

PARENTS' PERSPECTIVES OF SIBLING BULLYING: A QUALITATIVE INQUIRY

A DISSERTATION

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to those closest to me who supported me throughout the process, through the challenges and tears. Completing this dissertation would not have been possible without the strong support and encouragement from my partner Steven, the best doggo ever Bandit, my therapist Samra Bastian, and Dr. Jessica Villareal, my colleague and dear friend. This study was a labor of love and serves as a dedication to those who suffer from the trauma of bullying in the family. As Francis Bacon once said, "Knowledge is power."

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operational definition differences, longitudinal deficits in the literature, and lack of literature including multi-systemic perspectives outside of bullying at school.

This study, grounded in family-systems theory, is designed to 1) understand parents' perspectives of sibling bullying, 2) understand how parents describe their own experiences with sibling bullying, and (3) investigate how parents address bullying issues with their children. This chapter introduces the planned research and the phenomenon of bullying. By looking at the contextual influence of the system, the phenomenon of bullying can be further understood. This information is essential to providing future therapy-based interventions and bullying prevention programming for families and mental health professionals.

Statement of the Problem

Bullying is not limited to childhood. Despite research efforts, bullying continues to be a problematic phenomenon for children, families, and the greater community. There is an urgent need for this research to bring about a further understanding of the perspectives of parents who have experienced sibling bullying to understand further how bullying behaviors influence others in the family system. Currently, there is a surplus of literature on the child's experience of bullying. This literature stems from traditional bullying behavior at school. Therefore, it is imperative to bridge the gap by examining the parent's experience as children grow into adults and eventually go on to parent their own children. However, research by Holt et al. (2008) found that parents are often not aware of their child's bullying involvement because the child does not confide in the parent. Among parents, understanding and interpreting bullying behaviors vary. Mishna (2004) found that sometimes what the child considered to be bullying was dismissed by the parent. Parents must have a mutual understanding with the school to work with school officials when bullying issues arise. Sawyer et al. (2011) report that most teachers can collaborate with parents when resolving student issues and perceive collaboration with parents as

essential for reducing bullying behaviors. Thus, knowing parental bullying experiences will be the key information needed to support individuals experiencing bullying outside of the school system.

The following research questions will guide this study:

- 1.) What are parents' perspectives of sibling bullying?
- 2.) How do parents address bullying experiences with their children?
- 3.) How have participants' childhood experiences of sibling bullying influenced their own parenting when their children are involved in sibling bullying?

Purpose of the Study

This research will help the marriage and family therapy field know more about the consequences of bullying and the family system. This researcher is hoping to learn more from parents who experienced sibling bullying as children to know how their experiences may influence their own behavior towards their children and other members of the family system. This phenomenological study will uncover the voices of parents impacted by sibling bullying using a qualitative methodology based on family systems and bioecological perspectives. Information gathered about the parental experience of sibling bullying may foster a better understanding of how bullying behaviors may be perpetuated in families and other systems.

Genre

This study will use the phenomenological approach to investigate in-depth individual interviews with parents who have experienced sibling bullying themselves. Family systems theory will provide the theoretical framework in which the study will be conducted. Family systems theory emerged from literature as a commonly used theoretical perspective when studying the bullying phenomenon. For the purpose of this study, family systems theory is helpful in exploring parents' perspectives on sibling bullying and how it has impacted their lives.

This is inspired by Bowen (2004), who views the system as a whole relationship that exists between families. This study focused on parent-child interaction and sibling interaction during parents' childhood.

A phenomenological framework explored the parent's experience of sibling bullying behavior. This explorative research aimed to understand further the meaning made by parents who have experienced sibling bullying using a phenomenological methodology (Moustakas, 1994). Furthermore, by focusing on the deeper meaning, this study sought to know more about the experience of sibling bullying through the lens of parents and the executive subsystem. Using the phenomenological approach requires a repetitious process to gain a more detailed description that begins the start of a reflective analysis that represents "the essence of the experience" (Moustakas, 1994). While conducting qualitative phenomenological research, I will practice epoche throughout my research process. Epoche is known as self-reflective checking of the researcher's biases throughout the data gathering and analysis of the study (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005; Moustakas, 1994). This process is also referred to as bracketing (Creswell, 1998).

Limitations

Regarding a qualitative study, one must consider the study's limitations. This study is limited by the participants' experiences as the full experience cannot truly be explored. Also, this study only examined the lived experiences of parents who have experienced bullying by their siblings in childhood. Using a phenomenological approach in qualitative research, the meaning of the experience is only reflected through the participants' perspective (Moustakas, 1994).

Delimitations

Participation in the study will require being a parent of two or more children. In addition, participants must be over the age of 18 and self-identify as having experienced sibling bullying in childhood. Experiences of sibling bullying must have happened more than once over a

person's lifetime. All races, ethnicities, and genders are welcome to participate. The selection of participants will be purposeful to capture the experience of those whose voices have not been fully explored in the literature.

Operational Definitions

For the purpose of this research, terms have been operationally defined:

Bullying: bullying is a behavior that leaves a child "exposed, repeated over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other students" (Olweus, 1993, p. 9). Furthermore, three characteristics must be present to label a situation bullying: harmful intent, imbalance of power or strength, and repetition of negative actions on the part of one or more other persons. Both overt and covert behaviors.

Physical Bullying: physical acts (hitting, pushing, shoving, spitting, etc.; Olweus, 1993).

Verbal Bullying: name-calling, taunting, threatening, or malicious gossip (Olweus, 1993).

Social or Relational Bullying: indirect or covert acts of aggression such as malicious gossip, social exclusion, damaging the victim's relationships, or demanding compliance as a condition of friendship (Crick & Grotpeter, 1996).

Cyberbullying: bullying using the internet or other digital communication devices to insult or threaten someone (Juvonen & Gross, 2008). This can include texting, Facebook, or other social communication.

Sexual Harassment: unwanted sexual remarks, inappropriate touching, receiving unwanted sexual pictures or similar material via digital communication devices (deLara, 2008).

Hazing: students coerce their classmates into performing dangerous and humiliating acts to fulfill a rite of passage into a group or organization (Thomas, 2006).

Bully: the person who is the perpetrator, aggressor, or leader of the aggressive act (Espelage & Swearer, 2003).

Bystander: a spectator, witness, or observer of a bullying situation. Not the bully or the victim (Olweus, 1993).

Victim: the person targeted by the bully (Espelage & Swearer, 2003).

Family: any parent, adult, or legal guardian of the child.

Family Bullying: A form of domestic aggression that occurs in the home between parents/guardians, marital partners, siblings, grandparents, aunts, uncles, or cousins. Step-relatives are also included in this definition. One person acts aggressively and asserts dominance to gain power and control over another family member(s) and vice versa.

Sibling Bullying: A form of domestic aggression between siblings in the home (stepsiblings or non-biological siblings are also included in this definition). One person acts aggressively and asserts dominance to gain power and control over another family member(s) and vice versa.

Sibling: Biologically related children to both parents.

Stepsibling: No biological link shared with one parent.

Half-sibling: Both children share one biological parent.

Adopted Siblings: Legally, the children of a shared parent or guardian.

Family Systems Theory: A family is an integral unit wherein members affect other members through their behavioral choices (Gurman & Kniskern, 1981).

Researcher

Through my education as a licensed family therapist intern, I have gained extensive knowledge of how trauma impacts the mind and body. Bullying is a specific form of trauma and can leave lasting effects on those who are involved. I use this trauma-informed lens to explore methods of sensitivity when treating clients. I believe using a trauma-informed lens allows me to examine further the systemic impact of trauma on the person and the family system involved.

Summary

Research on bullying has been approached from many different angles. Information will be gathered from parents who share their lived experiences with the sibling bullying phenomenon by using a phenomenological approach in this qualitative study. There is extensive research on the effects of bullying from the bullies, victims', and bystanders' perspectives. Many anti-bullying programs have been studied and evaluated for their effectiveness. The little research conducted with adults has mostly been with teachers and school administrators. Yet, there has been little research to address what the family thinks about bullying and how it impacts the greater family system. Despite the extensive exploration and media attention given to bullying, most research suggests that aggressive behavior in schools is not decreasing (Hamarus & Kaikkonen, 2008). This study will utilize the family systems theory as its foundation. This study will explore the personal experiences of parents who encountered sibling bullying at home and how they perceive bullying as a phenomenon. Three research questions will guide the study by exploring parents' personal experiences with sibling bullying, their influence on the parenting of their children, and their impact on the family system.

Therefore, there is an urgent need for this research to understand further the impairment caused by bullying and how an increase in family therapy-based interventions may be able to reduce suffering for children and adults.

Theoretical Framework

Murray Bowen's family systems theory, Albert Bandura's social cognitive theory, and a trauma-informed lens have influenced my perspective of bullying as a systemic issue plaguing families and their communities. Considering these popular theoretical views when addressing the bullying phenomenon is crucial, as they are the foundation for which professionals first begin to look at bullying behaviors. The theoretical frameworks used in this paper support the extant literature and promote a new direction for how this issue can be viewed by professionals and those seeking resolution from bullying experiences.

Bowen's Family Systems Theory

Bowen's family systems theory will provide the primary theoretical framework in which the study will be organized. General systems theory comes from the plethora of literature as a commonly used theoretical perspective when studying the bullying phenomenon. More specifically, Bowen's family systems theory creates a family systems framework for examining family dynamics and patterns passed through generations. Bullying behaviors displayed at school can stem from a culmination of complex issues within the family system (Rigby, 1994). The family systems framework highlights the similarities between the school system and the home environment, such as in the case of relationships between siblings (Duncan, 2004; Wolke & Skew, 2012).

The family system is an intricate structure that requires each member of the family to fulfill their social role, follow rules, adapt to change, and establish and maintain boundaries (Bowen, 1978). Bowen (2004) views the family system as a whole relationship and a single

collective unit. Families also engage in behaviors that are passed down through generations, called the multigenerational process, which influences anxiety management and directs how rules about relationships are passed down (Kerr & Bowen, 1988). Since bullying is a relational problem, it is imperative to explore the relationships in which the phenomenon occurs. Because the family unit is the most foundational relationship system, professionals must be aware of the consequences of bullying in the home to further expand existing treatment methods and conceptualize new ways to serve those suffering from bullying.

Triangulation

The triangle is the most stable unit or molecule of the family (Bowen, 1978). He states that therapy is the modification of the triangle and change in the unit. The nuclear family is seen in the unit, for example, the mother, father, and children. In a triangle, there will always be two insiders and one outsider. The insiders in a triangle actively exclude the outsider. Someone is always uncomfortable being an outsider. The triangles in family systems are in a constant state of motion. According to Bowen (1978), triangles are the tension system of anxiety in a dyadic relationship used by deflecting, connecting, or introducing a third person in the unit to maintain the anxiety. The theory purports that when anxiety becomes too great between two family members, then a third more vulnerable family member is sought to help relieve the anxiety between the two original family members by increasing the anxiety experienced by the vulnerable family member who is drawn into the triangle (Gilbert, 2013; Ross et al., 2016). Bowen theorized that the persons being ‘triangulated- in,’ which he believed most often to be the children, would, over time, then become symptomatic and display physiological or emotional indicators of anxiety (Kerr & Bowen, 1988). When anxiety is too high in a system, maladaptive

coping, such as emotional fusion or emotional cut-off, is used during triangulation (Ross et al., 2016).

Differentiation of Self

Differentiation of self means an individual can process their thoughts and feelings while rationally responding without anxiety being present. The family is thought to operate from a level of anxiety that the family can no longer tolerate on their own. This anxiety changes how the family adapts and navigates relationships with members of the family. The siblings fighting can be a by-product of the anxiety felt in the system.

Differentiation of self refers to an intrapersonal balance between thinking and feeling and an interpersonal balance between separateness and togetherness with others (Bowen, 1978).

Bowen hypothesized that higher levels of differentiation would result in more intimate relationships and fewer physical and psychological symptoms of distress (Kerr & Bowen, 1988; Skowron et al., 2003). An individual's level of differentiation is determined by their ability to manage their emotional reactivity while maintaining their own beliefs, opinions, and emotions with other members of the family, therefore resisting the systemic pull towards fusion and maintaining a higher level of emotional maturity (Gilbert, 2013). Skowron et al. (2003) defined the differentiation of self as the capacity of a family system and its members to manage emotional reactivity, remain thoughtful amid strong emotions, and experience intimacy and autonomy in relationships. People with low differentiation of self are quick and easy to adapt their thoughts, opinions, and feelings to please others in hopes of gaining acceptance.

Sibling Position

Siblings possess different views of the family based on birth order. Each sibling holds a different role within the family system. When considering sibling position, no two children

experience their family similarly (Bowen, 1978). According to Bowen, birth order, preferential parental treatment, and gender rules and roles can influence the differentiation levels of siblings (Bowen, 1978). Bowen theorized that siblings would seek to balance the system by balancing failure and success. He hypothesized that one sibling can only be as successful as another sibling who is unsuccessful in maintaining balance in the system (Bowen, 1978; Kerr & Bowen, 1988).

