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Preschoolers Aggressive Behavior toward Others Is It Child-play? Is It Bullying?

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Preschoolers Aggressive Behavior toward Others
Is It Child-play? Is It Bullying?

by

Brenda Jean White

A Dissertation Presented to the
College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences of Nova Southeastern University
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

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Brenda Jean White
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This dissertation was submitted by Brenda Jean White under the direction of the chair of the dissertation committee listed below. It was submitted to the College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences and approved in partial fulfillment for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Conflict Analysis and Resolution at Nova Southeastern University.

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Chair

Dustin Berna, Ph.D.
Dedication

Glory to God, for He is worthy to praise. I dedicate this work to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ because when all others saw the worst in me, He saw the best in me. I also dedicate this dissertation to my best friend, my love, and my supporter throughout this journey James McCoy (aka Kat-1). Your patience, sacrifice, belief in me, and all those motivating speeches brought me through—I love you “Kat-1”. This work is also dedicated to my children, Octivia (Meatball) and Karmeta (Netra), my grandchildren Kweisi, Jatoreal, Shyhome, Jairus, and Serina, my departed grandson Dajuanza, and to my 2 great-grandchildren, Kyrie and Preston. To my parents, Alice and the late Arthur (Jig) White, I dedicate this dissertation, to you both, and I thank you for your support, and as I reflect on daddy saying to me “continue in school because you never can get enough of education,” I want to say, “Daddy I did it.” I would also like to dedicate this work to my surviving siblings, Beatrice, Leon, Sylvester, Bobby, and baby sister Angela; thank you all for your love, encouragement, and support. This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of my departed siblings, Arthur Jr. and Roosevelt; you are always in my heart. Lastly, I dedicate this dissertation to Ms. Susan Smith (Public Speaking class) of Broward Community College, who was so tough on me in my freshman year of college. Not only did she believe in me, but she also helped me to believe in myself.
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*I just cannot stop praising His holy name. Thanks be to God, my source, my strength, and my all and all.*

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To the 20 participants who volunteered their time and energy to share ‘their stories’ and have their voices heard, I thank you.

I must also thank my ‘village’ of family and friends who not only supported me but also prayed for me. To my sisters of love, support and constant encouragement, Dr. Sonia Galloway, Dr. Becky Bell, and (soon to be Dr.) Basma Alzamil, thank you for calling and checking up on me and not missing a month and oh yes—we made it through!. And to my best friend Marisela Herrera, who stuck with me from Broward Community College to Ph.D. at Nova, I thank you and will always love you for all of your support.
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<th>Meaning</th>
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<td>OMG</td>
<td>Oh My God</td>
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<tr>
<td>SRO</td>
<td>School Resource Officer</td>
</tr>
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<td>G.C.A.D.</td>
<td>Get Cancer and Die</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D.I.R.L.</td>
<td>Die In Real Life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I.H.M.L.</td>
<td>I Hate My Life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J.L.M.A.</td>
<td>Just Leave Me Alone</td>
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<td>F.U.G.L.Y.</td>
<td>Fat and Ugly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F.O.A.D.</td>
<td>Fuck Off and Die</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G.N.O.C.</td>
<td>Get Naked On Camera</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M.O.S.</td>
<td>Mother Over Shoulder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.G.L.Y.</td>
<td>Unique Gifted Lovable You</td>
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Abstract

Bullying in schools is largely discussed when referring to middle and high school students. Students in preschool are often considered to be too young to carry out acts of bullying. Unfortunately, this is contrary to the truth. Bullying among children aged 2-5 is very common, although it can easily be dismissed as a normal stage in child development. Educators and observers argue that bullying in preschool occurs when a child or a group of children intimidate another child or group of children to the point that it becomes a behavioral pattern. Evidence shows that 2-5 year-olds engage in acts intended to cause physical or emotional harm on their peers. Young children exposed to bullying display similar symptoms as older children, including sleeping problems, stomach pains, headaches and fear to attend school. The qualitative phenomenological method was chosen, as this research was exploratory in nature. The data collected for the research was conducted utilizing several methods such as surveys, phone calls, and in-person interviews. The goal was to gain more information regarding preschool bullying, as there is currently very limited information on this topic, as well as to determine whether this behavior was seen as child-play or bullying by adult caregivers. The experience freely and graciously shared by the participants led to five themes, which provided a conceptual framework for the study, and allowed the 20 participants to share their experiences.
Chapter 1: Introduction

“You must be the change you wish to see in the world.” Mohandas Gandhi

“Mommy, kids at school are so mean to me: please don't make me go back there,” might be your first clue that something is wrong. The real eye-opener is when a child brings his/her preschool class picture home and points from one smiling child to the next, stating "his name is Banker, her name is Gianna, and with a sad face the child states that’s the kid that always hits me, Mom, he is a bully…"

The effectiveness of a school in meeting its mandate is dependent on numerous factors. Notably, the success of students largely depends on the learning environment that they are exposed to while at school. Barriers to education in the school environment must thus be addressed for effective learning. Unfortunately, some social ills threaten safety in the school environment. Bullying in schools presents a threat to student safety and has received considerable attention in the recent past. While there is no agreement on the most accurate definition of bullying, the act can comprehensively be defined as a student’s repeated exposure to negative actions from one student or a group of students over an extended period. Bullying is sometimes equated with aggressive behavior, as it entails negative actions intended at inflicting injury or discomfort on the victim (Olweus, 1993). The act of bullying is associated with negative outcomes, particularly to the victims. Although bullying is mainly targeted at an individual, it may come to harm other members of the community given its adverse ripple effects.

In the recent past, bullying has received unprecedented levels of attention from different quarters. This comes in light of the heightened level and frequency of violence
associated with bullying. However, while adverse cases of bullying-related violence, such as school shootings, are a recent development, bullying has haunted schools for a long time. In fact, bullying has existed as a problem of human societies for centuries, spreading across regions, cultures, and ages. Throughout history, and in varying social quarters, the existence of bullying can be attributed to two main purposes: maintaining the status quo and injuring others physically, emotionally, or socially (Wang, Iannotti, & Nansel, 2009). The vice exists independent of culture, presenting deeper underlying causes. Bullying has been argued to arise from environmental and genetic factors (Ball, Arseneault, Taylor, Maughan, Caspi, & Moffitt, 2008).

Bullying in schools is largely discussed when referring to middle and high school students. Students in preschool are often considered to be too young to carry out acts of bullying. Unfortunately, this is contrary to the truth. Bullying among children aged 2-5 is very common, although it can easily be dismissed as a normal stage in child development. Evidence shows that 2-5-year-olds engage in acts intended at causing physical or emotional harm to their colleagues. Young children exposed to bullying display similar symptoms as older children, including sleeping problems, stomach pains, headaches, and fear of attending school. Educators and social observers argue that bullying in preschool occurs when a child or a group of children intimidate another child or a group of children to the point that it becomes a behavioral pattern. While bullying in young children can easily be eradicated through the intervention of an adult, lack of intervention has led to its spread. Thus, adults who downplay or ignore acts of bullying have an equal influence in advancing the behavior as the bullies (Evans, 2011).
While the concept of bullying appears to be straightforward, its heterogeneity and evolving nature make it hard to comprehend. Bullying in schools can take different forms that serve different purposes. Perhaps the most common form of bullying is physical bullying. It involves physical aggression by the perpetrator targeted at the victim. In fact, physical bullying represents the most reported form of bullying in kindergartens (Gillies-Rezo & Bosacki, 2003). Physical bullying can be easily picked out. As such, schools have effectively implemented measures to curb it. Even then, physical abuse may take a less direct form, which makes it hard to discern. For instance, the perpetrator may damage the school work of another student with the aim of disempowering them. While this does not inflict physical pain, it constitutes physical bullying (Levine & Tamburrino, 2014). Difficulties in discerning bullying from similar behaviors may thus present challenges in formulating effective measures to curb it.

Other common forms of bullying in schools, especially among young children, are verbal and relational bullying. Verbal bullying entails offensive remarks and name calling intended to cause emotional harm to the victim. While this form of bullying is more prevalent in older children, preschoolers are not exempted. Children who “deviate from the norm” are the major victims of this form of bullying. In particular, children who display antisocial behavior, academic difficulties, and attention problems often fall victim to bullies. Unfortunately, teachers have also been shown to bully these children verbally, thus worsening the situation (Vitaro, Brendgen, & Arseneault, 2009). Relational bullying, although more covert than verbal and physical bullying, has equally adverse effects on children. This form of bullying takes place when bullies threaten the social relations of
their victim. It may take the form of “silent treatment,” social aggression, and the spreading of malicious rumors. Similar to verbal bullying, adults contribute to the worsening of this form of bullying. In this respect, most parents and teachers dismiss relational bullying as harmless. However, the adverse psychological and sociological impacts that it has on children demand it to be addressed (Young, Nelson, Hottle, Warburton, & Young, 2009).

New forms of bullying have become more prevalent with recent technological advancements. Cyber bullying, also known as e-bullying, has risen with the increased adoption of smartphones and other mobile communication devices. This form of bullying entails the use of online communication channels, such as the internet and social networking sites. Cyber bullying has drawn much attention given its potential to cause damage to victims. On this note, cyber bullying can take place between people unknown to each other, as it does not require physical contact between the bully and the victim. Bullies can thus cover their tracks after attacking unsuspecting individuals. Besides, the widespread use and virtual nature of the internet makes cyber bullying easier to execute when compared to other forms of bullying. In fact, the internet may provide an avenue for bullies to come together to attack an individual (Lee, 2004). Other forms of bullying that are prominent in schools are sexual and prejudicial bullying.

Children who bully others possess some characteristics and skills that enable them to dominate over their victims. Bullies display different forms of aggression, including intimidation, teasing, and taunting. Male bullies differ from female bullies in that they tend to engage in more overt and visible forms of aggression. Girls, on the other hand,
employ more covert forms of aggressions, such as slandering and manipulating relationships. Bullies may also display antisocial behaviors and heightened psychological instability (Olweus, 1993). Interestingly, such characteristics are influenced by the psycho-social health of the children’s families, as well as the support foundation to which they are exposed. Families with poor psycho-social health are more likely to produce children who bully. Lack of positive and effective communication at the family level may also contribute to similar outcomes. The relationships that children have outside school also contribute to their likelihood of bullying other children at school. Moreover, parents who subject their children to rejection or hostility tend to pass bullying-related characteristics to their children (Connolly & O'Moore, 2003).

Myriad factors influence whether a child will become a bully or a victim of bullying. Broadly, these factors can be categorized as either evolutionary or environmental. However, these factors may act concurrently. Research has proven that the genetic makeup of a child and their development and health in fetal life play a major role in determining whether a child will become a bully, a victim, or both. As such, bullying may present itself as an inherited trait in a child (Sugden, Arseneault, Harrington, Moffitt, Williams, & Caspi, 2010). Also, environmental factors pertaining to the family and the socioeconomic background influence the formation of bullying-related traits. Particularly, poor socioeconomic backgrounds are highly associated with the formation of bullying behavior. This correlation can be explained through the argument that children from a low socioeconomic background lack role models, proper supervision,
and are usually brought up in environments where personal boundaries are not respected (Jansen, et al., 2012).

Parenting has also been argued to be a major factor influencing the development of bullying behavior. In this respect, family functioning may lead to maladjustment in the behavior of a child. Lack of involvement by parents in the affairs of their children, nonexistence of imposed limits on the display of aggressive behavior, and the absence of role models in managing conflicts are some of the parenting-related factors that contribute to the development of bullying behavior. Besides, the behavior of the parent or caregiver may shape the behavior of a child concerning bullying. Parents with poor conflict management skills may contribute to their children becoming bullies. In some cases, individual factors may also influence the development of bullying behavior. Such factors include a difficult temperament, poor attachment to the caregiver, and poor self-regulation (Marini, 2013).

Bullying has been found to have several adverse impacts on the bullies, victims, and bystanders. Victims of bullying pay the highest price, as their psycho-social health is adversely affected. In this respect, victims are likely to experience loneliness, high social anxiety, depression, and low self-worth (Hawley, 2003). Somatic complaints including vomiting, stomach pains, and headaches are also common effects of bullying on victims. Children attending school are even more affected, as school performance declines with bullying. Notably, school work is more adversely affected when teachers are aware of the cases of bullying but fail to take the necessary actions to address them. The social lives of victims of bullying also suffer, as most of them find it hard to maintain healthy
relationships. Without proper counseling, the effects of bullying may have long-term consequences for victims, as they have been shown to indulge in life-threatening behaviors such as suicide and drug abuse (Smith & Sharp, 1994). Bullies are also negatively impacted by their behaviors. That is, their traits have destructive consequences in later years (Anthony & Lindert, 2010).

Several strategies have been proposed for implementation with the aim of addressing this social ill in schools. The sensitization of elementary students on different aspects of bullying behavior is among the strategies proposed. In this case, it is argued that making children more aware of the meaning and consequences of bullying is likely to create an internal motivation in them to avoid engaging in the vice. The suggested education programs should be targeted at addressing the knowledge, attitude, skills, and behaviors related to bullying. Children should also be made aware of cultural diversities in their surroundings with the aim of enhancing their appreciation of diversity. With intercultural skills, children are less likely to bully others on the basis of these diversities (Levine & Tamburrino, 2014). Parent-educator partnerships are suggested in these programs (Jordan & Austin, 2012). Teaching effective conflict resolution strategies to students would also aid in reducing bullying tendencies.

The formulation and implementation of effective anti-bullying programs have also been found to minimize bullying behavior. Unfortunately, there is a scarcity of such programs at the preschool level. In fact, the Be-Prox program is the only anti-bullying program that has been implemented and tested for effectiveness. This program has recorded some positive results regarding bullying prevention (Alsaker & Valkanover,
8

2012). Other strategies that have been suggested include measures that encourage empathy and open communication. Empathy training has been noted to reduce bullying behavior. Similarly, open communication is associated with reduced cases of relational bullying.

It is upon this background of information that this study seeks to investigate bullying behavior in preschoolers. Primarily, this study aims to fill the gap in the literature relating to bullying among preschool. Much of the existing literature on bullying in children focuses on middle and high schools. Bullying among preschoolers is often ignored or dismissed. Since children aged 2-5 years have been noted to experience bullying, there is a need to investigate bullying in this population. On this note, bullying in children may take different forms when compared to bullying in middle and high schools. For instance, young children are unlikely to experience cyber bullying as their access to and ability to use electronic devices is limited. Besides, the low exposure that these children have may also be influential in their bullying behaviors.

Also, preschoolers have limited social interactions. Consequently, it is easier to point out the major factors contributing to their development of bullying behavior. In this respect, parents/caregivers form the major source of social contact for children. In fact, the main environment that preschoolers are exposed to is the family environment. It has been shown that environmental and evolutionary factors are the main influences in the development of bullying behavior. Gaining a perspective of bullying behavior among preschoolers would give a clear indication of the factors influencing this behavior. By doing this, this research will give a clear indication of situations that make children more
vulnerable and susceptible to becoming bullies. Also, it will be easier to control for factors associated with the same in a bid to limit bullying. As such, bullying reduction interventions and programs that will result from this study are likely to be effective given their higher focus.

This study will aim at gaining a deeper understanding of the short-term and long-term impacts of bullying. While the impacts of bullying have long been investigated, the focus is more on the victims. However, there is little evidence of the impact of bullying on the bully. Even sadder is the lack of inquiry on how exposure to bullying affects bystanders. This study will seek to establish how children who witness acts of bullying without taking part are affected by these acts. There is a notable bias when addressing the effects of bullying. The focus has only been put on those actively involved in the act. However, since bullying mainly occurs in social areas, such as schools, other people may also be impacted by it. Exploring this area will help assess the seriousness of these impacts at the community level.

It has also been noted that the actions of bystanders, such as parents and teachers, are a major factor that influences bullying behavior and its consequences. On this note, it has been shown that parenting skills, including the association between a parent and a child, influence the development of bullying behavior. Besides, failure to intervene in cases of bullying escalates the negative impacts of the vice. As such, minimizing the adverse effects of bullying requires the input of more stakeholders if progress is to be made. Bystanders can have a positive influence, to evaluate how this study will consider in the process their role in minimizing bullying and its impacts.
Lastly, this study will appreciate the importance of anti-bullying interventions and programs. Currently, only one anti-bullying program has been evaluated for effectiveness in reducing bullying behavior in preschoolers. However, the adverse implications of bullying call for more measures to curb the vice. Most of the suggested strategies for minimizing the prevalence of bullying behavior have not been tested for effectiveness. In this study, appropriate recommendations on how early intervention and implementation of anti-bullying campaigns should be carried out will be offered. Thus, this study is significant as it will offer solutions to the bullying menace in schools.

**Background of the Problem**

Bullying is a worldwide problem and is defined as a set of behaviors, seen in all age groups, and is currently receiving a great deal of attention. However, the abundance of attention is mostly focused on bullying among older children in the media and in research and these bullying behaviors are thought of as in older children as "part of growing up." However, relatively little focus has been paid to bullying in early childhood. This could partly be because measuring bullying is challenging to do amongst young children because young children tend to over-report behaviors as bullying where most of the behaviors may not be defined as bullying. “Bullying is usually believed to occur within larger urban areas, but in all actuality, bullying has no demographic barriers, school size (urban or rural), or racial composition.”

**Statement of the Problem**

There is currently an abundance of research conducted on bullying and topics surrounding bullying in older children (kindergarten and older). However, relatively little
focus has been paid to bullying in early childhood. It could be because most adults who work with young children do not concern themselves with one important challenge. That challenge is caregivers who ignore or downplay behavior of bullying due to the young age of children who express feelings aggressively because of their undeveloped skills in self-awareness and communication. These are the behaviors that most preschoolers use to deliberately and repeatedly hurt and/or scare weaker children.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study and the interviews was to explore how adult caregivers of preschool age children define bullying, their attitudes towards bullying, as well as suggestions for presentation of preschool bullying. The interviews are aimed to better understand the social reality of caregivers both through the thoughts and viewpoints of preschool bullying. The main prime was to find out if preschool bullying really does exist and if so exactly how can the phenomenon be comprehended.

Significance of the Study

The significant of the research study is to simplify a better understanding of the caregivers’ characteristics and perceptions influencing their responses in early child bullying situations. The findings from this study have the potential to impact schools, neighborhoods, playground, and caregivers (i.e., parents, teacher, aides, counselors, nurses) who work with children at the preschool age. In addition, this research may promote the rights of all children for protection from bullying.

Definition of Terms

To understand the area of bullying behaviors and strategies to prevent it, certain
terms need clarification. The terms are:

**Bullying.** "...student is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other students." (Olweus, 1993, p. 9)

**Intervention.** To intervene or step in when an act of bullying is occurring and reduce the implication of an act occurring. (Husbey, 2006)

**Prevention.** To attempt to stop an event from occurring.

**Theoretical Framework:**

Provides a structure through which the chosen population and environment can be explored and explained through different paradigms that will shed insight from a different perspective, possibly adding to the body of knowledge in areas that may not be expounded upon through other theories.

a. Social-Ecological – will provide a platform for exploring the background and history of the challenges that emerge from social, physical, and community contexts as well as the individual characteristics of youth who are bullied and victimized.

b. Theory of Mind– Provides a deeper understanding of the social cognitive ability to attribute mental states to oneself and others and to use these attributions in understanding, predicting, and explaining the behavior of others.

c. Nature and Nurture concept – Provides understanding related to the relative importance of an individual's innate qualities ("nature" in the sense of nativism or innatism) as compared to an individual's personal experiences ("nurture" in the sense of empiricism or behaviorism) in causing individual differences in physical
and behavioral traits.

d. Intersectionality– Provides a backdrop for understanding the concept of groups whose identities fall into two or more social constructs such as the strong and the weak.

Research Question

Preschoolers' aggressive behavior toward others: Is it child play? Is it bullying?

