THE KINDNESS CURE: A CRITICAL INQUIRY INTO DISCOURSES OF BULLYING, SCHOOL-BASED PREVENTION EDUCATION AND THE REPRODUCTION OF GENDER INEQUALITY

A dissertation presented

By

Margot E. Abels

To

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In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

This project uncovers and analyzes contemporary mechanisms used by educational institutions to sustain social inequality. Using the theoretical tools of sociology to interpret the messages contained in elementary bullying prevention, I reveal the ways in which school-based programming plays a role in the gendering of children. This involves the promotion of obsolete (binary) conceptualizations of gender, the validation of an association between conventional norms of masculinity and aggression and the use of rhetoric to normalize social stratification rooted in gender. Through a detailed review of popular, commercially developed curriculum materials and a series of focus groups with elementary classroom teachers, this study builds on prior work which links bullying prevention, public schools and social stratification. It produces empirical evidence to document the language and ideas of neoliberalism, individualism and medicalization embedded in school-based anti-bullying efforts and demonstrates the persistent imposition of a kindness narrative. Civility, positioned as a remedy for bullying, functions, instead, to silence critical examination of the ingredients of systemic inequality and to stymy change. This renders bullying prevention counterproductive, constitutive of the very conditions which compose a bully-friendly environment and, ultimately, raises questions about the utility of school-based health education within a context of social inequality.
To my mom, who taught me to explore the meaningful world behind the kind and nice.

This project is dedicated to my mom, Gusta J. Abels, artist, feminist, activist, intellect and inspiration, on whose deathbed I promised I would finish. Look, mom, I’m a doctor!

This project would not have been possible without the love and support of my wife, Bridget, and our daughter, Makayla; you were my rocks, when needed; stepped aside, when needed; and, didn’t complain all too much. I owe you both a vacation!

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Chapter 1: Introduction & Background

Since its inception in 2009, the Kind Campaign, an internationally known documentary and self-described movement aimed at reducing harm caused by the bullying behaviors of girls, has undergone exponential growth in popularity. This is evidenced, in part, by invitations from over 300 schools nationwide to bring the Campaign’s message about the dangerous consequences of bullying to their students. The Campaign’s mission is to raise awareness and promote kindness as a means of healing the damage done by what the high-profile founders – namely, Lauren Parsekian, the wife of Breaking Bad star Aaron Paul - refer to as the competition and cattiness underlying girl against girl bullying. Workshop participants are provided the opportunity to give a heart-felt apology to each other. Visitors to the Campaign’s website can take the Kindness Pledge, purchase designer jewelry to financially support the campaign and access Kind Cards, a pay-it-forward type of activity which encourages sharing a written testimonial of appreciation (Kind Campaign). There is even the opportunity to participate in the project’s uniquely named “fashtivism”, or activism through messaged clothing made possible by an exclusive partnership with Kohl’s (Harvey 2017). For all intents and purposes, the idea behind the Kind Campaign is one of hope, aimed, it seems, at facilitating a change in youth culture such that respect and generosity would lead to a decrease in bullying behavior. Promoting a harmonious culture of kindness hardly seems objectionable. However, recent scholarly publications (Klein, 2012; Pascoe 2014) suggest a contrary reading of bullying, arguing that programs like the Kind Campaign, along with a small, but widely disseminated, repertoire of strategies used to combat bullying, are misdirected and, as will be shown, constitutive of the very conditions from which bullying behavior arises.
The Ripple Kindness Project, an elementary school curriculum which is marketed as a positive alternative to typical anti-bullying programs, employs positive psychology\(^1\) and social-emotional learning strategies to cultivate a culture of kindness. Claiming that “[k]indness is one of the best natural medicines for just about any ailment”, purchasing this curriculum provides schools with a 320-page classroom activities guide, a variety of materials to use to spread the kindness message and links to their affiliated ETSY store for purchasing kindness-themed merchandise.\(^2\) Subscribing to the program’s blog results in inspiring stories of kindness regularly appearing in your inbox; and on each page of their website a quote from a school counselor is repeated; she writes:

> It only takes one, one little person tossing one small pebble to ripple kindness out into the world. Before we know it, that ripple becomes a wave of compassion that will bathes us all in a tsunami of love. Ripple Kindness serves up the warmth that the world needs now, more than ever, one child at a time, one kind act at a time. It will nourish and shape the hearts of our future by teaching and modeling intentional kindness. If you’re ready for a significant climate change, global warming of the real KIND, then join the Ripple revolution today.

The Ripple Kindness Project is just one example of many, many, available initiatives. In fact, one simple Google search results in hundreds of thousands of hits revealing kindness as a dominant trend in bullying cures and offering option after option of programs and materials: Kill it with Kindness, Stomp Out Bullying, Simple Acts of Kindness, Fighting Bullying with Kindness, Kindness Day, Think Kindness, Campaign for Kindness, the Golden Rule Project, Choose Kindness, the Kindness Challenge and on and on. What is this about and why is bullying

\(^1\) In short, positive psychology involves the use of scientific methodology to identify what factors foster optimal living and create the conditions in which individuals thrive.  
\(^2\) https://www.etsy.com/au/shop/RippleKindness?ref=hdr_shop_menu
prevention headed in this direction? In other words, should we respond with a smiley face emoji or a frown?

**THE PROJECT**

Theorizing from a sociological perspective provides a valuable and seldom articulated structural interpretation of dominant understandings of bullying and the interventions designed in response. Such an analysis entails a shift away from a commonly held conceptualization of bullying as a problem of the individual and bullying prevention as controlling individual behavior, an individualism reflecting a cultural emphasis on mindfulness and civility. An alternative view driven by sociological inquiry considers bullying, and its corresponding prevention efforts, as locations for the reproduction of inequalities. This shift involves situating bullying within its larger social and institutional contexts, applying a lens of social stratification and feminist theory, and sorting through the details of a complex picture in which bullying appears to beget bullying.

This project involves an examination of the role of gender inequality in school-based bullying prevention education initiatives. The intent, more generally, is to use this exploration to question how bullying programs serve schools’ function as an important and active location for the reproduction of systems of social stratification. I will examine the ways in which bullying prevention programs offer both overt and covert instruction in the skills and ideologies needed to guide young people into their place within hierarchically arranged gender relations. From a practical or applied standpoint, examining this will deepen our understanding of how bullying prevention programs contribute, not only to the failure of school-based bullying efforts to remediate bullying behavior, but also may exacerbate those conditions which promote bullying.
From a more theoretical location, this study examines contemporary machinations of social stratification and the gendered socialization of children within US schools.

It is possible, then, that the very efforts implemented to decrease the incidence of bullying contribute to its increase; a process in which gender plays a significant role. Since a central, defining aspect of normative masculinity is physical aggression, it follows that a greater adherence to convention has been correlated with aggressive behavior. The promotion of conformist gendered ideas and practices within anti-bullying programs, in turn, help to maintain an environment accommodating of aggressive behavior - the very context in which bullying occurs. This study involves a close consideration of the treatment of gender within current understandings of – and responses to – bullying. While the interdisciplinary body of academic literature about bullying attends to the role of gender and recognizes that power is a significant operating force, my work makes a unique contribution because it examines how gender is expressed within these curricula as natural and binary. This helps to change the discussion from one of conventional gender ideologies to a questioning of the nature of gender and the concept as it is taught to children. Additionally, the discourses used to describe bullying reveal a failure to consider sexism or a broad critique of social inequality. By looking at what is being implemented and how, the intent here is to 1) uncover the extent to which the bullying prevention education implemented in schools promotes or deconstructs binary and/or essentialist conceptualizations of gender; 2) ascertain whether examples can be located of school-based initiatives in which attention is paid to the interconnectedness of gender and power, hence, providing students with skills for social critique and disrupting the reproduction of inequality; and, 3) if a reification of the link between outdated and rigid ideas about gender and behavior is exposed, examine
whether this link contributes to bullying prevention education that is counter-productive and, perhaps, self-perpetuating.

BACKGROUND: BULLYING

Bullying is a hot topic; high rates of peer-to-peer bullying among school-aged youth are undisputed, multiple negative consequences have been suggested in the research and public sentiment characterizes a wide range of responses as necessary measures to end what is perceived as an epidemic of violence. Yet, the concept of bullying lacks a clear, concise and universally agreed-upon definition. One bullying researcher, Elizabeth J. Meyer, articulates a widely held definition of bullying as behavior which repeatedly and over time intentionally inflicts injury on another individual. This includes bullying behavior which is verbal and involves threatening, taunting, teasing and name calling; it might be physical and include hitting, pushing or kicking; or, it might be psychological and manifest as negative gestures or purposeful exclusion, among other things (Meyer 2012). The National Association of School Psychologists describes bullying as a learned, anti-social behavior. At its essence is a power differential between a dominant bully and a weaker victim; however, it is distinct from other serious forms of school violence which involve weapons, vandalism or physical harm (Cohn 2003). Similarly, the federal government puts an imbalance of power at the center of its definition of bullying, contending that without a differential in physical strength, popularity or access to embarrassing information that is used to control another, a situation cannot be labeled as bullying (US HHS Bullying Definition). Beyond some common components, the definition of bullying varies, reflecting a number of unresolved considerations and questions: is bullying distinct from hate crime; is stalking a form of bullying; and, is most bullying normative youth behavior which should be responded to without alarm?
Despite variations in definition, there is consistency in the data explaining bullying. Dominant sources of information about the prevalence of bullying reveal that over one-third of students report being bullied at school in a given year. Within a two-month period, the self-reported rate of having been involved in different types of bullying (either as perpetrator or recipient of the bullying) breaks down as follows: 20.8% physically, 53.6% verbally, 51.4% socially and 13.6% electronically (Wang 2009). The data also confirm that bullying is found at all grade levels; it occurs more frequently during middle school, with the exception of cyberbullying, which peaks in high school (Wang 2009). It is also clear that certain students are more likely to be the targets of bullies. A heightened risk of victimization based on appearance, size, gender expression, perceived sexual identity and disability is, for the most part, uncontested (AERA 2013; Meyer 2012; US HHS Considerations for Specific Groups). And, finally, there is considerable agreement over the significant physical, social and academic consequences for perpetrators, victims, family members and witnesses of bullying. These consequences encompass a range of outcomes, including poor academic performance and school attendance and an increased risk of mental health problems, involvement in interpersonal or sexual violence, problematic substance use and suicide (AERA 2013; CDC 2014; Gini and Pozzoli 2006; OJJDP 2013; Safran 2007).

Coupled with compelling personal stories and often tragic news accounts, these facts have resulted in the characterization of bullying as an epidemic, reflecting a severity and urgency indicative of a significant shift from previous views which minimized bullying as expected, harmless and character-building (Safran 2007). This new sense of bullying-as-crisis, a moral panic of epic proportions in which the behavior of young people, reformulated as threatening, requires a dramatic response, has sparked a proliferation of research aimed at identifying the
causes of bullying and the profiles of a typical bully and victim. And, despite the fact that the language of bullying reflects larger social upheavals and anxieties, the quest for specifics is akin to identifying the etiology of an illness in order to reduce its incidence and is, therefore, justified by a belief that the greater the understanding of those conditions or dynamics from which bullying arises, the easier bullying will be to prevent.

The intended mission of most educational institutions, partnered with access to large numbers of young people, make schools well-positioned as key players in the prevention of bullying. For the most part, school-based anti-bullying programs are conceived of as part of a violence prevention paradigm and are situated within a comprehensive health education/health promotion framework (APHA; CDC 2014 *Youth Bullying*; SOPHE 2012). Yet, the strategies implemented run the gamut, from zero tolerance policies, to one-time assemblies with high priced, inspirational speakers, to multi-pronged initiatives aimed to change school culture to metal detectors. Assessing the salience of context as a stimulant to bullying behavior has never received much emphasis or revealed significant results (Sampson 2002). Clues for preventing and reducing bullying have been sought within the physical environment of schools. Examinations of class size, teacher-student ratios, composition of student populations, family/school relationships, budgets and policies, among other factors, demonstrate an acknowledgment of the relationship between school climate and the prevalence of bullying; however, clear and practical recommendations remain elusive (AERA 2013; Swearer 2010). In their review of the twenty-eight incidences of random school violence between 1982 and 2001, Kimmel and Mahler (2003) describe the influence of political climate on the causes of bullying,

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3 Many bullying researchers attribute this increase in attention to the highly publicized school shootings of the early 1990’s (Meraviglia 2002; Safran 2007). Both bullying and school shootings force a new understanding of what previously might have been considered harmless or innocent behaviors as precursors of deadly violence.
suggesting that the content of bullying incidents reflects local cultures of violence, opinions about guns and attitudes about masculinity. ⁴ Substantiated by the fact that over 70% of the reviewed incidents occurred in red states, Kimmel and Mahler correlate bullying with conservative politics, corresponding cultural values and emerging moral panics out of which specific, contemporary cultural targets are identified and marked for a response. In this case, the authors discuss the demonizing of Goth music, video games, birth control and the teaching of evolution as factors responsible for desensitizing children to violence (2003:1440-1442).⁵

However, looking to social and cultural contexts for answers has been overshadowed by a dominant psycho-social paradigm. As recently as 2012, in collaboration with the Kinder & Braver World Project of Harvard University and the MacArthur Foundation, Lady Gaga’s Born This Way Foundation published a guide for school personnel in which bullying prevention was exclusively located in individual skill building. The solutions proposed have their foundation in an understanding of bullying as caused by a deficiency in six areas - self-regulation, perspective

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⁴ Commenting on the underlying causes of the uneven distribution of school based violence found across the country, Kimmel and Mahler write:

What this suggests is that school violence is unevenly distributed and that to understand its causes, we must look locally—both at “gun culture” (percentage of homes owning firearms, gun registrations, NRA memberships), local gender culture, and local school cultures—attitudes about gender nonconformity, tolerance of bullying, and teacher attitudes. We need to focus less on the form of school violence—documenting its prevalence and presenting a demographic profile of the shooters—and more on the content of the shootings; instead of asking psychological questions about family dynamics and composition, psychological problems, and pathologies, we need to focus our attention on local school cultures and hierarchies, peer interactions, normative gender ideologies, and the interactions among academics, adolescence, and gender identity (2003:7)

⁵ Kimmel, Klein and other scholars who have written on bullying opt not to articulate a firm distinction between bullying and other forms of violence. Kimmel and Klein look to underlying cultural, social and political causes which create a school climate conducive to violence, regardless of the specific form. Bullying is described as a contributing factor in school shootings in that relentless bullying may lead to retaliation by a victim (Sampson 2002:14). Alternatively, it is depicted as a continuum of violence with bullying on the less severe end of a scale with other manifestation of violent behavior (Ferguson 2007). Despite the lack of consistency, this project will include writings which might discuss school shootings and other forms of violent behavior as long as the article includes a focus on bullying, even if a relationship between bullying and the other form(s) of violence is not articulated.
taking, emotion management, problem-solving, communication skills and friendship skills (Jones 2012), firmly fixing the roots of bullying - and, its remedy- in the individual. One problematic aspect of a psychological account such as this is the lack of consensus as to the components of a consistent psychological profile of perpetrator and victim. Some studies correlate bullying behavior with truancy, substance abuse and psychiatric disorders, while others claim that bullies are often of high intelligence, popular, powerful and possess a highly defined ability to strategize and manipulate (Card 2008; Ferguson 2007; Safran 2007:52-53). Experts in violence from multiple disciplines suggest a number of predisposing psychological factors such as childhood abuse, absentee fathers and dominant mothers (Kimmel and Mahler 2003). According to Kimmel and Mahler, these factors are theoretically possible influences; yet, they are not supported empirically, as many perpetrators of violence come from so called “intact” families and have no history of abuse. Blaming psychological rather than environmental factors is evidenced by what Kimmel and Mahler describe as a shift in public perception regarding school violence from blaming what are cast as inherent violent tendencies of inner city minorities to the mental health problems of White, middle-class male perpetrators (2003:1443). Needless-to-say, the disparate array of explanations and variations in definition, along with the belief that a fundamental clarity will drive effective solutions, complicate the possibility of agreement and translate into inconsistent, and sometimes contradictory, responses to the problem of bullying.