Intergenerational Transmission Process

According to Bowen, families pass down behaviors, rules, and anxiety management from one generation to the next (Kerr & Bowen, 1988). This intergenerational process expands well into multiple generations, and very little is said to change regarding the level of differentiation among family members (Gilbert, 2013). Differentiation of self means an individual can process their thoughts and feelings while rationally responding without anxiety being present. The family is thought to operate from a level of anxiety that the family can no longer tolerate on their own. This anxiety changes how the family adapts and navigates relationships with members of the family. The siblings fighting can be a by-product of the anxiety felt in the system.

Family Projection Process

Bowen defined the family projection process as the process by which parental undifferentiation impairs one or more children in the nuclear family system (Bowen, 1978). The family projection process is how the parents transmit their emotional problems to a child. As a result of this process, the child can experience the following: impaired functioning, increased vulnerability, problems, and strengths. The family projection process involves the least differentiated person in the family system who seeks to control their own interpersonal anxiety by controlling the system. In turn, this is said to raise anxiety levels in the entire system (Kerr &

Bowen, 1988). Differentiation levels are transferred from parents to children, and each child in the family can have a unique experience (Cepukiene, 2021).

Emotional Cut-Off

Bowen asserted that individuals in a fused family system would seek to cut-off from family members to manage the overwhelming anxiety that triangulation and fusion can create (Kerr & Bowen, 1988). Emotional cut-off is defined as an “extreme form of distancing” in the process of differentiation of self (Cepukiene, 2021). Bowen’s theory hypothesized that nuclear families with high levels of differentiation of self would be less likely to seek emotional fusion or emotional cut-off as ways to manage anxiety in the system (Kerr & Bowen, 1988). Emotional cut-off is an attempt to manage unresolved anxiety, conflict, and attachment. Individuals who cut-off family members and/or are overly fused to family members are not well differentiated (Cepukiene, 2021).

The Nuclear Family Emotional System

The nuclear family system is considered the primary emotional unit rather than the individual (Bowen, 1978). The nuclear family system provides the foundation for the assumption that what affects one member of a system affects everyone in the system, therefore explaining the phenomena of the transmissible nature of anxiety within a family system (Cepukiene, 2021). Within this nuclear family system, individuals will exchange their sense of self by fusion, thus resulting in a lower level of differentiation of self (Kerr & Bowen, 1988; Skowron, 2000). The actions of those in the family system largely depend on the conditions of those intense relationships in the nuclear family.

Societal Emotional Process

The societal emotional process indicates that family systems theory can be applied to larger societal systems, such as the community and the world, as society is considered part of one larger family (Kerr & Bowen, 1988). The emotional system is said to govern behavior on a societal level. Originally named the societal regression concept, Bowen theorized that society fluctuates in its collective anxiety levels, functional order status, and organization, much like families do (Bowen, 1978). This process provides context to the changes in emotional states experienced by society as a whole and family systems living in the collective system.

Bowen and Bullying

Bowen (1978) created a family systems theory with eight concepts to describe the complex interactions within a family system. Bowen's family systems theory includes the following: (a) differentiation of self, (b) nuclear family emotional process, (c) family projection process, (d) multigenerational transmission process, (e) emotional cut-off, and (f) sibling position. Differentiation of self, emotional cut-off, and sibling position demonstrates the main importance when considering the dynamic of sibling bullying (Bowen, 1978). A positive relationship with a sibling allows a child to learn skills, such as assertiveness, within the safe boundaries of the family. This positive example supports Bowen's family systems theory.

Differentiation of self represents the degree to which a family member has separated themselves from the family unit. A well-differentiated person is said to be able to remain calm and rational when confronted with criticism, conflict, and rejection. Alternatively, a person with low differentiation is heavily influenced by other people's opinions, acceptance, and approval and will alter their views to conform when faced with pressure. Bullies are an example of those who

have low differentiation of self; however, instead of conforming when faced with pressure, they pressure others to agree with their views (Bowen, 1978).

Emotional cut-off defines a method of coping with unresolved emotional issues (Bowen, 1978). For example, siblings may choose to cut-off their parents due to the inability to resolve conflict and to reduce tension. Cut-off can mean cutting off contact with family members by physically moving away or discontinuing verbal communication. Unresolved attachment issues can exist in many forms and relate to the emotional immaturity of both the parents and the child (Bowen, 1978).

Sibling position refers to sibling order playing a role in characteristics displayed based on how children are arranged according to age within the family. Bowen integrated the findings of Toman and Toman (1970) as he explored the importance of sibling position. They found the characteristics of one sibling in a certain position differ from those of siblings in other positions. Although no sibling position is inherently superior or inferior to the others, distinct characteristics can be seen in those individuals based on sibling position in birth order. For example, older children are expected to set examples and lead, whereas younger children tend to follow the lead of older children (Toman & Toman, 1970). For example, when a younger sibling bullies an older sibling, their action has two potential consequences. First, the rank in leadership has been violated, as the older sibling is typically the leader. Second, if the bullying goes unresolved, then the relationship may result in an emotional cut-off. Emotional cut-off from a sibling might include increased physical distance, withholding verbal communication, or both (Bowen, 1978).

According to Adler (1928), siblings experience rivalry as the need to overcome an inferiority complex by reducing competition and differentiating oneself. Siblings influence one another through their behavior in the sibling relationship. The number of children and years between them can influence the intensity and degree at which fighting and arguing unfolds (Adler, 1928).

Bowen's (1978) family systems theory presents a view of the world as interconnected. It views the individual regarding his or her relationships with family and, ultimately, with society. Small changes from generation to generation eventually have substantial consequences. Any shift to the system can provide positive or negative results, changing family dynamics or maintaining more of the same.

Social Cognitive Theory

Another widely used theory for researching bullying behaviors is social learning theory posited by Albert Bandura. Bandura's (1977) theory sees human interaction from an intertwined cognitive, behavioral, and environmental position. People learn by observing other people and how they behave. This theory looks at observation learning, intrinsic reinforcement, and learning independent of behavior change. Bandura's famous Bobo doll experiment put his theory into action by showing that children can learn behavior simply by observing an adult and their behavior towards the doll. For example, adults demonstrated aggressive behavior onto the doll, and children copied the aggressive behavior they observed. Bandura (1977) posited there are three models for learning: live model, symbolic model, and verbal instructional model. Someone learns from someone else's behavior as they see it as a live model. Learned behavior displayed in film, TV, or other external means is considered a symbolic model. Whereas verbal instruction or description given by someone else is known as the verbal instruction model. Later, Bandura renamed his theory social cognitive theory to describe the cognitive components of his theory

more accurately on learning. The cognitive process is an integral aspect of learning and behavioral change.

Reciprocal determinism is the term Bandura used to describe the triadic influence of interaction, including the environment, individual, and behavior contributing to an individual's development (Allison & Bussey, 2016). Environmental events such as modeling, verbal instruction, and social influence affect the person's response to the environment, which is dependent on the person's personality and physical features (Bandura, 1989). Furthermore, behavior is shaped by the environment and controls the parts of the environment to which the person is susceptible to being exposed. This theory suggests people influence the environment, and thus, in turn, the environment influences the people. Moreover, Bandura's theory states that children learn from their environment, and their behaviors can be positively or negatively reinforced by the environment within which they grow. Children will participate in behaviors they believe will be rewarded rather than punished (Bandura, 1977). For example, if a child personally gains something from acting out in a negative manner, then they are likely to repeat this harmful behavior for personal gain. Bandura (1989) posits that people directly influence their life's outcomes, as evidenced by selecting, influencing, and constructing their own circumstances. This information is necessary when examining bullying behaviors, as negative behaviors can be learned from members of the family. Members of the family can have a powerful influence on their family dynamics and relationship patterns. Bandura (1977) states that children learn aggression from role models or whoever they have close contact with and repeat aggressive behavior as it is positively reinforced. Parents being immediate role models for their children can directly influence how they respond to stressful situations and emotions. Thus, parents influence how children interact with their peers by teaching prosocial ways of

interaction; they may model such interactions with significant persons in the environment and provide positive reinforcement for positive social behaviors. The family environment provides the context for children to learn prosocial strategies by modeling healthy communication and emotional expression, especially during times of stress and emotional reactivity. Social learning theory posits that children can learn aggressive behavior patterns directly through experience or indirectly by observing people around them.

Intrinsic Reinforcement

Internal reward system: Internal state of mind and motivation are important to influence the learning process. Internal satisfaction is gained by continuing behavior and then reinforced by personal enjoyment.

Observing, imitating, and modeling are ways people learn, independent from external behavior change. Bandura (1977) posited a four-step modeling process responsible for successful learning: attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation. If behavior is related or interesting in a way of uniqueness, then it is likely to grab attention, thus influencing the learning process. One way to retain information is to go over information several times. Reinforcement and punishment influence motivation to replicate a behavior. Motivation is necessary to replicate the modeled behavior for observational learning to be successful. People who identify others who are successful and embody similar characteristics to themselves are said to be motivated to replicate their behavior; however, they can be disinterested in replicating observed behavior, resulting in negative consequences (Bandura, 1986). Although first-hand experiencing behaviors can be an effective form of learning, simply observing others receive reinforcement or punishment can be motivating for successful behavior change. For example, if a child sees their sibling being physically beaten for stealing money out of their mom's purse, then the child is said to be

motivated not to steal money from their mom's purse. Behavior is learned through others, not direct learning. Using an operant learning perspective, bullies develop learned behaviors from someone or somewhere and can be overlooked as victims of bullying themselves. Specifically, individuals repeat modeled behavior from those closest to them in their core or intimate group, such as family and friends (Shadmanfaat et al., 2020). As the environment reinforces bullying behavior, bullying behavior is maintained. Furthermore, this theory posits that the people responsible for the main source of an individual's positive and negative reinforcements will have the greatest influence on the individual's behavior (Shadmanfaat et al., 2020).

Cognitive beliefs are important to examine in those children who bully and engage in aggressive behaviors (Naylor et al., 2011). Parents who reinforce cognitive beliefs in support of bullying and aggressive behaviors pass these beliefs onto their children. For example, a child watching their parent gain power and control from others simply due to their aggressive behavior or bullying may model for the child that bullying is how a person intimidates and gains power and control to gain the things they want. Children may be intrinsically motivated to gain power and control over their siblings or peers to assert dominance and prove their self-worth (Recchia et al., 2010). The need to demonstrate self-worth can be motivated by bullying behaviors to seek attention and praise from others. Therefore, parents can be essential when seeking to interrupt this pattern of behavioral influence and teach children how to gain power and control without aggression toward others. For example, parents can catch their children doing something good as a way of using praise to reinforce positive prosocial behaviors they want their children to continue to put into practice. Parents may lead by example in showing their children they can gain power in a way that is not harmful to others but rather considered admirable, such as being a leader. For example, in siblings, if one sibling is not sharing their toys with another sibling or

spending more quality time with one parent than the other sibling, then parents might be able to step in and interrupt this power imbalance by making time for each child to play with the desired toys and spending equal amounts of divided attention on each child. Although it is unrealistic to say parents can create and maintain an equal space for their children 100% of the time, increasing attempts to distribute power and control evenly may interrupt bullying behaviors and restore balance in the family system (Bowes et al., 2014).

Trauma-Informed Lens

Through my education as a student family therapist, I have gained extensive knowledge of how trauma impacts the mind and body. Bullying is a specific form of trauma and can leave lasting effects on those who are involved. I use this trauma-informed lens to explore methods of sensitivity when treating clients. I believe using a trauma-informed lens allows me to examine further the systemic impact of trauma on the person and the family system involved.

James and MacKinnon (2012) state that the goal is not to provide a new model of therapy but to show that a trauma-informed lens can be incorporated into existing family therapy practices. By working toward incorporating change, both in how professionals understand presenting problems and solutions for intervention, the family therapist can understand the impact of trauma holistically.

Synthesis of Theoretical Frameworks

Theory provides an essential framework that researchers use to conceptualize bullying phenomena. Bowen's family systems theory and social cognitive theory have many similarities and differences but are essential for the family therapist/researcher to understand the multiple factors involved in bullying. Both provide a distinct socio-cultural lens when examining the experiences of those who suffer from bullying behaviors, which is beneficial for professionals attempting to parse the relational systems that lead to or sustain bullying behaviors. The main

underpinning of these theories is the systemic relational component provided to understand the ways in which human behavior develops and transpires. In addition, these theories examine the importance of the bidirectional process of human behavior which helps to predict future behavioral patterns and understanding of the human learning process. Bowen's family systems theory focuses on relational systems such as the emotional interconnected exchange amongst the system in which family members exist. Bandura's social cognitive theory focuses on the reinforcement of behavior during the learning process and behavioral patterns that transpire from direct and indirect observation and exposure.

Furthermore, Bowen's family systems examine processes that families experience when problematic behaviors are perpetuated throughout the system and the mechanisms that keep those behaviors homeostatic. Because these theories use contextually specific but similar language, using them in conjunction allows the researcher to gain a cohesive perspective on this intricate phenomenon, and they can expound on the broader complexity of the issue, especially since the current theoretical state of research is so saturated with a narrowly focused and restrictive approach. Similarly, these theories examine the person, environment, and behavior as a reciprocal exchange between systems. These theories support common beliefs about bullying behaviors because they target the relational aspects of aggressive behaviors, which allows for a broader, more current, and multi-contextual approach and frees the researcher from the confines of a traditional theoretic outlook. These theories combine relational dynamics with contextual factors and environmental influence to explain human relationships. Although a different language is used, it is essential to consider the relational component of each theory and the significance of treating bullying as a relational issue because it not only benefits the strength of

the research but will guide practical applications of the research findings and treatment interventions.

