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EFFECTIVENESS OF ANTI-BULLYING TEAMS FROM PRACTITIONERS' PERSPECTIVES

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EFFECTIVENESS OF ANTI-BULLYING UNDERCOVER TEAMS FROM PRACTITIONERS’ PERSPECTIVES

A Project
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Science in
in Counseling and Guidance

by
Dorry Lillard
June 2015
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A Project
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Approved by:

John Winslade, 1st Reader, Educational Psychology and Counseling

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ABSTRACT

School bullying is a worldwide problem and has been called a “social phenomenon” that is negatively impacting the lives of children, including the bullies, the victims and the bystanders. This project used qualitative methods to investigate the implementation process and effectiveness of a bullying intervention called Undercover Anti-Bullying Teams. The “no blame” approach idea to healing bullying relationships originated by Bill Hubbard was later modified with narrative perspectives by Michael Williams, a counselor at a high school in Auckland, New Zealand. The purpose of this project was to gain qualitative insight from two practitioners in New Zealand, and two practitioners in California, about their personal experiences with the implementation of this approach. The data collected from the practitioners included implementation procedures of the undercover teams program, their personal success stories, team members’ responses, and the positive impact that the experiences have had for their lives. The study found that Undercover Anti-Bullying Teams have the potential to help students create positive change personally and in the classroom and school environment. The study also found that undercover teams have the potential to foster a safer environment for students to learn. Bullying is a serious problem in schools and has severe negative consequences for everyone involved. Effective bullying interventions and preventative measures can help create awareness that can minimize the prevalence of this growing epidemic.
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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my beloved brother, Jamey Don Sathoff. I would have never made it this far without him. He instilled in me the importance of education, and this is a product of his inspiration and example.
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Investigating Anti-Bullying Programs

Bullying is commonly known to be a worldwide problem. Numerous studies have attempted to find answers and solutions in a quest to end the epidemic of bullying in schools. Bauer, Lozano & Rivara, (2006, p. 266) describe it as a “social phenomenon” which include various roles, such as bully, victim, bully-victim, or bystander. Over 70% of students report experiencing bullying at some point by the end of the twelfth grade according to Juvonen (2014). Haltigan and Vaillancourt, (2014) asserted 5%-17% of school-aged children are known to bully others, and victims represent approximately 4%-12% of school-aged children. (p. 2426).

The earliest estimates of bullying prevalence were based on surveys of more than 130,000 Norwegian students conducted in 1983, where it was determined that (a) the percentage of victimized students who were bullied two or three times a month or more, had increased by approximately 50% since 1983, and (b) the percentage of students who were involved in the most serious forms of bullying problems had increased by 65% (Olweus & Limber, 2010, p. 125).

Carlson and Horne (2004) asserted that “it is unlikely that childhood bullying will ever be completely eliminated.” However, “with the cooperation of communities, agencies, schools, counselors, teachers and students, the problem
can be reduced” (p. 259). International anti-bullying conferences are now being held in selected states around the world, in efforts to bring about awareness in communities about the dangers and effects of bullying behaviors, which seem to be helping with prevalence rates, according to research.

Although answers to end bullying altogether have not yet been found, there has been a significant increase in awareness over the last few decades (Rigby, 2002). The increase in awareness about the dangers of bullying behavior has motivated numerous schools around the world to implement anti-bullying programs, which have impacted prevalence rates. However, there have been few studies evaluating the effectiveness of the programs, which creates a challenge for educators and practitioners when deciding which programs are most useful. A Norwegian researcher, Dan Olweus, was the first to publish research on school bullying prevention efforts (Merrell, Gueldner, Ross & Isava, 2008) during the 1970’s, which influenced the implementation of international anti-bullying intervention/prevention programs during the 1980s and 1990s. Olweus’s influence is still evident in current research and continues to provide a foundation for many school bullying intervention efforts. Although intervention research efforts have been slow over the last few decades, they are reaching a size that can now be studied and evaluated.

There are a multitude of negative consequences that are directly related to bullying incidents. Research indicates that consequences from bullying behaviors do not only affect the victim; they can affect the entire climate of a
The most serious consequence is suicide. Many students have taken their own lives after being bullied. Research further shows that other serious consequences include depression, low grades, poor attendance, isolation, self-mutilation, and drug and alcohol use (Brown, 2008; Haltigan & Vaillancourt, 2014; Jones, Manstead & Livingstone, 2009). The psychological distress from peer victimization can be both short-term and long-term, depending on the severity and longevity of abuse (Rueger & Jenkins, 2013). “Bullies, victims, and bully-victims are at risk for negative mental health and social outcomes that may persist into adulthood” (Bauer, Lozano, Rivara, 2006, p. 266).

The most common approach to bullying behavior is punitive and usually involves the identification of a perpetrator(s) and a victim, isolating the perpetrator and applying punishment (Williams, 2011). The problem with this method is that resentment toward authority and desire for revenge are possible outcomes. “Another problem with the punitive approach, is that it frequently works to restrain and repress the bullying behavior, but does not stand much chance of transforming the relationships involved” (Williams & Winslade, 2008, p. 2). Punishment of bullies can thus be argued to have limited effect. Restorative practices are an approach that aims to be more effective when dealing with problematic behavior in schools, such as bullying. The undercover anti-bullying teams approach addresses offending behavior “in terms of the harm that is done to relationships, rather than in terms of breakdown of the authority of rules or administrators.” “This assumption argues that the main requirement for justice is
to restore personal and community relations that have been harmed by problematic behavior, rather than to restore the authority of those in power” (Williams & Winslade, p. 2).

School counselors are challenged with bullying issues on a regular basis, and need effective alternatives to punitive measures, when attempting to combat bullying relationships in schools. Analysis of archival data in one New Zealand school shows that undercover anti-bullying teams can be useful in combating bullying relationships (Winslade & Williams, 2008). It is imperative that research efforts continue to investigate what is useful and what is not, in order to foster healthy learning environments for students in schools. “Happier and safer schools are better schools; happier and safer students are better students” (Williams, 2013). Bauer, Lozano and Rivara (2006) asserted, “Without appropriate intervention, bullying behaviors tend to increase and contribute to a negative school environment” (p. 266).

Undercover anti-bullying team intervention methods were investigated in this study and experiences were shared from a practitioner’s perspective. Five school counselors were interviewed, and asked questions pertaining to their personal experience of working with the teams, and recorded data was compared and analyzed, and discussed throughout this paper.

As mentioned above, the practice of undercover anti-bullying teams is a non-punitive approach to the problem of bullying. The purpose of undercover teams is to transform bullying relationships, by rewriting the relationship story
between the bully and the victim. The emphasis highlights the development of positive relationships, rather than pathologizing and punishing the bully (Winslade & Williams, 2012). Postmodern approaches, such as restorative practices and narrative therapy perspectives, are becoming a useful approach to responding to bullying behavior. Narrative perspectives argue that, “The problem is not the bully; the problem is the existence of a bullying relationship, which is central to the practice of bullying” (Winslade & Williams, 2008, p. 3). The undercover approach is a “no blame” approach (Robinson & Maines, 1977), to healing bullying relationships, which leaves space for victims to re-write their bullying story, rather than leaving them with the negative consequences that can result from their problem-saturated story, and that can potentially have harmful effects on their well-being and lives. Moreover, it involves “strategic effort” by the school counselor to “re-author relationships” as seen in narrative counseling (Williams & Winslade, 2008, p.3). Re-authoring happens in ways that are “incompatible with the ongoing performance of bullying stories” (p. 3). In addition, “the role of the counselor in undercover anti-bullying teams helps the victim restore a sense of self that was damaged by the bullying” (p. 2).

Purpose of the Project

This research project attempts to analyze data collected from counseling practitioners in school settings in New Zealand and California. The purpose of the analysis is to illustrate the perceptions of practitioners and to document the implementation procedures used regarding anti-bullying undercover teams. It
does this by analyzing data collected from interviews with practitioners who have had experience with this method of healing bullying relationships in schools. This project focuses on the implementation procedures, practitioners’ perspectives on the effectiveness of the program and the problems that may arise during the undercover team process, all as reported from a practitioner’s perspective in their own words. Data was collected from the interviews and analyzed by corroborating and comparing recurrent topics and themes, which will shed some light on the anti-bullying program’s effectiveness. Currently, there is limited literature written about undercover anti-bullying teams and their effectiveness. However, the feedback pertaining to the effectiveness of the program has been positive, which makes it worthy of further investigation (Winslade & Williams, 2008).

The term “undercover teams” was created by Bill Hubbard (2004), drawing on Robinson and Maines (1977) “no blame” approach to bullying (Winslade & Williams (2013). Narrative perspectives were later added to the approach, which involves “removing the deficit discourse and totalizing identities of bullies and victims” (Winslade & Williams, 2008, p. 3).

While bullying continues to be problematic in schools around the world, new methods, such as restorative practices, are gaining popularity as a “means to address student misbehavior” (Mergler, Vargas & Caldwell, 2014, p.24). Research shows that dropping out of school, repeating a grade, and entering the juvenile justice system is more likely for individuals who have been disciplined by
punitive measures. Mergler et al. further argue that, “Tossing a misbehaving child out of class or suspending the student from school may not be the best option for the student, school, or community” (p. 25).

According to Winslade and Williams (2008), the punitive approach typically involves “the identification of the perpetrator and the victim, the isolation of the perpetrator, and the application of a punishment by school authorities, effectively using the power of authority to stop the bullying by overpowering it” (p. 1). As previously mentioned, researchers are discovering that restorative practices may be more effective in healing bullying relationships and creating safer school climates for learning than punitive measures. However, according to Morrison (2006), “research has not yet produced reliable evidence on which of the different perspectives and associated practices are most likely to reduce bullying in schools” (p. 372).

The problem with the punitive approach is that it focuses on the bully and neglects the victim. Punitive measures such as, “punishing,” “isolating” and “pathologizing”, are paradoxical to restorative practices, which focus on building positive relationships. As noted by Williams and Winslade (2008), “responding to bullying behavior in schools through punitive methods may reproduce the same power relations that are inherent in the bullying” (p. 1).

Restorative practices in schools address problematic behavior similarly to the way restorative justice addresses criminal behavior, which is thought of as harm done to relationships, rather than as a breakdown of authoritative rules and
regulations (Winslade & Williams, 2008, p. 2). Restorative practices are claimed to be more effective in combating bullying relationships because they take the focus off of the perpetrator and attempt to heal the broken relationship in a relationally transformative approach (p. 3). The healing begins by placing the victim in a position of power, and creating space for new narratives to be formed. Furthermore, bystanders are included in the process, which encourages change and healing and creates space for the victim to rewrite the bullying story (Winslade & Williams, 2008). As noted in Williams (2013):

Undercover anti-bullying teams approach is a strategic intervention where the target of the bullying, the counselor and teachers co-author an alternative story of peace and harmony by recruiting a group of students who are popular and influential to influence the class relationships and support the victim. (PowerPoint Presentation).

The undercover teams program is a five-phase approach to combating bullying relationships in schools. The phases are: “(a) valuing the victim (b) recruiting the team (c) creating the plan (d) monitoring progress and (e) celebrating success” (Williams, 2010, p. 1).

Valuing the Victim

The first phase involves the counselor meeting with the victim to determine whether a bullying relationship exists. When a bullying relationship has been positively identified, the counselor will write down the story of the victim in his or her own words.
Recruiting the Team

The victim is then told about the undercover team process, and is invited to choose students to be a part of the team: the two worst bullies, and four others who are well respected among peers. The chosen students then meet with the counselor, and are invited to be a part of a special “undercover operation,” which usually creates a sense of intrigue.

Creating a Plan

After they accept the invitation to be part of the team, the counselor reads them a story about the victim in his or her own words, and the victim is identified. A five-point plan is then developed to help the victim through his or her “rough patch”.

Monitoring Progress

The counselor meets with the victim on a regular basis and also meets with the team regularly to monitor progress and make changes to their five-point plans, if necessary.

Celebrating Success

Once the victim declares that the bullying has ended, the team receives a food voucher and a principal's award in recognition of their accomplishments.

My research project will provide an in-depth look at practitioners’ perspectives regarding the undercover team program. Questions for practitioners will be geared toward their experience of the implementation process, and their perspectives on the effectiveness of the program, and whether
or not the program would be recommended for other schools around the world. If this program is effective in combating bullying relationships and creating safer learning environments for students, I believe that more counselors and schools will want to implement this method to help minimize bullying behaviors and create healthier classroom and school climates.

Personal Interest

The reason I chose to do this research project is because, during my fieldwork at a local middle school here in California, and during my study abroad experience in New Zealand at a high school, I noticed many students coming into the office with bullying issues. There was not an anti-bullying program being implemented at either school at the time. This surprised me because it seemed that bullying issues were the most common topic discussed in the counseling office during my fieldwork experience. I began to ask questions about how bullying issues were typically handled by the counselors, and discovered that the New Zealand school’s procedure for handling bullying issues consisted of utilizing peer group mediation. This method is called “MASH,” which stands for mediators activating student harmony. This method is narrative therapy-based (Morgan, 2000) and externalization and mapping effects were the primary focus (Winslade & Monk, 2013). The group provided peer support to help mend broken relationships and friendships. However, they never identified the conflicts as bullying issues. When dealing with bullying relationships, where a student was
experiencing significant harm, the issues would be taken to the year-level dean, who may call for a restorative conference. The dean would then assess the situation and utilize the power of authority to end the conflict. Although the school did not have any bullying intervention programs, they did, however, advocate small communities of awareness and support regarding problematic students, where they collaboratively found solutions to problems. In my California experience at a local middle school, intervention methods consisted of the counselor essentially handling the bullying issues by identifying and threatening the bully with punishment, if the behavior did not stop. In addition, there were incidences where a bullying relationship was identified as something else, and not addressed at all.

As I was witnessing these bullying incidences during my fieldwork experience, I began reflecting on my own personal experience in middle school, when I was involved in a bullying relationship. There was no way I would have ever had the courage to talk to a counselor or my parents about the issues I was having with the bully. The primary reason for this was fear of retaliation. I then began reflecting on other experiences of bullying, such as when my children were attending middle school and high school. I remember the pain and struggles they had, and remember feeling very helpless about their situation. I had the same fear of retaliation for them as I had for myself when I was dealing with these issues, and did not tell anyone about it. I would encourage them to be strong and ignore the perpetrators, but no matter what I said or did, nothing
seemed to help. My children still have pain from the bullying experiences that seem to continue to affect them. I like the idea of undercover anti-bullying teams as an intervention, because I believe it would have made a difference in my life. In addition, I have read about the effectiveness of the program and feel that it could be greatly useful in schools world-wide as an effective method to combat bullying relationships, and improve classroom and school climate.

I was first introduced to the concept during a therapeutic workshop in Redlands, California, where I met Michael Williams (Guidance Counselor and Head of Student Support and Development at Edgewater College, Pakuranga, Auckland, New Zealand) for the first time. Also present was John Winslade, (Professor in the College of Education at California State University, San Bernardino). Williams discussed undercover anti-bullying teams with about six other students from California State University San Bernardino, using a powerpoint presentation. One of the statements that resonated with me was, “Victims of bullying are less likely to report and suffer in silence.” Williams then described how the undercover teams work, which piqued my interest. After this fascinating presentation, I knew that I wanted to explore the topic more in-depth.

My curiosity about anti-bullying interventions also led me to an anti-bullying conference in Riverside, California, which I heard about during my last fieldwork experience working in a middle school. To my surprise, I received an ample amount of information on the topic. There was no discussion of undercover anti-bullying teams at this conference, but I learned a lot about other
intervention methods that were also effective in combating bullying issues in schools. This is where I discovered that there were bullying programs taking place around the world in various school settings. I then decided to do a special project on the topic of bullying during my last fieldwork experience. During this project, my passion for the topic grew even more, and I wanted to learn as much as I possibly could about bullying interventions. I am also very passionate about narrative therapy, upon which the undercover teams foundation was built. These two passions came together and motivated me to do this research project. I am looking forward to discovering the effectiveness of undercover teams, in hopes that other schools around the world will want to implement the program to help restore bullying relationships and improve classroom and school environments. I am grateful for this opportunity to be working with Dr. John Winslade on this research project, and hope that this research will help make a difference.

Scope of the Project

The research question being addressed in this project is: 'How are undercover teams implemented by practitioners’ and what is their perceived effectiveness compared to other anti-bullying programs?’ There are many anti-bullying programs currently being implemented in schools. In order to investigate some of the programs, it is necessary to interview some of the counselors who are currently implementing them. The intentions of this project were to create awareness of the serious nature of bullying relationships, and provide useful
information that might potentially help combat these issues. Furthermore, the information generated by this project may help counselors, parents, teachers, administrators, and researchers that are searching for useful methods on this topic. In addition, counselors can utilize the methods described in this paper to help make a difference for students regarding safety issues, healing bullying relationships, and improving the overall climate of their school. The undercover anti-bullying team approach may be the answer they have been searching for. For researchers, the project can be utilized as a basis for further research and can potentially create a ripple effect in other schools across the country. For teachers, and school administrators, the idea of anti-bully undercover teams may be something that can be utilized to help foster safe and healthy school environments.

Significance of the Project

This project will bring awareness to others about the seriousness of bullying in schools, and provide valuable information that can potentially decrease the prevalence of the epidemic. Reading about the issues that may arise with undercover anti-bullying teams and the effectiveness of the program from those who are currently implementing them, may shed some light for those who are searching for ways to combat the growing problem of bullying in their schools.
The use of undercover anti-bullying teams began in New Zealand, but they are now also being utilized in California. The significance of this research project is to help counselors and schools around the world consider implementation of this program as an effective intervention method to address bullying relationships. In addition, the information gathered in this project may potentially create better learning environments for others, which will benefit the entire climate of schools.

Limitations to the Study

The research project is an analysis of data collected from practitioners in their own words, about the implementation and perceived effectiveness of anti-bullying undercover teams. The data collected about the undercover team process does not conform to formal quantitative methods of scientific discovery. However, it is useful, because it provides a record of the process of implementing the undercover anti-bullying team program from the practitioner's point of view. Furthermore, this project does not guarantee effectiveness of anti-bullying programs in all school settings around the world. Current literature provides information regarding implementation of the program in New Zealand school settings only. This does not mean, however, that they would not be useful in settings in other countries. While the study has limitations, the readers get a glimpse of an anti-bullying program that is making a difference in students'
learning environment and providing space for new stories to be developed and explored.
CHAPTER TWO
REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

What is Bullying?

Bullying is difficult to define, and sometimes difficult to identify. Definitions vary, but most definitions have the commonality of the existence of a “power imbalance between the bully and victim” (Aalsma & Brown, 2008, p.101). Meier (2014) stated that it is difficult to tell the difference between bullying and other behaviors. One definition of bullying describes it as a “proactive form of aggression directed towards a weaker peer”. (Gini, Pozzoli, Borghi, Franzoni., 2008, p. 617). Sherer and Nickerson (2010) define bullying as a specific form of aggressive behavior, which includes an “intention to harm,” “repeated occurrences,” and an “imbalance of power” (p. 687). Aalsma and Brown (2008) asserted that bullying has two key components, an “imbalance of power and repetition” (p. 101). Juvonen (2005) argued that the “perpetrator” must be stronger and more intimidating than the “target,” for an imbalance of power to exist. An imbalance of power does not solely require one to be physically larger, stronger, or more intimidating than the target. It can also exist when one is being “outnumbered”, such as when a group of students attack one student verbally or physically (p. 37). Some researchers suggest that bullying is a way to exert control in a situation when one lacks control in other areas of life. The bully feeds off the reaction of the victim, which indicates “proof of power,” as noted in Juvonen (2014). Research further describes bullying as a “subjective experience,
which manifests in many different forms and context and depends on age and gender” (McElearney, Roosemale-Cocq, Scott, & Stephenson, 2008). It is also considered subjective in terms of the “impact on the emotional health and development” of all involved, including bullies, victims and bully-victims (p. 110).

Bullying involves individual personality characteristics or typical reaction patterns, in combination with physical strength or weaknesses, and environmental factors, such as attitudes, routines, and behavior of adults in the school environment play major role in determining the extent to which the problems will manifest themselves in a classroom or a school (Olweus & Limber 2010, p. 125).

**Start and Peak of Bullying Behavior**

Research indicates that bullying usually begins around the fourth grade and continues throughout middle school, where it reaches its peak. Research further indicates that “boys are more likely than girls to engage in bullying behaviors” (Juvonen, 2005, p.37). Studies show that the reason bullying peaks in middle school, is because students are transitioning from a more structured, smaller school, with one teacher and one classroom environment, to a larger, less structured school, with multiple teachers and classrooms. Some students find the new climate overwhelming and threatening, and take it upon themselves to create structure (Juvonen, 2014). One explanation as to why this occurs is that threatening environments have a tendency to make students go into a primal
response mode, which brings out their most aggressive nature (Pease, 2014). Consequently, there is a rise in bullying behavior.