Further, there is no federal law addressing bullying or providing direction or standardization to prevention initiatives. Existing federal law (see Appendix #1)⁶ may justify or

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⁶ Only two-thirds of state policies contain language reflecting legal protections based on race, class, sexual orientation or disability. Whether or not to make explicit in law those categories of vulnerability to bullying has caused controversy, despite studies showing a lower prevalence of bullying for certain groups when named as a protected class. In many cases, this omission reflects a prohibition in the state law against the enumeration of protected classes, justified as a commitment to providing equal protection, in contrast to recognizing the power differentials underlying bullying behavior. Debates over enumeration have resulted in delays in the implementation
force a response when an instance of bullying also involves harassment based on a protected
class; regardless, specific bullying laws are decided on a state by state basis (US HHS Federal
Laws). At present, 49 states, with the exception of Montana, have anti-bullying legislation; these
play a significant part in compelling schools to respond. Typically, state law mandates that
every school put in place bullying prevention and intervention plans operationalized as
classroom programs and judicial consequences (Stuart-Cassel 2011). However, many states
adhere to a philosophy of local control, so that a school district may be directed by law to
implement an evidence-based or evaluated program rooted in proven, best practice while, at the
same time, have the discretion to implement plans autonomously, without specific guidance to
drive standardization and accountability (MADESE).

In addition to a lack of specifics in the law to guide implementation, there have been few
program evaluations which identify reliably and consistently effective bullying prevention
practices (Ferguson 2007; Merrell 2008). Ferguson’s 2007 meta-analysis involved the review of
45 studies published between 1995 and 2006 and concluded that, overall, school-based anti-
bullying programs were not effective in reducing bullying behaviors. Vreeman’s review of 26
rigorously evaluated school-based interventions found that curricular interventions had not
consistently improved outcomes related to bullying (2007). And, in their 2008 meta-analysis of
25 years of research on school bullying interventions (1980 – 2004), Merrell and Isava found
that, despite some limited evidence of positive outcomes on specific measures such as
knowledge and attitude, there was no evidence of meaningful change for the majority of
variables. One might conclude that the imprecise nature of identifying causation makes programmatic initiatives difficult to evaluate; and, a lack of consensus regarding a definition of bullying makes studies a challenge to compare. Yet, multiple meta-analyses of research using a range of methodologies have revealed disappointing results, limited and mixed success on certain individual measures, no long-term impact or surefire best practices and, in some case, a negative effect (Meraviglia 2003; Swearer 2010). Furthermore, the successes identified have been, for the most part, limited to gains in information and awareness without reductions in the incidence of bullying among young people.\footnote{There are studies which indicate that school-based anti-bullying policies and the presence of LGBT student groups (Gay/Straight Alliance, for example) may result in improvements in school climate. Students in the most recent National School Climate Survey (Kosciw 2014), conducted by the Gay, Lesbian, Straight Education Network, self-report a decrease in incidents of anti-LGBT harassment in schools with such groups in place. How this translates into numbers of reported and unreported incidences of bullying has yet to be determined.}

School-based initiatives have assumed a central role in the implementation of strategies to combat bullying. However, without knowing what works and why, schools are left to pick and choose strategies or to adapt curriculum materials without clear direction. While in much of the literature the gold star of comprehensive bullying prevention programs involves intensive, whole-school interventions targeting both victims and perpetrators and consisting of curriculum or classroom instruction, social skills groups, mentoring, parent meetings, clear disciplinary procedures, playground supervision and interventions by a social worker (Farrington and Ttofi 2009; Swearer 2010; Ttofi and Farrington 2011; CDC \textit{Social-Ecological Model} 2013), multiple barriers constrain the implementation of such a wide-reaching approach to anti-bullying programming. Despite the pressure on schools to prevent bullying behavior (at least that which is high profile and severe), attending to the demands of mandatory standardized testing remains a
top priority for schools, leaving little attention, time, funding, training and administrative support for bullying prevention.  

With unique and often intractable constraints, school health educators tend to look to the prevention strategies outlined in public health research to adapt approaches originating from a discipline and a culture which are distinct, and often at odds, with the world of public education. Of particular relevance to this current project is the adoption of an ecological approach to health promotion (Stokols 1992); a perspective which recognizes that the person cannot be isolated from his/her social and historical context but should, rather, be considered within a “range of nested contextual systems of schools, adults, neighborhoods, and society” (Swearer 2010:42). In this project I look at the way schools’ ability to implement an expansive ecological approach is restrained; and, I make the case that the promotion of a facile culture of caring and respect ignores deeply embedded and systemic dynamics of power and inequality.

A typical school activity which looks to a relatively simple solution and neglects the structural underpinnings of bullying is the zero tolerance policy.  


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8 There are multiple sources in which standardized testing and the common core of learning are referred to as obstacles to the implementation of non-academic subjects such as bullying prevention education. The very fact that there is little evidence of material support (funding and time built into the school day dedicated to bullying prevention), suggests that it is less of a priority than standardized testing and academic preparation. Some examples of relevant online sources include the following: Century Foundation’s 2013 Report (http://tcf.org/work/education/detail/the-efficacy-of-anti-bullying-laws); University of Northern Colorado (http://www.unco.edu/northernvision/spring2013/bullying.html; http://www.hsta.org/index.php/news/doe-chips-away-at-bullying-issue); Canadian Journal of Public Health (http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/14700245); University of Washington Center for Public Health Nutrition (http://depts.washington.edu/uwcphn/work/cfs/doc/plan/barriers.pdf); and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/physicalactivity/pdf/roleofschools_obesity.pdf:4).

9 Of zero tolerance policies, the Association of American Educators writes the following:

Back in the 80’s, ‘zero tolerance’ was the catchphrase for the anti-drug campaigns that ran in schools. Nowadays, it has been modified in context to include bullying and disruptive behavior in the classroom. Such policies are widespread among schools nationwide which “mandates the application of predetermined consequences, most often severe and punitive in nature that are intended to be applied regardless of the gravity of behavior, mitigating circumstances or
policy is that, by pairing any incident with a specific punishment, bullying will eventually be eradicated. It is a strategic policing of individual behavior in order to facilitate a cultural norm that is intolerant of interpersonal violence and encourages bystander intervention. This tactic is easy and inexpensive to implement, so it is frequently used, despite the widespread recognition in the education and public health literatures that it is an ineffective strategy. While the approach of zero tolerance is to quash bullying, other programs aim to replace it with positive behavior, often operationalized as the promotion of caring. For instance, in their 2011 bulletin on bullying, the U.S. Department of Justice’s Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention placed significant emphasis on creating caring school cultures as a remedy for bullying which could easily be achieved by training school staff to model caring behavior to increase access to caring adults (Seeley 2011; Silbaugh 2013). Massachusetts’ state education agency’s Bullying Prevention Guide also asserts that key to preventing bullying is the creation of classroom environments of caring and respect, although this document recommends doing so via the implementation of Character Education or integrating into teaching the purpose of molding children into moral, successful citizens (Parker-Roerden 2007). Measuring caring and sharing is, in fact, one of twelve dimensions assessed in the National School Climate Center’s Comprehensive School Climate Inventory. Suffice it to say that the ecological approach of public health and the caring culture of educational settings are insufficient attempts, by and large, to take into account the context of bullying, signifying the mismatched pairing of discourses of culture or environmental change with individual solutions which police or control behavior. This

situational context”. In other words, it does not matter what the situation or the type of behavior was zero tolerance will be applied (Hyder 2015).

A (perhaps unintended yet related) way that schools attempt to address context is through education about cyber bullying. Apart from the academic literature, an initial review of cyber bullying discussions has not revealed a macro-level approach in which young people are offered opportunities to examine their relationship to technological advances as well as the link between technology and social inequality. Rather, – and, similar to the employment of zero tolerance strategies – educational content appears to emphasize simplistic, protective action steps.
allows a consideration of contextual and systemic factors and their relationship to bullying to be avoided.

This project builds on prior work exploring masculinity, schools, and structural inequality by gathering empirical evidence of the ways in which gender conformity is promoted (or simply left unchallenged) within bullying prevention initiatives. It aims to make a contribution to the literature by providing data which speaks to bullying’s relationship to gender inequality and the role of bullying prevention in the process of social stratification. Included in this document are the blueprints for the study, the findings and an interpretation of the research with an emphasis on application. Following this introductory chapter, chapter two and three provides an in-depth recounting of the guiding literature and methodology, respectively. Chapter four details the research findings that describe the treatment of gender in bullying prevention materials and curricula implementation as well as the role bullying and bullying prevention play in the processes of gender socialization and stratification. Chapter five dives deeply into the theme of kindness and addresses the contemporary use of civility to control behavior and silence critical inquiry. And, chapter six addresses the specific ways in which discourses of individualism and medicalization operate within the bullying paradigm to reinforce dominant cultural themes. Finally, chapter seven contains my discussion of the findings and a wrap up.

If, in fact, bullying programs promote, rather than disrupt, gender conformity, then an exploration of bullying as a tool of stratification might result in recommendations far outside the realm of what commonly occurs in school-based bullying prevention, comprehensive health education and school environments at large. At a minimum, reframing bullying helps to reveal contemporary strategies enlisted to serve a social investment in inequality; it sheds light on the role bullying – including school-based anti-bullying programs - plays in the maintenance of a
hierarchical and gendered social order, thus altering how we discuss and, ultimately, respond to bullying. Here and there we see glimpses of such a critique in the popular media. In her scathing review of *Finding Kind*, the film produced and featured by Parsekian’s initiative to fight girl against girl crime, Alissa Sklar, founder of *Risk(within)reason: Helping parents, educators and teens make sense of technology and high-risk behaviours* writes the following astute – and sarcastic - critique:

The other reason this film made me cringe is because of the overly simplistic and facile solution it proposes to the complex topic of bullying. If only we could just be nice to each other.

Ooh. Why didn’t we think of that before? I guess our pretty little heads were too full of cookie recipes and the rumours we were planning to spread about our friends.

Actually, bullying isn’t even about nice at all, so *Finding Kind* totally misses the point. At its core, bullying is about social power. People who bully do so in order to shore up or improve their own tenuous spot in the social hierarchy (Sklar 2012).
Chapter 2 Guiding Literature/Theoretical Background

My approach to the study of bullying locates the work firmly within sociological theory. To do this I draw on the literature of three specific areas – gender inequality, social stratification and medical sociology. Through a close examination of bullying prevention and my experience with school-based health education and sociological scholarship, I make the case for a mutually beneficial partnership between the discipline of health education and the theoretical perspectives of sociology. By highlighting the multiple ways in which sociology can inform our understanding and practice of health education – and, vice versa – this project makes unique theoretical and practical contributions.

PRIMARY LITERATURES AND DRIVING THEORIES

For this project, I’ve relied on the influential theoretical writings of scholars in the field of sociology and related disciplines. Yet, because the topic of bullying is often the focus of public discussion and debate, media accounts and government documents have been relevant and useful, as well. Together, the literature supporting this project reflects structural, political and interpretative approaches, all which inform my analysis.

Three primary theoretical approaches are used for this project; these are briefly described below and examined in greater detail in the sections that follow:

1) Gender Studies – This research rests on an assumption that gender is socially constructed and that an unquestioned and rigid gender binary is an effective means by which individuals are categorized and ranked. In part, this project will examine the relationship between bullying prevention and the socialization of children into traditional gender norms. A particular focus will be on the interaction among gender conformity, normative masculinity, aggressive behaviors and school-based bullying. An intersectional approach will also be maintained,
such that the complex nature of identities and experiences will be brought to the work as a fundamental assumption.

2) Social Stratification – Data collected about gender and school-based bullying prevention education will be analyzed using theoretical frames which describe the reproduction of inequality and consider, in part, how social positions are taught and hierarchies are sustained. Underlying questions include, how are gendered power imbalances embedded within bullying prevention? In what ways does anti-bullying prevention help schools fulfill their function as a key institution for the maintenance of gender inequality? And, does using a frame of social stratification further an understanding of why bullying prevention has met with minimal success?

3) Medical/Health Sociology – How are understandings of bullying framed within the contemporary medical model and what might be the consequences of this? More specifically, how does the medicalization of gendered behavior pathologize children, reinforce ideologies of individualism and function in the favor of a stratified social order? How is the authority of medicine, public health and scientific evidence used to legitimize certain practices, rendering what might be areas for scholarly inquiry uncontested truths?

RESEARCH FOCUS: GENDER-BASED BULLYING

The literature paints a picture of bullying that is limited in scope and utility for prevention efforts. Nevertheless, attention is paid to the role of gender. A gendered critique of bullying typically contrasts bullying perpetrated and suffered by girls and that which is experienced by boys. Presented are two discrete relationships to bullying behavior which manifests as different 1) forms of bullying, 2) roles within bullying, and 3) risks for bullying. What is often expressed within scholarly accounts, governmental documents and public rhetoric is a greater involvement in physical and verbal aggression for boys, while girls suffer more from indirect or relational aggression, such as ostracism, gossip and ridicule (Gini and Pozzoli 2006; Ostrov and Keating 2004; Safran 2007; Swearer 2010; Wang 2009). Males are more likely to be perpetrators; and, females are subject to higher levels of victimization. Although the literature contains speculation that girls may be becoming increasingly involved in overt aggression or
engaging more in the perpetration of violence\textsuperscript{11}, what is constant is the picture of two different types of bullying and two distinct gendered roles within the bullying interaction.

