaching profession is an essential part of society and it ensures that U.S. citizens will contribute

meaningfully to their communities (Hiver, 2015; Maaranen et al., 2016). When teachers are tasked with responsibilities they perceive as beyond their roles as teachers, the added duties may lead to teachers struggling in their abilities to perform their actual jobs, one of which includes ensuring a safe learning environment for their students (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014). Therefore, when teachers perceive a school climate as positive, school leaders support teachers and provide them with adequate resources to perform their job effectively, one aspect of which is managing their classroom and learning to identify and curtail bullying. Therefore, a positive school climate can influence one subgroup within the school, namely teachers, who then influence another subgroup, namely students.

Other examples may be made, but these follow the same general path. Generally, a positive school climate empowers all individual members of the school by allowing them the freedom as well as the safety to perform their respective roles effectively (Cornell et al., 2015; Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015; Jain et al., 2015). When school leaders empower teachers and staff, they can curtail negative phenomena, such as bullying, which then removes the psychosocial and academic barriers associated with bullying for their students. When such barriers are removed, students are better able to attain academic success, which then allows them more options on how to become meaningful contributors to society. The achievements of students may also influence the future of their school and its leaders. In the next section, the kinds of bullying today are discussed, namely traditional and cyberbullying, as modern cases may be difficult to identify and address for school leaders, teachers, and staff. Additional guidance may be required on how to address these issues.

## **Bullying and Cyberbullying**

In simple terms, bullying is any act of a person who intentionally takes advantage of a power imbalance, real or perceived, wherein the stronger individual repeatedly commits acts of aggression against a weaker individual over an extended period (Slonje et al., 2013). Traditionally, bullying was conceived as physical aggression. Across the United States, school leaders and policy makers have worked diligently in the past few decades to reduce bullying, resulting in a substantially lower rate of physical bullying today (Chapin, 2016; Corcoran, McGuckin, & Prentice, 2015); however, this work does not mean that leaders have eradicated bullying.

A new form of bullying has arisen from the modern technologies available to students today, such as smartphones, high-speed Internet, and social media. Due to the accessibility of the Internet for students today, most students can spend their leisure time on the Internet and do so regularly (Lenhart, 2015). There are countless positive effects from these technological advancements; however, traditional bullying has also taken on an online form, termed cyberbullying (Chapin, 2016; Corcoran et al., 2015).

Cyberbullying may be the traditional definition of bullying conducted over online spaces (Ybarra, Boyd, Korchmaros, & Oppenheim, 2012); however, several scholars have contended that cyberbullying is a distinct phenomenon due to the difficulty of ascertaining whether cyberbullying acts are repetitious or are due to a power imbalance (Kowalski, Giumetti, Schroeder, & Lattanner, 2014; Slonje et al., 2013). Corcoran et al. (2015) requested that the term cyberbullying be abandoned due to the difficult nature of establishing repetition and power imbalance in online environments, proposing instead the use of the term *cyberaggression*.



The variance in scholarly opinion regarding the definition of cyberbullying leads to a weak consensus (Corcoran et al., 2015; Kowalski et al., 2014; Slonje et al., 2013). It was still unknown how cyberbullying should be defined. Because this line of inquiry has only recently begun, it may be some time before a definitive consensus is reached. Due to these considerations, cyberbullying was defined in this study as traditional bullying conducted in online spaces, while placing less emphasis on the aspects of repetition and power imbalance, as these were currently impossible to determine reliably online (Ybarra et al., 2012). School leaders must recognize the importance of addressing cyberbullying during the development of their anti-bullying program to avoid any negative outcomes associated with bullying.

### **Anti-Bullying Programs in the United States**

Leaders of most states have an anti-bullying statute and model anti-bullying policies to guide how school district leaders choose to design and implement their anti-bullying programs (Shetgiri, Espelage, & Carroll, 2015a); however, many anti-bullying programs are school based. School leaders and policy makers design their programs without conducting empirical studies that test the efficacy of their programs (Shetgiri, Espelage, & Carroll, 2015b). This aspect can lead to ineffective results, as most evidence-based anti-bullying program leaders have focused on modifying a school's culture instead of addressing individual cases, as observed as most likely to reliably engender sustainable results (Bosworth & Judkins, 2014; Leadbeater et al., 2015; Shukla et al., 2016; Steffgen et al., 2013).

Most school leaders have adopted a bullying prevention program in response to convincing evidence for the effects of bullying on their students that could negatively

impact their life outcomes (Bosworth & Judkins, 2014; Lee et al., 2015). Therefore, leaders must foster a positive school culture; through that culture, bullying is better prevented. Individual subgroups within the school can perform their roles effectively to ensure a safe learning environment for the students (Bosworth & Judkins, 2014; Psanos, 2013). According to Ansary, Elias, Greene, and Green (2015), the most effective anti-bullying programs include a strong emphasis placed by the program on the inculcation of a positive school culture and strategies derived from social-emotional and character development, a strong commitment to proper implementation, assessment of effectiveness, sustainability, and a clear and constant strategy for action when confronted by bullying.

Additionally, scholars and teaching professionals have designed specific programs as options for school leaders in their schools. For example, the Oklahoma State Department of Education (2019) offered the following choices for evidence-based bullying programs: Aggressors, Victims, and Bystanders; Al's Pals: Kids Making Healthy Choices; Bully Prevention Program; Great Expectations; Lesson One; LifeSkills Training; LionsQuest Skills for Adolescence; Pax Good Behavior Game; Peacebuilders; Project ACHIEVE; Project KIND; Safe School Ambassadors; Safe Dates; Second Step; Steps to Respect: A Bullying Prevention Program; and Zippy's Friends. The sheer number of choices available for school leaders might make it difficult to identify the program most suited for their school, especially if insufficient research has been conducted on their chosen program's efficacy (Ansary et al., 2015).

Several scholars have found that anti-bullying programs are reliant on contextual factors to work effectively, such as student ages or perceived school cultures. For

example, Yeager et al. (2015) conducted a meta-analysis on 19 studies with researchers who administered a single anti-bullying program; Yeager et al. found that the school leaders who reported the most positive effects had implemented the program on students from Grade 7 and below. From Grade 8 and above, Yeager et al. observed a steep decline in efficacy was observed, to an average of 0. This finding indicated that anti-bullying programs might be influenced by the ages of students during implementation; therefore, school leaders must be cautious in choosing anti-bullying programs that have been studied as effective on student populations dissimilar from their own.

In addition to factors related to student age, the efficacy of anti-bullying programs may also rely on school culture. Individual members within the school are given tasks to ensure a safe learning environment for students (Juvonen, Schacter, Sainio, & Salmivalli, 2016); however, if these members perceive a lack of support from the organization, it is more likely that they fail to implement the programs properly, which can result in the lack of positive results (Bosworth & Judkins, 2014; Clifford et al., 2012; Cornell et al., 2015; Steffgen et al., 2013).

Espelage, Polanin, and Low (2014) investigated the possible relationship between how teachers and staff perceived their school's environment and the self-reports of the students regarding bullying, aggression, victimization, and willingness to intervene in cases of bullying. Data were gathered from 3,616 sixth-grade students and 1,447 teachers and staff across 36 middle schools in the Midwestern United States (Espelage, Polanin et al., 2014). Espelage, Polanin et al. (2014) found that the number of teacher and staff participants who reported that their school was committed to combating bullying and perceived positive relationships with their students correlated with the number of student

participants who reported fewer instances of bullying, aggression, or other forms of peer victimization. This finding shows that a positive school culture that is committed to eradicate bullying is more likely to lead to contexts where bullying is prevented (Sheras & Bradshaw, 2016), such as school leaders providing adequate organizational support to teachers and staff who are more empowered to address issues of bullying, which then translates to empowered students to intervene when witnessing such cases.

To summarize, anti-bullying programs in the United States are numerous and distinct from one another, which may translate to tough decisions from school leaders as to which program to implement in their schools (Ansary et al., 2015). Most anti-bullying program leaders work by creating and maintaining a positive school culture that curtails bullying from numerous sources, namely from school leaders to teachers and staff and to the students (Sheras & Bradshaw, 2016). The efficacy of anti-bullying programs may vary depending on the specific context of the subject school. For this study, the OBPP was chosen by the study site, as discussed in more detail in the following section.