The primary research question is to assist the researcher in understanding the perspective of adult caregivers of preschool age children's aggressive behavioral toward each other, and to answer the question of whether the aggressive behavior should be ignored due to their young age. As explained in the background of the research study, much attention is paid to bullying among older children – both in the media and in research - relatively little focus has been paid to bullying in early childhood. This could be due to a panorama that behaviors thought of as bullying in older children are seen in part of maturing. This is certainly part of it. However, it is a challenge to measure bullying among young children due to young children over-reporting behaviors as bullying that most definitions would not include.

This phenomenological research study attempts to examine and explore the lived experiences of adult caregivers of preschool age children within their natural environ(s) as well as to provide information that bullying is more common among young children than school aged children. It is also important to emphasize how critical preschool years are in shaping children's future development, especially their social and emotional maturation. As early childhood caregivers, it may be beneficial to consider bullying
further by specifically identifying types of aggression, which are related to the origin of bullying itself. This research study is also important in order to gain a greater understanding of why children engage in bullying behaviors by identifying common characteristics of their personalities or home environments.

Summary

This study serves to contribute to a more robust and fully developed understanding of the caregivers’ characteristics and perceptions influencing their responses in early child bullying situations. Chapter 1 presented a framework and the theoretical underpinnings that describe the research problem and the need for the study. Chapter 2 presents a more detailed examination of the existing literature regarding early childhood bullying in order to provide a context for answering the research question in terms of meaningful studies that have been published within the last twenty years. Chapter 3 provides a detailed explanation of the methodology and procedures used to explore this research topic. Chapter 4 presents the findings of the study, while Chapter 5 presents a discussion of the findings, implications for practice, and the recommendations for future research.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

The literature review attempts to provide a context for answering the research questions in terms of meaningful studies that have been published within the last twenty years. The review was conducted after perusing textbooks on the subject of bullying, and also after selecting a sufficiently large number of scholarly articles published in peer reviewed journals with high impact factors. An attempt was made to locate and review as many phenomenological studies as possible because, as explained in the introductory chapter, qualitative social studies often attempt to describe the “lived experience” of a particular phenomenon. The review has been divided into appropriate sections and a synthesis of articles and contemporary views is provided in the last section.

Preschool Bullying Overview

It would be worthwhile to attempt a clear and precise definition of the term “school bullying” at the outset of this review, since there seems to be a considerable debate in literature about the exact meaning of “bullying.” Although Ross (105) showed that there is no agreement among researchers, many have in fact used the definition provided earlier by Olweus (9) which states that a student exposed repeatedly to negative actions from one or more other students over an extended period of time is experiencing bullying or victimization. Olweus further noted that negative actions signify an intentional inflicting, or an attempt at inflicting, injury or discomfort by one student to another and it is therefore synonymous with aggressive behavior. Although Olweus stated that even one instance of serious harassment, under certain conditions, can be considered as bullying, Ross felt that these conditions should be investigated further before the term
“bullying” can be ascribed to the accompanying behavior.

Another often used definition was provided by Smith and Sharp (2), and it simply states that bullying is a systematic abuse of power. This not only accommodates the earlier definition by Olweus and its sought extension by Ross, but it also acknowledges the implied imbalance of power between the bully and her victim. On the other hand, Crick and Dodge (128) felt that this definition is too broad and unnecessarily brings many other abuse of power instances within the ambit of bullying. More recently it has been acknowledged that bullying in school may involve not only physical aggression but also verbal notes and other subtle forms of aggressive behavior that may not even be noticed by the teacher (Camodeca et al. 116). It is also recognized that three types of aggressive behaviors can be broadly recognized: direct physical aggression (this involves kicking, pushing, and similar behavior); direct verbal aggression (involves threats and name-calling); and indirect aggression (including the spreading of rumors and creation of negative images) (Sanders and Phye 5). Educators and social observers have also recognized that preschool bullying behavior often originates when intimidation of one child (or children) by another (or a group) becomes a behavioral pattern because adults have not intervened to specify limits of such behavior or have not engaged in problem solving with the children involved. It has been emphasized that a discussion on bullying should focus not only on the children involved, but also on adults who may either ignore or downplay such behavior (Evans 2). At the same time, Barker et al. (1185) showed that children in preschool (ages 2 to 4) who exhibit chronic and high levels of peer victimization are often subjected to harsh and highly reactive parenting practices when
compared to children who are not victimized. Before further analyzing preschool bullying and its causes and effects, it would therefore be prudent to investigate the origin of bullying.

**Origin and History of Bullying**

It is commonly acknowledged that bullying has been one of the problems of human societies for many centuries, across cultures and across regions, from primitive hunter-gatherer to modern post-industrial societies (Due et al. 128). Rawson (212) presented evidence of bullying behavior, in one form or the other, in ancient Greece and Rome. Similarly, Cunningham showed that bullying occurred in cultures as diverse and temporally separated as medieval China and Europe, and Renaissance period Europe. Coming to extant societies, Briggs (137) and other researchers found bullying to be present in very different cultures and environments, including the African Mountain Ik and the Arctic Utku Eskimos. The universal nature of this phenomenon suggests that unbalanced aggressive behavior has a deeper origin than being merely a cultural phenomenon, and may at least be one of the universal behaviors that evolved very early in the human species history. It might even be shown to predate human origin, perhaps having perhaps been inherited from a species ancestor, particularly if such behavior can be established to be shared by other extant species.

Wang, Iannotti, and Nansel (368) observed that bullying has been used throughout history for two often overlapping purposes – to maintain status quo, or existing social order, so that no societal group becomes dominant or exceptionally powerful; and to injure others socially, emotionally, or physically. Extending this observation into the
animal kingdom and especially into the primate world, several anthropological studies have reported severe bullying behavior among baboons, one of the prominent non-human primates found across the world. Female baboons have been observed to work together and systematically gang up on other females coming from different bloodlines (Altmann 114). As a result, those females who lose frequently become stressed and their reproduction rates become lower when compared to those who are in a dominant position (Sapolsky 292). Females have also been observed to intimidate and display other aggressive behavioral patterns towards weaker females in order to obtain resources from the latter (Seyfarth 917).

Significantly, several authors have studied non-human animal behavior and conjectured that bullying in adolescence may have evolutionary relevance, instead of merely resulting from maladaptive development from an early stage. For example Volk et al. (a 223) reported that bullying may evolve through mental adaption in response to past evolutionary pressures. According to them, bullying evolved because it afforded bullies more opportunities for reproductive sex because they were more active with partners of the opposite sex and had more opportunities of mating at an earlier age. In the case of males, this behavior was displayed through physical strength and attempts at dominance, while in case of girls it was displayed through attractiveness and resourcefulness that indicated greater fertility and ability to take care of offspring. Similar findings were reported by Gallup, White, and Gallup (423), who found that bigger individuals were able to engage in sex more frequently and from an earlier age, signifying bullying as an advantageous and heritable trait that has higher probability of being inherited through
Bullying, or domination, however, has an associated cost: Bell et al. (619) showed that the offspring of females who evicted subordinates were lighter compared to offspring born to females who did not take part in such bullying activities. Bullying leads to increased maternal stress levels and considerable expenditure of energy because of prolonged chase and fight attempts. The authors showed that such negative factors may limit the ability of the individual to dominate too wide a territory or too large a group; in addition, for a wide variety of species such as mongoose, chicken, wild dogs, and primates, there are optimal levels of investment in targeted aggression. Koh and Wong (23) used a survey method to investigate whether bullying emerged due to an adaptive edge for better sexual opportunities, as proposed by evolutionary psychology theory. They found that bullies had higher mean mental scores and also enjoyed higher social rank within the school, thereby lending some credence to the hypothesis of bullying as an evolutionary trait.

It is evident that one of the reasons that primates and other non-human animals engage in bullying is the resultant control over resources and/or territories, and this might have contributed to it becoming an inherited trait. Massey, Byrd-Craven, and Swearingen (5) sought to relate preschool power play with resource control strategies and their effects on the health of children. Using a resource control theory proposed earlier by Hawley (213) to explore social strategies and health outcome, the authors found that children who use coercive and prosocial strategies are able to gain resources from within their group and also allowed such children to be positively viewed by others outside the group.
Prosocial strategies include helping, cooperation, and reciprocation, and such bistrategic individuals (as they were termed by Hawley) were found to be aware of when to use a particular strategy effectively. It is interesting to note that hierarchical social structure and strategies to adapt to it have been found even in infants (ages 10 to 13 months), which implies that these strategies play an important role as selective agents in the evolution of human beings (Thomsen et al. 477). Another interesting study relating the act of bullying with genetic and environmental factors in early childhood was conducted by Ball et al. (104). These two factors were studied using the concordance of particular traits within monozygotic (MZ) and dizygotic (DZ) twin pairs. The authors distinguished between three groups – bullies, victims, and bully-victims – and noted that the last group have elevated behavioral and emotional problems. They found that genetic factors account for as high as 73% of variations in victimization behavior and 61% of bullying behavior, while the most of the rest of the variations can be explained with the help of environmental factors; on the other hand, in case of bully-victims, genetic factors alone were found to be significant. The authors concluded that both genetic and environmental factors play an important role in determining the future development of a child, and that intervention programs should be related to mediating characteristics that are linked to both these factors.

**Different Types of Bullying Behaviors**

Social scientists recognize that bullying is a heterogeneous behavior, and that a number of different types of bullying behaviors exist. Five forms of bullying can be identified in general, including racial/ethnic, verbal, physical, sexual, and indirect/social,
each having a specific purpose or function. Newer forms have also been observed, and this includes cyber bullying (Wade and Beran 45). Many of these, of course, occur together, and the perpetrator may not always be aware that she is engaging in such behavior. These are discussed in the following sections.

**Physical Bullying.** One of the most prevalent types of bullying in school and among children, physical bullying include activities such as hitting, shoving, kicking, and other physical aggression by the perpetrator (Rigby 20). On the other hand, fighting is usually not a case of bullying because the former usually results from a disagreement boiling over and the participants are usually (though not always) more equal to each other in terms of power status. Kindergarten children also report more instances of physical bullying among themselves than any other form (Gillies-Rezo and Bosacki 163). Since physical acts of aggression are one of the easiest to identify by authorities, schools have historically taken strong measures to quell physical bullying on campus; as a result this is also the form of bullying that is used most often to intimidate an individual off campus. Although kicking and other such acts are the most visible forms of physical bullying, it can also assume less obvious and more indirect forms such as taking possession and/or damaging the properties or school work of one student by another – in this case the intent is to disempower without inflicting physical pain (Lee 9). Earlier, a number of authors reported that physical victimization is experienced more by boys than by girls, especially in older children (Boulton and Underwood 73; Crick and Grotpace 367). However, recently it has been reported that physical aggression among girls, and incidents of girl to girl violence, are also increasing, particularly in preadolescent girls of ages 6 to 12½
years (Boyer 344). Studies have shown that the primary reason for physical bullying among preschool children is arguments over play materials and/or possession disputes (Allison et al. 167).

One of the earliest authors to have explored the phenomenon among preschool children were Crick, Casas and Ku (376), who investigated both physical and relational victimization (the latter form will be discussed in a later section) among children between 3 to 5 years old. They found girls to be less physically aggressive than boys, as confirmed by teacher reports and naturalistic observations, and also that boys direct their aggression towards other boys (rather than girls) since peer interactions during preschool are differentiated by gender. The victim role was not found to be well-developed until children reached an age of 4 to 5 years, and boys and girls were found to be exposed to quite different peer victimization environments with possible implications for their future developments.

Later, Snyder et al. (1883) reported that physical bullying is widespread in the playground among children who are 5-7 years old, with acts of physical aggression and victimization, accompanied by verbal harassment, occurring once every 3-6 minutes. In addition, 80-90% of children in the playground were found to be a recipient of peer aggression. A longitudinal study by Jansen et al. a (440) found that children exhibiting preschool aggressiveness (age 4-5 years) were more likely to be bullies or bully/victims, while children having adequate preschool motor functioning were more likely to bullies than victims. More recently, Camodeca, Caravita, and Coppola (310) observed that preschool bullying is characterized by physical and verbal bullying, and that different
roles such as bully, victim, follower of the bully, and defender of the victim, are clearly
distinguished.

**Verbal Bullying.** As discussed in the previous section, verbal bullying often
accompanies the physical form; for some age groups it may perhaps even be more
prevalent than physical bullying. It calls for little effort on the part of the perpetrator, and
yet it often has an immediate impact, especially if carried out in front of the appropriate
audience. It is characterized by name calling and offensive or threatening remarks, and it
is used to create as well as seek out a vulnerable person or group. Bullies may use
supposed attributes of racial, ethnic, sexual, or behavioral nature while seeking to gain
power advantage over the victim, and recently the use of phones, computers, and other
devices have allowed the perpetrator to engage in bullying even when physically
separated from the victim (Lee 10). Verbal bullying was reported by Macklem (56) to
increase in frequency as children get older, with a corresponding decrease in physical
bullying; this was also confirmed by Dupper’s (18) observation that verbal bullying
incidences increase in frequency as children progress from middle to high school.

It has been widely reported that children who frequently experience verbal
aggression from their parents are more likely to become physical or verbal aggressors
themselves, across all age groups – preschool, elementary and high school, and among
boys as well as girls. It has also been found that children who are verbally as well as
physically abused exhibit the highest rates of aggressive behavior themselves (Vissing et
al. 223; Teicher et al. 993). Brendgen, Wanner and Vitaro (1585) found that some
preschool and kindergarten children are also subjected to verbal abuse from their
teachers, in addition to their peers. This is especially true for children exhibiting high levels of antisocial behavior and attention problems, and it is also sometimes related to academic difficulties and/or delinquent behavior in early adolescence. The authors remarked that relatively better adjusted children are at low risk of being subjected to verbal abuse by their teachers, but that at-risk children were highly vulnerable to subsequent difficulties in development. Another study by Vlachou, Botsoglou, and Andreou (8) sought to establish the frequencies of different forms of bullying in preschool, including verbal, physical, relational, and rumor spreading. They found that these frequencies vary significantly depending on the source of information – peer, self, teacher, or outside observer. In case of teacher reporting, the authors found that 22% of children were reported as victims and 30% as bullies when it came to verbal aggression. Perren and Alasker (45) reported that bullies resorted to both physical and verbal aggression in kindergartens, and the victims are usually children without friends or those who have, for some reason, left a peer group. They also suggested that verbal bullying often occurs in the absence of a teacher or other adults.

Relational Aggression. Relational bullying is a more covert form when compared to the physical or verbal forms, although it can be quite as harmful as the others. Examples of relational aggression include social aggression, the so-called silent treatment (threatening to stop talking to someone), spreading rumors with malicious intent, and other such manipulative practices. Parents and teachers have traditionally paid much less attention to this form of bullying than to the other forms, assuming it to be a part or normal socializing and growing up pains, but perhaps also because of the fact that it is
more difficult to conclusively blame a student for engaging in it (Young et al. 2). The highly effective nature of relational aggression can be attributed to the fact that peer group relations are very important to children, and boys as well as girls take great care in ensuring that their positions within their social strata are maintained. Sociologists have also observed that boys are less likely to report this form of bullying than girls, even though they may be subjected to an equal extent, and in fact reporting relational bullying might make the position of the boy even worse than earlier (Kevorkian and D’Antona 99).

Curtner-Smith et al. (181) found that maternal empathy is strongly correlated with their children’s relational bullying, while another factor was found to be inappropriate developmental expectations from children and mother’s need for exerting power. They also corroborated the findings by many other authors that girls tended to exhibit more relational bullying than boys (for example: Alsaker and Valkanover 175; McEvoy et al. 53). Levine and Tamburrino (271) analyzed different forms of bullying and how relational aggression can be identified in the early childhood stage. They suggested that this form of bullying is more prevalent among girls, and takes place through indirect actions such as exclusion, control of peer relationships, or a detachment of friendships. Girls are supposed to engage in it more often because they are more verbal, in contrast to boys who are more aggressive. The authors in fact also categorized verbal, cyber, and sexual bullying (the latter two will be discussed in the next sections) as forms of relational bullying, and observed that both physical and relational aggression occur in preschools. They elaborated on the differences between these two forms and these are
shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1

*Essential characteristics of physical or direct relational or indirect forms of aggression.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Physical Bullying</th>
<th>Relational Bullying</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Direct and often results in the victim being bodily harmed</td>
<td>Indirect and consists of attempts at damaging the intended victim’s relationship or identity in a peer group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Often leaves detectable injury marks after getting kicked, punched or hit</td>
<td>Associated with rejection with peers; there are no physical injury marks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More prevalent among boys than girls</td>
<td>Preschool children, age 3-5, display a more subtle and simpler form of relational aggression (Ostrov et al. 355)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used to display superiority of power and strength of the bully over the victim</td>
<td>May delay the formation of supportive relationships with peers (Johnson and Foster 141)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Levine and Tamburrino 273.

**Physical vs. Relational Bullying.** Ostrov et al. (361) conducted an observational study on preschool children and found that the latter use gossiping, secret telling, and the spreading of rumors when confronted with a limited resource situation, and these corroborated their observations with teacher reports as well as the completion of the child behavior scale instrument. Johnson and Foster later expanded this study by observing that the use of such relational aggression tools led to a significant decline in mutual
friendships and also a decrease in liking between the aggressor and the victim over a period of two months. In addition, relational aggression was observed to result in disruptions in peer acceptance, number of mutual friendships, and friendship stability over the two month period of observation.

**Cyber Bullying.** This is also known as techno-bullying or e-bullying, and this form has become one of the most pernicious in recent times following the exponential rise in the use of smart phones and other communication gadgets. Its chief characteristic is the use of Internet tools such as email, chat rooms, and social media. Parents must learn the lingo used by their children so that they too can recognize dialogue that may be inappropriate or threatening to their children. The use of some of the acronyms, such as G.C.A.D. and D.I.R.L., are very hurtful and when used over the Internet for the world to see can drive a child to become withdrawn and possibly even commit suicide. When children are communicating with their friends, acronyms such as: M.O.S., I.H.M.L., J.L.M.A., F.U.G.L.Y., F.O.A.D., and G.N.O.C. should be recognizable by parents and set off alarm bells that something is going on that may require immediate attention. The parent may try to assume some air of understanding the lingo of their youth by adopting the acronym U.G.L.Y. for use to reinforce the confidence in the child that he/she is loved and does not have to act upon the negative dialogue they may come in contact with during their day. Another distinguishing feature between cyber and other forms of bullying is that the former often takes place between persons unknown to each other through anonymous exchange of messages, images, and other media content; the resulting psychological pain is, therefore, often rendered at a distance and only in an
indirect manner (Lee 10). Within the context of schools, cyber bullying includes several methods, such as a group of students creating derogatory text messages and showing them to one another before transmitting the messages to the victim/s; sending emails that threaten or emotionally blackmail; forwarding confidential emails with sensitive content to all students in campus so that the original creator/recipient of the email is publicly humiliated; bombarding a particular student with “flame” emails, messages, or chat content; and harassing a student in chat rooms, Facebook groups, or other online public/private forums (Campbell 68). In addition, many unique and peculiar instances of cyber bullying have been reported in the popular press – for example, the setting up of humiliating websites targeting an individual; creating online polls depicting a student as the “biggest geek” or the “worst looking girl;” feigning affection and/or attraction in order to elicit confidential information that is later made public; creating morphed photographs or doctored videos; sharing photos and/or videos that target individual characteristics such as obesity, thinness, speech deficiency, sexual orientation; etc. (Gonchar 2014). An exhaustive taxonomy of the phenomenon was prepared by Willard (7).

