The Culture of the Female Victim
In High School Bullying

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Abstract

North Americans have become more aware of bullying as the result of the many accounts reported in newspapers, and on television and written in books involving the deaths, beatings and shootings of students. This study investigates bullying from the perspective of the victimized female high school student. A qualitative study was conducted by interviewing three female students in Grades 8-12 who self-identified as victims. The findings provide insight into the types of bullying, and reactions to and ramifications of bullying. Verbal and non-verbal aggression was the most prominent. Physical aggression was always preceded or accompanied by verbal aggression. Cyber bullying was particularly insidious because of the anonymity it allowed. The participants described the devastating effects bullying had on their self-esteem and their relationships. This study showed that the emotional pain resulting from bullying incidents had negative repercussions in both the short and long-term. Based on the results of this study, recommendations are provided to schools on how to work with victims.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

Violent events and tragedies in schools across North America have heightened awareness regarding bullying. Newspapers and television report many accounts that involve the deaths, beatings and shootings of students. In 2000, in British Columbia, two students left suicide notes that indicated they were ending their lives as the result of severe high school bullying (Coloroso, 2003). Mayencourt, Locke and McMahon (2003) stated that, “British Columbia faces a serious problem with bullying, harassment and intimidation in its school system” (p. 6).

Governments, communities, schools, research centers, media, and individuals have analyzed and suggested solutions to bullying. The research has indicated that the ramifications of bullying exist for the bully and the victim both in the short and long-term. These implications can be of an emotional, academic, social, physical or psychiatric nature (Mishna, 2004; Nansel, Overpeck, Pilla, Ruan, Simons-Morton & Scheidt, 2001). Therefore, it is crucial that research continues to investigate the impact of bullying and the methods to eliminate it.

In recent years most discussions and research have focused on the number of incidents of bullying, the underlying causes of bullying, the strategies to eliminate the occurrence of bullying and the success of bullying interventions (Ananiadou, Schneider, Smith, & Smith, 2004; Craig & Pepler, 2003). However, Mishna (2004) stresses the need for qualitative research conducted on victims. Discussions and research relating to the victims will help inform the populace about the need to understand the culture of bullying and ways to help to eradicate it. In my role as a high school counselor, I have noticed
that approximately nine out of ten bullying situations are female related. Therefore, I think female victims in particular need a forum to express feelings and reactions regarding bullying.

Female victims are frequently the recipients of non-physical aggression such as starting rumours, social exclusion and withering looks that are often not called aggression but rather “what girls’ do”, “a phase girls go through”, and “learning what it is like in the real world” (DiPasquale, 2004; Simmons, 2002). These acts of aggression can be accomplished in such a covert manner that the perpetrator appears innocent. Researchers such as Bjorkqvist (1994; cited in Sweeney, 2005) state that, “covert bullying is part of human behavior. It is in the biology.” (p. 2). These ideas suggest that bullying behaviour should be expected, and is a necessary and natural part of the social structure. However, from my readings and discussions with females of all ages, non-physical aggression can have immediate repercussions as well as long lasting emotional scars.

As an educator, I have attended many workshops on developing strategies that will create safe and caring schools. Dr. Shelley Hymel, an educational psychologist from the University of British Columbia, facilitated the most recent anti-bullying conference I attended. The workshop affirmed my belief that every school has a unique culture. Dr. Hymel discussed the premise that schools must consider their populations, the beliefs, attitudes and values of the school and community, and the relationships between persons in the school before implementing intervention strategies. The culture and needs of an inner city school could be very different from those of a rural school. Each student in the school also has personal characteristics and needs. Intervention strategies a counselor, teacher or administrator can implement are school and case specific. Therefore, it is
important that systems to support female victims of bullying be based on an understanding of the specific bullying behaviours that occur at a school.

In my role as a counselor, I have had interactions with female students who have been bullied. Students have various responses to being bullied. Some students wish to have a place to vent their anger and some want the situation to be handled by a teacher or administrator; others request punishment for the bully, while still others want strategies that will help them cope with the bully. These students also express confusion and frustration regarding the bully, the bullying incident and the bystanders. I believe it is important to take the time to understand what high school females consider bullying to be, what their reactions to bullying are, and how bullying affects their relationships with others.

Most research has been conducted using quantitative methods such as surveys (Mishna, 2004). This type of research provides statistical data but does not take into account the personal experiences relative to the bullying culture of the female victim. According to Mishna (2004) there is a “lack of literature on the effects of bullying from the standpoint of the victimized children” (p. 235). Few qualitative studies have investigated the experiences of victimized students (Owens, Shute & Slee, 2000). In order to allow female students to fully explain their experiences and feelings, it is necessary to conduct interviews that allow victimized girls a forum for sharing their experiences. I believe it is vitally important to acknowledge that an increased understanding of the views of female victims is an essential step in providing effective counseling. My interest lies in exploring the culture of the female victim in high school bullying.
Chapter 2

Literature Review

Although bullying has been an aspect of school life for many years, it was not until the early 1970s that researchers began to investigate the problem. Early research began in Scandinavia and moved, in the 1980s and early 1990s, to other countries such as Canada, Great Britain, Japan, Australia and the United States (Olweus, 1995).

Researchers agree that the key component in bullying is an imbalance of power between two individuals, between two groups or between a group and an individual (DiPasquale, 2004; Mishna, 2004; Olweus, 1995). They further state that the more powerful use physical, verbal and social actions to purposefully cause distress to the less powerful (Artz, 2001; DiPasquale, 2004; Olweus, 1995). Physical actions are considered direct bullying while social or relational actions are considered indirect bullying. Verbal bullying fits in both categories as comments can be made in a quiet undetectable way or in a loud, obvious manner. The indirect forms of bullying can be overt, such as threats and intimidation, or covert, such as exclusion or gossip. (Charach, Pepler & Ziegler, 1995; Hurst, 2005; Mishna, 2004; Olweus, 1995).

Physical bullying is the most visible and therefore the easiest form of bullying to identify. This is often what individuals first think of when bullying is mentioned. Physical bullying includes things such as slapping, biting, pinching, spitting, and kicking, and destroying clothes and property. Boys tend to use physical bullying more than girls (Coloroso, 2003; Lescheid, Cummings, Brunschot & Cunningham, 2001). This difference is a reflection of the socialization of boys in our culture (Coloroso, 2003; Simmons, 2002). Vail (2002) captures this idea when she states, “We still expect boys to be
aggressive, domineering and competitive, and we expect girls to be cooperative, nurturing, and, well, nice” (p. 11).

Verbal bullying accounts for approximately 70% of all bullying complaints, thereby making it the most common form of bullying (Coloroso, 2003). Males and females use verbal bullying equally (Coloroso, 2003). Verbal bullying tactics include name-calling, cruel criticism, racial slurs, gossip, extortion of possessions and threats of violence.