The Bully

Research regarding the definition and characteristics of the bully seems to vary. Lambie (2009) argues that bullies are physically stronger than their peers, and oftentimes, are a product of a troubled home environment. Some research suggests that bullies have low self-esteem, while others suggest they have inflated self-esteem. Juvonen (2014) further argues that research opinion regarding bullies having low self-esteem is a myth. Juvonen states that bullies actually have inflated self-esteem and egos, which contradicts previous research and discourses about bully characteristics. However, findings regarding self-esteem and aggressive behavior have only been supported by theory and lack empirical evidence. Salmivalli (2001) found that “risk-seeking” individuals are known to have “high self-esteem,” while those with “low self-esteem” lack confidence in their abilities (p. 377). However, empirical findings on this topic seem to lack sound evidence. Salmivalli (2001) further asserts that traditional measures for self-esteem have been criticized as inadequate, and found no correlation between self-esteem and aggressive bullying behavior. Measures of self-esteem and self-worth have been used in studies to determine links to aggressive behavior, however, traditional measurement tools have not proven to be reliable (p. 378).
There are a multitude of definitions in research regarding the characteristics of the bully, which creates complexity. Most definitions describe the bully as physically stronger, and larger than their peers, and oftentimes a product of a troubled home environment (Merrell, Gueldner, Ross, & Isava, 2008). Merrell et al. argue that “poor parental” role modeling in problem-solving and ineffective discipline is to blame (p. 27). Family factors have been directly linked to domestic violence, harsh physical discipline, authoritarian parenting, poor parental supervision and drug and alcohol use by family members (Meier, 2014). In regards to the low self-esteem versus high self-esteem debate, most research and discourses connect high self-esteem to positive attributes such as “success,” “optimism,” and “physical health,” and low self-esteem is connected with negative attributes such as, “depression,” “loneliness,” and “fearfulness.” Findings regarding self-esteem factors are essentially viewed in this light. However, findings regarding self-esteem and bullying behavior have only been supported by theory (Salmivalli, 2001, p. 37).

Studies have referred to bullies as risk-seeking individuals who have high self-esteem, and claim that individuals with low self-esteem lack confidence in their abilities. However, Salmivalli (2001) argues that empirical findings on this topic seem to lack sound evidence and measurements have been unreliable (p. 377). Merrell, Gueldner, Ross, and Isava (2008) further argue that, “although research on bully characteristics is complex, recent findings indicate that bullies lack empathy, have poorer academic skills and grades, and have social
perception biases and cognitive deficits” (p. 26). Bullies also have a tendency to be at a higher risk for substance abuse problems and become involved in criminal behavior later in life. Furthermore, the older they get, they become “increasingly unpopular” with their peers. Unfortunately, discourses regarding bully characteristic descriptions and definitions are deep-seated in American culture and the complexity of the topic remains a challenge.

There have been multiple studies suggesting various reasons as to why young people and teenagers bully others. However, recent studies suggest that the problem is not the bully. Birchmeier, Flaspohler, Elfstrom, Vanerzee, and Sink (2009) argue that “there is more involved than solely a dyadic relationship between a bully and victim” (p. 638). Research has discovered that bystanders are also responsible for encouraging or discouraging the bullying behavior (Poyhonen, Juvonen, & Salmivalli, 2012). As a result, intervention efforts are focusing on addressing bullying behavior by educating bystanders about the effects of bullying and teaching them how to make a stand on behalf of the victim by directly “stepping in,” “seeking help,” or “comforting the victim” (p. 723). Undercover anti-bullying teams address bullying relationships in a very similar way. As noted above, the bystanders are included in the process, which encourages change and healing and creates space for the victim to rewrite the bullying story (Winslade & Williams, 2008).

These findings confirm the importance of implementing programs in schools that teach students how to recognize and respond appropriately to
bullying behaviors. Interventions programs such as undercover anti-bullying teams have been successful in helping students identify and respond to these behaviors in a way that helps restore relationships damaged by the bullying. In addition, the bullying students are offered a new pro-social identity and anonymity to gain confidence with that identity, and assertive students, such as bystanders, are given a “framework in which to act” (Williams, 2011). Educating students about the role they choose, whether it involves defending, reinforcing, or not intervening at all, is key to making a difference in the growing epidemic of bullying in our schools (Juvonen, 2014). Juvonen further asserts that interventions that target the whole peer group are necessary, because doing so offsets the behavior. When someone stands up, the power imbalance gets offset, which seems to work, according to Juvonen.

The “Target’ Victim

Perpetrators look for safe, easy targets, such as those with no friends, those whom others dislike or envy, or those who are just different from others. The students at the highest risk for being bullied are those with learning disabilities, such as those with attention deficit disorders (Juvonen, 2014). Moreover, children with special needs, who are under weight or over weight, who speak another language, are lesbian, gay, or bi-sexual, and/or stand out as ‘different,’ are also included in the high risk category (Low & Ryzin, 2014). Research further indicates that passive and socially withdrawn children are at the highest risk of being bullied, and the bullying only makes them more withdrawn
(Juvonen, 2005). Some may believe that being bullied builds character. Research challenges this belief, and claims that it only makes the victims weaker, especially when no one helps. The psychological impact can vary from anger and frustration, to helplessness and hopelessness (Pease, 2014). Research shows that the reaction to bullying predicts the duration (Juvonen, 2014). For example, if a target responds in a weak manner to the perpetrator, the likelihood of being targeted again is significantly higher, than if they responded with confidence and strength (Juvonen, 2014).

Findings regarding descriptions and characteristics of the victim, are more consistent than those that refer to bullies, according to Merrel, Gueldner, Ross, & Isava (2008). Victims, or “targets” tend to be physically weaker and smaller than bullies, and are “anxious,” “fearful,” “insecure,” “depressed,” and have “low self-esteem,” and are “passive,” and “withdrawn.” Perpetrators look for safe and easy targets, such as those who others dislike, or envy, or those who are “different” from others.

The Bystanders

A bystander is one who witnesses bullying behavior. According to Jon Pease (2014), most bystanders are afraid to stand up to a bully, because they are afraid that they will be targeted. They may also feel helpless and believe that if they do not do anything that they are endorsing violence.

Standing up, or defending, can effectively stop peer harassment. Studies have shown that “empowering bystanders to actively support and defend their
victimized peers is a key for effective interventions against bullying” (Poyhonen, Juvonen, & Salmivalli, 2012, p. 722). In addition, “defending has been associated with two potential positive outcomes; bullying decreasing, and the victim’s plight being alleviated” (Poyhonen, Juvonen, & Salmivalli, 2012, p. 723).

Bullies are rewarded by their peers’ responses, and receive power, or “ego-boosters” from the reward (Juvonen, 2014). Therefore, taking the power away, by educating children how to properly respond to bullying behavior is imperative when seeking for solutions to the problem. Juvonen further asserted that bullies are considered the ‘cool kids’ in middle school, particularly in the first year. ‘Coolness,’ therefore, is considered the strongest predictor of self-esteem, which can motivate children to bully. These findings confirm the importance of implementing programs in schools, such as undercover anti-bullying teams, and other methods that teach students how to recognize and respond appropriately to bullying behaviors. Educating students about the role they choose, whether it involves defending, reinforcing, or not intervening at all, is key to making a difference in the growing epidemic of bullying in our schools (Juvonen, 2014). Juvonen further asserts that interventions that target the whole peer group are necessary, because they offset the behavior. When someone stands up, the power imbalance gets offset, which seems to work, according to Juvonen, (2014). Undercover anti-bullying teams are one such intervention that targets the whole peer group, which has the potential to dramatically offset the balance of power and enhance the relationships in the classroom and school community
Literature suggests that empowering bystanders is imperative for anti-bullying interventions to be effective (Juvonen & Salmivalli, 2012).

Types of Bullying

There are two types of bullying, direct and indirect. Direct bullying involves physical aggression, threats and name-calling, and indirect bullying involves exclusion and talking about someone, which is more common with girls than boys, according to Juvonen, (2014).

There are several types of behaviors that constitute bullying, a few of which are nearly undetectable. For example, Gordon (2014) asserts that name-calling can leave “very deep emotional scars and wounds that cannot be seen, but are felt very deeply and can last a lifetime” (p. 1). According to Williams (2011), “Covert bullying has the potential to result in more severe psychological, social and mental health problems than overt bullying and is more difficult to detect and eliminate” (PowerPoint Presentation). Overt bullying behaviors are “obvious behaviors,” while covert behaviors are “less obvious” (Gordon 2014, p. 2). Name-calling and insults intended to humiliate, belittle, and demean someone, are considered overt behavior. Furthermore, overt behavior includes direct attacks, such as punching, shoving, threats and yelling. Covert bullying involves nasty rumors, exclusion, non-verbal insults, snorts, giggles, and other derogatory noises.

Covert bullying is a little more difficult to detect. It involves psychological intimidation as opposed to physical force (Juvonen, 2014). Research indicates
that covert bullying is more prevalent than overt behavior in schools. The primary reason for this, is because, not only is it more difficult to detect and eliminate (Williams, 2013), it is also easily deniable. Williams, (2013), stated that “covert bullying has the potential to result in more severe psychological, social and mental health problems than overt bullying” (PowerPoint Presentation)

Cyberbullying

One example of covert behavior can be seen in cyberbullying. Cyberbullying is a form of covert bullying that varies from straightforward attacks to subtle messages that damage the victim’s social relations, which are delivered using electronic means (Gordon, 2014). Cyberbullying can include sending hurtful messages, such as emails and texts, and posting hurtful images and threatening comments about someone on social media. The impact and consequences of this type of bullying behavior are significant. The effects include emotional and psychological distress such as anxiety, fear, depression and low self-esteem. Some students have taken their own lives after being overwhelmed and traumatized by cyberbullying behaviors (Meier, 2014).

One of the reasons why this type of bullying may be one of the most dangerous forms of bullying behavior, is because it is the most difficult of all covert behaviors to detect (Pease, 2014). What makes cyberbullying dangerous and damaging, is that most students will not tell anyone about it. Current studies indicate that approximately 67% of students do not tell an adult when they are being bullied, or cyberbullied (Juvonen, 2014). In addition, this type of bullying is
said to pose one of the biggest challenges for schools. The primary reason for this is that students who come forward are at risk for retaliation, and are judged as weak or sensitive. In many cases they are even viewed as the problem (Pease, 2014). Furthermore, cyberbullying usually takes place outside of school such as, while students are home using the internet (Mishna, Cook, Gadalla, Daciuk, & Solomon, 2010). However, research shows that it can happen wherever “electronic media” can be accessed (p. 362) and there are “significant psychosocial and academic repercussions” (p. 363).

Cyber-bullying is a growing issue among teens. One reason for this is that they are frequently on the internet, which leaves them vulnerable to attacks from perpetrators (Pease, 2014). In addition, cyber bullies can say things they do not have the courage to say to one’s face, because “technology makes them feel anonymous” (Gordon, 2014, p. 2), and perpetrators can harass targets through electronic communication with less risk of getting caught (Meier, 2014). To the targets of cyberbullying, it feels never-ending and invasive. Bullies can get to the target anytime and anywhere, oftentimes they are victimized in the safety of their own home (Pease, 2014).

Relational aggression is another type of bullying that tends to go unnoticed, because it is sneaky and less obvious than other types. This type of bullying involves sabotaging another student’s social standing. It is accomplished by spreading rumors, manipulating situations and breaking confidences (Gordon, 2014). The bully’s goal in relational aggression bullying is
to increase their own social standing by breaking down, and controlling another person. Research indicates that this type of behavior is more common with girls, than boys (Juvonen, 2014).

Sexual bullying is another type of bullying that involves repeated, harmful actions that are intended to humiliate the target in a sexual manner. This can include crude, sexual comments, propositioning, and inappropriate touching. Gordon (2014) asserts that girls are most often the target of this type of bullying, but the bullies include boys and girls. Studies indicate that boys are more responsible for the inappropriate touching and propositioning, and girls are more responsible for the name-calling (Gordon, 2014). Lastly, there is prejudicial bullying, which involves attacking a person’s race, religion or sexual orientation. Gordon (2014) further asserts that often this type of bullying is severe and can lead to hate crimes.

Impact

Studies have shown that peer victimization has severe psychological and academic consequences. The psychological distress can be both short-term and long term (Rueger & Jenkins, 2014). Peer victimization is responsible for depression, “higher levels of anxiety and lower levels of self-esteem.” In addition, it has been linked to a multitude of other factors such as “attendance,” “lower grade point averages,” and poorer attitudes about school in general. These factors have also been directly linked to absenteeism, and lower academic achievement (Rueger & Jenkins, 2014, p.77).
The psychological impact of bullying can vary from anger and frustration, to helplessness and hopelessness, powerlessness (Juvonen, 2014). Research indicates that it is “strongly associated with poorer mental health, including depression and suicide ideation, and psychosomatic symptoms” (McElearney, Roosmale-Cocq, Scott & Stephenson, 2008, p. 110). Furthermore, “victims are more likely to spend more time in the nurses’ office, have poor attendance, and refuse to go to school, or even leave their houses” (Davis, 2011, p. 4). This causes them to struggle academically, resulting in a significant drop in grades.

The emotional impact can also be significant. According to Davis (2011), bullied students live with fear and have more anger and resentment toward others; they have sleeping problems due to nightmares about the bullying; and they have “low self-esteem,” “higher rates of depression,” and have “poor interpersonal relationships” in adulthood (p. 5). Studies have shown that psychological distress from school bullying can be either “short-term or long-term” (Rueger & Jenkins, 2014). According to McElearney et al. (2008), effects from bullying can persist into adulthood such as “juvenile delinquency,” alcohol misuse,” “violence,” and “criminality” (p. 111). It is further responsible for high anxiety, and low self-esteem, and has been linked to a multitude of other factors such as attendance, lower grade point averages, and poorer attitudes about school in general. These factors have been directly linked to absenteeism, and lower academic achievement.
Fatality is the worst consequence of all. Many students have taken their own lives after repetitively being bullied. For example, in 1992, a teenager by the name of Megan Meier hung herself and died just three weeks before her fourteenth birthday. This case was directly linked to cyberbullying through a social networking website called “MySpace” (meganmeierfoundation.org). This case gained enormous media attention, and created an awareness regarding the dangers of cyberbullying, stalking, and harassment through electronic technology. As a result, laws were passed that prohibited these actions, and made them illegal and criminal, now known as “Megan’s Law”. The death of Megan Meier also prompted an organization to be established in her name called the “Megan Meier Foundation.” The purpose of the organization is to promote awareness for parents, educators, and students about the dangers of cyberbullying and bullying in general such as, how to detect if someone is being bullied; steps to take when you are being bullied; and how to report any of these activities to law enforcement (Meier, 2014).

Preventative Measures

Bullying most often “occurs in the presence of peers” who, more often than not, do nothing to stop it (Nickerson, 2008, p. 687). Research indicates that empathy plays an important role when considering preventative measures for anti-bullying strategies. (Nickerson, 2008) defines empathy as, “The reactions of an individual to the experiences of another” (p. 690). For example empathy can
be learned from the example of other family members, such as siblings, cousins, aunts and uncles. One important thing to be mindful of is that children are always watching and learning. Pease asserts the importance of adults being aware of their behavior in front of children at all times. This is just one more reason why educating parents about teaching their children empathy is important, especially when research proves that it can make a huge impact on the growing problem of bullying. Pease (2014) further asserted that a kid’s job is to figure out who they are by comparing their image of self to others.

Research indicates that one of the reasons that children become targets is that they are told they do not have a voice. This is usually something that comes from the parents. Pease asserted that there are four critical skills that need to be taught to children. They include learning to help others, finding their voice, using their voice, and listening. The most effective way to teach empathy is to model it at home and in the classroom. If a child witnesses a teacher or a parent responding negatively or poorly to a situation, they are likely to imitate that behavior (Pease, 2014).

Relationships Matter

Juvonen, (2014) discussed the significance of friendships and relationships. Whether or not a student has a good relationship with a parent, a teacher, a counselor, or a friend, it can make a difference in their life when bullying issues arise. Research shows that a caring environment is essential. Juvonen asserted that if a student has a trusting relationship with a parent,
teacher, or any adult, or has at least one friend to turn to, it helps alleviate the stress involved with bullying. It is important for children to “fit in,” and when they don’t, they can potentially become a target for bullying. Juvonen argues that it is about safety and comfort. When children are in distress, they will seek comfort from the people they are closest to. For example, when a child has issues at home, such as poor parental guidance, violence, or marital problems such as fighting and divorce, they have a difficult time turning to their parents when there are problems at school. When they do not have a trusting relationship with a teacher or counselor, they will turn to a friend. If they do not have any friends, they can feel isolated and alone, which can cause more distress and problems for them.

The influence of friendship and peer support in anti-bully interventions and programs is recently gaining attention as an important element in combating bullying in schools (McElearney, Roosmale-Cocq, Scott & Stephenson, 2008). Research argues that students who are isolated, such as “those who lack friendships and a support network,” (p. 112) are at increased risk for being bullied. By contrast, those who have friends have a significantly decreased risk. Furthermore, children take on roles in bullying that reinforce it and sustain it. The roles include the “bully,” (perpetrator), the “victim,” (target), or the “reinforcer” (bystander), which can also be a “defender” (p. 113). Recent peer support programs have focused on challenging bullying behavior with an emphasis on particular roles.
These programs build on the natural willingness of children to want to help each other in a school environment. Peer support utilized as an intervention taps into the potential to be helpful with the use of appropriate training and regular debriefing sessions. Peer support models include “peer counseling,” “befriending,” “mediation,” “mentoring, and “peer education.” According to McElearney, Roosmale-Cocq, Scott & Stephenson (2008), these programs are most effective when incorporated with a “comprehensive program” such as a whole school approach. However, these programs should not be seen as an alternative to whole school approaches, but rather as complementary to them. A peer support program is typically coordinated by the teacher and involves children who volunteer to be trained in “active listening,” “empathy,” and “problem solving skills.” The training prepares children to work with students outside of their friendship groups and “learn communication skills that reduce prejudices and strengthen conflict skills such as, how to help peers relate constructively and non-violently to each other” (p. 113). In addition, regular “debriefing” and “counseling supervision” is recommended with these peer support programs. Moreover, they may encourage children to seek help from each other, which can additionally increase coping skills with short term and long term bullying situations.

Literature further shows that “encouraging friendship” in schools helps prevent peer relationship problems and bullying, and helps change roles such as, “bystander’ to “defender,” as they develop skills and awareness (McElearney et
al., p. 114). A study in Northern Ireland discussed the implementation, specifically “development and management of a befriending peer support program in a primary school.” (p.120) Sixteen children were selected and trained as peer supporters by a school counselor and one other staff member. Students gained knowledge in the areas of team-building, confidentiality, listening and questioning skills and friendship and anti-bullying. The students participated in role-play activities and other experimental techniques and then presented an assembly to the whole school. Questionnaires were then given to peer group supporters regarding the experience with the training, which revealed that the training had helped them understand themselves better and “increased their knowledge in friendship and bullying skills” (p. 121). The peer support group learned about the importance of empathy and how to promote inclusion for younger students who were standing alone. They were invited to play with peer supporters and other students. The conclusion of this study was that peer group programs are a logical solution for dealing with bullying by encouraging friendships and students’ willingness to help others. The study also determined that students preferred to seek help from friends, rather than adults, in troubling circumstances, and preferred talking to a friend, rather than a parent or professional, about bullying concerns, since some students have a difficult time sharing their concerns about these issues with adults. Moreover, these programs offer a “choice alternative” for seeking help (p. 126).
Another bullying prevention program that promotes friendship skills is called “Steps to Respect.” This program is taught to the upper three elementary grades in which lessons are taught in a classroom such as, “how to recognize bullying,” “improving assertiveness,” “building friendships,” “increase protective social connections,” “communication skills to help deter bullying and teaching appropriate bystander responses” (Low, Ryzin, Brown, Smith & Haggerty, 2014, p. 167). A randomized control sample determined that Steps to Respect had positive effects on students’ attitudes, bullying related behavior perpetration, positive bystander behavior and school climate (p. 167).

**Bully Busters**

Bully busters is a program that helps bullies and victims, but also “strengthens positive relationships between teachers, bullies, victims, and other students who lose a sense of security and academic struggles resulting from being bystanders” (Newman-Carlson & Home, 2004, p. 259). This is another school-based program, like the undercover anti-bullying intervention program, and peer support programs. According to Newman-Carlson and Home, there have been many recommendations for using school-based programs for dealing with bullying issues in schools. “Olweus’s (1978) school-based intervention program was the first bully reduction program to be evaluated by systematic research” (p. 259). The program was designed to impact classroom and school environments. Bully Busters followed in the footsteps of Olweus by implementing a school-based program that included seven modules. They were:
Module 1: Increasing Awareness of Bullying
Module 2: Recognizing the Bully
Module 3: Recognizing the Victim
Module 4: Taking Charge: Interventions for Bullying Behavior
Module 5: Assisting Victims: Recommendations and Interventions
Module 6: The Role of Prevention
Module 7: Relaxation and Coping Skills

**Awareness Training**

Parent/teacher awareness and involvement in intervention programs can also be helpful. Research has shown that parents and teachers play a significant role in the efforts to end bullying (Juvonen, 2014). The problem is that bullying does not just happen in our schools; it is everywhere. It can happen in the workplace, and even at home. As mentioned previously, parents and adults need to be educated on the importance of setting a good example in front of children. If there is an imbalance of power at home, such as an older sibling picking on a younger sibling, or perhaps a parent who uses intimidation tactics to control a child, the behavior is observed and learned, and can potentially be demonstrated at school. Likewise, children will emulate positive behavior, so, if a parent or teacher displays empathy and compassion for others, a child is likely to be more empathetic and compassionate toward others. Making bystanders more compassionate is imperative when discussing anti-bullying strategies, which begins with teaching and modeling empathy (Juvonen, 2014).
Objectives for Schools

One objective that schools are currently working on involves making sure that the bullying does not go undetected. Studies indicate that awareness training for all students is more important than just dealing with the ‘problem’ cases (Pease, 2014). Reducing the ‘coolness’ of bullying is another objective. Anti-bullying undercover teams address this awareness by inviting the students whom others respect, or who are known as ‘cool’, to be a part of the team. According to Winslade and Williams, (2008), this type of peer influence changes the experience for the victim. The bullies are outnumbered by the ‘cool’ students, and peer pressure is reversed (p. 5).