Literature Review

Currently, there is limited information on the systemic impact of family bullying. Much of the literature focuses on the context of school-based bullying and not on the family system (Butler & Lynn Platt, 2007). Other studies solely focus on the child's experience of bullying at school. In addition, these studies are limited in their exploration of how parents might perceive their child's experience with bullying at school (Lovegrove et al., 2013). The lack of research on this topic leads me to believe that there remains a failure to examine the systemic context of bullying, which is necessary for families to understand bullying behaviors. Sawyer and colleagues (2011) claim there is a lack of research on the perspectives and understandings of parents of children who are bullied, with most research focusing on the direct experiences of children who are involved, including those who bully, are victimized, or are bystanders. Also, teachers have been the focus of the little research that has centered on adults. The few examples of research focusing on adults mainly emphasize the experiences of teachers and school staff.

However, original research conducted by deLara (2016) thoroughly examines the consequences of childhood bullying on adult life. This research is important because it highlights bullying behaviors that occur at home from within the family system. Specifically, deLara details the adverse effects that may result from the parental experience of bullying: anxiety, depression, physical health issues, teen pregnancy, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), criminal activities, and homelessness. Also, bullying contributes to physiological changes in the brain and leads to mental health issues (deLara, 2016). Moreover, deLara found bullying to impact adult decision-making skills, and the ability to thrive in relationships and interpersonal interactions.

In addition, in deLara's discussion of the impacts of bullying in adulthood, Berry and Adams (2016) stated that more research should focus on aggression in families and how bullying is defined within the context of the family system, not excluding how, when, where, and why bullying can occur. Gómez-Ortiz et al. (2019) found that certain parenting styles, such as authoritarian and strict styles, can be linked to the connection between the family context and higher involvement in bullying behaviors.

Similarly, Cox and Paley (1997) assert some of the principles of the family systems to include the following: the wholeness and the sum of the family as greater than just its parts, the idea that families do not exist in a vacuum, the family as a hierarchical structure containing its own subsystems, adaptive features, and homeostatic needs, the family environment as a working model of interconnected relationships, and the family as a self-adaptive and organized system operating within a living context of change.

Family systems theory provides a framework to illustrate the connection between members of the family and their transmission of behavioral influence to each other. Subsequently, when one member of the family is affected by a problem relating to bullying, other members of the family will be influenced as well. Family systems theory demonstrates the significance of family relationships when looking at the development of aggressive behavioral patterns displayed by children (Cross & Barnes, 2014). Berry and Adams (2016) found that bullying situations in families create an ongoing undercurrent of conflict and is shaped by three relational practices: understanding, dialogue, and forgiveness. Moreover, they identify a cyclical connection: understanding can create conversation and forgiveness; conversation can create understanding and forgiveness, and forgiveness can create understanding and conversation. Thus, when looked at in the context of communication, the purpose of understanding family dynamics

is to improve the individual's relationship with others. Family involvement is critical for further understanding how to help those affected by bullying (Harcourt, 2014).

Definition of Bullying

Dan Olweus is one of the first and most widely accepted researchers of bullying behaviors, and his work provides a solid foundation for what is known about bullying today. According to Olweus (1993), bullying can be defined as a behavior that leaves a child “exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other students” (p. 9). He further defined a “negative action” as a behavior that “intentionally inflicts, or attempts to afflict, injury or discomfort upon another” (p. 9). A negative action can be carried out verbally through threatening, teasing, rumors, or name-calling, as well as through physical forms such as hitting, kicking, pushing, shoving, and making faces or gestures. Bullying can be carried out by a single individual or a group, and targets of bullying can also include either individuals or groups. Olweus emphasized that behaviors should only be labeled as bullying to describe relationships in which there is an imbalance of power, not merely for two students who happen to be fighting. Therefore, the three characteristics that must be present to be labeled bullying, according to Olweus (1993), are harmful intent, an imbalance of power or strength, and repetition of negative behaviors.

The literature also references Smith and Sharp’s (1994, p. 2) definition purporting that “bullying is a systemic abuse of power.” Since researchers cannot agree on how to define bullying outside of the school environment, Olweus’ school-based bullying definition is the most accepted because it clearly outlines the behaviors and relationship dynamics used to describe bullying. The terms "abuse," "harassment," and “victimization” are more commonly used in other contexts to describe bullying behavior. Stives et al. (2019) suggest researchers provide a clear definition of bullying for parents, so they are aware of the specific behaviors inquired about

during the research process. For this research, it is imperative to consider multiple perspectives on how adults may define their bullying experience; therefore, bullying will be defined as behavior that leaves a person exposed, repeated over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more persons. Furthermore, three characteristics must be present to label a situation bullying, harmful intent, imbalance of power or strength, and repetition of negative actions on the part of one or more persons and include physical, verbal, social/relational, cyber, and sexual harassment (unwanted sexual remarks, inappropriate touching, receiving unwanted sexual pictures or similar material via digital communication devices).

History of Bullying

Hamarus and Kaikkonen (2008) find that bullying behaviors are not decreasing, despite the extensive media attention and emphasis given to issues of bullying. Furthermore, there is concern that children who bully others often acquire the knowledge of how to use power and aggression to control and distress others. Thus, it is believed their knowledge creates an interactional style that will move through adolescence into adult relationships (Pepler et al., 2006). They found parents to be in a position of power relative to their children, and when they use forms of harsh punishment, they inadvertently model the power and aggression for their children, who may then in turn transfer those lessons onto other children. This provides support for the relational dynamics of bullying behaviors and how bullying behaviors are developed through generations.

According to Steinberg et al. (1992), parenting, which includes psychological autonomy-granting, high acceptance, and supervision, leads to better adolescent school performance and school engagement. Thus, positive parental involvement might act as a buffer for bullying behaviors perpetuated in children. Humphrey and Crisp (2008) interviewed parents of children who had experienced bullying by other children in an Australian kindergarten seeking to

understand the impact of peer-perpetrated violence. Humphrey and Crisp (2008) found that definitions provided for bullying were consistent with those given for school-based bullying, which indicates that historically, bullying behaviors have been seen as existing solely within an academic environment, and the burden is placed on administrators and school staff to resolve it, which ultimately leaves interventional gaps and excludes parental involvement. Overall, there is a need to create more effective anti-bullying policies for children and develop further education and support for teachers and parents (Humphrey & Crisp, 2008).

Furthermore, Berry and Adams (2016) discuss the implications that family members who have experienced family bullying feel a sense of non-voluntary relationship obligation. However, they do not encourage the abandonment of family relationships when dealing with bullying in the family. Thus, this research helps to identify communication problems rooted in the family and suggests that families might consider their perspective to be less obligatory and more voluntary in nature. Knowledge of parental experience of bullying may illuminate issues in communication and discrepancies created for the executive subsystem. Understanding these foundational and historical concepts in research pertaining to bullying helps illuminate the cyclical regurgitation of literature and demonstrates the need to introduce broader perspectives to help develop a new working model for the family.

Sibling Bullying

Oftentimes those who identify as having siblings can relate to having experiences of sibling rivalry and numerous arguments (Hoetger, et al., 2015). Disagreements or fights can be a shared experience among those who have siblings. However, the literature struggles to agree upon defining sibling behaviors as aggression, bullying, or rivalry in one clear succinct definition. The term “sibling violence” and “sibling abuse” is most used among researchers in this area (Goodwin & Roscoe, 1990).

Parents and Bullying

Hale et al. (2017) find the lived experience of parents is often overlooked in bullying research. Little is known about how parents feel when their child has experienced bullying, how they respond, and their experiences of involvement when helping their child. In addition, Harcourt et al. (2015) and Sawyer et al. (2011) suggest that some parents hold different perspectives in terms of the seriousness of bullying behaviors than others and are more likely to respond to physical forms of their children's victimization than other forms. Hale et al. (2017) found that parents are distressed regarding their emotional responses to their child being bullied. In turn, parents also influence how children interact with their peers by teaching prosocial ways of interaction; they may model such interactions with significant persons in the environment and provide positive reinforcement for positive social behaviors. The family environment provides the context for children to learn prosocial strategies by modeling healthy communication and emotional expression, especially during times of stress and emotional reactivity (Hale et al., 2017).

In addition, parents' perspectives of their parenting role, especially with regards to problematic situations involving their children, can feel dichotomous, like they are either the "good" or "bad" parent. The study conducted by Humphrey and Crisp (2008) found the following issues within a bullying scenario: school staff is unaware of a child being bullied, overall lack of information on bullying, parents feel isolated in their experience, parents lack the ability to advocate for children, and more support from family members is needed. From the little research done on parents, it appears they lack proper education and inclusion when bullying behaviors arise (Cooper & Nickerson, 2013).

Hale et al. (2017) used focus groups and eight interviews with 21 female parents to gather information on parents' own experiences with their children experiencing bullying at school.

This study was limited by their gender being only female participants. This research showed that the parents struggled to be good parents and were frustrated by how the school handled bullying situations, as they tried to become more involved and were met with informational barriers. Hale et al. (2017) provided this example:

The parents often did not trust the teachers, they believed they needed to support their complaint of bullying with some form of evidence, they suspected the school already knew about the bullying and crucially they did not trust the school/teachers to protect their child.

Comparably, Stives et al. (2019) found that half of the parents they surveyed were not sure of what behaviors are considered bullying and were fearful their child would be bullied at school.

The results of these studies suggest that further exploration of parents' experience with bullying may provide useful insight as to what types of support are needed for parents who are experiencing the challenges associated with bullying behaviors. Stives et al. (2019) suggest that future research can be valuable by asking parents about their own bullying experience to understand whether strategies parents offer to their children differ based on the parent's experience with bullying. Further exploration of the parent's voice may highlight some necessary information that is lacking in bullying literature.

Risks and Outcomes

Hoetger et al. (2015) state that virtually no research has addressed the question of whether sibling aggression or abuse can be defined as bullying. A bullying classification requires a power imbalance, which may not be ultimately apparent in sibling dynamics; however, Naylor et al. (2011) purport that almost all forms of violence, including violence among siblings, involve systemic abuses of power and thus, is defined as bullying. One important aspect of bullying remains the imbalance of power. Felson (1983) believes these differences in siblings are tied to

naturally occurring aspects of the relationship such as age or gender. Hoetger and colleagues (2015) found that siblings who were involved in bullying were less likely to report it as bullying due to the thinking that sibling fighting is normal. Ultimately, it is said to lead to an overall normalization of abuse in the family (Bowes et al., 2014; Hoetger et al., 2015). The normalization of sibling abuse and family violence may perpetuate bullying further into adulthood (deLara, 2016). Furthermore, it is essential for family therapists and helping professionals to continue exploring ways to treat families impacted by bullying.

According to Bowes et al. (2014) using the lens of social-ecological theory, sibling relationships can vary as a function of family, peer, and individual factors that may also increase the risk of psychiatric disorder. Bowes et al. (2014) also found that victims of sibling bullying are twice as likely to develop depression by early adulthood and to report self-harming behavior within the previous year when compared to those children not bullied by their siblings. Negative sibling relationships have been found to be associated with internalizing and externalizing problems among children (Buist et al., 2013). Tanrikulu and Campbell (2015) found gender and age to have possible associations with sibling bullying. Thus, age and gender should be considered when considering treating using family therapy. Tanrikulu and Campbell (2015) highlight the abundance of programming for the intervention and prevention of bullying in schools for peer bullying; however, there remains a severe lack of evidence-based practices for parents for sibling bullying.

Evaluation and Implications

Parents are especially important in helping their children recover from incidents of bullying. Although there is a large amount of literature that focuses on children who experience bullying, there is little to no research that includes the parent's perspective of bullying, despite parents playing such a crucial role in the child's social development within the family system.

Adding parents' perspectives to bullying literature will increase our understanding of how parents recognize and respond to their child being bullied or being involved in aggressive behaviors. Although the bullying phenomenon is complex, it is important to understand parents' perspectives to close major gaps in the literature and to develop family-based interventions. Bullying occurs within a larger social context and extends across many systems outside of just the schoolyard. A clear picture of the impact bullying has in the home environment may provide insight into the multisystemic change needed to treat this expansive issue. Parents play an influential role in their children's lives and are responsible for advocating for the safety and well-being of their children. Therefore, it may be important to consider research that includes their thoughts, beliefs, and attitudes toward bullying. This expanded systemic perspective on bullying is crucial for family therapists and other helping professionals to develop systemic interventions to treat families and greater communities struggling to find answers.