Relational or social bullying can be extremely difficult to detect. Individuals or groups use tactics that are meant to damage a sense of self or a relationship while preserving a façade of niceness (Coloroso, 2003; Simmons, 2002). Simmons (2002) reported that after twenty years a woman recalled the feelings of embarrassment and rejection she experienced after being bullied by her peer group; she also recalled crying herself to sleep every night as the result of name-calling, social exclusion and body slams all performed by bullies with wide-eyed innocence. In some instances the relationship itself is used as a means to control others. According to Crick and Grotpeter (1996; cited in Artz & Nicholson, 2001) females use relational bullying to gain or preserve favourable social positions. Relational or social bullying can be accomplished through the use of negative body or facial language, rumour spreading, gossip or social exclusion (Coloroso, 2003; Simmons, 2002). The victims’ fears of escalating harsher actions often hide the resulting pain.

*Cyber bullying*, a relatively new form of verbal and social bullying, involves the use of digital communication technology to transmit or post messages that are intended to harm others (Hurley, 2004). It is especially insidious, as the source of the bullying is
often anonymous. Slanderous and abusive messages or images can be sent to personal accounts and can be posted on the web, in chat rooms and on cell phones. The bully is able to anonymously increase potential audiences while the victim is troubled by the realization that it is almost impossible to know how far the information has spread (Hurley, 2004). According to one American study (I-safe, 2004) conducted with 1,500 Grades 4 to 8 students, 48% reported being bullied on line, 35% reported being threatened on line and 58% reported having mean or hurtful things said or posted on line (cited by Hoeth & Rychter, 2004). A British Columbia study which examined students from seventh to twelfth grades indicated that 7% of males and 23% of females felt unsafe on the internet (Tonkin, Murphy, Lee & Saewye, 2005).

The numerous studies conducted worldwide indicate that large numbers of students are affected by bullying either as the bully or the victim (Craig & Pepler, 2004; Olweus, 1995). The majority of data collected was in the form of surveys completed by students, teachers, administrators and parents. Olweus (1995) reported, on several studies completed in the early 1980s, that 15% of Scandinavian school children were involved in bully-victim issues. He believed that this figure underestimated the number of students actually involved in bullying problems.

Canadian studies conducted in southern Ontario in the early 1990s indicated that about 18% of students were involved in bully-victim problems (DiPasquale, 2004). Another study completed in Toronto in 1990 indicated that 21% of students were involved in bully-victim difficulties (Ziegler, 1991). These numbers are comparable with numbers reported in other countries for the same period (Dipasquale, 2004).
In 2001-2002 the World Health Organization conducted a cross sectional survey in 36 countries entitled *Health and Behaviour Survey of School-Aged Children* (HBSC). The Canadian sample was surveyed in early 2002. The survey clustered students by classrooms in elementary, middle and high schools. The data were collected from students who were from the sixth to the tenth grade in a range of schools that represented size, location, language and religion in all Canadian provinces. Approximately 34% of the boys and 27% of the girls reported that they had been bullied at least once in a six-week period (Craig & Pepler, 2003). In the 36 countries being studied, these figures put Canadian students in the top third. When frequent bullying rates were examined, Canada ranked in the top quarter with 17% of the boys and 18% of the girls reporting being bullied at least twice in a five day period (Craig & Pepler, 2003). These figures indicate that a significant number of Canadian students are bullied.

British Columbia Ministry of Education studies conducted in 2002 indicated that 22% of tenth grade students and 18% of twelfth grade students were picked on, bullied or teased (Mayencourt et al., 2003). In a 2005 workshop presented by Dr. Shelley Hymel, she reported that approximately 30% of students in a school are involved in bully-victims situations. These statistics indicate that bullying is an issue for students in British Columbia’s schools.

When examining bullying specifically as it relates to girls, 72% report that they have been bullied during their school years (Casey-Cannon, Hayward & Gowen, 2001; Craig & Pepler, 2003). The Canadian portion of the HBCS study reported that 79% of girls were teased, 72% had rumours spread about them and 21% were physically bullied. In 2003 the McCreary Centre Society of British Columbia conducted a study with
students in the seventh to twelfth grades. Females in this study reported that in the past year 39% had been harassed verbally, 38% had been excluded purposely by peers and 18% had been physically bullied. These statistics support the belief that girls both use and are the victims of more social or relational bullying rather than physical bullying.

Bullying is a complex issue. Mishna (2004) conducted a qualitative study in a large Canadian city with fourth-grade and fifth-grade students, their parents and teachers. She found a mismatch between how an individual cognitively defines what bullying is and how an individual labels a negative interaction between students. Even though most adults claim to have zero tolerance toward bullying behaviours, their interpretation of incidents does not always coincide with their espoused beliefs. Some adults do not deem an incident to be bullying if the victimized child is somehow considered responsible, if there does not appear to be a power imbalance between individuals, or if the victim and the bully are friends. Mishna’s study concluded that students and adults agree that power imbalance and the intent to hurt constitute bullying. However, there was uncertainty around defining and labeling relational or non-physical bullying. Often non-physical bullying was seen as less harmful than physical bullying, thereby imposing a hierarchy of seriousness on bullying. This study revealed that bullying is a complex issue for students and adults.

Dealing with bullying among friends is a complicated and confusing issue for both adults and students. Respondents in Mishna’s 2004 study had difficulty judging the difference between typical conflict and bullying. Some parents and teachers suggested that students’ actions and reactions were a normal part of growing up. A now successful 25 year-old anonymous writer published a story in Education Canada that related her
experiences as the victim of name-calling, teasing and mind games perpetrated by peers who claimed to be her friends. While these supposed friends pretended it was all in good fun, her “real friends” stood by and watched. Simmons (2002) recounts numerous stories of girls in the same predicament with “intimate enemies”. Situations of this nature leave students confused and hurt by the bullying-friendship dilemma.

The risk of bullying in friendships is higher for girls than boys because of the importance of relationships in the lives of girls and women (Casey-Cannon et al., 2001; Craig & Pepler, 2004). Hadley (2003) suggested that adolescent girls are in the process of discovering and developing “multiple versions of self” (p.379) as they weave together the factors that form their identities. She further indicated that during this time of self-discovery girls need to maintain the impression of niceness while they continue in their struggle for belonging. During this struggle, aggression goes on beneath the surface. It appears that being accepted into the right group is crucial to girls. In order to maintain status within a group, girls need to participate in the bullying behaviours of the group. By participating in group bullying, they not only protect their own membership but also block the ability of outsiders to develop close personal relationships within the group.

Two studies that examined female bullying were conducted by Casey-Cannon et al. (2001) and Owens et al. (2000). Both studies were conducted in schools in large urban centers. Casey-Cannon et al. interviewed 20 seventh grade middle-school girls; Owens et al. used 54 fifteen year olds from two Catholic schools. The mutual aims of the studies were to examine the behaviours of the girls, the effects of indirect aggression on girls, and the teachers’ and girls’ explanations for the existence of indirect aggression. Owens et al. also examined existing and possible interventions.
The studies conducted by Casey Cannon et al. (2001) and Owens et al. (2000) support the opinions of Coloroso (2003) and Simmons (2002) in that verbal and relational bullying behaviours are the most prevalent. Both studies had the following similar findings. Verbal bullying focused on physical characteristics, race, personality, being new or different and name-calling. Relational bullying consisted of rumours, breaking confidences and exclusion. The purpose of all forms of bullying was social isolation. Respondents indicated that the details and feelings involved in bullying incidents remained over time, possibly for the rest of their lives. However, Casey-Cannon et al. noted that physical bullying always occurred in conjunction with relational bullying. Owens et al. observed that in some instances, girls were ostracized by the whole group or for long periods of time.