### **The OBPP**

For this study, the OBPP was chosen as the anti-bullying program in the study site. The program was created to diminish bullying in schools and offer procedures to assist students and teachers to work together to recognize bullying, respond to bullying situations, and prevent further bullying. Core principles of the OBPP included warmth, positive interest, and involvement by adults; firm limits to unacceptable behavior; consistent use of nonphysical, nonhostile negative consequences when rules were broken; and adults who functioned as authorities and positive role models (Olweus & Limber, 2007, pp. 31-32). Olweus and Limber (2007) defined bullying as when “a person is

bullied when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other persons, and he or she has difficulty defending himself or herself” (p. 11). Various forms or kinds of bullying included being verbally bullied, being socially excluded or isolated, being physically bullied, being bullied through lies and false rumors, having money or other things taken or damaged, being threatened or forced to do things, being racially bullied, being sexually bullied, and being cyberbullied (via cell phone or the internet; Olweus & Limber, 2007, p. 14). Importantly, “bullying requires no apparent provocation and may be direct or overt (e.g., kicking, punching, name-calling) or completely subtle or indirect (e.g., spreading rumors, exclusion, manipulation)” (Finn, 2008, p. 2). Four anti-bullying rules were adopted as part of the school-wide OBPP that included the following:

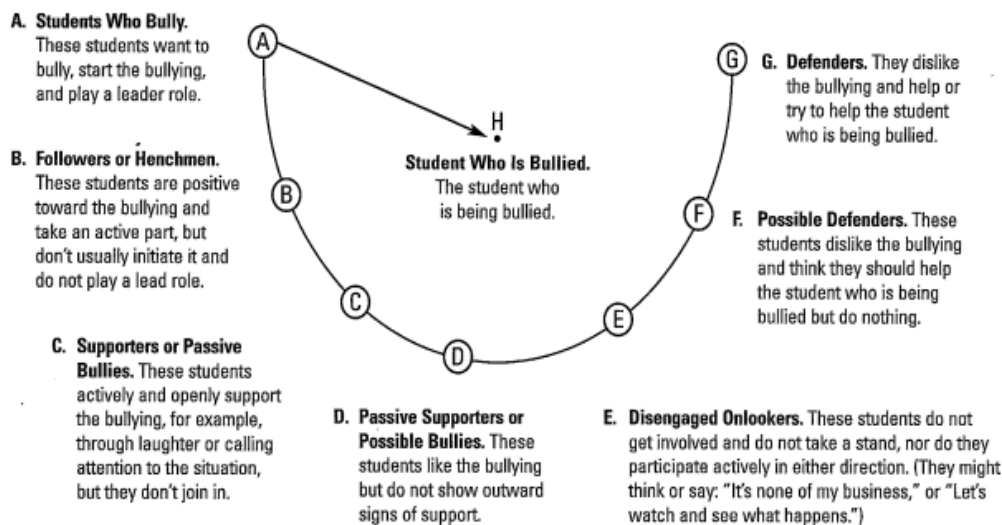
1. We will not bully others.
2. We will try to help students who are bullied.
3. We will try to include students who are left out.
4. If we know that somebody is being bullied, we will tell an adult at school and an adult at home. (Olweus & Limber, 2007, p. 51)

In simpler terms, the OBPP focused on the value of peer support networks for bullying victims; the four steps were used to empower the students to report bullying, learn to respond to bullying, control their emotional responses to bullying so they could react appropriately to the bullying, and foster empathy for their peers (Olweus, 1997). These anti-bullying expectations were posted in each classroom and hallways throughout the school. Reports about bullying incidents or infractions to program guidelines were reported by the teacher who observed the incident, reported on a Bullying Incident Log to

guidance, or referred directly to administration.

Bullying situations are described in terms of the Olweus Bullying Circle (Figure). Everyone has a role, including (a) students who bully, (b) followers or henchmen, (c) supporters or passive bullies, (d) passive supporters or possible bullies, (e) disengaged onlookers, (f) possible defenders, (g) defenders, and (h) the student who is bullied (Olweus & Limber, 2007, p. 24).

Here is a description of each role in the Bullying Circle:



*Figure.* Olweus Bullying Circle (with a description of each role). From *Olweus bullying prevention program: Teacher guide*, by D. Olweus and S. P. Limber, 2007, Center City, MN, Hazelden. Copyright 2007 by Hazelden. Reprinted with permission.

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Olweus Founder Dr. Dan Olweus and Olweus Expert Dr. Susan Limber (2010) acknowledged several challenges when implementing a bullying prevention program, including “some that are somewhat unique to the American experience and others that likely are not” (p. 130). Olweus and Limber (2010) stated the following regarding challenges:

- Resistance by school staff and parents.
- Underestimation of the “significant social, emotional, and academic costs of bullying” as well as the “overestimated the ability of victimized children to stop bullying without assistance from adults” (p. 130).
- Simple or short-term solutions or a “piecemeal” approach to bullying prevention (p. 131).
- Conflicting strategies used in tandem with the OBPP, such as “zero-tolerance policies, peer mediation or conflict resolution strategies, or group treatment for students who bully” (p. 131).
- The “tendency of school personnel to ‘cherry-pick’ program elements that are perceived as easier to implement, while failing to implement elements that require great effort” (p. 131), identified as particular challenges to the United States.

Edmondson and Hoover (2008) emphasized the importance of program fidelity and evidence-based curriculum or lesson plans for teachers to utilize. Finn (2008) reemphasized that although whole-school programs had the advantage of targeting the entire school population, “many of the studies examined had empirical flaws such as a lack of control conditions, the allowance of some program components to be optional, and unmonitored treatment integrity. Programs with monitoring procedures produced more positive outcomes than those without” (p. 14).

The OBPP has garnered overwhelmingly positive results in Olweus’s (1997) native Norway and neighboring Sweden, resulting in reductions of approximately 30-70% (Egan & Todorov, 2009). Additionally, the price of the OBPP was determined to be

cost-effective in terms of costs incurred to protect students from bullying in comparison to the societal value of reducing bullying (Beckman & Svensson, 2015); however, the results for the OBPP in the United States have (so far) only garnered reductions of 5-30% (Gregory, 2016). The reasons behind these results are examined in more detailed in the following section.

### **Results of the OBPP in the United States**

The results obtained by the OBPP in American schools have been less effective compared to results from other countries, though its efficacy can vary based on intersections between culture, race or ethnicity, and family background (Espelage, 2013). Bauer, Lozano, and Rivara (2007) investigated the impact of OBPP using a nonrandomized-controlled trial with 10 public middle schools, where seven were intervention schools, with the rest being control. Data were gathered using student self-reports on relational and physical bullying as well as making use of the available school survey data to determine whether the program improved the attitudes and perceptions of students regarding bullying (Bauer et al., 2007). Bauer et al. found that despite some positive effects that varied by gender, ethnicity, and grade, there was no overall effect on the reduction of bullying or the improvement of the perceptions of students regarding bullying. This finding can be seen to support the caution advised by scholars in choosing a specific anti-bullying program to ensure that the school is appropriate for the model chosen, as anti-bullying programs may be influenced by sociocultural factors that may vary among locations (Espelage, 2013).

One of the reasons noted by scholars for the lack of success of the OBPP in America like those attained in Norway may be the lack of familiarity of American school



leaders, teachers, and staff with the program. Cecil and Molnar-Main (2015) conducted a study about how the OBPP was implemented in 88 elementary schools in Pennsylvania. Data were gathered from 2,022 teachers, 88.5% of which were women. The results obtained showed that a large majority of the participants reported performing certain elements of the OBPP with high fidelity, such as attending the school kick-off event, posting the rules in the classroom, and explaining the rules to their students (Cecil & Molnar-Main, 2015); however, some elements of the OBPP were less likely to be implemented correctly, such as receiving booster sessions and engaging in activities that necessitated parental involvement (Cecil & Molnar-Main, 2015). Two possible reasons were found, namely teachers who reported self-efficacy and teachers who had more experience with the OBPP were more likely to implement more elements of the OBPP compared to teachers who perceived little to no self-efficacy and those with no experience with the OBPP (Cecil & Molnar-Main, 2015). This finding may indicate that implementing the OBPP in American schools requires additional teacher preparation and OBPP training.

These findings supported the contention by Ttofi and Farrington (2011) in their meta-analysis of anti-bullying programs. Effective programs were generally found outside North America, and the 14 intervention studies conducted in either the United States or Canada were found to lead to insignificant effects in terms of reducing bullying (Ttofi & Farrington, 2011). These findings indicated that successful anti-bullying program leaders must be able to respond to the specific contextual needs of a given school, as bullying may be influenced by distinct sociocultural factors that must be addressed to eradicate bullying (Espelage, 2013).

### **Other Anti-Bullying Programs in the United States**

Several studies have been conducted about bullying prevention programs in schools. One such program is the Steps to Respect program (Low, Van Ryzin, Brown, Smith, & Haggerty, 2014). The focus of this program is on the staff of the school. The objective of Steps to Respect is to increase awareness and responsiveness of teachers, principals, administrators, and other school leaders to foster socially responsible beliefs among students as a preventive measure to bullying (Low et al., 2014); however, exploring perceptions of school staff cannot be enough to have a deep understanding of the phenomenon of bullying. Therefore, this study explored the perspective of students about bullying.

In another study, Timmons-Mitchell, Levesque, Harris, Flannery, and Falcone (2016) focused the exploration on another program, the StandUp program, during its pilot test. This initiative was an online-based program for bullying prevention. StandUp showed improvements in a small sample of high school students who exhibited improved behavior from the first to third sessions of StandUp; however, this program could not be a stand-alone program. The benefits of StandUp might be maximized using the program in conjunction with other successful or effective bullying preventive programs.

Despite having other programs for anti-bullying or bullying prevention, a common option used remains to be the OBPP. Therefore, this researcher focused on this preventive program for bullying. The implications of the use of this bullying intervention in a middle school located in South Carolina remained unknown. Therefore, this gap was addressed in this study.

## Summary

Bullying is a global public health problem that continues to exist in the United States, despite the widespread adoption of anti-bullying programs among American schools to combat the adverse effects that have been associated by scholars to bullying (Bosworth & Judkins, 2014; Lee et al., 2015; Shetgiri et al., 2015a, 2015b; Yeager et al., 2015). Some examples of such programs include the OBPP, Open Circle, and Steps to Respect: A Bullying Prevention Program; however, due to the substantial number of programs for school leaders and policy makers to choose from, school leaders may struggle to find the right fit for their specific needs (Espelage, 2013; Gregory, 2016). Given the significant influence of sociocultural factors on school culture and bullying (Espelage, 2013; Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015; Steffgen et al., 2013), specific anti-bullying programs need to be investigated in similar contexts to the subject school before implementation, to avoid choosing programs that do not meet the particular needs of a school to reduce bullying.