Awareness training involves educating students about empathy, perspective taking, and specific up-stander behaviors that empower youth, such as fostering collective compassion. It may involve showing videos about how these behaviors can help make a difference. Another objective involves preventing victims from feeling helpless and hopeless. Follow-through and mediation of incidents can prevent the feelings of helplessness and hopelessness (Pease, 2014). The final objective, involves making bystanders more compassionate. This can be accomplished by just simply setting an example. Studies have shown that children will emulate what they see adults do. Consequently, adults need of be mindful of how they behave in front of children at all times (Pease, 2014).
A very sad fact about bullying is that no school is immune to it, and currently there is little evidence pointing to a cure. The good news is that the effects, such as the emotional hurt caused by bullying can be diminished, and the climate of a school can be changed, which reduces bullying incidents and negative emotional impact (Juvonen, 2014). School climate has been defined as “The culture, milieu, or character of a school, and its sense of community and overall organizational health” (Low & Ryzin, 2014, p. 307). Furthermore, “Climate is the foundation of students' values, behaviors and peer group norms” (p. 307). Research further suggests that bullying problems and school climate are closely related. In fact there have been numerous research studies suggesting a strong relationship between school climate and academic achievement (Klien, Cornell & Konold, 2012, p. 154).

Moreover, studies have shown relations between positive school climate, a reduction in bullying, increases in pro-social responses to bullying, and a greater willingness to seek help and intervene (Low & Ryzin, 2014). Research has linked the importance of “community connectedness,” “trusting relationships with teachers,” and the availability of “caring adults” to a decrease in aggression and bullying victimization in schools. Moreover, there is an increase in help-seeking behaviors (Low & Ryzin, p. 307).

Currently, there has been an “increased interest among school personnel in implementing evidence-based prevention and intervention programs” (p. 308). This may be due to the increased prevalence rates of bullying over the last
twenty years, and the proven relationship with academic achievement and adverse mental health. Research indicates that having a positive school climate is a requisite to reducing aggression and bullying in schools. However, researchers determined that the goal of ending bullying begins at home where children learn how to behave, by watching their parents and developing healthy relationships. Learned behavior at home is brought to school where bullying is most prevalent (Pease, 2014). Unfortunately, there are limits as to what can be done about controlling a child’s environment at home. Schools can offer awareness classes that encourage education for parents. Parents need to know that their “involvement” is an “important variable” for intervention programs to work effectively (Low & Ryzin, 2014, p.307).

**Punitive Measures**

According to Winslade & Williams, (2012) the most common response to bullying is to identify the bully, isolate the individual offender and exercise punishment. This can be problematic, because it sends the wrong message. Bullying is dealt with by overpowering it, which sends the message that the power of school authorities is stronger than the power of the bully, which is not an empowering message for bullies or victims. Moreover, this message is the same message that is conveyed in the practice of bullying. Punishment also has the potential to create resentment, which can lead to retaliation. As a result, victims may be unwilling to come forward and tell anyone about the bullying
behavior. Punishment may also result in “shaming the offender,” which may increase the likelihood of “re-offending” (Winslade & Williams, 2012, p. 127).

In addition, studies have shown that school discipline can be counterproductive and can lead to higher dropout rates, and have an impact on teachers leaving the profession. Research indicates that approximately 44% of teachers and 39% of highly qualified teachers leave their professions due to discipline issues. “PBIS is a major change in a school’s approach to discipline” (Cregor, 2008, p. 35).

Research shows that punitive measures and zero tolerance pullout programs, peer mediation and support groups do not work (Winslade & Williams, 2012). According to Juvonen, (2014), is unlikely that bullying can be stopped. However, bullying behaviors can be decreased with the help of anti-bullying intervention programs that focus on bystanders.

Changing School Climate

“School climate refers to the culture, milieu, or character of a school, capturing a sense of community and overall organizational health,” according to Low, Sabina & Ryzin (2014, p. 306). Collaborative efforts, such as “commitment to academics, school relations with parents, trusting relations with peers and teachers, and an enhanced willingness to report or intervene,” are vital for changing the environment in schools, and creating a safe climate for students (Low & Ryzin, 2014, p. 307). A positive school climate is therefore necessary for any intervention program to work. The efforts begin with fostering positive and
supportive relations. Research indicates that a positive psychosocial climate also increases help-seeking behavior, which is imperative for the success of any violence prevention program. Furthermore, studies have shown that the higher the level of organizational health, the greater the success in bullying intervention programs (Low & Ryzin, p. 308).

Bullying is known to create a climate of fear, mistrust and intimidation, which impacts the learning environment of schools (Low & Ryzin, 2014). Therefore, it only makes sense that creating a climate that is fair, supportive and respectful will: enhance and improve the learning environment; improve behaviors, attitudes and values; and potentially reverse the negative effects of bullying both socially and academically. In addition, studies have shown that for any intervention to be successful, the entire school must be involved. Research has indicated that intervention programs are ineffective without the support and involvement of all students and staff. Studies indicate that students need to feel safe in their environment in order to learn effectively, which begins with creating a school climate that feels safe (Low, Sabina & Ryzin, 2014, p. 308).

Implementation of Bullying Programs

Literature shows a rise in bullying issues in schools over the last few decades. Numerous schools have implemented anti-bullying programs, which appear to be making a difference. However, there is little evidence about the effectiveness and success of these various programs, according to Rigby (2002). Carlson & Horne (2004) asserted that there have been “few empirical studies
evaluating the effectiveness of school-based intervention programs confronting the issues of bullying” (p. 259). “Olweus’s school based program was the first to be evaluated by systematic research” (p.259). Newman-Carlson & Horne, (2004) further argued that schools should implement programs that not only help the bully and the victim, but also strengthen “positive relationships between teachers, bullies, victims, and other students” (p.259).

Although there is a rise in bullying problems in schools, there has also been a rise in “awareness” (Rigby, 2002, p. 1). The once assumed physical nature of bullying, such as shoving, kicking, punching and hitting, as discussed in Gordon (2014), is no longer viewed as the “only factor that constitutes bullying” (p. 1). Due to the rise in “awareness” on the topic, researchers are developing a very different perspective.

Current evidence suggests that anti-bullying school-wide programs, such as PBIS, only work if everyone is on board. In other words, cooperation is needed from the entire staff, particularly principals and teachers, in order for the program to be successful. Furthermore, research indicates that awareness training for all students is a must for any changes to occur. Punishing the perpetrator and making him/her aware of the damages they are causing does not work (Juvonen, 2014). What does work, is educating all students about how to recognize bullying, and how to properly respond to it. The perpetrator needs the encouragement from others in order to fulfill his/her need for power. Therefore
teaching kids about the consequences of their actions is necessary (Pease, 2014).

Studies have shown that most children have negative feelings about bullying. However, there is a very strong need for kids to belong to a group. Additionally, there is a need to be noticed. “Evolutionary principles may play an important role in bullying behavior,” such as establishing “social dominance” (Juvonen, 2005 p.37). Aggression among primates was a natural response in order to establish dominance within a group. Therefore, it is possible that bullying tactics may be a natural response to establishing a place on top of the social hierarchy (Juvonen, 2005). Taking this thought into consideration provides one explanation as to why there are not currently any hopeful solutions to stop bullying in its entirety. However, most research in this field of study rules out the primitive reasoning, and has focused more on “personality traits,” “emotional and social cognitive abilities,” and the “parental styles and attachment” as the connections to “bullying and victimization” (Gini, Pozzoli, Borghi, Fransoni, 2008, p. 617).

Laws and Policies and School-Wide Intervention Programs

According to Samara and Smith (2008), there have been many changes in “knowledge, policy and practice in the last fifteen years,” beginning with Dan Olweus’s Norwegian campaign of interventions from the 1980s (p. 663) From 1991 to 1994, the Department of Education and Science launched an anti-
bullying intervention project in twenty-three schools. An outcome of this project, *Don't suffer in silence*, was the provision of a resource for schools to improve their anti-bullying programs (Samara & Smith).

Furthermore, as more suicide cases are surfacing, such as the Megan Meier case, which prompted the “Megan Meier Foundation,” increased awareness in communities about the seriousness of bullying has developed. Websites, such as [www.stopbullying.gov](http://www.stopbullying.gov) offer information about bullying protection, such as policies and state laws, bullying prevention, risk assessment, cyber-bullying, how to respond and how to get help. Currently, there are approximately eleven California education codes in existence that address the topic of bullying. A majority of these laws were enacted between 1999 and 2010. As Cassel, Bell and Springer (2011) assert, “Bullying in schools has become widely viewed as an urgent social, health, and education concern that has moved to the forefront of public debate on school legislation and policy” (p. 11). Bullying is now viewed as “extremely serious” and often a “neglected” issue faced by school systems. The bullying-related suicide shooting at Columbine High School in 1999 was another incident that piqued awareness. Then a trend in suicides began, which were directly linked to “chronic bullying,” which ignited “national attention” to the growing trend of bullying in schools. Serious consequences such as “depression,” “substance use,” “aggressive impulses,” and “school truancy,” are directly linked to bullying behaviors, according to Stuart-Cassel, Bell and Springer (2011).
These “incidents and factors” have created the need for “effective solutions” from governments and school systems (Stuart-Cassel, Bell and Springer, p. 11). In 2010, government officials, researchers, policymakers, and educational practitioners together hosted the first “Federal Partners in Bullying Prevention Summit,” that explored strategies for combatting bullying behaviors in schools. The focus of the summit was to re-examine existing laws and policies that were applicable to elementary and secondary schools.

A key finding included:

- 46 states have bullying laws and 45 of those laws direct school districts to adopt bullying policies. However, 3 of the 46 states prohibit bullying without defining the behavior that is prohibited. 36 states include provisions in their education codes prohibiting cyber-bullying or bullying using electronic media. 33 states specify that schools have jurisdiction over off-campus behavior, if it creates a hostile school environment. 41 states have created model-bullying policies, 12 of which were not mandated to do so under law. Three other states, including Hawaii, Montana, and Michigan, also developed model policies in the absence of state bullying legislation. Among the 20 school district bullying policies reviewed in this study, districts located in states with more expansive legislation produced the most expansive school district policies. However, several school districts in states with less expansive laws also
substantially expanded the scope and content of their policies beyond the minimum legal expectations (Stewart-Cassel, Bell, Springer, 2011, p.12).

State bullying laws have increased significantly since the 1999 Columbine shooting. Georgia was one of the very first states to implement bullying prevention programs. “From 1999 to 2010, there were more than 120 bills enacted by state legislatures nationally” (Stewart-Cassel, Bell & Springer, 2011, p. 13).

Twenty-nine additional bills were made into law by the year 2011. In fact, only Hawaii, Michigan, Montana, and South Dakota did not have bullying laws as of April 30th, 2011. Nationally, training and prevention programs, such as awareness programs, bullying education, and whole school approaches addressing school climate have been practiced in various school districts. Here are a few of them:

Ten states require or encourage bullying education and programs, and twenty-five states mandate districts to implement personnel training. Twenty states mandate that districts implement bullying prevention, education, or awareness programs for students and 11 states use discretionary language to encourage prevention efforts. Eighteen state laws outline specific requirements for monitoring and compiling data on bullying complaints.
Eighteen state laws include specific statutes addressing the rights of bullying victims to seek legal remedies under law (Stewart-Cassel, Bell & Springer, 2011 pp. 34-35.).

The challenge has been “defining what constitutes bullying and the types of behavior that define bullying” (p. 45). There has also been a challenge with finding an “appropriate balance between state and local control establishing school based bullying policies” (Stewart-Cassel, Bell & Springer, 2011 p.45). The problem that states face with implementing bullying prevention programs, according to Stewart-Cassel, Bell & Springer, (2011) such as whole-school bullying education, is that mandates are often “unfunded”. Due to the difficulty in finding resources to fund the programs, schools often struggle complying with state laws (p. 45). In addition, laws have failed to specify dates and timelines for compliance, which also makes it difficult for schools to comply (p. 45).

Knowing whether or not anti-bullying programs are successful requires “carefully designed experimental studies” that include “reliable reports of bullying incidents” measured before and after a program is implemented according to Rigby (2002, p. 1). Since these studies are scarce, it has been difficult to measure. There were a few studies from 1985 to 2000, which provided a little information regarding the effectiveness of anti-bullying programs. Most of these studies involved aggressive bullying at school before and after intervention (p. 2). In addition, the studies examined included educational programs, highlighting “teacher awareness and understanding” of the phenomenon of bullying, the
“development of anti-bullying policies, supported by school community” and parents, and “introduction of relevant curriculum material” focusing on awareness of bullying. (p. 2) Lastly, with regard to procedures for dealing with cases of bullying, some programs emphasized “a need for rules and sanctions”, while others emphasized problem-solving approaches, such as the “no-blame” approach, as seen in restorative practices (Rigby, p. 2).

The success of the above mentioned programs were evaluated and reduction in bullying was clearly evidenced, according to Rigby (2011). The largest reduction reported was by Dan Olweus in Norway in the 1980’s, where there was a 50% reduction, according to Rigby (2011), achieved by utilizing anti-bullying programs to combat bullying. Reduction was greater in schools where programs were carried out more thoroughly. In some “highly conscientious” schools, a reduction of up to 80% was reported. Rigby asserts that it is difficult to determine “which kind” of programs can be deemed most successful because of commonalities in the programs. However, it is worth comparing and examining the effectiveness of programs that utilize punitive measures, such as rules and sanctions, and those that emphasize problem-solving methods, such as restorative justice (Rigby, 2011, p.2). In this study, interventions using punitive measures were very positive in Norway, but proved negative in Canada, Belgium, and Switzerland. Interventions using problem-solving approaches were positive in England, Spain, London, Finland, and Austria. The conclusion of this
study indicated that problem-solving approaches, such as restorative practices, are far more successful than punitive measure approaches (p. 3).

According to Stephens (2011), schools are morally responsible for providing measures, such as prevention and intervention programs, to reduce bullying. “To ignore bullying is to ‘condemn’ many victims of unprovoked aggression to pain and distress in childhood and adult life” (Stephens, p. 382). It is important to show that interventions have positive effects. As mentioned above, Dan Olweus was the first to systematically investigate the nature and the prevalence of bullying in schools. The program is called OBPP, which is a “comprehensive, school-wide program designed to reduce bullying and achieve better peer relations among students in elementary, middle, and junior high school grades” (Olweus & Limber, 2010, p. 124). Studies of “OBPP in the United States” show that the program has had a “positive impact on students’ self-reported involvement in bullying and anti-social behavior” (p. 124). Olweus searched for ways to prevent and reduce the problem. He warns researchers to be wary of anti-bullying school interventions that do not have evidence of successful outcomes. Olweus argues, however, that quantitative measures are blunt instruments that often leave out the voices of the bullies and the victims. Qualitative research is therefore necessary for investigating the effectiveness of anti-bullying programs, because “it gets closer to the micro-cultural environment in which bullying occurs” (Olweus & Limber, p. 383).
The studies of Dan Olweus at the University of Bergen in Norway, regarding bullying and antisocial behavior during the 1980’s influenced many countries to implement anti-bullying programs. The Olweus intervention program produced “substantial reductions of up to 50% or more in students’ reports of bullying and victimization.” (Olweus & Limber, p. 389). The primary goal of the program is to create a “safe and positive learning environment.” This is accomplished by:

(a) adults displaying warm, positive interest and engagement (b) clear boundaries concerning unacceptable behavior (c) consistent use of nonphysical, non-hostile but negative sanctions when rules are broken (d) adults at school (and ideally at home) act with authority and positive role models. (p. 385)

The goal of the program is to create an environment that decreases opportunities for the bully to receive rewards for his/her behavior. The intervention is useful at school, in the classroom, and for individual purposes. According to Stephens (2011), an anti-bullying program must be evaluated for effectiveness. The primary goal for schools seeking methods to decrease prevalence rates of bullying must be “to change the negative school climate that is allowing the bullying to flourish” (p. 389) The focus of the whole school approach is to develop supportive school environments that promote caring and other respectful, helpful behaviors over time” (p. 391).
The most recent anti-bullying intervention program that is gaining popularity is called positive behavior interventions and support (PBIS). PBIS is a system-based, sustained approach to improving student behavior that requires a school-wide commitment. This process involves durable implementation of evidence-based practices and procedures that are incorporated with ongoing school reform efforts. The purpose is to correct and improve four key elements: 1) outcomes: academic and behavior targets 2) data: status, need for change, effects of interventions 3) practices: evidence based interventions and strategies; and 4) systems: supports that are needed to enable the implementation of the practices of PBIS. These four elements work together to help build a sustainable system (Cregor, 2008, p.34)

This intervention requires a 3-5 year commitment. The rewards for implementation of school-wide supports have been: “reduced office referral rates of up to 50%; improved attendance and school engagement; improved academic achievement; reduced dropout rates; reduced delinquency in later years; improved school atmosphere and reduced referrals to special education.”

According to Lambie, Murray, Krynen, Price & Johnson, (2013) whole school approaches are “more effective than interventions that focus on one domain” (p. 12).

Studies have shown that bullies need the encouragement from peers in order to feel powerful (Pease, 2014). Therefore, teaching students, recipients and bystanders, how to recognize and respond to bullying can have an impact on
decreasing the prevalence. It only makes sense that, if the bully is encouraged by the responses from victims and bystanders, then educating students how to respond to the behavior should have an impact. There are several PBIS lesson plans that have been proven to be effective. Expect / Respect is one lesson plan that PBIS initiated. It involves educating a student focus group and receiving input on their perspectives of bullying, for the purpose of spreading the messages of the program throughout the school. This program includes three 1-hour lesson plans that emphasize opportunities for routines such as stop, stopping, bystander and seeking support, and thirdly it focuses on training and coaching for faculty and staff (Cregor, 2008, p.32). Moreover, the lessons focus on “the importance of respectful behavior” and how to convey messages such as “stop,” signaling “disrespectful behavior,” “stopping routine,” if a student is asked to stop, and “bystander routine,” such as what to do when you witness someone using the stop routine and they do not stop. The final section teaches students how to seek support from adults when the disrespectful behaviors do not stop. The emphasis and importance of the whole-school approach is consistent throughout current findings (Cregor, 2008, p. 33).

The whole-school approach involves three tiers. Tier 1 involves a school-wide positive behavior learning framework, which is considered the “inclusive” tier. This tier involves agreed school-wide expectations that are taught, modeled, and reinforced. Tier 2 involves early intervention and problem-solving. Undercover anti-bullying teams belong in this tier. Tier 3 involves intensive
interventions, which include formal restorative conferences and individualized follow-up and support. Undercover anti-bullying teams may also belong in this tier (Williams, 2013).

The PBIS model focuses on reinforcement from “acknowledging and rewarding appropriate behavior” with tangible things such as lunch with a friend, free time in the gym, ice cream socials, and pizza parties. (Cregor, 2008, p. 34) However, intangible things such as praise are also considered a reward. It is important to note that PBIS does not only focus on positive reinforcement. Consequences are just as consistent as rewards. Consequences include things like verbal warnings, contacting parents, and disciplinary referrals. These supports “maintain acceptable behavior for about 80% of students.” (p. 34) The remaining 20% require individualized supports that target more challenging behaviors. Implementing PBIS and changing the culture of the school is not easy, but it is a flexible program that has been proven to help change the climate of the school, and reduce bullying behaviors. (Cregor, 2008)

Restorative Responses and Undercover Teams

Restorative responses, such as anti-bullying undercover teams fall under the first and second tier of school-wide supports systems, and have shown success in rebuilding positive personal identities within the school community (Stevenson, 2015). The “no blame” approach to school bullying was influenced by Barbara Maines and George Robinson from the U.K. in the 1990s. At the
time, this approach was believed to be “the single answer to school bullying that everyone was looking for” (Stevenson, p. 1). According to Stevenson, the undercover teams approach is in the family of restorative responses. The undercover teams approach is a ‘targeted’ approach, which belongs in the middle of the hierarchy. There are three tiers; intensive, targeted and universal. The top tier, intensive, involves conferencing and mediation – that is, repairing relationships. The middle tier, targeted, involves the classroom, groups, and individual conferences. The bottom tier, universal, involves the social and emotional skills program, such as “re-affirming relationships through developing social and emotional skills,” which is more of a “whole-school response to bullying.” (p. 2) The difference between restorative conferences and undercover teams is that the undercover teams process does not make students with bullying behavior accountable, as does restorative conferencing. For example, in a conference situation, the bully will be named for the harmful actions, though not in a degrading fashion. In the undercover teams process, the behaviors are named, but not the individuals.