In both the Casey-Cannon et al. and Owens et al. studies, emotional responses indicated that the incidents of bullying left victims feeling confused, sad, unhappy, rejected, or hurt. Self-esteem and self-confidence were damaged in the process. Some girls attempted to minimize or cover up these feelings for fear of providing the bully with more reasons to continue the tormenting and for fear of future relationships being thwarted. In some cases, the girls attempted to hide emotions from themselves by pretending that the incident was just good-natured teasing.

Both Casey-Cannon et al (2001) and Owens et al. (2000) also revealed that behavioural responses varied from ignoring the perpetrator to responding in a verbal, physical, or relational manner. The physical and verbal reactions were often immediate responses while the relational reactions needed to wait until the bully was engaged in an action that warranted retaliation (Casey-Cannon et al., 2001). Simmons’ (2002)
narratives support the concept of delaying retaliation until the victim feels relatively secure in her ability to retaliate successfully. According to Simmons, few students requested parental or teacher assistance for fear the incidents would escalate or assistance would be denied, and several girls enlisted the help of boys to deal with the perpetrator.

In both the Casey Cannon et al. (2001) and Owens et al. (2000) studies, bullying had serious self-image and peer relationship repercussions for some of the victims. Insults to physical attributes that could not be changed or attacks on the most disliked qualities of the individual were reinforced with the result of increased negative self-esteem. Regardless of the relevance of the comments, most of the students internalized the insults. Over time some of the girls became socially isolated, lost friendships, changed schools or contemplated suicide.

When Owens et al. (2000) examined existing and possible interventions for indirect aggression, students and teachers had different perspectives. These researchers concluded that most interventions are based on overt forms of bullying. The girls believed that adult intervention made the harassment worse but much more covert. They stated that curriculum interventions would not be successful, as students would view such attempts a “joke”. Students also felt that the existing anti-bullying policies were ineffective, and teachers realized the limitations of their ability to intervene, or even see girls’ aggression. However, at times, teachers felt they were able to integrate a girl back into a group without the students being aware of the teacher’s role.

In general, students are often reluctant to report bullying for fear that the bully may not stop and there may be more victimization. This fear, along with implied and actual threats, promotes a “code of silence” that allows bullies to continue with cruel
behaviour (Coloroso, 2003). The reporting of bullying also feeds into the feelings of shame. The target has been made to feel unpopular, isolated and unworthy of respect. Added to this is the fact that bullied students have often had an experience where an authority figure was unable or unwilling to stop the harassment (Coloroso, 2003; DiPasquale, 2004; Simmons, 2002).

In some of the literature reviewed there is an indication that some teachers, parents and students believe that certain students instigate and/or thrive on being a victim (Mishna, 2004; Simmons, 2002). In studies conducted in Canada, the United States and Australia, some female students accepted responsibility for provoking the bully (Casey-Cannon, 2001; Mishna, 2004; Owens et al., 2000). The victim does something that is annoying, aggravating or indiscrete that begins the conflict and, therefore, deserves the consequences. These findings support the idea of the “provocative victim” that is mentioned in numerous pieces of research (Coloroso, 2003; DiPasquale, 2004; Mishna, 2004; Simmons, 2002). Teachers in the Owens et al. (2000) study did not support the concept of victim responsibility. They were more inclined to blame poor social skills or a home environment that did not promote good problem solving techniques.

DiPasquale (2004) made an even stronger statement when he claimed that adults tend to dislike victims and therefore have a tendency to look for evidence that the victims provoked the bully. He claims that adults tend to “interrogate” the victims when they approach an adult for help. DiPasquale’s statement was supported by a physically and emotionally abused British Columbia student who stated, “It was I, and not my tormentors, that was assessed, analyzed and punished” (Mayencourt et al., 2003, p. 14).
This type of adult behaviour assigns blame to the victim rather than providing support for the victim.

Research has shown that students who have been victims will often continue to be victims (Olweus, 1995). The feelings that result from bullying incidents often remain over time (Casey-Cannon, 2001; Olweus, 1995; Vail, 2002). Women in particular have vivid memories of bullying incidents that occurred during their elementary and high school years. These women maintain that, even though they are now successful and have a warm nurturing circle of friends, the emotional scars from those early incidents still remain (DiPasquale, 2004; Simmons, 2002). Evidence of adult repercussions of continued childhood victimization included increased signs of depression, low self-esteem and suicide attempts (DiPasquale, 2004; Olweus, 1995). Craig and Pepler (2004) suggested that childhood victimization continues to plague adult relationships by causing martial difficulties and hindering the victim's ability to help her children's social development.

Statistics indicate that bullying is occurring in schools around the world (Olweus, 1995). Students, parents, educators and researchers agree that bullying is an issue in schools. Female victims indicate that relational and verbal bullying comprises the greatest percentage of bullying. The effects of these types of bullying have ramifications for female victims that impact the present and sometimes their future. The literature supports the need for a study that allows for an in-depth exploration of the culture of the female bully while enabling the victims to safely recount their experiences.

With both immediate and long-term repercussions emerging from bullying, it is imperative that school personnel become involved in the investigating of female bullying.
Interviewing victimized students is an important step if researchers intend to discover a clear description of the victims' perceptions of bullying and the victims' perceptions of the effects of bullying (Owens et al., 2000). Vail (2002) stated that, "in order to understand what it is that's going on with girls it is necessary to step into their world (p. 9)."

Some researchers recommended that in order to understand bullying problems schools need to develop a way to assess the extent of bullying and the associated social, emotional, psychological, educational and physical problems (Craig & Pepler, 2003; Owens et al., 2000). Casey-Cannon et al. (2001) suggested that a trusted and familiar counselor be enlisted to "assess [the] types of victimization, levels of distress related to these behaviors and students' judgments of respect among their peers" (p. 147). This knowledge and the understanding of female aggression and its effects on girls are important prerequisites to developing intervention policies and strategies that reduce or eliminate aggression (Owens et al., 2000; Vail, 2002).

From my readings, discussions with colleagues, and media reports, and from personal experience, I have come to the realization that there are widely differing perceptions regarding female bullying. Some individuals regard female aggression as a part of growing up; others find female aggression to be a highly destructive force that damages girls both in the present and possibly in the future. My experiences and readings lead me to believe that female aggression is not a static phenomenon; it changes with the individuals and locations involved. Therefore, to effectively prevent or intervene in bullying situations, adults must understand the extent, type and impact of bullying problems at that specific location. A qualitative study would bring greater clarity to the
complexities of a bullying culture as in-depth interviews would assist in revealing more thoroughly the female student’s perceptions about bullying, her associated feelings and her reactions. In order to understand the bullying problems at the school in which I teach, I propose to explore the culture of the female victim in high school bullying at a specific high school with the following questions:

1) Under what circumstances does the victim perceive she has been bullied?;
2) What feelings and thoughts does the victim of bullying experience?; and,
3) What is the impact of bullying on the victim’s behaviour?
Chapter 3

Method

Setting

This study was conducted in a public high school in a rural community in the central interior of British Columbia. The high school is comprised of approximately 900 students in Grades 8 to 12. The majority of students are bussed to school. This community is home to approximately 25,000 people.