What appears to be absent from these accounts is a deconstruction of the fundamental notions of gender underlying these distinctions. In other words, the presentation of gender differences as taken-for-granted suggests an overreliance on an essential, binary conceptualization. Using a lens of social construction allows for an exploration of bullying prevention programs to ascertain whether they essentialize aggressive masculinity, promote conformity to gender norms and, inadvertently, contribute to the perpetration of bullying behaviors. If, on the one hand, this research confirms that a fluid or expansive understanding of the nature of gender is embedded in anti-bullying rhetoric, the supposition that ideologies which link aggression to the essence of masculinity, and, in turn, exacerbate bullying, would be undermined; however, the literature does not currently point in this direction. Law professor Katherine Silbaugh speaks to this when she writes,

\[\text{[a]ttempts to intervene on the “boy question” ordinarily begin with ideas about boys’ differences and the need to understand, accept, and support boys for who they are: rough-and-tumble players with Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) who are hunters rather than gatherers and are noncompliant, competitive, and physically charged. In other words, attempts to intervene on the “boy question” tend to honor gender stereotypes and masculinities… (2013:1030)}\]

\textsuperscript{11} This perception is both supported and questioned on the grounds that a perceived change in female bullying might be reflective of 1) inconsistencies in the definition of bullying, 2) shifts in the extent to which different forms of bullying are minimized; and, 3) the expansion of available technologies which facilitate covert, yet potentially damaging, bullying behavior. What is particularly interesting and relevant is the way in which changes in female bullying are characterized as \textit{girls becoming more like boys or taking on male behaviors}, which comes with its own set of consequences and issues needing consideration.
Silbaugh reminds us that the commonplace gender distinctions found within bullying rhetoric help to naturalize the link between masculinity and aggression, point out the tension between breathing life into a socially constructed identity category when attempting to deconstruct said category and deflate its potency. This raises questions about the nature of gender, sexism and feminist responses. For instance, how does the bullying rhetoric shore up the parameters of identity categories? Does the bullying literature characterize gendered traits as either negative or positive in order to facilitate access to different levels of power? And, how best to confront the misperception on the part of the designers and implementers of anti-bullying curricula that gender equality has been achieved, that which prevents engagement in a critique of school’s role in gender socialization. If the research proposed here confirms that ideas which naturalize gender differences lie, un-problematicized, at the heart of school-based bullying programs, applying an analysis of sexism and inequality might, in fact, elicit very different – and, perhaps, more effective - responses to bullying.

The scholarly ground on which more complex and instructive links between gender and bullying rest has been compellingly theorized and articulated. Particularly useful are the descriptions of masculinity in the sociological explorations of school-based violence within the work of C.J. Pascoe (2007). In brief, Pascoe addresses adolescent masculinity through a lens of queer theory in which she disconnects masculinity from the body, deconstructs fixed and natural gender categories and, instead, defines masculinity as a process of interaction and dominance. Masculinity is conceived of as a fluid construct; its associated features can be enacted by anyone. And, although Pascoe does not repudiate agency, she writes that “[d]efining masculinity as ‘what men do’ reifies biologized categories of male and female that are problematic” (2007:9). In contrast, to define maleness with a list of qualities and behaviors inscribed onto the body
supports a binary notion of gender in which two, fixed categories are associated with a specific personality or psychological profile (Courtenay 2000). The dynamic in which reenactments of gender constructs bolster a hierarchically arranged social structure is, as suggested by Pascoe, at the center of commonly found gendered explanations of bullying and efforts to prevent it (2007:8-10).

The degree of conformity to these static gender constructs may be indicative of the extent to which children and adolescents are involved in bullying. Those traits that have come to characterize the essence of masculinity have been shown to be predictive of bullying behavior, such that a large percentage of the violence perpetrated by boys, targeting both girls and boys, is motivated by a perceived challenge to, or failure to meet, conventional masculine traits of athleticism, dominance or unemotionality, for example (Gini and Pozzoli 2006; Klein 2012; Leek 2013; Reidy 2009; Trickett 2009). The problem for girls, in contrast, is not described as a failure to achieve standards of femininity, but is often expressed as meanness and a lack of self-confidence which transforms into jealousy, competition and cruelty (Sklar 2012). And, although it has been estimated that approximately 80% of young people will experience gender-based bullying by the time they graduate high school (Anagnostopoulos 2009), it is not surprising that boys and girls who do not express their gender conventionally are more likely to be involved in bullying (Roberts 2013; AERA 2013).

Research supports an association between contemporary conceptualizations of gender and the perpetration of violence. Dominant ideologies of masculinity are linked to aggressive behavior - physical, verbal and/or sexual, such that violence and gender have become inextricably linked (Barker 2010; Bridges and Pascoe 2014; Carr 2005; Iwamoto 2011; Mahalik 2003; Mahalik 2006; Murnen 2002; Roberts 2010). The burden to conform to specific indicators
of hyper-masculinity is a social mandate taught to children early (Bridges and Pascoe 2014); and two prominent features of masculinity, proving heterosexuality and being tough, are deeply embedded (Tricket 2009). It is within the obligatory and never-ending task of reinforcing the parameters of one’s masculinity by differentiating one’s male self from others (females and gay males) - what Tricket refers to as disassociation from their binary other (2009:20) - that bullying emerges as seemingly effective. It allows young children to practice masculinity by asserting social dominance, thus setting the stage for the assumption of male privilege (Gini and Pozzoli 2006; Steinfeldt 2012).

Accounting for the interaction between homophobia and gender inequality, Pascoe and Kimmel/Mahler examine the ways in which anti-gay bullying enforces the parameters of normative masculinity. Homophobic bullying serves to effectively punish adolescent gender transgressions; evoking the fag epithet marginalizes and stigmatizes the victim, makes clear the gender parameters to which conformity is necessary and facilitates the continual confirmation and repudiation of gender (Courtenay 2000; Pascoe 2007; Payne and Smith 2012). In an effort to defend their social identity and retain their social power, boys and young men engage in heightened aggressive and violent behavior and take risks that, according to Courtenay, ultimately undermining men’s bodies by resulting in poor health outcomes (Courtenay 2000; Kimmel and Mahler 2003;) and shorter life expectancy.  

12 Courtenay writes that hypermasculine constructions may lead to smoking, drug and alcohol use, fighting, sexual conquests, dominance, crime and acts of physical endurance. In fact, “[a] growing body of research provides evidence that men who endorse dominant norms of masculinity engage in poorer health behaviours and have greater health risks than their peers with less traditional beliefs” (Ne et al., 1991; Pleck et al., 1994a; Eisler, 1995; O'Neil et al., 1995). One recent longitudinal study of 1676 young men in the United States, aged 15 to 23 years, is among the few nationally representative studies to examine the influence of masculinity on health behavior over time. When a variety of psychosocial factors were controlled for, beliefs about masculinity emerged as the strongest predictor of risk-taking behavior 2 1/2 years later. Courtenay also addresses the fact that in order to enact masculine privilege,
The evidence suggests that gender policing via bullying occurs at multiple age levels and in multiple settings; however, assuming a universal experience would be a mistake. The research addressing school-aged bullying and race/ethnicity is, surprisingly, spotty, yet we know that men of different races and classes have differential access to male privilege. At a minimum, what is known is that Asian American students report high rates of victimization whereas African American students have a consistently low rate. In addition, recent immigrants and those who identify as multiracial have elevated rates of involvement in bullying – both as victim and bully (US HHS Considerations for Specific Groups; Scherr 2012). Because, by definition, bullying incidents involve an imbalance of power, it may be reasonable to expect a complex relationship among race, ethnicity and bullying. Whether different rates or types of bullying are dependent on setting or demographic is not clear; however, it also may be safe to assume that cultural and other factors would lead to distinctions in bullying and bullying prevention occurring, for example, in a public school or a religious institution or targeting elementary in contrast to high school students. With gender as the focus of analysis, how race and class influence images of ideal masculinity and femininity, as well as imperatives to conform, are important questions to consider. When casting bullying as a means of teaching gender inequality, it is important to ask about how the context of racial and economic disparities results in a unique expression of bullying behavior and requires a reshaping of bullying prevention activities. In fact, failing to address the confluence of aggressive behavior, gender ideologies and multiple identity markers, including sexual orientation, gender identity and disability – all uniquely implicated in the men adopt unhealthy behaviors and take risks associated with maintaining power – for example, men refuse to admit pain, deny needing help, ignore HIV risk, overlook symptoms, fight, smoke and avoid appearing vulnerable (2000).
bullying literature, but not treated in partnership with an analysis of gender – would, most likely, lead to a universalizing of research questions resulting in flawed conclusions.

Embracing a concept of masculinity as complex, contested and constructed raises questions about the possibility of a bully-free school within a social context of inequality. In fact, the implications of subscribing to a picture of bullying the likes of which is presented here are considerable, Bridges and Pascoe suggest that “[r]eal change would require investment in new ideals surrounding masculinity not predicated on dominance and violence (2014:14)”. Jessie Klein (2012) calls for the use of a gender-inclusive pedagogy within early childhood education, one that avoids gender stereotypes and values a range of gender expressions. Anagnostopoulos and colleagues (2009) recommend that schools establish opportunities for staff to critically examine sexist and heterosexist cultural narratives underlying acts of intervention into gender-based bullying. Silbaugh (2013:1030) suggests that schools teach students to look beyond gender conformity, urging them to express feelings in nonaggressive ways and to establish a culture of inclusion in which gender stereotypes are interrupted. In addition to calling for an inclusive curriculum, cooperative learning strategies and leadership opportunities for girls, Parker-Roedon’s report advises schools to help students disentangle gender expectations from their genuine selves. The authors write, “[i]t is equally important to interrupt any power imbalances in the classroom that might spill over from power imbalances inherent in society. If unchecked, power imbalances can be exploited and give rise to verbal and physical bullying” (2007:25). Recommendations such as these are exciting but lack specificity. If anti-bullying programs incorporate these suggestions for developing students’ critical understanding of structural inequality, the body of literature lacks detail and direction - that which would, in turn, provide evidence of implementation – or, guidance for implementation. As remedies for
bullying, revaluing masculinity, interrupting or punishing sexist and homophobic speech and raising awareness of difference are no match for the preservation of structural inequality, developing a deeper understanding of which is a central aim of this project and addressed more specifically in the next section.

Context: Schools, Health Education and Reproducing Inequality

Bullying and its prevention, of course, does not occur in a vacuum and the school setting places unique conditions and limits on what can be implemented. Broadly considered, sociologists have well-documented that the American public school system is designed to sustain systems of inequality. Grand sociological theory and empirical research have illustrated how a covert and naturalized hierarchy is embedded within educational institutions, quietly teaching children to take their place in the social world. The contribution of school-based health education, the milieu in which bullying prevention education is typically located, to this process has received little attention. The multiple and unique ways health education – inclusive of bullying prevention - trains young people to enact inequalities based on gender, race, class, sexual identity, size and ability speak to its role as a mechanism that is worthy of further attention.

Reporting on a 2013 study questioning the efficacy of bullying prevention programs, the Huffington Post quoted lead researcher and Criminal Justice scholar Dr. Seokjin Jeong’s concluding recommendations in which he asserted the need to “move beyond individual risk factors and focus on systemic change within the schools” (Klein 2013). Similarly, Dr. Rachel Vreeman’s assessment of bullying prevention led her to conclude that successful programs deliberately consider the power imbalances built into the school structure (Vreeman 2007). An advocate of whole-school interventions, Vreeman addresses that most initiatives are limited and
unevenly implemented. She recognizes that these interventions would be wholly inadequate if bullying were to be regarded as “a sociocultural phenomenon springing from the existence of specified social groups with different levels of power” (2007:86). Employing a concept of context which extends beyond the walls of the school, C.J. Pascoe charges that medicalized and psychological readings of bullying, paired with a limited vision of whole school culture, obfuscates the role of social inequality (2014:3). Pascoe’s critique is spot on; she speaks to the unstable definition of bullying, such that, because the term bullying has come to describe a range of actions involving an aggressor/victim, anyone can claim victim status (e.g., she references the Christian Right claiming to be victimized by policies which protect students from homophobic harassment13). This, in turn, facilitates the pitting of groups against each other and a focus on the individual, diverting attention from the ways in which young people are socialized into structural inequality. Pascoe writes,

…the interactional process of bullying both builds on existing embodied, classed, raced, gendered and sexualized social inequalities and simultaneously prepares young people to accept such inequalities as a “normal” part of living in the world… In this model of bullying, we as a society assign some of the dirty work of the reproduction of social inequality to our children, then pathologize them for interactionally acting out the sort of inequality that we as adults instantiate in law, policy, cultural values and social institutions (2014:2).

13 It is fitting to make mention here of the larger national trend involving the strategic use of claims to religious freedom as a means of eroding civil rights. This is evidenced by a recent escalation of judicial and legislative attempts to pit anti-discrimination protections against religious freedom and best exemplified by the Supreme Court’s decision in Burwell v. Hobby Lobby. This case affirmed religious exemption for certain for-profit companies from the Affordable Care Act’s contraception mandate and has been followed by many attempts to use religion to justify institutionalized homophobia, antisemitism and other forms of discrimination (be it the restriction or denial of wedding services, adoption support and the like). This is indicative of a political climate characterized by regressive policies, backlash against progress made by the previous administration and in which, ironically, the bully-like behavior a president is tolerated.
Pascoe cautions that, if schools connect individual skill and character to school climate, then young people, who are deficient – or, perceived as deficient - in certain skills or characteristics, are to blame for a negative school environment. Hence, the burden to sustain a bullying-free culture of kindness is placed on students, an idea which is bolstered, according to Pascoe, by the juxtaposition of the chaotic and cruel world of children and adolescents with “the adult world [which] is rife with equality and kindness and not one that encourages social inequality through social policy and cultural norms (2014:5)”.