The undercover teams approach focuses on the behavior and on rebuilding relationships, rather than pointing to an individual. In addition, the undercover teams process involves an ongoing relationship with a trusted staff member, and the offender receives counseling over a period of time that restorative processes usually do not provide. Moreover, undercover teams provide an opportunity for friendship while supporting the victim through his/her
struggle. Stevenson, (2015) asserted that undercover teams also provide some fun for students in the stressful world of school life, and turn an extremely serious problem, that has the potential to damage a students’ sense of self-worth, into a positive experience for students in school. Stevenson (2015), further asserted that undercover teams may be effective as an initial response to bullying issues. However, there are times when the severity of bullying may demand an accountability that restorative conferencing provides. This process usually involves the involvement of other staff members and parents. Involvement of staff members is also helpful during the undercover teams process, such as notifying teachers. However, they are not actively involved in the meetings, they are just notified and educated on the process. Stevenson (2015), asserted, “Involving staff provides a wider audience to the undercover teams process, and helps them with negative views they may have about the bully” (p. 8). In addition, it can help teachers with appropriate responses toward the bullying behavior. For example, if a teacher is unaware that an undercover team is operating, he/she may respond to the bully using punitive measures, which would destroy the environment for the undercover teams process to work effectively, and the undercover team may potentially collapse. According to Stevenson, it is safer to invite the teachers into the secret of the operation.

Winslade and Williams (2012), argued that most common advice given to people who are being bullied is, “Just learn how to deal with it!” “It will go away!” The problem is that this does not seem to work. Perpetrators enjoy the sense of
power they receive from bullying, and they get this power whether the victim responds or not. In fact, they often find it amusing to observe a victim attempting to hold back the emotions produced by the abuse. Other responses include fighting back, and even blaming the victim. These responses have not produced any change in the incidence of bullying. Winslade and Williams also argued that a systemic approach in schools, such as more supervision on playgrounds and other hot spots, is what is needed for schools that take bullying seriously (p. 126). They further agreed that school-wide programs are needed to reduce bullying incidences (p. 126).

**Narrative Therapy**

Undercover anti-bullying teams draw from a narrative perspective (Winslade & Williams, 2012). Actions of students are seen as played out storylines with a plot trajectory. Students are participants in a storyline, but can be invited to step out of the storyline into an alternative one, according to Williams (2013). Narrative therapy involves conversations that explore stories about our lives that connect events as they happen in order, over a time period, and searching for ways to make meaning and explain the stories according to their plot (Morgan, 2000). According to Morgan, stories are determined by how we link events together and by the meaning we give them. In other words, the way we interpret our own stories by linking events together, forms the way we think of ourselves, and our stories shape our lives, present and future. The context in which the stories of our lives are formed contributes to the
interpretation and meaning we give to events. The reason narrative therapy can be useful when dealing with bullying issues is that it does not punish, blame or isolate individuals. Instead, it invites students to re-author a new identity (Uppal, 2012).

Cultural beliefs, ideas, and practices can be an enormous influence on the meanings and interpretation we give our stories. Similarly, those in power positions can have an enormous influence on our identities and self-concept such as through the names bullies call others, which narrative therapy defines as “thin descriptions” (Morgan, 2000, p.13). Thin descriptions, or conclusions can lead to negative interpretations and meanings of our stories, which can impact on our identity. These conclusions can lead to problematic identities such as “bully,” and “victim”. Narrative therapy avoids “totalizing descriptions” and descriptions of people based on “deficit discourse” (Winslade & Williams, 2008, p. 3). “Deficit discourses point us to pathology rather than competence or health” (Winslade & Monk, 2007, p. 79). Narrative therapy invites us to take a look at our dominant stories and deficit discourses (or problems) in a different light, through conversation and collaboration, and develop rich and thick descriptions of lives and relationships, in lieu of the thin descriptions and conclusions. These rich descriptions are called “alternative stories” (Morgan, 2000 p. 15). The following is an example of a dominant story and deficit discourse;

All my life I’ve been bullied. People teased me about my red hair and because I’m small. Somebody even said I was so small I couldn’t read,
but basically they been teasing me about my hair. They make my life hard by making rude comments about me. (Winslade & Williams, 2012, p. 129.)

A rich description and conclusion would look something like this:

The bullying no longer controls my life. I have learned how to deal with people who tease me. It doesn’t bother me so much anymore.

I really like myself now. (p. 129).

The person with the problem is viewed as a participant in a problematic storyline, rather than as a problem person. This is accomplished through a process of questioning which involves externalization, that is, naming the problem, “tracing the history of the problem,” “exploring the effects,” “evaluating the effects, and deconstruction.” (Morgan, 2000, p. 45) Deconstruction involves “taking apart” beliefs and ideas that assist the problem story. Morgan writes, “When we examine the dominant beliefs and ideas that may be supporting the life of the problem, we are assisting people to further separate from the problem” (p. 49). New preferred stories and descriptions are also called “unique outcomes,” or “alternative stories,” and they involve an exploration of a person’s “desires, intentions, preferences, beliefs, hopes, personal qualities, values, strengths, commitments, plans, characteristics, abilities, and purposes” (p. 61).

“Discovering unique outcomes and developing alternative stories offer new possibilities and hope for problematic lives “ (p. 75).
Undercover Anti-Bullying Teams

An undercover anti-bullying team is a “unique approach” to combating bullying in schools (Winslade & Williams 2012, p. 126). The approach focuses on healing relationships, rather than punishing the perpetrator. Winslade & Williams (2012) discuss the practice of undercover teams and assert that they involve a strategic effort to re-author relationships as viewed in narrative therapy. Literature shows that traditional punitive measures used to combat bullying behaviors do not work (p. 5). This does not imply, however, that the retributive approach is always wrong and that use of power by school administrators is never necessary. According to Winslade & Williams (2008), the retributive approach works to “restrain” and “repress” bullying, but does not address the bullying relationship (p. 2). Punitive measures, such as identifying the perpetrator and punishing them accordingly for their actions, have been the common response when dealing with bullying issues in schools. The problem with this approach is the implicit message conveyed, “The power of the school authorities is stronger than the power of the bully,” which is the same message as included in bullying practices. In addition, there are risks of retaliation on the victim when punishment is the response (Winslade & Williams, 2012, p. 127). Victims of bullying, fear that the bullying will worsen if the perpetrator is punished for the behavior. The “no blame” approach of undercover teams decreases the chances of retaliation on the victim, because it is based on the narrative principle, “The person is not the problem, the problem is the problem” (Winslade &
Williams, 2008, p. 3). This notion, derived from narrative therapy, removes the deficit discourse and totalizing identities, which can have detrimental effects on both the victim and the perpetrator, according to Winslade and Williams. Furthermore, “bystanders are utilized to give assistance for the victim and they are included in the story of the bullying relationship” (p. 5). This further helps the victim because literature shows that bystanders play an important role in the bullying relationship.

**How do Undercover Teams Work?**

The undercover team process has five phases. In the first phase, the counselor will meet with the victim and determine whether or not there is an existing bullying relationship. After a bullying relationship has been identified, the counselor will write down the story of the victim in his or her own words. After hearing the story, the counselor will explain to the victim what an undercover team is all about, including that it is a covert operation that must remain a secret, and then asks the victim to invite two of the worst bullies to be a part of the team, along with four other students that have never been bullied or bullied others. The four additional students must also include an equal spread of girls and boys, and must be well respected among their peers.

The second phase of the process involves a team meeting. The two worst bullies and the four additional well-respected peers, meets with the counselor for the first time. The counselor reads the story of the victim to the team and invites them to be a part of an undercover operation. The sense of intrigue is usually
very appealing to students and most of them are more than willing to participate. After they have agreed to be a part of the team, the victim is identified and they are invited to develop a plan to help the victim overcome the bullying issues. The third phase involves meetings with the victim over the course of the first few weeks. The fourth phase involves meetings with the team in order to modify the progress and make changes to their five-point plan, if needed. Once the victim declares that the bullying has stopped, the team receives a food voucher and a principal’s award in recognition of their accomplishments, which concludes the final phase of the undercover team operation.

What Is Distinctive About Anti-Bullying Undercover Teams?

Winslade & Williams (2008) found that what is distinctive about this approach is that it is a “no blame” approach that focuses on healing the bullying relationship, rather than on “punishing,” “isolating,” and “pathologizing” the perpetrator as seen in traditional anti-bullying methods (p. 127). According to Winslade & Williams, this narrative-based approach has been utilized in New Zealand, and has had positive effects in combating bullying relationships in schools. Williams & Winslade (2012) discuss the effectiveness of undercover anti-bully teams. Responses from victims collected from archival data included, “I am now regularly attending all my classes,” and, “It has changed my life for the future ahead” (p.30).

Utilization of peer influences in undercover teams changes the experience for the victim and allows the victim to rewrite a new story of the bullying
relationship, which encourages change and healing for the victim and the bully (Winslade & Williams, 2008). Traditional punitive measures focus on punishing the bully, which leaves the victim vulnerable for retribution and creates isolation, which increases the suffering of the bullying relationship (Winslade & Williams, 2012). The undercover team approach focuses on “transforming the relationship between the bully and the victim, rather than on pathologizing and punishing the perpetrator,” which is said to create a bigger problem for both the bully and the victim (p. 123). Furthermore, the principles supporting the undercover teams approach are based on narrative family therapy (Winslade & Williams, 2012). There is limited literature on the topic of undercover anti-bullying teams to draw from, because the approach is fairly new. However, literature regarding the approach is producing positive results for counselors who are currently implementing undercover teams in schools. According to Winslade & Williams (2012), there are only three published articles and one chapter in a book, and a few studies by California State University San Bernardino students that utilized archival data for research on the topic.

The distinctiveness of the “no blame” approach, according to Williams, (2010) is that the focus is taken away from blaming the bully and is rather highlighting the “bullying relationship,” which is what sets this method apart from other intervention methods that focus on punishing the offender. It can reduce bullying in a school to the benefit of students’ learning, teachers’ classroom management, and administrators workloads (Winslade & Williams, 2012, p.128).
CHAPTER THREE
RESEARCH METHOD

This research project is a qualitative investigation based on semi-structured interviews about the in-depth experiences of school counselors in New Zealand and California. I interviewed participants through Skype and data was collected by audio recordings that were later transcribed and analyzed. The data contained questions and responses from interviews with practitioners who have worked with undercover anti-bullying teams. Follow-up questions for clarification and elaboration were also asked. During my study abroad experience in New Zealand working at an all girls high school, and after my experience working at a middle school in California, I realized that bullying is problematic everywhere, and there is a need for effective intervention programs.

Dr. John Winslade has written a chapter in a book and several articles regarding undercover anti-bullying teams method, and has worked alongside practitioners who have utilized this method to combat bullying relationships in schools. The data collected was from voice recordings of interviews taken from practitioners in the school-counseling field in New Zealand and California. Dr John Winslade preselected the practitioners that were interviewed for this research project, who agreed to discuss their experience with me regarding undercover anti-bullying teams. I reviewed the data collected and analyzed the most significant portions of the collected information.
Research Design

This was a qualitative investigation based on interviews about the in-depth experiences of school counselors in New Zealand and in California, who have facilitated the undercover team process. The reason a qualitative approach was used was in order to gather formative data to understand better the issues with regard to implementation, rather than summative data on the effects of the process. The goal for this research project was to acquire information regarding working with undercover anti-bullying teams in the practitioner’s own words. The participants had experience working with restorative practices and closely worked with teams in middle schools and high schools, where they are employed as counselors. The participants were interviewed via Skype and digitally recorded. Then the interviews were later transcribed for analysis. Emails were written back and forth between participants and researcher for clarification purposes.

Objectives

The objective of this study was to examine the implementation experiences of running undercover anti-bullying teams, and get it in-depth look at the perspectives and experiences of school counselors who are implementing the teams here in California and also in New Zealand. The purpose of the study was to answer the question, "How are undercover teams implemented by practitioners and what is the practitioner’s perspective on how they work and their
effectiveness?” The hypothesis was that undercover teams foster safe and healthy learning environments for students, and practitioners who worked with undercover teams have experienced enormous success in healing bullying relationships. The healing begins by placing the victim in a position of power, and provides space for a new, alternative story about the bullying relationship. This changes the victim’s perspective about the experience, which can potentially foster a safe and healthy learning environment for them and other students.

Participants

The school counselors identified for this study were selected based on their pre-existing practice of utilizing an undercover team approach to bullying. Two of the male participants work at New Zealand high schools located in the rural area of Auckland, and the other two female participants work at California schools, one middle school and one elementary school located in urban areas of Southern California. The combined experience of all four participants running anti-bullying undercover teams is one hundred forty.

Recruitment

Dr. John Winslade preselected the participants for this research project. Three of the participants in New Zealand and two practitioners from California have closely worked with undercover anti-bully teams and had experience in this field. They were selected based on their pre-existing practice of utilizing an undercover team approach to bullying.
They were all school counselors and they are the most experienced at implementing the undercover teams. Several were in New Zealand and several in California. The participants were sent a letter via email, with attached consent form to sign. (see Appendix X). The participants from New Zealand were interviewed via Skype, and interviews in California were conducted either via Skype or in person. Telephone conversations and emails were also necessary for the convenience of the participants.

Procedures

The researcher met with the research participants individually via Skype and recorded and transcribed their responses to X questions. Questions were designed to address issues that have arisen with the teams. The data collection took place via Skype on a home computer. The interviews of the participants were recorded on a digital device and later transcribed. The type of technology used to record the interviews was a portable recorder. Collection began at the outset of the interview, and ended at the closing. The interviews were semi structured and follow-up questions for clarification and elaboration were asked.

The researcher focused on the personal experiences of the participants, implementation of undercover teams, as well as their perceptions of the effectiveness of utilizing undercover teams to combat bullying relationships in schools. The transcribed information collected by the participants during the interviews was compared and analyzed for important topics and themes.
regarding the experiences of practitioners with undercover teams. Each participant was asked the same questions, which were designed to discover the following:

(1) the effectiveness of anti-bully undercover teams; (2) issues that have arisen during the anti-bully undercover team process; (3) the effectiveness of anti-bullying undercover teams with all types of bullying; (4) responses from bullies, victims, and bystanders regarding the undercover teams process; (5) practitioners' personal feelings about the utilization of undercover teams; (6) other methods that have been utilized by the practitioners to address bullying relationships; (7) the effectiveness of anti-bully undercover teams in other school settings; (8) the effectiveness of undercover teams method compared to other anti-bullying intervention and prevention methods; (9) practitioner's feelings about punitive measures being utilized to combat bullying issues; (10) undercover team selection process, and problems that arise with the selection process; (11) types of bullying issues; (12) the five-point plan and issues that have arisen with the plan.

The following questions were asked;

"How many undercover teams have you run?"

"What have been the usual ages/grade levels of the participants?"

"How did the targets of bullying come to you?" "Referrals from teachers?"

"Self referral?"

"What types of bullying issues have you encountered?"
"Has cyber bullying been a common problem?" "Is it the same or different?"

"Can undercover teams be used for cyber bullying issues?"

"Have you come across situations where you have decided that and undercover team is not the best approach?" "For what reasons?"

"When you offered to set up an undercover team, how do students respond?" "What are the common questions they ask?"

"Do they have doubts about doing it?" "How many say yes, and how many say no?"

"How do you typically select members from the teams?"

"How do bullies respond to being part of the team?"

"How do they handle the knowledge that bullying is known about them?"

"Has anyone said no to being invited to be a member of the team?"

"What are some responses from the team members when you tell them about the bullying?"

"How did the students react to the idea of staying undercover?" "What do they say?"

"What are some of the ideas that students come up with for their five-point plan, or do they try other things?"

"What does the target typically say about the undercover teams work at the first monitoring meeting?"
"Have there been any teams that have not been successful?" "How many? Why?"

"How effective has the implementation of undercover teams been for you?"

"What other methods have you tried to help combat bullying at your school?"

"How effective do you think this program would be in other school settings?"

"Would you say that undercover teams are the most effective method?" "Why, or why not?"

"How did you learn about undercover teams as a tool to help heal bullying relationships?"

"How long have you been using undercover teams to help with bullying issues?"

"What are your feelings about punitive measures to combat bullying issues?"

"How do undercover teams compared to other methods that are used to help minimize bullying and heal bullying relationships?"
Data Analysis

I collected data during Skype sessions via audio recording on electronic recording device, and notes were also taken of semi-structured interviews with the participants in the research study. The data analysis consisted of reading and rereading the transcribed data about participant’s experiences with undercover teams, such as the implementation issues arising from utilizing this program. The researcher compared the analysis for significant recurrent topics or themes and also significant differences. The themes were then checked through a further reading of the data, looking for corroborating or contradictory data. The findings were checked for the extent to which they supported or modified existing literature about the undercover teams.

Ethical Concerns

The main ethical concerns in this study were to protect participants from any harm and to safeguard the collected data information. I adhered to the confidentiality and research standards of the American Counseling Association Code of Ethics and safeguarded participant’s information at all times. I also informed the participants that the interviews will be voice recorded and that the words may be quoted and included in the dissemination of the research. The participants were asked to give their consent prior to recording the interviews. The recordings and recording device were then secured in a locked safe that only I had access to. The interviews were personally transcribed on my home
computer for data analysis, and recordings did not leave the location where they were stored for any reason. Files were saved with password protection. No files were named with participants’ names, and no identifying information, such the participants’ names or names of schools were used for any part of the research or dissemination. Voice recordings have been destroyed.

Participants were notified that the information collected in this study was designed to answer the research question for the study and utilized to complete a Masters level research project that would be published through Scholarworks, and may also be published in a journal article.

The researcher adhered to the confidentiality and research standards of the American counseling Association code of ethics, [ACA standards A.2.a., B.1.c., G.2.d., & G.4.4.d]. The participant’s information was safeguarded at all times. Participants were informed that the interviews were recorded, and that their words may be quoted and included in the dissemination of the research [ACA Standard B.6.c] Recording began at the outset of the interview, and ended at the closing. The recordings of the interviews were secured in a locked safe that only the researcher had access to. The interviews were later transcribed for data analysis. No files were named with participant’s names. No identifying information, such as participants’ names or names of schools were used for any part of the research or dissemination. All identifying material was locked in a safe that only the researcher had access to. The recordings and identifying material did not leave the location where they were stored for any reason. Voice
recordings and other identifiable information was kept no longer than thirty days after cessation of the study, at which time all materials collected for this study were destroyed.

The cost to the participants was approximately one half hour of their time. A potential benefit would be allowing the participants to reflect further about their experiences of implementing an undercover team process. Participation in the study may prove to be an educational experience for the participants, while also contributing to a deeper understanding of the nature of undercover teams.

Participants were given a consent form to sign (see Appendix X) prior to the first interview. Participants were given an opportunity to ask any questions about the interview or the research project, prior to the interview commencing. Consent forms included how the information gathered will be used for academic research and other possible publications. Voice recordings and notes taken from the interviews will be destroyed upon completion of the research project.
CHAPTER FOUR
FINDINGS AND RESULTS

In this chapter the data collected in this study will be presented. The data collected here investigates the implementation and perceptions of effectiveness of the undercover teams through the eyes of four counselors, two from New Zealand and two from California.

Participants one, two and three reported their undercover anti-bullying teams experiences with ages thirteen to eighteen years old, and participant four reported her experiences with undercover teams from ages six to eleven years old. The combined total of teams run by the practitioners was approximately one hundred forty. As I read and re-read the data collected from the participants, I noticed a reoccurrence of certain themes among the practitioners’ responses. These consistent themes will be presented here.

Participants Responses to Undercover Teams Experiences

Prevalence and Peak of Bullying

The four participants responded to several questions regarding their experiences with undercover teams. The first question pertained to bullying prevalence and peak of bullying behaviors in school.

Bullying seems to be most prevalent in junior high school. One participant reported a few reasons why this may be the case.
The students have all these new relationships, new structures and new systems, and they can’t settle in, so they revert to their previous sort of modus operandi, and pick on kids (Participant 1).

Participant 1 reported that bullying peaks in junior high because students are adjusting to new structures and systems and they have a difficult time settling in, and they express their frustration by taking it out on others.

How Counselors Receive Referrals

Referrals for help involving bullying situations range from self-referrals, teacher referrals, student referrals to parents calling the school for help. Participants reported that students often refer themselves. Here is what participants said about where their referrals come from when asked how the targets of bullying come to them. Participant 1 reported an equal amount of referrals come from teachers, self-referrals and friends.

Many students will bring their friend to my office when the friend has been bullied. Sometimes teachers will make an observation that there is something wrong with a student and they will send the student to my office. I often get referrals from the [year level] Dean as well. Occasionally students themselves will come in and tell me about their bullying issues, but they come in for other reasons and it becomes clear to me that they have been bullied. There is a particular pattern at my school
involving an equal amount of referrals from teachers, self-referrals and
friends bringing friends in for help (Participant 1).

Participant 2 reported that referrals come from self-referrals and teacher
referrals, with self-referrals being most frequent.

Approximately 70 or 80% are self-referrals, and others are encouraged by
teachers (Participant 2).

Participant 3 reported that referrals come from teachers, friends, and
parents.

Teachers and administrators will refer students to me and then I will
investigate. Many times students will come in and report for other students
such as a friend that needs help. I have also had some parents ask for
help (Participant 3).

Participant 4 receives referrals from teachers, self-referrals and parents.