Sampling Procedure

I interviewed three female students from a public high school. Two of the participants were from the senior Grades 11-12 and one participant was from the junior Grades 8-10. This type of purposeful sampling (Patton 1987) is considered particularly useful in research that requires information rich sources. The use of participants from a high school setting allows for an examination of the phenomenon in the unique culture which the phenomenon is occurring (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997). The interviewees were female students who had self-identified as having an interest in or concerns about the culture of female bullying in a high school environment. The self-identification process was the result of students responding to posters requesting the participation of female students interested in this study. Therefore, they have timely information on the culture of female aggression. McMillan and Schumacher (1997) state that, “a few cases studied in-depth yield many insights about the topic” (p. 397). In this case the girls’ experiences would be recent and in a high school setting, thereby providing an information-rich source that is relevant to my research.
Procedures

I first contacted the Superintendent in writing to get permission to interview students. This is school board policy for research with students. I informed the school principal in writing of the intent of my research. I obtained the principal’s permission to conduct interviews. Before contacting the participants, I obtained approval to conduct the study from the UNBC Research Ethics Board. All parties were informed that I would not reveal the names of the participants.

In order to recruit students, I placed posters in various locations in the high school in which I am employed, such as hallway bulletin boards and girls’ washrooms. The posters had a brief explanation of the study and the researcher’s work place phone number as the means for contact. Once contact was made I confirmed that I was interested in exploring the culture of female bullying in a high school environment as described in the poster. I explained that participation required taking part in a taped interview session that would last approximately one hour. The potential participant was then given the opportunity to ask questions about the study. I asked the student if she was interested in participating in the study and requested permission to contact her parents or guardians for permission to conduct the interview. All three students preferred to discuss the proposal with their parents/guardians before I made personal contact with the parents/guardians; after the students did so, I provided the parents/guardians the opportunity to ask questions regarding the study. I informed the parents/guardians that the interview would take approximately one hour and that I would tape the interview. I informed the participant verbally and in writing that I would allow her to read what she stated and my interpretations of what she said. I informed the participant that she would
be able to change or delete any information. The participant was informed that my research project would be available for reading before it was submitted to the university for approval.

I advised the participant and parents/guardians that I would take measures to ensure confidentiality. I would not disclose, to any party, the names of the student participant. I would not discuss or act upon information revealed during the interview process. Only I, the UNBC supervisory committee and the participant would have access to the transcript of the interview. The tapes and transcripts were stored in a locked filing cabinet in my home. The tapes and transcripts would be destroyed once the project was officially completed. The participant and I arranged interview times and locations that maintained the participant’s privacy. I informed the participant that disclosing her participation in the study to others may compromise confidentiality. The participant was informed that anonymity would be preserved in the written work by using aliases for the names of people and places.

I informed the participant and parents/guardians that the participant was free to end her involvement at any time. The participant did not need to give a reason for withdrawing. Any information gathered from the participant would be destroyed.

I explained to participants and parents/guardians that the purpose of this study would be to provide counselors with information that would assist them in supporting students. However, participants taking part in the study could perhaps derive personal benefits. Being part of the study could validate the participant’s thoughts and ideas regarding the culture of bullying in a high school environment. The interview process would allow the participant time to reflect on her thoughts and feelings surrounding a
past or present school related issue. Participation would have provided the student with an opportunity to explain, discuss and resolve a personal issue. During the interview or possible debriefing sessions, the participant may have started to develop skills to deal with conflict in a school setting. For some participants, the telling of their story could alleviate concerns and stress.

The participants and parents/guardians were informed about potential risks involved in this study. I was aware that confidentiality could be broken by the participant. In my experience as a counselor, I am aware that students often have a compelling need to share information with peers. I suggested that, if the need to share arose, the participant could do one of the following: see me to debrief, set up an appointment with another counselor or express feelings or ideas in a journal. The interview experience could have led to the surfacing of unresolved issues which could cause the participant emotional stress. The participant may have relived unpleasant or uncomfortable experiences.

I proposed that the interview take place on a week day after school hours or on a weekend at a location that was free of distractions and provided privacy. Some suggested locations were an office/room at the college, the library office at an elementary school, the resource room office or my office at the high school. However, I was agreeable to interviewing the participant in her home or another location that respected her privacy and comfort level. I was prepared to offer transportation.

Before the interviews began, the participant and parents/guardians were asked to sign a consent form giving permission to use the taped interviews and guaranteeing confidentiality and anonymity. My purpose in following these procedures was to allow
the participant to freely choose to participate or withdraw without fear of repercussions, identification or misrepresentation.

Data Collection Strategies

Data was collected through the use of an in-depth, open-ended interview. I chose the interview as a data collection instrument in order to obtain a better understanding of the context of the victim’s experiences and an increased understanding of each girl’s interpretation of that experience. As Patton (1987) states, “We cannot observe, feelings, thoughts and intentions. We cannot observe situations that took place in some previous point in time. We have to ask people questions about those things. The purpose of interviewing then is to allow us to enter the other person’s perspective” (p. 109). I allowed the girls to explain their world rather than imposing restrictions on their responses.

I developed a list of interview questions and probes (Appendix A) that were used as a basis for the interview. However, these questions were not prescriptive; they were only used to maintain the focus of the interview. This allowed for flexibility to move with and fully explore the girl’s experiences. The style of the interviews was a combination of informal conversation and interview guide approach (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997). This approach made sure that I covered the same relevant topics for all participants but allowed both of us the flexibility to explore their responses in a conversational manner. The idea was to stay with the girl’s voice as opposed to following a set agenda. This allowed the participant to become more open as she would
feel that the researcher was placing the emphasis on her thoughts, feelings and experiences (Brown & Gilligan, 1992).

Two colleagues were enlisted to check for validity and sensitivity in the questions. An explanation of the intent of the study and the proposed problems were shared. The checkers were then asked to respond to the interview questions. Modifications were made to the questions to reflect input from my colleagues.

The questions were submitted to my University of Northern British Columbia committee members for comments and feedback. The questions were then rewritten to include the committee member’s suggestions and observations. This examination and redrafting of questions helped to reduce interviewer bias.

At the beginning of the interview, I made sure that we were both comfortable in an environment that was free of distractions. Two participants chose to be interviewed in the researcher’s office; one participant chose her home. I reminded the participant that the purpose of this interview was to gather information about how safe or unsafe she as a female student, felt at school. I told the participant that I would be asking questions about good and bad days at school, focusing on how those days made her feel or think and how she reacted to things that happen at school. I gave the participant the opportunity to ask questions about the study. I established rapport by asking questions such as, “How are you? Please tell me about a typical day in school. How did you feel about that day?” I reminded the participant that she had the right to refuse to answer any questions and/or end the interview at any time.

Once rapport was established, I began asking questions about a safe day at school. I then moved on to discuss an unsafe day at school. I was attempting to get details,
opinions and feelings about safe and unsafe days. I started with the positive so that I did not set a negative tone to the interview. I used probes to clarify or expand information as “interview probes can increase comprehensiveness” (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997, p. 447). Patton (1987) suggests that probes are an important way to maintain control of the interview without turning it into an interrogation. I was very caring and respectful in my attitude toward each participant and remained neutral in my response to the content of the information presented by the participant.