Pascoe evokes Bourdieu’s model of the cultural reproduction of inequality and describes how power is transmitted and stratification naturalized by the institutions which provide opportunities for socialization to children at very young ages. In fact, Pascoe is crystal clear. Bullying allows young people to actively reinforce inequality; bullies are not pathological individuals and victims are not random. Rather, bullying embodies larger social inequalities and no amount of education which aims to familiarize students with difference or promote kindness will eradicate bullying. She calls for an entirely different approach when she suggests that education:

…place social forces, institutionalized inequality and cultural norms that reproduce inequality at the center of the discussion. This would bring policies and phenomena pertaining to social inequalities such as the dismantling of social welfare systems, current anti-fat bias in medical and health research, continued criminalization of young men of color, widespread Title IX violations in education and laws that specifically target the civil rights of sexual minorities into a discussion about bullying such that this discussion would not solely focus on young persons’ seemingly random cruelty to another (2014:3).
Pascoe leads us from the distraction of the individual and the pathological and reminds us to examine bullying as a means of teaching young people how to enact their social positions and naturalize behavior which sustains systems of power.

Bourdieu’s work offers a valuable framework for understanding the key role educational institutions play in cementing and transmitting social inequality. In *Distinction* (1984), Bourdieu details how cultural codes are manufactured, learned, expressed and utilized to establish class parameters and to facilitate inclusion or exclusion into these well-defined classes. The acquisition and possession of certain tastes, aesthetics and skills, Bourdieu’s *cultural capital*, functions as an un-interrogated mechanism linking individuals to specific locations within class hierarchy, effectively preserving and naturalizing class distinction. Schools, according to Bourdieu, are especially effective in handing down values and behavioral expectations from one generation to the next, constituting a socialization process which ensures adherence to those attributes which have become characteristic of a designated social status (Bourdieu 1984). Parents and schools partner in this transmission of class, evident in the different parenting-styles of middle and working-class parents which teach children their place – and, not their place - in the world (Lareau 2003). Aspects of upbringing, including levels of autonomy, comfort with authority, the relationship between parent and child and the amount of leisure time expected and allowed, in turn, translate into the important skills of verbal expression and negotiation. These can predict for a sense of entitlement, comfort with institutions and in the work world and, overall, greater success as adults. It is through this system of reproduction that educational institutions mediate membership into the contemporary structure of class stratification (Sullivan 2002).
Addressing classroom instruction, Lisa Delpit (1995) describes a “culture of power” (1995:24) in which young students learn different codes or rules for functioning at different locations within a social order stratified to guarantee the position of those at the top. Looking at the confluence of race and class, Delpit describes how some children come to school with the advantage of having been reared in such a way that exposes them to greater cultural capital than others (1995:28-30). These children benefit from exposure to certain cultural codes which facilitate the acquisition of those attributes which lead to success in the dominant social environment. What occurs in schools is continued instruction which leads to differential access to those dispositions and skills that are valued and considered inherent – natural and expected - in those with higher, powerful positions. Inequality is taught and maintained by educational institutions, such that, as Delpit writes, “to act as if power does not exist is to ensure that the power status quo remains the same” (1995:39). Delpit promotes addressing power and inequality head on; she suggests that debates over instructional methodology are distractions from the important task of identifying, dissecting, reinterpreting and teaching the language codes of the dominant social group while acknowledging their arbitrariness (1995:40-45).

If educational institutions play a key role in the reproduction of inequality, what part does bullying prevention play? What are the unique features of school-based health education which provide much of the context for bullying prevention education and contribute to this process?14

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14 Typically, school-based bullying prevention education is part of, or related to, a district’s health and safety initiatives. Responding to state mandates, schools must put something in place, but this might be limited to a well-defined judicial response, leaving responsibility in the hands of a building administrator. Alternatively, bullying prevention might be woven into a district’s coordinated health program and involve a curriculum component, staff training, coordination with parents and community members in addition to judicial measures. Much of this depends on the resources available, personnel in place and the scope and strength of infrastructure to support the implementation of a broad array of strategies. The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, for instance, recommends that bullying prevention “be considered as part of a district’s approach to creating safe and healthy learning environments” (MADESE). Such a recommendation is often delegated to a health
Historically, schools have had an ambivalent relationship with health education; and despite a considerable amount of research confirming a link between health and academic achievement, there continues to be a lack of consensus as to the school’s role and responsibility when it comes to funding, selecting, supporting and implementing strategies which aim to improve the health and well-being of students. Questions about the purpose of teaching health in K-12 public schools remain unresolved; key debates include whether health education is synonymous with the teaching of values, making it, in the minds of some, the purview of parents. Is health education, rather, an objective subject, based in scientific fact and, therefore, proven to have an association with success, productivity and good health? Are certain topics, like alcohol and drug education or disease prevention, motivated by a fear of lawsuits, negative media attention, a high-profile tragedy or compliance with legislative or funding requirements? Or, might health education be a response to popular characterizations of adolescents as out-of-control, dangerous, overly-sexual and incapable of exercising good judgment? On paper, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s Division of Adolescent and School Health broadly defines comprehensive school health education as aimed at building a healthful environment through age-appropriate instruction on a range of health-related topics, including bullying, implemented along with the provision of health services, healthy meals, physical activity, counseling support, and reporting mechanism as an anti-bullying coordinator, if such a position exists in the district, who oversees the program or leads a district taskforce, such that planning and implementation occurs in collaboration with other school personnel, legal counsel, law enforcement, community members, parents and, in some cases, students. Components of a bullying program may be implemented by a designated health teacher; in some locations, anti-bullying activities are the responsibility of the classroom teacher or generalist; and, other programs are carried out by a combination of the two. How program oversight and implementation occurs is district specific and resource-dependent; however, the bulk of resources and guidance comes from federal and professional organizations tasked with improving health and healthcare, such as the CDC and HHS. An example of the typical face and shape of a district program is found on the website of my home district - www.lynnschools.org/resources_bullying_socialmedia.shtml#gpm1_2.
family involvement and under the active leadership of administrators, school personnel and community members (National Center for HIV 2013; Coalition of National Health Education Organizations What is Health Education?; Basch 2011). In actuality, many schools lack the time, resources, and, for some, commitment to put in place a comprehensive health education program along the lines of what the CDC describes (UCLA). Despite guidance and some limited funding opportunities from federal agencies, research linking good health to academic achievement, polls consistently showing overwhelming support by parents and the increased adoption of state mandates and educational standards, what occurs is the partial and inconsistent implementation of the components of a comprehensive program which are perceived as the least controversial and burdensome (Coalition of National Health Education Organizations 2013; Kann 2007). Global competition for educational excellence and a continued sense of urgency to excel on standardized assessment has helped relegate health education to an afterthought on the bottom of the priorities list for schools. Even with relatively new state mandates (often lacking for most of the individual topics which compose health education), these large-scale demands on schools significantly restrict the implementation of anti-bullying efforts.

What occurs in school-based anti-bullying programming clearly reflects multiple influences and constraints - the cost and availability of commercially designed curricula, national and local politics, the understanding and commitment of school administration, the weightiness of competing school priorities, the training and status of classroom implementers and the immediacy of high profile cases of bullying. Guidance regarding what is taught, for how much time and by whom is missing. What seems to be a lack of attention to identified best practice or a disconnect between research and implementation is similar to what has long plagued the larger discipline of health education and resulted in inconsistencies and inefficacy.
Curiously, at the same time that health education (in this case, bullying prevention) is limited by a host of pressing and shared concerns, the backlash and controversy is unlike that generated by other academic areas. Arguments ensue surrounding how schools should best respond to high profile happenings - a cluster of teen pregnancies, an alcohol-related fatality or, in the case of bullying, a teen suicide. Programmatic initiatives are often scrutinized, debated and the subject of headlines – these include universal HPV vaccination, tobacco stings in convenience stores, continued funding of the discredited DARE program, documenting the weight of students to prevent obesity and, more recently, organized opposition to anti-bullying laws and programs (Bender 1997:81; Hall 2012; McKenzie 2011:164-5; People for the American Way). All too familiar are the controversies over sexuality education which range from national debates about abstinence-only approaches to local fights over condom availability. Similarly, groups organized in opposition to school-based bullying initiatives object to the characterization of some bullying as targeted discrimination. The opposition claims that anti-bullying programs which promote safety for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender students, for example, are an affront to religious freedoms. The voices which rise to the surface in such controversies tend to be, on the one hand, conservative, often religious, activists who strategically use moral paradigms to create panic and gain support as described in other areas (Irvine 2002). On the other hand, promoters of health education attempt to bring legitimacy to the work they do in schools by adopting the discursive strategies of science and medicine - this last point is introduced below and discussed in detail in Chapter 6.

MEDICALIZATION, BULLYING AND SCIENTIFIC TRUTH

At present, there is not a formal branch of sociology with a focus on health education and school-based prevention, although many of the concepts and approaches from medical sociology
are applicable and useful for analysis; this project draws upon the ways in which medical sociology uses the concepts of medicalization and individualism. The medicalization of behaviors that might be otherwise framed, has significant consequences; Barker addresses how medicalization functions to obscure the many social forces which negatively impact health. By locating the origin of a behavior in the body and, subsequently, directing the search for remedy to the realms of medicine and health, problematized behaviors are removed from their context and depoliticized, explains Barker (Barker 1998). In doing so, the focus of inquiry becomes limited by a lens fixed on a pathologized individual matched with a relatively personalized plan for change. This is not to say that individualism is irrelevant to the cause and remedy of bullying; there is no doubt that individual characteristics, skills and personal histories play a part. The problem, instead, is narrow psychological explanations and proposed solutions which serve alternative social purposes while failing to address structural factors.

Framing bullying as an epidemic is similarly nuanced and complex. On the one hand, the language of epidemic can be interpreted as rendering bullying an example of the downsides of medicalization. Casting bullying as an epidemic furthers the application of a disease model bringing its prevention under the authority of the health professions and locating remedy with the individual. Also, because the concept of epidemic can imply a sense of urgency and crisis, any panic accompanying bullying can distract from its underlying and systemic roots. On the other hand, there are important examples in which the language of epidemic shifts beliefs about cause away from responses which hinder care. Pairing a disease model with addiction, for example, might be reductive, but it can decrease judgement, shame, the imposition of morality and other obstacles to treatment or recovery. Does it follow, then, that approaching bullying through a medicalized lens reduces barriers to reporting, intervening, treating and, even, preventing
bullying? It may be reasonable to assume that this is preferable to alternative paradigms - a judicial approach which relies on punishment to prevent and control bullying or moralistic responses which privilege rules about good and bad. Without evidence, results of such a comparison are unknown; suffice it to say that the pros and cons of medicalization are valuable considerations.

Borrowing from the public health field, school health education has incorporated the language of measurable objectives, the prevalence of risk behaviors, the need to collect local data and be data-driven, the emphasis on health promotion and wellness and the legitimacy of evidence-based practice - best practices deemed effective by evaluation research (SAMHSA National Registry). The American Educational Research Association (2013:55-58), among others, recommends that school-based bullying programs begin with data collection, surveys and focus groups, followed by the implementation of an evaluated program shown to have an impact on student behavior. Framing bullying in science, as with other components of health education, provides needed credibility, characterizing prevention as medically accurate, neutral and unthreatening rather than moral or political. At the same time, it relies on a medical paradigm, pathologizing the behaviors of young people, turning previously taken-for-granted behaviors into an epidemic and ignoring social and historical contexts. Evidence-based practice does not take into account important feminist critiques of scientific objectivity and neutrality. And, it directs prevention education toward theories of individual behavior change, such that the focus on individual responsibility and agency is reminiscent of the ideology of the neoliberal, hierarchical and patriarchal social milieu without critique, question or consideration of power and inequality. Even when the strategic approach to prevention employs the language of whole school culture and social ecology, the plan involves individual skill acquisition in order to influence the
interaction of individuals; this, according to Barker, obscures social forces, therefore, directing attention away from systemic change.

Jessie Klein, a prominent bullying researcher, aligns a sophisticated articulation of the structural roots of bullying with solutions that miss the mark, illustrating this tension between the social/cultural, the scientific and the individual. Klein pins the blame for bullying on the lack of preparation and support allowing young people to navigate a hostile school environment. She writes of a hierarchical and competitive school culture, reflecting the status systems of adults and teaching about social power, in which violence becomes a normal response to everyday pressures and demands. She describes a climate in which boys face consequences if they are perceived as not “masculine” enough and illustrates how girls’ confidence is undermined through daily name calling (Klein 2012). Violence becomes a tool for survival; whether addressing commonplace bullying interactions or high-profile school shootings, school violence is a reaction to social conditions and not an expression of the natural tendencies of the individual. While Klein’s interpretation might embrace a powerful and valid social critique, her solutions, curiously, seem inconsistent. She advocates a model of compassionate schools in which cooperation and a sense of responsibility to the community are valued. This seems to suggest a focus on context and environment. However, Klein’s community is dependent on individual behavior change; her recommendations include increasing discussions of sexuality and healthy friendships, building strong individuals and solid relationships and creating opportunities for mutual support and the appreciation of others in the school community. Klein draws a detailed picture of the bully society; one which embraces the systemic and the structural. At the same time, she calls for solutions which speak to the personal and behavioral. Her analysis is invaluable and, perhaps, the primary purpose for the book; her recommendations, however, seem curiously out-of-step.
ADDITIONAL LITERATURES

Finally, there are several additional collections of readings which have significantly shaped the interpretation of findings.

*Understanding Kindness*

Although there is not a sustained sub-discipline within sociology organized around the topic of kindness, an overlap exists with both independent writings on the topic as well as other bodies of scholarship which look at emotions, morality, positivity, civility and the like. While kindness has been the subject of psychological research, the attention from sociology has been minimal. In their 2016 article published in *Sociology*, Brownlie and Anderson built a case for a sociological engagement with kindness. First, the authors suggest that kindness has multiple theoretical uses for sociology – addressing both micro and macro consideration; second, Brownlie and Anderson suggest that kindness is already featured – perhaps under a different name – in work which looks at social support, a topic of particular interest to those of us in medical sociology. Kindness is found in Goffman’s work on performance, morality and solidarity (2016:3) as well as in Elijah Anderson’s “cosmopolitan canopies”, urban spaces of mutual respect which offer respite from racial “incivilities” (2016:13). Despite these and a handful of other instances, Brownlie and Anderson note the inconsistent definitions of kindness which include a positive attitude, altruistic response to another’s need, polite behavior, an avoidance of conflictual rhetoric and others. They address the absence of kindness from the sociological literature, speculating that this is the result of a neoliberal climate in which competitiveness, individualism, consumerism dominate and kindness is associated with weakness (2016:2). And, they recognize the gendered nature of kindness in which nurturing is
associated with women and the private juxtaposed with the male, public features of 
neo-liberalism. In contrast, Clegg and Rowland reject a gendered binary which pits reason against 
emotion. Writing about higher education, Clegg and Rowland promote kindness in teaching as a 
remedy for the privileging of rationalism, identifying the subversive potential in response to 
neo-liberalism. Others echo a similar sentiment, remarking that the dominance of men in higher 
education is rooted in work practices and a general sensibility in which kindness is embarrassing, 
signifying “a transgression of accepted boundaries…sentimental and unrigorous” (722). Lynch, 
Baker, and Lyons (2009) similarly address the gendered nature of kindness within education, 
pointing out that benchmarks for success in academia position kindness as subversive, 
community-building and having revolutionary potential. Regardless of how kindness is presented 
vis-à-vis neo-liberalism, most accounts address the gendered dualism embedded in the concept of 
kindness. This embedded meaning facilitates kindness’ quiet role in the contemporary 
manifestation of gender inequality such that hidden within the concept is a typically 
unacknowledged gendered disparity which allows for a false sense of equal opportunity and a 
silencing of subversive potential.