I have had both teacher referrals and self-referrals. Students will put
referrals in my mailbox, and I have received a lot of referrals this way. I have
also had parents call me and tell me that they are concerned for their child’s
safety, because their child is being bullied and does not want to come to school (Participant 4).

The data thus indicates that teacher referrals and self-referrals are the most common. All four participants reported that they receive referrals from teachers. Three participants reported that self-referrals are common, with participant 2 having the highest self-referral rate. Two participants reported that they receive referrals from concerned parents. Participant 1 and 3 reported receiving referrals from other students such as friends bringing friends in.

The Selection Process

The selection of team members is an important component of the undercover teams process. Participants reported that they will sometimes help the students with the process by showing them photos of the potential team members, but the bullied student is the one who ultimately selects who will be on the team. Here’s what the participants said when asked how team members are typically selected.

The selection of team members is the most important part of the whole process. The composition of the team really determines the outcome and the effectiveness. Therefore, it is important to include the students in the selection of the team, because, although they may not select the best kids for the team, they need to feel as if it is their own. I will typically show the
victims pictures of the students they are selecting. I do this so that it is easy for the students to point out who the perpetrators are and who they want to be on their team. This helps me very much, because it helps me explore the different relationships and the different connections between the students that the victim selects. This method is particularly effective when the student is new to the school, especially if they have been bullied right from the start (Participant 4).

The selection process thus gives the victim an important experience of agency in the undercover team process. In the bullying relation they may be on the receiving end but here they are invited to take an initiative. The same participant gave an explanation for why this shift is important.

These new students are isolated and most of them don't even know the names of the kids who are bullying them. So this method helps them identify who the kids are. I explained to them that the students they select to be on the team need to be students that don't bully people and are not bullied by others. This is the method that I use. These particular students are ones that are not involved in bullying because they are above that. They are focusing on schoolwork. They have a good reputation with teachers, and they are seen by the rest the kids in their class as role
models and good kids. When I explain this to the bullied student they usually understand how these particular students can help (Participant 4).

Another participant supported what Participant 4 had said about the importance of the victim being centrally involved in the selection of the undercover team.

I will typically talk to the person who has been negatively affected by the bullying actions and ask them to think about their class and who they think might be willing to support them. So I tell them to think about students who have an influence on the class and the students who are the main agents of the actions they are concerned about. The victim will then provide a list of students, usually eight or so, to be on the team (Participant 2).

Another participant stressed the development of a voice in the victim who is given a say in the process and is treated as the “main source of information”. But this speaker notes that victims often have problems doing this.

The bullied student is the main source of information and they will choose the two biggest bullies and will began naming the students who they think our leaders and do not bully others, or get bullied. This is where a lot of
my bullied students have problems. It is difficult for them to think of the other four students for the team (Participant 3).

It is worth noting here that these speakers see the victim’s role in the selection process also helps the process itself to be effective.

The teachers can also play a role in the selection process, if they are asked to confirm that the students selected are good candidates for the team. Participants report that the selection process is an important part of the undercover teams process, and that teacher involvement and support argues well for a successful outcome.

Once I have done this, I let the student know that I will be running it by their teacher because the teacher may have some other students in mind that could help can contribute that process that the student is not thinking of. When I say this, everything shifts because they realize that other people will be involved also. When they realize that teachers are going to know about what is going on and be more observant and take some responsibility, everything shifts (Participant 4).

Again, the speaker was willing to speculate on the reasons that teacher involvement might be valuable.
In narrative terms it is called expanding the audience, or increasing the audience. The more people that know about what is going on, the better the outcome. Bullying survives on the concept of “the code of silence”. It exists because people do not do anything about it and they do not say anything about it. So undercover teams are a way of exposing it and bringing it to life. There are a lot of references in scriptures about what is in the darkness has been brought to life. I think this is a big aspect of why undercover teams are successful … the secrets are exposed and they are dealt with … whereas before nothing was being done about it. The concept of exposing these things, or making them visible is a critical aspect for why these teams work so well. Some teachers do not even know that it is going on in class. The teachers are quite shocked actually when I explain to them that there is bullying going on in their classroom, and that one of their students has been selected to be on a team to make things better. When the teachers get beyond the sense of personal blame, after realizing that bullying is happening in their classroom, and they realize that the phenomenon does not allow them to know about it because the students involved in bullying are really smart about keeping it from them, they are ready to jump on board and help in any way they can. They realize that there are some positive benefits, such as a more positive classroom environment is being created … I will recruit students based on the teachers’ advice and let the victim know that there will be additional
students being added to their team that their teacher has personally selected (Participant 1).

Another participant added to the reasoning that lay behind the teacher involvement in the selection process.

I will help them with this selection process by showing them photos of the students. I do this because a lot of times the students have a difficult time with names, so I will show them faces and it will make the process easier. I then take that list and double-check it with the teacher to make sure that the four additional students selected to be on the team are not being bullied. I do this because I do not want a situation where the bullies are bullying the students on the team. So I will get the teacher’s feedback, and ask them if the students who have been selected can work well together. I also asked them if they are leaders and if they are able keep a secret. Most of the time, the teacher will confirm that the selection is fine. There have been a few times where the student has not been at the school very long, and the new student may not know the students very well. If this happens to be the case, the teacher may switch a few of the students that were selected by the bullied student (Participant 4).
How frequently such situations pertain is not measured by this study. Perhaps future research might ascertain this. Other participants supported the idea here though.

I then consult with the classroom teachers about what has been going on in their classroom and talk to them about the undercover team that I am putting together. I then ask them for any thoughts or suggestions on other students that they think will be helpful and useful for the undercover team process. The teachers usually agree with the team members that have already been selected. I then invite the students that have been selected to be on the team to be a part of the undercover team process” (Participant 2).

One participant reported that teacher involvement and support is also helpful when the bullied student is challenged with selecting the four other students for the team.

The bullied student is the main source of information. This student will name the two worst bullies… and then they will begin to name the students that are known as leaders and positive role models. It is important that the students selected are those that don’t get bullied. This part of the selection process always seems to be a challenge for the
student. They might come up with one or two, and then I will either try to help them and suggest students, or I will ask their permission to get some suggested names from their teacher.

The participants emphasized that teacher involvement is sometimes necessary during the selection process and may prove to be very helpful. Further studies may be necessary to determine the frequency of teacher involvement.

**Refusal to be Part of the Team**

When students are told about the undercover teams, they are given a choice to refuse to be a part of it. Many people who hear about this process are concerned to know how much team members are willing to be part of the process. Participants reported, however, that students very rarely say no. Here is what they said when asked if anyone has ever refused to be part of the team.

I've never had anyone say no to being part of the team (Participant 1).

It doesn't happen very often (Participant 2).

No one has ever said no to being a member of the team. They are usually very eager to help (Participant 3).
I have never had anyone ever tell me that they did not want to do it (Participant 4).

These responses are remarkably consistent and suggest that refusals to be part of the team are rare occurrences.

**Team Members Responses**

The team members have various responses when first being invited to be on an undercover team. Most students initially feel like they are in trouble, but after the undercover teams process is explained to them, they are relieved and generally express enthusiasm for the idea. Some students will openly admit that they are part of the problem, but are relieved when they discover that the method is a “no blame” approach. Participants reported responses from nervousness, curiosity, confessions, remorse, shame, and pointing the finger to enthusiasm, general excitement and a desire to help. Here’s how the participants responded to my question about team members’ responses regarding undercover teams.

They know what’s been going on because they see it. After I read the story to the team, they usually appear shocked, distressed, ashamed, and guilty that they haven't done anything about it. However, when they realize that they have been invited to make a positive change for the target of the bullying, and when they realize that they are being the co-
author of a new story for the target, they usually respond very positively
(Participant 1).

This speaker indicates a multitude of emotions arise after the story of the
victim has been read to them. Again, after they realize that they are being invited
to be a part of something that will produce positive change for the victim, they
respond positively. And once again, several emotions are expressed after the
story has been read to them.

Some are curious or surprised that they are invited into the team. Initially
it's like, “Am I in trouble?” And I tell them, “No, it is not about blame or
trouble. It is about helping somebody out.” “I'm asking if you're willing to
help me.” “I'm aware of something that is going on, and I'm asking you if
you’d be interested in helping someone that's in a rough spot, and be part
of a process and be willing to make some change.” This will usually pique
their curiosity. Some of them smile and help themselves. "Oh yeah, I
have done that.” They recognize their own actions in the story so they
might help themselves. Some of the group will look across the circle at
the person as the stories are being told, and they will look at them like
they know that it was that person that did it (Participant 2).
Team members initially express concern about being in trouble, but after they hear the “no blame” explanation, they feel relieved and sometimes share how they have participated in the bullying actions, or look at others on the team that have participated. The team members are typically curious, open-minded, and willing to participate on the team to help produce positive change for the victim.

They feel acknowledged and please to be invited, affirmed, challenged to take on the role that might bring about change. So there is that sense of feedback and accountability. On the whole, there is a high level of curiosity, a sense of being acknowledged, a sense of being interested, and an enthusiasm to be part of the process, including those who notice themselves in the story of action. Initially they might have some doubts, and that gets worked through in the steps. Very early on in the piece, students will sometimes pull out (Participant 2).

The same speaker expresses that there is general enthusiasm from team members about being a part of the undercover teams process after they hear the victims’ story. Sometimes the students may remove themselves from the process early on, but further research may be necessary to explain why this happens.
There is typically a lot of sadness, surprise, and compassion. They express enormous interest in standing in solidarity and making a change for a person's life, even the bullies become motivated to stand for change. I've seen boys very moved by the story after they hear the effects that the bullying has had on the targeted student. The story is a very important part of the process and has enormous impact on them (Participant 2).

When the team first walks into my office, they seem nervous and they think they are in trouble. Approximately 95% of them will say "Are we in trouble?" And then when I tell them that they are not in trouble, and that I just need their help with something, you see a huge sigh of relief and then a smile comes on their face. They get really excited about it. Their eyes light up, and it's a big thing for them, even for the bullies. Some of them do have doubts, but the ones who have doubts are usually the bullies (Participant 3).

Again, there is a general concern about being in trouble, and after they hear that they are not being reprimanded or punished for something they have done, the team is relieved and become enthusiastic about being a part of the change process for the victim. The ones that generally have doubts about the process are typically the bullies.
They say a lot of things like, "Really?" "That's sad," or, "That's happening? I didn't know that." Most of the time they are shocked and they say things like, "I can't believe that's happening," or, "I didn't know that" (Participant 3).

Again, there are typically emotional responses from the team when they first hear about the bullying. The fourth speaker also expresses similar responses from the team members when they first hear about the bullying, and sometimes receives confessions and remorse from the two worst perpetrators.

I've had a variety of different reactions. The role model students, or the prestigious ones, they are usually very responsive, and very sympathetic. They'll verbalize things like, “Oh my gosh, this is terrible!” “We feel really bad.” “We know exactly what you're talking about.” “We know who it is.” “We want to help.” And I've had anywhere from the other extreme too. Sometimes the two worst students will help themselves, and confess and say, “I did that.” “I'm really sorry.” Or, they will start defending themselves, or maybe the four prestigious students in the middle of the story will start calling the bullies out and saying, “It's their fault,” “You shouldn't have done this,” or, “They are the ones who are doing this.” I've had all types of reactions when I told them in the initial meeting. Usually they think they're in trouble. So they'll ask, “Why are we here?” “What did
we do?” “Why were we picked?” Or, they are usually concerned, because two of the worst bullies typically come to the office or come to the counselor, because of some incident that happened. So they are usually on the defense right away. Then, they want answers to questions like, “How is it a secret?” “How is it undercover?” “How are we picked?” “What are we expected to do?” And then after they get all those answers, that motivates them to want to help. Once they find out that the person being bullied pick them because they are the ones who can get it to stop, and they hear that they are the ones who can make a difference, and after I tell them that nobody else has been able to do anything about it, and nobody else could get it to stop, but they can do it, this seems to motivate them as well. They also seem shocked by this and say things like, “Really?” “They picked us?” And so every time they get answers to their questions, their demeanor changes a little bit each time, and they become more motivated to be a part of it (Participant 4).

The similarities in responses from the first and second speaker indicate that team members are initially concerned that they are in trouble and this concern increases when they see the bullies, because they know that these students generally come to the counseling office for something they have done wrong. After they hear that they are not in trouble and hear that they are the ones that can make a difference, their general attitude regarding the team
changes toward a more positive outlook. The third and fourth speakers talked about emotional responses and general curiosity about why they were picked and the fourth speaker said that as their questions get answered, they become more comfortable about being part of the process.

Victims Responses

The victims in the bullying relationship are initially curious, yet skeptical when first introduced to the undercover anti-bullying team idea. This reaction is usually based on fear of being exposed and negative assumptions resulting from past negative experiences. Participants reported that the victims are reluctant because nothing else has worked for them in the past, and they fear the exposure, but they will follow along with it because nothing else has worked for them. When I asked how the victims respond to the undercover teams process, here’s how they responded.

They are usually pretty curious. If my explanation is clear, they can see how the support of their colleagues can make a big difference. They feel grateful that something is being done. However, a lot of them are skeptical as to whether or not it is really going to work, especially when I explain to them that the kids that are doing the bullying have to be on their team. They have a difficult time understanding that part. Students that understand the whole process respond very positively about the idea. However, a lot of them are reluctant at first. Typically, they will just follow
along with it, because nothing else has worked for them. Initially when I bring up the idea after they share their story with me, they are really apprehensive and kind of surprised that the solution will include two of the worst bullies on the team (Participant 1).

Although victims feel apprehensive and nervous about the undercover idea, they are also grateful that something is being done, and if they understand how the process works, they respond very positively to it. The apprehensiveness may be an extension of their fears from past experiences of measures that didn't work (Participant 4).

The same speaker reported some comments victims say when they are initially unsure about the idea. Participant 4 shared a similar response.

So usually they are really skeptical like, “Why?” “I don't really know about this.” “Are you sure this is going to work?” or, “No, that's not a good idea.” It takes some convincing to help them see that it actually would be something worth trying. They're not usually open to it right away (Participant 4).

The typical first response is an embarrassment and caution about sharing a story with others. They feel vulnerable and they fear being exposed. So
the initial response from the person coming forward is, “I’m not happy about being here.” There is a lot of nervousness and vulnerability of being exposed (Participant 2).

Again there is a similar response to the way that victim initially feel about setting up an undercover team.

The students will initially say things like, “I’m not sure this is going to work, because nothing else has ever worked before” “How do you know it’s going to work?” “What if the cover is blown? ” “What if people find out about it?” “Are they going to find out about me?” “If they find out about me, then what’s going to happen?” (Participant 1)

Participants 1, 2 and 4 agree that victims are initially nervous and apprehensive when the idea of undercover teams is introduced to them as an idea that may help them. Participant 4 suggests the reluctance may be a response from nothing else having worked in the past, but they are grateful that something is being done and it seems that, if they understand how the process works, they are more receptive to it and feel more positive about it.

Victims’ Responses During the First Monitoring Meeting

The victims are usually very pleased with the outcome of the strategies that the teams have used to make their life more pleasant at school. Participants
reported that during the first monitoring meeting the victims express enthusiasm, excitement and are generally happy with the way the teams are running. When I asked the participants how the victims responded in the first monitoring meeting, here’s what they said.

“They've changed,” "They always talk to me now," "They talk to me now like we used to talk,” "One of them shakes my hand and says, ‘sup doc,” "Everyone said they were sorry to me and asked if I was okay,” "He used to mock me, but now he jokes with me,” "He now asks if I’m okay, because I’m always quiet in class,” "I want to thank them for changing," "I wasn’t expecting them to be kind,” “I was expecting them to be angry because I snitched on them," “They are all good kids now," "On Facebook they say, I love you little sis.” Sometimes at the first monitoring meeting I have success right away. Once the team realizes the impact of their behavior and the bully realizes the kind of image they have, it changes them. When the problems are much deeper it takes a bit longer, but typically change happens very quickly. I try to do the first meeting with the target within 10 days after setting up the team (Participant 1).

These responses emphasize that there is generally positive feedback from the victims when they meet with the practitioner for the first monitoring meeting. The speaker indicates that change and success occurs very quickly. This
meeting takes place approximately ten days after the teams begin. Participant 3 has similar comments.

I’ve never have ended a team after the first monitoring meeting. The target will say things like, "Well, things have got a little better. The team has helped." Sometimes they will tell me that the bullying has stopped right away, but I always say to them, "I know you are really shocked that the bullying has ended so quickly and you want the team to get their award, but how about if we wait just a few more days to make sure that everything still remains quiet and that the bullying has stopped?" They are usually happy with that. They are happy with the results. They usually say, "This is really working." I think they are shocked that something that has been bothering them so much and has been such a huge part of their life has ended so quickly. I will usually have the target rate the bullying from one to ten, ten being the worst. When the bullying goes from and eight to a three, will ask them why it is a three. They will then tell me why the team is doing such a good job and they get really excited about the team helping them. This is what usually happens in the first meeting (Participant 3).

This speaker also indicates that there has been positive feedback from the victims in the first monitoring meeting. However, the speaker indicates concern
with ending a team so quickly and does not recommend this. The victims generally express enthusiasm about the undercover teams and are quite surprised that the bullying stops so suddenly, after being such a significant part of their life. The next speaker expresses very similar enthusiasm from the victims and similar caution about ending a team quickly.

For the first meeting, they are very optimistic, their spirits are high and they are very excited and enthusiastic. They say things like, "Oh my gosh, everyone is being nice to me and even the bullies are being nice to me." Most of the time the bullying hasn't completely eliminated. They might rate the bullying from one to ten and say it is about at a five. I've had many instances where they will try to defend the team and say things like, "Everyone is being so nice to me now and I am so happy, so we can now ended and give them all their awards." I always tell them when they say this, "No, we need to wait a little bit and make sure the story sticks. However, most of the time they are really excited and they want to celebrate after only 24 hours. They say things like, "It's over." and I tell them, "That's wonderful, let's just make sure that it stays that way" (Participant 4).

Most of the time the bullying doesn't end right away, but the victims are enthusiastic about the rapid change that occurs. This speaker expresses that
although the victim is enthusiastic about the sudden change in behaviors towards them, it is recommended that the teams run longer to make sure that the bullying has completely eliminated.

They are usually very excited, animated, enthusiastic, and have lots of stories about how various members of the team are doing things that are bringing about positive change for them (Participant 2).

Again, there is general enthusiasm from the victims in the first monitoring meeting, suggesting that positive change occurs very quickly for the victims.

**Bullies Responses**

When the bullies first walk into the room with the other students, they are usually quite surprised and nervous. When they realize that they are not going to get into trouble, their demeanor changes. After they hear the effects of the victim’s story, and hear the other students’ responses to the behavior, they usually desire to become part of the solution, rather than continue to be part of the problem. Participants reported that this shift in behavior for the bullies, is the usually the most interesting part of the process. When I asked the participants how the bullies respond to being invited to become part of the team, here’s how they responded.
This is the most fascinating part of all I think. Usually there is a whole range of responses that they make. Sometimes, they will immediately raise their hand up and say, "Yeah that was me." It’s interesting because the ones who do this are usually the first ones to come up with suggestions for developing a plan. Sometimes they will not say anything at all, and they will just be quiet and withdrawn. However, once the rest of the team begins coming up with ideas, it is amazing how quickly a fall in line. Once they realize that they are not going to be exposed, and they realize that they are being invited to do something about a problem that is essentially of their own making, and they are being invited to do something about it, they usually will begin responding with helpful ideas. There is a little bit of shifting blame. They will also be defensive and sometimes say, "It wasn't me." When this happens, I quickly explain to them that their name was not mentioned in the victim’s story. When I say this they usually seem relieved. Telling the victim’s story is just as important just setting up the team. When the team hears the sensitive story, and realizes that know one is going to be blamed, this usually creates a relation to shift that wasn't obvious before. The most important thing to the bully is that they are not exposed. The bullying is the only thing that is exposed. They know it is about them. Sometimes the most popular students in the class are the worst bullies. I never know what's going to happen on these teams. I have done 40 teams and each one has
been different. The bullies typically looked nervous because they have an idea that the game is up. They are nervous because they don't really know how the counselor is going to deal with it. They wonder what all the other kids are doing in the room. They are recruited on a team with students that they normally do not have much to do with. When the bully discovers that the bullying is known about them, they feel outnumbered for the first time where they once thought that they may have had the upper hand, they no longer have the upper hand and their actions are seen as deplorable, despicable, and unpleasant. When they hear the other students respond with, "That's horrible" or, "That's terrible," this has a powerful effect on them. So there is a point where things shift. Once the story is read aloud to the team, and the bullies hear the comments from the other students there is a shift (Participant 1).