For this study, the OBPP was chosen as the anti-bullying program for a middle school located in the southern United States. The OBPP garnered impressive results in Norway (Egan & Todorov, 2009; Olweus, 1997), but the results were lacking when the OBPP was implemented in American schools (Gregory, 2016). More studies must be conducted on the issue as there remained a gap in the literature regarding the effectiveness of the OBPP in middle schools located in the southern United States. In the next chapter, the research methodology is discussed in more detail, and the methodological choices for this study are justified.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

The purpose of this quantitative study was to determine the effectiveness of the OBPP in combatting bullying in a middle school for the 2015-2016 school year. Data from the Middle School Bullying Survey were used to evaluate the prevalence of bullying, and data were used from the South Carolina Department of Education school report on school climate.

This chapter includes descriptions of the methodology and the procedures used for this study. The chapter is organized into the following sections: research design, setting, instrumentation, study procedures, assumptions, limitations, delimitations, and ethical assurances. The chapter concludes with a summary.

#### **Research Design**

In this study, a quantitative comparative analysis was conducted. The following research questions were used:

1. To what extent is there an association in the perceptions of students regarding being bullied at school before and after the implementation of the bullying prevention program?
2. To what extent did students who indicated that they were bullied report incidents to others before and after the implementation of the bullying prevention program?
3. To what extent is there a difference between the perceptions of girls and boys before and after the implementation of the bullying prevention program?
4. To what extent is there an association in the locations of bullying reported before and after the implementation of the bullying prevention program?

5. To what extent is there an association in the perceptions of eighth-grade students and teachers on the social and physical environments from the end of 2015 to the end of 2016 as determined by the South Carolina Department of Education Annual Report Card Summary Evaluation Results?

A quantitative methodology was appropriate for this study because the variables analyzed were measured using an instrument that yielded numeric data. Additionally, the research questions, as written, could be addressed using a quantitative methodology (e.g., Vogt, Gardner, & Haeffele, 2012). Furthermore, this researcher used a quantitative methodology so this researcher could analyze large sets of data, which was instrumental in evaluating a campus-wide program. A pretest/posttest research design was appropriate for this study because the purpose of the study was to determine the efficacy of a bullying program at a school; therefore, there was a need to identify differences in the school, namely perceptions of school climate and prevalence of bullying, to determine that efficacy (e.g., White & Sabarwal, 2014).

### **Research Setting**

The location of the study was a middle school in a district located in northwestern South Carolina. The district was roughly 3.5 miles wide and 14 miles long, with an estimated population of approximately 17,000-22,000 individuals. The middle school was a rural public school, located on the outskirts of an upstate South Carolina city. The neighborhood surrounding the school was comprised of older established homes as well as refurbished apartment buildings, government subsidized homes, and a trailer court. Residents had diverse histories, backgrounds, and socioeconomic levels.

## Participants

The participants were from a middle school in a district located in northwestern South Carolina. The middle school had approximately 416 students in enrollment at that time. The school was comprised of 0.96% Asian students, 12.5% Black or African American students, 11.1% Hispanic or Latino students, 3.4% multi-racial students, and 72.1% White students.

Table 2

*PowerSchool Data for 2015-2016 Active Enrollments: Ethnicity Counts – Demographics*

Grade	Asian			Black or African American			Hispanic or Latino			Multi-Racial			White			Total
Gender	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M/F
6	0	1	1	9	6	15	9	6	15	3	1	4	46	44	90	125
7	2	1	3	14	5	19	8	7	15	2	1	3	59	51	110	150
8	0	0	0	9	9	18	7	9	16	2	5	7	57	43	100	141
Total	2	2	4	32	20	52	24	22	46	7	7	14	162	138	300	416

## Instrumentation

**Middle School Bullying Survey.** The Middle School Bullying Survey was modeled after important components adopted from the OBPP to provide a “quantitative or numeric description of trends, attitudes, or opinions of a population by studying a sample of that population” (Creswell, 2014, pp. 155-156). This researcher used the OBQ to measure the prevalence of bullying, “hot spots” (areas around the school where bullying most often occurs), and student perceptions and attitudes about bullying (see Solberg & Olweus, 2003). Permission to create a new bullying survey based on the OBQ was granted through the Olweus Program at Clemson University and supported by both the middle school and school district (Appendix A).

The school principal and assistant principal edited the Middle School Bullying

Survey and approved it on August 13, 2015. The survey was validated by an eighth-grade (honors) homeroom class on September 16, 2015 with 16 student participants. This group was chosen due to their full class size, 3 years of participation in the OBPP, and the ability to articulate meaningful feedback as honors students. Moreover, 56.25% of students validating the survey were female and 43.75% were male. Students did not express concerns with terminology, but it was necessary to change the phrasing of several of the questions in response to student write-in responses. Student write-in responses included the following comments:

- This needs to have an answer, but I have never been bullied or have seen any bullying going on in this school; I lied on several of the questions.
- The survey will not let me pick, but I have NOT been bullied.
- No additional thoughts.
- GET A BETTER SURVEY.
- I'm not bullied.
- None.

Question 4 was changed from “How often have you been bullied?” to “If you have bullied at a chosen middle school, how often have you been bullied?” Question 5 was changed from “Where have you been bullied?” to “If you have been bullied at a chosen middle school, where have you been bullied?” Another answer option of “I have never been bullied” was added to Question 5. Question 7 was changed from “What forms of bullying have you experienced?” to “If you have been bullied at a chosen middle school, what forms of bullying have you experience?” Another answer option of “I have never been bullied” was added to Question 7. For Question 8, the new response

option of “I have never reported an issue with bullying” was added. Phrasing changes and additional answer options were made to address student comments.

**School report card ratings.** Leaders of South Carolina measure the performance indices for schools. The state report card shows the current performance of a school, which is the measure of school climate and safety needs (Education Commission of the States, 2013). The report card was generated for each school, along with the statewide report card (Education Commission of the States, 2013). Using this instrument was important in addressing the first research question. This researcher used data during the school years of 2015 and 2016 to determine if there was a change in school climate.

## **Procedures**

**Data collection.** Data used for this study were from a secondary data set. To complete the bullying survey (Appendix B), students used their school-issued tablets to login to the SurveyMonkey site using the web address of <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/svwjcgw>. Students completed the survey during the designated weekly Olweus time. Olweus was conducted once per week during homeroom. The 2015-2016 school year served as the period for the presurvey and postsurvey. The student questionnaire included nine questions with designated response choices as well as four options to write in additional information. Student participation in the study was anonymous.

**Presurvey.** All students in attendance on September 18, 2015 were cognitively able and present on campus; they participated in the Middle School Bullying Survey – Fall 2015 Pre-Assessment. Of the 406 students enrolled at the southern middle school, 335 students participated in the survey. These data were used as pretest data to address



the second research question. Aside from the data from the Middle School Bullying Survey, this researcher also obtained the details of school climate from the state's school report card of the chosen school during the fall 2015 preassessment phase. The details of the school climate from the state's school report card in 2015 were used as the pretest data for addressing the fifth research question.

***Postsurvey.*** The Bullying Survey (postassessment) was administered again at the end of the school year on May 20, 2016. Of the 415 students enrolled at the middle school at that time, 312 students participated in the survey. These data were used as pretest data to address the second research question. Aside from the data from the Middle School Bullying Survey, this researcher also obtained details of the school climate report card of the chosen school during the end of the 2015-2016 school year for the postassessment phase. The details of the school climate from the state's school report card in 2016 were used as posttest data for addressing the fifth research question.

**Data analysis.** Analyzing data for the first and third research questions required a  $t$  test with a chi-square distribution using data from the Middle School Bullying Survey for the end of school year 2014-2015 and end of school year 2015-2016. For the second research question, a descriptive analysis was performed. Descriptive analysis was performed for the data from each of the locations included in the fourth research question. For the fifth research question, a Pearson correlation analysis was performed.