Summary

The theoretical framework of this study is based on family systems theory, bioecological perspective, social learning theory, and a trauma-informed lens to explore how parents have experienced bullying. The review of the literature reflects extensive information on bullying, its history, and systemic characteristics. Overall, the parent's perspective is valuable when examining bullying behaviors in children because of its lasting effects into adulthood. It is beneficial to include their perspective as they play an influential role in their child's life. More literature is needed that considers the parents' perspective regarding the role bullying plays in the family system. Little consideration has been given to the voices of parents in the studies of the bullying phenomenon. Parents' viewpoints and perspectives should be taken seriously when attempting to change bullying policy in schools and other systems. Parental involvement is critical to providing change and understanding for this complex issue. Bullying will continue to

Setting and Sample

This purposive sample of 11 adults over the age of 18 years old ceased data collection when richness and saturation were achieved. Each participant self-identified as being a parent of two or more children between the ages of 10 and 18 who experienced bullying from a sibling, half-sibling, or stepsibling in their childhood. Participants were English speaking and able to share their experiences to be able to fully participate in the study. One sampling method was used for this study. Following IRB approval of the research protocol by the Texas Woman's University Office for the Protection of Research Subjects, participants were recruited using the listed method. Upon approval, the interviews took place online via the Zoom platform and were recorded for transcription purposes. Phone interviews were offered for those who did not have web camera access.

This method utilized a purposive sample aimed for 15 adults over the age of 18 years old and ceased data collection when richness and saturation were achieved. Each individual participant self-identified as having been bullied by a sibling in their childhood and a parent of two or more children between the ages of 10 and 18. Permission to advertise the study was sought from any gatekeepers prior to advertising. Gatekeepers are known as page administrators who monitor the group for compliance with rules and regulations for safe social media use by all members who join. Recruitment of the desired population started online using social media advertising on the parenting page of Reddit and Facebook, which contains 3.3 million members. A digital flyer (Appendix C) was created specifically for this research study and distributed using online social media platforms such as Reddit and Facebook to advertise participation in the study.

The Interview Process

A semi-structured interview was used to gather information from participants during this study. Semi-structured interviews are used when asking open-ended and probing questions to get to know the independent thoughts about a particular group (Adams, 2015). Participants were asked to complete an individual interview that consisted of several questions about their own personal experience with sibling bullying and their parental experience with sibling bullying. The interview asked participants to share their experience in as much detail as they saw fit.

Data Collection

Preliminary questions were asked as part of a pre-screening process with the participants to gain support for and an understanding of the project. Informed consent was gathered before proceeding with the study. Participants were asked to answer three pre-screening questions (Appendix D) to determine study eligibility. Once it was deemed that the participant met the criteria of the study, a follow up email (Appendix E) was sent out to schedule an interview. Each participant was interviewed once. The interviews were video-recorded, and participants were given the opportunity at the end of the interview to share any additional comments to fully capture their experience. The interview began with the interviewer asking: "To begin, tell me a little about yourself and your household." Suter (2012) states the purpose of multiple sources of data is corroboration and converging evidence. Having access to additional sources of data for the evaluation of a particular interpretation is necessary for a more in-depth investigation of an experience (Suter, 2012). Each interview was limited to no more than 45 minutes in length. Data was gathered until it reached saturation.

Trustworthiness of the Study

Bracketing

Due to my long-standing interest and dedication to research on the phenomenon of bullying, along with my personal experiences of being bullied myself, treating individuals and families in therapy, and witnessing others suffer from being bullied, I implemented strategies of bracketing to minimize bias and increase trustworthiness and credibility in my study (Creswell, 2014). Included is the outline of my bracketing plan:

- 1.) Peer debriefing: I consulted with a peer as a second coder who has little experience with bullying literature and does not self-identify to be as closely tied to the subject matter as myself. Since I have researched this subject for 9 years and have treated families dealing with the complex issue of bullying, it was essential for me to consult a peer to ensure my own beliefs did not cloud the data and inaccurately reflect the experience of my participants.
- 2.) Journal: To address any inherent bias, I have toward the subject, I recorded my thoughts, beliefs, and assumptions using reflective journaling throughout the research process. I utilized reflective thinking exercises to ensure that I was transparent about my thoughts during the research process. Journaling helped me to monitor any subjective perspectives and maintain honesty and credibility throughout the research process.
- 3.) Member checking: Upon completion of the interviews for this study, I provided the opportunity for the participants to share their thoughts and opinions on the data after it was transcribed by emailing participants a copy of the completed transcript for their review. I took any feedback or revisions provided after transcription and incorporated their perspectives to ensure the data accurately reflects their experience.

Qualitative research has standards of trustworthiness like subjectivity, reflexivity, capability of gathering data, and capability of interpretation (Morrow, 2005). Qualitative research is more subjective in nature when examining data, unlike quantitative research (Morrow, 2005). Subjectivity is not limited or controlled but used as data as it enhances the quality of the research (Moustakas, 1994). My own experience as a researcher and my understanding of the world ultimately affects the research process. Thus, my ability to be reflexive was an important aspect to understand about my own effect on the research (Moustakas, 1994). Reflexivity is the process of becoming aware of the researcher's assumptions, predispositions, and personal experiences about research and making them known to the self and others by using bracketing (Fischer, 2009).

Researcher as Instrument

I defined my academic interest and experience with bullying as research using bracketing. Bracketing is an ongoing process where the researcher reveals their personal interests, experiences, cultural factors, assumptions, and ideas that could influence how they view the study's data (Fischer, 2009). My personal experience includes a history of being a victim of traditional forms of bullying throughout my childhood and family bullying. In this case, I can personally relate to some of the emotional and psychological distress that the participants may have endured when they dealt with bullies. My own research into the significance of bullying within a family systems context stem from my passion to help children and families who may not have had the same support as myself during challenging moments in their life. As a clinician in the field of marriage and family therapy, my clinical experience working with people who have experienced trauma such as bullying has led me to believe this research is necessary to further expand our knowledge of this phenomenon so that researchers, clinicians, and professionals can help families cope and recover from bullying behaviors.

Bullying is a common issue, and more research is leaning toward expansion to include multiple systems and intervention development for families.

Being aware of past experiences and clinical orientations, I focused on understanding parents' lives and what parents experienced from their own perspectives. By inductive analysis, I worked on being flexible and open to the experiences expressed by the parents who had recounted their experiences with bullying. I asked open-ended questions, conducted interviews, and allowed for personal exploration to ensure the participants were able to freely express themselves. I approached the research process reflexively by disclosing my emotions and using these in the analysis of these cases. Notetaking was utilized to record any emotions that came up for me during the interview. Throughout the interviews, any repressed memories, or aroused feelings from my past experiences of bullying were recorded in my reflexive journal.

Another strategy used for reflexivity is to consult with a research team or peer debriefing. My research team includes myself, major professor, committee, and an expert reviewer. My major professor reviewed the transcripts, reflexive journal, and we discussed the themes that arose from the data. All themes will be audited by the committee, which makes the research process transparent, and the direct quotations for the themes enhance credibility. Considering culture and context improves the trustworthiness of a qualitative study (Morrow, 2005). Having an expert reviewer who is knowledgeable in the field of bullying literature will provide an additional perspective to ensure the accuracy of the information presented. The expert reviewer was used to ensure my interpretation of the data was accurate. Their role helped to ensure the credibility of the data and reduce the risk of biased interpretation.

Data Analysis

All data for the interviews was stored and analyzed using a password-protected computer and password-protected external hard drive. NVivo coding was utilized and is known for using

the participants' exact words. NVivo coding was useful when aiming to remain grounded in the participant's voice.

First Cycle Coding

The recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim. Meaningful statements were extracted from the interviews. The qualitative interviewer conducted first-cycle coding that used the original data to develop codes known as a descriptive coding method (Saldaña, 2021). Duplicate statements were discarded, and specific statements were generalized. Categories were formed from the exact words used by the participants.

Second Cycle Coding

Pattern and focused coding were used in the second coding cycle to organize the code descriptions and data samples. Pattern coding is a method of finding connections between the codes developed from the first cycle (Saldaña, 2021). Whereas focused coding searches for the most frequent or significant codes to develop the most prominent categories in the data (Charmaz, 2014). Next, subcategories were developed using focused and pattern coding. A complete list of meaningful statements was formulated and analyzed using NVivo, and the meanings of these statements were gathered. Clusters of themes were isolated from these articulated meanings. The theme clusters were integrated into an exhaustive description of the findings. In paragraph form, the meanings of the isolated themes were discussed at length. Following, a summary was provided for each meaning.

Methodological rigor was upheld in numerous ways. The dependability of the themes was verified by examining original interview data and assessing for data not accounted for in the themes, and conversely, for content in the themes not apparent in the interview data. An expert reviewer, with expertise in phenomenological research, looked over the interviews and

confirmed the accuracy of the findings. The credibility of the data was secured by using bracketing to suspend personal beliefs and assumptions. Consultation with the research committee was used to ensure accuracy in data interpretation. Also, the initial findings were given to each participant for confirmation and clarification. Any new data received at this stage was incorporated into the final descriptions and interpretations. Clarification from participants was also used to increase the validity of this study and member checking was conducted during analysis (Creswell, 2014). Participants identified as being able to read and write English; however, it seemed English was not their first language, as indicated by their use of fragmented English, which indicated potential vulnerability to misinterpretation due to grammatical errors in their responses. Conducting member checks is important to avoid interpreting data incorrectly. Participants were sent transcripts of their interviews for clarity. Participants were provided the opportunity to respond to the transcriptions with corrections, approval, or changes.

Ethical Considerations

For ethical considerations, permission from participants to record the interviews before they begin the study was obtained during pre-screening questions. The consent form informed participants of background information about the purpose of the study; procedures of the study, the nature of the study, any possible risks and benefits of participating in the study, the protection of participants' rights that is tied to the practice of confidentiality, and my contact information regarding any questions or concerns that may arise for participants. Permission was secured from the Texas Woman's University IRB, following university guidelines to protect the human rights of my participants. Upon receiving my approval letter from the IRB, a copy was provided to all persons, to secure permission to perform my study (Creswell, 2014). All online data was kept secure using encrypted passwords. Only my major professor and I have access to the data.

Participation in the study was completely voluntary and attrition occurred as I explored a sensitive topic.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the experiences of parents who reported experiencing sibling bullying. It utilized recorded interviews, which allowed parents to voice their personal experiences with sibling bullying. Member checking was used to ensure participants were satisfied with the interpretation of data during the study. This study is unique as it began to explore the voices of the executive subsystem, parents, who also experienced bullying as do their children and other members of the family system. The shared lived experiences gained from this study can further help the professional community understand the importance of knowing how bullying affects families. Future research can use this experiential knowledge to explore expansive methods for intervention and prevention of bullying within family systems.

This study included questions that were carefully designed to provide comprehensive exploration for the purpose of the research. Initial questions were developed and followed up by sub-questions for further probing as needed. This interview method made space for participants to share their individual and unique experiences as was reported to the researcher. Kallio et al. (2016) stated, that semi-structured interviews are designed to help guide the conversation and provide participants the opportunity to share additional details they believe are important that might not be reflected in the question itself. Before constructing the semi-structured interview questions, a level of study on the subject is required as interview questions are based on prior knowledge from the literature. See Appendix A for the interview guide.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The purpose of this chapter is to present the stories collected from individual semi-structured interviews with the researcher and the results from data analysis. The research questions that guided this study are as follows: (1) What are parents' perspectives of sibling bullying? (2) How do parents address bullying experiences with their children? and (3) How have participants' childhood experiences of sibling bullying influenced their own parenting when their children are involved in sibling bullying? To determine eligibility, participants were pre-screened based on the following criteria: must be an adult over the age of 18, be bullied by a sibling in childhood, and presently or have previously parented two or more children between the ages of 10 and 18 who engaged in sibling bullying. This section is followed by a description of the sample, a table of participant demographics, an outline of the research methodology that was used for the qualitative data analysis, a presentation of the data and results by theme, and a summary.

Self of the Researcher

My journey in bullying research started during my undergraduate years when my professor mentor, Dr. Kimberly Barchard, asked me to think of what problem I was most passionate about solving. Bullying had been something I not only experienced personally but witnessed as a student throughout the lifetime of my education. My bullying experience started in the home while also occurring at school, so I am no stranger to the impact of trauma and lasting impressions this issue can cause for an individual. Although I have not personally experienced sibling bullying due to being an only child and losing my brother at a young age, to me, bullying remains a deep issue in relationships and presents many challenges for family

therapists seeking novel ways to treat this pervasive and misunderstood phenomena as the research starts to expand from looking at peer bullying to examining dynamics within the family.

Description of the Sample

Table 1 contains the following demographic information for participants: age, gender, race/ethnicity, number of children, and state. Interviews were conducted online via Zoom and included participants from all over the United States. A diverse sample of 11 parents was obtained ($n = 7$ Black/African American, $n = 2$ Asian, $n = 2$ Hispanic/Latina).

Table 1

Demographic Information

Parents	Age	Gender	Race/Ethnicity	Number of children	State
P1	28	M	Asian	3	GA
P2	37	F	Hispanic/Latina	3	NV
P3	30	F	Black	2	FL
P4	35	F	Black	2	NV
P5	40	F	Black	3	IL
P6	30	F	Black	2	TX
P7	29	F	Black	2	NY
P8	30	M	Black	4	CA
P9	30	F	Black	2	IL
P10	34	M	Asian	3	NC
P11	45	F	Hispanic/Latina	3	NV

Participant Profiles

P1. P1 has three children and is married to his wife. P1 reported physical bullying as the main concern in his household.