The speaker expresses the reactions from the bullies as the most fascinating part, because this is where a shift occurs in their behavior. Where the bullies once may have felt like they had the upper hand, they become outnumbered for the first time by team members that find their behavior unacceptable and appalling. The reaction from the team members encourages this shift to occur. The bullies may also confess to the bullying behavior once they realize that they are not going to be exposed and they are invited to be part of a solution.
I think initially there is some concern there that they might be identified. They are a little embarrassed and concerned that they might be blamed. I quickly explained to them that this is a no blame approach, and it is the actions that are the problem that the person. I tell them that the undercover team project is the focus and the impact that the actions are having on a specific individual. And then explain to them that our job is to stand in solidarity with that person and to stand up against the effects of harassment, ridicule or whatever name we give the problem. So the language in the construction of the project is very important. I open a space for the bully to step into, and give them an opportunity to step out as well. I ask them if they want to contribute to the problem or contribute to the solution. I ask them if they want to take a stand for respect, safety, consideration for a positive learning environment, or if they want to take a stand for the problem. This is a pretty irresistible invitation. It is inviting the person to step out of what they are standing for without any blame. This gives the bully an opportunity to leave everything behind that they have done to harm someone else, and gives them the option and the choice to be part of the solution rather than the problem. The bullies typically respond very positively to this, and most of them agree to be part of the solution (Participant 2).
The second speaker experiences similar responses from the bullies as the first speaker and adds that once the bully realizes that they are given an opportunity to leave behind their negative behavior without blame, they decide to become part of the solution to produce change for the victim. The next speaker expresses the reactions of the bullies, and said that they typically seem confused, quiet.

I’ve had a variety of different reactions. Usually from the two worst bullies, anything from being quiet and nonresponsive and the kind of looking confused and looking around like, “How were we selected for a solution for this?” “Doesn’t everybody know that we are the ones doing this?” The bullies will usually stay quiet and look down. Only one time I had a bully stand up and say, “It isn’t true.” “They are lying.” “Here’s what really happened” (Participant 3).

The third speaker said that one student had attempted to defend the bullying actions, but typically they are quiet and confused.

Many times the bully will just stay quiet at the beginning, and a lot of them might have their head down a little, or they might be looking around. Sometimes they’ll say things like, "Wait a minute, I know what’s going on." Or, "You don’t have to tell me, I already know why I’m here," or "Wait,
wait, wait!” “Let me tell you what's really going on.” The bully wants to try
and defend herself/himself. Then I'll say things like, "You don't need to tell
me anything else.” “Let's just go with the story.” “Let me finish telling you
the story, and then if you have any information on who the bully is, just
keep it to yourself, because this isn't about getting the bully in trouble.”
“We don't want the bully to get in trouble, we just want it to stop.” I think
that kind of surprises the bully a little bit. They will say things like "Okay,
fine!” “I'll go along with it and participate” (Participant 3).

The third speaker shared similar responses from the bully as the first and
second speaker. The bullies are quiet at first and then try to defend themselves.
Once they realize that they are not going to be in trouble, they are more willing to
participate.

Usually from the two worst bullies, anything from being quiet and
nonresponsive and the kind of looking confused and looking around like,
“How were we selected for a solution for this?” “Doesn't everybody know
that we are the ones doing this?” (Participant 4)

Again, the typical response from the bullies seems to be quiet and
confused.
How the Students’ React to being Undercover

The next section focuses on reactions from the team members to being undercover. It investigates how much they like the idea and how central it is to the process. Participants reported that students sometimes raise concerns about having to deceive their friends. Here’s how the participants responded when I asked them about how students respond to being undercover.

During the evaluation questions [at the end of the team process] I ask the students, “What do you like about the idea of being undercover?” Some of them like it, and there are others that don’t. When I ask them what improvements they can make, some of them tell me, "It shouldn't be undercover, because I want to be able to tell my friends that I'm doing this." Sometimes, of course, they do tell people and it doesn't really matter. It's more about being discrete, rather than being a secret. The reasons why they don't like it is because they have to act differently, and when their friends asked him why they are acting differently they can't tell them that they are on an undercover team. They have to think of other excuses as to why they are being different. They don't like having to deceive their friends. When I am setting the teams up I tell them that people are going to ask them why they are doing this, and that they need to think of some answers that are not being dishonest, because I do not
condone lying, but this will protect the integrity of the approach (Participant 1).

This response indicates a potential difficulty in the process but it also suggests ways of minimizing the difficulty. The next response suggests getting around the issue in a different way.

I really don't emphasize the undercover part of it. I tell them that they are in a class and they are part of the culture. I ask them if they are interested in working within that culture to change the culture, to change the way people speak to each other, to change the dynamics of what is happening in their class. I think of it in terms of being a change agent...so I only mention the undercover term once in the beginning and quickly move on from that. I don't prefer to use this language because to me it is like a having policeman in the classroom that catches people doing things, so I don't care for the metaphor. This is my approach (Participant 2).

By contrast, the next participant emphasizes the undercover aspect much more.

This is the part that I really love the most. I tell the students that they have to work in secret and they can't tell anybody. I always tell them that they
can tell a few people maybe at home, but they can't tell their best friend and they can't talk about this with the students in their class. They must be undercover. Typically their eyes light up and they say things like, "What?" "We're going to be like a secret agent?" "Can we have a little secret handshake?" "Can we have a secret name in a secret badge?" They get really into it. They want to have a secret meeting place on the playground. They love the secrecy part of it. For a couple of teams, I made an undercover team agent card and I got stickers from the police department and made them a badge that said "junior police officer" and I put this on the back of the card and I would sign it and say they are undercover team agents. Then they say things like, "Oh my gosh we're secret agents!" I also made an undercover team pledge that the students say at the beginning of every team meeting. They would raise their right hand and read it at every meeting. They took enormous pride in this pledge. The teams took the undercover idea very seriously, and they took pride in their positions as a team member. (Participant 4)

The fourth participant also emphasizes the undercover aspect strongly.

They love it. They say things like, "Okay you can't tell anybody. This is totally top-secret okay?" "No one can know." They really value this. They
take it very seriously. I give them little badges and they take pride in them. They really value the top-secret mission behind it all. (Participant 3)

There is thus a small discrepancy between these differences in emphasis. Perhaps this is explained in terms of the age group of the team members. The respective value of each of these emphases is not resolved in this study. It is more that an issue for future study is raised.

Responses from the Team for their Five-Point Plan

The next topic of inquiry was about the five-point plan that the team members came up with. Participants were asked about the sort of ideas that team members came up with. Participants reported that they take this part of the process very seriously and will stick with the plan or make additions to it along the way. The first speaker stressed the accountability factor in relation to the five-point plan.

The students will come up with ideas like, "I will sit next to her and say hi to her," "I will hang out with her," "I will cheer her up," "I will ask her if she is okay," "I will stick up for her," "I will stop others from mocking her." These are some of the things that they say they are going to do, then sometimes they do other things like sharing a lunch. When I get the team together, we go back to the plan and we talk about it. I will remind them about what they agreed to do and ask them how things have been going.
Then I will ask if they've done anything else that is not on the plan. I will write down all of the things they have done and ask them if there is anything else we need to do, and if they think the plan is adequate. I will always go back to the plan, because the plan is like a contract, it's an agreement and that is where accountability comes from. They are accountable for whether they have done the things they say they're going to do. There is another level of accountability that is recorded on the information sheet. Sometimes the students will only do five, and other times they come up with more ideas than they had in the initial plan. Typically they do more than they say they're going to do (Participant 1).

The second speaker placed more emphasis on the transformative aspect of the former bystanders actively looking out for opportunities to interrupt instances of bullying, naming this as the first part of the team’s plan and the expression of solidarity with the victim as the second part.

What I like about undercover teams is that it mobilizes bystanders … and makes everybody part of the problem or part of the solution. So the first part of any plan really is to be on the lookout or be on the alert and notice when bullying is happening. They are to take action and not minimize or ignore the behavior when it is occurring. We then talk about what kind of actions they can take, which is the first part of the plan. The ideas for the
plan typically include looking out, being alert and noticing when to take action. The second part of the plan is about solidarity with the person who has been affected by the bullying. The students will come up with ideas like including the person into their group, sitting next to them so that they are not alone, talking to them every day, sitting by them at lunch, or whatever makes sense for that individual. This part of the process is about taking a strong stance and holding the team accountable (Participant 2).

Although not as developed as in the first statement, the concept of accountability is again referred to. Participant 3 emphasized the solidarity theme more but also made the point, as did participant 1, that team members often spontaneously add extra items to the list of actions.

The teams come up with ideas like, "We could sit with them", "We can ask them to have lunch with us", "Let's not leave him alone", "We can make him a card", "We can make sure that if somebody is bullying them that they stop it", "We can smile at them", "When we passed by them we can say hi to them", "We will sit next to them", "We will have lunch with them". The students pretty much stick with their five-point plan, but they will also add things to the plan (Participant 3).
Participant 4 works with elementary-aged students and there are differences in the kind of ideas they come up with, but the principles remain similar.

This is always the fun part, seeing what the students come up with. I am always very surprised with what they come up with. They can be very creative, and as adults, we sometimes underestimate them. I always tell them that I am going to write up their plan but I remind them that they were picked to be on the team so they need to come up with a plan to help the student in need. I have one team create a schedule and the students had shifts so that the student in need was never alone. I thought this was really creative. They came up with this all on their own and it worked out great. Some students will say, "Let's make him a birthday card because his birthday is coming up," and then other students will say, "I can get him a present. Me and my mom will go shopping." They always come up with really cute things like, "We will always sit by him at lunch," or, "Two of us will invite him to soccer," "We will invite him to tether ball when it is our shift." They just come up with so many things that you would never think that little kids could actually come up with. It's fun for me, because I really don't have to do anything, they practically do it all themselves (Participant 4).
The emphasis here is strongly again on the solidarity aspect, rather than on the accountability aspect. On the other hand, the speaker is focusing mostly on the time when the team is generating its plan, whereas Participant 1 above was also looking ahead to the monitoring meetings at which the accountability aspect might be more important.

**Best Method**

Participants reported that undercover teams are, in their estimation, the best method for combating relational aggression in schools, because they help every student involved, including bystanders, victims, bullies, and even those that rarely receive any recognition. Here are various comments by the participants along these lines:

I honestly think that undercover teams are the best method for combating bullying relationships (Participant 3).

I think that this is the best method, because you are not just helping out the student that is being bullied, you are helping the student that is bullying also, as well as helping the other students that hardly ever get any recognition (Participant 3).
It is just helpful for everyone involved … Principals love it, because they want to have students in their office for good reasons. They love giving out awards assemblies, rather than punishing kids (Participant 3).

This is honestly the best method for anti-bullying there is. It is great. I am always very happy when I do these teams, because it is the highlight of my year. I see how happy the kids are while they are doing them and afterwards (Participant 3).

I would say that undercover teams are the most effective method for addressing relational aggression in the classroom (Participant 1).

It is the most effective method for a particular context and particular kinds of problems … They are the most effective method because they are creating a culture of bystander involvement (Participant 2).

I honestly think that undercover teams are the best method for combating bullying relationships. I think this is the best method, because you are not just helping out the student that is being bullied, you are helping the student that is bullying also, and helping the other students that hardly ever get any recognition. So it's just helpful for everyone around (Participant 3).
Undercover teams are extremely effective. I am to the point where I think that everybody should be using this method (Participant 4).

These comments indicate a general enthusiasm for running undercover teams among participants in this study. By themselves these statements do not prove the effectiveness of the approach but they point to the practitioners' belief in the efficacy of the undercover teams approach.

What Makes Undercover Teams Effective?

Participants also reported on a range of components of the undercover teams approach that they believe contribute to the success of this approach. One point that was made implied that support and feedback from teachers and principals was very important and helpful. When participants were asked about their personal views based on their experience with implementing undercover teams and effectiveness of the experiences, here's how they responded.

The teams are very effective, because I get a lot of support from the school. The principal for example, is always asking me to set up a team for students. This is also one indication that the teams have been successful. The teachers recognize that they work, and the principal supports it also. It has been personally very effective for me. And for the school, it has been effective because there have been obvious changes in
how the classrooms function as a result of the way that the teams have been set up (Participant 1).

Such responses underscore the value of teacher and administrative support and raise the question of what different outcomes might follow without such support.

Another component of the process that participant’s noted was that the undercover teams process did not just focus on the bullies alone or the victims alone. Instead it is focused on both.

It is like the saying… "You kill two birds with one stone." Well, with anti-bullying teams, you kill seven or more with one stone (Participant 3).

You are not only helping the student that is being bullied, but you are also helping the bullies too … I would say it is the most effective intervention for bullying, because you are including the people who are responsible for the bullying, which is the genius part of it. You are not creating an intervention just for the target. You are actually putting students together that are working together in the same classroom, or in their little school community, and working with them to solve the problem. I think it is just an error proof, genius way to combat bullying issues. How could it not
work if you have the kids that are actually doing the bullying on the same team? Of course it's going to work (Participant 4).

These comments support the idea that the effectiveness of undercover teams may be linked to the bully being part of the process. Further research may be necessary to prove whether or not the bully’s position on the team is related to the effectiveness and success of the process.

The Success of Undercover Teams from the Practitioners’ Perspective

The data indicates that undercover teams are very successful for healing bullying relationships. Practitioners reported one hundred percent success rate with every team they ran. Here is what the participants said when asked if there have been any teams that have not been successful.

I can honestly say that I have not had any teams that have not been successful. Every case has been successful for me. The bullying pretty much stops immediately. Some teams may take longer than others but there is always a successful outcome. I think they are the only method to claim 100% success (Participant 1).
Undercover teams are very good and have been very successful (Participant 2).

I have had one hundred percent success rate. Every single time I have done an undercover team, it has worked (Participant 3).

I haven’t had any unsuccessful teams. If the bullying hasn’t ended, I don’t end the team (Participant 4).

These comments regarding the success of implementing the process of undercover teams are from a limited number of participants, but they represent quite a lot of experience. The data indicates that utilizing this method in schools may prove to be a highly successful intervention method for healing bullying relationships.

**Undercover Teams Help Students Who Seldom Get Any Recognition**

The responses from bullies who have been involved with undercover anti-bullying teams, according to participants in this study, have been positive and students who never get any recognition, such as those who are not bullied, or who do not bully others, receive acknowledgement from school staff members and family members. Participants reported that undercover team members experience feelings of accomplishment, which helps build self-esteem and
confidence. Here is how the participants responded when asked how bullies respond to being part of the team.

The bullies on the team say things like, "I've never been nice to anyone in my life" or, "This is the first time that I've ever been nice and it feels good," and so it builds their self-esteem and their confidence. You invite them to thrive in a situation where they can use their leadership skills in a form of doing something good for others, rather than harming others, and this allows these particular students to thrive (Participant 4).

This response from one of the bullies thus gives the impression that the undercover teams have provided a first-time experience of them of what it feels like to be kind, which seems to build self-confidence. The same participant reported that it is helpful for other students that never get any recognition.

It also helps the other students that have been selected for the teams. These are the kids on the team that no one really bullies, or they have never been bullied. These are the kids that we take for granted because they are doing so well. You know, they don't really need help, so they are never really acknowledged. And then you have the overachievers that you always get to talk to or see and interact with. These are the students that get encouragement and are awarded for their achievements. But the
students that are in the middle typically do not get any attention at all. These are the ones that are taken for granted and often ignored. And so when the students become a part of a team, they get recognition. They get told that they are a good kid. It gives them an opportunity to be in a leadership role and be in a position that could help someone else. You will see their faces light up. And they are very happy and very proud of themselves. It also gives them a chance to talk to their parents about their achievements with the teams” (Participant 4).

These could be said to be significant spinoffs from the undercover teams process. They are spinoffs because they are not about the central purpose of addressing the bullying but they represent valuable advantages that accrue from an undercover team process.

**A Positive Story from a Former Victim**

Undercover teams have the potential to create a ripple effect. One participant reported that a student that was once a victim was called upon to be a member of a team to help someone else. When I asked the how effective has the implementation of undercover teams been for them personally, here’s how one participant responded.

I had a student that wrote a suicide note because he was getting bullied so much in the sixth grade. We did an undercover team for him, now in
the 8th grade, he actually got selected by one of the students to be a member of an undercover team. He was the type of student that had difficulty showing his emotions too much. I told him that he is the only student that I’ve ever had, that has been on both sides. He was a student that has been supported on a team, and now he is actually helping someone else. He is a completely different person now. He is confident, has many friends, and is very happy. A few years ago, it was just the opposite. He always kept to himself, he was shy, he would put his head down, and he was lonely and sad and withdrawn. I asked him how it feels to now be able to help someone else? His answer was, "It feels good." It was a short answer, but there was so much in that answer, because I think that he has experienced what it feels like to be on the other side. This was also one of my most extreme cases. This was the only student I had that was able to experience both sides of the team. I just think this is wonderful. Not only are students be helped by the teams, but there may be a time in their life they will be called upon to help others as well. This creates a ripple effect (Practitioner 3).

Here the speaker shares a personal success story with the implementation of the undercover teams method for one student that had experience on both sides of the team. He was once a victim, and later was asked to be on a team to help someone else.
Positive Outcome for Bullies

After a team has ended, the bullies typically respond positively. One participant reported that the undercover teams change the bullies' behavior in a very positive way. When I asked the participants how bullies handled the knowledge that bullying is known about them, here's what they said.

The bullies end up being the biggest defenders and protectors of the students who they were bullying. They are the ones that actually are the most proactive and active in the group. And the beginning they are hesitant and look around the room at the other students on the team and wonder if the other students know that they are the bully. They will also sometimes put their head down in shame. However, toward the end they are the ones that are coming up with the most suggestions on what can be done to help the student that has been bullied. They will ask me if they can write the student a nice note. Most of the bullies will ask me in the end if I knew they were the bully all along. Some of them will admit that they were the bullies after the team has ended. I always tell them that it doesn't matter, because they are the ones then helped the student the most and I remind them that the only thing that matters is that they helped create change for the student in need. I think the reason they do this, is because it's an opportunity for them to redeem themselves. They usually feel very bad about what they did. One student shared with me that it was
the first time in her entire life that she has been nice. She really meant it.
I asked her how she felt about that, and she said that she really liked it.
Since this discussion, I have seen her behavior change. She is not as
bossy or mean to her friends anymore. So I believe that undercover
teams actually create change for the bullies in a very positive way. It
seems to give them a lot of confidence and self-esteem (Participant 3).

This speaker shares a unique outcome for the bully. Where the bully
initially seems reluctant to be a part of the team, their attitudes toward the victim
and themselves changes at the end of the process. There is a general positive
shift that lifts their self-esteem and they become the most proactive toward
positive change for the victims.

Undercover Teams Can Help Create a Positive Culture

Undercover teams work best when schools have a culture of caring and
compassion. Undercover teams may be a step toward creating a positive school
culture, where differences are more accepted. Creating this type of environment
requires whole school support. One participant reports that tough schools, such
as those with diversity, need help and undercover teams can be useful in
creating universal ideas that students can look up to. When I asked the
participants about how effective the implementation of the undercover teams
process have been for them, and whether or not they would be effective in other
school settings, here’s how they responded.
It has a lot to do with the school culture. If there is a school culture of caring, and that's the belief, and if all of the schools values are aligned with that central approach, or central value, then I think things like this can work quite well. Our school stands for “everyone cares.” This is our mantra. We care about our community, we care about others, we care about ourselves, and we care about learning. Everyone knows this school as a place where everyone cares and is called to care. It is difficult in certain schools to find universal ideas that students can look up to. For example, in a Catholic school, everyone has the same values but in a secular school you may have diversity, so you have to find a way to bring all of those groups together and find a neutral ideal. So the value that we have here at our school, "EC", which stands for “everyone cares” sort of connects everyone with the same values. You also have to consider the social environment in a classroom. It is a community. I think it is important to get this whole community behind having a common environment where kids are accepted, and where their differences are accepted. Differences are one of the motivators of bullying. I do think that undercover teams are more effective in a school that believes in the idea of caring for each other (Participant 1).
Participant 1 related the effectiveness of the undercover anti-bullying teams approach to the school culture of caring for individuals and noted that this may not exist in other school cultures. The second speaker had something quite different to say about why undercover teams are effective.

I think one of the reasons why undercover teams are so effective is they create a culture of bystander involvement. I have noticed a culture change even in classrooms where there is not an undercover team. As more and more people have experience being part of these teams, you become either part of the solution or part of the problem. It is creating a culture that when bullying occurs students have an obligation, responsibility and opportunity to do something about it. Everyone in the classroom is responsible for the culture and the events that occur in that room. It is an intervention to change the culture. They have two functions (1) the teams stand in solidarity with the person being targeted and (2) the teams hold agents accountable (Participant 2).

Participant 1 further explains what may be required for undercover teams to be effective in other settings.

You also have to consider the social environment in a classroom. It is a community. I think it's important to get this whole community behind
having a common environment where kids are accepted, and where their differences are accepted. I do think it is more effective where each youth has a place, or in a school that believes in the idea of caring for each other. I would like to come to a tough school in California and begin the process of setting something like this up. I think it is important to start small and not try to gain the approval from the entire school staff. I would just work with a few teachers, and have them experience the success of the teams. This is how creating a school culture of caring starts, and then it builds from there. The students and the teachers that experience success with the teams begin to create a positive school climate, and it begins to spread (Participant 1).

The responses from participants 1 and 2 discuss how cultural influences are an important factor for successful implementation of undercover teams in other school settings. Further research may be worthy of looking into the aspects of the importance of school culture support and implementation of undercover teams as a method to combat bullying issues.

Other Uses for Undercover Teams

Undercover teams potentially can be used for other purposes that do not involve bullying, such as when a student just needs a little support. They also can be used wherever the bullying is going and where students meet on a regular basis, on such as afterschool programs and sports activities. Participants
reported that undercover teams are very flexible in the way they are designed. When participants were asked about the type of bullying issues they have encountered and if undercover teams can be useful for other issues, here’s how they responded.