Sociology, Childhood and Adolescence

Finally, it is important to bring attention to the ideas about young people underlying the 
bullying prevention paradigm. Diving into the body of literature which discusses the construction 
of childhood and adolescence over time and in different cultures is beyond the scope of this 
chapter. There are, however, pervasive assumptions about young people to acknowledge as it is 
important to recognize the ways in which bullying and its prevention both construct ideas about 
childhood and adolescence and reflect and confirm their contemporary interpretations and 
functions. There are my assumptions about young peoples’ capacity for understanding social
inequality in a basic, yet critical and transformational way. There are implied assumptions on the part of classroom teachers and curriculum developers that, although bullying interactions have significant personal consequences, bullying behavior can be trained away through the parroting of simple, prescribed behaviors. And, there are mixed beliefs about the ability of young people to be both active and passive participants in the socialization process.

Looking with a broad stroke at the contemporary ideologies of childhood and adolescence embedded in bullying prevention programs also raises many questions. What ideas about different young people are brought to the table when, for example, prevention assumes a relatively universal experience of bullying in contrast with that which embraces variation in experience based on race, class, personal experience and family background? What is the function of the distinction made between the bullying-type behavior of adults - sometimes rewarded and other times criminalized – and the characterizing of young people’s behavior? Does the discourse regarding bullying and anti-bullying programs contribute to the picture of a generation of unruly, out of control and at risk young people; or, is an uneven application of this characterization to disparate groups of children used to justify differential responses and degrees of policing behaviors?

Berkeley Education professor Daniel Perlstein describes the school culture which supports bullying as one in which the perpetration of “small cruelties” reinforces rigid hierarchies among students and serves as a “rehearsal for the social inequalities of the adult world (Perlstein 2000: 76)” . Perlstein paints a picture of bullying as significantly contributing to a system which places students in varying positions relative to power. It is typically characterized as a behavior of unruly kids when, in fact, it prepares young people for the lack of compassion, expression and inclusiveness of the adult world (2000:19).
The mischaracterization of bullying as an epidemic of pathological, out-of-control young people fits the description of a moral panic, an extreme or knee-jerk response to a specific population and/or behavior resulting in panic, controversy and opposition (Herdt 2009). Moral panics reflect fears of social upheaval or threat which are placated by the control of certain, targeted groups (Herdt). For example, Lorena Garcia’s research considers the bias within sexuality education and the consequences for Latina youth; she writes that “[r]esearch on school-based sex education has uncovered the insidious ways in which national and local fears about the instability of racial, gender, class and sexual hierarchies are articulated…” (Garcia 2009: 520). She unpacks distinct discourses – and, programmatic responses - that which targets white, middle to upper class youth, often thought of as needing intervention to guide them through a hormone besieged adolescence and that which constructs youth of color as always at risk. Similar to others who addresses the same topic (Fields 2008; Tolman 1994), Garcia’s concludes by emphasizing the importance of teaching young people to critically engage with risk in order to confront social inequalities.

The unique nature of this project relies on long-standing theoretical traditions working in synch with contemporary writings. The initial approach to my research involved bringing the scholarship of medical sociology, gender studies and work in the area of stratification, or inequality, to deepen the understanding of bullying and its prevention. These approaches have been invaluable and eye opening. Further, the data has driven the consideration of additional theoretical traditions which have added to the complexity of my conclusions and recommendations for both scholarly research and practical application. Reading on, the details of my methodology are described next, leading into my data and a discussion of my findings.
Chapter 3: Study Methods

This chapter describes in detail the mixed-methods, qualitative approach used to examine the discourses dominating bullying prevention in the elementary classroom. The design of the study locates gender inequality at the focal point of inquiry. This provides the opportunity to conduct a close examination of bullying prevention’s position in the process by which educational institutions reproduce a stratified social system.

To best address the study’s research questions, which aim to identify and analyze the messages embedded within school-based bullying prevention which socialize children into conformity with normative gender, data collection occurred in two phases. Phase 1 was an interpretive content analysis of commonly used and commercially developed instructional materials used in bullying prevention programs. The second phase involved a series of four focus groups conducted to explore the perspectives and experiences of elementary-level teachers on gender and bullying – those teachers most likely to be using bullying prevention curriculum. This two-phase strategy allowed for the identification of some of the gaps between what is intended in prevention curricula and the actuality of what is implemented in the public school classroom.

PHASE ONE: CONTENT ANALYSIS/MATERIALS REVIEW

*Background:* Of the multiple components which together compose a comprehensive response to bullying in schools, curriculum is a key factor. Forty of the 49 states with anti-bullying legislation specifically reference curricula as a central program element with some states requiring, and others encouraging, local curriculum adoption and implementation (US
HHS Key Components). Others of these laws promote integrated efforts and suggest embedding bullying within programs built on the promotion of character education or social and emotional learning. Still other state laws specify that programs be evidenced-based in that they meet a set of identified criteria, confirmed by rigorous evaluation research and, if implemented to fidelity, suggest a greater possibility of effectiveness (Sacco 2012:11). Among other impacts, this results in a tremendous variation in curriculum implementation due to a dearth of consistent guidelines as to what instructional strategies local school districts should prioritize and a lack of evaluation results for programs implemented with anything less than full fidelity. The absence of specification in the law is coupled with a lack of funding; only three state laws identify funding sources for bullying prevention, while the others remain unfunded (or, under-funded) mandates or recommendations. The inclusion of classroom prevention education in state-level, legislative responses to bullying is typically characterized as a positive development. However, as discussed, these responses are subject to multiple influences which lead to inconsistency in the design, scope, strategic approach and execution of classroom instructional interventions.

Selection: The large number of curricula available, the absence of specific recommendations and the lack of uniformity in implementation combine to pose unique challenges for the selection of the curricula for use in schools and for inclusion in this study. At the same time, however, multiple federal, state, local, governmental, professional and academic sources provide lists of recommended programs for use by schools and community organizations. My search for commercially produced bullying prevention curricula to review started with the websites of many of these organizations, often with one site linking to another, a snowball-type technique for developing my sample. These sources included the American School Health Association, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Massachusetts
Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network, the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, the Department of Justice, the Office of Juvenile Justice, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Agency, the Education Development Center, the Anti-defamation League and the Southern Poverty Law Center/Teaching Tolerance. This initial search was supplemented by open-ended online research relying predominantly on 1) the search engines: Google, Google Scholar and Scholar OneSearch of Northeastern University’s libraries and 2) combinations from a core list of search terms: “bullying,” “prevention,” “programs,” “youth,” “schools,” “evidence-based,” “school-based,” “anti-bullying initiatives,” “gender,” “LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender),” “girls,” “boys,” “masculinity,” “aggression,” and “evaluated”. And, finally, meta-analyses and program evaluations included in my literature search were used as a secondary line of identification and confirmation, resulting in a list composed of a total of 50 distinct elementary bullying prevention programs. The bullet points below document key components of the process by which identification of materials occurred, followed by Table 1, which lists the recommended curricula organized by source.

1) An initial search was conducted using websites of the leading national, government-funded and non-profit organizations which were established or expanded to provide technical assistance to schools and community organizations in the implementation of bullying prevention education. The federal government’s www.stopbullying.gov, a collaborative website for the coordination and dissemination of information about bullying established by the Departments of Education, Health and Human Services and Justice, directs viewers to FindYouthInfo.gov, an interagency effort on the part of 18 federal departments serving youth, to obtain specific program recommendations. To be included in FindYouthInfo.gov’s
Program Directory involves having conducted a rigorous multi-stepped evaluation process of formally nominated curricula which results in a designation as an effective or promising evidence-based practice. Of the nine curricula evaluated for bullying prevention, four were categorized as effective and five promising, and all but one targeted elementary aged students (ages 5-11).

2) The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention’s Model Programs Guide relies on expert reviewers to create a list of evidence-based youth programs based on that found in FindYouthInfo.gov’s Program Directory. A review of bullying-only initiatives found seven programs, one of which does not have a favorable rating, although the other six are rated as effective or promising.

3) The final federal source from which curricula recommendations were sought was the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)’s National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices, which offered the most comprehensive list of options. After limiting the search to early childhood and elementary school settings only, 16 programs were identified.

4) In 2012 Harvard’s Berkman Center for Internet and Society produced a bullying prevention and intervention guidance document which used the criteria of evidence-based practice and rigorous evaluation to ultimately offer three curriculum recommendations; only one of the three has been shown to have some positive impact in evaluations conducted in the U.S. Five additional curricula are mentioned as having beneficial effects on skills that may be related to bullying, such as social emotional skills and conduct problems, but have not been specifically designed or evaluated for use as bullying prevention. The Harvard report also recommends seven websites and databases which are regularly updated as new data on curriculum
effectiveness become available. These suggestions include the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (MADESE), the Promising Practices Network and the Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence.

5) In my home state of Massachusetts, as in many other states, school- and district-level decision-making reflects a long-standing educational philosophy and practice of local control, an approach which aims to preserve the autonomy of local educational entities. This is confirmed by MADESE on its website which states clearly that local districts and schools have the discretion to select anti-bullying programs independent of the recommendations of the Department; thus, pairing procedures which allow for choice with a state mandate. State law also required MADESE to “compile, post, and periodically update a list of bullying prevention and intervention resources, evidence-based curricula, best practices and academic-based research”, at present, MADESE recommends five curricula for use (MADESE).

6) The network and scope of non-governmental organizations which recommend curricula is impressive and too large to capture here. One example is the Promising Practices Network, a project of the Rand Corporation, which began in 1997 in order to showcase approaches and programs from the scientific literature to improve health and education outcomes for young people. The Network was defunded in 2014 and redirects visitors to its website to Blueprints for Healthy Youth Development, a privately funded website for the dissemination of evidence-based positive youth development produced by the Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence (CSPV), at the Institute of Behavior Science, University of Colorado Boulder. Only three programs have been designated as promising model programs by Blueprints. Similarly, the Resource Guide of the Colorado Bullying Prevention Initiative-
program of the Colorado Trust, a foundation dedicated to health equity - recommends just six model programs, the selection of which is justified by both best practices as identified in the bullying literature and experience - 3.5 years of grant funding to anti-bullying programs (Colorado Trust 2008).

7) The Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) is a clearing house for social and emotional learning (SEL), a strategy, CASEL claims, is linked by research to academic achievement and behavioral modification, including reductions in aggression. CASEL recommends a total of 23 curricula targeting young children; a subset of these are designed for a universal audience and have a specific focus on bullying, rather than a broad approach to SEL. Although CASEL states that the skills taught in generic SEL initiatives are incompatible with bullying and are likely to reduce bullying, the descriptions of only two such curricula mention bullying, the Open Circle and Positive Action programs (CASEL).

8) Several program evaluations, curricula reviews and meta-analyses were located as part of the initial literature search for this project. Review of these provided a useful point of comparison, helping to identify which curricula were selected for inclusion and determine if the lists significantly varied from the titles already chronicled. The most current and expansive of the meta-analyses is Farrington and Ttofi’s (2009). From a total of 622 reports reviewed, Farrington and Ttofi found that only 89 reports, reflecting 53 program evaluations, fit their inclusion criteria; the others were excluded due to methodological incompatibilities. Ultimately, 44 evaluations were used by Farrington and Ttofi for this rigorously vetted meta-analysis and, of this total, included in the table here (Table 1) are only U.S. programs, with the exception of the KiVa program, a Finnish initiative slowly being adopted for use in the
U.S. The other meta-analyses and evaluations reviewed were either outdated, redundant or non-specific (Espelage 2003; Ferguson 2007; Merrell 2008; Swearer 2010; Twemlow 2001; Vreeman 2007; Wang 2009). The final meta-analysis considered was Smith’s 2004 book examining the success of school-based bullying prevention initiatives (Smith 2004). Here thirteen programs and their corresponding evaluations are described in detail. The majority of these programs neither use commercially-produced curricula nor do they involve detailed classroom instruction; additionally, only two are used in the U.S.