Table 3

*Methods Chart*

Research Question	Data	Analysis
RQ1: To what extent is there an association in the perceptions of students regarding being bullied at school before and after the implementation of the bullying prevention program?	<p>Middle School Bullying Survey</p> <p>3. Have you ever been bullied at your middle school?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yes</li> <li>• No</li> </ul>	<p>Chi-Square</p> <p>This researcher conducted a <i>t</i> test of the third question in the school bullying survey (Appendix B) for the end of school year 2014-2015 and end of school year 2015-2016.</p> <p>A <i>p</i> level of 0.05 was set to determine if the difference was significant or insignificant.</p> <p>This researcher determined if a significant difference existed between the number of students who claimed to be bullied before and after the bullying prevention program was implemented.</p>
RQ2: To what extent did students who indicated that they were bullied report incidents to others before and after the implementation of the bullying prevention program?	<p>Middle School Bullying Survey</p> <p>8. Who have you reported the incidences to?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Current grade level Teacher</li> <li>• Past grade level Teacher</li> <li>• Exploratory Teacher</li> <li>• Administrator</li> <li>• Guidance Counselor</li> <li>• Friend (who attends the chosen middle school)</li> <li>• Parent/Guardian</li> <li>• I have never reported an issue with bullying</li> <li>• Other</li> </ul> <p>Please describe/explain reporting of your bullying experience(s).</p>	<p>Descriptive Analysis</p> <p>This researcher performed a <i>t</i> test of the eighth question in the school bullying survey (Appendix B) for the end of school year 2014-2015 and end of school year 2015-2016. A <i>p</i> level of 0.05 was set to determine if the difference was significant or insignificant.</p> <p>This researcher determined if a significant difference existed between the total numbers of students who reported bullying incidents to other people before and after the bullying prevention program was implemented.</p>

(continued)

Research Question	Data	Analysis
RQ3: To what extent is there a difference between the perceptions of girls and boys before and after the implementation of the bullying prevention program?	<p>Middle School Bullying Survey</p> <p>2. What is your gender?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Male (boy)</li> <li>• Female (girl)</li> </ul>	<p>Chi-Square</p> <p>This researcher performed a <i>t</i> test of the data on the school bullying survey (Appendix B) between boys and girls the end of school year 2014-2015 and end of school year 2015-2016.</p> <p>A <i>p</i> level of 0.05 was set to determine if the difference was significant or insignificant.</p> <p>This researcher determined if a significant difference existed between the total number of male and female students who reported being bullied before and after the bullying prevention program was implemented.</p>
RQ4: To what extent is there an association in the locations of bullying reported before and after the implementation of the bullying prevention program?	<p>Middle School Bullying Survey</p> <p>5. If you have been bullied at your middle school, where have you been bullied? (check all that apply)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Homeroom</li> <li>• Academic classroom (English language arts, math, science, social studies)</li> <li>• Exploratory (electives) classroom</li> <li>• Cafeteria</li> <li>• Gym</li> <li>• Hallway</li> <li>• Bathroom</li> <li>• Locker room</li> <li>• Recess</li> <li>• Before School</li> <li>• After School</li> <li>• Online/texting - during school hours</li> <li>• District sporting events</li> <li>• I have never been bullied</li> <li>• Other (please specify)</li> <li>• Online/texting - outside of school hours</li> </ul>	<p>Descriptive Analysis (for each)</p> <p>This researcher performed a <i>t</i> test of the fifth question in the school bullying survey (Appendix B) for the end of school year 2014-2015 and end of school year 2015-2016. There were 13 locations identified or included in the survey. A <i>p</i> level of 0.05 was set to determine if the difference was significant or insignificant.</p> <p>This researcher determined if a significant difference existed between the total numbers of students who reported being bullied in the different locations before and after the bullying prevention program was implemented.</p>

(continued)

Research Question	Data	Analysis
RQ5: To what extent is there an association in the perceptions of eighth-grade students and teachers on the social and physical environments from the end of 2015 to the end of 2016 as determined by the South Carolina Department of Education Annual Report Card Summary Evaluation Results?	School report card summary  2014-2015 school year & 2015-2016 school year	Pearson  The researcher performed a <i>t</i> test of teachers' and students' satisfaction ratings about the social and physical environments of the school based on the school report card summary for the end of school year 2014-2015 and end of school year 2015-2016.  A <i>p</i> level of 0.05 was set to determine if the difference was significant or insignificant. This researcher determined if a significant difference existed between teachers' and students' satisfaction ratings about the social and physical environments of the school before and after the bullying prevention program was implemented

### Ethical Considerations

When including human participants in a study, ethical issues must be addressed (Taber, 2014). The main ethical consideration for this study was confidentiality of the participants. Through this process, identities of participants were not determined.

As the researcher of this study and one of the school counselors of the middle school, this researcher addressed ethical issues regarding student confidentiality. This researcher must address these confidentiality concerns according to the American School Counselor Association (2016):

- To support the students' right to privacy and protect confidential information received from students, the family, guardians, and staff members.
- To explain the meaning and limits of confidentiality to students in developmentally appropriate terms.
- To provide appropriate disclosure and informed consent regarding the counseling relationship and confidentiality.

- To inform students and the family of the limits to confidentiality when student poses a danger to self or others; court ordered disclosure; consultation with other professionals in support of the student, such as colleagues, supervisors, treatment teams, and other support personnel; and privileged communication is not granted by state laws and local guidelines (e.g., school board policies).
- To keep personal notes separate from educational records and not disclose their contents except when privacy exceptions exist.
- To seek guidance from supervisors and appropriate legal advice when their records are subpoenaed.
- To assert their beliefs that information shared by students is “confidential” and should not be revealed without the student’s consent.
- To adhere to all laws protecting student records, health information, and special services (i.e., Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974, Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996, and Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004).

It was ethically essential to keep this researcher’s role as a school counselor separate from the role as a researcher. As the researcher, this researcher relied on quantitative anonymous data, as opposed to qualitative data, to keep these positions separate.

Another means of keeping the identity and data for this study confidential was to ensure that the storage place was secure. This researcher kept all physical data for this study, such as printed spreadsheets and survey forms, inside a locked cabinet. Only this researcher had access to the data. All the files were kept until the conclusion of the study and then were securely destroyed.

**Summary**

The purpose of this quantitative study was to determine the effectiveness of the OBPP in combatting bullying in a middle school for the 2015-2016 school year. Data used for this study were secondary data collected during the 2015-2016 school year using the OBQ and school climate report card. Data were analyzed using chi-square tests, descriptive analyses, and Pearson's correlation coefficients to address the research questions. This chapter included a discussion of the appropriateness of the research design, a description of the setting and bullying prevention program, and the research procedures. The following chapter presents the results for this study.

## **Chapter 4: Results**

The purpose of this quantitative study was to determine the effectiveness of the OBPP in combatting bullying in a middle school for the 2015-2016 school year. The effectiveness of the OBPP was assessed in two aspects: prevalence of bullying and school climate. Data from the Middle School Bullying Survey were used to evaluate the prevalence of bullying, while data from the South Carolina Department of Education school report were used to assess the school climate. The following were the research questions that guided this study:

1. To what extent is there an association in the perceptions of students regarding being bullied at school before and after the implementation of the bullying prevention program?
2. To what extent did students who indicated that they were bullied report incidents to others before and after the implementation of the bullying prevention program?
3. To what extent is there a difference between the perceptions of girls and boys before and after the implementation of the bullying prevention program?
4. To what extent is there an association in the locations of bullying reported before and after the implementation of the bullying prevention program?
5. To what extent is there an association in the perceptions of eighth-grade students and teachers on the social and physical environments from the end of 2015 to the end of 2016 as determined by the South Carolina Department of Education Annual Report Card Summary Evaluation Results?

This chapter presents the results of the data analysis conducted on the data

collected. The next section includes discussion of the participants' demographics.

Thereafter, a section that includes the results of the data analysis for each research question is presented. Last, a summary of the key results concludes the chapter.

### **Demographics**

Data were collected from the school bullying survey and South Carolina Department of Education school report during the school year 2015-2016. The school year 2015-2016 served as the period from the pretest and posttest that corresponded to the before and after implementation of the bullying prevention program. The data for the pretest were collected on September 18, 2015, and the posttest data were collected on May 20, 2016. Of the 406 students enrolled during the pretest data collection, 335 participated in the survey. A response rate of 82.5% was achieved. Meanwhile, of the 415 students enrolled during the posttest data collection, 312 participated in the survey. A response rate of 75.2% was achieved (see Table 4).

Table 4

#### *Participant Demographics*

	Pretest		Posttest	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Gender				
Male	176	52.5%	167	53.5%
Female	159	47.5%	145	46.5%
Grade Level				
Sixth	114	34.0%	106	34.0%
Seventh	111	33.1%	99	31.7%
Eighth	110	32.8%	107	34.3%

Table 4 presents the demographics of the participants. In the pretest, of the 335 students who participated in the survey, more than half ( $n = 176$ , 52.5%) were male, and



most were on the sixth-grade level ( $n = 114$ , 34.0%). In the posttest, most were male ( $n = 167$ , 53.5%) and on eighth-grade level ( $n = 107$ , 34.3%).

### **Data Analysis**

**Research Question 1: To what extent is there an association in the perceptions of students regarding being bullied at school before and after the implementation of the bullying prevention program?**  $H_{I0}$  was the following: There is no significant association between the perceptions of students regarding being bullied at school before and after the implementation of the bullying prevention program.  $H_{Ia}$  was the following: There is no significant association between the perceptions of students regarding being bullied at school before and after the implementation of the bullying prevention program.

To address this research question and test the corresponding hypotheses, chi-square tests were conducted. Specifically, data asking about whether the student had been bullied (Question 3) at the middle school for the pretest and posttest were utilized. Table 5 provides the cross tabulation used to compute for the chi-square statistics. The results showed that  $p(\chi^2 > 0.757) = 0.384$ . The  $p$  value (0.384) was greater than the significance level (0.05); therefore, the null hypothesis was accepted. Thus, this researcher concluded that there was no statistically significant association in the perceptions of students regarding being bullied at school before and after the implementation of the bullying prevention program.