During the interviews, I took notes that included the time, date, place, individuals involved, time spent and main ideas (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997). I recorded observations of the participant’s reactions and non-verbal communication. This added greater detail to the tape-recorded data. I recorded my ideas and feelings during the interview process and after each interview. This was necessary to help me be aware of personal biases that I may have unintentionally brought to or developed during the study (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997).

At the end of the interview I spent time debriefing with the participant. I asked how the participant felt about the interview. I asked the participant if the interview had left her feeling anxious or stressed. I was mindful of non-verbal signs that indicated distress or anxiety on the part of the participant. I asked the participant if she would like the opportunity to discuss any concerns she had with someone else. I informed the participant that the following services were available: another counselor, youth care worker or behaviour specialist at the school, or a counselor at an outside agency. The participant was informed that the offer of follow up services could also be accessed at a future time.
Data Analysis

Following the interviews, I first transcribed the tapes, then provided a copy of the transcription to the participant, who then added, changed or deleted any information. I then examined the transcripts and my journal entries to discover categories, themes or differences in the experiences, reactions and feelings of the participants (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997). I was looking for terms and categories that came from the students’ voices rather than my own imposed classifications (Patton, 1987).

I carefully examined the transcripts and my journal notes for cases in which my questioning techniques may have led the participant to believe I desired a specific answer (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997). Having already conducted a literature review, I was vigilant in not imposing my preconceived ideas on the data. I monitored my biases in all parts of this study as “objectivity in qualitative research refers to the dependability and conformability of the researcher’s interactive style, data recordings, data analysis and interpretation of participant meanings” (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997, p. 408).

I then gave each of the participants a pseudonym so that I could track their responses in my writing while maintaining the anonymity of the students. I labeled the interviewees Dora, Ida and Sue. I examined the transcripts for quotations that were examples of the same underlying ideas as suggested by Patton (1987).
Chapter 4

Results

Findings

Although the three participants were different ages, had different personalities and were not involved in the same incidents, there were common strands and themes in their responses. There were also some differences in the perceptions of the students.

All three participants seemed to have a very clear idea about what constituted a safe day and the feelings associated with a safe day. The participants indicated that being with friends who were supportive and caring was the basis for a good day. This link with others provided both a connected feeling and protection from others. Ida described a good day at school as a day when, “I just hang out with my friends, be happy, have fun. You know just joking and laughing and talking and being with your friends.” It was also important that interactions with acquaintances and peers be, if not positive, then at least neutral.

All three students indicated that a safe day at school made them “feel good.” This good feeling came from positive interactions with both friends and acquaintances. Having a good day also seemed to bolster the students’ confidence and desire to do independent activities. Dora stated on a good day, “I’d feel pretty good and I’d want to go downtown by myself.”

The girls all indicated that accomplishing work in class contributed to a positive day. Knowing a teacher was in the classroom and monitoring the students activities helped promote a feeling of safeness. However, Sue indicated that she had observed and
been involved in a number of bullying incidents which occurred during class time particularly in physical education.

When examining unsafe days, two of the students referred to their experiences as bullying. The third student began calling the incidents “girl issues” but about half way through the interview she switched to using the word bullying when she referred to negative incidents where she was the victim.

Even though the girls were not asked to define bullying, a clear image emerged about what they felt bullying was in relation to themselves. Bullying occurred when the actions of a student or students were directed at another student in a manner which caused physical, emotional or social distress. The actions could be overt such as name-calling or tripping or covert such as exclusion or eye-rolling.

**Question 1: Under what circumstances does the victim perceive she has been bullied?**

The participants had been subjected to a range of bullying experiences from eye-rolling to being physically attacked. Bullying occurred in both covert and overt ways. These attacks, whether verbal, non-verbal, social or physical, contributed to promoting negative feelings in the participants.

All three students reported being the recipient of non-verbal bullying such as eye-rolling, dirty looks, obscene gestures and making faces. The girls indicated that these non-verbal attacks were employed to convey displeasure, demonstrate dislike or intimidate the victims. One student found eye-rolling to be very offensive. She indicated that eye-rolling was a way to demean another person while maintaining an air of
innocence. She stated, “Oh God. I don’t like eye-rolling; it is like so rude and such a put down.”

Verbal bullying comprised the majority of bullying experienced by all three participants. These experiences included name-calling, threats, rumours, gossip, and comments about personal characteristics, clothing and boyfriends.

Threats were uttered to challenge the victim to fight in order to settle a dispute or as a punishment for reporting bullying. After reporting an incident of bullying, Dora had the experience of being sent home for her own protection while school authorities dealt with the offending students. When asked to describe how she felt about being sent home, her response was, “Pretty good [because] I didn’t have to come to school and get picked on.” In another situation, Dora was threatened by a girl who involved herself in a dispute between Dora and a friend. One of Dora’s friends was so concerned about the escalating threats that she involved the police. Dora stated, “I got phone calls from the cops saying, we got a call from one of your friends saying that this ... girl wants to kill you.” Two students who had been verbally harassing Ida challenged her to a fight. Ida reported that she felt, “Scared that they were [going to] beat me up [because] they are huge fighters and I am not.”

The rumours and gossip had a tendency to be sexual in nature. Lies were spread about the students having sexual encounters with numerous partners, becoming pregnant, having abortions, having aids and being a lesbian. Once a rumour or gossip started to spread it was very difficult to contain or reverse. Two participants indicated that peers liked to share gossip because it gave the individual spreading the gossip a sense of power. One student stated, “…and she started going around saying that I had aids from him and I
got pregnant, had an abortion ten days ago,” was typical of the types of rumours and
gossip that were spread about the participants.

Attacks on personal characteristics such as looks, weight and intelligence were
fairly common. The students described being called fat, dumb, ugly, slutty looking, or
dorky, and being a suck up. Even though the students were aware that the comments
were not true it was easy to believe the bully’s hurtful comments. One student suggested
that there often was a hint of truth in the insults. Dora commented, “Like, when I have
trouble with school work it is easy to like believe it when somebody calls me dumb.”

The participants had the perception that physical harassment was more common at
the junior level than at the senior level. One student commented, “I feel safer being in a
higher grade. In Grade 12 people don’t really want to mess with you.” The physical
bullying experiences included being elbowed, slapped and pushed around, having coffee
thrown on an individual and being purposefully soaked by a vehicle in which the bullies
were riding. Physical bullying was always preceded or accompanied by verbal
exchanges.

The two senior students had experienced bullying on the internet. In one case the
student’s email address was changed to a sexually derogatory title. Both students had
their personal profiles altered to indicate they behaved in a sexually inappropriate
manner. One student indicated that improper pictures were posted on her site. The
internet was also used as a means to spread lies and rumours that were hard to trace. One
of the senior students claimed, “They can just say oh well then someone must have got on
to my account and started saying stuff; it wasn’t me. They can just say that and [not]
worry about it.”
All three students indicated that a variety of bullying experiences occurred on the bus ride to and from school. The girls described that they were called names, given dirty looks, tripped and had things thrown at them. Other students also used social isolation by refusing to sit with the participant or huddling to talk while occasionally glancing at the participant. Dora commented, “You’re not really safe on the bus because the bus driver is too busy watching the road and not the students.”