Table 1- Elementary School-based Bullying Prevention Curricula Arranged by Key Source and Rank, where indicated.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Elementary Curricula</th>
<th>Rank, if indicated</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>FindYouthInfo.gov - <a href="http://findyouthinfo.gov/">http://findyouthinfo.gov/</a> (8)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Positive Action</td>
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<tr>
<td>Second Step</td>
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<tr>
<td>SNAP &amp; Under 12 Outreach Project</td>
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<tr>
<td>Steps to Respect</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kiva</td>
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<tr>
<td>Success in stages</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Peace makers</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Too good for violence</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) -</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><a href="http://www.ojjdp.gov/mpg/Topic/Details/3">http://www.ojjdp.gov/mpg/Topic/Details/3</a> (7)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Positive Action</td>
<td>√+ (Effective)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Steps to Respect</td>
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<tr>
<td>Caring School Community</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Kiva</td>
<td>√ (Promising)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Success in Stages</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Leadership Program’s Violence Prevention Project</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tribes</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services (SAMHSA) -</strong></td>
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<td><a href="http://www.nrepp.samhsa.gov/Index.aspx">http://www.nrepp.samhsa.gov/Index.aspx</a> (16)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Al’s Pals: Kids Making Healthy Choices</td>
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<tr>
<td>CAPSLE: Creating a Peaceful School Learning Environment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cool Kids Child and Adolescent Anxiety Management Program</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lesson One</td>
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<tr>
<td>Open Circle</td>
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<tr>
<td>PAX Good Behavior Game</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ripple Effects Whole Spectrum Intervention System</td>
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<tr>
<td>Elementary Curricula</td>
<td>Rank, if indicated</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rock In Prevention, Rock PLUS</td>
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<tr>
<td>Safe &amp; Civil Schools Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports Model</td>
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<tr>
<td>Safe School Ambassadors</td>
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<tr>
<td>Say It Straight</td>
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<td>Social Skills Group Intervention</td>
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<td>Steps to Respect</td>
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<td>Students Taking A Right Stand</td>
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<td>Virginia Student Threat Assessment Guidelines</td>
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<td>Zippy’s Friends</td>
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<tr>
<td>Steps to Respect</td>
<td>Recommended</td>
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<tr>
<td>Olweus</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KiVa</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Second Step</td>
<td>Possibly effective</td>
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<tr>
<td>The RULER Program</td>
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<tr>
<td>Roots of Empathy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tribes Learning Communities</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education -</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><a href="http://www.doe.mass.edu/bullying/">http://www.doe.mass.edu/bullying/</a> (5)</td>
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<td>Al's Pals: Kids Making Healthy Choices</td>
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<tr>
<td>Olweus</td>
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<tr>
<td>Michigan Model for Comprehensive School Health Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>PATHS (Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Peacebuilders</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Blueprints for Healthy Youth Development -</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><a href="http://www.blueprintsprograms.com/programResults.php">http://www.blueprintsprograms.com/programResults.php</a> (3)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Positive Action</td>
<td>Model</td>
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<tr>
<td>Steps to Respect</td>
<td>Promising</td>
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<tr>
<td>Olweus</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Colorado Bullying Prevention Initiative - <a href="http://www.coloradotrust.org">www.coloradotrust.org</a></strong> (6)</td>
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<td>Olweus</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bully Proofing Your School</td>
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<td>PATHS</td>
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<td>Second Step</td>
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<td>Steps to Respect</td>
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<tr>
<td>Safe School Ambassadors</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning Guide Online -</strong></td>
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<td><a href="http://www.casel.org/guide">http://www.casel.org/guide</a> (23)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Elementary Curricula</td>
<td>Rank, if indicated</td>
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<tr>
<td>4Rs (Reading, Writing, Respect, and Resolution)</td>
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<td>Al's Pals</td>
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<td>Caring School Community</td>
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<td>Competent Kids, Caring Communities</td>
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<td>HighScope Educational Approach for Preschool</td>
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<td>I Can Problem Solve</td>
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<td>The Incredible Years Series</td>
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<td>Michigan Model for Health</td>
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<td>MindUP</td>
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<td>Open Circle</td>
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<td>PATHS (Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies)</td>
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<td>Peace Works: Peacemaking Skills for Little Kids</td>
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<td>Positive Action</td>
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<td>Raising Healthy Children</td>
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<td>Resolving Conflict Creatively Program (RCCP)</td>
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<td>Responsive Classroom</td>
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<td>RULER</td>
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<td>Second Step</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social Decision Making / Problem Solving Program</td>
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<td>Steps to Respect</td>
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<td>Too Good for Violence</td>
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<td>Tools of the Mind</td>
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<td>Tribes Learning Communities</td>
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<td><strong>Farrington &amp; Ttofi Meta-analysis, 2010 (10)</strong></td>
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<td>Social Skills Group Intervention (S.S.Grin)</td>
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<td>CAPSLE</td>
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<td>Steps to Respect</td>
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<td>Youth Matters</td>
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<tr>
<td>KiVa (Finland)</td>
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<td>Expect Respect</td>
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<tr>
<td>Olweus (Seattle &amp; Chula Vista)</td>
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<tr>
<td>South Carolina Program</td>
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<td>Bully-Proofing Your School</td>
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<td>B.E.S.T. – Bulling Eliminated from Schools Together</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Smith, Peter K., et al. “Bullying in Schools: How Successful Can Interventions Be?”, 2004 (2)</strong></td>
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</table>

Olweus
Expect Respect
Inclusion Criteria: Despite the large number of curricula identified from credible sources, the total number selected for this project reflects a subset of initiatives based on the following four baseline criteria:

- **Elementary level programs.** Programs with an exclusive focus on middle and high school students have been omitted so that the materials assessed reflect primary prevention strategies and facilitate the maintenance of a narrow focus on the messages given to children during a time that external messages have a significant impact on the formation of their gendered selves.

- **Bullying focus.** Those curricula selected have an explicit focus on bullying rather than generic life skills, such as resisting peer pressure, healthy decision-making, social skills and increasing self-esteem. Programs designed as SEL initiatives with updated or supplemental bullying prevention lessons were included, while life skills training, drug and alcohol prevention and other health and wellness-related initiatives which teach generic skills were omitted. These skills might be useful for combatting bullying, but this project requires that the materials – or, a dedicated portion - have been designed explicitly to target bullying behaviors. There is little evidence that the majority of children have developed the capacity to apply or transfer social, emotional or behavioral skills learned in one area to another, such that teaching blanket skills does not seem to work well in reducing risk behavior. Prevention research has demonstrated that the more specific and narrowly focused, the more effective (Kirby 2001). This provides justification for the decision to eliminate prevention curricula used for bullying programs, but not designed as such, from consideration in this study.

Adherence to evidence-based strategies is also not a useful benchmark for inclusion in the project. As discussed in the previous chapter, this has been an on-going challenge for schools
in most subject areas. Adherence has proven particularly difficult for those non-college preparatory subjects which are not part of state-wide or national academic assessment. A 2011 report of school-based violence prevention programs funded by the federal Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act found that only eight percent of schools across the country employ an evidence-based prevention program. Less than half of these programs (forty-four percent) met a minimal standard of fidelity in implementation, determined by an index of generic components (USDOE Prevalence and Implementation Fidelity: xviii-xix). Furthermore, even if schools attempt to adhere to an evaluated curriculum with fidelity, implementation is subject to the skill and style of the teacher, the school environment as well as unpredictable external influences, such as media reports, parental concerns or community opposition.

Selection: A total of fifty curricula were identified which met the criteria for inclusion. Two conditions were applied to further cut the list down to a manageable size: the number of recommendations and accessibility. By requiring that a curriculum be suggested by more than one key source, then pairing down the list further based on affordability or the availability of exam or preview copies, a total of five complete curricula were chosen.

In addition to the five complete curricula included in the study, individual classroom activities were considered for inclusion when they serve well as an example not found in the primary materials selected (see Table 2 for overview of materials included); the consideration and inclusion of these materials recalls the partial or fragmented implementation of anti-bullying programs. In fact, with the exception of evaluation studies, curricula are typically not

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15 For the government’s study summarized in this report, the generic components used to assess fidelity are 1) number of topics covered (adherence); 2) number of lessons (dosage); 3) frequency of student participation; and, 4) level of risk targeted (match between program and population characteristics). Other studies mentioned in the report also include measures such as 1) number of instructional strategies; 2) number of rewards, recognition and student mastery; 3) based on data; 4) national or regional in scope; 5) conforms to theoretical guideline; 6) quality of delivery; and, 7) participant engagement (USDOE Prevalence and Implementation Fidelity).
implemented in their entirety or with fidelity to their original - and, evaluated - designs. This reflects the competing priorities challenging school districts, a lack of clear and consistent guidance and support for implementation and a disconnect between federal and state policies and a philosophy of local control. Together these factors result in a poor health education track record for schools.

A small number of commonly used curricula are priced beyond the means of this study, for example, the Second Step curriculum. Generously, the publishing company was willing to provide background information and a handful of sample lessons for my use. In some cases, individual classroom activities were available online. Not being able to review a curriculum in its entirety limits the broad claims I can make about a product’s treatment of gender and other themes relevant to my analysis; the content of the very parts I cannot access might counter any conclusions reached. My familiarity with these products, and the sizable amount of content I have been able to review, make me confident that the potential for contradictions is minimal. Regardless, when supplemental material is included, the fact that I have not reviewed the full curriculum will be noted.

**TABLE 2 - Overview of Included Materials**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Curriculum/Grade Level</th>
<th>Overview</th>
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</table>
| Positive Action (Developed by Carol Gerber Allred., Published by Positive Action, Twin Falls, Idaho. 2009-2012) | ▪ Promotes an intrinsic interest in learning and encourages cooperation among students  
▪ Teaches the intuitive philosophy that you feel good about yourself when you do positive actions - our thoughts lead to actions and those actions lead to feelings about ourselves which in turn lead to more thoughts  
▪ Focus is to create positive learning environments  
▪ Composed of scripted lessons targeting each grade level  
▪ Approximately 40 scripted lessons per grade level taking 15 minutes each to complete |
| PreK-High School | • The effects of the program range from increased academic achievement to dramatic reductions in problem behaviors  
• Companion kits for School Climate, Counselors, Community and Family members and addressing related topics (Drug Education/Bullying kits) |
| --- | --- |
| Bully Proof Your School - (Published by Sopris West, Longmont, CO, 1992) K-1: 2-6 (with boosters) | • Flexible design composed of 20-30 minute lessons to be implemented weekly over a 2-3 month timeframe  
• K-6th has 6/7 classroom lessons with follow-up 3 to 6 weeks later  
• Nationally recognized school safety program aimed at creating a safe, civil and caring school culture by focusing on prevention  
• Creates a “caring majority” of students who take the lead in establishing and maintaining a safe and caring school community  
• Works to convert the silent majority of students into a caring majority by teaching strategies that help them to avoid victimization and to take a stand for a bully-free school  
• Promotes student attachment to school, attendance at school and achievement in school  
• Teaches skills for interacting, understanding friendship and problem solving through compromise  
• Results show that schools which have implemented the program, incidences of bullying behaviors have declined and feelings of safety among the students have increased |
| Tribes Learning Communities (Written by Jeanne Gibbs. Published Center Source, Cloverdale, CA) PreK-12 & afterschool | • Aim is to build safe and caring environments; not a “fix it” program to reduce violence, drug use, etc. but about creating positive school community in which students achieve success because they:  
  o feel included and appreciated by peers and teachers  
  o are respected for their different abilities, cultures, gender, interests and dreams  
  o are actively involved in their own learning  
  o have positive expectations from others that they will succeed  
• Research-based process to create a culture that maximizes learning and human development  
• Teaches social skills to K-12 students and recognized as a violence prevention program  
• Not a curriculum, per se, but 165 community building activities to teach essential collaborative skills, design interactive learning experiences, work with multiple learning styles, foster the development of resiliency, and support school community change |
| Olweus (Developed by Dan Olweus., Published by Hazelden. 2009) | • Program philosophy rooted in human rights (fundamental right to feel safe at school)  
• Recommended implementation is across all grades in a school bldg. at approximately same time  
• Needs to be part of a comprehensive school initiative and not stand-alone |
**Al’s Pals: Kids Making Healthy Choices**

*Developed by Virginia Commonwealth U. starting 1993 & distribution by Wingspan began 1997*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PK, K, 1st and afterschool with booster for 2nd.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Resiliency-based early childhood curriculum and teacher training program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develops social-emotional skills in children 3 to 8 years old; infuses prosocial concepts into the classroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key skills taught: how to express feelings appropriately, use kind words, care about others, use self-control, think independently, accept differences, solve problems peacefully, cope, make safe and healthy choices, and understand that tobacco, alcohol and illegal drugs are not for children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trained teacher conducts two lessons a week, each lasting 10 to 15 minutes for a total of 46 lessons over 23 weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uses creative play, brainstorming, puppetry, original music, role plays, and movement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9-lesson booster curriculum for second or third grade to reinforce skills learned through the core program; companion parent education program available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation results show that children who participate are 2 to 5 times more likely to improve their use of positive social behaviors like sharing, taking turns, using self-control and solving problems than ones who do not participate</td>
</tr>
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**Supplemental Materials**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Second step</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Published by Committee for Children, Seattle. Early learning – 8.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaches empathy in an effort to reduce aggressive behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At present, it is being implemented in over 15,000 U.S. schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Its companion piece, <em>Steps to Respect</em>, facilitates the establishment of anti-bullying policies and procedures in addition to staff and parent training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implemented in 22-28 weekly topics, includes skill instruction</td>
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<tr>
<th>Open Circle</th>
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<tr>
<td><em>Wellesley Centers for</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Teaches pro-social and emotional skills, including empathy, positive relationships, problem solving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evidence-based, whole school approach</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Document Review: Curricula were reviewed and coded in the summer and fall of 2015. Coding was done by hand, reducing and grouping the data into high level categories for analysis. Both preset and emergent codes were used to facilitate a review of the curriculum content in order to identify the frequency, location and nature of gendered themes. Specifically sought were the embedded gendered messages which suggest the meaning systems taught to children as part of their early socialization into rigid and binary gender identities. This included references to the performance of gendered behaviors and obligatory gender conformity. Also coded were the locations of subtle, nuanced or absent messages, places in which an easily unrecognized, embedded message might suggest conformity to one’s assigned gender or where a gendered message might be expected and, by remaining unspoken or unchallenged, is, thus, confirmed.

Building on the project’s two research questions, a more refined list of questions was developed. These provided detail to assist in the identification of the more subtle and nuanced messages as well as to further breakdown the data to guide its categorization. These questions include:

- What are the dominant messages about bullying embedded in the curriculum and do the materials suggest a relationship between these messages and process of social stratification?
- Are there specific theoretical or strategic emphases identifiable in the materials; these might include psychological explanations for bullying perpetration, individual explanations for victimization, ecological approaches to prevention or a reliance on scientific evidence to provide legitimacy?
- What are the gendered messages written into these bullying prevention curricula?
- Do the messages speak to the socialization of elementary school students as gendered individuals? Are correlations with other identity markers – race, class, disability, sexual orientation – discovered?
More specifically, how does the curriculum attend to power differentials, particularly related to gender differences? Are there ways in which gender distinctions are characterized as binary and/or natural? Is gender contested or characterized as constructed? Is aggressive or violent behavior described as masculine? And, is a high value seemingly placed on gender conformity and/or is transgression associated with negative consequences?

If there are no explicit or overt messages, are subtle gender clues apparent? Can ideas about gender be inferred or interpreted based on the format and nature of the materials (including language, images, themes)?

Using these questions, the following 22 codes (Table 3) were used to categorize the findings from the curricula review as well as from the focus groups:

**Table 3- Review Categories:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(randomly ordered)</th>
<th>Aggression</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Perp/bully profile</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Power</td>
<td>Normative</td>
<td>Respect</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caring</td>
<td>Inequality</td>
<td>Empathy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kindness</td>
<td>Victims</td>
<td>Learning gender</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment (climate)</td>
<td>Gender/friend</td>
<td>Conformity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inclusion</td>
<td>Character/friend</td>
<td>Positivity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>Individual(ism)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citizen</td>
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**PHASE 2: FOCUS GROUPS**

The second phase of the project involved a series of focus groups with elementary classroom teachers to explore the role of gender in the implementation of anti-bullying programs.