Table 5

*Cross Tabulation for Research Question 1*

	Yes	No	Total
Pretest	73	262	335
Posttest	77	235	312
Total	150	497	647

**Research Question 2: To what extent did students who indicated that they were bullied report incidents to others before and after the implementation of the bullying prevention program?** To address this research question, descriptive analysis using frequency and percentage was computed. Of the 73 participants who reported that they were bullied in the selected middle school in the pretest, most told their parent/guardian that they were bullied ( $n = 42, 57.5\%$ ), followed by guidance counselors ( $n = 27, 37.0\%$ ), friend who attended the chosen middle school ( $n = 25, 34.2\%$ ), current grade level teachers ( $n = 21, 28.8\%$ ), and past grade level teachers ( $n = 18, 24.7\%$ ). Of the 77 participants who reported that they were bullied in the selected middle school in the posttest, most reported the bullying incident to their parent/guardian ( $n = 37, 48.1\%$ ), followed by friend who attended the chosen middle school ( $n = 33, 42.9\%$ ), guidance counselors ( $n = 30, 39.0\%$ ), current grade level teachers ( $n = 17, 22.1\%$ ), and friend who did not attend the chosen middle school ( $n = 14, 18.2\%$ ).

Comparing the results between the pretest and posttest, this researcher inferred that both sets of participants reported their bullying incidents to their parent/guardian more often. Other top answers for both sets of participants included guidance counselors, friend who attended the chosen middle school, and current grade level teachers. More so, this researcher noted that some participants from the pretest ( $n = 12, 16.4\%$ ) and posttest

( $n = 12$ , 15.6%) mentioned that they did not report to anyone about their bullying incidents. Table 6 presents the relevant frequency and percentage of the responses of the participants about who did they report to regarding their bullying incident.

Table 6

*Frequency and Percentage of Responses from Question 8*

	Pretest		Posttest	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Current grade level teacher	21	28.8%	17	22.1%
Past grade level teacher	18	24.7%	6	7.8%
Exploratory (electives) teacher	11	15.1%	10	13.0%
Administrator	4	5.5%	12	15.6%
Guidance Counselor	27	37.0%	30	39.0%
Friend (who attends the chosen middle school)	25	34.2%	33	42.9%
Friend (who does not attend the chosen middle school)	15	20.5%	14	18.2%
Parent/Guardian	42	57.5%	37	48.1%
Did not report to someone	12	16.4%	12	15.6%
Others	4	5.5%	3	3.9%

**Research Question 3: To what extent is there a difference between the perceptions of girls and boys before and after the implementation of the bullying prevention program?**  $H3_0$  was the following: There is no significant difference between the perceptions of girls and boys before and after the implementation of the bullying prevention program.  $H3_a$  was the following: There is a significant difference between the perceptions of girls and boys before and after the implementation of the bullying prevention program.

To address this research question and test the corresponding hypotheses, chi-square tests were conducted. Specifically, data asking about whether the student had been bullied (Question 2) at the middle school for the pretest and posttest were utilized.

Table 7 provides the cross tabulation used to compute for the chi-square statistics. The results showed that  $p(\chi^2 > 0.101) = 0.741$ . The  $p$  value (0.741) was greater than the significance level (0.05); therefore, the null hypothesis was accepted. Thus, this researcher concluded that there was no statistically significant difference between the perceptions of girls and boys before and after the implementation of the bullying prevention program.

Table 7

*Cross Tabulation for Research Question 3*

	Male	Female	Total
Pretest	38	35	73
Posttest	38	39	77
Total	76	74	150

**Research Question 4: To what extent is there an association in the locations of bullying reported before and after the implementation of the bullying prevention program?** To address this research question, descriptive analysis using frequency and percentage was computed. Of the 73 participants who reported that they were bullied in the selected middle school in the pretest, most experienced the bullying incident at the gym and during recess time ( $n = 34$ , 46.6%%), followed by in the hallway ( $n = 28$ , 38.4%), after school ( $n = 25$ , 34.2%), in homeroom ( $n = 19$ , 26.0%), and in an academic classroom ( $n = 18$ , 24.7%). Of the 77 participants who reported they were bullied in the selected middle school in the posttest, most experienced the bullying incident during recess time ( $n = 36$ , 46.8%), followed by at the gym and in the hallway ( $n = 32$ , 41.6%), in an exploratory classroom ( $n = 33$ , 42.9%), in the cafeteria ( $n = 30$ , 39.0%), and in an academic classroom ( $n = 28$ , 36.4%). Comparing the two sets of participants, bullying

happened more often at the gym, in the hallway, and during recess. Table 8 presents the relevant frequency and percentages of the responses about the places where the participants experienced their bullying incidents.

Table 8

*Frequency and Percentage of Responses from Question 5*

	Pretest		Posttest	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Homeroom	19	26.0%	26	33.8%
Academic classroom	18	24.7%	28	36.4%
Exploratory classroom	14	19.2%	33	42.9%
Cafeteria	20	27.4%	30	39.0%
Gym	34	46.6%	32	41.6%
Hallway	28	38.4%	32	41.6%
Bathroom	11	15.1%	11	14.3%
Locker room	11	15.1%	13	16.9%
Recess	34	46.6%	36	46.8%
Before school	16	21.9%	10	13.0%
After school	25	34.2%	13	16.9%
Online/texting—during school hours	5	6.8%	3	3.9%
Online/texting—after school hours	14	19.2%	14	18.2%
District sporting events	6	8.2%	4	5.2%
Others	0	0.0%	3	3.9%

**Research Question 5: To what extent is there an association in the perceptions of eighth-grade students and teachers on the social and physical environments from the end of 2015 to the end of 2016 as determined by the South Carolina Department of Education Annual Report Card Summary Evaluation**

**Results?**  $H5_0$  was the following: There is no significant association in the perceptions of eighth-grade students and teachers on the social and physical environments from the end of 2015 to the end of 2016 as determined by the South Carolina Department of Education Annual Report Card Summary Evaluation Results.  $H5_a$  was the following: There is a significant association in the perceptions of eighth-grade students and teachers on the

social and physical environments from the end of 2015 to the end of 2016 as determined by the South Carolina Department of Education Annual Report Card Summary Evaluation Results.

To address this research question and test the corresponding hypotheses, chi-square tests were conducted. Specifically, the data of teachers' and students' satisfaction ratings about the social and physical environments of the school were utilized. Table 9 provides the cross tabulation used to compute for the chi-square statistics. The results showed that  $p(\chi^2 > 0.389) = 0.741$ . The  $p$  value (0.741) was greater than the significance level (0.05); therefore, the null hypothesis was accepted. Thus, this researcher concluded that there was no statistically significant association in the perceptions of eighth-grade students and teachers on the social and physical environments from the end of 2015 to the end of 2016, as determined by the South Carolina Department of Education Annual Report Card Summary Evaluation Results.

Table 9

*Cross Tabulation for Research Question 5*

	Male	Female	Total
Teachers	94	95	189
Student	81	98	179
Total	175	193	368

## Summary

The purpose of this quantitative study was to determine the effectiveness of the OBPP in combatting bullying in a middle school for the 2015-2016 school year. The effectiveness of the bullying prevention program was assessed according to the prevalence of bullying and school climate. Data for the prevalence of bullying were

gathered using the Middle School Bullying Survey, while data for the school climate were gathered from the South Carolina Department of Education school report. In addition, pretests and posttests were conducted to determine the effectiveness of the bullying prevention program. A total of 335 students participated in the pretest, while 312 students participated in the posttest.

For Research Question 1, using chi-square tests, the results showed that there were no statistically significant associations in perceptions of students regarding being bullied at school before and after the implementation of the bullying prevention program. For Research Question 2, using descriptive statistics, results showed that both sets of participants reported their bullying incidents to their parent/guardian more often. For Research Question 3, using chi-square tests, the results showed that there were no statistically significant differences between the perceptions of girls and boys before and after the implementation of the bullying prevention program. For Research Question 4, using descriptive statistics, results showed that bullying happened more often at the gym, in the hallway, and during recess. Last, for Research Question 5, using chi-square tests, results showed that there were no statistically significant associations in perceptions of eighth-grade students and teachers on the social and physical environments from the end of 2015 to the end of 2016, as determined by the South Carolina Department of Education Annual Report Card Summary Evaluation Results. Chapter 5 provides a discussion of these results.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion**

### **Introduction**

Researchers have defined bullying as a public health problem that influences the life outcomes of both victims and perpetrators of bullying (Bosworth & Judkins, 2014; Lee et al., 2015). Based on NCES (2015), one of every four students ages 12 to 18 reported being bullied during the 2013 school year. Eriksen et al. (2014) defined bullying as an act of committing intentional and repeated physical and/or emotional aggression toward another person or group of individuals. These acts of bullying can include cases of humiliation, teasing, name-calling, threatening, harassment, taunting, social isolation, and gossiping (Englehart, 2014; Eriksen et al., 2014).

Bullying in school has become a pressing issue that has resulted in growing concerns due to the different negative effects it has on the victim, perpetrator, and the people around them (Eriksen et al., 2014). Bullying has become a problem for students, parents, teachers, and administrators due to different side effects on the people impacted by the situation (Bauman & Yoon, 2014). Students who experience bullying and who bully experience many negative effects of bullying. Some negative effects to students for being involved in bullying include violent behavior, depression, poor self-esteem, and poor academic performance (Englehart, 2014; Hymel et al., 2015); thus, prevention of bullying has become a common topic of discussion.

Statistics have shown the prevalence of bullying in middle schools, indicating that at least 70% of students have claimed to know someone who has been bullied (Hymel et al., 2015; Lester et al., 2013). Given the high incidence of bullying in school, leaders of all 50 states in the United States passed policies, laws, or both to address bullying and



protect children (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2017). One of the programs created to address bullying was the OBPP. The main goal of the OBPP and other bullying prevention programs is to diminish the bullying behavior to produce a safe environment that is beneficial to student learning. Bullying prevention programs have been mostly effective, with a modest impact in reducing bullying and victimization (Bauman & Yoon, 2014).