P2. P2 has three children and is married to her husband. P2 reported relational bullying as the primary concern in her household.

P3. P3 has two children and is married to her husband. P3 reported name-calling and intimidation as the primary concerns in her household.

P4. P4 has two children and is married to her husband. P4 reported fighting and verbal aggression as the primary concern in her household.

P5. P5 has three children and is married to her husband. P5 reported arguments, unequal ownership of resources, and competition is the primary concern in her household.

P6. P6 has two children ages 10 and 15 and is married to her husband. P6 reported name-calling and public embarrassment as the primary concern in her household.

P7. P7 has two children and is married to her husband. P7 reported fighting over unequal resources and gifts as the primary concern in her household.

P8. P8 has four children and is married to his wife. P8 reported fighting over unequal resources and gifts as the primary concern in his household.

P9. P9 has two children, ages 11 and 15, and is married to her husband. P9 reported fighting and competition as the primary concern in her household.

P10. P10 has three children, ages 6, 10, and 14, and is married to his wife. P10 reported fighting over unequal resources and gifts as the primary concern in his household.

P11. P11 has three children, ages 12, 14, and 16, and is married to her husband. P11 reported verbal bullying and treating siblings differently when others were around.

Research Methodology for the Data Analysis

The interviews were transcribed using sonix.ai software and then reviewed for accuracy and to verify the interview content. All research-gathering materials with identifying information were locked and stored in a safe location until they could be destroyed.

Participants were given a unique code to protect their identifying information (P1 through P11). NVivo coding was used to gather the exact words to describe each participant's experience to remain grounded in the participant's voice. First and second cycling coding was used to gather themes and subthemes presented in the data. Patterns emerged during coding as participants' stories repeated similar information, providing data saturation.

Presentation of Data and Results of the Analysis

Table 2 outlines the interview questions used in the study and their corresponding themes. Table 3 outlines the themes and corresponding codes.

Table 2

Interview Questions and Corresponding Themes

Interview questions	Theme #
2.) What are your personal beliefs about bullying?	1
3.) Describe your relationship(s) to your sibling(s) growing up.	2
4.) In as much detail as you can, please describe your most recent memory of sibling bullying. What stands out most in your memory?	3
5.) Describe in detail any emotions you felt during your sibling bullying experience.	1

Interview questions	Theme #
6.) Did anyone notice your bullying experience? Or did anyone offer to help you? Please explain.	4
7.) Looking back, How did you respond after your experience with sibling bullying? What did you do that helped you to cope with the bullying that helped you the most? What actions did you take that ended up being the least helpful?	5
8.) Thinking about your experiences as the survivor of sibling bullying — Please explain what influence this may have had on your behavior now as an adult.	5
9.) In what ways has your personal experience with sibling bullying shaped your response to your children’s experience?	6
10.) What advice would you give to your children when they experience sibling bullying? Please explain.	6
11.) Is there anything else you feel I should know about your experience with sibling bullying?	6

Table 3*Themes and Corresponding Codes*

Themes	Codes
1.) Beliefs and Emotions Felt During the Bullying Experience	Harmful Power and violence Uncomfortable emotions
2.) Sibling Order— Elder Siblings Bully the Younger Sibling	Unbalanced relationship Distant/cut-off relationships
3.) Powerlessness and Weakness Arose from Experiences of Sibling Conflict	Perceived weakness Power imbalance Unequal distribution of resources
4.) Parents Did Not Notice or Did Not Respond When Learning of Bullying Behavior	Ignored/not noticed Parents noticed and did not intervene Other family offered to help
5.) Behavioral Adaptations Being the Survivor of Sibling Bullying	Perfectionism Hypervigilant Withdrawal Conflict resolution skills Self-improvement
6.) Parental Advice to Their Children on How to Address Bullying Behaviors, Coping, & Solutions	Increasing fairness Opening dialogue with their children Facilitating positive relationships Solutions

Six themes emerged from the data analysis, which is presented in this section, along with a summary of the associated codes and the supporting verbatim quotes of the participants. Participants expressed their beliefs and emotions during their sibling bullying experience and addressed interview questions 2 and 5. All participants shared that sibling order was important to their experience and found that elder siblings bully the younger sibling, which addressed interview question 3. Then, participants shared that what stood out most in their memory of being bullied at home was feeling powerlessness and weakness when being bullied by a sibling, and addressed interview question 4. Participants expressed no one noticed or responded when learning of sibling bullying and addressed interview question 6. Those who survived sibling bullying expressed behavioral changes they made that allowed them to adapt to their experience and addressed interview questions 7 and 8. Lastly, parents shared advice they would give their children on addressing bullying behaviors, coping, and solutions for future suggestions and satisfied interview questions 9, 10, and 11. The findings of this qualitative semi-structured inquiry addressed the research questions, which explored the lived experiences of participants who experienced sibling bullying in their childhood and also a parent or have parented two or more children engaging in sibling bullying.

Theme 1: Beliefs and Emotions Felt During the Bullying Experience

When asked about their personal beliefs about bullying, participants shared bullying as (a) harmful, involving (b) power and violence, and resulting in being left with (c) uncomfortable emotions.

Harmful

This study found that the participants believed their bullying experiences to be emotionally, physically, and mentally harmful. For example, participant 3 said “No one is

supposed to experience bullying. It is something that can affect a person like emotionally, physically, even mentally, it can really affect someone.” Participant 8 said “it can be harmful.”

Power and Violence

A resounding number of participants shared their bullying experiences, including dynamics of power and violence. For example, participant 5 said “We are both females, so we should have equal rights to pursue our property or things in the house. You shouldn't use power against me or exert your first bornship on me, I feel cheated upon.” Participants reported they believed their siblings exerted power over them to demoralize, intimidate, and target the sibling they believed was the weaker one. For example, participant 7 said “My personal belief about bullying is bullying is bad, so it intimidates one. It lowers a person’s self-esteem and bullying should not be the case especially when it comes to family.” Participant 10 said “I believe if a person is being bullied, it means they are maybe being targeted and its an indication they have no worth or value. And in that case you should report it maybe to an elder person.”

Uncomfortable Emotions

Disappointed, sad, low, cheated, weak, and isolated were said to be uncomfortable emotions and consequences felt as participants reflected on their experience of being bullied by their siblings. For example, participant 5 said “A weaker person is being bullied from someone who seems more powerful.” For example, participant 9 said “I feel weak and demoralized.” For example, participant 4 said “I feel looked down on. Maybe I should use that word. I felt demoted. I just felt very hurt.”

Participant 4: I’m unable to defend myself and shows how very weak I am. I should like try to fight for myself or try to defend myself when I’m in trouble. And throughout that period of time they were always making reference about that. They were always calling

me weakling. They were insulting me and trying not to be very aggressive. They were not pushing or beating me. It was just the words of the mouth at heart. And they were trying to send me on lots of jobs that period. And I felt like they didn't have any regard for me. And that period, I felt very sad.

Participant 4 expressed that their bullying experience at school did not stop at home; however, the bullying continued with emotional and verbal insults by their three older siblings.

Theme 2: Sibling Order— Elder Siblings Bully the Younger Sibling

Participants noted the importance of sibling order when discussing their sibling bullying experiences, as the elder sibling was noted to be the source of conflict in all reported cases. This theme consisted of two patterns, which are (a) unbalanced relationships and (b) distant/cut-off relationships.

Unbalanced Relationships

Sibling relationships described by the participants in this study were said to be unbalanced. Sibling relationships were described as one-sided. For example, participant 10 said “My relationship with my brother was somehow unbalanced.” Participants who experienced sibling bullying themselves noted an elder sibling targeted them. Elder siblings were described as more powerful than the younger ones, seeking to be first in all aspects of the sibling relationship. For example, participant 8 shared “My elder brother, he always feels this sense of domination as the first born.”

Participant 5: Kind of feeling like no one loves me, no one cares about me. Sometimes I begin to wonder, did my parents really give birth to me? They treated my sister better than me because she's the first one. I kind of feel depressed growing up.

Participants reported competition to be an indicator of conflict in their sibling relationships.

Distant/Cut-Off Relationships

Sibling relationships that were described as having rivalry and loss of power due to sibling order felt distant, drifted apart and cut-off later in adulthood. For example, participant 3 said “because of the bullying, I had to I was like scared of him, so I would try to avoid him. We drifted apart. We have a distant relationship, I’d say.” Participant 5 said “my elder sibling was a competitive situation, you know. Sometimes we both need the same thing or want the same thing at the same time. So she kind of exerts power to get it first.”

Theme 3: Powerlessness and Weakness Arose from Experiences of Sibling Conflict

Sibling conflict occurs when relationships involve (a) perceived weakness, (b) power imbalance, and (c) unequal distribution of resources.

Perceived Weakness

These themes were prevalent in 10 out of 11 interviews. Bullying in sibling relationships was said to include elements of physical and relational aggression.

Participant 1: My brother hits me with a blunt object and he hits my hand and I got some fractures. And what I can’t forget, that my own brother can do that to me. So that is what is tearing my mind to death. And I don’t know how I will get rid of that thought and forgive him.

Participant 6: They kept teasing me and pushing me out of the family. I actually saw it that way, that they were trying to push me out of the family, making me an outcast in some way, and I wasn’t happy. It got serious. I tried to talk to my parents. They didn’t take me seriously, but my brothers did.

Power Imbalance

Several participants’ experiences of sibling bullying included dynamics of power imbalance. For example, participant 1 said “I was mistakenly born in that family. My brother

wants to be the superior. Uh, superior one, so he doesn't want us to overtook him." Participants shared feeling weak while also battling with the inability to defend themselves against aggressive behaviors from their older sibling(s).

Participant 4: They said all sorts of things, how weak I am. I'm not going to like be able to defend myself. I'm going to lose my husband to women because I'm unable to defend myself the way they said things like that.

Participant 9: I was young and he was more elderly to us. He saw himself like he was the one. So because he was bigger than us he was supposed to get the bigger share. But we're supposed to share this together. But he was physically bullying us because, you know, we are weak and we couldn't defend ourselves.

Unequal Distribution of Resources

Not sharing resources provided in the home, gifts, or other physical items was a shared problem amongst those who experienced sibling bullying. Unequal distribution of items was used as a way for older siblings to exert power over younger siblings who could not gain similar status.

Participant 5: Competition actually cause bullying at times. That's according to my own experience. Like when there's a limited supply of resources and both siblings need it at the same time. That leads to sibling with the most power, exert power just to get that. I kind of try my best as much as possible to get them out of competitive situations. Make sure everybody has what he wants and everybody uses it.

Some older siblings were described as selfish because they took everything provided by their parents for themselves. For example, participant 5 said "This is my mom's car, as siblings we

both have equal right to our parents property, but she exerted the power as the first child. She went with the car, and I had to take public transport.”

Participant 10: There was this time my dad had bought Christmas presents for us, for me and my brother. So he wanted us to share between me and my brother. And he left the gift for us to share. So I can say my brother took advantage of that and wanted the best thing for himself and left some of the smallest gifts for me so that I can take the small things. And he took the bigger gifts and the good gifts for himself.

Theme 4: Parents Did Not Notice or Did Not Respond When Learning of Bullying Behavior

The participants’ parents did not acknowledge sibling bullying when made aware; however, other siblings and/or extended family offered to help. The following patterns emerged: (a) ignored/not noticed, (b) parents noticed and did not intervene, and (c) other family offered to help.

Ignored/Not Noticed

Most participants expressed their experience of sibling bullying was ignored or not noticed by their parents.

Participant 3: No one did. He always did it away from my parents. He was a good kid. But he bullied me from behind closed doors. Just come into my room and say things when my parents were not around. No one really noticed it.

Participant 8: My parents were 9 to 5 workers and they didn’t stay with us all the time. We were the only ones home after coming back from school, were just go to the football field to play some football and my younger sister, she always sees what’s happened, but, you know, there’s nothing she can do because she don’t have a say.

Parents Noticed and Did Not Intervene

Although seven out of 11 participants made their parents aware of the problem, no help was offered. For example, participant 5 “My parents never offered to help or try to help me in any way.” Also, participant 4 shared “I just didn't get any form of support or someone to defend me.”

Other Family Offered to Help

Finally, it was mentioned that other siblings or extended family such as cousins and grandparents, offered to intervene to support those experiencing sibling bullying. For example, participant 6 “My brothers boosted my morale, made me feel better as a person. Quickened my academic ambitions. They did just made me want to do it quickly, to prove my sisters wrong.” and participant 4 said “I just had one cousin that tried to defend me from my own siblings then. But then he stopped coming around, so I stopped getting the defense.”

Theme 5: Behavioral Adaptations Being the Survivor of Sibling Bullying

Adults who experience sibling bullying in childhood are faced with consequences of trauma responses as evidenced by (a) perfectionism, (b) hypervigilant, and (c) withdrawal. Some adults felt they gained (d) conflict resolution skills, and (e) self-improvement because of their bullying experience.