Mishna et al. (63) attempted to enumerate the frequency of cyber bullying in terms of the three categories commonly found in other forms – bully, victim, and bully-victim. They found that cyber bullying was widely prevalent among middle and high school students, with the bully-victim category being the most common (in contrast to its being the least common in other forms); in addition, this category was found to comprise more females than males. The risk factors were reported to be hours spent per day in front
of the computer and disclosing passwords to friends. Privitera and Campbell (395) showed that cyber bullying is associated with a number of negative outcomes, such as anxiety, depression, substance abuse, sleep difficulties, deterioration in school performance, increase in absenteeism and truancy, dropping out of school, and murder or suicide. A comprehensive review and meta-analysis of existing research was performed by Kowalski et al. (1073) in order to explore the relationship between cyber bullying and cyber victimization, and also to elicit meaningful behavioral and psychological variables in this context. They noted several unique features of online communication and data exchange that make cyber bullying particularly widespread, such as the dependency of students, who are experiencing anxiety in face-to-face communications, on online interpersonal communications; the fact that almost a third of youth online are contacted by persons they do not know; and heavy users of the Internet often reporting higher levels of depression, obsessive compulsion, and anxiety (Kelleci and Inal 191). Kowalski et al. also noted that the remoteness and anonymity of the perpetrator/s and victim/s significantly lower empathy and remorse, and thereby potentially increases the magnitude of bullying/victimization. On the other hand, there is often a time lag between the actual act of aggression and response to it, which, according to the authors, signifies that motives between cyber bullying and other forms might be different – while the motives for traditional bullying may be more interpersonal, the motives for cyber bullying may be more intrapersonal. The authors created a theoretical framework and showed that determinants of cyber bullying/victimization are not universal, but rather vary from one culture to another. As an example, they showed that the relationship between social stress
and cyber bullying was larger in North America than in other regions, and the impact of personal factors such as empathy, narcissism, social intelligence, and hyperactivity also differ. The authors created the input factors and distal outputs for both cyber bullying and victimizations, and this is shown below (See Figure 1).

**Figure 1.** Theoretical framework showing input factors and distal outcomes for cyber bullying and victimization. *Source: Kowalski et al. 1122.*

**Sexual Bullying.** Repeated and harmful action targeting a fellow student in a sexual manner is referred to as sexual bullying. It involves sexual name-calling, unsolicited touching, display of pornographic material, sexual propositioning, and similar acts; sending messages with sexual connotations or content (often referred to as sexting) can be considered a variant of cyber bullying. There is only a fine line between sexual
bullying and sexual abuse, with the former often degenerating into the latter. A variant of this type of bullying is homophobic bullying, where students are victimized due to their preferences such as being gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender – students as well as teachers or other school staff may engage in this (Rivers 152). An earlier study by Rivers (36) found that as high as 52% of students had been afraid of the way someone looked at them, while 11% reported being sexually harassed by either their peers or their teachers. They also found that the type of harassment was strongly correlated with the gender of the victim, with gay, bisexual and transgender male students being kicked, publicly ridiculed or called names more often than lesbian or bisexual female students; on the other hand, the latter students reported being ostracized more often, with only male students speaking with them at school. Most of the students from both groups reported facing aggression that was sexual in nature. This aspect was further investigated by Berlan et al. (366), who carried out a survey involving sexual minority youth in the age group 14-22 years. They found that a significantly larger proportion of gay males, lesbian females, and bisexual male and female students reported being bullied or harassed than corresponding heterosexual male or female students. Based on this survey, they concluded that sexual orientation significantly altered the form of bullying faced by students.

A qualitative study by Shute, Owens, and Slee (477) found that bullying and victimization of girls by boys during adolescence almost always has sexual overtones, with verbal and other indirect sexual aggression being very common. They also found many commonalities in cross-gender victimization and bullying across nations, perhaps
unlike cyber bullying. They also noted that the feminist influence, which led to awareness of the disadvantages faced by girls in school, interactions had penetrated mainstream psychology research only slowly, due to which harassment arising out of culturally legitimated gendered power differentials has been largely neglected in literature. They suggested that sexual harassment and bullying should be considered together because both involve aggression and power abuse of a similar nature.

Another extension of sexual bullying is dating violence, and this was explored by Fredland (95). The author used the phenomenological variant of the ecological systems theory, proposed earlier by Spencer (37), to create a theoretical framework that would explain sexual bullying in terms of ecological and developmental principles. Fredland noted that sexual bullies are more likely to experience disruptive family relations at home, while parental disharmony and poor housing conditions were found to be other significant environmental factors. It was also observed that younger girls are more likely to be bully victims than older girls, perhaps because the latter are sometimes able to find a niche or benefit from friend protection factors. On the other hand, older girls are more likely to be victims of violence by an intimate partner. Sexual bullying was found to occur the most in the middle school years, during the transition period from early to late adolescence. In fact, the concept of dating violence was found to be appropriate only for the latter group, with very young adolescents often not engaged in any form of dating relationship. The transition from bullying to sexual aggression to sexual violence was also investigated by Miller et al. (607) and they reported similar findings, even though they used an ethnically diverse sample. Girls were found to be more likely the victims
and less likely to be the perpetrator of sexual bullying, and their aggressive behavior pattern was found to lessen over time as they transition from early adolescence to young adulthood. The authors suggested that girls are more likely to engage in aggressive behavior in early adolescence when gender differences are relatively diminished, and this behavior is likely to reduce as they become members of mixed gender groups as they grow into adulthood.

**Prejudicial Bullying.** This form of bullying occurs due to existing prejudices and stereotypes based on, for example, race, ethnicity, skin color, sexual orientation, religion, etc. Very often it turns into other forms of aggression, such as sexual, cyber, or verbal bullying; it also acts as the genesis of most hate crimes later in life. Children usually engage in prejudicial bullying because they consider children who belong to “other” types will be inferior to them. Hewstone et al. (265) found that children living in communities that are more segregated into religious, racial, ethnic, or other such groups are less likely to come across members of other groups, and are therefore more likely to engage in this form of bullying in their schools. In a follow up study, Dyer and Teggart (360) observed that the number of children and adolescents who engaged in racial bullying in school was increasing in Northern Ireland, and associated it with the fact that there were increasing levels of racial intolerance and harassments in the prevalent society.

Associations between ethnicity, ethnic diversity, and bullying among children studying the in last year of primary school were studied by Tolsma et al. (51) using social misfit and inter-ethnic relations theories. A significant departure point between their study and many previous ones was that they investigated whether prejudicial bullying in
ethnically diverse classes is directed towards fellow students from ethnic in-groups or ethnic out-groups. The reason for this particular investigation was that earlier studies had reported inconsistent findings with respect to prevalence of bullying and victimization from various ethnic groups and common characteristics of prejudicial bullies. According to misfit theory, persons who own characteristics deviate from the group normative are characterized as misfits. This theory has earlier been applied to argue that ethnic non-native students are victimized by native students to a greater extent than native students themselves, because the non-natives do not possess the cultural skills required to relate to the dominant native culture (Eslea and Mukhtar 207; Strohmeier and Spiel 107). Tolsma et al. found that prevalence of bullying could be correlated with the level of ethnic diversity in a school, and showed that instances of bullying between students from a different ethnic background are just as frequent as instances of bullying within one’s own ethnic group. They concluded that the probability of becoming a victim does not vary on the victim’s ethnicity, or whether she belongs to the minority or majority group. It was also found that both inter- and intra-ethnic bullying are prevalent in ethnically diverse institutions.

Another form of prejudicial bullying is over social status, with presumably the bully belonging to a higher status than the victim. This form was examined by Rodkin and Berger (473) using several parameters, such as social preference, popularity, and physical competence as perceived by children and teachers, to measure the construct of social status. The work was significant because of its investigation of social status asymmetries between bullies and their victims and an attempt at dyadic understanding of
who bullies whom. Using this measure, the authors ascertained two sources of heterogeneity in social status asymmetries between bullies and victims – the first source was social status and the second source was gender. The authors found that both sources significantly affected bullying – bullies were observed to have higher social status (as measured by popularity, but not by preference), and boys were found to have a higher chance of being bullied by other boys of a higher social standing. A significant finding was that children were likely to be less popular when they were bullies rather than victims, indicating the multidimensionality of social status. A similar study by Sijtsema et al. (57), however, found that bullying behavior conferred prestige on the perpetrator and victims in fact had low prestige. On the other hand, the study showed that there is a difference between being popular and being liked, since bullies were not liked by their victims as well as their classmates. The authors also noted that bullies strive to increase the popularity component of their status with increase in their early adolescence. The contrasting nature of these studies, and their often contradictory finding, indicates that prejudicial bullying, much as other forms of bullying, is a socially complex phenomenon with a number of contrarian driving factors.

**Types of Bullies**

Bullying behavior can be of different types, and similarly bullies at school can also be of different types. Salmivalli et al. (12) observed that one of the common types is the male bully who is positioned at the center of a supporting group, the one who is in charge. He may either assault himself or provide instructions to others; the latter play the role of assistants or “enforcers,” encouraging the bullies. Later, several subcategories
within this main type of male “bully” were suggested (Rivers, Duncan and Vesag 21).
The first is the bully/victim – boys who are bullied at home or at other places and then use the same methods to bully others.

The second type is the provocative bully, the ones who provoke others and then wonder why the other child has retaliated. This is because the provocateur has no clear idea about even simple social behaviors, possibly because either they have not received the necessary social training, or they have undiagnosed condition such as Asperger’s syndrome or autism. A small subset of children also provoke because of a subconscious desire to receive the “punishment” that they think they deserve.

Another type of bully is the anxious one, constituting of boys who have a fear of failure or rejection and who, therefore, assail fellow students whom they perceive to be more successful or better liked. The unhappiness of the bully is subconsciously translated into anger and their bullying behavior is actually an attempt to compensate for their own inadequacies (Rivers, Duncan, and Vesag 22).

In contrast to male bullies, the profile or types of female bullies have not been clearly defined or discussed in literature. One reason for this might be that girls do not always engage in overt bullying as their male counterparts do; as discussed in an earlier section, girls are more likely to perpetrate social bullying through more subtle as well as more complex means. Girls tend to cooperate more often than boys do, and they are more likely to choose to play in a negotiated turn-taking manner (Crombie and DesJardins 15). A number of other authors have indicated that the preferred modus operandi of female bullies is indirect rather than direct aggression, reflecting gender differences in bullying
behavior (see, for example, Arnold et al. 183; Archer 414; and Whitney and Smith 11).

On the other hand, Thorne (114) and later Maccoby (240) suggested that there are actually no distinct categories of male or female bullies, only a spectrum of behavior within both sexes ranging from more subtle and covert behavior patterns to more direct and overt ones.

**Characteristics of Children who Bully**

Having discussed the different types of bullies, it would be worthwhile to discuss the signs and symptoms of a typical bully. Olweus (58) noted that bullies usually tease in an unwelcome manner, taunt, intimidate, threaten, hit, and display other signs of primary aggression. While they might engage in such behavior with a number of fellow students, they usually select a few weaker students as the targets of their repeated aggression. While boys usually engage in more visible and overt forms of aggression, including physical and verbal assaults, girls are likely to employ less visible and more covert forms of harassment, such as slandering, spreading rumors, and manipulating relationships. In addition, Olweus noted that bullies are likely to be physically stronger than their victims and physically more effective in play activities. Bullies may be impulsive and easy to anger, and have low frustration tolerance; they may not easily conform to rules and are more likely to resort to cheating; in addition they are more likely to have low tolerances towards adversities and delays. Bullies are also likely to display antisocial traits, such as stealing or vandalism, at a younger age than their peers. They are likely to achieve average or below average grades in elementary school, and are likely to develop a negative attitude towards school as they progress through it (Olweus 60).
Male bullies are often athletes, popular in school, and psychologically strong. They often have very good social skills and are able to manipulate the many followers that they often attract. Since bullying behavior is usually self-reinforcing, their peer status increases their sense of well-being. As a result, bullies are likely to repeat their behavior in order to gain approval from their peers, and they may even butter up to adults in order to remain unsuspected (Alude et al. 153).

Connolly and Moore (560) provided a comprehensive description of the home environment of children who bully. They observed that there is significant association between such children and poor family psycho-social health, with the children three times more likely to have problems at home when compared to children who do not bully. The authors also observed that there is likely to be an absence of positive and effective communication in such families, with likely factors that aggravate aggression being the absence of a father, loss of a parent through divorce rather than death, a depressed mother, an irritable parent, and/or marital discord. Such children are likely to be maladjusted after witnessing negative paternal or maternal relationships, and very aggressive boys are likely to have experienced negative or rejecting attitudes from their parents along with a combination of a lax mother and a hostile father.

Commenting on the more recent phenomenon of cyberbullying, Twyman et al. (195) observed that cyberbullies share many of the characteristics of traditional bullies, but there are also some notable differences. Children who engage in cyberbullying or are bully/victims use the Internet and various connecting gadgets (such as computers, smartphones, tablets, etc.) intensively 4 or more times every week, consider themselves
experts in their online abilities, consider the Internet to be a very important part of their lives, and are only infrequently monitored by their parents. An important finding of this study was that some children engage in bullying only online and not in the actual world, possibly because of the anonymity and physical distance from their victims that cyberbullying affords (Twyman et al. 198). In a similar finding, Pyzalski (305) reported that cyberbullies may hide their online acts from their parents, or even their victims, in the actual world.

**Characteristics of Children who are Bullied**

Children who are bullied – victims as well as bully/victims – also have some defining characteristics. Olweus (54) documented a number of primary and secondary signs that such children display at school and at home. The primary signs at school include being repeatedly teased, taunted, degraded in an unwelcome manner, made fun of and laughed at derisively, hit, pushed, and shoved. Such children try to withdraw if they become involved in a fight, and they frequently have their belongings taken from them or damaged. Some of the secondary symptoms displayed at school include being alone and/or excluded from peer groups, being chosen last in team games, a habit of being close to teachers or other adults during school breaks, appearing to be anxious, insecure, or depressed, and showing a gradual or sudden decline in quality of school work. Primary signs displayed at home include returning home with torn clothing, damaged belongings, and/or bruises on the person; not bringing a friend home; not getting invited to friends’ parties or trying to arrange their own parties at home; having restless sleep with bad
dreams; choosing uncommon routes for going to school or other commonly visited places; etc.

Olweus (56) further observed that victims might have the following general characteristics: being physically weaker than their fellow students; having body anxiety; being cautious or sensitive, withdrawn, passive, and shy; being anxious or insecure; having difficulty asserting themselves among friends; and relating better to adults than to peers. The author also described another category called the provocative victim, who are physically weaker than their peers but may be irritable and hot-tempered; they may be hyperactive and restless, creating tension within the group through their clumsy, immature, or offensive actions; they may disliked by adults too; and they may try to bully weaker children. Many of the characteristics were confirmed in a study by Veenstra et al. (673), who observed that victims become lonely in school not only because of their own nature but also because many of their classmates avoid them for fear of being bullied themselves. The authors also noted that at the preadolescent stage a boy is more likely to be a bully or a bully/victim than a girl, while girls are more likely to be passive victims. Victims were also found have a greater likelihood of coming from families with a lower socioeconomic status than bullies or uninvolved children.

Rivers, Duncan, and Vesag (22) added two more characteristics to the male victim—falsehood and collusion. According to them, the false victim is the one who simply makes false claims about being bullied in order to gain the attention of adults around them, while the colluding victim is the one who tries to gain entry into a group by
actually seeking the role of the victim. If they find a more favorable or sought-after
group, however, they will readily leave the bullies in their erstwhile group.

The psychological attributes of victims and bully/victims were studied by
Georgiou and Stavrinides (574), who found that such children were likely to be more
socially isolated, more temperamental, and different mentally than typical students who
are not involved in bullying. The authors found that children are put at a high risk of
being victimized if they appear to be significantly different from others, either physically
or mentally. Passive, and especially aggressive, victims were found to significantly suffer
from physical and relational victimization when compared to uninvolved children, and
their mothers often reported that they have difficulty controlling their temper. Similar
characteristics were reported by Kingsbury and Espelage (71).

Causes and Effects of Bullying

Causes

This review began by looking at possible origins of bullying behavior as a
response to evolutionary and environmental factors. It would, therefore, be apt to begin a
discussion of the causes of bullying among school children by exploring these causes
further. Ball et al. (104) suggested that whether a child would become a bully, a victim, or
a bully/victim, was determined in some parts by his or her genetic endowments, as well
as their surrounding environments. A related study by Vitaro, Brendgen, and Arseneault
(376) established that study of MZ twins can be useful in establishing environmental
influences on emotional and behavioral development of preschool children. The authors
showed that causal pathways between environmental factors and developmental
outcomes can be established using a difference score strategy, which correlates differences between MZ dyad members to an environmental experience of interest (Vitaro, Brendgen, and Arseneault 378). Another comprehensive prospective cohort study investigated environmental and genetic causes and their causal pathways leading to normal and abnormal growth, development and health during fetal life, childhood as well as adulthood (Jaddoe et al. 739). The authors studied behavioral development and child psychopathology among many other factors, and found that depression as well as anxiety disorders can be associated with environmental factors.

It is interesting to note that genetic variation in the serotonin transporter gene 5-HTTLPR has been found to moderate the emotional problems of children who are victimized frequently. Sugden et al. (830) observed that the SS genotype of such children was at higher risk of developing emotional problems at age 12 than children who had the SL or LL genotype. They also found that this genetic moderation can be observed even if the pre-victimization problem of children ages 5 to 12 years is taken into account, which indicates that emotional disturbance after exposure to stressful environments in such victims is an inherited trait.

The act of bullying has also been sought to be explained using Theory of Mind (ToM), particularly because a number of authors have characterized bullying as goal-oriented and proactive aggression, in which the aggressor might attack the victim even without provocation (for example: Camodeca and Goossens 186; Salmivalli and Peets 322). Ringleader bullies, who take the initiative in showing aggressive behavior, have been shown to possess good ToM skills such as an ability to attribute mental states to self
and to others to explain and predict behavior. Caravita, Blasio, and Salmivalli (138) observed that ToM skills are associated with three types of behavior: ringleader bullying, defending the victim, and victimization. According them, ringleader bullies ages 7 to 10 have significantly greater ToM skills than their peers, and bullying acts are positively correlated to mental state understanding (victimization is, on the other hand, negatively correlated). On the other hand, it was found that ToM skills are a predictor of bullying only among boys, indicating that gender is also a moderating variable in the association of such skills with bullying.

Apart from natural and environmental causes, bullying also has family and socioeconomic causes, and this has been investigated by a number of authors. Jansen et al. (494) found that there is a strong association between children coming from a family with low socioeconomic status (SES) or from a poor school neighborhood and display of bullying behavior. In such families there is often a lack of consideration for individual boundaries, poor role models, and lack of supervision. However, the influence of school neighborhood was found to be negligible once the authors adjusted for family status, indicating that children may not necessarily become bullies if they study at such schools.

Since there is some common ground between delinquency and bullying, three criminological theories – general theory of crime, differential association theory, and general strain theory – were tested empirically by Moon, Hwang, and McCluskey (850) in order to find out whether these can explain the origin of bullying. Although they found little support for these theories in explaining the etiology of bullying, they did observe that strains generate in campus, such as those due to physical or emotional punishments
by teachers or strains originating from exams, have significant effects on bullying behavior. It should be mentioned, however, that the study was carried out on Korean students and teachers and the authors acknowledged that stress levels on Korean students are, in general, higher than those on their American counterparts.

Researchers agree that bullying is a complex phenomenon with multiple, often overlapping, factors. While some are broad, such as those discussed so far, some others pertain to the individual. A number of factors related to family functioning may lead to maladjustment at the individual level, for example lack of warmth among family members, not enough involvement of the parents in the lives of their children, a lack of imposed limits on display of violent or aggressive behavior, and absence of role models in conflict management. Poor attachment to the primary care giver, a difficult temperament, and difficulty with self-regulation may be other individual factors leading to a manifestation of bullying (Marini, Spear, and Bombay 41).

**Effects**

Bullying has been acknowledged to lead to a wide range of serious negative outcomes for the bully as well as for the victim. While victims experience higher social anxiety levels, loneliness, lower self-worth, and a tendency towards depression (Hawker and Boulton 441), bullies themselves may undergo some negative consequences (Volk et al. b 375). In the case of preschool children, those exhibiting repeated aggressive behavior towards some of their peers can be said to be exhibiting precursory bully tendencies. While some have argued that this is a part of childhood activities and even a
sort of rite of passage, many authors have pointed out that this leads to damaging and
destructive consequences in later years (Coloroso 134; Anthony and Lindert 224).