The general problem for this study was the persistent occurrence of bullying in schools across the United States, despite the existence of several intervention programs and policies targeted to address this specific issue (Lee et al., 2015; Yeager et al., 2015). The specific problem addressed was that the effectiveness of one anti-bullying program (the OBPP) in a middle school located in the state of South Carolina remained unknown.

The purpose of this quantitative study was to determine the effectiveness of the OBPP in combatting bullying in a school for the 2015-2016 school year. The aim of the OBPP was to reduce existing bullying issues among students, avoid the increase in bullying problems, and achieve better peer relations at school (Olweus & Limber, 2007, p. 1). The methodology used in the study was a quantitative pretest/posttest study focused on establishing similarities and differences of specific factors for one group before and after an intervention or the introduction of an experimental factor (e.g., Edmonds & Kennedy, 2016). Data were from the Middle School Bullying Survey and South Carolina Department of Education school report on school climate. The participants included middle school students in northwestern South Carolina.

Chapter 5 summarizes the dissertation and relates findings to existing literature. This chapter starts with a brief overview on the current state of bullying and the efforts

put into addressing bullying. The problem addressed in the study, as well as the purpose of this study on the effectiveness of the current bullying programs, is also briefly discussed. The next sections contain the research questions used in the study to achieve the purpose of this research on the implementation of a bullying program, followed by a summary of the findings from statistical tests using data gathered from participants. The discussion focusing on the analysis of the findings on the effectiveness of the bullying program in relation to the existing literature in Chapter 2 follows. The final sections of this study are dedicated to the implications of the study for district officials, schools, and parents as well as the recommendations for future researchers and district officials. Last, a conclusion is provided at the end of this chapter.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions were used to achieve the goal of the study:

1. To what extent is there an association in the perceptions of students regarding being bullied at school before and after the implementation of the bullying prevention program?
2. To what extent did students who indicated that they were bullied report incidents to others before and after the implementation of the bullying prevention program?
3. To what extent is there a difference between the perceptions of girls and boys before and after the implementation of the bullying prevention program?
4. To what extent is there an association in the locations of bullying reported before and after the implementation of the bullying prevention program?
5. To what extent is there an association in the perceptions of eighth-grade

students and teachers on the social and physical environments from the end of 2015 to the end of 2016 as determined by the South Carolina Department of Education Annual Report Card Summary Evaluation Results?

### **Summary of the Findings**

The theory used to guide the study was Bandura's (1989) social cognitive theory. This theory was extensively used to explain factors involving bullying and to understand bullying behaviors. The theory was used to explain that there were constant interactions between the social environment, internal stimuli, and behavior (Swearer et al., 2014). To understand an individual's behavior, one must analyze all three aspects described in the social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1989; Swearer et al., 2014).

Demographic information showed that for the pretest, from the 335 students who participated in the survey, more than half ( $n = 176$ , 52.5%) were male and on the sixth-grade level ( $n = 114$ , 34.0%). For the posttest, 312 of 415 enrolled students participated. Most were male ( $n = 167$ , 53.5%) and on the eighth-grade level ( $n = 107$ , 34.3%). Results showed that there was no statistically significant association between perceptions of students on being bullied before and after implementation of the program. For Question 2, results showed that both in the pre and posttest, students who identified themselves as having been bullied in middle school reported the incidents to their parent/guardian. The results on the difference in perceptions of girls and boys before and after implementation of the bullying intervention program showed that there was no change between pre and postimplementation. For the fourth question, both pre and postimplementation results showed that bullying often happened at the gym, in the hallway, and during recess. Results also confirmed that there was no significant

association in perceptions of eighth-grade students and teachers on the social and physical environments from the end of 2015 to the end of 2016, as determined by the South Carolina Department of Education Annual Report Card Summary Evaluation Results.

### **Interpretation of the Findings**

**Research Question 1: To what extent is there an association in the perceptions of students regarding being bullied at school before and after the implementation of the bullying prevention program?** Based on results of the study, the null hypothesis was accepted. There was no statistically significant association in the perceptions of students regarding being bullied at school before and after the implementation of the bullying prevention program. These findings were in line with some existing studies as well as unaligned with some researchers.

The OBPP had positive results in Norway and Sweden, resulting in reduced occurrences of bullying by 30-70% (Egan & Todorov, 2009; Olweus, 1997); however, results for the OBPP in the United States have only shown the reduction of bullying by 5-30% so far (Gregory, 2016). The results obtained by the OBPP in American schools have so far been less effective compared to the results from other countries, though the efficacy could vary based on intersections between cultures, races, ethnicities, and family backgrounds (Espelage, 2013). The results of this study supported these findings, as there were no identified significant differences before and after the implementation of the program in the setting for this study. Ttofi and Farrington (2011) similarly found that studies conducted in the United States or Canada resulted in insignificant effects for reducing bullying.

The findings in this study were also consistent with Bauer et al.'s (2007) results. They explained that while there were some positive effects that differed by genders, ethnicities, and grades, there were no overall effects found on the reduction of bullying or improvement of the perceptions of students regarding bullying. Based on the results of the test completed, no significant differences were reported in the perception of students. Bauer et al. (2007) was aligned with the other suggestions of the researchers that there was a need to remain careful in choosing a specific anti-bullying program to ensure that the model was fit and appropriate for the school. These programs might be influenced by sociocultural factors that may vary among locations (Espelage, 2013). The OBPP might not be the appropriate program for the school in this study, thereby resulting in no difference in perception before and after the implementation of the program.

Researchers have explained that the lack of success of the OBPP in the United States compared to those in Norway and Sweden may have been due to the lack of familiarity by the school leaders, teachers, and staff with the program. For example, Cecil and Molnar-Main (2015) found that performing certain elements of the OBPP with high fidelity, such as attending the school kick-off event, posting the rules in the classroom, and explaining the rules to their students, increased results; however, some aspects of the program were less likely to be implemented, such as receiving booster sessions and engaging in activities that necessitated parental involvement. The possible reasons were that teachers who reported self-efficacy and teachers who had more experience with the OBPP were more likely to implement more elements of the OBPP compared to teachers who perceived little to no self-efficacy and those with no experience with the OBPP.

Another aspect that was explained in the existing literature regarding the effectiveness of the program was school culture and implementation of the program. There are anti-bullying policies that can help guide school district leaders on how they will design and implement bullying programs (Shetgiri et al., 2015a); however, many anti-bullying programs are school based. School leaders and policy makers design their programs without conducting empirical studies that test the efficacy of their programs (Shetgiri et al., 2015b). This issue can lead to ineffective results, as most evidence-based anti-bullying program leaders have focused on modifying a school's culture instead of addressing individual cases, which researchers have observed as most likely to reliably engender sustainable results (Bosworth & Judkins, 2014; Leadbeater et al., 2015; Shukla et al., 2016; Steffgen et al., 2013).

Some school leaders found evidence that there was a link between school culture and bullying. Students from schools with a positive culture are less likely to be exposed to bullying and other forms of peer victimization (Bosworth & Judkins, 2014; Clifford et al., 2012; Steffgen et al., 2013; Thapa et al., 2012; Wang et al., 2013). Ansary et al. (2015) shared that the most effective anti-bullying programs included a strong emphasis on the inculcation of a positive school culture and strategies derived from social-emotional and character development, a strong commitment to proper implementation, assessment of effectiveness, sustainability, and a clear and constant strategy for action when confronted by bullying. OBPP is focused on the value of peer support networks for bullying victims; and the four steps empower the students to report bullying, learn to respond to bullying, control their emotional responses to bullying so they can react appropriately to the bullying, and foster empathy for their peers (Olweus, 1997).

Several scholars have noted that leaders of anti-bullying programs depend on contextual factors to work effectively, such as perceived school cultures and student ages. For example, Yeager et al. (2015) administered a single anti-bullying program. Based on their findings, school leaders who reported the most positive effects had implemented the program on students from Grade 7 and below. There was a large decline in the efficacy for those who were in Grade 8 and above. Aside from factors related to student age, the efficacy of anti-bullying programs might also rely on school culture.

**Research Question 2: To what extent did students who indicated that they were bullied report incidents to others before and after the implementation of the bullying prevention program?** Based on the findings, most reported the bullying incident to their parent/guardian for both pre and postimplementation of the program. Others reported that they reported to friends, guidance counselors, and current grade level teachers. Some participants from the pretest ( $n = 12$ , 16.4%) and posttest ( $n = 12$ , 15.6%) mentioned that they did not report to anyone about their bullying incidents. There were minimal differences in the number of students who did not report pre and postimplementation of the program. The program used in this study received positive results in other countries but had extremely limited success in the United States.

There was minimal literature on how the program influenced the reporting of bullying incidents; however, existing literature included how a positive school culture influenced cases of bullying. Based on results of the study, the implementation of the program did not have significant bearing to how incidents were reported, with findings between pre and postimplementation being more or less the same. Moreover, several researchers have linked school culture and bullying. Students from schools with a

positive culture are less likely to be exposed to bullying and other forms of peer victimization (Bosworth & Judkins, 2014; Clifford et al., 2012; Steffgen et al., 2013; Thapa et al., 2012; Wang et al., 2013).