Perfectionism

Several trauma responses were noted to have resulted from those who faced sibling bullying. Survivors of sibling bullying noted they tried to be perfect to avoid discrimination or demotion from others. Perfectionism was used to avoid making mistakes, which was viewed as making oneself a target for bullying by their siblings. For example, participant 4 said “I try to be a perfectionist to do my job to the best. So I don't get any form of discrimination or demotion.”

Hypervigilant

The experience of sibling bullying highlighted heightened awareness of self, being more observant, and watching out for others showing aggressive behaviors in the environment. And participant 4 said “It keeps me very observant about the environment.” Participant 3 said “I try to make sure whatever I do is perfect and I’m always hard on myself when I make mistakes.”

Withdrawal

One participant shared their rivalry experience with their sibling, which made them change from being more extroverted to more introverted. Participant 7 said “sibling rivalry made me an introvert. When I was young, I was an extrovert. But it came to a time that I changed to an introvert. I felt like having alone time was the best time.” Another participant said he would stay out of the way and “stay in my own lane.” Two parents used the word trauma to describe their perspective seeing their own children bully one another. For example, participant 6 said “I won’t lie to you, I experienced some kind of trauma seeing my older son bully his younger brother because I know how I felt.”

Participant 9: I actually see it as something the younger ones should not be experiencing at all because it’s traumatizing and its actually destructive to surely give them to live in an environment that they feel they’re not comfortable. I can’t tolerate it at all.

Conflict Resolution Skills

On the other hand, some parents reported their experience to be positive. Those with positive experiences were able to adapt to the trauma of sibling bullying by gaining the ability to reduce conflict between their children as well as challenging themselves to be able to talk to their own children about bullying. Participant 4 said “It made me very positive. I could be very optimistic about certain things that look impossibly good.”

Self Improvement

Some felt they were a better person and stronger after having had the experience of sibling bullying.

Participant 6: It made me stronger as a person. It made me approach things with a more reasonable aspect, like do not judge from one side or take sides or defend the person I'm hearing. I just want to know both sides if there has been bias here, bias judgement here. And it keeps me better at my work. It keeps me calm headed. Well, it just made me stronger. Honestly, it made me a better person.

Participant 10: I can say it has really changed my behavior because now I'm able to talk to my children about it and I'm able to try and tell him bullying is not good and explain some of the ways that they should avoid bullying each other and explain the effect of bullying.

Theme 6: Parental Advice to Their Children on How to Address Bullying Behaviors, Coping, & Solutions

Parents suggested addressing bullying behaviors in their children by (a) increasing fairness, (b) opening dialogue with their children, and (c) facilitating positive relationships among siblings (d) solutions.

Increasing Fairness

To address issues of sibling bullying, parents suggested increasing fairness by reducing the potential for competition or unequal treatment in sibling relationships. For example, participant 5 said "I made sure to treat them in such a way that no one gets or feels cheated."

Participant 9: "I think children are supposed to be shown equity from when they are young so that even when they come of age, like 15 or 11, they still have the virtues, and they will be resisting this kind of behavior, violence, and bullying.

Open Dialogue With Their Children

Maintaining an open dialogue with each child involved by facilitating open conversations about bullying was mentioned to address problematic behaviors. Parents provided insight about their experience and what was learned and tried to facilitate positive relationships amongst their children by building their child's self-esteem, reducing arguments, and having empathy for their child as they reflected on their own experience. Participant 3 shared "I really do know what it's like. I had to create a supportive and positive environment for my children."

Facilitating Positive Relationships

Parents provided their own insight for how to cope with bullying behaviors. For example, participant 10 said "I try to facilitate positive relationships with them and try to build self-esteem amongst them so that they cannot feel low when they are being bullied by the other siblings."

Participant 5 said "Make them know that we are all important to each other."

Solutions

When addressing sibling bullying, parents advised their children to (a) Talk together and/or to talk to someone they trust, (b) love one another, (c) avoid the sibling that is bullying, (d) do not seek revenge, (e) reminding them they are not alone, and (f) sharing their personal story. Most mentioned the importance of talking together, separating the bully and victim to talk about what happened, and suggesting they talk to anyone they trust. For example, participant 2 said "If they can't talk to each other, to go talk to mom or dad or a family member that they can trust."

Participant 7: I handle it by gathering them together, going out to a place and talking to them, just putting some sense into their mind. And letting them understand that no matter what happens, no matter where they go, there's still one blood.

Parents encourage their children to love each other no matter what because if they can learn to love their siblings, they can learn to live, love, and respect one another. Sibling love was expressed to be the most important love, as blood cannot change. For example, participant 5 said “They should always love each other, once there is love, love is above every other thing. Once you can love each other, you can learn to live with each other.”

Participant 7: Sibling love is most important and there is no way blood can change. So whenever you go, wherever you go, wherever we are with the first person who will come to your rescue whenever even you have a problem is your brother or sister. So they should always learn to love and respect each other.

Parents shared advice that included ways of expressing love and helping their children find ways to love one another. For example, participant 4 said “Don't feel your sibling doesn't love you. That's the way they express their love.” Participant 7 said “I think that I should find a better way to help my children love each other.”

Two parents suggested their children avoid their siblings bullying them by staying away from them. Participant 8 said “Staying away from bullying and in my own case, can, make one offspring to be free from it.” Participant 1 said “Ask them to stay away from each other. Do not seek revenge.” This parent advised not to seek revenge on the sibling who is bullying but rather seek parental support to reduce conflict and engage in conversations to build self-esteem. One parent advised their child they are not alone, and others offered what was learned from their own personal story to help their children not feel alone in their experience. For example, participant 10 said “The most important thing is to remind them they are not alone.” Participant 5 shared “Most of the time I always remember my experience in my childhood and kind of feel the kind of responses I wanted to receive as a child.”

Parents provided additional advice from their experiences with sibling bullying: increasing development of educational programs, talk to your kids, and seek professional advice.

Participant 1: I want to see a program taught in schools so that way kids know from the start that bullying is no ok. Either in school or some other organization or any part that can conduct that kind of program. Additionally, participant 7 said “I think I should find a better way to help my children love each other.”

Participant 10: When I see my kids bullying each other I usually feel bad. I try so hard to talk to them so that they cannot be able to repeat the same mistake and bully each other.

Participant 2: Getting advice from other people outside of immediate family. My mom is very neutral and does not like to take sides. If I can find somebody that can give me some type of advice, I try to talk to them and see what they can tell me and if maybe I'm doing something wrong.

Summary

The parental experience of sibling bullying and response to their own children's experience of sibling bullying was explored through this research by way of phenomenological qualitative inquiry. Eleven parents voluntarily participated in semi-structured interviews that were conducted online via the Zoom platform and recorded to gather descriptions of their experiences. Theme 1 addressed parent's personal beliefs about bullying and the emotions they felt during their experience, Theme 2 addressed sibling order, Theme 3 addressed powerlessness and weakness felt during sibling conflict, Theme 4 addressed parents did not notice or did not respond when learning of bullying behavior, Theme 5 addressed behavioral adaptations of being the survivor of sibling bullying, and Theme 6 addressed parental advice given to their children, coping, and suggestions for future directions for research.

The next chapter summarizes the research, followed by a discussion and interpretation of the research findings and results. Findings are compared to the data found in previous literature. The chapter includes the study's limitations, implications, and recommendations for future research. Lastly, a conclusion is provided to summarize the completed research study in its entirety.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

This chapter summarizes the results presented in Chapter 4, followed by an overview of the research findings. Each theme is examined through its relation to previous literature and theories and its interpretation through the lens of each research question. Then, this chapter outlines the study's limitations, implications, and suggestions for future research before concluding the study.

Discussion of the Results

The parental perspective shapes our understanding of sibling bullying intergenerationally through the parents' personal experience and how they use that experience to address the issue with their children. This study examined the perspectives of parents who self-identified as being bullied by a sibling in their childhood as well as parented two or more children between the ages of 10 and 18 years of age who engaged in sibling bullying. Understanding the perspectives of parents continues to be an important area of research when attempting to understand the complex issue of bullying because there is little known about the consequences and implications for the family system.

A qualitative inquiry was to explore the data from the semi-structured interviews from 11 parents who self-identified as having experienced sibling bullying in their childhood, as well as having two or more children who engaged in sibling bullying. Thematic analysis was used to find six themes and 20 patterns that emerged from the data gathered from the interviews.

Theme 1: Beliefs and emotions felt during bullying experience

Theme 2: Sibling order-- elder siblings bully the younger sibling (Q3)

Theme 3: Powerlessness and weakness arose from experiences of sibling conflict (Q4)

Theme 4: Parents did not notice or did not respond when learning of bullying behavior (Q6)

Theme 5: Behavioral adaptations being the survivor of bullying (Q7, Q8)

Theme 6: Parental Advice to their children on how to address bullying behaviors, coping, and solutions (Q9, Q10, Q11)

Table 4

Research Questions and Corresponding Themes

Research question	Corresponding theme
1. What are parent's perspectives of sibling bullying?	1,2,3
2. How do parents address bullying experiences with their children?	4,6
3. How have participants' childhood experiences of sibling bullying influenced their own parenting when their children are involved in sibling bullying?	5

Table 4 provides an overview of the original research questions and the corresponding themes that emerged from the participants' responses. Themes 1-3 addressed the research question of what parents' perspectives of sibling bullying are. Theme 4 and 6 addressed the research question of how parents address bullying experiences with their children. Theme 5 addressed the research question of how the participants' childhood experiences of sibling bullying influenced their own parenting when their children were involved in sibling bullying.

Comparison of Results to Previous Literature and Theory

Theme 1: Beliefs and Emotions Felt During the Bullying Experience

The first research question aimed to understand the parental perspectives of sibling bullying. This theme addressed interview questions 2, 5, and 9. Most participants believed that sibling bullying was bad, harmful, and a problem that needed to be addressed to reduce family conflict. Perspectives of consequences of bullying were mixed as some parents shared that they believed bullying a sibling resulted in feeling sad, demoralized, cheated, and weak, whereas some parents felt sibling bullying helped give them experience with conflict resolution skills and motivation for self-improvement.

This study found participants believed their bullying experiences to be emotionally, physically, and mentally harmful. The definition of bullying provided by Olweus (1993) aligns with the beliefs shared about bullying by participants: harmful intent, an imbalance of power or strength, and repetition of negative behaviors. Volk et al. (2014) proposed an updated definition of bullying that builds upon Olweus' definition and over 4 decades of bullying research. The revised definition comprised of both ecological and evolutionary perspectives and defined bullying as "bullying is aggressive goal-directed behavior that harms another individual within the context of a power imbalance" (Volk et al., 2014, p. 327). A resounding number of participants shared their bullying experiences, including dynamics of power and violence. Children may be motivated to gain power and control over their siblings or peers to assert dominance and prove their self-worth (Recchia et al., 2010). Siblings seeking to gain power and control may be motivated to get the things they want or prove their self-worth through forms of aggressive behavior, hence why it is essential for parents to model helpful ways to gain power and control without harming their siblings.

Participants had a difficult time identifying emotions they felt during their bullying experience; however, they labeled it as “bad” and “sad.” Most participants expressed having low self-esteem because of their sibling bullying experience, which is consistent with existing literature that untreated bullying in childhood leads to depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, and PTSD in adulthood (deLara, 2016).

Adults respond to stress based on childhood experiences as these become embedded in the parts of the brain responsible for stress regulation (Hostinar & Gunnar, 2013). When asked to recall emotions felt when thinking about their children engaging in sibling bullying, participants said they felt sad, depressed, scared, frustrated, paranoid, stressed, bad, and emotionless. Participants provided insight on how issues of bullying in the family may influence their response to their children, as well as how they address the emotional problems that occur from bullying in the family. Parents’ understanding, perceptions, and beliefs about bullying and forms of victimization may influence their reactions to bullying (Waasdorp et al., 2011). It is imperative that parents understand what constitutes bullying behaviors and how they perceive it will impact the ways they are able to respond to their own children being bullied. To summarize, parents have an integral role in addressing sibling bullying by helping their children gain conflict resolution skills. This will help to interrupt power imbalances and prevent negative emotional experiences.

Theme 2: Sibling Order—Elder Siblings Bully the Younger Sibling

The second theme addressed interview question 3. Siblings possess different views of the family based on birth order. When considering sibling position, no two children experience their family similarly (Bowen, 1978). Bowen theorized that one sibling can only be as successful as another sibling who is unsuccessful in maintaining balance in the system (Bowen, 1978; Kerr &

Bowen, 1988). Dantchev and Wolke (2019) found firstborn children and those growing up in families with more children at home had an increased likelihood of perpetrating sibling bullying (bully-victim or bully). Participants concluded their experiences with siblings to be negative with older siblings due to feeling unbalanced, targeted, and loss of power due to sibling rivalry.