Victims may develop several somatic complaints, including headaches,
stomachaches, and vomiting. Their school performance may also deteriorate, either
gradually or precipitously, if the bullying has started recently due to some cause. School
work has been found to be particularly severely affected when teachers are aware of the
bullying but do not take steps to prevent it. Victims become socially awkward and
anxious, and have difficulty in starting or sustaining relationships – this tends to develop
into a vicious cycle. A small number of victims may even have difficulty in normalizing
their lives, and if not provided support and counseling, may seek refuge in life-ending
behavior such as suicide or serious drug abuse (Smith and Sharp 253). Bullying has a
particularly deleterious effort on dysfluent children in the areas of their personal
relationships, self-esteem, and the onset of depression. Some of them may develop a
moderate to severe stammer, which in turn might prevent them from making friends
(Hugh-Jones and Smith 151).

A comprehensive review of the effects of bullying was provided by Aluede et al.
(156). In addition to those already discussed above, the effects include: elevated suicidal
tendencies among victims; increased likelihood of carrying weapons to school; higher
chances of injury for the victims as well as the bully; emotional stress and injury; a
variety of physical and mental ailments; higher rates of absenteeism and drop outs; and
long-terms effects on victims that last much beyond schools. In particular, victims may
continue to remain isolated and have low self-esteem well into adulthood.
Solutions to Bullying

The problem of bullying has been recognized by social scientists, educators and policy makers in many countries across the world, and many different types of remedial measures, at both the institutional and individual levels, have been proposed. Some of these measures and their efficacy are briefly reviewed in the sections below.

Reducing Bullying in Elementary Students

The first step in eradicating bullying can be taken by educating young children about four aspects: knowledge, attitudes, skills, and behavior. Educators should discuss various aspects of bullying with children and develop their knowledge in areas such as the meaning of bullying, its possible short and long term consequences, and how it can be prevented. The four aspects and the areas which teachers should ideally focus on with regard to each of them are shown in Figure 2 below:
Teachers can inculcate appropriate attitudes and values by teaching empathy to children, particularly when they observe that someone is being bullied, and also teach them that the act of bullying is an abhorrent one – the perpetrator as well as onlookers should feel ashamed of it. Educators should also encourage children when they refrain from bullying, try to resolve disputes that may later lead to bullying, and provide support and acceptance to those of their peers who have been bullied (Rigby 62). The importance of parent-educator partnership was stressed by Jordan and Austin (450), who stated that different types of bullying can be effectively controlled only when the two combine. The
authors provided a number of actionable items that the two can focus on, such as: provide individual and group counseling to the bully and bullied in order to resocialize them; developing a complaint process for reporting bullying that parents, students as well as educators can access; maintaining zero tolerance for bullying and consistently enforcing rules; implementing preventive interventions that address changing the normative beliefs about the acceptability of bullying; implementing bully prevention curricula for the entire school; etc.

**Bullying Prevention in Preschools**

Anti-bullying agencies such as the Literacy Alliance has suggested that preschool and kindergarten kids should be engaged during story time to be curious about their surroundings and also to acknowledge and embrace the social and cultural diversity that they find around them (Levine and Tamburrino 273). This viewpoint is reinforced by research carried out by Thornberg, who observed that deviant appearances and behavior at preschool invites bullying; children should, therefore, be taught the virtues of tolerance and of accepting someone for who they are. They should also be provided with culturally relevant texts and be exposed to different backgrounds. According to Twemlow and Sacco (214), the key to preventing bullying at the preschool stage is the inclusion of messages and activities as organic components of education in a manner that these take care of their developmental needs.

Another fruitful method of preventing adolescent bullying is to teach conflict resolution, preferably by seating the children in a circle and asking them questions on situations that relate to them (for example how they would decide on who gets which
toy). Palenski (2012) observed that teachers and adults should also find out the source of the conflict and validate the emotions of the children by involving them in the situation.

**Putting Together Bullying Programs**

It has been established that anti-bullying intervention programs reduce the perpetration of bullying activities by 20-23% and victimization by 17-20%, although it has also been shown that these programs are more effective in case of older children (aged 11 years or more) than younger ones (Vlachou et al. 347). Even so, the importance of implementing well-designed programs has been acknowledged by teachers and parents, and such programs are being sought to be implemented at all levels from preschool to high school. Hong (81) reviewed one of the more popular such programs, the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program, which is implemented at the middle school level. He found that although the program is effective for schools located in upper/middle class areas, it is not so effective for more impoverished areas. They observed that children from lower SES and cultural differences often determine the extent to which students seek assistance and teachers implement anti-bullying measures.

So far only one anti-bullying program at the preschool level has been tested for reliability, and it is the Be-Prox program. Alasker and Valkanover (16) stated that it involves intensive focused supervision for teachers for 4 months, where they are taught the importance of group discussions, mutual support, and mutual cooperation. The program has five modules, each of which can be addressed in single or multiple meetings: sensitization, detection, discussion in class, framing of rules for bullying prevention, and the implementation and use of positive and negative sanctions against
bullying. Alaker and Valkanover (25) observed that there are some positive effects of the program in preschool bullying prevention, but at the same time it is difficult to measure changes, even in groups of teachers and children who have been sensitized through the program.

**Encouraging Open Communication and Empathy**

The importance of open communication has also been emphasized, particularly with respect to girl-to-girl violence, which often takes the form of relational bullying. Boyer (348) noted that an open communication process can eliminate victimization to a great extent particularly in cases of female bullying, but this also requires training of school administrators, counselors, teachers, and parents. Similarly, Low, Kok, and Lee (198) observed that open communication not only helps parents access appropriate school policies and community resources, but also creates space for peer to peer discussions among students and teachers.

Sahin (1325) investigated the effectiveness of empathy training in bullying prevention in primary school and found that there was a significant reduction in bullying behavior of participants who had been imparted such training. In addition, Nickerson, Mele and Princiotta (687) observed that empathy and attachment training led to a significantly increased number of students who played the role of defenders in a middle school.

**Chapter Summary**

A synthesis of the definitions discussed at the beginning of the literature review suggests that “bullying” may be stated to be a pattern of verbal or physical intimidation
of someone with less social or physical power. Significant research has been undertaken to understand the origin and history of this phenomenon, and many authors have shown that bullying has been prevalent in all societies and cultures from prehistoric times. This has led sociologists to suggest that it does not have merely a cultural origin, but might be rooted in genetic and environmental factors. Anthropologists have observed that bullying is practiced among primates and other animals for various purposes, such as maintaining existing social orders, controlling resources, and attracting partners.

Bullying has been reported to have many different forms, both direct and indirect. Direct or physical bullying is engaged in more by boys than girls, although it has been shown recently that violent girl-to-girl bullying in the preadolescent stage (ages 6 to 12½ years) is also increasing. Traditionally, it has been reported that girls engage more often in indirect or relational bullying, which involves the spreading of rumors and engaging in other manipulative practice. Both boys and girls, however, have been shown to inflict verbal bullying on their victims. Recently the rise of cyber bullying has also been noted, and it has been observed that this form allows the aggressor anonymity and physical separation from the victim, making it more pervasive and ubiquitous among school children. More traditional forms of bullying include sexual and prejudicial bullying.

Researchers have commented on many typical characteristics of the male and female bully as well as victim. Male bullies are usually physically stronger than their victims and may enjoy a higher socioeconomic status in the peer group. They often have very good social skills and are able to manipulate children around them. Cyberbullies
have been found to be very active on the Internet, have high opinions about their online capabilities, and little parental supervision at home.

Parents, teachers, and policy makers have responded to bullying activities in many ways, both at the institutional and individual levels. Several anti-bullying programs have been instituted, of which the Olweus program is one of the oldest but still one of the most popular. In addition, researchers have pointed out the efficacy of encouraging peer to peer open communication among both students and teachers, and recommended the use of empathy training. It has been suggested that children at the preschool level should be taught the virtues of tolerance and of accepting someone for who they are, while exposing them to different and diverse backgrounds. They should also be taught conflict resolution by describing situations to them in which they can relate, and then asking them to respond in appropriate manners.
Chapter 3: Research Method

The research methodology that will be employed in this dissertation is phenomenological research design. The core principle of a phenomenological research design is to “describe.” Indeed, describing is the operative word that dictates phenomenology, where the researcher describes a phenomenon as accurately as possible. In vividly describing the phenomenon, the researcher also refrains from using any pre-given framework as a foundation of building on the same. Nevertheless, the researcher must remain true to the facts. In this research design, the researcher takes the role of a phenomenologist, and their main and only objective is to understand or unearth the social and psychological phenomenon from the points of views of the people involved. This dissertation is on early childhood bullying, and with respect to this research design, the researcher’s concern is to understand this topic from the perspectives of parents and other caregivers involved or affected by early childhood bullying and those involved as enumerated in the research methods and appropriate design and participants sections.

By applying phenomenology, the researcher’s project is to collect data and gather stories from parents, preschool teachers, aids, playground monitors, as well as any other caregiver that could possibly share insight regarding the topic. The researcher’s goal is to gather data to help understand what bullying looks like in the classroom and on the playground and as Berg (2009) stated, to gain “a greater depth of understanding” (p. 2). The qualitative nature of the study also had the ability to get at the “what, how, when and where...its essence and ambience” (p. 3).
A secondary goal is to look at what teachers are currently doing in their classrooms. More specifically, to understand what intervention and prevention strategies teachers are currently utilizing, and the strategies' perceived effectiveness by the teachers. The researcher’s main objective is find out “does preschool bullying really exist” or is repeated aggressive behavior from one child toward another “just child play?” This research is intended to help teachers and other caregivers who are developing classroom and center-wide programs to be able to differentiate bullying behavior from rough housing as well as to work toward ending bullying and bullying behaviors in early childhood-aged children. The researcher will also be identifying the topic, which is early childhood bullying.

Bullying is a very wide topic, as there are different manifestations and examples of bullying. However, in respect to this dissertation, the area of interest is early childhood bullying as stated. The most important consideration is how the research unfolds, which speaks to the paradigm. Paradigm comes from the Latin word “paradigma” and the Greek word “paradeigma,” which means model, pattern, or example (Bless and Higson-Smith, 2000). Therefore, a paradigm is a patterning of a person’s thinking. Moreover, it is the foundational example among examples, a model or an exemplar in which to follow and on whose foundation a design action is taken. In other words, a paradigm is also an action of presenting a view, or a basic set of perspectives or beliefs on whose action is based; it guides the action. By doing this, the worldviews of the researcher become ultimate. A researcher’s epistemology is basically his or her theory of knowledge and this theory of knowledge helps the researcher in deciding how a social phenomenon is going to be
studied (Cobb and Morse, 2003). In respect to this study, the researcher’s epistemology is that children are exposed to bullying behaviors from other same aged peers and that most caregivers ignore bullying and deems it as just child play. This is a situation that compounds the problem of childhood bullying because it exacerbates the problem. As such, it was important to engage with the study’s participants in collecting the data. For this reason, I identified phenomenological research study as the most ideal mean of this study. Unlike positivists, phenomenologists hold that a researcher cannot be divorced from his or her own position of presuppositions (Holloway, 2007). In that regard, researchers are allowed to hold explicit positions or beliefs. It is the intention of this research, as pointed out from the onset, to gather data on the phenomenon of childhood bullying, and to understand why most parent(s) and other caregivers tend to overlook the gravity of the issue and confuse it with child play. For the sake of clarity, it is important to be specific on what is meant by “early childhood bullying” and “caregivers.”

The body of knowledge on bullying among children has largely paid attention to bullying among older children. The focus on both the media and research has tended to pay little attention to early childhood bullying. This is partly due to the fact that bullying among older children is regarded as part of growing up. However, the body of knowledge on the issue of early childhood bullying is significantly growing. In defining bullying, there are three elements that must be captured.

- The first one is that bullying is an act of aggression and that the act is intended to do harm.
- The second element is that bullying is repeated over time.
The third element is that the act of bullying occurs where there is power imbalance. To expound this definition further, bullying is thus a series of acts which are intended to cause harm or injure another child. In addition, the other key motivation of children who orchestrate bullying is to assert or gain power over another child or children.

It is important to emphasize this definition because of the fact that it distinguishes bullying from aggressive manifestations of child play such as tumble and rough play, as well as other aspects of the developing social skills of the children. Though bullying can manifest through aggressive physical contact, it can equally be done through social (such as social exclusion) and verbal (such as name calling) nature. In the context of early childhood, there are very few studies quantifying the number of children who are bullies and are victims of bullying. A study conducted by Finkelhor, D. et al. (2009) found that at least 20 percent of children between the ages of 2 and 5 have experienced bullying (physical) in their lifetime. It also found out that 14 percent of children within the same age group have been teased, which is a form of verbal bullying. The paper presents some estimates that suggest that cases of bullying are more common among younger children compared to cases of bullying among school going children. The prevalence data indicates that there is more bullying among younger children below the age of five, but less cases of bullying when children grow older. Going hand in hand with this decline is the fact that as children grows older, the nature of bullying tends to change from more physical, overt, and aggressive behaviors to different manifestations of bullying. These include social exclusion and verbal attacks. These forms of bullying are very common as
children advance in age. From the available data on changes in bullying with respect to age, has found that even among children as young as four years old, there are differences in the form and nature of bullying between boys and girls. In comparison, boys are more likely to employ physical aggression to bully their peers compared to girls. There is a general agreement among researchers that bullying is partly fostered by the development of social, behavioral, and emotional skills among children. Among the children, these skills tend to be very fluid, the result of which is a range of challenging behaviors, with bullying being among them. However, as children master social and regulatory skills, these challenging behaviors, including bullying, tend to decrease. Understanding the challenging question of where bullying comes from is important in determining the best way of dealing with it. This question has been approached through the use of measures of behavioral problems. The difference between bullies and victims is that the externalizing score of bullies is usually on the extreme. In other words, they act outwardly usually in extreme ways. On their part, bullying victims have a high internalizing score (Renn, et al., 2009). These include passivity and withdrawal behaviors.

Caregivers are defined as people who take care of the very young, the aged, the disabled, or the ill. Anyone can take the role of a caregiver; for instance, when someone ensures the care of an ailing friend is in place, that their friend eats every day and is taking their medication, they become caregivers. Being a caregiver can also be a paying job, such a nurse at a hospital or a home health aide. These act as caregivers. In respect to this dissertation, the focus is on child caregivers. These are trusted adults, friends, or role models who are entrusted to give or foster a safe and caring environment to a child. They
provide them essential skills and resources needed to help them succeed as adults. In addition, caregivers impart core cultural values in children. They are also expected to offer love, acceptance, encouragement, appreciation, and also guidance to the children under their care. Caregivers thus provide the most intimate, closest context of protecting and nurturing children as they discover and develop their identities and personalities, and as they develop physically, emotionally, cognitively, and socially.

It is a well-known fact that children whose needs are adequately and warmly met (for example feeding, holding, cradling, and changing them) stand a higher chance of developing an important developmental task, which is attachment. While this bond of affection between caregivers and the children is critical for a healthy parent/caregiver-child relationship, it equally extends to the kind of relationships that children will have with other children, their siblings, as well as other family members. When younger children below the age of four are helped to successfully attach with their caregivers and parents, they learn important lessons, such as the trust that they are part of the outside world and that this world is welcoming. Moreover, they are also more likely to interact and explore their environments (Ostrovand and Keating, 2004). Research has found that a positive relationship between caregivers and children is one that is warm, communicative, and open. It is a relationship that provides reasoning for best behavior and rules. In addition, this is a kind of relationship that promotes high self-esteem and good performance in school. It also leads to fewer negative outcomes, such as aggression, depression, and drug use in children. These negative outcomes could also lead to bullying.
Young children are dependent on the care they get from others. This is because there is no child who is on his or her own. In other words, a child is someone who is always under the care of someone. The physical and psychological needs are usually met by a person or a group of people who understand the children. Indeed, the capacity of a child to grow in all aspects largely depends on an adult, under whose care the child is dependent. There is great importance for there to be a close interpersonal relationship between children and their caregivers. The relationship should also be caring. This warm relationship between the children and their caregivers and other key adults in their lives is fundamental for the healthy development and survival of the child (Renn, et al., 2009).

This healthy development includes discipline and stimulation. Where such a relationship is devoid of personalized care, there can be a devastating effect on the health, personal adjustment, growth, and cognitive capacity of the child. To ensure the good growth and health of the child, the caregiver must be very sensitive to the young child’s physical state. This includes the ability to judge whether the child is tired, hungry, angry, and aggressive, among others.

When the caregiver is responsive, he or she is able to effectively make these critical judgments, and this is because they are able to monitor the movements, response, temperament, and behavior of the child. By continually monitoring the response of a child under their care, caregivers are well-placed to focus their actions and adjust them to achieve optimum outcomes, such as comforting, encouraging, calming, correcting, and letting the children understand the nature of their actions and behaviors. The care that a child receives is critical because of its power to affect the growth and development of a
child. Care in this context refers to the practices and behaviors of the caregivers in providing emotional support and stimulation. This should be in terms of the responsiveness and affection of the child.

One of the most important challenges in life is learning how to get along with others. Childcare settings such as home care groups, daycare, preschool, and play groups often provide the children with their initial social experience. Through child care settings, children are able to observe, learn and also practice various social skills they need to enable them to get along with others and relate with them. Nevertheless, child care settings are also the environments where many children experience or observe early forms of bullying for the very first time. In a situation where these early forms of bullying attitudes are not adequately addressed, it is highly likely that patterns of victimization and violence may grow and persist within the child care settings, and also into later stages of growth such as later childhood and adolescence (Roninson and Maines, 2008). It could even persist into adulthood.

It is thus the ultimate responsibility of the caregivers to keep the children safe. Part of keeping the children safe includes fostering an environment that is devoid of bullying. Indeed, caregivers have a huge role to play in determining if early childhood bullying behavior manifests and spreads. They also determine if this behavior is minimized and only seen in isolated events. Children need to be helped to understand how to maintain friends, and also how to avoid becoming bullies. This requires them to be taught a variety of social skills. For instance, children need to learn how to analyze and also settle social problems. They also need to understand and react in a caring and
sensitive manner to what others, and especially their peers, think and feel. In addition, they need to understand how to stand up for themselves or assert themselves in a manner that is fair and respectful without being unnecessarily aggressive or attacking others.

There are characteristics of child care settings that foster bullying behavior. Therefore, bullying among younger children is a common occurrence, largely due to the setting that the care is being provided in. Some of these settings can be reorganized, while others are impossible to influence. When children get together in childcare settings such as home care groups, daycare, preschool, and play groups, they often differ in a number of ways. These ways include the physical size, family experience, and skills level. Because of these underlying differences, there will be patterns of behaviors bent towards hurting that may emerge. It is not unlikely to see children in childcare settings making mean faces to one another, pushing others aside, saying mean things to one another, and even refusing to play with certain children. Moreover, some young children will go to an extent of engaging in actual bullying attitudes by repeatedly and deliberately dominating a child who appears to be vulnerable through name-calling, social exclusion, and physical attacks.

As noted, child care settings provide a natural learning environment for the children; they also should be a potentially safe haven where teaching and practicing of these social skills takes place (Rigby and Bauman, 2009). Young children are better poised to learn social skills when they are made to appreciate that the skills are important and where they are given concrete and real examples that they can understand. However, the explanation and examples given to them are largely dependent on their developmental
level as well as their age. Some of the best ways in which social skills can be imparted in children include presentations, discussions, modeling, storytelling, role playing, curricula activities, and games. Caregivers can also capitalize on the opportunities created throughout the day to enable the children to practice things they have learned. They can also coach them and offer the children cues, feedback and encouragement. When children start learning important new strategies in this manner, care providers can minimize their level of support.