Espelage, Polanin et al. (2014) studied the possible relationships between how teachers and staff perceived their school's environment and the self-reports of the students regarding bullying, aggression, victimization, and willingness to intervene in cases of bullying. Based on the findings, a positive school culture committed to eliminating bullying was more likely to lead to prevention of bullying (Sheras & Bradshaw, 2016), such as school leaders providing adequate organizational support to teachers and staff who were more empowered to address issues of bullying. This empowerment might translate to empowered students who intervene when witnessing such bullying cases (Espelage, Polanin et al., 2014).

Fekkes, Pijpers, and Verloove-Vanhorick (2004) found that regular communication between children, parents, and teachers on bullying incidents was important. Based on their findings, children spoke to their parents more than their teachers about being bullied. They explained that teachers should regularly talk to parents about bullying incidents. Teachers should involve parents of active bullies when addressing a bullying problem because bullies should also learn in their homes that bullying behaviors are not acceptable.

Axford et al. (2015) studied why and how school-based programs to prevent bullying should involve parents as well as the influence of the involvement of parents in these types of programs. Based on their findings, the involvement of parents in school-based bullying programs increased the possibility of parents discovering the bullying and



letting the school know that their child was being bullied, which allowed school leaders to act. Further research was required to identify if it was a causal factor; however, Axford et al. associated parental involvement with reduction of bullying.

**Research Question 3: To what extent is there a difference between the perceptions of girls and boys regarding being bullied at school before and after the implementation of the bullying prevention program?** Based on the results of the study, the null hypothesis was accepted. There were no statistically significant differences between the perceptions of girls and boys before and after the implementation of the bullying prevention program. Some studies' evidences were supported by what was found in this study, and some were inconsistent with results.

Consistent with findings for other questions, findings on the perceptions of girls and boys before and after the implementation of the program did not show any significant differences. These findings were consistent with what Ttofi and Farrington (2011) found in their study. From their analysis of anti-bullying programs, Ttofi and Farrington found that programs in the United States or Canada did not lead to insignificant effects in terms of reducing bullying. Bauer et al. (2007) also did not observe an overall effect on the reduction of bullying or the improvement of the perceptions of students regarding bullying in their study.

The implementation of the program was also another aspect discussed in existing literature and its effect on how effective the program can be. Leaders of most states have an anti-bullying statute as well as model anti-bullying policies to guide how school district leaders choose to design and implement their anti-bullying programs (Shetgiri et al., 2015a); however, anti-bullying programs are oftentimes school based.

To implement the program effectively, researchers have noted the need to obtain support from the organization. Individual members within the school receive tasks to ensure a safe learning environment for students (Juvonen et al., 2016). If these members perceive a lack of support from the organization, they may more likely fail to implement the programs properly, which can result in the lack of positive results (Bosworth & Judkins, 2014; Clifford et al., 2012; Cornell et al., 2015; Steffgen et al., 2013).

Based on Ansary et al. (2015), the most effective anti-bullying programs include a strong emphasis placed on the inculcation of a positive school culture and strategies derived from social-emotional and character development, a strong commitment to proper implementation, assessment of effectiveness and sustainability, and a clear and constant strategy for action when confronted by bullying. Espelage, Polanin et al. (2014) highlighted the possible relationship between how teachers and staff perceived their school's environment and the self-reports of the students regarding bullying, aggression, victimization, and willingness to intervene in cases of bullying. A positive school culture committed to eliminating bullying is more likely to lead to prevention of bullying (Sheras & Bradshaw, 2016).

**Research Question 4: To what extent is there an association in the locations of bullying reported before and after the implementation of the bullying prevention program?** Based on the findings, most experienced the bullying incident at the gym and during recess time for both pre and postimplementation of the program. Others reported several other locations, such as in hallways, after school, in homeroom, and in an academic classroom. There was no difference in the top location of bullying pre and postimplementation of the program; however, for the rest of the locations reported, there

were some variations pre and postimplementation of the program. After school and in homeroom ranked third and fourth in the pretest, which were not reported in the postimplementation as locations where bullying happens. These were replaced by in an exploratory classroom and in the cafeteria.

Given the implementation of a program, the expectation was that bullying would not be as evident, especially physical bullying. School leaders and policy makers in the United States worked persistently to lessen bullying, which generally resulted in substantially lower rates of physical bullying (Chapin, 2016; Corcoran et al., 2015); however, this process does not eliminate bullying as there are new forms of bullying due to the modern technologies available to students today, such as smartphones, high-speed internet, and social media. There are countless positive effects from these technological advancements; however, traditional bullying has also taken on an online form, which scholars have termed cyberbullying (Chapin, 2016; Corcoran et al., 2015). The results in the study before and after implementation did not indicate any other forms of bullying, which indicated a shift from evident bullying in school through physical forms to online bullying. The findings of the study were inconsistent with claims that physical bullying had already lessened.

There was little to no literature available discussing the location of bullying; however, this researcher noted that the program used in this study received positive results in other countries but had limited success in the United States. Some researchers have emphasized the importance of school culture and implementation of an anti-bullying program and its success.

**Research Question 5: To what extent is there an association in the perceptions of eighth-grade students and teachers on the social and physical environments from the end of 2015 to the end of 2016 as determined by the South Carolina Department of Education Annual Report Card Summary Evaluation**

**Results?** Based on the results of the study, the null hypothesis was accepted. There were no statistically significant associations in the perceptions of eighth-grade students and teachers on the social and physical environments from the end of 2015 to the end of 2016, as determined by the South Carolina Department of Education Annual Report Card Summary Evaluation Results. Some studies' data were supported by these findings, while others were inconsistent with findings in this study.

Ansary et al. (2015) emphasized that the leaders of the most effective anti-bullying programs put emphasis on the inculcation of a positive school culture and strategies derived from social-emotional and character development, a strong commitment to proper implementation, assessment of effectiveness, and sustainability. The support of the organization was also important; if individual members within the school perceived a lack of support from the organization, they were more likely to fail to implement the programs properly, which could result in a lack of positive results (Bosworth & Judkins, 2014; Clifford et al., 2012; Cornell et al., 2015; Steffgen et al., 2013).

Egan and Todorov (2009) and Olweus (1997) found that the OBPP program had remarkable success in other countries, such as Norway and Sweden; however, the result achieved in the United States was not at the scale many expected (Gregory, 2016). There was minimal reduction on bullying, which might be due to the lack of familiarity of

American school leaders, teachers, and staff with the program. Cecil and Molnar-Main (2015) explained that the implementation of the program was centered on performing certain elements of the OBPP with high conformity, such as attending the school kick-off event, posting the rules in the classroom, and explaining the rules to their students; however, some elements of the OBPP were less likely to be implemented correctly, such as receiving booster sessions and engaging in activities that necessitated parental involvement (Cecil & Molnar-Main, 2015).

### **Limitations of the Study**

There were several limitations encountered in the study. One of the limitations included the results of the use of secondary data. The results of the study were limited to the specific program. These could not be compared to other bullying programs given that secondary data using the OBQ were used for the study. Another limitation was the period used to implement the study. Thus, the results were based on what occurred during the span of time when it was implemented.

Another limitation was the research bias, given that this researcher was a counselor at the school at the time these data were collected. This issue was addressed by ensuring that past experiences, preferences, and opinions related to the topic of the study were acknowledged before conducting data collection.

### **Recommendations for Further Study**

This researcher focused on exploring the effectiveness of the OBPP in combatting bullying in a school for the 2015-2016 school year. Based on the literature and findings, there are other aspects of this topic researchers can explore. Future researchers can consider these aspects if they plan to explore the topic further.

This researcher did not include descriptive statistics in the analysis and if there were differences in the perceptions of students regarding being bullied at school before and after the implementation of the bullying prevention program depending on race, social status, gender, and so on. Some studies indicated that personal factors, such as age, culture, race, ethnicity, and family background, could influence the success of a specific bullying program. Thus, one of the recommendations is to consider these descriptive statistics and see how similar or different the results will be when gender, age, and so on are considered.

Researchers can compare different schools and states to explore if results are similar. This study was focused in South Carolina. Researchers can include a different geographic location to identify if results are similar across various locations or whether it plays a factor on how a bullying program is perceived.

Another area that can be explored is the use of a mixed methods study. One of the areas future researchers can explore is expanding the scope of study to include perceptions of other stakeholders, such as teachers. Through a mixed methods approach, future researchers can explore different perspectives to obtain a more in-depth view of how bullying programs are perceived and the impact on the school. This future study will also help future researchers understand better what can be done for bullying program leaders to achieve a better success rate.

### **Implications**

The results of the study may have implications on different stakeholders. The outcomes of the study reinforced some findings from previous studies on the effectiveness of the OBPP; however, this study also indicated results that were unaligned

and inconsistent with some existing studies on bullying programs.

Despite the varying results, this study is helpful for different stakeholders, given the information they can use to improve and address the issue of bullying. Implementing a program accurately and consistently is vital to ensure that benefits from the program are maximized. To see the impact and success of programs like the ones created to address bullying, leadership must ensure the implementation design is followed carefully and accurately. Implementation scientists have studied what works, for who and under what conditions, and how interventions and programs can be adapted and maximized in ways that are manageable (Bauer, Damschroder, Hagedorn, Smith, & Kilbourne, 2015). This approach focuses on gaps between interventions that developed in research, which are effective, and the implementation and translation into practice of these interventions and programs to communications.