**Question 2: What feelings and thoughts does the victim of bullying experience?**

The girls responded to victimization in a range of emotional ways. Emotional reactions included feeling hurt, scared, embarrassed, ashamed, unwanted, sad and depressed.

Being scared had at one time or another caused all three participants to be afraid to attend school. Once at school, they were nervous of being on their own and afraid of seeing the bully or bullies, using the washroom and going downtown. Sue very simply summed up the feeling of all three students when she stated, “I thought that I was going to get beat up and I was scared to come to school.”

Being victimized by a bully promoted and reinforced negative feelings and damaged self-esteem. Ida stated that, “You know having somebody say you’re ugly and you’re fat is so much easier to believe than someone saying that you are beautiful, you know. You’re smart. You’re a great person.” Dirty looks and having faces made at her left at least one girl feeling “unwanted”. Rumours and gossip often had the effect of causing shame, embarrassment and social isolation. When discussing her feelings about rumours and gossip Dora whispered, “It felt embarrassing and I [kind of] felt ashamed of
myself even though what they said [wasn’t] true. I still felt really sad. I just wanted them [the rumours] fixed cause they weren’t true. And people were starting to make it look like they were true.”

Some bullying incidents left students feeling confused. Dora stated, “We were walking to our locker and......, she kinda got really name calling and stuff. [She was] calling us skanks and stuff. And I thought wow what did I do to you.” This confusion was even more apparent when the students were friends. Ida shared, “...And I think that’s why it affected me so much because we were friends at first. I’d think well you are friends with me why do you hate me and stuff.”

The participants all indicated that they had felt sad, hurt, awful and scared. After being teased about personal taste in music and boyfriends, Sue commented, “I felt awful, sad. I walked away.” Two of the students classified their feelings as depression. The most dramatic emotional reaction was from Ida who ended her reflection on her year in the eighth grade with, “Like in Grade 8 and depressed, clinically depressed.”

**Question 3: What is the impact of bullying on the victim's behaviour?**

Victimization produced a variety of behavioural responses including ignoring the act and the bully, responding with a verbal retort or a physical action, projecting an image of toughness, enlisting the assistance of an adult or peer for help and refusing to come to school.

At one point in their lives two of the girls attempted to change their appearance and mannerisms to prevent being bullied. Both students wore large bulky black coats to make themselves appear larger. They swore a great deal to appear tougher. One student
tried to adopt the "Goth" look of black clothes, nail polish and eye make-up. In both instances, the students felt it helped keep bullies away from them, but the transformation was short lived because neither girl was comfortable or able to sustain the altered appearance.

When the victim retaliated with verbal insults, the results were varied. The harassment might continue, escalate or end. Dora explained a situation where being assertive and standing up for herself ended the harassment. Dora explained, "She was bugging me about my boyfriend, so I just went up to her and got up in her face and told her to just shut her fat mouth, and she goes, 'How rude,' but she quit bugging me." Sue's experience was less positive. Sue declared, "They were picking on me and calling me names, so I just started to call them names back and then they said I was ugly and wore funny clothes. They are just always picking on me."

In at least one instance, physical retaliation seemed to have the desired effect. Ida stated, "And I then I just kicked her butt. ....So I decided I'd tried everything else so maybe if I put some fear into her maybe she won't mess with me. It was my last resort....She hasn't said anything bad about me since then." Ida also indicated she would resort to physical retaliation with this particular student if the student were to "start talking bad about me again." Even though Dora slapped another student and stated that it made her feel "like the bigger person", it was a short lived feeling of euphoria. Her statement of, "...but I really wasn't the bigger, better person," indicated that she understood that using aggressive physical behaviour did not equate with being a powerful person.
Enlisting or involving peer support was a useful tactic for all three girls. Having a group of friends around the student provided emotional and physical support. When Ida was threatened by two other girls, she claimed that the girls did not try to fight with her; “because I had friends with me, they didn’t really want to mess with me with all my friends around.” However, students were cautious about who they asked for help because in Dora’s words, “I tell people that are really close to me and that I could trust [be]cause if I told somebody I couldn’t trust they would tell other people and then it [bullying] would just get worse.”

Two of the participants felt that being a victim impacted their relationships with other students. The bullying made them wary of new relationships and at times put a strain on old friendships. In some instances the bully and the victim were in the same social group and the bully would, “go inside their [mutual friends] heads and say stuff about me.” There was also the fear that friends would think if an individual was being bullied there must be something wrong with her. If the bullying continued for a long period of time then peers start to believe the bully’s side even though the information was inaccurate. There was also the concern that friends won’t want to hang around the victim for fear of being bullied themselves. Avoiding the bully implied weakness. One student observed, “I have been downtown and I’ve seen them [bullies] across the street and I’ve told my friends I have to turn around and go the other way and then I just look weak and scared.”

Starting new relationships with other females and males also posed some problems. Students were careful not to develop new friendships with students who were connected with the bully. Ida stated, “I don’t really want to hang out with anyone that is
associated with them.” Two of the students reported being fearful of being set up when a friend of the bullies tried to befriend them.
Conclusions

This qualitative study was undertaken to explore the culture of bullying from the perspective of female high school students. It endeavored to discover what females considered bullying, what feelings they experienced as the result of bullying and how bullying impacted their behaviour.

Consistent with the literature, the results of this study suggest that some high school girls are the victims in bullying situations where the more powerful use physical, verbal and social measures to deliberately cause distress to the less powerful (Artz, 2001; Mishna, 2004). In this study, female students perceived they had been bullied when they experienced negative verbal, non-verbal and physical actions from their peers. Non-verbal actions included eye-rolls, dirty looks, obscene gestures and rude faces. Verbal actions consisted of name-calling, rumour and gossip spreading, threats and comments about personal characteristics and boyfriends. Physical bullying involved elbowing, slapping, pushing, throwing coffee them and the purposeful soaking of the victim by a vehicle in which the bullies were riding. The perceptions of the participants in this study indicate that they did, in fact, feel they were bullied in a variety of ways that caused them to feel distressed and less powerful. The aggressive behaviours experienced by the participants in this study, as described above, is evidence that some female students in this high school are the victims of bullying.

The results of this study agree with other research that proposed that the negative feelings involved in victimization linger over time (Craig & Pepler, 2003). The students
in this study clearly recalled incidents that had occurred from one week to ten years prior to the interview. Two students remembered feeling hurt, sad and confused about victimization that happened during their elementary years. One student explained, “They made me feel real sad when they [would not] play with me and [called] me names and stuff.” This particular senior high student who experienced bullying in elementary school is still affected over the incident. This participant’s response validates the research that suggests that negative feelings, as a consequence of victimization, linger over time.

Research indicates that verbal bullying constitutes the most common form of bullying (Coloroso, 2003; Casey-Cannon et al., 2001). From my personal experience as a counselor, I would concur with the research findings as most female students who seek my help do so with issues related to name-calling, rude comments, put downs and insults. The results of this study revealed that female victims experienced more verbal aggression than physical aggression. Physical aggression was always reported in conjunction with other forms of aggression. The female participants of this study reported that verbal aggression often served the purpose of causing social dilemmas for the victim. Overall, verbal aggression was the most common form of bullying; physical aggression was less common.