Caregivers have a huge role to play in preventing bullying and aggressive behavior from escalating. It is thus important for caregivers to adopt effective strategies that will help them effectively deal with incidents of bullying before they occur, when they occur, and in the aftermath of an occurrence. It is important for them to promote an environment that recognizes and supports respect. Such is also an environment where bullying is not tolerated or accepted. It is the role of caregivers to help the children learn all the relevant social skills that will help them deal with or confront bullying. Some of the social skills that young children require to make and retain friends and to avoid becoming orchestrators of bullying include social problem-solving skills. This includes finding elaborate and effective ways of teaching children the skills relevant for them to solve problems. They also include how to deal with feelings and how to encourage self-calming and impulse control. Other social problem-solving skills include listening skills, how to come up with solutions, how to anticipate consequences, and also how to evaluate violent solutions as harmful.
The second skill that young children should learn is empathy. For young children, empathy skills are very important because it helps them understand the feelings of other children. This is a major deterrent to bullying. Caregivers can help children adopt empathy skills by encouraging them to speak out about their feelings and also share with others how they perceive bullying. They can also help children adopt empathy skills by discussing with them how they or other children might feel as a result of bullying. They can also model empathy in children by talking about and identifying the distress of others and how they can think of ways of helping them.

Another important skill that caregivers have a responsibility of imparting in children to address bullying is assertiveness. It is important to teach children how to ask for things from others and how to offer things to others. The emphasis should be to ensure that this is done in a polite way and also in an open-ended manner. Moreover, assertive skills are important to children as it helps them to avoid being submissive when faced with a bully, bullying tactics, discriminatory acts, and bossiness. Assertive skills are also important in helping children meet their goals. By appreciating the importance of meeting their goals, children will know that they do not have to use others or manipulate others in order to fulfill their needs.

So far, this section has explained the meaning of the phenomenology methodology which is used in this dissertation. Equally, it has provided the research paradigm of the completed research undertaking. The next section (Chapter 4) ventures further into the phenomenon associated with early childhood bullying. It will answer the
research questions by sampling qualitative data derived from semi-structured interviews, documents, and audiovisual materials.

This qualitative data and analysis research will concentrate on collected data and gather stories from preschool teachers, aids, parents, and other caregivers to understand what bullying looks like in the classroom. The collected data will also look at what these teachers are currently doing in their classrooms to understand what interventions and preventions are currently being used and their perceived effectiveness.

**Research Design**

The data was collected utilizing several methods such as surveys, phone calls, as well as in-person interviews. The qualitative study method was chosen, as this research was exploratory in nature. The goal of this research was to gain more information regarding preschool bullying, as there is currently very limited information on this topic. This will be done by capturing the stories of what takes place in the preschool classroom, or as Berg (2009) stated, “to gain a greater depth of understanding” (p. 2). The qualitative nature of the study also had the ability to get at the “what, how, when and where...its essence and ambience” (p. 3). The following qualitative interview questions will be utilized to gain a deeper understanding about a population. The chapter also presents a brief description of the participants’ profiles.

**Interview Questions**

As a parent(s) or a caregiver(s) of a pre-school child:

1) How would you define bullying?
2) How often have you witnessed a preschool age child being physically or emotionally bullied at home and/or at school? Can you describe what you witnessed?

3) How would you interpret repeated aggressive behavior of one child toward another? Bullying or Child play? Please explain your answer.

4) What are your thoughts on school safety and bullying? In what areas of a school do you think most bullying occurs? Why do you think these places represent "risk zones?"

5) What are some ways to eliminate bullying within the school environment? In the home environment?

6) What role(s) do you think race, socioeconomic status, or culture play in bullying?

**Participants’ Profiles**

Privacy and confidentiality are the cornerstones of studies delving into potentially sensitive issues, and researchers can attend to these cornerstones by assigning the participants numbers or aliases (Creswell, 2013). The researcher in this study provided each participant with a participant number (P-1, P-2, etc.) as a means of identification and as an added measure of participant privacy. This existential phenomenological study included 20 participants, from two different preschools, who were individually interviewed using a semi-structured questionnaire in a face-to-face interviewing process. All of the participants self-identified: their position at the preschool, how long they have been working with preschoolers, or whether they were a parent of a preschool-age child. This section highlights their backgrounds and provides an overview of their professional
careers. Higher education is an important factor in this research but does not discriminate those that may have only a high diploma. One of the participants has a Masters in Education, four participants have Bachelor degrees in education, five of the participants have a Bachelor in various degrees, two participants have an AA in computer technology, and the other eight have high school diplomas. The participants in the study have a total of over 275 years of combined childcare service, and some have worked at different schools. While phenomenological approaches focus on the shared experiences of a phenomenon, leading to results that reflect an essence common to all participants, the researcher chose to provide a brief introduction of each individual participant. These are presented below.

**Participant 1.** P-1 is the preschool owner and administrator. She holds an MS in Education (MSED) and has owned the preschool for 15 years. She shared, “I knew early on I wanted to own and operate my own business. My interest was always in early education because this is what my mother did, but she was an employee. I remember going to help out at the daycare where she worked during school breaks and during the summer. I fell in love with little children because they are so impressionable at that tender age. She characterized herself as being extroverted, “very determined, very hardworking, and very motivated to be the best caregiver ever.”

**Participant 2.** P-2 is a male who has worked in the preschool for 15 years as a bus driver. He shared that this was his first job as a driver after graduating from CDL School. P-2 recalled, “I had planned a career as a truck driver but while waiting for a call back this job came through and I’ve been driving ever since. My job is not just a job; it is
a career and lifestyle.” P-2 took pride in sharing: “I hold an AA in computers and work part time as a computer tech, but would not trade my job as a preschool bus driver for nothing in the world.”

**Participant 3.** P-3 described herself as an “introvert” and stated, “If I were asked to describe myself I would use character, integrity, trustworthiness, respect…Those are intangible factors. I want those things to speak for me when I can’t speak for myself.” She has worked as a preschool classroom aide for 28 years and commented, “It’s kind of a career that I actually chose it, so I kind of wanted to do it. I knew when I finished high school where I wanted to go. Although I can retire, I just don’t want to. I love working with little babies.” She mentioned that she has worked in 4 different preschools and daycares during her 28-year career.

**Participant 4.** P-4 has been working with preschoolers for one year doing her internship. She shared, “I see some of the kids here are more aggressive than others and I feel that they are bullies. I don’t want to label them, but there is no other way to describe what I observed.” She went on to say, “I see a couple kids, both boys and girls, being aggressive over and over. When I address the issue the child becomes tearful and scream, 'I want that toy!' To me, that’s aggressive behavior, especially when the child is put into timeout but comes out doing the same thing. I feel that children in preschool can be considered bullies.”

**Participant 5.** P-5 is an elderly employee who said that she has been working with children for “oh so many years, let me see- about 40.” She stated that she started as a volunteer back in high school. She stated, “I have different certificates, but I do not have
a degree in higher education, only a high school diploma, but I’ve been working with preschoolers ever since.” She also stated, “I use to think that when kids fought over a toy it was just child play, I use to laugh and go on but not now. A while back two boys were fighting over a ball when I went to talk to them one of the boys told me, 'Bitch you aren’t my mommy, and you don’t tell me what to do.' I did not know what to think of that. That was an eye-opener for me. Some of the kids constantly hit, kick, name call, and take things from other kids no matter how much they are disciplined.”

Participant 6. P-6 has been working at the same preschool from day one (15 years), when participant P-1 opened her school in 2001. P-6 shared, “I and P-1 have been best friends since we met in college. I stopped at my Bachelor in Psychology, but we stayed in contact. To tell the truth, P-1 is my wife now, and we have three children, one in high school, one in middle school, and one in preschool. Our daughter does not come here. We take her to a different school. We want her to learn social skills without our presence.” Taking a deep breath, P-6 states, “A lot has changed throughout the years. I don’t want to call kids at such young ages 'bullies' but if you are looking at the definition of bullying it would appear that their aggressive repeated behavior could be considered bullying. I feel that children learn from their environment and if they see it they are going to repeat it. So I have to say that the aggressive repeated behavior I see appears to be bullying. Damn, it hurt to say that but…”

Participant 7. P-7 is an aide. He described himself as a dual employee. He said, “I drive the bus and keep the school clean.” P-7 stated that he has an AA in criminal justice but retired after working in the field for 25 years. He shared, “Driving the bus
transporting the little darlings to and from school you hear a lot of whispering, cursing, name calling, and threatening, much more that you would expect for children so young. The two names that the children use most are Nigger and Faggot. I consider that verbal abuse and something that the child heard from home. This is not child play to me. This is just wrong and parents need to talk to their child when they hear this kind of talk around their homes.”

**Participant 8.** P-8 is a parent. She described herself as a well-stabled mom. She stated that she waited until she got her Masters and an established career before having children. She stated that she has a Masters in Special Education but never pursued it; she instead decided to become a flight attendant, where she has 25 years in services. Her insight regarding bullying was, “I do think preschool age children can be bullies. My son is 4-years-old, and for about a week I have been getting calls from his teacher that he is constantly crying. When I talked to him, he said that he doesn't want to go to school anymore. I brushed it off because I thought he was having a hard time getting up early or just wanted to stay home. Then I asked him one day why he didn't want to go and he told me he didn't want to go because of these two boys who call him names because he does not wear Jordan’s.”

**Participant 9.** P-9 is a father who is a single parent of three girls. His wife left the family due to addiction. He stated that he knows that some kids at all ages level can bully others. He wanted to be sure that his identity would not be exposed before making his comment. Once I assured him that everything that he says would be confidential, he stated, “I am a single father. I work hard daily as a sanitation worker. My older daughters
get picked on because of my job but they can stand up for themselves, they are 11 and 12, but my 4-year-old cries a lot when those mean ass kids make comments about my job. She can’t understand that I make more money than some people with 4 years of college. I never went to college. I got this job right out of high school because my father works for the city as well. So, yes, preschoolers can be mean and bullies.”

Participant 10. P-10 is a teacher who has just finished college (2016) with a Bachelor of Education with an emphasis in Early Childhood. She shared that she did her internship at this preschool and was excited that she was offered a job with the school. She stated, “due to the lack of early childhood bullying research, it appears that some parents and teachers do not think that the aggressive behavior that ‘babies’ project should be considered bullying.” She stated, “I know better from my years of study and I also did several papers on early childhood bullying, and I understand that although they are very young, the aggressive behavior does create a constant fear in their victims.” P-10 also shared a reference from a paper that she wrote that states, “Studies have found that kids who are repeatedly bullied are especially vulnerable to the negative impact of bullying on their health, including lower self-esteem, more symptoms of severe depression, greater likelihood of using alcohol or drugs, or other effects that compromise not just mental health, but also physical health” (Ellis, R 2014).

Participant 11. P-11 is a big sister to a little brother. She was picking on him, and I just had to ask her how she felt when it came to early childhood bullying. She stated, “I pick up my brother because my parents work late. I am 19-years-old and am in my freshman year of college, and my little brother is 4…go figure. My little brother is a
bully. My parents let him have his way, and that’s why I agree little kids can be aggressive and bullies. My little brother will kick and hit me if I don’t do what he asks. When I hit him back, of course, my mother says, ‘he is a baby, and you need to stop hitting him back and let him have his way.’ But you know something, now that my little brother is in school my mother now has to eat those words because when he does not get his way at school he acts out and my parents get a phone call.” P-11 went on to say, “I am studying social work right now, but after talking to you about early childhood bullying, I am going to change my degree to child psychology.”

**Participant 12.** P-12 stated, “I am a mother who is in the military. I went into the military because I am a single parent and I wanted to do well by my child. When I got pregnant, my son’s father and I planned to marry, but he was shot and killed during a drive-by. I promised myself that I would not get welfare or food stamps. I felt that college would take too long and cost too much so I decided to enlist in the Army. My son spends time with both paternal and maternal grandparents. He’s three and a half, and I just put him in school. I saw that he was being spoiled and was very aggressive when he plays with other children, which showed me that he needs to develop his social skills. My son takes toys from others kids, he hits, kicks, spits, etc. He learned that from his cousins who are older and do the same. When he goes to the park, he throws sand and rocks at the other people. I say people because he does not care how big the person is. Right now people will say, ‘oh that’s okay,’ but how long is that going to last and is it going to be okay when he hits their little boy or girl? His grandparents, uncles, and auntie think it is soo cute but I think it is bullying and I don’t like it. I am going to be deployed for 6
months, and I told my family that I want my child to learn how to share and get along with others.”

**Participant 13.** P-13 stated, “Child I am the mother of 8, a grandma of 35, and a great-grandma of 3. I am retired, but I work as a cafeteria worker for many years. I only have a 9th-grade education. I am from South Carolina. There I worked in the cotton mills. I always was taught that if the child is younger than you, you give the younger child what they are having a fit for. That’s the way I was raised. That’s the way I raised my children, and that’s what I think should be done. Preschool children don’t know about no bullying they are just babies. I see bullying in my neighborhood, but it is them big bad ass ‘Chaps.’ That’s what we called children in SC, Chaps.”

**Participant 14.** P-14 are the parents of a mentally challenged child. The parents both stated that they are Ministers of God and have seen both love and abuse towards their child because of his Down syndrome. They both shared that their child is 7, but with his diagnosis he has the capacity of a 3-4-year-old. The parents stated, “we did everything right, ate right, took my prenatal, went to lamas class, and never missed a doctor visit, but when our little angel was born it was a blessing after we got over the shock. We prayed, cried, but never did we want to disown our son. God showed us the love that he brought to our family. Yes, he gets stares, but it’s okay because we let him know that he is an angel of God and some people don’t understand. At church, he’s treated nice, but since he’s been in the preschool, he said that the children wouldn't throw the ball to him. He said that he sits by himself during lunch. It makes me sad and yes I do cry, but I never let
him see me cry. My husband and I are both 40-years-old and have Bachelor of Arts degrees in Religion. We met in college.”

Participant 15. Just as I started to interview P-15, the mother of 5 children, her daughter ran up crying and stated, “Mommy, that girl that I told you that always calls me names is calling me the 'B' word again. Mommy,” the child cried, “she is a bully. I hate bullies.” P-15 (Mommy) is a single mom by choice who is a 7th grade teacher. She stated, “I have a Bachelor in education and I have been teaching for 9 years at a public school that has been a B-rating school for the past 5 years, however, that’s great because when I started it was a C+ school. It is predominantly African American. I teach here because this is where I went to school and I remember when I was in school bullying was an issue, but it was in junior high, not preschool. Nowadays it appears to be amongst little kids and children. It’s sad that our little kids can’t go to school without someone picking on them.”

Participant 16. P-16 is a mother who owns and operates a beauty business and works as a licensed cosmetologist. She started out wanting to be a nurse but changed her mind after a child with a gunshot wound died right before her eyes. She stated, “That was the worst thing I ever experienced. I said then 'I can’t, I just can’t.' I went home and told my parents, and they told me to go with my gut. My gut lead me to become a successful business owner. I have 3 shops and glory be to God they all are doing well.” P-16 sighed before she shared, “My daughter, who is 6 now, used to go to a dance class every Friday night. One night when I picked her up, she said to me 'Mommy this girl told me not to play with another girl and if I continue to play with that girl she will kill me.' My
daughter stated that when she started down the stairs, that same girl hit her in her back. Girl, you talk about a mad mother, I was one. I told my daughter the next time that happens to knock the #@%& out of that girl. It just so happened that my sister was there and heard me tell my daughter that. My sister said that’s not the right thing to tell my niece. I agreed but at the time I was so upset, and I had a flashback to when we were growing up we fought back.”

Participant 17. P-17 is a School Resource Officer (SRO). He described himself as a sworn law enforcement officer who is responsible for providing security and crime prevention services in school environments. He stated, “I have been in the school system for 3 years, and talking about bullying I think I have seen it done in all types of ways. Children can be brutal. There are so many “cliques” or gangs, if I may. I don’t have children, and I can’t speak about preschool bullying as an experienced parent, but I can say bullying is painful to both male and female, no matter how old or young. My definition of bullying is repeated aggressive behavior of one person towards another so if that is happening by a preschooler, yes, in my opinion, preschoolers can be seen as bullying. Parents, teachers, and other caregivers should not use it while they are young. It would make my job a lot easier.”

Participant 18. P-18 is a case manager at a mental health clinic who has a 3-year-old in preschool. She described herself as a very busy mom who is studying for her Masters, works 40 hours a week, and is pregnant with her second child. P-18 stated, “Yes, I do feel that preschoolers can become bullies if we as parents don’t stop the unwanted behavior at home. Right now my child is an only child, and he is not used to sharing his
toys, so when we go visit I see him not engaging very well. I told my husband that we need to put him in daycare so he can learn social skills prior to school days. My husband agreed, and we did. We received a few calls from his teacher stating that our son was pretty much bullying others (hitting, yelling, taking toys from others, and most of all throwing tantrums) when he does not get his way. We started talking to him, explaining that he has to learn to share with others because he is about to have a new little baby sister and he has to be nice to her. Well, needless to say, we along with his teacher do see a slight change in his behavior but have a long way to go.”

**Participant 19.** P-19 is a mother who shares that her children are being bullied now due to her current situation of homeless. She is the mother of 3, 2 girls and 1 boy. “Please forgive me if I cry,” she stated. “My life is in ruins now. My children are so sad, and I am so depressed. I was living on top of the world then it all came tumbling down when I found out about my husband’s infidelity. I was a stay-at-home mother because my husband wanted to be the breadwinner. Now at 35-years-old, I and my 3 children, 2 girls and 1 boy live from family to family and shelter to shelter. My children are 3, 10, and 15. My children get picked on by both young and old because we are homeless, my kids don’t dress like the other kids, and they don’t get dropped off at school in a fancy car. My 15-year-old is always getting into fights because she is trying to protect her 3-year-old brother and 10-year-old sister. To answer your question, I think kids at all age levels bully. With today’s images, music, TV shows, and the lack of parenting skills, where all the mothers want to do is get their weave and nails done and get to the club every weekend, who's raising the kids? I work 2 jobs (fast food) and live in one room in a
shelter while trying to study to become an armed security officer. I stop trying to tell my kids not to bully back. I know it is not the solution, but I am just tired. Thank you for letting me vent!”

**Participant 20.** P-20 is a grandmother who is raising her 7 and 4-year-old grandchildren due to her daughter being incarcerated for drug trafficking. P-20 works at a call center. She stated, “Lord, here I go again raising children because my daughter is going to be gone for a long, long time. My grandchildren get picked on by the children in the neighborhood. It occurs at the park and at the bus stop. The children hear the grownups talking about their mother and when they get to the playground and/or bus stop the kids make fun of them saying things like 'your mom is in prison, she a bad women, your mama is going to die in jail, or you are going to be just like your mommy, in jail.' I don’t blame the children who pick on my grandchildren; I blame the parents who are making these comments. Children repeat what they hear. I don’t want to say preschoolers are bullies because my 4-year-old grandchild is not a bully. I blame the environment in which many children live in that causes them to act and be the way they are.”
Table 2

Participant Demographics

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<th>Pseudonym</th>
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Chapter Summary

Chapter 3 discusses the research methodology that will be employed in the qualitative study, which is that of a phenomenological research design. Finally, this chapter discussed the appropriateness of the research design, the population, assumptions and limitations, and ethical assurances. The following chapter includes information on the data collection process as well as data analyses, which include identifying themes from the answers of the participating respondents, the results for this study which will be examined and assessed.
Chapter 4: Execution of the Study, Methods, and Participants

This qualitative study was conducted according to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) guidelines. The researcher agreed to ethical and reliable practices. The research contents have been accepted, and all measurements and results will remain confidential. The qualitative data was collected by conducting face-to-face interviews utilizing approved prepared questions. The preschool participants (administrators, teachers, bus drivers, and aides) understood that they were part of a research project and all parties’ privacy will be maintained.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to gain an understanding of the work/life as experienced by individual caregivers who have worked or have children of the preschool age and who have observed aggressive behavior from one preschooler toward other preschoolers. Because of the analysis of the information presented by the participants, the following themes and sub-themes emerged, relevant to the lived experiences of this sample of caregivers of preschool age children.