Results have showed that there was no difference between pre and post implementation of the anti-bullying program in terms of who students report the bullying incident to. These findings can be utilized by stakeholders and parents where students are exposed to bullying and how these impact the behavior and tendencies of students to become bullies. Social cognitive theory explained that children who are most likely to engage in bullying have been exposed to bullying and other aggressive behaviors, have a pro-bullying attitude, interact with others who indicate that bullying is acceptable, and overtly or covertly reinforce bullying behaviors (Swearer et al., 2014). Swearer et al. (2014) asserted that bullies learned violent behaviors through observational learning and reinforcement.

With the occurrence of bullying in school, school stakeholders need to revisit the kind of culture their schools have to help address bullying. Organizational culture theorists explained the difference by postulating that organization leaders developed a culture over time that could influence how specific actors thought, felt, and behaved within the organization (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015). Based on the findings, bullying often happens in the gym and during recess as well as in hallways, after school, in homeroom, and in an academic classroom. There is a lot of interaction that happens in these locations among students. Schools stakeholders need to ensure that the kind of culture developed in school is one that is positive and encourages good behavior and treatment of every student.

Some of these stakeholders are district officials. Based on what was found from the study, the implementation of the bullying prevention program did not make any difference in the perception of students regarding being bullied. These findings can be utilized and leveraged on by district officials to reassess the bullying program that is implemented. Based on the findings, while it may not be absolute, the intention of the program to prevent bullying may not have been met and the effectiveness may need to be reviewed. District officials have the influence to develop and modify laws that may have a significant impact on the issues related to bullying, especially in school. District officials should review the current program in place and modify, discontinue, and/or create other programs that could be more effective and align better with the needs of the students.

School officials can use this study to understand what makes a program successful and how students perceive the program. They need to be aware of whether there is



progress in the program being implemented to ensure that the program is effective and addressing the issue. Bullying has also been identified as common in the gym and during recess. This finding is supported by previous research, which also reported that most bullying happens in the gym and during recess when the teacher is not around (Albayrak, Yildiz, & Erol, 2016). School officials, such as teachers, can better implement a program with more understanding and knowledge of the possible tendencies of bullying. Bullying is often reported to the parent/guardian both pre and postimplementation of a bullying program; however, this contrasted with previous literature, which found that less than 16% of bullied students reported the incidents to their parents (Hicks, Jennings, Jennings, Berry, & Green, 2018). Thus, school officials should revisit how they can work with parents to address bullying.

Students can also benefit from the findings of this study. They are the ones who are heavily influenced by bullying, as both the victims and perpetrators. Victims and perpetrators can draw from this study the importance of these programs to address the prevailing issues of bullying in schools. They can gain some background on how bullying may influence them negatively. Parents can also leverage on this study to understand better how these program leaders help address bullying. They can learn from the findings of this study to gain more information about the role of preventive programs in improving overall school climate and frequency of bullying reports. Parents will be in a better position to assist their children if they are more familiar with solutions being placed to curtail bullying. Overall, the study may contribute to the ongoing need to address the identified research gap through identifying the impact of the OBPP on efforts against bullying.

### **Recommendations for the District**

The goal of the OBPP to address bullying was not met based on findings in this study. The perceptions of students pre and postimplementation did not change regarding bullying. Participants reported that bullying usually happened during recess and in the gym. Additionally, they shared that they reported bullying to their parents or guardians.

With these findings, this researcher recommends that district officials revisit the implemented program and assess the gaps that resulted in the program's ineffectiveness. The current program is not recommended; students do not feel that there is any improvement or change in terms of being bullied. District officials must review the implementation and guidelines of the current program to understand better areas for improvement and types of changes for the program to address bullying better. District officials should also obtain perspectives of various stakeholders with involvement in implementing the program, including school officials and parents of students.

### **Conclusion**

Bullying is a concern and viewed as a public health concern, which influences life outcomes of both victims and perpetrators. Based on NCES (2015), one of every four students ages 12 to 18 reported being bullied during the 2013 school year. This researcher investigated the effectiveness of the OBPP in combatting bullying in a school for the 2015-2016 school year.

Results showed that there were no significant differences identified before and after the program was implemented. There were minimal differences noted for the number of students who did not report the bullying they experienced. Further studies are suggested to expand the study to have a more holistic view of the topic. Researchers can

explore incorporating demographic information in the analysis to identify how it influences the perception of a person on bullying. The inclusion of other stakeholders as participants is another opportunity to expand the study to have a unique perspective given their involvement in the implementation of the programs.

Overall, the findings are beneficial to many stakeholders, including students, teachers, parents, school leaders, and the government. The findings on the ineffectiveness of the program based on the perspective of students pre and postimplementation of the program are beneficial to stakeholders to identify what can be improved to create a program that is effective. The findings also showed where bullying often occurred and who bullied students reported the incident to after facing a bully. Based on the findings, most students experienced bullying at the gym and during recess before the implementation of the program and after the program was implemented. The findings also showed that students who experienced bullying reported the incident to their parent/guardian for both pre and postimplementation of the program.

This information is beneficial for stakeholders; they can consider these findings when creating a program. The bullying prevention program in place did not automatically eliminate bullying in schools; therefore, leadership must design an appropriate program and approach to address bullying. Different stakeholders should work together to implement a successful bullying program.

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Appendix A

Bullying Prevention Program



Over the course of three years, verbal bullying and rumors have continued to be the prevailing form of bullying. There has been little change in the amount of verbal bullying and rumors in the female population. However, there has been a decline in this form of bullying with male students.

#### Location of bullying

	2012	2013	2014
Girls	41% In hallways/stairwells	40% In hallways/stairwells	40% In hallways/stairwells
Boys	46% In hallways/stairwells	44% In hallways/stairwells	41% In gym class or locker room/shower

During the three years data was collected from the OBQ, there has been little change in the location and amount of bullying with female students in the hallways/stairwells. The male students at [REDACTED] School have seen a decrease in bullying in the hallways/stairwells. The location of the predominant amount of bullying for males students has also changed locations indicating a new focus area is needed for male students.

#### Reporting of bullying (by students)

	2012	2013	2014
Girls	56% Parent/Guardian 56% Sibling/Friend	63% Parent/Guardian	65.9% Parent / Guardian
Boys	43% Teacher or another adult at school	42% Sibling/Friend	33.3% Parent/Guardian 33.3% Sibling/Friend

The data indicates that female students are most comfortable speaking with their parent/guardian, and this number has increased over the last three years. Male students do not appear to have a consistent group they are comfortable reporting to, and the data even indicates they are less likely to report a bullying issues to anyone.

We are proud that this is our 5th year of the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program at [REDACTED] School. I am honored to have led the OBPC (Olweus Bullying Prevention Committee) in drafting a survey. This survey will focus on target areas identified in the OBQ from past years, and will be used to gain additional information and insight about the nature and scope of bullying at the middle school level.

I understand that the Olweus Bullying Questionnaire is a copyrighted document and agree to use it for research purposes only. I further agree to share my findings with Dan Olweus and Sue Limber once my study is complete.

## Appendix B

### Fall 2015 & Spring 2016 Middle School Student Bullying Survey

Please respond to the following questions and statements about bullying.  
We want your opinions or experiences to guide the responses your give.

**Definition of Bullying:**

Bullying is when someone repeatedly and on purpose says or does mean or hurtful things to another person who has a hard time defending himself or herself (Olweus & Linden, 2007, p. xii)

OR

A person is bullied when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other persons, and he or she has difficulty defending himself or herself (Olweus & Linden, 2007, p. 11).

1. What is your current grade level?
  - sixth
  - seventh
  - eighth
2. What is your gender?
  - Male (boy)
  - Female (girl)
3. Have you ever been bullied at your middle school?
  - Yes
  - No
4. If you have been bullied at your middle school, how often have you been bullied?
  - One or more times per day.
  - One or more times per week.
  - One or more times per month.
  - I have never been bullied.
5. If you have been bullied at your middle school, where have you been bullied?  
(check all that apply)
  - Homeroom
  - Academic classroom (English Language Arts, Math, Science, Social Studies)
  - Exploratory (electives) classroom
  - Cafeteria
  - Gym
  - Hallway
  - Bathroom
  - Locker room
  - Recess
  - Before School
  - After School
  - Online/texting - during school hours
  - Online/texting - outside of school hours
  - District sporting events
  - I have never been bullied
  - Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

6. If you checked online/texting (question #5), please give further information:
- Phone texting
  - Facebook
  - Twitter
  - Snapchat
  - E-mail
  - Online gaming
  - Other \_\_\_\_\_
7. If you have been bullied at your middle school, what forms of bullying have you experienced?
- Verbal
  - Social exclusion or isolation
  - Physical
  - Lies or false rumors
  - Money or other personal property taken or damaged
  - Racial
  - Sexual
  - Cyber
  - I have never been bullied
- Please describe / explain the form / type of your bullying experience(s).
8. Who have you reported the incidences to?
- Current grade level Teacher
  - Past grade level Teacher
  - Exploratory Teacher
  - Administrator
  - Guidance Counselor
  - Friend (who attends the chosen middle school)
  - Parent / Guardian
  - I have never reported an issue with bullying
  - Other \_\_\_\_\_
- Please describe / explain reporting of your bullying experience(s).
9. Please type in any additional thoughts or comments you would like to add about bullying at your middle school.

Thank you for participating in this survey for your middle school.