Undercover teams can be useful for other purposes as well. For example, I once set up a team where a person just needed some support. She just didn’t feel like she fit in and needed a little support, and this worked quite well for her. It is very flexible in the way it is designed (Participant 1).

The second speaker reported that undercover teams give students support wherever there is a problem.

I’ve also done teams with afterschool programs. I would have a team with just the kids in that particular program. And I would build teams around that, such as soccer basketball and other different activities. So wherever the problem is, I’ll build a team around just that program. You can target wherever the bullying is happening. So you want to target the kids who are primarily responsible for the bullying wherever it is happening (Participant 4).
Participant 1 noted that undercover teams are useful for other purposes other than bullying issues. Participant 2 reports that undercover teams can be useful in other areas of the school and not solely useful in classroom settings. Further research may be needed to determine the effectiveness of undercover anti-bullying teams for other purposes other than bullying and areas of the school other than the classroom. The reason why it may be successful in other settings for participant 4 could be because she is in an elementary school setting where students are with the same group of students in all locations for most of the day.

**Deciding when Undercover Teams are Appropriate**

Undercover teams are successful when they are used appropriately. They are not appropriate for every bullying situation. There are other methods, such as restorative methods, and conflict coaching, or other intervention methods that may be appropriate for circumstances that do not involve relational bullying. Participants reported that they do not use undercover teams for every bullying situation, and counselors need to be cautioned that one size does not fit all. When I asked the participants if they have come across situations where they have decided that an undercover team is not the best approach, here is what they said.

The reason why I have a high success rate with undercover teams is because I know when it is appropriate to use a team for them to work. I do not use undercover teams for every bullying situation. Whoever is
using these teams must be aware and really know when it is appropriate and when it is not (Participant 3).

The first speaker emphasized that undercover teams success is largely due to the discretion of when it is appropriate to use an undercover team.

I do not use undercover teams for every bullying situation. Whoever is using these teams must be aware and really know when it is appropriate for the circumstance” (Participant 1).

Again, the importance of discretion regarding when undercover teams method is the appropriate response is emphasized.

Counselors need to make sure that they are using them adequately for adequate situations. If it is just a case involving two friends, and there is only a misunderstanding, there are other ways to deal with that rather than implementing an undercover team, because it wouldn't work in those cases (Participant 3).

The third speaker responded similarly and emphasized that undercover teams do not work for all bullying situations. The next speaker discusses another
method that may be useful intervention response to bullying situations where the aggression is only between two people outside of the classroom.

We need to use restorative methods and practices when bullying is not in the classroom. Restorative methods are more about intervention. It is not an elimination method. Restorative practices involve anything that needs to be done to restore harm that has occurred. It can include people who are bullying people, and it can include solely a fight in the school as a result of the bullying. A common misconception is that when people fight they are bullying. However, the bullying goes on before the fight happens. The fight is always the expression of the frustration and anger that is a result of the teasing and name-calling and the putdowns. In this case, I will use a form of conflict coaching. I think you have to be careful with one-size-fits-all approaches. Undercover teams work particularly well when it is a relational problem that is occurring within a classroom. But when you have different age groups and different groups of students that are bullying other groups of students, you need to look at a combination of restorative practices plus maybe some intervention by authorities as well. Additionally, when bullying is going on in many classes, or older students are bullying younger students, or it’s happening outside of the school, or there is silent bullying going on, I think that this type of method is not designed for that” (Participant 1).
The implication here is that undercover teams work particularly well where aggressive behavior and bullying relationships exist inside a classroom.

I sometimes write formal statements, which goes to the disciplinary department of the school. I will use this approach in the case of an assault, serious threat, and when the bullying involves a targeted situation or a specific individual. In other circumstances, I will use either restorative or punitive, or individual counseling. I have also worked with circles, which is a type of method that is useful when a whole classroom dynamic has been disrupted (Participant 2).

Here is another response to bullying behavior that calls for restorative or punitive measures depending on the severity of the situation. The next speaker discusses another response to bullying behavior, but did not go into detail regarding the context and implementation method.

I have used conflict resolution, which is what I have used in the past before implementing the teams (Participant 3).

There is lack of information here regarding conflict resolution to assess any similarities or differences with other responses.
If there are a few students who do not wish to establish a team, I usually do a restorative conversation instead. I would rather do the undercover teams, but this is an effective method also. Restorative conferences are effective as well. However, I only do the conference when the target refuses to do the team, which has only been a few times. If the problem involves only two students, then it would be appropriate to have a meeting such as a restorative conference. If there are multiple kids involved, I use undercover teams. We also have PBIS in our district, which is like tier 1 type of prevention. This type of prevention teaches school-wide expectations, lessons and social skills that teach staff members daily about expectations. Part of the expectations with PBIS is teaching students how to be respectful. What that would look like for the bully piece, is every student in every class receives lessons on what cyber bullying looks like, what gossiping look like, and what every type of bullying, verbal, physical looks like, including how important it is for everyone to stand up against it and say that it is disrespectful, and not cool. We are just stepping into this as a district. This is more of a prevention piece. We don't wait until it gets into the threshold of bullying. This involves anything that influences culture. We teach the students what is disrespectful as a culture and how to resist negative behaviors. We are
beginning to implement this type of prevention piece at our school (Participant 4).

Here the speaker discusses the usefulness of restorative methods when a bullying situation calls for something different other than undercover teams. If the problem is only between two people, other methods may be appropriate. Undercover teams work best when several students are involved in the bullying behaviors such as a victim, a bully or bullies, and bystanders. Whole school approaches may be necessary in order to address preventative measures such as awareness. It was mentioned in this study that undercover teams may improve school climate, but more studies are needed to determine whether or not this is a possibility.

Overall, participants reported that their experiences with undercover teams have been successful, and are useful for combating relational type bullying where students meet regularly at specific locations in school. Based on the responses from the participants, anti-bullying undercover teams heal bullying relationships and create positive change for victims, bullies and bystanders, and they are an effective bullying intervention that can be implemented by following a simple five-phase plan.

When Undercover Teams Are Not the Best Approach

Undercover teams work best when students are within the same group for most of the day. If the bullying is happening outside of the classroom and the
student involved in the bullying relationship do not share a class together, or are
not with the same group of students for most of the day, undercover teams may
not be the best approach. Participants reported that undercover teams work best
when the students involved in the bullying relationship are in the same classroom
or setting. When I asked the participants if they have come across situations
where you have decided that an undercover team is not the best approach,
here’s how they responded.

I have had situations where undercover teams would not be appropriate.
Undercover teams work best when the bully and the student are in the
same classroom. If the bullying is occurring outside of the classroom, it is
not as effective, because the undercover team can only give the bullied
student support, but it will not be as effective, because the person who is
doing the bullying is not given the opportunity to change their ways. The
relationship is not there in the same way as it is when the students are all
together in the same class. If I am faced with this type of situation I
usually use a restorative approach. In this approach nobody will be
blamed, but there is a problem that needs to be sorted out. This is a
specific approach for a specific situation (Participant 1).

The first speaker reported that unless bullying is occurring inside the
classroom, or the bully and the victim meet regularly in a classroom type setting,
difficulty arises in the process of setting up a team. Undercover anti-bullying teams heal relationships where a bullying relationship is present. Therefore, if the bullying is occurring outside of the classroom, another approach may be necessary. The next speaker followed this thought with another reason for utilizing another method when there is a bullying issue.

When there is ongoing history between the person being targeted and the one or two that are involved in the bullying then I will use a restorative conversation, rather than an undercover team to solve the problem (Participant 2).

The reasons for undercover teams not being the appropriate response were a little different for this participant.

If I’m in dealing with any type of bullying that does not involve relational bullying, because I do not feel that it is the appropriate response (Participant 3).

Here is a very different response from the participant that works in an elementary school setting.
I work at an elementary school, so for the most part, the students are with the same group for most of the day. It is easy for me to set teams up, so I always use undercover teams for most bullying situations, unless the victim does not want to do it. They can even be set up if the bullying is happening on the bus (Participant 4).

Participant 1 feels that undercover teams can only be useful in the classroom, while participant 2 reported that when bullying involves one or two students a restorative approach would be more appropriate. Participant 3 reports that undercover teams can only be useful in relational bullying and other methods may be more appropriate for other types of bullying issues. Participant 4 works at an elementary school and reported that undercover teams are useful for all types of bullying situations and any location, because the students are with the same students for most of the day. This calls for further research to investigate the usefulness and effectiveness of undercover teams in different school settings and for different types of bullying issues, other than relational type bullying.

**Reasons why Undercover Teams may not Experience Success**

Undercover teams require a careful monitoring process. One participant reports that they have the potential to fizzle out if they are not carefully monitored. When I asked if there have been any teams that have not been successful, here’s how one participant responded.
If the teams were ever not successful, I would think it would be because the students lose interest. You have to keep the momentum going. The monitoring process involves seeing the team and seeing the victim, and then seeing the team again, and the victim again, backwards and forwards until you are sure that the bullying has been eliminated. I think they could easily fizzle out if you don't stay on top of it (Participant 1).

Here the speaker indicates that the undercover teams process involves consistency and careful monitoring to keep teams running strong.

**Cyberbullying Issues and Undercover Teams**

Cyber-bullying is increasingly becoming problematic in schools. It could be difficult to set up undercover teams for this type of bullying. Participants duly reported that it would be difficult, because cyber-bullying is anonymous and students set up false Facebook accounts, which creates a challenge when identifying who is involved. When the participants were asked about the usefulness of undercover teams for cyber-bullying issues, here’s how they responded.

Cyber-bullying is a huge problem at our school, as I am sure it is in any school. Unfortunately, undercover teams are not useful for this type of bullying. It would be difficult because there is not an opportunity to set up a team in order to help the person that is being bullied. They can be used
to support a person that is being bullied online, but this type of bullying would require a different technique. Cyber-bullying is anonymous and it comes from all different directions. It is much more frightening and much more difficult to address. Undercover teams heal bullying relationships where relational problems exist in relationships and friendships. When looking at cyber-bullying issues, there is no relationship or friendship, because typically, it involves just one person setting up a false Facebook account. Therefore, it is anonymous and it is not easy finding out where the attacks are coming from" (Participant 1).

Cyber-bullying is becoming much more prevalent in the last five years. It would be difficult to use undercover anti-bullying teams for this type of bullying because the posts are anonymous, which is quite different to an extension of the dynamics in a classroom. Undercover teams are really about mobilizing bystanders. So when cyber-bullying is going on, it is difficult to identify, mobilize, or involve bystanders. I haven’t used undercover teams for cyber bullying issues. I have only used the teams where there is a classroom dynamic and where it involves people in the same classroom. I think it would be different and difficult to arrange something like this in cyberspace. However, I think this is a new and emerging, rapidly growing realm that is useful to consider the undercover teams technology and its application into cyberspace. It would be
interesting to talk to someone who has been targeted only online and not in a classroom. I would be interested in gathering a team together and trying this out. The only way something like this could be possible however, is if the student can identify who the perpetrators are and to the bystanders are. I would then gather everyone together and have a discussion about potentially setting up a team. It would involve monitoring the online comments, intervening and exploring the problem. I can see how undercover teams could be useful if the student can identify the people that are involved (Participant 2).

This is a complex issue because often times bullying does not stop at school, it continues online. This is what happens in most bullying circumstances at school. The cases I have had, has been a combination of bullying at school and bullying online. When students come in to tell me about cyber bullying issues, it usually is an extension of a problem that began at school. I think that it might be difficult to use undercover teams for cyber bullying issues because it would be difficult to identify the students who are involved, because students create fake accounts. Therefore, it is difficult to know the students involved or even part of my school. So this creates complexity, because of the anonymity that is involved. Students will not admit that they were the ones writing the bad comments. Therefore, since it is difficult to verify who the students are it
would be difficult to set up an undercover team. I just don't see how it would be possible. I never had a case that involved 100% cyber bullying. I think it would be very difficult to use undercover teams for this (Participant 3).

In the last few years cyber bullying has become increasingly more of a problem. I think that the effects of it are just as damaging as the bullying that is face-to-face at school. I'm not sure if it would be useful are not. I think it depends on if the students can be identified and they all go to the same school (Participant 4).

**Anti-Bullying Teams in Comparison to other Methods**

There are several methods and interventions utilized by schools to help combat bullying relationships, but restorative methods and undercover anti-bullying teams seem to be the most effective. Participants reported that other methods such as, punishing and shaming the bully, does not work for healing bullying relationships, and undercover teams and restorative methods are the most effective for relational type bullying. I asked the participants how undercover anti bullying undercover teams compare to other intervention methods for bullying and here is how they responded.

I think that a lot of people have tried other methods, but the methods don't seem to work. Most people will try and bring the bullies and the victims
Punitive measures such as punishing and shaming the bully do not seem to work for addressing relational bullying, and undercover teams appear to be a more appropriate response for relational type bullying.

It is very different than other methods. When thinking about the methods in the old days, where you just bring the bully in and tell them to stop it, or counsel the bully and try to fix them, or threaten or punish them. When you compare those methods with undercover teams, there is really no comparison (Practitioner 2).

The second speaker feels that when comparing undercover teams to other methods, there is no comparison. The response was similar to the first speaker in regards to other methods that have not experienced the success that undercover teams has had. However, more research would be necessary and useful to determine why undercover teams are more effective than other methods for certain bullying behaviors.
I haven't really used any other methods, but the ones that our district would encourage us to use, is anger management. I've never ran any anger management groups, but I just see that it's not effective because I hear my colleagues talking about it. They seem so discouraged, because they are not having success with it. I haven't seen or heard anyone say that they have actually had success with any other types of interventions. The only method I would say that is equally effective is maybe using another restorative approach, such as a restorative conversation or a restorative conference, or something like that. However, any other kind of traditional methods are not successful at all (Participant 4).

Again, the response regarding other methods as an intervention for bullying behaviors leans more positively toward anti-bullying undercover teams, than other methods. The only method that was expressed as equally effective was the restorative approach method, but traditional methods of interventions do not seem to compare to the undercover teams method. This statement made be a call more further research to compare anti-bullying intervention implementation methods to other methods in order to determine whether or not this is true.

Other types of restorative methods may be useful as well. One participant reports that classroom circles are being utilized to produce awareness in schools
and teach students skills that help them behave appropriately. This may possibly be something that can create culture change such as PBIS.

Classroom circles are a part of the restorative justice method and are now being used to help build relationships. I think this may be more powerful than the PBIS. This is where the teachers will have classroom meetings about the students and it's about building relationships. The restorative circle actually brings their skills to life. When they use their skills in a circle, it teaches the students how to behave appropriately. It teaches people how to greet people, and teaches people how to utilize their skills as opposed to memorizing steps. We are starting to do those circles in classrooms and I think that will be stronger than the PBIS. PBIS teaches kids social skills and expectations, and circles teach kids how to develop positive relationship skills, which will actually prevent the bullying more than the social skills will (Practitioner 4).

There was an indication that a method called classroom circles may be an effective whole school preventative measure that may create culture change for students. Further research regarding the effectiveness of this alternative method as a whole school approach may or may not prove this to be true.
Punitive Measures

Some schools may require counselors to utilize punitive measures. Participants reported that punitive measures do not work when dealing with bullying in schools, and have the potential to make matters worse for the victim. When I asked the participants what their feelings were about punitive measures to combat bullying issues, here’s what they said.

The problem with using punitive methods is that it's the ultimate irony. You are using power against people who are using power to hurt someone else. When people are punished for bullying they usually try to get revenge on the person that they think has told on them. This is the main reason why students don't tell because they don't want things to become worse. They fear retaliation. They are also scared of the reputation they are going to get if they don't tell about the bullying because they may be seen as a weak person. They think that if the bullies get punished it will just make matters worse for them. The natural response for parents is that they want the bullied student punished. However, they do not realize that this kind of action will only make matters worse for the person being targeted. Is frustrating for the parents to hear that we are going to use different approach because they want something done immediately. I explained to them that it may not solve the problem immediately, but the other methods have greater long-term effects for the person being
targeted. When punitive measures are used, the victim does not get the opportunity to think positively about him/herself, or discover that they are worthy of support. This is what undercover teams do. They tell the victim of the bullying that they deserve to be supported and that they are entitled to be cared about. Just because you have something quirky about you, doesn't mean that you are not entitled to be cared about, or worthy of being shown compassion to. If you only use a punitive approach, then those expressions are denied for that person. I don’t think that all students who are bullied are always passive. They often do things that annoy people and they often say harsh things to people that say harsh things to them. It's not always one way. The bullies need to learn about boundaries and restraints and the targets need to learn how to be less obvious and less attention seeking. All of these things come through with the learning opportunities that can happen from undercover teams. I often ask the team, "Is there anything you would like me to ask the victim that can help them not to be bullied by others?" Typically they will say things like, “You can ask them not to call out,” or, “You can advise them about not smelling so badly.” Sometimes it is a simple as just asking the person not to be so annoying and attention seeking. There is significant positive change that happens with students who are involved in undercover teams. The bullies start realizing that it is working and making a difference and the teachers notice that they are changing as well. Therefore, I do not
think that punitive methods will work for these situations. Punitive measures do not create a safe environment for students to talk about bullying issues. The idea is to create a safe environment for students to tell others what is happening (Participant 1).

There are very clear expressions in this response regarding utilization of punitive measures to combat bullying in schools. The speaker feels strongly that punitive measures only make matters worse for offender and victim. The use of power to stop someone from using power is not an approach that seems to be getting positive feedback. The use of power and authority to punish individuals for their behavior can perpetuate more damage to individuals, and do not foster safe environments for students.

I think punitive measures should be the last resort. I think there comes a time where people who persist in perpetrating actions of bullying need to be removed from others. I think this is a last resort response for ultimate accountability. However, I would want to pursue other methods first (Participant 2).

Here the response to utilizing punitive measures as an intervention method for bullying behaviors was described as something that should be utilized
as a last resort response. The next speaker utilizes punitive measures only in extreme cases.

I only use punitive measures in extreme cases such as in the bully is using a weapon or if someone is breaking the law. We don't really have many cases like this though. The situations we deal with here include name-calling, pushing bullying online. Punitive measures do not help with these types of situations. We were using punitive measures when I first started working here, and the problems would just continue. The teams offer a solution to the problem. We create little soldiers, because they continue working even after the team has ended. The students will come in and tell me what's going on and to keep an eye on a certain situation. I think that it has actually changed the school climate. Now students feel that it is okay to come and tell someone that someone is getting bullied so that they could be helped. Before began using the teams, the students would not tell anyone about a problem because they would feel like they were snitching, and they would fear that other students would call them a rat. I no longer hear this at my school. Punitive measures make matters worse, but anti-bullying undercover teams offer a positive solution that changes the students and the school climate.
Here the response shows again that punitive measures are not an appropriate response for bullying behaviors in schools. The same speaker elaborates a little more about experiences with punitive measures.

Our prior administration would require that all counselors must use punitive measures and discipline bullying behavior, which was really difficult, because this is not what I learned in school. The punitive measures involved suspensions, detentions, and other punitive tools, which most schools have used against these types of situations, which honestly in my opinion has never work. The problems continue. Sometimes we don’t even know if the problems have stopped, or if they continue. The kids will give up on asking adults for help, because they fear that it will make the situation worse. It has made it worse for them in the past, so they just feel, why ask for help? (Participant 3)

Punitive measures as a response to bullying are thus not supported by participants as an appropriate response to bullying behaviors in schools, and the speakers spoke strongly about the negative effects this method can have for both bully and victim.
Learning from Experience

Undercover teams appear to be always successful, but some teams may last longer than others depending on the circumstances. One participant reported that having several teams working at the same time may be necessary in some cases, especially if the bullying is happening in more than one classroom. Here’s another response to the question, “How effective has the implementation of undercover teams been for you?” This response discusses what one participant learned about a team that lasted longer than it should have. Here is what was said.

One team lasted two months. Looking back on that, if I had two teams working at the same time, it wouldn’t have taken so long to end, because this was bullying that was going on between two classrooms. It was like sixty students bullying one student. I should have had an undercover team in each class as opposed to having one undercover team in one class trying to work with all sixty kids. This is why that one took a little bit longer. This was a student that had been out-casted by multiple students in school. They would say things like, "He stinks" "He's gross" "He's disgusting" "Don't touch his stuff," and he was shunned from the playground and everything. He wasn’t allowed to touch any equipment. When I started a team, I only created one from the student’s home class. I did not create one in the classes that he rotated to, and that’s what I
should have done. Then I had another one that took a year, and it was with a transgender student. It was multiple grade levels that were bullying, but I only had a team in the main class and I should have had multiple teams working in multiple classrooms. This situation was happening across many grade levels, from second, third and fourth. I should have maybe had teams in multiple classrooms, because it was happening across many grade levels, from second, third and fourth. This is why it took so long. It was primarily happening on the playground, and not in the classrooms, but I should have picked multiple teams that could have worked in the classrooms and on the playground. If the bullying is happening in multiple classrooms, and the kids are in multiple classrooms, I probably should have had one team per class. (Participant 4)

The speaker realized why the team took so long to end, and shared some things that may be useful if faced with the same situation in the future. The question it raises, however, is, “What would be the relationship between the different teams?”

Undercover Teams are Becoming more Popular in Schools

Undercover teams are becoming more popular in schools, and more counselors are using this method to combat bullying relationships. One participant reported that people are becoming more interested in knowing why
this approach works and are experimenting with the idea. When I asked about how the participant came to know about undercover teams, here was the response.