Although bullying is not a new topic, much more focus has been placed on this troublesome social phenomenon during the past few years. However, studies addressing the issue of bullying during the preschool period are still extremely rare. This apparent lack of interest in victimized preschoolers should be viewed with respect to the methodological constraints projected upon researchers. This study defines bullying as “an aggressive behavior of intentional ‘harm doing,’ which is carried out repeatedly and over time within a personal relationship characterized by an imbalance of power” (Olweus, D., 1999). The study seeks to identify different forms of bullying and the central roles of
preschoolers. The proposed research also seeks to explore how children at such a young age learn bullying behavior. The driving inquiry of this research proposal is to understand that even though bullying does happen in preschools, the subtleties of determining what is normal at this age are complex (Selk, K., 2010), as well as how a caregiver can know what they see on the playground. This chapter presents the results of the study, provides a discussion of the emerging themes, and culminates in the final results.

The findings of this study suggest that the participants largely believe that bullying does occur in preschool. The participants’ view bullying seen in all age groups as a set of behaviors, which include verbal, physical, and relational excluding others from play, conditional threats, and the participants' perception of seeing one child repeated aggressive behavior toward another child were the three conditions most likely to be associated with bullying. The majority of the participants felt that bullying could occur in a single incident, and only one in twenty agreed with the notion that children's actions must be intentional to be considered bullying. The study did not appear to raise questions about whether current interpretations of bullying in the literature are suitable for children in the context of preschool.

The review and analysis of the information provided by the participants revealed the following five primary themes: 1) Defining bullying 2) The most common type of bullying preschoolers engage in 3) What age is too young to be considered a bully 4) Is the behavior environmental or nurture 5) Prevention/Intervention (see Figure 4). In addition to the primary themes, there were a host of sub-themes, which will be discussed below. From the interviews, the researcher progressed to developing thematic structure.
The thematic structure is the descriptions and representations provided by the participants, which illuminated an ‘interrelationship’ and ‘connectedness’ of the emerging themes.

*Figure 3. Emergent Themes.*

**Theme 1: Define bullying in your own words.**

One of the hurdles to defining and understanding the perception of preschool bullying is that people have differing views on what actually constitutes a bullying incident. To begin the discussion, it is significant to work from a common definition of bullying. That, in and of itself, has been a debate over the years. An explicit, common definition of bullying is hard to come by, as few can agree on a single definition.

“Research has shown that one of the discerning characteristics of whether or not someone perceives an incident as an act of bullying is if the act in question matches their own personal definition of bullying” (Mishna et al., 2006). “Further, other external
factors that have not yet been studied could exist that influence personal definitions” (Bradshaw & Waasdorp, 2009).

P-1. Defining bullying was the first and foremost theme that was emphasized by Participant 1. Participant 1 stated, “I happen to think that much of our work in tackling bullying is hamstrung by different opinions and disagreements about how we should define ‘bullying.’ As a mother, first and preschool owner and administrator, I see repeated aggressive behavior as learned behavior from the child environment.” Participant 1 shared that she sees children as sponges, they absorb everything they see and hear. She continued by adding: “if the child lives in an environment with hitting, kicking, taking things from others, etc. and is never redirected, or redirected with hitting and things being taken from them, then we cannot expect the child to understand that in the real-world others are not going to accept their behavior.” She concluded by sharing that years back she probably would never call a child a bully at such a young age, however, “the children who come to the school now are very aggressive and sometimes when I talk to the parent I see where it comes from.”

P-2. “As a male and father, I feel preschoolers could be bullies BUT who wants their son to be picked on? I recall my son coming home crying. I had a fit.” Participant 2 admitted that he told his son to retaliate. He stated, “I told him when you go to school tomorrow you better kick that boy’s ass because boys don’t cry.” He said that was the way he was raised. He shared: “On my bus, I see so much bullying, but it is usually the girls telling other girls not to sit or talk to other girls. At first, I thought it was just little girls being little girls, but now with this new generation, these girls are mean. They call
each other bitches, whores, talk about each other clothes, shoes, and hair. All I can do sometimes is shake my head. So, if that is what it’s called bullying, then YES preschoolers can are bullies.”

**P-3.** “Well, I think that all that name calling, like if one child is constantly calling another child names like stupid, ugly, or something, yes that is a form of bullying but I don’t know if the child understands what he/she is doing or saying.” Participant 3 stated that a person does not have to be physical to be a bully. She went on to say, “A person doesn’t have to always hit someone to be considered a bully. They can exclude other children from joining activities which is a form of inappropriate behavior toward others.”

**P-4.** “Being the only child I went to a private school, and I did not get bullied there, and if I did, I did not realize it.” Participant 4 shared her race: “No, I don’t mind sharing that I am white. I’ve heard so many horrible things about the intercity school I decided that I wanted to give back and be a teacher in the intercity. I am doing my internship here at this preschool, and yes, I do hear a lot of name calling and threatening.” She also said that she did not want to label any child at the school. She stated: “That's all I need as a white person is to label a child at this school. When I have to talk to a parent I say to them …your child has been a bit more aggressive than normal.” I feel that I must be careful with what I say… but bottom line the behavior is that of bullies. It’s repeated, aggressive, verbal, relational, and sometimes physical.”

**P-5.** “Children, so sweet and innocent,” stated Participant 5. She continued sharing how she ‘hates’ to label young children as bullies but she also said how she noticed how things have changed over the years. She shared: “Some children are just so
mean and hateful that I can’t help but to call them as they appear to be a… bully. I say that because I have seen some children picking on the same child until that child kick their butt. Yes, things have changed over the 40 years that I have been working with children.”

P-6. “Yes ma’am, bottom line some of our little angles are bullies. I do believe it is a learned behavior. They learn it from their environment.” Participant 6 expressed that most children learn inappropriate behavior from home where they may have older brothers and sisters. He continued to say, “Some of them live in homes where there is physical abuse committed by their parents as well as their older sibling(s). One day I overheard this little girl tell this other little girl if you don’t give me your chips at lunch I am going to get you. I had noticed that the little girl was giving her food away at lunch, but I thought it was by choice until I overheard that little girl threatens the other little girl. I am talking about 4 years old.”

P-7. “Like I said earlier, the children I drive back and forth to school are very ugly to each other, especially the girls. It’s more like scheming, which happens in groups. It’s not like one-on-one, it more like a group of girls bullying one girl.”

P-8. “OMG, children are supposed to be nice to each other. That’s what I teach my son,” Participant 8 shared. She said that she tells her son that he should never hit a girl, and to use the terms “excuse me, thank you, and I am sorry because politeness and concerns for the rights and feelings of others in our society seem to have phased out.” She stated, “Yes, I do believe that preschoolers can be bullies because when the children pick on my son because he does not wear Jordan’s they are hurting him intentionally and that to me is a repeated mean action…bullying.” She also commended researcher for the
study: “It is great that you are doing this interview because there is something that got to be done to stop preschoolers from growing up to be adult bullies.”

P-9. “Yep...some of these kids are so mean and nasty to be so young. I know that it is wrong but I told my children if they are picked on to fight back. I do have to go to the school quite a bit but I don’t care. I am a single father and I don’t want my children to be messed with because of my job or because my wife left. Every day, it doesn’t matter where on the bus, at school, or in the front yard, there is someone saying something mean to my children. It is always the same three girls.” Participant 9 shared that sometimes other girls join the 3 girls to ‘poke fun’ at his children. He said that he does not allow his children out of the yard because he doesn't live in the best neighborhood and they get picked on about where they live as well. He yelled: “I get so mad just talking about it. Hell, yeah those bitches that keep taunting my children are bullies.”

P-10. In conversation Participant 10 stated her concerns over the fact that some of the very young seem to be very aggressive towards their peers and her colleagues don’t seem to see a problem with it. In continuing the dialogue, Participant 10 also stated: “I’ve done several studies during my Bachelor on early childhood bullying and the behaviors, and I went to visit a couple of preschools and what I’ve witnessed has been classic textbook definitions of bullying at their young age.” Participant 10 concluded with: “I would say 100% preschoolers can be bullies.”

P-11. While speaking with the big sister of a little brother whose mother accused her of bullying her little brother, she assured that she was responding in a defending way rather than initiating the bullying. Further conversation revealed that her mother did not
see his behavior, due to his age, as being bullying. She said: “*My mother got a rude awakening when she put my little brother in school and started getting constant phone calls from the school regarding his behavior while interacting with the other kids.*” Participant 11 said her mother finally realized that things that he did at home that allowed him to get his way were seen at school for what they really were, and that was bullying.

**P-12.** Participant 12 shared with me her feelings by stating: “I *don’t feel that when I’m deployed anything will be done to tone down his behavior because for one thing they think it’s cute. I want this bad behavior nipped in the bud so it won’t become a tree but I’m the only one who seems concerned about it.*” Participant 12 went on to share: “*None of the Grandparents are trying to tone his behavior down, and it will soon be too late for them to do it as they are getting up in age.*” Participant 12’s main concern was she could not take him with her and the only options that she had in leaving him here were not good ones.

**P-13.** Participant 13 stated: “*Being the family elder with so many children, grand and great grand, I know a little something about kids. Little children and babies don’t know anything about how to bully. They are just interacting with each other.*” Participant 13 went on to further state: “*Kids are always fussing and arguing over toys and attention. That doesn’t make them bullies.*” Participant 13 feels that it is the older kids who get together and decide to make fun of and tease other kids who are not a part of their individual circles, she considers older kids as bullies.

**P-14.** Participant 14 and his wife covertly felt that they were responsible for their son’s lack of development before he was born by possibly not doing something they were
supposed to do. Participant 14 said: “Even though now we know that’s not true, we still feel a heavy responsibility for providing for him as normal a life as is possible in spite of the obstacles in the way of that task.” Participant 14 concluded his dialogue by sharing that his son’s mental capacity makes it harder for him to understand how he is different from the other kids and that he hopes that with God’s help they can help him to grow in his world and enjoy life in his own way as best is possible.

**P-15.** Participant 15 said she now realized that children’s behaviors have not changed over the years, but what has changed is how we categorize them. She said: “When I was younger, we didn’t associate babies and preschoolers as being bullies. We considered their behavior to be cute and felt that they would simply outgrow the aggression as they got older.” Participant 15 further shared her feelings in the matter by admitting how wrong she was. “It doesn’t go away automatically with age,” she said. “Without the proper attention to the issue, it simply grows with the child,” and with that admission being said, Participant 15 also stated: “That being said, I instructed my child to defend herself when she is attacked by that little girl. It may not stop her from being a bully, but it will stop her from bullying her.”

**P-16.** Participant 16 stated: “I felt that my sister was right. However, her advice would not keep my daughter from being picked on by that girl, and then who knows, other girls might join in on the ‘fun.’” Participant 16 felt that even though she agreed with what her sister was saying, it did not change what she told her daughter to do.

**P-17.** Participant 17 spoke of how he saw bullying, and felt sorry for the bullied. However, he felt there was not much he could do about it other than to stop it at the time
and write the report. “I can’t travel around with the student all day,” he said. It was with
remorse that Participant 17 admitted: “Eventually, the student and the parents will have
to take measures themselves to bring it to an end.” He feels it may involve putting the
student in a different school, where it can happen again, or taking the child and putting
them into self-defense classes so that they can better defend themselves.

**P-18.** Participant 18 stated: “We now realize that expecting teachers to change
him is not their job. The change has to begin at home. More time has to be spent with him
at home which is where most of his time will be spent.” Participant 18 admitted that they
can’t wait until his baby sister gets here to start changing his ways. They know it may be
too late then. They also understand that the process will not happen overnight. They
know they have to teach him how to share and how to not be self-indulgent. It seemed as
though they fully realized the issue, because Participant 18 further stated: “We must
instill in him the desire to include others in what he is doing and how to be a team player.
Most of all we have to spend more time with him so that he doesn’t mind including others
in what he is doing.”

**P-19.** Participant 19 stated: “I don’t get to share my feelings very often and
sometimes I just need to hear them so that I can get the strength to continue on. I’m not
looking for sympathy; I just want my kids to survive their childhood and grow up to be
decent law-abiding citizens.” Participant 19 described the kids as good kids, but that she
cannot always be with them to protect them from bullying. She feels that as they get older
they can look out for each other, but until then her oldest daughter is doing what she can
to help to minimize the bullying. Participant 19’s apparent relief in the help given by the
oldest daughter was expressed in her statement: “That is a big help to me because all of my energy is used trying to keep a roof over their heads and food on the table.”

**P-20.** Participant 20 stated: “As I said when we first started this interview, I don’t feel children that young know what bullying is. I define bullying as big kids picking on...on weak or small children.” Participant 20 feels the children around here hear their mamas talking about her daughter being in jail. It makes her sad but she realizes that her grandchildren have to live with it. She does not blame the children who pick on her grandchildren; she blames the parents who are saying things about her situation. Participant 20 then rationalized the children’s actions by stating: “Children repeat what they hear. I can’t agree with people that think preschoolers are bullies because my 4-year-old grandchild is not a bully. I blame the environment in which many children live that causes them to act and be the way they are. They are not bullies, they are just repeating what they heard.”

**Theme 2: What types of bullying are most common amongst preschoolers?**

The theme of types of bullying was powerful amongst the participants, as they recalled their encounters with bullying behaviors. All 20 of the participants discussed having had to deal with bullying behaviors directly or indirectly. All 20 participants agreed that bullying is a hurtful behavior that occurs repeatedly. All 20 participants seem to agree on three forms of bullying, but 10 of the participants emphasized bullying as verbal, physical, and relational.

**Type 1: Verbal bullying** is described as spoken words that are hurtful. A child incurs pain and embarrassment when they are called names, teased, or disrespected in an
inappropriate manner, such as making disrespectful comments about someone's attributes (appearance, religion, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, etc.).

One of the simplest types of bullying, but simultaneously one of the most hurtful to a bully's victim, is verbal bullying. Verbal bullying may begin at a very early age with childish name calling and taunting. Although this behavior may seem commonplace and unthreatening to a parent or an older person who has heard these taunts before, it can be devastating to a child.

Verbal bullying may continue throughout a child's young life as well, although it oftentimes becomes more subtle. From basic putdowns to more complicated mental games, bullies can break down your child's emotional health in a variety of different ways through the words that they use.

P-5. “I never thought about preschool bullying or looked at it in that light.”
Participant 5 recalled and shared a confrontation that she had once when she confronted a child regarding him picking on another child: “I was shocked by the retort of the young boy and really didn’t know how to handle that. I wondered how long this child has had a mouth like that while at the same time I figured he must have learned that at home.”

P-7. “As the aide/bus driver at the preschool, what I hear most is verbal truanting and mean word. This is a good question, something I never thought of, but now that I am presented with the subject in that light I recalled conversations I had overheard between kids when conversing with each other.” He went on to say, “On listening to these kids I knew that they had to be learning what they were saying at home. They brought it here amongst their friends and it became ‘each one teach one’ type of thing. It brings to
question if the parents realize or care what their children are picking up from them and the behaviors that are being paired up with the dialogues.”

P-8. “About preschool bullying, my negligence in observing, recognizing, and investigating my son’s issues in school earlier could have and should have been addressed sooner. However, now that I know there is a problem, that is at the top of my to-do list as far as important matters to handle is concerned.” Participant 8 shared overhearing “criticizing” talking about others' attire, “such as ugly shoes, cheap shoes, omg it's all about the shoes.”

P-9. “Name calling…whether it is calling their mother all kinds of names or talking about my job. I never thought of my job as being an issue of concern for my child in school. I always felt I make a good honest living that more than adequately provides my family with everything they want. Problem is I didn’t realize it doesn’t provide them with status due to parental employment in the eyes of their peers, and regardless of how personally comfortable they were with the fruit of my labor, it did nothing for them as far as their embarrassment due to the type of work I do.”

Type 2: Physical bullying is typically done by larger students or older children who have a size advantage over other children. When most people think of bullying, they think of physical bullying. Physical bullying generally consists of any type of bullying that involves injury to a child. The injury may be obvious to the adult, or they may not realize it has happened. Physical bullying not only provides a danger to a child's physical health, as some bullying injuries can be quite serious, but it also can have a negative
effect on a child's emotional health as well. Prompt attention to physical bullying is necessary to ensure that children don't have barriers toward their happiness.

**P-5.** “Again, I never thought about preschool bullying or looked at it in that light. However, now I am being interviewed I am thinking about so much stuff that I literally never paid any attention to. Girls mostly call her names and won’t play with others. Boys have this tug-a-war thing going on. Why, if there are 5 red cars, one kid will try or take the one that the other kid is playing with. Yes, I laugh, but I know that it is not just child play due to things I see in the news about kids getting bullied.”

**P-11.** “My brother is a little monster.” Participant 11 described her brother as one who hits, kicks, throws himself to the floor, yells, screams, and isolates himself. She states: “OMG, should I go farther? I am so glad that you presented this research topic to me. I get to talk about it in this light and I talk to my parents about my bothers actions. My brother can be in the grocery store and he will throw things from our cart at other kids. The first time it was cute, the second time he hit a kid in the eye and the mother did not find it cute and the store manager has to write an incident report.” She shared a brief example of confrontation she had with her parents regarding her brother. She added, “It seems my little brother is smart enough to know how to do his bullying and then hide behind mom’s skirt. That worked fine for him here at home but it painted a different picture when he started school. Mother’s skirt wasn’t there to hide behind and other people and kids didn’t find his behavior to be so cute.”

**P-12.** “I never thought about a child bullying at this age, but my son and the definition of bully describe his action to a Tee. I didn’t realize that the way he plays with
his relatives had become his norm and that he thought that was the way it was supposed to be with everybody. His paternal and maternal family naturally sees nothing wrong with his behavior.”

P-18. “I feel a lot of the behaviors our little angels have comes from home ...but...my husband and I call ourselves doing, saying, acting, watching the right TV shows, the whole nine yard and our son still bullying. WHY?? Because he is so spoiled. After getting those calls from school regarding his interaction with his classmates we come to the realization that our son was going to have to learn to share with others and that it wasn’t going to happen overnight or come automatically, especially when he was used to being the only one to receive the positive attention. I see that he has to start learning now and that teaching him to share with others is most urgent as he needs to start exercising that behavior right now.”

Type 3: Relational Bullying, an even more painful type of bullying, is one that hurts a child on the inside. Relational bullying is a hidden type of aggression (or hostile behavior) where peers harm "others through purposeful manipulation and damaging of their peer relationships" (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995).

P-14. “Having a disability gave reason to children with ‘normal’ faculties to use our son as a whipping post. They isolated him from their group sports functions and ignored him during lunch time, further accentuating the fact to him that he was different. They treated him differently but in a negative way. I don’t want to look at it as bullying, I look at it as children who do not know how to include a disabled child. But I am preparing myself for the middle/high school days.”
P-16. “On learning from my daughter that she was being taunted by a fellow classmate and threatened with physical violence, I stepped outside the box and gave her the okay to defend herself. Sometimes the abnormal is the only solution to resolve in circumstances that on their own merit are also outside the box. I felt bad about it later but not bad enough to feel that she shouldn’t have done it.”

Theme 3: What age is too young to be considered a bully?

During this research, it was obvious that some of the participants found it hard to believe that bullying could start at such an early age of 3, or in some cases as early as 2. Parents, educators, and other caregivers in the early childhood setting often overlook bullying for a variety of reasons: 1) Could be because children at such early age are looked to be too naïve and innocent to be bullies, and 2) the child’s aggressive behavior may be dismissed or accepted by saying “kids will be kids,” and 3) others may blame the child’s environment. What we fail to realize is that early or “pre-bullying” behavior can and will turn into elementary, middle, and high school bullying if we do not put preventive actions in place.

P-1. “It pains me as a parent and administrator to admit it, but YES there are some kids that I just cannot help identifying them as bullies. I call their parents in for conferences, but I am very careful what terminology I use. Let me tell you I have a lady working for me once, and she told one of the parents that her son was always bullying other kids. That parent took her son out of the school because she felt that her son was being labeled.”
P-3. “Well, like I said earlier, I think that all that name calling, hitting, taking things from others constantly. Yes, that is bullying, but I don’t know if the child understands what he/she is doing or saying. So it hard for me to say yes or no to 3-year-old kids being considered bullies.”