Participants expected their older children to treat their siblings equally and to love one another. Parents tend to have an idealistic expectation of how their children will treat one another. Older siblings were expected to set an example of showing love to their younger siblings. For example, the oldest sibling was said to be expected to set examples and lead, whereas younger siblings tend to follow the lead of the older sibling (Toman & Toman, 1970). In contrast, younger siblings were told to love their siblings no matter what because they are family and blood-related. Younger siblings were expected to accept bullying behaviors as an expression of love by their siblings. This may be in an attempt to squash conflict and maintain expected levels of desired behavior amongst siblings. This thought process may be an adaptation for parents with unresolved bullying experiences in their childhood to cope with the harmful effects of being bullied by a sibling. In conjunction with preexisting literature, sibling order can influence the intensity and degree to which conflict unfolds (Adler, 1928). Participants noted the eldest sibling as the source of conflict due to issues with an imbalance of power and loss of control due to younger siblings' perceived weakness in parental treatment and unequal distribution of resources. Older siblings sought power over their younger siblings by taking resources and asserting dominance. Dantchev and Wolke (2019) educating parents on how to deal with and manage resource losses for firstborns can foster improved sibling relationships.

Sibling relationships that were described as having rivalry and loss of power due to sibling order were reported to be distant, drifted apart, and cut off later in adulthood. Emotional

cut-off is defined as an “extreme form of distancing” in the self-differentiation process (Cepukiene, 2021). Emotional cut-off is an attempt to manage unresolved anxiety, conflict, and attachment issues within the family system. Participants said they cut off their siblings to remove themselves from the ongoing bullying because it felt “bad, weak, and isolating.”

To sum up, birth order plays a major role in the success of sibling relationships. Participants shared a negative experience with their siblings in childhood due to imbalances of power with older siblings. To reduce conflict, parents suggested their younger children accept bullying as an expression of love. Sibling relationships with conflict and loss of power were said to be distant and cut-off in adulthood. Emotional cut-off is used to manage unresolved anxiety, conflict, and attachment issues within the family system.

Theme 3: Powerlessness and Weakness Arose From Experiences of Sibling Conflict

The third theme addressed interview question 4. Children may be intrinsically motivated to gain power and control over their siblings or peers to assert dominance and prove their self-worth (Recchia et al., 2010). Parents can be essential when seeking to interrupt negative patterns of behavioral influence as children seek praise from others to demonstrate self-worth by teaching children how to gain power and control without showing aggression towards others. For example, in siblings, if one sibling is not sharing their toys with another sibling or spending more quality time with one parent than the other sibling, then parents might be able to step in and interrupt this power imbalance by making time for each child to play with the desired toys and spending equal amounts of divided attention on each child. Not sharing resources provided in the home by parents, gifts, or other physical items was a common problem among those who experienced sibling bullying. Unequal distribution of items was used as a way for older siblings to exert power over younger siblings who could not gain similar status. Some older siblings were

described as selfish due to taking resources provided by their parents for themselves, such as gifts and transportation by having a car to drive. To conclude, older siblings were said to use unequal distribution of resources to assert power over younger siblings. The ways parents respond to conflict can drastically influence the outcome for siblings learning how to reduce competition amongst the family.

Theme 4: Parents Did Not Notice or Did Not Respond When Learning of Bullying Behavior

The second research question aimed to understand how parents address bullying experiences with their children. The fourth theme addressed interview question 6. It is problematic to consider sibling bullying as acceptable behavior within families. According to Khan and Rogers (2015), despite ongoing trends, there is a normalization of violent behavior among sibling relationships. They suggest using the term “sibling violence” to describe harmful actions between siblings. Similarly, harmful sibling behavior is typically described using the terms “rivalry” and “horseplay,” which further minimizes the impact of sibling bullying and inaccurately describes the experience for those victimized.

Overall, parents struggled with knowing how to address sibling bullying with their children; however, there were some commonalities among those sampled. When sibling bullying was addressed, parents chose to talk to those affected by the behavior (the bully and the victim). Some parents choose to speak to their children separately before coming together to address the issue. Alternatively, some parents reported they spoke to only the victim or only the perpetrator of the bullying behavior. Regardless of the perpetrator, sibling bullying harms the social and emotional well-being of children and adolescents (Sabah, 2022). Those exposed to sibling bullying face the same consequences as those bullied by their peers (Sabah, 2022). Many parents shared their personal experiences with sibling bullying when addressing bullying behaviors with

their children to address the consequences it may cause, and the emotions felt during the experience. Chen et al. (2021) found parents that who discussed bullying with their children were a protective factor against bullying victimization.

It is not mentioned in previous literature that parents do not notice or respond to their children when learning of bullying behavior. This may be because studies have not examined the adult perspective of sibling or family bullying; however, they examined their perspective of peer bullying in schools. All but two of the participants in this study stated their experience of sibling bullying was ignored by their parents. Although made aware of the problem, no help was offered. However, older siblings or cousins offered to intervene to support those experiencing sibling bullying. A lack of parental response to sibling bullying can reinforce tolerance and acceptance among individuals, families, and society at large (Hoffman & Edwards, 2004; Kiselica & Morrill-Richards, 2007). Thus, parental response to sibling bullying is not only crucial, but knowing how to respond in appropriate ways by modeling healthy boundaries and conflict resolution skills will support the development of creating a safer family environment.

It was apparent that for many of the parents who reported what was happening, little was known about how to address sibling bullying or ways to stop it. However, the results of this study demonstrated support for Harcourt et al. (2015) and Sawyer et al. (2011) suggesting some parents hold different perspectives in terms of the seriousness of bullying behaviors than others and are more likely to respond to physical forms of their children's victimization than other forms. Overall, there were many ways parents chose to respond to their children being bullied by a sibling. It is important to note that this research was exclusive, as it found that an overwhelming majority of parents did not have anyone to help them address their sibling

bullying experience in childhood. Therefore, those who had their experience ignored adapted as a result.

Theme 5: Behavioral Adaptations Being the Survivor of Bullying

The fifth theme addressed interview questions 7 and 8. “The meaning of the word “trauma,” in its Greek origin, is “wound.” Whether we realize it or not, our woundedness, or how we cope with it, dictates much of our behavior, shapes our social habits, and informs our ways of thinking about the world. It can even determine whether we are capable of rational thought in matters of the greatest importance to our lives” (Maté & Maté, 2022, p. 30). Those affected by bullying behaviors adapt to their environment to survive. The biological processes that humans are hardwired to use to survive impact daily living and relational development or dissolution. The parents in this qualitative inquiry shared how they adapted ways they addressed bullying with their children based on their childhood experiences with sibling bullying.

Having a trauma-informed lens when gathering and examining the data was crucial to understanding the experiences of those impacted by sibling bullying, as well as being sensitive to the difficulty and bravery it took for them to share their personal story for research purposes. The trauma of bullying entails not only the hurt of the attacks in the present but the scars and memories that remain for victims and their fear of possible reprisal in the future (Berry & Adams, 2016). There is a strong association between bullying exposure and PTSD symptoms in children and adolescents (Idsoe et al., 2021). Children who are exposed to chronic interpersonal stressors, especially those lacking proper caregiving, can experience varied emotional and behavioral challenges that can lead to developmental trauma or PTSD symptoms (Idsoe et al., 2021). There are five essential components when considering having a trauma-informed perspective: safety, trustworthiness, choice, collaboration, and empowerment. Trauma may evoke

feelings of guilt and shame resulting from the traumatic experience(s). Guilt and shame create a negative narrative about oneself and how the individual relates to others. Although many factors contribute to bullying victimization, those who experience both bullying in the family and at school are at higher risk for developing maladaptive schemas; however, working with targets of bullying to change negative beliefs “schemas” about themselves may help them to reduce their risk of re-victimization (Calvete et al., 2018). Parents can create a safe and trusting environment for their children to feel empowered by establishing a change in the family environment to help their children relate to their siblings in a different way, rather than using guilt and shame to punish undesirable behavior.

Parents can have a multitude of responses to bullying behaviors. Reciprocal determinism suggests that people influence the environment, and in turn, the environment influences the people and their behavior (Bandura, 1989). This theory explains how bullying behavior can be reinforced or diminished based on parental response. Since most of the parents in this study said their bullying experience went unnoticed, the bullying behavior continued. When parents responded to their children engaging in sibling bullying, they felt it was important to address bullying behaviors by advising them to love their sibling and sharing their stories to stop the bullying amongst their children. Unresolved trauma can be passed down through a person’s biology, behaviorally, and collectively through the family unit. It is also important to note that since their experiences of sibling bullying went unnoticed, it can be impactful for those needing to share their story to feel heard and validated. Thus, this study highlighted unhealed wounds or trauma that are not dealt with and eventually are passed on intergenerationally, and thus, as humans, we have behavioral adaptations based on our experiences. Parents provided advice to

their children based on how they wished their parents would have responded to their concerns about sibling bullying during their childhood.

Agllias (2015) suggests that family estrangement should be considered “a balanced and appropriate response to an unhealthy situation.” Bullying between siblings is a relational issue. Survivors of sibling bullying noted they tried to be perfect to avoid discrimination or demotion from others. Perfectionism was used to avoid making mistakes, which was viewed as making oneself a target for bullying by their siblings. The experience of sibling bullying resulted in a heightened awareness of self over time, being more observant. People with low differentiation of self are quick and easy to adapt their thoughts, opinions, and feelings to please others in hopes of gaining their acceptance.

Adults who experience sibling bullying in childhood are faced with consequences of trauma responses as evidenced by perfectionism, hypervigilance, and withdrawn. Parents in this study shared how the lasting effects of their experience resulted in flashbacks and distressing emotions when thinking about their own children engaging in sibling bullying. The traumatic experiences of sibling bullying shared by many parents in this study suggest that the consequences of bullying have lasting effects on not only the one receiving the bullying but also the perpetrator as well. One parent shared she felt remorse for how she treated her siblings growing up as both the perpetrator and victim of sibling bullying. Many parents realized sibling bullying negatively impacted their relationship with their sibling long into adulthood.

Alternatively, four parents described their experience to be positive since they gained conflict resolution skills and self-improvement because of their bullying experience. The parents who described having positive experiences despite their adversity experienced posttraumatic growth, which gave them the capacity to adapt and recover from difficult experiences. These

parents found their adaptation to surviving the experience to make them stronger as a person, approach situations with reason, and allow them to discuss the harmful effects bullying can have on others. These adaptations can be labeled as resilience. Resilience involves the processes that allow a person to move forward and experience positive adaptation after facing adversity (Armitage et al., 2021). Ultimately, parents with sibling bullying experiences shared ways they would address or change how they respond to their own children.

Theme 6: Parental Advice to Their Children on How to Address Bullying Behaviors, Coping, and Solutions

The third research question aimed to understand how parents' childhood experiences of sibling bullying influenced their own parenting when their children were involved in sibling bullying. The sixth theme addressed interview questions 9, 10, and 11. The family projection process is how the parents transmit their emotional problems to a child. Parents shared their own personal stories with their children to inform them of their own personal beliefs about bullying and how it impacted them and provided advice to prevent future bullying behaviors amongst their children in hopes of creating a loving family environment.

Advice given to those children who engaged in sibling bullying ranged from sharing their own personal experiences, informing their children to love and respect one another, and loving their siblings no matter what. Parents believed telling their children to love and respect one another would resolve issues of bullying because they did not believe their own siblings loved them when they endured sibling bullying in their own childhood. In addition, those who reported their parents did not respond or acknowledge their bullying experience felt ignored and thus believed it was important to address bullying behaviors with their children by talking to them, making addressing sibling bullying a priority. When addressing bullying between siblings, it is

important to label the harmful behavior of sibling bullying. Historically, it has been normalized when referred to in the context of rivalry (Kiselica & Morrill-Richards, 2007). Perkins and Shadik (2018) case study mentioned the potential for parents to normalize violence between siblings as they reference their childhood experiences with their siblings. When learning of children engaging in sibling bullying, parental response can either cease or perpetuate the development of harmful behaviors in the family system. Moreover, a violent family environment contributes to lifelong patterns of sibling abuse and violence that are repeated throughout generations (Kiselica & Morrill-Richards, 2007).

Parents suggested there is a need to develop future programming to reduce bullying behaviors in the family. “Knowledge of parental perceptions and meaning of what constitutes sibling violence may help inform future interventions aimed at helping parents prevent, alleviate, and address violence between siblings” (Perkins & Shadik, 2018, p. 79). There is a need to create more effective anti-bullying policies for children and develop further education and support for teachers and parents (Humphrey & Crisp, 2008). Knowledge of the parental experience of bullying helped to illuminate issues in communication and discrepancies created in the executive subsystem, such as varied differences in how bullying was talked about, who was involved in the conversation when parents addressed known bullying behaviors between siblings, and parents choosing to share a personal story to inform children of the harmful impact of being bullied by a sibling. To conclude, parents highlighted the need for anti-bullying policies, educational resources for parents, and structured support for how to handle bullying behaviors in families.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future research should examine the parenting styles of parents who experience trauma, such as sibling bullying, to further understand the relationship between trauma and parenting. Future research may include the voices of other family members, such as aunts, uncles, cousins,

and other extended family members, to gather a richer systemic lens of bullying in the family. It may be impactful to understand and conceptualize the difference between rivalry and bullying when examining these behaviors within the family system. Lastly, future research might explore how suggested methods for intervention can be used to treat bullying when applied to a family system, both from the parents' and clinicians' perspectives. This research coincides with the idea that family communication research should continue to explore bullying in the family using the term “bullying” and will remain separate from the research referencing peer bullying due to the need to examine issues of conflict and aggression occurring in family relationships as they are dynamic and different from that of relationships with our peers.