I talk about it quite a lot and there are a lot of research articles, and people are talking about it. Articles are written about me in the newspaper and all sorts of things. I’ve been invited to speak at conferences. People are interested in knowing why this approach works. At the conferences, I have had counselors approach me and tell me that they are using undercover teams at their school and that it has been a fantastic experience. I have had numerous people emailing me and asking me for the forms that I use and I often send them out to them. Some counselors play with the ideas and are flexible (Participant 1).

Such growth in interest suggests that the time is right for more research into the approach. This study is part of this development, but further and more rigorous outcome studies are becoming called for.

Undercover Teams in Other School Settings

Undercover teams are useful in most school settings. They are particularly useful where the same group of students meet regularly in the same location, however since elementary school students have only one classroom for the entire day, the challenge for these students could be that it’s difficult to keep...
the undercover teams a secret. Participants reported that undercover teams would be highly effective in all school settings. I asked the participants if they thought that undercover teams would be effective in other school settings and here’s what they said.

The challenge with using undercover teams in other school settings such as elementary schools I would think, would be keeping it undercover. I think it would be more challenging for younger students to keep a secret. In a high school, you have an opportunity to work with students in their core classes. I think the way that you can protect the reputation of the victim of the bully, is to organize meetings when the rest of the kids are not there. So I think in a primary school you can do it, if you had a meeting with selected kids, maybe at lunchtime or interval, or before school or after school, when the other kids aren’t around. But if you take six kids out of a class for a monitoring meeting, it is too obvious, particularly if the class has 24 kids or more. That’s a lot of kids going out suddenly from a class to see the school guidance counselor, and that raises a lot of questions for others (Participant 1).

The first speaker expresses an opinion about why it would be challenging for elementary schools to have undercover teams. However, more studies would be helpful to determine whether or not it is more challenging to run undercover
teams in elementary schools. The next speaker has a different opinion on the effectiveness of anti-bullying undercover teams in all school settings and thinks that they would be particularly very effective in elementary and middle schools.

Undercover teams would be highly effective in all school settings. I believe that undercover teams would particularly very effective with elementary and middle school children. I think that elementary school aged and middle school aged could implement this very, very effectively. However, I think it is equally effective for all school settings. I think that the structural constraints are a consideration. I know that for example in middle school it works well for us in New Zealand in the first two years, and it works well in the high school because the students are with a group of 30 students for most of the day. So an undercover team will only work with a group within that group that they are with for most of the day. The undercover team has to be drawn from the population where the present problem occurs. For example, the behavior could be on the bus, or only in the lunchroom, or on a sports team. You can take a group of students from anywhere there is a problem (Participant 2).

The second speaker’s response to the effectiveness of undercover teams in all school settings was that it is most effective in high school and the first two years of middle school, because the students are with the same group of
students for most of the day. The next speaker indicates that elementary school is thriving with the approach.

I've taught my colleagues how to use undercover teams in elementary and high school settings. The elementary ones are thriving. I think it will work in all school settings (Participant 3).

Again, the opinion about utilizing undercover teams in all school settings is generally positive, and elementary schools seem to be doing quite well with the approach. The next speaker also stated that undercover teams would be effective in all school settings, but added that a tier one prevention, such as PBIS, may be necessary.

I think it would be effective in any school setting. I think that you just need to make sure that the school has some kind of tier-one prevention, like PBIS with the climate culture established along with it. The tier one prevention would make it more sustainable for the whole school. It definitely made a difference with the participants I have worked with in elementary school. The bullies changed and became the role models, and they had a good experience with the person that was victimized. But I don't think that undercover teams could change the whole school climate. I think it will change the class culture but I think to get a whole school
climate change you actually have to be talking about these things as a whole school such as the PBIS approach (Participant 4).

The response from the fourth speaker about utilizing undercover teams effectiveness in all school settings were similar regarding the effectiveness undercover teams in all school settings, however the speaker added that tier one prevention may be necessary to create a culture change for the whole school.

The voices heard in this chapter from the participants indicate strong opinions about the effectiveness of anti-bullying undercover teams being utilized as an intervention for relational bullying in classrooms. The data also indicates that this method may influence school culture as well. The positive influence and differences that are created for the victim, the bully and the bystanders, are also evident in this data information. Furthermore, the participants voiced that undercover teams are the only intervention they have utilized for healing bullying relationships where the end results were one hundred percent successful.
CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this research project was to investigate the implementation issues of undercover anti-bullying teams. These teams amount to serious interventions that aim to address bullying relationships in schools. They appear to be useful for combating such relationships and to help foster safe and healthy school environments for students. In addition, they have the potential to decrease the prevalence rate of the bullying epidemic in schools.

This chapter brings together perspectives from four practitioners who have utilized this method as an anti-bullying intervention and offers an insight into their experiences and into their perceptions of effectiveness of utilizing this method, as well as their experiences with other methods. I will further discuss how this project complements previous research of anti-bullying programs that have been utilized in schools for this purpose. The chapter will also discuss the implications of the recorded data from personal interviews with these practitioners. The limitations of the data and findings will also be discussed. Lastly, suggestions for further research will be made.

The research question I began with was: “How are undercover teams implemented by practitioners and what is the perceived effectiveness compared to other anti-bullying programs?” The research question was answered by collecting data from recorded interviews with four practitioners, two from New
Zealand and two from California. They had respectively used the undercover anti-bullying team approach in two high schools, one middle school and one elementary school. The findings suggest the effectiveness of an intervention program that has been utilized to heal bullying relationships in schools.

According to existing literature, bullying behavior involves an imbalance of power between a perpetrator and a victim; and secondly, it involves repetitive harm doing. Research further indicates that bullying usually begins and reaches its peak in middle school (Juvonen, 2014). This finding was also supported by this research project, because practitioners reported that middle school students have a difficult time adjusting to new structures and systems, and as they are struggling to settle in, they often resort to bullying behaviors to deal with these frustrations.

Existing studies suggest that cyber-bullying is a growing issue among teens. This trend was also supported in this research project. Participants reported that cyber-bullying issues are increasingly becoming problematic and that undercover teams are not designed to help with these type of issues, because the bullying is anonymous, which creates a dilemma for selecting undercover team members.

The influence of friendship and peer support in anti-bullying interventions and programs is gaining attention as an important element in combating bullying in schools. The participants in this study also emphasized the importance of
working to affect peer relationships, which is the central focus and purpose of undercover anti-bullying teams.

Recent studies into bullying, point to bystander involvement as a significant component that perpetuates bullying prevalence. Participants in this study reported that recognition of the importance of bystander involvement was a key reason that undercover teams were successful. Undercover teams enlist both bystanders and bullies and give them a role to play. By all accounts they are nearly always willing to play this role.

Literature further suggests that anti-bullying school-wide programs designed to influence culture, such as PBIS and OBPP has had a positive impact on students’ involvement in bullying behavior, and argues that schools have a moral responsibility to provide measures such as prevention and intervention programs to reduce bullying. However, more studies are needed to investigate the effectiveness of such programs.

Qualitative research is necessary for investigating the detail of anti-bullying programs, because it gets closer to the micro-cultural environment in which bullying occurs. Participants in this research project, reported that the undercover anti-bullying teams method positively impacts student involvement in bullying behaviors, and is effective for a classroom environment and where relational bullying is present, and may also positively influence school culture.

This study focused on an anti-bullying program in particular micro-cultural environments where bullying was present. As an intervention it appears to
produce change in that environment which has the potential to spread throughout at least a classroom, if not a school culture. Participants reported aspects of cultural change in classrooms where undercover teams were not present. Participants also reported that as more people experience being part of the teams, a culture is being created that when bullying occurs, students have an obligation, responsibility and opportunity to do something about it. Undercover anti-bullying teams are an intervention that seems to bring about positive change in the school culture by creating solidarity with the person being targeted and accountability for bystanders and bullies.

Summary of the Findings

What emerged from my findings is that the participants' perceived the effectiveness of anti-bullying undercover teams as more effective than other methods for combating bullying relationships where relational type bullying is present in the classroom.

Findings further indicate that the selection process of the undercover anti-bullying team method is the most important part of the entire process. Teacher involvement in the selection process seems to influence successful outcomes for the teams. Collaboration with classroom teachers provides additional support towards a successful outcome for the teams. All four participants reported one hundred percent success with anti-bullying undercover teams when dealing with bullying relationships. They further suggested that some teams may take longer
than others to have a successful outcome, but the teams have so far always been successful. Participants reported that the team does not end until the bullying stops, and the victim determines when this occurs, which places the victim in a position of power for the first time without ever having to confront the bullies.

It is evident from these participants that such intervention methods can help heal bullying relationships and create safer school environments for students to learn. The findings suggest that everyone involved in the bullying relationship including the victim, bystanders and the bully positively benefits from undercover anti-bullying teams. Self esteem is also elevated for the victim where it was once depleted by the bullying relationship. Participants also reported a positive impact for the bully and team members. The findings suggest that positive change occurs for everyone involved in the anti-bullying undercover team process. Participants reported that bullies’ responses include learning to be kind for the first time and building self-confidence. Participants also reported that students who rarely receive recognition for any achievements, received recognition for the first time.

By contrast, participants reported that punitive measures tend to make matters worse for the bully and victim. It is also evident from my findings that undercover teams are flexible and can also be utilized to help students with struggles that do not involve bullying. Furthermore, the data shows that
undercover teams can possibly be utilized outside the classroom, where the bullying relationship is occurring at a place where bully and victim meet regularly.

Discussion

The findings in this project are based on practitioners’ perspectives regarding their experiences with utilizing undercover anti-bullying teams to combat bullying relationships in schools. These perspectives are unique because the practitioners voice their personal experiences regarding the practice of anti-bullying undercover teams, which has not been extensively investigated previously. While previous literature shows that school-wide preventative measures can help increase awareness and improve school climate, undercover anti-bullying teams as an intervention method may also positively influence change in school climate. The importance of bystander awareness and intervention efforts was emphasized in previous research, arguing that “educating bystanders about the effects of bullying and teaching them how to make a stand on behalf of the victim” is vital to the efforts of decreasing prevalence rates of bullying in schools (Poyhonen, Juvonen, & Salmivalli, 2012 p. 723). The findings in this project also emphasized the importance of bystander awareness and involvement, such as making a stand for the victim, as an integral component to decreasing bullying incidences and making a difference in the lives of those negatively effected, which confirms the importance of implementing
programs in schools that teach students how to recognize and respond appropriately to bullying behaviors.

This study differed from previous literature, because the voices were heard from practitioners who are currently implementing anti-bullying undercover teams in their schools and have had great success with the process so far. There are few qualitative studies regarding effective bullying interventions that the voices, and opinions of those implementing the processes are actually heard. Quantitative studies do not offer this in their categories. The questionnaires in these studies do not have open-ended questions as in the interviews of the participants in this type of study. Although there were a limited number of participants, they had a lot of experience with utilizing this method.

The practitioners shared their stories, showing subtle differences in how they used the process. There was an emphasis on teacher involvement as an important part of the selection process, which is not something mentioned in the five-phase approach, but was learned through experience with setting up the teams as being helpful. Each practitioner followed the step-by-step process, but added their own unique style and communication methods that helped moved the teams along toward a successful outcome. Since every situation is unique, flexibility is important, which is an additional component that the structure of anti-bullying undercover teams offer. Although undercover teams offer flexibility, the findings indicate that consistency and momentum is a vital component to keep the teams running effectively. Regular meetings and monitoring is required for
this to happen. Feedback from teachers and administrators was also mentioned as something to be useful for effectiveness. The feedback from others is an indicator that the teams are creating change and making a difference. It represents the success of the program because without hearing from other school officials, it would be difficult to determine if change is occurring throughout the school.

Another unique feature in this study is the involvement of the bully in the intervention process. Previous research on bullying interventions and preventative measures do not include the bully in the healing process of bullying relationships. One participant mentioned that, “This is the genius part of it.” Perhaps this is a new approach that researchers may investigate further in future studies. Literature shows that bullies have a tendency to be at higher risk for substance abuse problems and criminal behavior later in life (Merrell, Gueldner, Ross, & Isava, 2008). The findings show that undercover anti-bullying teams change the bullies’ aggressive behavior and highlights that there have been significant changes in the bullies’ self-esteem and their outlook on their negative behavior. According to some previous research, low self esteem is a factor in why bullies harm others (Salmivalli, 2001, p.37). If we were to speculate beyond this data, intervention methods that include potential positive transformation and help for the bully, may lead us to new perspectives that be useful toward not only decreasing prevalence rates of bullying in schools, but may also provide useful measures toward a safer society as a whole.
The students’ responses to the idea of being undercover vary for various reasons, but lean more toward a generally positive attitude about them. Findings show that elementary school students generally seem to have a more favorable attitude about the idea, than middle school and high school students. The reasons for this were not determined in this study but may be implications for further studies. I found that although the attitudes about being undercover differ in other school settings, the findings show that positive change occurs for the bullies, victims, and bystanders and success of the teams have been profound. The narrative spin off from the original “no blame” approach offers unique outcomes for all involved. As the damage from bullying relationships are being restored, new stories are being developed for students that have the potential to create new meanings for individuals regarding bullying behaviors, which may create positive change for their future.

I have found that undercover teams have the potential to end the bullying almost immediately, which is different from previous literature regarding bullying intervention methods. The potential for a ripple effect was evident in my findings. As more counselors and administrators in schools experience the potential impact the teams may have in the changing the classroom environment, more schools may be willing to try this method as a useful intervention. This method began in New Zealand and is now being utilized in California as a useful approach, so the ripple effect may be said to have already begun.
Previous findings indicate the importance of implementing programs in schools that teach students how to recognize and respond appropriately to bullying behaviors. It was evident in my findings that undercover teams provide this component. Furthermore, research indicates that defending has been associated with two potential positive outcomes; bullying decreasing and the victim’s plight being alleviated (Poyhonen, Juvonen, & Salmivalli, 2012, p. 723). My findings indicate that defending the victim is what undercover teams is all about. Participants in my study discussed the feedback from team members that indicate a conscious team effort, including multiple ideas in their five-point plan, which emphasized supporting and sometimes defending the victim as their main objectives.

Previous evidence suggests that relationships are important when addressing bullying issues. Whether or not a student has a good relationship with a parent, a teacher, a counselor, or a friend, it can make a difference in their life when bullying issues arise. (Juvonen, 2014) Anti bullying undercover teams main objective is healing bullying relationships, and recognizing that building healthy relationships and friendships are important when addressing bullying issues.
Limitations to the Study

The information collected in this study regarding personal experiences with an intervention method called undercover anti-bullying teams, implemented by four practitioners provides valuable information about the process and effectiveness of the program from their personal views and opinions. However, we need to be cautioned by several limitations to this study that may impact assumptions that are not accurate. First, there were only four practitioners that participated in this study. Two of the practitioners only had experience working with students’ ages thirteen to eighteen years old, one had experience working with middle school students aged eleven to thirteen years old, and one participant only had experience working with students’ ages six to eleven years old. Two of the participants worked at schools in New Zealand, and the other two worked at schools in California. While they had run between them over one hundred and forty teams, there were still a limited number of participants to gather information from. The small sample size does not generalize to the implementation of undercover anti-bullying teams in all school settings.

The success of the teams was not fully explained in this project. It could have been due to geographical location, or to other factors not included or mentioned in this study. Secondly, there may be a difference in the educational structures, such as size of classes, population of schools, socioeconomic variables, and location that may have impacted results. Perhaps bullying is more aggressive and prevalent in California schools than in New Zealand schools.
Another limitation may be that there were differences in the style and approach of each participant with the implementation of the program, which may or may not have contributed to the overall success.

Other limitations may be that the effectiveness of the anti-bullying program as discussed in this paper, may not guarantee effectiveness in all school settings around the world. This study only discusses implementation of the program in four specific school settings. The effectiveness of the program as discussed in a high school setting, does not guarantee that the program will be effective in all high school settings. Likewise, the effectiveness of the program in elementary and junior high settings as discussed this project, does not guarantee the effectiveness of the program in other elementary and junior high settings. Since this is the first project to investigate undercover teams in California school settings, the implications as discussed here does not guarantee equal results will occur with this program in other California school settings.

Future Research and Recommendations

This research project used recorded information gathered from for practitioners, two from New Zealand and two from California who shared their personal perspectives based on the experiences with undercover anti-bullying teams. Further research would need to extend the study to more practitioners in more schools in more contexts. An outcome study would also need to include the perspectives of students and parents as well as counselors. Such studies in
the end will need to focus on observed changes in behavior, rather than just on practitioner reports. A controlled study comparing an undercover team with a different approach is also warranted, as are pre and post measures of student attitudes. These are tasks, which future studies might address.

The available data nevertheless provides enough evidence to suggest that bullying in schools is a growing problem, and schools have a responsibility and obligation to provide a safe environment for children to learn. Interventions that help foster positive change for students and create safer school environments are needed for schools to address the bullying epidemic.
March 09, 2015

Ms. Dorry Lillard and Prof. John Winslade  
c/o: Prof. John Winslade  
Department of Special Education, Rehabilitation and Counseling  
California State University, San Bernardino  
5500 University Parkway  
San Bernardino, California 92407

Dear Ms. Lillard and Prof. Winslade:

Your application to use human subjects, titled “Understanding the Purpose and Effectiveness of Restorative Practices in Undercover Teams from a Practitioner’s Perspective” has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). The attached informed consent document has been stamped and signed by the IRB chairperson. All subsequent copies used must be this officially approved version. A change in your informed consent (no matter how minor the change) requires resubmission of your protocol as amended. Your application is approved for one year from March 09, 2015 through March 08, 2016. One month prior to the approval end date you need to file for a renewal if you have not completed your research. See additional requirements (Items 1 – 4) of your approval below.

Your responsibilities as the researcher/investigator reporting to the IRB Committee include the following 4 requirements as mandated by the Code of Federal Regulations 45 CFR 46 listed below. Please note that the protocol change form and renewal form are located on the IRB website under the forms menu. Failure to notify the IRB of the above may result in disciplinary action. You are required to keep copies of the informed consent forms and data for at least three years. Please notify the IRB Research Compliance Officer for any of the following:

1) Submit a protocol change form if any changes (no matter how minor) are proposed in your research protocol for review and approval of the IRB before implemented in your research,
2) If any unanticipated/adverse events are experienced by subjects during your research,
3) To apply for renewal and continuing review of your protocol one month prior to the protocols end date,
4) When your project has ended by emailing the IRB Research Compliance Officer.

The CSUSB IRB has not evaluated your proposal for scientific merit, except to weigh the risk to the human participants and the aspects of the proposal related to potential risk and benefit. This approval notice does not replace any departmental or additional approvals which may be required.

If you have any questions regarding the IRB decision, please contact Michael Gillespie, the IRB Compliance Officer. Mr. Michael Gillespie can be reached by phone at (909) 537-7388, by fax at (909) 537-7028, or by email at mgillespie@csusb.edu. Please include your application approval identification number (listed at the top) in all correspondence.

Best of luck with your research.

Sincerely,

Judy Sylva

Judy Sylva, Ph.D., Chair  
Institutional Review Board

JS/mg

cc: Prof. John Winslade, Department of Special Education, Rehabilitation and Counseling

909.537.7588 • fax: 909.537.7028 • http://irb.csusb.edu/

5500 UNIVERSITY PARKWAY, SAN BERNARDINO, CA 92407-2393
Informed Consent Form to Participate in Study

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Dorry Lillard and supervised by Dr. John Winslade from the counseling and guidance program at California State University San Bernardino. I hope to learn about implementation issues with regard to undercover anti-bullying teams from a practitioner’s perspective. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you have experience with undercover teams and have utilized this method to combat bullying relationships in schools.

You were selected based on your pre-existing practice of utilizing an undercover team approach to bullying. The cost to you is approximately one half hour of your time. A potential benefit would be an opportunity for you to reflect further about your experiences of implementing undercover the teams. Participation in the study may prove to be an educational experience for you, while also contributing to a deeper understanding of the nature of undercover teams.

If you agree to participate, you will be interviewed via Skype or in person, by Dorry Lillard. You will be asked questions regarding your experiences with undercover anti-bullying teams. The interview will take approximately 30 minutes to no more than one hour to complete. The interview will be voice recorded in order to transcribe the content for data analysis and dissemination.

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential. Identities will be kept confidential by safeguarding all information collected in a locked safe that only Dorry Lillard will have access to. Voice recordings and information collected during the study, will be kept no longer than 30 days after the cessation of the study. Data collected, including voice
recordings and notes taken from the interview, will then be destroyed.

It is not anticipated that there will be any major risks to you from participating, but doing so will cost about half an hour of your time and some thought about your answers. The benefits will lie in the encouragement that this study offers to others who might be interested in implementing undercover teams.

Your participation is voluntary. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time without penalty.

If you have any questions about the study, please feel free to contact me at +1 760-285-4031, or send an email to dorrylillard@yahoo.com. You can also contact my supervisor, Dr John Winslade, at +1 909 537 7312 or jwinslad@csusb.edu

Your signature indicates that you have read and understand the information provided above, that you willingly agree to participate, that you may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty, that you receive a copy of this form, and that you are not waiving any legal claims.

Signed

Date

I also understand that the interview will be audio-recorded and I give consent for my interview to be recorded.

Signed
REFERENCES