While emotional responses varied, student descriptions support findings that victimization is hurtful and destructive (Simmons, 2002; Owens et al., 2000). As a counselor, I agree with the research I have read and this study as students who come seeking my assistance are often crying and upset; they are seeking reassurance that they are accepted, likeable and worthy of respect. The students in this study reported fear of attending school, and nervousness while on their own, and dread of the possibility of
encountering the bully or bullies at school or downtown. Students experienced damaged self-esteem, depression and confusion over friends and peers being the perpetrators of bullying. From my experience as a counselor, from my readings and from the findings of this study, I realize that some female students have been negatively impacted by bullying incidents.

The behaviour of female victims, in this study, was impacted in various ways. Consistent with the literature this study revealed how the female victims reacted to new relationships, how old relationships were impacted, how female victims garnered support from friends and how they verbally and physically reacted to being bullied (Casey-Cannon et al., 2001; Owen et al., 2000). When relating to peers, students were anxious at the beginning of new relationships because there was fear that there may be a connection between the new friend and the bully. Old relationships were strained because at times old friends wondered if there was truth to the gossip and they were fearful of being bullied themselves. However, the students also used friendships as a form of support and protection. Victims believed having friends and belonging to the right group provided some protection. Some students became physically and verbally aggressive in an attempt to end being bullied. This study revealed one aspect of behaviour that was not included in other research studies on bullying. Two of the students indicated that they modified their appearance and mannerisms in order to end being victims. These personal accounts are evidence that the female victim of bullying is affected in many ways.

Generally bullying incidents occurred in locations and at times where there were few adult supervisors (Olweus, 1995). In this study, school hallways, washrooms, and
grounds, and downtown were prime locations for bullies to attack. Most incidents occurred before and after school, at lunch hour and during breaks between classes.

In other research and in this study adult ability to support victims and end the bullying was not considered very successful (Owens et al., 2000). Ida disclosed the negative results she experienced when the principal required another student to apologize to her. The apology was fine, but the repercussion was that, "I got bullied so heavily that day on the bus after that, that it wasn’t even funny.” These students reported that parents, teachers and counselors often advised the victim to ignore the bullying, to walk away or to have a quick come back. The girls indicated that it is almost impossible for students or adults to prove verbal or non-verbal harassment. Overall, the students' responses indicated that they did not believe that effective anti-bullying support existed within the school system.

According to this study, bullying on the bus ride to and from school appeared to happen fairly frequently. This was an area that was not discussed in the literature. Perhaps other research occurred in urban areas where bussing was not a common practice or perhaps researchers reported only what happened at school.

Another area I did not find discussed in the literature was a form of school social invisibility as presented by two of the interviewees. Both students described the negative feelings they had when they became aware that their pictures were not included in the yearbook. One student commented, “You know how in the yearbook, how they always have those surveys.... And that’s just the thing to make you feel like crap, whenever they have those yearbook [surveys] where your name is never on there. Last year my picture wasn’t even in the yearbook.” Even though this was not a form of bullying as defined in
this study (verbal, non-verbal and physical actions from other students that are intended to cause harm), it left the students feeling socially isolated in the context of the school as a whole. Does this situation of social isolation become a bullying incident by the institution?

Overall, this study indicated that victimization is a factor for some female high school students. Negative repercussions of victimization impacted the emotional, social and physical well being of the female students. Bullying occurred in relationships characterized by a power imbalance. Peers and friends played a central role in the bullying as well as an essential role in preventing bullying. At times, the students in this study felt unsafe at school. The findings of this study lead me to believe that it is the responsibility of this school to intervene appropriately in bullying situations and to be proactive in preventing bullying behaviour in order to ensure the safety and well-being of all students.

Recommendations from the Study

The results of this study indicate that in this high school some girls are dealing with female bullying situations. According to Olweus (1995) it is a “fundamental right for a child to feel safe at school and to be spared the oppression and repeated intentional humiliation implied in bullying” (p. 198). Therefore, I believe that it is necessary for schools to implement policies and procedures that ensure the safety of students.

While the girls who engaged in successful retaliation acknowledged that retaliation was inappropriate, it did produce the result of bringing about a cessation of the bullying behaviour. This outcome is disconcerting in that some students are learning that
bullying in return is an effective response. As the students also reported that retaliation lessens with age, it might be appropriate to have older students become mentors for younger victimized students. It may also be important for a school to develop a peer mediation process that would assist victims and bullies to resolve differences in an acceptable manner. From a teaching perspective, interpersonal problem solving skills could be included in health and career programs.

Reporting an incident to a teacher or another adult in the school was not considered an effective means to end bullying. This was especially true in the case of verbal and non-verbal bullying. The girls believed that it was too difficult to prove verbal or non-verbal aggression. These students had also experienced negative repercussions from the bully as the result of informing an adult. Adult solutions such as walking away or ignoring the bullying left the student feeling unsupported. These results suggest that bullying behaviour likely occurs with more frequency than is realized by adults in a high school. Therefore, it is important that adults in high schools use careful observation and individual student interviews to assess whether individuals are being isolated or hurt by peers. It is important for adults to respond in a supportive manner and pursue every possible step to prevent victimization from reoccurring when bullying is reported or observed. In light of the research that already exists on female bullying and in light of the results of this study, it would be appropriate for this high school to develop effective strategies that ensured the safety of victims who reported bullying behaviours.

Victimization frequently impacted what the girls thought about themselves. This was especially evident when the girls were insulted about physical characteristics. The negative comments impacted the girls' judgment of themselves. From these results, it
appears that this school could develop programs to help girls acquire strategies that develop and maintain self-esteem in the face of bullying. Coloroso (2003) reminds us that we must provide an emotionally safe place for victims to tell their stories so that supporting adults can attempt to fully understand the students’ point of view. In this manner the adult can provide comfort and reassurance to victims after an incident of bullying.

This study indicates that the majority of bullying occurs in areas and at times that have low levels of adult observers. Other literature agrees with this finding (Coloroso, 2003; Olweus, 1995). Areas such as washrooms, hallways, schoolyards and school buses were often cited as problem spots. Before and after school, lunch hour and breaks between classes were often considered unsafe times. To counteract this aspect of bullying Olweus suggests that schools increase the “monitoring and surveillance of the students’ activities in and out of school” (p. 199). It is recommended that adults engaging in this supervision be able to act in a non-hostile, non-physical and consistent manner (Olweus, 1995). Therefore, training is necessary to ensure that all adults in the school respond sensitively and consistently to bullying incidents.

The issue of cyber bullying is much more complex and difficult to monitor due to the anonymity that can be achieved on the internet. Much of the cyber bullying seemed to occur from a home computer. If this occurs, it is recommended that students be encouraged to print copies of the cyber bullying to share with parents, school staff and, if necessary, the police. If cyber bullying occurs from a student account at school, the student could lose computer privileges at the school.
School counselors have the opportunity to assist students in many ways. By developing supportive and trusting relationships with students, counselors can provide a physically and emotionally safe place for students to discuss bullying issues and associated feelings. During discussions students can be empowered to increase their sense of control over the experience. If appropriate, a counselor could provide intervention that assists the victim and the bully to reconcile differences. Counselors are in position to serve as advocates for victims and catalysts for change.