*Description:* The gap between what is intended to be taught and what is implemented in the elementary classroom as bullying prevention is significant, reflecting discrepancies between state and local policy and practice, competing educational priorities and a deficit of resources. For teachers, these factors translate into limited time, materials and training, occurring in a politicized environment which, at best, misunderstands health education and, at worst, opposes it. These and other factors shape what is taught about bullying and how; this, in turn, results in
the prioritization of the least challenging, least controversial or most neutral program components.

Variation not only characterizes what is taught, it reflects who is doing the teaching. Some districts have health education specialists or designated bullying prevention educators who, I initially thought, were responsible for carrying out instructional activities. Classroom teachers, I assumed, were positioned to overseen a classroom in which bullying prevention education takes place by reinforcing district messages, enforcing local policies and conducting supplemental activities, as necessary. After minimal inquiry, it became clear that most districts rely on classroom teachers to carry out the instructional component of the school’s bullying prevention plan. I had also assumed that elementary classroom teachers would have limited knowledge of all that occurs in their districts – including curriculum, policy, training, parent involvement and other components of a comprehensive plan. This, again, was not the case, as, with the exception of those who were new to the district, participants expressed confidence in their familiarity with their district’s approach. Never-the-less, the decision to work with classroom teachers, rather than to identify and interview anti-bullying specialists, reflects an acknowledgment that many districts lack the resources to hire a district specialist and, at an elementary level, classroom teachers are often best situated or positioned to understand the context, intent and impact of the instruction as delivered.

Sample: In order to maximize numbers and ensure availability, focus group participants were drawn from graduate-level education students who are working towards a master’s degree in elementary reading from the American International College (AIC) based in Springfield, Massachusetts. The individuals in this sample are currently teachers but have a range of teaching experience – some fairly new to the profession and others long time educators. Teachers seeking
this degree are almost exclusively English/Language Arts teachers, a core subject area taught by a main classroom teacher on the elementary level.

AIC’s graduate programs use a cohort model in which a discrete group of students attend courses at a satellite location and advance through the program together. This cohort model predicts for a unique camaraderie among the group members. The focus group format capitalized on this familiarity, allowing collaborative, in-depth discussion of bullying to occur, an issue about which AIC does not offer formal instruction. The format of the focus groups also offered flexibility to explore unanticipated directions and topics.

To help ensure confidentiality, participants were not asked to give their names or identify the district in which they are employed, although they were encouraged to identify the type of district - urban, suburban or rural. Not all shared this information, but, based on those who did, the sample can be characterized as evenly split between urban and suburban, representing districts located exclusively in eastern Massachusetts, encompassing a wide range of income levels and diversity of populations and including Lawrence, Everett, Lynn, Medford, Lexington, Methuen and Andover. Furthermore, participants drew on their experiences with other districts, where they were formerly employed or those in which their children were students, to respond to the focus group questions.

Design: As with the curriculum review, the research questions for the full project were broken down with some specificity for this phase of the research. Accordingly, the focus groups were intended to:

• increase the understanding of elementary teachers’ perceptions of bullying prevention efforts within their district or school and both positive and negative forces impacting effective implementation;

• examine how elementary teachers perceive the role of gender within bullying interactions; and,
• explore teacher perspectives on the place of gender inequality in bullying prevention education.

Four, 1-1.5 hour focus groups were conducted; each group consisted of ten to fifteen classroom teachers. Three groups were held in Medford and one in Wakefield, MA. during the span of AIC’s regular class time, 4-9 p.m.

The centerpiece of each focus groups was a vignette – a short, but detailed scenario which described a case of bullying between school-aged children in which gender was emphasized. As a research method, vignettes are useful for transforming what might otherwise be a conceptual and remote area of inquiry into a concrete and tangible topic of discussion. Vignettes facilitate the examination of an issue in context, in this case, helping to highlight the environmental factors influencing the implementation of bullying prevention education. They help to elicit the experiences and judgments of study participants in a controlled and less personal way than other methodologies. And, vignettes can help to establish a dialogue, opening the way for more nuanced and complex findings about gender inequality and bullying prevention (Onwuegbuzie 2009; Rabiee 2004). Identification of the vignette ultimately used for the groups occurred during the materials review phase of the research.

Three documents detailing the structure, process and content of the focus groups were designed: 1) a script for the AIC professor to facilitate introduction of the research to her class; 2) a script for the moderator with an introduction, a series of questions and closing remarks; and, 3) the vignette. Northeastern University’s Institutional Review Board reviewed and approved all associated documents and the study in its entirety. The text of these can be found in Appendix #2.
Data Collection: While moderating the groups, I audio-recorded the meeting and took supplemental notes to mark noteworthy contributions by participants as well as to document observations in the moment. Shortly after each group, I transcribed the tapes in full and reviewed my hand-written notes to allow for a thorough comparison with data from the on-going curriculum review. Beyond confirmation of content, the researcher notes added little new information to the transcriptions. Key locations of participant interaction - when and where certain individual comments elicited indications of agreement (“Uh huh”, for example), a flurry of crosstalk or brief conversation - were highlighted when adding meaning or emphasis to the spoken narrative.

Analysis: Data analyses occurred from summer through the winter of 2015 and involved manual coding of material from the focus group transcriptions and extensive notes taken during the document review of phase one. The same 22 high level categories used for labeling chunks of information from the curricula (Table 3) were used to categorize the content of the focus groups. Also, noted were the locations of subtle or absent messages at which the meaning systems taught to children as part of their early socialization were embedded. This aided the capture of sites where obligatory conformity to rigid and binary gender identities was implied; these sites were, then, sorted into the existing categories.

Once coded, the information was reorganized by category or key word to facilitate examination of the data according to commonalities and patterns, to determine frequency of dominant ideas and to reveal emergent themes. The number of references per category was tallied and three indisputably dominant categories were identified by which the data was reorganized accordingly: kindness, individualism/individual skill building and inclusion/difference. Interestingly, the focus groups revealed common themes regarding the
treatment of bullying as well as shared understandings of gender within prevention efforts on the part of the teachers who participated. Looking for discrepancies between the focus groups and the curriculum materials to identify any gaps between intended instruction and implementation constituted the next level of analysis. And, finally, relevance to the driving research questions, aligned with the theoretical frames of the study, composed the bulk of the analysis.

In summary, bullying prevention curricula have been closely scrutinized through multiple quantitative evaluations of their effectiveness, the results of which have been interpreted as markers of programmatic success. This current project is unique; it involves a qualitative review of content and an analysis of discourse which has not been part of previous studies. A methodical review of materials is, then, paired with findings about the state of implementation and interpreted through a distinctly sociological lens. This design offers a more comprehensive picture of school-based bullying prevention education; it suggests that the omission of contextual and structural considerations has impaired prior research; and, it sheds light on factors closely aligned with the foundations of bullying which might have a greater influence on the overall success of efforts to prevent bullying. An in-depth examination of these points is the discussion which follows.
[B]oys will be boys…I don’t know…I feel like I’ve heard a lot of people against that thing now. And, I think that that’s a really good thing because I feel, like, it lets, like, you assume, oh, that because they get rough when they play it’s just what boys do, you know. But, maybe that is bullying. And…maybe that’s why we’re so shocked when, like, the sweetest girls do all these things because, you know, girls are sugar and spice and they’re all, like, always nice and boys are always gonna be the ones who roughhouse and think that’s just the way it is, you know. So maybe, like, you know…just because girls are supposed to be nicer and stuff doesn’t mean they always are or just cause they know the right things to say, and, you know, I don’t know… (Focus Group (FG) #1 September 29, 2015)

FRAMING THE FINDINGS

School-based bullying prevention education is a critical location in which the cultural tensions which produce our contemporary social organization play out. Yet, while the role that educational institutions fill in the process of reproducing social inequality has been well-scrutinized and documented; up until now, school-based bullying prevention’s contribution to this process has remained under-explored. To frame a discussion of bullying and gender inequality, it’s important to first point out that the role of gender is not ignored in bullying prevention curricula. On the contrary, attention is paid to gender, but, this occurs simultaneously with its de-emphasis. To use, perhaps, an awkwardly fitting but resonant parallel, the treatment of gender is reminiscent of how a color-blind ideology negates racial distinctions and perpetuates the deception that racial discrimination is a thing of the past. The bullying literature commonly emphasizes that both boys and girls bully. This suggests a sameness in bullying practices, an idea which is akin to the “we are all just people” sentiment of racial color-blindness. It promotes a belief in an even playing field, a gender equity of sorts, which diverts our attention from the underlying, pervasive and potent gender inequity - an embrace of feminist discourse without upsetting the apple cart. Michael Messner refers to this perpetuation of gender inequality in a
culturally acceptable way as *soft essentialism* (Messner 2011). This involves the characterization of boys and girls as equally capable, just different; in other words, a neo-separate-but-equal ideology. Rather than problematizing underlying gender inequalities, soft essentialism naturalizes gender distinctions with a post-feminist flair.

Describing the elusive and contradictory nature of post-feminism as dualistic, expressed as both popular discourse and academic theory, both backlash to feminism and anti-feminist, Suzanna Walters (1995: 117 and 138) describes cultural representations of gender as having the “veneer of feminism…[while] encoding reactionary ideas about women” (1995:134). This rings true for the treatment of gender in bullying prevention and muddles the unpacking of power dynamics embedded in bullying and efforts to prevent it. The multiple understandings of feminism and their relevance found within the various strands of post-feminist thought offer frames for assessing what can be read as contradiction in the data about the extent to which gender is implicated in bullying. What Walters characterizes as post-feminism’s depoliticization and individuation of feminist goals (1995:136-7) is similarly described by Rosalind Gill as dominant patterns of cultural life where gender is expressed as independent agency and individual power in contrast to other feminisms which engage a critique of large-scale structural inequalities and emphasize collective power and social change (Gill 2016; McRobbie 2009; Scharf 2012). These descriptions help to both decode and contextualize the simultaneous engagement and repudiation of feminism within bullying prevention materials and their implementation (Scharf). And, whether post-feminism reflects a reinvigorated gender activism in a neo-liberal world, a backlash against previous critiques of gender inequality or a full rejection of feminism veiled in gendered empowerment, it speaks to bullying prevention’s one-dimensional relationship to gender and whether that relationship serves as a diversion to mask
the undermining of feminist goals. This is not to suggest that the writers of curriculum materials or the implementers of bullying prevention programs’ intention is to bring feminism to the anti-bullying table, but to attempt to understand a curious tension between, on the one hand, acknowledging a gendered aspect to the problem of bullying and, on the other hand, a lack of challenge to gendered power relations. This co-existence allows for the juxtaposition of empowered women with a disavowing of the negative images of feminism past, a soft rhetoric of equality with an uneven substructure, evidence of neither push back nor backlash, but an undermining of feminist gains and visions of transformation which makes bullying and efforts to prevent it useful social tools.

GENDER NEUTRALITY AND THE POST-FEMINIST BULLY

Not once during the data collection for this study did participants initiate discussion of sexism, feminism, patriarchy, equality, oppression, empowerment or other similar concepts. Instead, when reference was made to uneven gender distinctions, participants responded with a range of negative reactions, from discomfort to outrage and an expressed desire to deemphasize or neutralize gender, characterizing it not as a divide or an obstacle but a mild variation. When asked about how schools instruct young students to be gendered beings, one focus group member summed up a commonly held sentiment well:

Um...I definitely think that schools play a major role in genderizing children and I actually have an example that I was like horrified. Um, it’s a woman that’s a volunteer in my school and she is a former nun and she’s like the sweetest, nicest person ever. I love her. But, she was in my room and a girl kind of like spoke out of turn and was kind of loud and it was rude and it was not allowed in my room, um, she didn’t mean anything by it though. And, the woman went “oh, I can’t believe you did that, especially for a girl”. And, I was like so horrified but she kind of caught herself, which I was glad, she was like, well, boys, too, but, um, so I was glad that she did catch herself, but, ah, cause I just hate when people say
and do things like that. And, I always tell the kids, I used to teach PreK and, like, every day I would have to say “you can do whatever you want. It doesn’t matter if you’re a boy or a girl ... (FG #1)

The distinction made consistently in the literature - be it an academic article, curriculum or news report - describes gendered bullying as a simple difference of outward manifestation - boys engage physically while girls’ bullying is psychological and emotional. And, although girls’ bullying may be portrayed as more vicious and insidious, a description which elevates the harm out of the trivial and rescues it from being minimized as silly-girl-nonsense, girls’ capacity for and the magnitude of their bullying is presented as indistinct from that which is perpetuated by boys. What becomes minimized is the troublesome association between the expression of an idealized masculine gender and aggression (Connell 1996; Adams 2010:279), an association which is pervasive, taught early and, as it becomes embedded as natural within the self-concept and behavior of boys, defines what girls are not, rendering them passive, without power and less than. Conformity to masculine conventions is rewarded with gender dominance (Gini and Pozzoli 2006; Klein 2012; Murnen 2002), yet the degree of adherence has been correlated in the research with a greater likelihood of impaired academic achievement (Brown 2015) and negative health outcomes for men - risky alcohol use, unprotected sex, stress, the perpetration of intimate partner violence and the avoidance of medical care and mental health support (Courtenay 2000; Culp-Ressler 2014; Netherland 2016)16. And, while these outcomes are the targets of prevention efforts, their rootedness in gender inequality, again, fails to be part of the picture. Key ideologies which legitimate violent behavior, including bullying, are ignored. Alternatives to essentialist constructions of a masculine/feminine binary as well as the social function of these categories are

16 Julie Netherland (2016) writes a fascinating piece about toxic masculinity and how it unconsciously fills the gap where butch role models would be useful. She links masculinity to an avoidance of self-care and negative health outcomes. And, she concludes with a description of letting go of the limitations of conventional masculinity.
left unexamined with regards to power differentials and the large-scale inequities in the classroom, in educational institutions and in the environments in which children live outside of school. And, overlooked is the literature which suggests that relational or indirect aggression is more common in girls who conform to traditional feminine gender norms, allowing girls to assert power in relationships while maintaining expectations that girls should avoid direct conflict, anger and confrontation (Crothers 2005). These omissions, paired with the appearance of equal opportunity, perpetuate misperceptions about the persistence of gender stratification enacting, for example, girl power without the power. In this way, gender inequality is seemingly ignored in bullying prevention and an opportunity for children to critically examine sexism is traded for rose colored glasses (Ringrose 2010).

In this chapter, I address two research questions by drawing on the sources of data previously described in Chapter Three: the anti-bullying curricula reviewed and the responses of elementary classroom teachers who participated in one of four focus groups. These questions are as follows.