P-4. “This was very surprising to me but during my studies I found out that at the age of 3-years-old, children can show bullying tendencies. It usually begins at home with other siblings or on the playground with their friends. But due to the age of the child it considered child play because it is conducted in the form of not wanting to take turns going down the slide, refusing to share their toys, and taking items from other children. Caregivers usually say they are just children. With statements like that, parents and caregivers are (unknowingly) giving approval to bullying behavior.”

P-6. “Yes ma’am some of our little angles are bullies.” Participant 6 revealed that he feels that children learn their inappropriate behavior towards others from their environment. He exclaimed, “Children aren’t born racist and bullying, they adapt to what they see and hear. Like I said earlier most of the children that are so mean is because they got older brothers and sisters. Some of them live in homes where there is physical abuse committed by their parents. One day I overheard this little girl tell this other little girl if you don’t give me your chips at lunch I am going to get you. I AM TALKING ABOUT 4 YEARS OLDS.”

P-8. “OMG, Yes, I do believe that preschoolers can be bullies because the children who pick on my son because he does not wear Jordan’s appear to do it daily. It’s the same ones. That’s nothing but bullying. They like to see him become upset and cry.”
They are hurting him intentionally and that to me is a repeated mean action...bullying. They are not too young to be called bullies.”

P-10. “I have a concern over the fact that some of the very young seem to be very aggressive towards their peers and my colleagues don’t seem to see a problem with it. I’ve done several studies during my Bachelor on early childhood bullying and the behaviors and I went to visit a couple preschools and what I’ve witnessed has been classic textbook definitions of bullying at their young age. I would say 100% preschoolers can be bullies.”

P-13. “I just can’t bring myself to accept babies being called bullies. We have been told that if you call a child stupid, dumb, and so on they grow up believing it. So why call children bullies.” Participant 13 feels that if a child is called a bully they will wear that label and grow up being a bully. Little children and babies don’t know anything about how to bully. They are just interacting with each other. Kids are always fussing and arguing over toys and attention. That doesn’t make them bullies.”

P-15. “I’m torn, I just don’t know, I just don’t feel they know what they are doing. I am from another country and in my country children at the age of 2-5 are looked at as children who are learning how to communicate and socialize. In Jamaica, we just overlook it when kids are fighting over a ball, or the little girls say to other we are not going to play with you. We just didn’t associate babies and preschoolers as being bullies. We considered their behavior to be cute and felt that they would simply outgrow the aggression as they got older.”
P-20. “I guess I am from the old school and I don’t believe that children at the age of 3 know what they are doing. As I said before, they just want what they want. Lord knows I just don’t think children that young should be called a bully. They just babies, middle school age children...yes...but 3 years old no...no...they just trying to get what they want and taking from the other child is them just being babies.”

Theme 4: How do preschoolers learn bullying behavior?

P-1. Participant 1 reiterated her statement that she made at the beginning of the interview as she stated: “As indicated in the beginning of this interview I am a mother first, and preschool owner and administrator second. I see repeated aggressive behavior as learned behavior from the child’s environment.” She continued saying that she feels children are like sponges they soak up everything they see and hear. If the child lives in an environment where beating them, yelling, cursing are acceptable then they are going to repeat what they hear. She states: “I saw a little girl spanking and scolding her baby doll. When I asked her why she was doing that she replied, ‘this is what mommy does when I am bad.’ The children who come to the school now are very aggressive and upon speaking to some of the parents I see where it comes from.”

P-6. “Yes, ma, where else do children that young learn behaviors. They learn it from their environment. Some of the children got older brothers and sisters. Some of them live in homes where there is abuse. They watch adult TV shows.” Participant 6 added, while laughing: “Hell, cartoons are not safe anymore.”

P-9. “Yep...some of the kids are so mean and nasty, but they get it from what they hear. If the grown-ups keep negative comments out of their mouths the kids would not say
hurtful things. Ma’am, it just dawned on me that I am one of those grown-ups which are saying the wrong things to my children. I will stop telling them to retaliate. I am going to change my wicked ways. Thank you for opening my eyes.”

P-11. “My brother definitely learns his behavior from home. My dad and mom would insist that I give my brother everything he asked for because he is a baby. My dad shows him how to punch, and there is cursing around my house. We are a home of the 21st century. We listen to rap music, and we watch realities shows, and yes we are exposed to a lot of stuff from those shows but since my parents got that rude awakening from the preschool where they started getting constant phone calls from the school regarding his behavior regarding his interacting with the other kids I see change.”

P-12. “This unacceptable behavior started at home. My baby is so spoiled, not only by his grandparents, but the entire family both nuclear and extended. When his father died, everyone stepped in and started to be father, uncle, brother, and grandfather. Yes, I want this bad behavior nipped in the bud so it won’t become a tree but I’m the only one who seems concerned about it. It hard to go against the family members, especially the grandparents, but thanks to this interview, I feel that I have some ammunition to fight with. I’m going to show them these questions that you are asking me and explain to them that if we don’t start working on changing his behavior it will become a factor later on.”

P-17. “Where else can children that young learned such behavior if not from their environment. I learned from my psychology class that some educationalists believed that children are born as “blank slates” and I agree. Children are not born racist, or as bullies, they learn these things from what they hear or see. I believe that babies hear
people around saying things like 'stop' and 'no' and usually those are the 2 words they learn first. Children are not inherent good or evil. I remember when I was a resource officer for a middle school and these 6th grade girls got into a fight and their parents were called. OMG, the parents were worse than the 6th graders. They went on so bad that we had to call for back-up for fear that the parents were going to fight. That was just many of the experiences. I said to myself now we see where the kids got it from. Children at preschool age and younger are so impressionable it is not hard for parents and other adults to mold the child with careful diligence.”

P-18. “We know that our son learned behavioral from home because every time he asks or cries we give it to him. And when he is around his little cousin or friends he takes a thing from others, and we always say play nice and look the other way instead of talking to our child about sharing and how to ask for things instead of snatching things out of other children hands. We will spend more time with him teaching him social skills.”

P-20. “I can’t change my feeling and like I said when we first meet I don’t feel that children that young know what bullying is. I define bullying as big kids picking on...on weak or small children. The children around here hear their mama talking about my daughter being in jail. If the grow-ups stop saying things around the child then child will not know what’s going on. So yes, that learned behavior came from home. Again, I don’t blame the children who pick on my grandchildren. I blame the parents who are saying things about her situation. Children repeat what they hear. I can’t agree with people that think preschoolers are bullies because my 4-year-old grandchild is not a
bully. I blame the environment in which many children live that causes them to act and be the way they are. They are not bullies they are just repeating what they heard.”

**Theme 5: Preventions/Interventions**

The last theme that materialized during data analysis was how to prevent preschoolers from bullying, and if the preschoolers are bullying what interventions can and should be utilized to alleviate the suffering of other preschoolers by their peers. This question was one about which all 20 participants were eager to share their perspective.

**P-1.** “I feel that children exhibit aggressive behavior or bully towards others in preschool because their social and behavioral demands in a preschool setting is different from their home environments, where children may experience some predictable challenges that can result in aggressive responses. They have to get used to change such as class behavior learning to communicate with children of different language and cooperative activities or play. Some of our children may be the only child and is used to having everything to his or herself. Now they are put into an environment where they must learn how to share. My prevention/intervention is teaching feeling awareness and social problem-solving skills along with respecting other.” Participant 1 continued, “I must say as an administrator/teacher I send age-appropriate material home to the parents often. I do this so they can review it periodically with the child, especially the ones that have behavioral issues”

**P-2.** “I think prevention and intervention should begin at home. Teach the child to say good morning, please, excuse me, may I have, can we share, thank you, etc. If the
child gets the root of good behavior from home, he/she will not have problems with others, and if he/she is having problems with bullies, teach them how to walk away and stay away from that person.”

P-3. “Well, I think that all that name calling, like if one child is constantly calling another child names like stupid, ugly, or something, can be prevented if the adult avoid labeling children as mean, bad, victims, or bullies, and rather discuss the experiences of the child. A young child may have difficulty understanding common definitions of bullying behavior. At such a young age, they may have difficulty understanding different types of bullying behaviors.” Participants 3 felt that a child can be taught the difference between aggressive and non-aggressive behaviors, and is able to learn the difference between acceptable and unacceptable behaviors at school, if they are taught it at home.

P-4. “What I experienced during my internship is the behavior of young children, when they are angry or don’t get what they want, that’s mostly when they become aggressive and act out. I guess because of their age it shouldn’t always be considered bullying. Still, there are ways to help young children get along with others. Preventive skills that parents, school staff, and other adults can help young children at age-appropriate ways are practicing pleasant ways that children can ask to join others in play and take turns in games, sharing toys, as well as smiling and saying hi to other children and asking them if they would like to play with her/him.”

P-5. “Again, I hate to label children as bullies but things have changed over the years...Some children are just so mean and hateful that I can’t help but to call them what they appear to be. To prevent these unwanted behaviors, we must first start at home.
Children can be taught anything we want to teach them because they are watching every move we make, imitating our moves, repeating what they hear, dancing like we do, playing dress up like their parents, pretending to smoke if they are exposed to it, you name it our very young children pick up on it, some sooner than others.” Participant 5 felt it is best to ensure that our children have access to developmentally appropriate play materials, watch appropriate TV shows, and hear proper language. “We must help young children learn the consequences of certain actions in ways they can understand. This and other prevention/interventions should start at home.”

P-6. "For some of our preschoolers their first opportunity to interact with each other outside of their family circle happens when they start daycare, preschool, and kindergarten. At the tender ages 3 to 5, kids are learning how to get along with each other, cooperate, share, and understand their feelings. What we as adults need to do is model appropriate behavior at all times as a prevention and intervention.”

P-7. “Like I said earlier, the children I drive back and forth to school are very mean and hurtful to each other especially the girls. It’s more like scheming, which happens in groups. While at home parent(s) need to teach their child how to treat other. When I was growing up you said thank you, it didn’t matter if your uncle gave you something or your younger sibling. When you walked into a room you said thank you, when you bump someone you said excuse me and when you see a child playing alone you offer that child to come and play with you. That all the prevention/intervention our young children need to learn is MANNERS”.
P-8. “I tell my son that he should never hit a girl, say excuse me, thank you, and I am sorry. I am going to teach him more social skills, and start role play to expose him to feelings of others. I will continue reinforcing his learned social skills by practicing these them periodically. That is my personal prevention/intervention for my son, AND I plan on sharing my techniques whenever and wherever. Again, I want to thank you for the great work you are doing by opening the eyes of the people that you are interviewing to the bullying epidemic where it is always been seen as something that occurs in middle and high school.”

P-9. “Yep...some of these kids are so mean and nasty to be so young. I know that it is wrong but I told my children if they are picked on to fight back. I do have to go to the school quite a bit but I don’t care. I am a single father and I don’t want my children to be messed with because of my job or because my wife left. Every day, it doesn’t matter where on the bus, at school, or in the front yard, there is someone saying something mean to my children. It is always the same 3 girls. They sometimes have other girls with them and they all be picking on them. I don’t allow my children out of the yard because I don’t live in the best neighborhood and they get picked on about that. I get mad just talking about it. Hell, yeah those bitches that keep taunting my children are bullies.”

P-10. “As I mentioned earlier my education and exposure to preschool bullying has caused me to look at child’s play and see things that the other caretakers may not see. I look at the behaviors in the entire child population and the interactions amongst each other. I recognize the desire of the children to avoid certain children due to the dominate behavior they express. I look at the reactions of different children, and I can see the
desire in some to avoid contact with those who seem to be overly aggressive in their eyes.

If I could convince and make aware to the other caretakers my view of the interactions amongst the children, we could probably prevent a lot of discomfort to some of the kids, but if I can’t then my prevention or intervention will be to be more vigilant and stand ready to, using my knowledge and experience, intervene in situations before they get out of hand. I would also continue to utilize the traditional disciplinary approach of yelling and scream, 'Stop, give him/her that back, give it to me, so on and so forth.'” (laughter)

**P-11.** “It used to make me so angry that my parents refused to acknowledge the obvious about my little brother. I have tried to be the prevention to him being a bully but then my parents in giving him his way all the time have made prevention nearly impossible. They have made my interaction more necessary by doing that because they enable the bad behavior. I'm the one who is with him most of the time. Intervention was not going to be happening at home because to my parents he was doing no wrong. Now they have to deal with the program and re-program his behavior because his interactions outside the home are not acceptable and they are being inconvenienced by having to respond to the school constantly calling them. I call those calls ‘wake-up calls.’ My prevention/intervention will be to role play with my brother in different setting to help him understand how his actions make others feel. Thank you for inviting me to be part of your research. I have learned a lot and I will be exploring ways to help curb bullying in any age group I work with.”

**P-12.** “My military schedule has forced me to have to depend on my parents and my in-laws to help me in raising my son.” Participant 12 feels that her child’s problem is
he is being spoiled by both his paternal and maternal grandparents. “Being an only child, he is used to having his way and not having to share what was his with anybody. His aggressiveness was cute to the ‘Grands’ but not to anyone else. Not recognizing a need by his grandparents for any sort of prevention meant that more intervention would be needed as well as his social skills. He had to learn to share things that he may be interested in with others who may be interested in it too. He doesn’t get chastised for the mischievous things he does, and I feel that intervention is necessary now to prevent problems down the road. The older he gets, the harder it will be to change him. I don’t want him growing up to be a bully. I don’t find it cute.”

P-13. “I feel I have raised enough younguns to know what I’m doing. My learning is from real life, and I don’t have any failures. My method has worked for years and never has any child of mine or that I raised ever come to me talking about being bullied. When they’re babies, they don’t know anything about that. That’s grown folks talk. You give them what they want when they want it, and you don’t have to worry about them taking it from another kid. That’s what I would call prevention. That works for grown folks too. If they have their own, they don’t have to take someone else’s. That’s the prevention. With good prevention, you don’t have to stop a fight. The bullying that I see isn’t done by the babies; it’s done by those teenagers, and I wouldn’t try to get in the middle of that. You call breaking up a fight intervention? Well, I’m too old to intervene. I’d call the police and let them intervene.”

P-14. “It took a while for us to stop feeling guilty for our son’s condition and sorry for ourselves as though we had caused it, but once we did we were able to deal with
the issue with our son’s wellbeing in full focus. Participants 14 felt that once they got their feelings out of the way, they became equipped to deal with the needs around their son’s condition and address his problem, which to him was more social than physical. They shared, “what is going on with him can be handled by an intervention in school. His school caretakers will have to intervene in the social attitude of his fellow classmates to not treat him any differently or make fun of his disability. I will request of the caretakers to make that a goal going forward to help our son to blend in with his peers properly. Our intervention is in strengthening the victim, who is our son, by learning how to do this and I feel I can share our knowledge with other parents who are dealing with their disabled child being treated as if they are going to break if you play with them.”

P-15. “I know I should say turn the other cheek, however turning the other cheek will just give a fresh new target. These days’ kids are acting out at a much younger age, and I’m not going to play naïve and tell my daughter not to protect herself if she gets picked on. I feel that if she folds under the bullying, it will continue forever, whereas if she fights back, win, lose, or draw it will cause the bullying on her to end. Most bullies don’t want resistance. Let the bully find someone else. In this sense, I feel that resistance will be the prevention down the road.”

P-16. “I refuse to let someone else’s child control what my daughter thinks or how she feels. I refuse to let my daughter feel uncomfortable in a place where she is supposed to feel safe and have a good time. Right or wrong I will always encourage my daughter to defend herself against an aggressor if I’m not there to protect her. I will address the situation on my level by confronting the parents of the aggressive child and put them on
notice that if their child threatens my daughter, that she has my permission and
instruction to protect herself by any means necessary. That will be my preventive measure
and then it will be up to the parents of the bully or bullies to intervene in their child’s
behavior. I am teaching her to grow up and be a lady, but I am not teaching her to be a
victim in the meantime.”

P-17. “Even though I don’t have any children of my own in school, I can still feel
the distress that I see on the kid’s faces when they are about to get bullied and they know
they can’t fight back. Participant 17 thinks if she intervenes, it would have to be
something that she will have to do all the time. She stated: “I can’t take them by the hand
and go around with them all day. I also know that if I intervene in an incident that I see,
it’s going to re-occur later out of my view and it will probably be even worse. The
prevention of this behavior has to be done out of the distraction of an audience. When
there is no audience then there is no need to ‘save face.’ The alternative to the bullying, I
feel, is to find out why the bully feels that the only way for attracting attention is by
bullying. On finding that out the pathway to prevention will be available.”

P-18. “Putting our child in daycare was a wake-up call. The daycare environment
is a far cry different from his home environment where he has sole access to whatever he
wants without having to share. When he went into the environment that called for
everyone to use the same toys and equipment he wasn’t used to that and so he did not
know how to do that and defended what he considered to be his. The daycare notified me
and then I realized I had to do my homework. My homework was to teach him that he has
to share things with others. That was the preventive measure in our issue. It was not too
soon either because he is about to have a sibling and he will have to share with his sister or brother down the road. The interventions that the daycare workers had to do let me know that even at his young age, being overly possessive without sharing skills can and will lead to classic bullying.”

P-19. “I just sometimes have to vent because I sacrifice a lot for my kids so that they may grow up as decent citizens. My financial status right now does not allow me to provide the material things that their peers use as items of measure for friendship. The things kids today use as measuring points do not qualify my kids to be respected in their eyes, and that makes it okay to their peers to bully them. Prevention/intervention in our case does not appear to be an option because the reason for discourse is about material things that we cannot afford in order to be accepted by others. This puts them in the position of having to defend each other when they are away from home. This has caused my kids to become bullies themselves, and even though I don’t condone it that appears to be their only means of self-preservation when they are amongst their peers. What seems to be a good prevention for them to being bullied is to be bullies themselves.”

P-20. Participant 20 feels that if children are taught proper interactions at home they may be less opt to bully others. This should start by watching what you say and do around your child. “Just as good as preschoolers can pick up bad habits, they can pick up good habits. And yes, it is true that you can teach a child to do good, but when they get behind your back or with their friends they tend to act out. I know I did. My mama would tell me not to go outside at the school basketball but as soon as my daddy left out the door I go with my friends knowing that I am going to get my butt whipped, but I did it
anyway. As I got older I realized that it was called peer pressure. I tell my grands to please choose their friends wisely. I tell them not to be picking on other children because you don’t like it when other children pick on you and say mean things so put yourself in that child place that you are picking on.”

**Chapter Summary**

The significance of the study was designed to explore and facilitate a better understanding of the 20 participants, including teachers, parents, and other adult caregiver’s characteristics and perceptions influencing their responses in preschool bullying situations. The analysis of the participants' data resulted in the emergence of five major themes (see Figure 4).

This chapter includes a summary of the participants' demographics, profiles, and the results of the study. While their individual insights may differ, they all shared a commonality in overarching concepts that led to the essence of transcending thresholds. The findings of this study indicates the potential to impact schools, teachers, students, parents, and other caregivers who work with students with social and emotional deficiencies. In addition, this research may shed light on the factors that affect classroom, playground, and the home environment in order to inform policy, improve classroom processes, and promote the rights of all students for protection from bullying.

The results of the phenomenological study revealed that insight into the intricacies that foster and maintain bullying behaviors in early childhood populations is important. The following insights and experiences of the essence of transcending thresholds was reflected in the five emergent themes as presented in Figure 4. These
results are further examined in Chapter Five, which presents a discussion of the findings (to include summary and interpretation), the implications for practice, and the recommendations for future research.
Chapter 5: Central Findings, Recommendations, and Conclusion

This qualitative phenomenological study investigated a purposeful sample of twenty adult preschool caregivers. There were many different areas surrounding during these interviews from various and diverse socio-economic backgrounds, nationality, educational levels, and geographical locations. As the data was analyzed, five dominant themes emerged, which revealed that overall the participants had encountered bullying behavior in one way or another: 1) defining the behavior 2) experiencing an act 3) whether age was a factor 4) nature/nurture, and 5) prevention/intervention. Within one of these five dominant themes, sub-themes were also discovered. These themes and sub-themes are described in the following sections to help contribute to a richer understanding.