Limitations

This study was conducted online and limited to those who saw the advertising materials and had access to working technology to participate in an online study. This study appealed to individuals who identified as being able to read and write English; however, it seemed English was not their first language, as indicated by their use of fragmented English, which indicated potential vulnerability to misinterpretation due to grammatical errors in their responses. Member checking by emailing the completed transcripts allowed for verification to ensure accuracy. This study solely focused on the individual parental experience and did not include a spouse or secondary parent, thus limiting the perspective of the entire parental unit.

Implications

When parents notice their children engaging in bullying, it is essential they can respond appropriately. This research highlights the need for further studies to better comprehend the dynamics of bullying within families. It also stresses the importance of providing families with practical methods to prevent bullying at home, as well as developing effective approaches for addressing and treating this behavior. It is important for parents to respond to their children when

they engage in bullying. The objective of this research is to open conversations about bullying in the family system and normalize its existence outside of the overburdened school system.

The results of this study may potentially empower parents of children to find unique ways to discuss bullying behaviors in the family. This research may potentially open the dialogue on bullying to include behaviors that are harmful in the family. Parents, school counselors, community therapists/counselors, teachers, and school administrators can all benefit from this information as it will expound upon the experiences of the family at home to further aid in understanding how bullying behaviors are perpetuated and maintained through generations. This research has the potential to provide insight into how bullying is discussed in families and provide new interventions for those struggling to treat bullying. In turn, it may just confirm existing beliefs about parent's perspectives of bullying. Though this study is limited by its inability to make causal inferences and generalizations, longitudinal data is beneficial to see if there is consistency in the parental experience of the bullying phenomena across the lifetime (Stives et al., 2019).

Conclusion

This research aimed to learn about parents' childhood experiences of sibling bullying and how they respond to their children when engaging in it. The research findings highlight the need for more focused research regarding bullying within the family to better understand bullying dynamics in families, provide concrete methods for families to stop bullying at home, and develop ways to address and treat the issue. Bullying behaviors in the home can be managed. Intervention is necessary to reduce the harmful effects of bullying later into adulthood. Parents can be more equipped to handle bullying situations amongst their children with professionals providing further guidance on ways to increase helpful intervention within the family system.

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APPENDIX A

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Title: Parents’ Perspectives of Sibling Bullying: An Exploratory Study

Principal Investigator: Marielle Leo.....mleo@twu.edu 702-625-2819

Faculty Advisor: Aaron Norton, PhD.....anorton@twu.edu 940-898-2677

Summary and Key Information about the Study

You are being asked to participate in a research study conducted by Marielle Leo, a Texas Woman’s University doctoral candidate, as part of her dissertation. The purpose of this research is to learn more from parents who experienced sibling bullying as children to know how their experiences may influence their own behavior towards their children and other members of the family system. You have been invited to participate in this study because you currently or have previously parented children between the ages of 10 and 18 years old who engage in sibling bullying and have self-identified as having been bullied by a sibling(s) in your childhood. As a participant, you will be asked to take part in a virtual Zoom interview regarding your experience being bullied by a sibling in your childhood and parenting your own children who bully each other. This interview will be audio-recorded, and we will use a code name to protect your confidentiality. The total time commitment for this study will be up to two hours in length. After completing the study, you will be asked to provide an email address for a \$20 Amazon e-gift card for your participation. The greatest risks of this study include the loss of time, potential loss of confidentiality, loss of anonymity, and emotional distress. We will discuss these risks and the rest of the study procedures in greater detail below.

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. If you are interested in learning more about this study, please review this consent form carefully and take your time deciding whether or not you want to participate. Please feel free to ask the researcher any questions you have about the study at any time.

Description of Procedures

As a participant in this study, you will be asked to spend between 45 to 60 minutes of your time in a virtual Zoom interview with the researcher. The researcher will ask you questions about your experience being bullied by sibling(s) in your childhood and parenting. You and the researcher will decide together on a private location where and when the interview will happen. You and the researcher will decide on a code name for you to use during the interview. The interview will be audio-recorded and then transcribed using sonix.ai so that the researcher can be accurate when studying what you have said. In order to be a participant in this study, you must be at least 28 years of age or older, currently or have previously parented children between the ages of 10 and 18 years old that engage in sibling bullying and have experienced sibling bullying during your childhood.

Potential Risks

The researcher will ask you questions about your experience being bullied by a sibling(s). A possible risk in this study is emotional distress with these questions you are asked. If you become tired or upset you may take breaks as needed. You may also stop answering questions at any time and end the interview. If you feel you need to talk to a professional about any distress that may arise from participation in this study, the researcher has provided you with a list of resources at the end of this form.

Abuse of a child must be reported to CPS (child protective services). The interview questions may be triggering to participants, and participants might share information involving abuse that has occurred, which is reportable to CPS. In order to minimize the risk of emotional distress, the researcher will pause the interview and inform you that you are about to communicate behaviors that are reportable and will ask how you would like to proceed.

A possible risk in this study is loss of time due to the length of the interview taking no more than 60 minutes to complete. You may discontinue participation in the study at any time.

Another risk in this study is the loss of confidentiality. Confidentiality will be protected to the extent that is allowed by law. The interview will be held at a private location that you and the researcher have agreed upon. You are encouraged to select an interview location free from distractions that is private and secure. A code name, not your real name, will be used during the interview. No one but the researcher will know your real name.

Only the researcher will have access to the audio recording Zoom interview. All digital forms will be maintained using a password-protected personal non-TWU-owned computer and encrypted computer files. The computer used for research will be stored and maintained in a locked cabinet with a key. Only the researcher will have access to the locked cabinet. The results of the study may be reported in scientific magazines or journals but your name or any other identifying information will not be included. There is a potential risk of loss of confidentiality in all email, downloading, electronic meetings, and internet transactions.

Please be aware that with virtual conferencing platforms, there is a risk of virtual meeting disruption,

(e.g., Zoom Bombing). In order to minimize this risk, the Zoom waiting room feature will be used. As the host of the meeting, the researcher is the only one to allow the scheduled participant to join the meeting.

There is a potential risk of loss of anonymity. The researchers will remove all your personal or identifiable information (e.g., your name, date of birth, contact information) from the audio recording Zoom interview and/or any study information. After all identifiable information is removed, your audio recordings and/or any personal information collected for this study may be used for future research or given to another researcher for future research without additional informed consent. For presentations and publications, all proper nouns, names, and specific details of shared experiences will be altered to protect your identification.

TWU Disclaimer Statement: The researchers will try to prevent any problem that could happen because of this research. You should let the researchers know immediately if there is a problem and they will try to help you. However, TWU does not provide medical services or financial assistance for injuries that might happen because you are taking part in this research.

Participation and Benefits

Your involvement in this study is completely voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at any time. Following the completion of the study, you will be asked if you would like to provide an email address to receive a \$20 Amazon e-gift card for your participation. A copy of the study results will be sent to the email you provide.

Questions Regarding the Study

You may print a copy of this consent page to keep. If you have any questions about the research study you should ask the researchers; their contact information is at the top of this form. If you

have questions about your rights as a participant in this research or how this study has been conducted, you may contact the TWU Office of Research and Sponsored Programs at 940-898-3378 or via e-mail at IRB@twu.edu.

Resources for Mental Health Support

American Psychological Association Psychologist Locator

<http://locator.apa.org/>

National Register of Health Service Psychologists

<http://www.findapsychologist.org/>

Mental Health of America Referrals

<http://www.nmha.org/go/searchMHA>

Psychology Today Find a Therapist

<http://therapists.psychologytoday.com/rms/>

National Board for Certified Counselors

<http://www.nbcc.org/CounselorFind>

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Opening script:

Thank you for participating in this interview. As I mentioned earlier, this study is interested in the lived experiences of adults who experienced bullying in childhood and are parents who have children engaging in sibling bullying. I really appreciate you taking the time to speak with me.

In this interview, I will ask about your personal experiences with sibling bullying and parenting children who are engaging in sibling bullying. There are no right or wrong answers. This also means you are more than welcome to let me know if something can be improved or suggested for further investigation.

The interview should take no longer than 45-60 minutes, depending on how long we talk. This interview is voluntary, and you have the option to opt-out at any time and you may also skip any questions you wish not to answer for any reason. Your identity will remain confidential in participation in this interview. Any findings or direct quotes that will be shared from this research will be kept anonymous. Any identifying information gathered during this interview will be changed for privacy and security purposes.

Finally, this interview will be recorded. All recordings are private and not shared with other parties. Recording the interview will allow me to focus on your story rather than taking notes for the entirety of our time together. Do you have any questions before we get started?

Probes:

Can you tell me more?

Is there anything else I should know about what you shared?

Can you expand further?

Anything else?

Closing Statement:

Thank you for taking time out of your day to speak with me today. Your contribution is useful and your participation is greatly appreciated. Would you mind if I called you back if I thought of other questions? Upon completion of the study, the data will be published and available for review. If interested, you may request a copy of the completed study by sending me an email. Please reach out to the available resources provided if you notice any emotions or concerns arise after participation today. Thank you!

The following semi-structured interview questions will be asked:

Participant's experience

1. To begin, tell me a little about yourself and your household.
2. What are your personal beliefs about bullying?
3. Describe your relationship(s) to your sibling(s) growing up.
4. In as much detail as you can, please describe your most recent memory of sibling bullying. What stands out most in your memory?
5. Describe in detail any emotions you felt during your sibling bullying experience.
6. Did anyone notice your bullying experience? Or did anyone offer to help you? Please explain.
7. Looking back, How did you respond after your experience with sibling bullying? What did you do that helped you to cope with the bullying that helped you the most? What actions did you take that ended up being the least helpful?

8. Thinking about your experiences as the survivor of sibling bullying — Please explain what influence this may have had on your behavior now as an adult.
9. In what ways has your personal experience with sibling bullying shaped your response to your children's experience?
 - a. How do you respond to your own children bullying each other?
 - b. What emotions come up for you when thinking about your children engaging in sibling bullying?
 - c. Provide an example(s) of how you have handled sibling bullying in your home after you learned your children were involved.
10. Thinking about your own child/children:
 - d. What advice would you give to your children when they experience sibling bullying? Please explain.
11. Is there anything else you feel I should know about your experience with sibling bullying?

Thank you for participating! Would you like to provide your email so you may be contacted to receive a \$20 Amazon e-gift card?

APPENDIX C DIGITAL FLYER



Parents' Perspectives of Sibling Bullying: An Exploratory Study

Purpose of Study

This study is looking to understand the individual experiences of adult parents who were bullied by a sibling in childhood and also currently or have previously parented children between 10 and 18 that engage in sibling bullying.

Sharing your experience can contribute to a body of knowledge and create new intervention methods for parents, families, and children suffering from bullying behaviors.

- Participation is voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at any time.
- Confidential interviews will be held virtually and recorded via Zoom.
- Interview length: Between 45-60 minutes

Are you eligible?

- Adults over the age of 18 years old.
- You currently or have previously parented children between 10 & 18 years old that engage in sibling bullying.
- You were bullied by a sibling(s) during your childhood.



Participation & Benefits

- Compensation will be provided in the form of a \$20 amazon e-gift card for your time.

Participants will be asked to complete:

- **45-60 minute interview**

**There is a potential risk of loss of confidentiality in all email, downloading, electronic meetings, and internet transactions.*

Participate NOW!

- Click or type in the following link to begin the research study:

<https://www.psychdata.com/s.asp?SID=194771>

If you're unsure if you meet the requirements, call or email:

Marielle Leo, M.A., MFT-Intern
Doctoral Candidate | mleo@twu.edu | 702-625-2819

Aaron Norton, Ph.D., LMFT-Supervisor
Associate Professor | anorton@twu.edu | 940-898-2677

APPENDIX D
PRESCREENING QUESTIONS

Pre-screening Questions:

Are you an adult over the of age 18?

Are you a parent of two or more children between the ages of 10 and 18 years old who engage in sibling bullying?

Were you bullied by a sibling in your childhood?

Thank you for participating!

APPENDIX E
EMAIL TO PARTICIPANTS

Hello,

Thank you for taking the time to respond to my survey. You qualify to participate in a doctoral research study looking to interview you regarding your experience with sibling bullying in childhood and as an adult parent with children who engage in sibling bullying. The study consists of one recorded 45-60 minute interview via Zoom.

Please respond to this email with days/times you are available to meet for one hour of your time.

Please keep in mind the time you select will be Pacific Standard Time.

Please let me know by responding to this email if you need another day and time. I will be flexible and accommodating to your schedule.

Should you have any questions about the study or how to participate, you may contact me Marielle Leo mleo@twu.edu or my research advisor, Dr. Aaron Norton anorton@twu.edu

There is a potential loss of confidentiality in all email, downloading, electronic meetings, and internet transactions. Participation is voluntary. All participants will be asked to provide an email to receive compensation for a \$20 Amazon e-gift card. The TWU IRB has approved this research.