Olweus (1995) suggests that any intervention and prevention strategies need to address bullying at the whole school, classroom and individual levels. These strategies would be based on the unique needs of the students. It is imperative that students, teachers and parents work collaboratively in order to successfully implement an anti-bullying program.

Recommendations for further research

This study examined a small cross section of students from the eighth to twelfth grades. Given the differences in high school experiences, perspectives and age levels, it would be beneficial to conduct independent studies at the junior and senior levels of a high school. Interviewing a larger cross section of students would allow for a more comprehensive body of knowledge to draw upon when evaluating and revamping school anti-bullying policies. This type of study could help counselors identify the possible differing needs of junior and senior students.

Data collected in qualitative studies are retrospective, subjective and usually limited in size. The self-selected participants in this study decided what information and
events to share with the researcher. Qualitative data allows for a better description of the context of bullying experiences and a better understanding of an individual's interpretation of the experience. Quantitative data provides a larger information base. Therefore, a study that utilized both qualitative and quantitative methods would provide a more thorough understanding of the culture of female bullying in a high school environment. The information gained would provide valuable input into the evaluation and development of school bullying policies and procedures.

Both the qualitative and quantitative parts of a study should be administered to students, school personnel and parents as it is important to discover their perceptions about bullying. The survey might assess bullying in relation to types, time, location, effects and bystander involvement. As suggested by Coloroso (2003), an important part of such a study would be an exploration of intervention and prevention strategies as experienced by the stakeholders. It is crucial to include all stakeholders in order to compile as thorough an understanding as possible.

Two students in this study recounted memories of bullying incidents from their elementary years. According to this study, a contingent of girls described being victimized in a high school environment. Some female adults described vivid memories and emotional scars as a result of bullying experiences during their school years (Simmons, 2002). Several researchers have suggested that bullying experiences have repercussions for victims that continue into adulthood (Craig & Pepler, 2004; DiPasquale, 2004). Given the apparent lasting consequences of victimization, it would be appropriate to examine the impact of bullying experiences on the development of female high school students.
Bullying is a complex issue that requires study from many perspectives. Future studies would likely reveal areas of concern and strength. Continued assessment of the perceptions of students, parents and teachers about the existence and ramifications of bullying is a worthwhile project.

**Limitations of the Study**

Due to the small sampling of this population, any results or interpretations would only apply to the experiences of these individuals at this particular location. It would not be appropriate to generalize the information to other girls or high schools. The fact that the study takes place in a predominately rural area may impact the results of the study. The size of city and school may influence the perceptions of the participants.

This study may not have attracted students who were the most knowledgeable about the culture of female aggression in a high school environment. Students may have refrained from participating for personal reasons. Several students inquired about the study but parents were opposed to having their child participate in the study. The culture of fear and reprisal may have interfered with student participation and parent/guardian consent.

The interview process and the resulting retrospective data is not always the most accurate data (McMillan & Schumacher 1997). The participants may have left out information that they felt was inappropriate or portrayed them in a negative manner.

I attempted to make the study as objective as possible; however, the nature of qualitative research relies on the interpretations of the observer. As a counselor/researcher employed at the school where the study was conducted, I knew the
interviewees and some of the other individuals named in the interviews. I had prior knowledge of some of the events that were revealed during the interviews. I was careful to monitor any preconceived ideas about people or events

Concluding Statement

I began this study with the knowledge that bullying is a concern for some students, teachers, parents and community members. As a counselor/teacher, I realized bullying caused distress, fear, humiliation and anger in some victims. My purpose for conducting this study was to improve my understanding of high school bullying as it relates to the female victim. Specifically, I was interested in finding out the ways in which females were bullied, their reactions to being victimized and what, if any, impact bullying had on the victims’ behaviour. This study helped me to understand that bullying in the high school takes many forms that go beyond name-calling and exclusion. As I progressed through the literature review and proceeded to conduct and analyze the interviews, I was surprised by the long-lasting emotional pain that was vividly described by the participants in my study and the accounts described in the literature. The emotional pain resulting from memories of bullying incidents can have negative repercussions for many years. These repercussions impact not only the lives of the victims in the present moment but they may also impact the victims’ ability to develop future relationships and parent their own children.

The information gathered from the interviews and from my readings has caused me to reevaluate my response to the victims of bullying. Previous to this study, my immediate response as a teacher/counselor would have been to suggest walking away or
provide the victim ideas for a snappy comeback. Even though I had empathy for the victim, I was providing a short-term solution that did not consider the long-term effects bullying has on self-esteem. I now am aware of the importance of listening carefully for the pain in each victim’s story. This was exemplified when one of the participants appreciatively said, “Thanks for lettin[g] me talk about this bullying stuff.” This study has helped me to understand how important it is to work with the victim to discover strategies that develop personal empowerment so that the long-term effects of emotional pain from bullying are minimized and the likelihood of being victimized is decreased.
References


APPENDIX A

Interview Format

Establishing Rapport

1) Please tell me about a typical day in school. If you and I were close friends and I was with you, what would we be doing?

2) How did you feel about that day?

3) (If the day was bad) What could you have done to turn this into a good day? (If the day was good.) What could have happened to turn that day into a bad day?

4) What you have just described to me seems to be a (good/bad) day in school. Can you tell me about a day that was (opposite from initial response).

Questions and Probes

1) Tell me about a day at school during which you felt safe. (Possible probes-What happened during the day, either in or out of class that made you feel safe? Please describe the situation to me. How did you feel? What did you do?)

2) Tell me about a day at school in which you felt unsafe. (Possible probes- Did anything happen during the day, either inside or outside the classroom that made you feel unsafe? Please describe the situation to me. How did you feel? What did you do?)

(If the student uses bully/bullied/bullying I would proceed with the following questions. If the student does not use bully/bullied/bullying but has used words such as harassed, teased, picked on, excluded; I will proceed with, “What you are describing to me would be called bullying by some individuals. What would you call this type of behaviour?” If the student indicates they would call it bullying I will proceed with the following
questions. If the student does not call the incident bullying I would proceed inserting the
student’s terminology for the words bully/bulled/bullying)

3) Please describe a time or times when you felt you were bullied? (Possible probes-
What was the incident about? Where did it happen? How did you react? What did you
do?

Can you tell me more about how you felt? Why do you think you felt that way?)

4) Were/are you a friend of (name of student involved)? (Possible probes- Has what
happened affected your friendship? Can you tell me why you feel that way?)

5) Who did you tell about the incident?

6) What did (name of person told) do about (name the incident)?

7) Do you feel that bullying has affected your relationship/friendship/getting along with
other students? (Possible probes- Please tell me tell me why you feel/think that way.)

8) Have you ever been afraid/hesitant to come to school? (Possible probes- Can you tell
me why?)

9) Do you use the Internet? (Possible Probes- Have you ever felt unsafe on the Internet?
Please tell me what made you feel unsafe.)

10) Is there anything else you would like to tell me? (Possible probes- Can you tell me
more about how you felt? Why do you think you feel/felt that way?)