This chapter outlines 1) discussion of the findings, 2) recommendations for practice, 3) recommendations for future research, 4) implications of the findings, and 5) overall conclusion developed from this qualitative enterprise.

All participants provided examples and/or stories of situations they observed that could be considered bullying. All of the examples and/or stories had overlapping themes and fell into one of the five categories. These categories are defining bullying, the most common type of bullying preschoolers engage in, what age is too young to be considered a bully, is the behavior environmental or nurture, and prevention/intervention.

In addition to the five primary themes, there were three sub-themes, which will be discussed below. These categories are psychical/aggression, verbal/teasing, and relational/exclusion. Each of the categories is listed below along with examples. Also
within some of the categories are specific reasons participants believe that a particular type of bullying occurs amongst preschoolers.

**Note.** Repetitiveness also appears in the answers.

**Theme 1: Defining Bullying**

All twenty participants were asked to defined bully in their own words. In doing so, most participants mentioned different physical acts, verbal violence, and occasional exclusion. Participants’ opinions on bullying through aggression varied as to what caused it. One participant felt it was due to children not knowing how to handle a situation. Another participant stated that children get aggressive when they wanted something another child has, similar to why bullying by exclusion happens. Lastly, a participant told a story where she felt that most people thought the behavior of the children was cute. The participant felt most people thought children at preschool age would simply outgrow the aggression.

**Theme 2: Most Common Types of Bullying Seen Amongst Preschoolers**

During the data collection process, the participants who had encountered, observed, and/or intervened in incidences shared their perspective on the different types of bullying.

**Aggressiveness:** Seven of the participants described bullying situations where the bully was physically aggressive towards his or her victim as involving children who hit, kicked, took items from others, bit, and punched. And yet another participant shared her concern over the fact that some of the very young seem to be very aggressive towards their peers but her colleagues do not seem to see a problem with it. The remaining
participants who spoke about bullying through aggression did not comment on why specifically this type seems to occur.

**Teasing:** Two out of twenty of the participants gave examples of teasing and name calling. They stated students would tease for many reasons, including how a child looked, but mostly the child would repeat what they had heard regarding certain things. However, one participant gave an example: “As the aide/bus driver at the preschool, what I hear most is verbal taunting and mean words.”

**Relational/Excluding:** Only three participants described situations that include one or more children (mainly girls) where they purposely excluded another child for different general reasons. One time it was because of the way she dressed. One parent (father) said that he feels that his child was being excluded because of his job (a sanitation worker) and yet the grandmother stated that she feels that her grandchildren are being excluded because their mother is in prison but would not label this as bullying. She described it as an action due to what the other children hear from their parents.

**Theme 3: How Young is Too Young**

“I guess I am from the old school, and I don’t believe that children at the age of 3 know what they are doing. They just babies, middle school age children...yes...but 3 years old no...no...they just trying to get what they want and taking from the other child is them just being babies,” shared a grandmother of three. This participant in the study admitted that she finds it hard to label children so young as bullies. While others had mixed feelings, it appeared that six of the twenty participants (administration,
intern, teacher’s aide, a first-year teacher, bus driver, etc.) did not hesitate to call the inappropriate, repeated behavior bullying.

However, it appeared that most of the participants have a little reluctance to call children so young bullies as not to vilify or label the young child. The participants who appear not to be so reluctant were teachers and other staff who work with the different diversity of children. They seem to take bullying much more seriously because they see it in different forms and as one participant stated, “no child or anyone should turn to violent means because of someone being mean to them for no reason.” One educator shared that in order to combat this she feels as though we need to go straight to the students no matter what the age and try to combat the bullying through them. This is because she shared that she feels that if students are taught not to bully at an early age and the consequences of it, then they will more likely choose not to.

**Theme 4: Nature/Nurture - How is Bullying Behavior Learned?**

The common consensus among all the participants is that bullying is in part driven by children’s developing social skills, behavior, and emotion regulation skills. These skills are very fluid among young children, with the result being a range of challenging behaviors, which could include bullying. Participant 20 shared, “One is not born a bully; their environment and teachings for others help to produce one. The child had to have learned their behavior from somewhere, which does not excuse the behavior but it does explain why he/she is acting in this manner.”

Every participant stated different reasons or causes on how or how children at such young age learned bullying behavior. They all gave reasons on why they think
children bully. Some of the participants gave reasons for why children become victims. Some participants had similar ideas as to what caused bullying, but each contributed a unique cause. Many of the reasons given for preschoolers bullying seemed to overlap or lead from one to another. Most of the participants felt that the children who bully do not necessarily have poor social skills and they may not have emotional problems. Rather, they may be popular, bright, and socially skilled, but learn the behavior from older siblings or their parents; in other words, the child learned the behavior from their environment. Some other causes are status gains where children were trying to look better in front of their peers or "look cool." The child puts others down or excludes others, which in return will raise the bully's status or popularity. Example: a child could learn from a parent who only invites cool kids to his/her birthday party, and then children would do what he/she said for the coveted invite.

**Media influence:** Two participants shared their opinion on the effect of media on preschool children. Participant 19 stated, "With today's images, music, TV shows, and the lack of parenting skills, where all the mothers want to do is get their weave and nails done and get to the club every weekend, who's raising the kids?" Yet participant 6 shared, "Yes ma, where else do children that young learn behaviors. They learn it from their environment. Some of the children got older brothers and sisters. Some of them live in homes where there is abuse. They watch adult TV shows. Hell, cartoons are not safe anymore."

**Gaining attention:** The final cause of bullying that was discussed was gaining attention. Two participants, P-17 and P-18, shared that bullying could be a need or want
for attention, something that may be lacking at home, or that negative attention is better than no attention.

**Theme 5: Prevention/Intervention**

The last theme that materialized during data analysis was prevention/intervention. The discussion entailed how to prevent preschoolers from bullying, and if the preschoolers are bullying what interventions can and should be utilized to alleviate the suffering of other preschoolers by their peers. This particular question was one about which all twenty participants were eager to share their viewpoint.

**Participant 1 shared:** “I must say as an administrator/teacher I send age appropriate material home to the parents often. I do this so they can review it periodically with the child, especially the ones who have behavioral issues.”

**Participants 2 and 7 stated:** “Teach the child manners such as to say good morning, please excuse me, may I have, can we share, thank you, etc.”

**Participant 3 said:** “Adults avoid labeling children as mean, bad, victims or bullies and rather discuss the experiences of the child.”

**Participant 4 shared:** “Preventive skills that parents, school staff, and other adults can help young children in age-appropriate ways are practicing pleasant ways that children can ask to join others in play and take turns in games, sharing toys, as well as smiling and saying hi to other children and asking them if they would like to play with her/him.”
Participant 5 shared: “To prevent these unwanted behaviors, we must first start at home. Children can be taught anything we want to teach them because they are watching every move we make.”

Participants 6 and 16 said: “What we as adults need to do is model appropriate behavior at all times as a prevention and intervention measure, and the parents of the bully or bullies need to intervene in their child’s inappropriate behavior.”

Participants 8, 11, and 12 said: “Teaching more social skills, and start role-playing to expose children to feelings of others.”

Participant 10 said: “My role in prevention or intervention will be to be more vigilant and stand ready to, using my knowledge and experience, intervene in situations before they get out of hand. I would also continue to utilize the traditional disciplinary approach of yelling and scream ‘Stop, give him/her that back, give it to me, so on and so forth.’”

Participants 14 and 15 said: “Our intervention is in resistance from bullying, turning the other cheek and strengthening the victim, who is our son. By learning how to do this I feel I can share our knowledge with other parents who are dealing with their disabled child being treated as if they are going to break if you play with them.”

Participant 17 shared: “The prevention of this behavior has to be done out of the distraction of an audience. When there is no audience, then there is no need to ‘save face’ The alternative to the bullying, I feel, is to find out why the bully feels that the only way for attracting attention is by bullying.”
Limitations

While these findings contribute to a compendium of literature providing insight to better understanding early childhood bullying shared by parents and other professionals who dedicate their life and time, there are also some significant limitations that must be mentioned.

One limitation lies with one of the shortcomings of many qualitative approaches: generalizability. The findings of this study cannot be generalized due to the small sample size that was not representative. However, this limitation is reconciled by the in-depth, rich descriptions provided by the participants, which fall in line with a phenomenological approach.

Another limitation involves the collection method. Although the participants were provided the opportunity to conduct a face-to-face interview, only a few of twenty participants were able to express their true feelings. However, it appeared that most of the participants had a little reluctance to call children so young bullies, as not to vilify or label the young child.

Recommendations for Practice

Based on the data provided by the participants regarding their perspectives of early childhood bullying, there are areas of practice that would benefit from a thorough review. The results of this study suggest that there are various areas of practice requiring examination, which are offered here as recommendations:

1. It would be beneficial for caregivers of preschoolers to be able to distinguish the difference between bullying and child play. A bullying situation is when one or
more child(ren) single out a child (the ‘victim’) and engage in inappropriate behaviors intended to harm that child.

2. Caregivers of preschoolers should develop age-appropriate conflict management strategies.

3. It is important for caregivers to understand how big a problem preschool bullying is becoming. So many times, preschool bullying is ignored due to the age of the child.

4. Caregivers of preschoolers should be vigilant at all times and intervene when there is an inappropriate interaction between children.

5. Caregivers should always model appropriate behavior around preschoolers, so they learn proper interactions with others. Young children are like sponges; they absorb most of everything they hear and see.

**Contributions to the Field of Conflict Analysis and Resolution**

An expected contribution is to enhance the literature in the conflict resolution field, utilizing the meta-evaluation of interventions in order to continue an open dialogue between various caregivers in the evaluation process. The evaluation and dialogue must be comprised of a variety of components, involving interventional actions to be undertaken while at the preschool age.

**Conclusion**

The general purpose of this qualitative study was to explore preschool age children's inappropriate interactions with other preschoolers to determine if it is bullying or child play, as well as to discuss actions and plans to prevent or reduce bullying among
preschoolers before they enter into higher education. The experience freely and graciously shared by the participants led to five themes, which were extremely informative. The researcher’s goal will be instrumental in helping others to distinguish the difference between bullying and child play properly.

This is not a new study on bullying behaviors but a study to present a new focus on preschoolers’ bullying behaviors, which are sometimes overlooked due to the age of the child. The researcher’s desire is to contribute to the compendium of literature in a host of fields, from reducing bullying to stopping bullying, as well as to the conflict analysis and resolution. This study provided a forum for a group of preschool caregivers who collectively shared their ‘voice’ regarding their experiences with early childhood care and their knowledge of the true definition of bullying.
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MEMOANDUM

To: Brenda Williams
   College of Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences

From: Pei-Fen Li, Ph.D,
   Center Representative, Institutional Review Board

Date: February 22, 2017

Re: IRB #: 2017-132; Title, “Preschoolers Aggressive Behavior towards Others….Is it Child-play? --- ---- Is it Bullying?”

I have reviewed the above-referenced research protocol at the center level. Based on the information provided, I have determined that this study is exempt from further IRB review under 45 CFR 46.101(b) (Exempt Category 2). You may proceed with your study as described to the IRB. As principal investigator, you must adhere to the following requirements:

1) CONSENT: If recruitment procedures include consent forms, they must be obtained in such a manner that they are clearly understood by the subjects and the process affords subjects the opportunity to ask questions, obtain detailed answers from those directly involved in the research, and have sufficient time to consider their participation after they have been provided this information. The subjects must be given a copy of the signed consent document, and a copy must be placed in a secure file separate from de-identified participant information. Record of informed consent must be retained for a minimum of three years from the conclusion of the study.

2) ADVERSE EVENTS/UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS: The principal investigator is required to notify the IRB chair and me (954-262-5369 and Pei-Fen Li, Ph.D, respectively) of any adverse reactions or unanticipated events that may develop as a result of this study. Reactions or events may include, but are not limited to, injury, depression as a result of participation in the study, life-threatening situation, death, or loss of confidentiality/anonymity of subject. Approval may be withdrawn if the problem is serious.

3) AMENDMENTS: Any changes in the study (e.g., procedures, number or types of subjects, consent forms, investigators, etc.) must be approved by the IRB prior to implementation. Please be advised that changes in a study may require further review depending on the nature of the change. Please contact me with any questions regarding amendments or changes to your study.


Cc: Dustin Berna, Ph.D.
    Pei-Fen Li, Ph.D.
Appendix B: Participant Recruitment Letters

Dear: _______________________,

My name is Brenda Williams, and I am a Ph.D. candidate at Nova Southeastern University. I am conducting a research study entitled: Preschoolers Aggressive Behavior towards Others...Is it Child-play? ------- Is it Bullying?” where I value the unique contribution you can make to my study, and I am excited about the possibility of your participation. The purpose of this study is to explore how preschooer aggression is perceived.

I am recruiting caregivers by way of face-to-face or telephone, who are parent(s), teachers, aids, playground monitors, and any other adults that care for young children. Inclusion Criteria for the proposed participants is as follows: The study specifically explores how caregivers perceive repeated aggressive behavior of one preschooler towards another. As such, the study will not limit religion, ethnicity, or gender. The only restriction would be caregivers under the age of 18 (youth babysitters and underage parents). The caregiver does not have to own a degree. The requirement is experience caring for preschoolers.

I will be asking participants to discuss their lived experiences in face-to-face interviews that will last approximately 50-60 minutes. The interviews will be audio recorded to capture the responses. Numbers will be utilized in place of real identities to help ensure confidentiality and privacy, throughout the study’s process. The interviews will take place at a time and location that is convenient to you. Please contact me to discuss further; I can be reached at 954-401-5233 or brendwi@nova.edu.

Warm regards,
Brenda Williams
I agree to participate in a research study of “Is It Child-play? -------Is It Bullying?” I understand the purpose and nature of this study and I am participating voluntarily. I grant permission for the data to be used in the process of completing a Ph.D. degree, including a dissertation and any other future publication. I understand that a brief synopsis of each participant including myself, will be used and will include the following information: regional location of residence, educational level, and any other pertinent information that will help the reader come to know and recall each participant. I grant permission for the above personal information to be used. I agree to meet at the following location ________________________________ on the following date _______________________ at _________ for an initial interview of 1 to 2 hours. If necessary, I will be available at a mutually agreed upon time and place for an additional 1 to 1 ½ hour interview. I also grant permission to the tape-recording of the interview(s).

_________________________________________ ______________________________________

Research Participant/Date Primary Researcher/Date
Appendix D: Interview Questions

**Research Study Title:** Childhood Bullying: A Phenomenological Study on Bullying vs. Child Play

**Participant Code Number:**

**Interview Start Time:**

**Interview Stop Time:**

**Date:**

**Place:**

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study that explores what is bullying as opposed to child play. Please be reminded that your privacy will be protected and all identifying information you share will be kept confidential. If you wish to withdraw from this study at any time, you may do so with no consequence, and the collected data will not be used in the study.

You are participant #__. If there are no questions, I will begin the interview, as well as the recording.

**Interview Questions**

As a parent(s) or a caregiver(s) of a pre-school child:

1) How would you define bullying?

2) How often have you witnessed a preschool age child being physically or emotional bullied at home and/or at school? Can you describe what you witnessed?

3) How would you interpret repeated aggressive behavior of one child toward another? Bullying or Child play. Please explain your answer.

4) What are your thoughts on school safety and bullying? What areas of a school do you think most bullying occurs? Why do you think these places represent “risk zones?”

5) What are some ways to eliminate bullying within the school environment? In the home environment?

6) What role(s) do you think race, socioeconomic status, or culture play in bullying?
Appendix E: Thank You Letter

Date:

Dear: _________________________

Thank you for meeting with me in an extended semi-structured interview and sharing your lived experiences. I appreciate your willingness to share your unique and personal thoughts, feelings, events and situations.

I have enclosed your transcribed interview and ask that you review the entire document. Please review the transcription and ensure the interview fully captured your lived experiences. After reviewing the transcript, you may realize that an important lived experience(s) was neglected. Please feel free to add comments, with the enclosed red pen, which would further elaborate your lived experience(s). If preferred, we can arrange a meeting to audio record your additions or corrections. Please do not edit for grammatical corrections. The way you told your lived experiences is what is critical.

When you have reviewed the verbatim transcript and have had the opportunity to make changes and additions, please return the transcript in the stamped addressed envelope. I have greatly valued your participation in this research study and your willingness to share your lived experiences. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me at (954) 401-5233 or brendwi@nova.edu.

Sincerely,

Brenda Williams

[Signature]
Appendix F: Informed Consent

Title of Research: Early Childhood Bullying. The Phenomenological Research Is To Explore the Lived Experiences of Preschoolers Bullying and How Young Children Can Be Taught the Negative Effects of Bullying

Investigator: Brenda Williams, Graduate Student, Department of Conflict Analysis and Resolution

Before consenting to take part in this phenomenological research study, it is important that you carefully read the following explanation of this study. This explanation describes the reason/purpose, procedures, benefits, risks, discomforts and precautions of the program. Also detailed are any alternative procedures available to you, as well as, your right to withdraw from this study at any time. There are no guarantee or assurances can or will be made as to the results of the study.

Explanation of Procedures

This phenomenological research study is designed to explore the lived experiences of preschoolers bullying and how young children can be taught the negative effects of bullying through the lens of their caregivers. Brenda Williams, a graduate student at Nova University, Department of Conflict Analysis and Resolution, Fort Lauderdale, Florida, is conducting this study to learn more about lived experiences of the effect of bullying on young children and their school experience. Participation in the study will involve the completion of ten to twelve open-ended interview questions, which will last approximately one and one half hours over a period of one day. The interview will be either audiotape or videotaped by the researcher and later transcribed for the purpose of data analysis. The interview will be conducted at a setting that is mutually agreeable to the participant and the researcher.

Risk and Discomforts

There are foreseen risks or discomforts from your participation in the study. Examples of any potential risks or discomforts may include emotional feelings, such as anger, sadness or grief, when asked questions during the interview.

Benefits

The overall desired benefit for any participation is the opportunity to discuss any feelings, perceptions, and concerns related to the experience of discussing events in your life that are or have been meaningful to you.

Alternative Treatments

As this is a biographical research study, this study does not involve specific treatments or procedures that will cause bodily harm; therefore, there are no known alternative treatments to participating in this study.

Confidentiality
The information collected during this study will remain confidential. Only the researcher and Dr. Dustin Berna, Nova Southeastern University, Department of Conflict Analysis and Resolution, Fort Lauderdale, FL, will have immediate access to this study’s data and information. As this information is confidential, no identifiable names or characteristics of the participant will be making available to anyone. Upon completion of this study, all tapes, transcripts, and notes will be destroyed. Please be aware that the results of this research will be published in the form of a graduate paper that may be disseminated among the professional community in fortune studies.

Withdrawal without Prejudice

Participation in this study is on a voluntary basis and refusal to participate will involve no penalty. Each participant is free to withdraw consent and discontinue participation in this project at any time without prejudice. Furthermore, a participant’s decision to voluntarily participate or not will, in no way, influence the level of professional and personal courtesy extended in the work environment.

New Findings

As this phenomenological research study progress, any new and significant findings developed during this study that may have an affect the participant’s willingness to continue will be provided by Brenda Williams, Graduate Student, Nova Southeastern University, Department of Conflict Analysis and Resolution.

Cost and/or Payment to Subject for Participation in Research

Nova Southeastern University, Department of Conflict Analysis and Resolution, Fort Lauderdale, FL, has made no provision for monetary compensation in the event of injury resulting from the research. If the need arises due to an injury, assistance will be provided to access health care services. The cost of health care services is the responsibility of the participant.

Questions

Any questions concerning the research project and/or the case of injury due to the project, participants can call my Chair/Committee members for this project.

Agreement

This agreement states that you have received a copy of this informed consent. Your signature below indicates that you agree to participate in this study.

___________________________________________  Date__________
Signature of Subject

___________________________________________  Date__________
Subject Name (printed)

___________________________________________  Date__________
Signature of Researcher