1) Are messages about gender embedded in school-based bullying prevention education programs such that conformity to traditional and stereotypical ideas about boys and girls is promoted?

2) In what ways might the implementation of bullying prevention in schools contribute to the socialization of children into conventional gender norms, particularly reinforcing the link between masculinity and aggressive behavior?

To answer these questions, this chapter aims to reveal the extent to which the bullying prevention education implemented in schools promotes or deconstructs binary and/or essentialist conceptualizations of gender and disrupts ideologies of normative masculinity and femininity, particularly in relation to aggressive behavior. I identify the extent to which attention is paid to the interconnectedness of gender and power to determine whether students are provided with the
necessary skills to engage in the critique and disruption of the reproduction of social inequality. If a reification of the link between gendered conventions and those ideologies and behaviors which underlie bullying interactions is revealed, it would appear that bullying prevention education is, perhaps, counter-productive and self-perpetuating. This is further confirmed when considering a post-feminist perspective that the *veneer* of equality provides cover for a persistent gender inequality feeding those conditions which generate bullying behavior.

Three dominant areas emerge from a high-level look at the treatment of gender in the data; these areas provide the structure for the discussion of findings in this chapter. First, the data shows that gender is included for inclusion’s sake or, left as a simple gratuitous nod to diversity. Second, references to gender mark a clear distinction between that which is described as the physical bullying of boys and the emotional and psychological bullying of girls, rooting the distinction in naturalized or essential understandings of gender while emphasizing that girls can do what boys do, in fact, often with a greater degree of nastiness and venom (the idea of a level playing field described earlier). And, finally, gender is treated in such a way to confirm the link between aggressive behavior and gender, thus reinforcing an ideology sitting at the foundation of bullying behavior. Although not overtly gender-negative, these treatments are suggestive of Messner’s soft essentialism; they represent an empty or false equity and are reminiscent of the tension described by post-feminism between a rejection and embrace of feminist critique.

Building on arguments made by Elizabeth Payne (2015) and C.J. Pascoe (2014), my findings offer evidence that the discourse used to address gender within the classroom is indicative of the role bullying prevention plays in the reproduction of social stratification. In brief, by not addressing power and inequality, normative conceptualizations of gender go uninterrupted, simultaneously schooling young people about expected gendered behavior as well as the
negative consequences of nonconformity. For the current generation of young people, bullying discourse is embedded in this process of early gender socialization. Yet, as C.J. Pascoe suggests, and the evidence confirms, not only is gender inequality quietly imposed on young people through the socialization process, bullying discourse allows children to be pathologized and blamed for interactionally acting out an inequality that exists everywhere (2014). This further turns attention from power and inequality, whitewashing gender stratification; and, on the one hand, trivializing bullying as the actions of kids while, on the other hand, casting bullying as an epidemic worthy of panic.

THE FINDINGS IN THREE THEMES

The three dominant themes which emerge from the data - the curriculum content reviewed and focus groups - demonstrate the presence of strong messages about gender coexisting with the absence of an examination of gender bias, gender socialization and gender inequality. The first theme is an emphasis on diversity which involves a simplistic call for inclusion and appreciation of difference. A cheerleader-like tone is characteristic of the treatment of race, ethnicity and special needs (for the most part, the curricula reviewed are silent on the topic of sexual identity), and, in the case of gender, there is an insistence on equal opportunity for boys and girls and a blind faith in a level playing field. Second, an essential and binary nature to gender is implied; without problematizing gender, conformity to traditional definitions and associated traits is assumed. And, the third theme is this strengthening of the link between hegemonic and conventional gender ideologies and behavior leaves the aggressiveness of normative masculinity uncontested and contributing to a bullying prevention education that is
counter-productive and, perhaps, self-perpetuating. The next sections describe each of these emerging themes, drawing on the data to provide examples of the ways in which the curricula illustrate, and the classroom teachers operationalize, this gendered paradigm.

Inclusion, Gender-Blindness and an Equity Meme

Championing an embrace of diversity and commitment to inclusion is amongst the main descriptors of the Tribes Learning Community, a program which takes on the ambitious goal of facilitating a reinvention of school culture (Tribes:3). This is described as a transformation from the current state into a caring environment, one which is responsive to what are characterized as basic human needs, to feel appreciated, supported, worthy and motivated toward academic success. The means to achieving this is the centerpiece of the program, the formation of learning environments, or tribes, which are built on the values of diversity, inclusion, democracy and the importance of culture and ethnicity. Yet, regardless of gender, race or culture, all community members have the opportunity to experience a caring and interdependence which Tribes assumes is a universal experience with a universal result - facilitating the replacement of feelings of vulnerability and defensiveness with the sense of self-worth. This is the key, according to Tribes, to reducing problematic behaviors (74-78).

Although multiculturalism and inclusion are, in varying degrees, features of all the curricula reviewed, Tribes prioritization of these factors is a hallmark of its unique learning community structure. In fact, the organization of Tribes into learning communities promises to facilitate harmony (127); the model of small environments in which different opinions and cultures are tolerated, integrated and respected, is intended to lay the groundwork for cultural empowerment and cultural pluralism (125-6). Individual community members are asked to express emotion,
participate in open discussion, learn about and appreciate other cultures, avoid “put-downs” and take responsibility when racist or sexist sentiment is expressed. *Tribes* distinctly labels certain activities as culturally insensitive - acknowledging Christian holidays, but no other religion’s celebrations, or requiring eye contact from Thai and Cambodian students, when averting one’s eyes is a sign of respect in these cultures (197), and *Tribes* specifically recommends holding diversity celebrations - multiethnic fairs, multicultural movie nights and the like (124-127, 311, 374).

While *Tribes’* emphasis on diversity and multiculturalism may appear well-intended, it expresses a glossing over of power and inequity. The program aims to prevent conflictual interactions, in which are deeply embedded disparate power relationships representative of large-scale and long-present social inequalities, by developing an individual’s skills for recognizing cultural difference (and to a lesser extent, gender difference); a mismatch at best. Its cursory and fragmented treatment of inclusion lacks an examination of structural racism and sexism. *Tribes* maintains that one (of four) reasons why children succeed with the program is its prioritization of respect for gender difference (*Tribes*, Intro packet:3), which is symbolized by illustrations throughout the materials showing what appear to be ethnically and racially mixed groups of male and female children. These images are neither critiqued nor are they accompanied by curriculum content, and they appear in sharp contrast to photographs of the program developers, all white women (*Tribes* Intro Packet:42-46). In comparison with other programs, the language of multicultural education and inclusion is extensive, yet *Tribes’* avoidance of the issue of power leaves the dynamics of inequality unquestioned. Insight into the complexities of gender socialization and gender inequality is absent, relegating the program’s emphasis on inclusion to lip service. The *Tribes* approach is reminiscent of cultural competence models which prioritize
an individual or an agency’s skills for effectively responding to cultural differences. These models are rightfully criticized for ignoring institutional oppression and relying on individual rather than systems change. Critics accuse cultural competence models of promoting a colorblind perspective, which equalizes and misperceives oppression, rather than an intersectional feminist perspective, which would involve an examination of the complex entanglement of systems of oppression (Abrams and Moio 2009).

Promoting multicultural understanding, awareness and acceptance is the stated objective of the activity in *Tribes* entitled, “What’s the Tint of Your Glasses?” On a picture of eyeglasses, each student illustrates answers to a series of questions - what is your country of birth; what language do your parents speak other than English; have you ever lived on a farm, ranch or in a city? To describe differences in perspective, the teacher is prompted to say “city person versus country person looks at pigs in a pen (pigs are dirty/pigs are great)” and to follow-up with a brief, undefined discussion. The session closes with an invitation for statements of appreciation in which students thank each other or otherwise verbally appreciate the contribution of another student, promoting a construct in which the act of giving platitudes is equated with accepting difference (374). The depth or complexity of the activity may appear as age-appropriate; however, the awareness and appreciation of difference does little to develop students’ critical eye for recognizing and understanding power differentials and inequality. The point is that this is not simply about neglect. Instead, this omission actively preserves the significant and well-theorized role schools play in socializing children into hierarchical gender norms. Educational materials, classroom structure, administrative hierarchies, teacher attitudes, systems of punishment and so forth are considered part of a hidden curriculum in which educational institutions serve as key locations in which the disparate valuation of male and female characteristics is enacted and done.
so without regard for variations in the interpretation of masculinity and femininity rooted in race, ethnicity, class and culture (Chapman 2014; Connell 1996; Klein 2012). *Tribes* treatment of gender represents a disconnect between the practice of diversity education and the hierarchical nature and function of the classroom, the school and the social milieu.

This reduction of multiculturalism and inclusion to a set of skills for appreciating difference is paired with an imperative involving a meme, or a distinct conceptualization, of equity. This idea asserts that boys and girls have the capacity to do and achieve the same, and that to say otherwise is old school and sexist. This philosophy is part and parcel of programs’ wholesale embrace of diversity divorced from its location in a hierarchical social order. This is well-illustrated by the *Al’s Pals: Kids Making Healthy Choices* program, another of the curricula reviewed which uses puppetry, creative play and original songs to reach its ultimate goal of forming a caring community. To do this, *Al’s Pals* aims to teach young students the skills to counter the internalization of negative influences in their lives (2004:v), thus reducing anti-social and aggressive behaviors (Wingspan 2013). The strategies incorporated into *Al’s Pals* reflect research which identifies the core skills of resiliency, self-control, communication, flexibility, independent thinking, healthy and peaceful problem solving, healthy decision-making and caring as essential for a certain profile of a healthy child (see chapters 5 & 6); an important component of this is a global acceptance of difference (*Al’s Pals* Overview Document:1).

Nowhere in *Al’s Pals* is gender and its relationship to bullying overtly addressed; nowhere is the individual’s social context considered. Out of the 46 lessons, two focus on promoting inclusion by recognizing and appreciating difference, specifically designed with the intent of enhancing an individual child’s capacity for accepting difference. The goal of lesson 7, for example, is to build resiliency through understanding that “different is okay” (7-2).
comparing shoes and acknowledging that, although we all wear them, there is still variation, students are learning that “having different things and liking different things is okay” (7-3). This same message is repeated in lesson 8 in which students draw their favorite toppings on paper slices of pizza in order to illustrate that they prefer different things (8-3). And, as many of the individual lessons in Al’s Pals incorporate original music, lessons seven and eight conclude with the “Different and the Same” song, the chorus of which reads as follows:

We’re different and the same
And, that’s okay
Cause I can be me
And you can be you
And we do what we want to do…
Different and the same.
And there’s no one to blame.
I can think one way
And I can think another way
And that’s okay. (7-4)

For many reasons, it is important to teach very young children to value difference. And, there is no doubt that doing so well, and with meaning, is a challenging task without substantial precedent. However, for the most part, teaching about difference occurs with a striking omission of references to power and structural disadvantage. Al’s Pals offers curriculum implementers pointers in “cultural competence”; teachers are instructed to modify the curriculum to reflect the cultures present in the classroom without changing the lesson’s purpose. They are urged to change names, language, cultural references and to provide opportunities for the expression of individual culture, suggesting that the meanings or significance of cultural symbols are interchangeable. And, without explanation, teachers are encouraged to stick to how the curriculum alternates “he” and “she” (Al’s Pals, Leading the Lesson:3); again, giving the impression of equity, yet without renewed purpose and decontextualized from the context of social inequality.
Similarly, the theme of embracing inclusion at the expense of change-making is found in the focus group data. One participant described this well:

Um, our, our school, we have a motto that we adopted, maybe, 10 years ago now…and it’s like *Opportunity, Diversity and Respect*. And, that diversity piece and that respect piece is supposed to be embedded in everyone’s classroom and um making school a culture that, you know, um, gives people the opportunity, equal opportunity to learn regardless of how they identify themself, gender, race, whatever. (FG#2) Unprompted, she continues to discuss her school’s celebration of difference amid a limited acceptance of diversity:

I have to say I’m pretty amazed sometimes. We have quite a few students that are transgender um and last year, well, actually two years ago, we started the trans-uh gender neutral bathrooms. And, um people are pretty accepting. I mean I’m sometimes more impressed with the students than with the teachers, when you know, kids come through the doors cause you never know what, you know. Really, it’s pretty amazing sometimes… I don’t want to be too pollyanna and say it’s all wonderful there, where I am, but like I said, they are pretty accepting… (FG#2)

This sentiment is shared by other focus group participants who, spontaneously, raise the issue of transgender students without being pointed in that direction as part of the focus group design. Unexpectedly turning the attention to gender identity, another focus group member illustrates with clarity the obscuring of those ideologies which sustain inequality in favor of a wholesale acceptance of difference:

I think it’s good to start young, like at 3-4-5 years old and tell them that it doesn’t matter, that it’s okay to be different, we need to celebrate that. It doesn’t matter. You can wear whatever you want and you can play with whatever you want. You can play whatever you want and, then, that way it won’t be as foreign to kids, when they get older, if a boy is wearing a dress, or something. Then, that child won’t get bullied, if we start young and say that gender, gender doesn’t own what you do…. yea, thank you. (FG#1)

Not once were the topics of homophobia and transphobia mentioned throughout the four focus groups; instead, transgender and cross-dressing students, for the most part, were met with a matter-of-fact (almost compulsory) acceptance. In one story, a classroom
teacher described explaining to a seventh grade boy, who came to school in a skirt that he is opting to take a huge risk. She acknowledged that the student was at a tough age, filled with struggling and searching, but characterizes his actions as individual decisions divorced from the social meaning of cross dressing in school and the oppressive reactions of classmates. After discussing the pros and cons and clarifying “what he was up against” without any “strong-arming” whatsoever, the boy decided to wear clothes which correspond with his gender as assigned at birth. The story was met with what appeared to be unanimous support, demonstrated through nods and sounds of agreement with the extension of appreciation and the support of the student to make what was put forth as the right decision. At the same time, the messiness that accompanies the addressing of power and policing, gender fluidity and gender inequality, that which looks at the bigger picture of systemic inequality, essentializing ideologies and social change, was avoided (Ringrose and Renold: 589).

*Gender Unproblematized*

The anti-bullying programs reviewed for this project consistently fail to engage a critique of categories of gender and gender-assigned traits. This, in turn, reinforces gender stratification by leaving unchallenged an obsolete and binary notion of gender as well as gendered characteristics fixed to biology and aligned with differing degrees of power. On what may seem like a very basic level, *Al’s Pals* addresses students as “boys and girls”, leaving no room for alternative gender identities (2-4). Further, the program includes a simple role play in which a girl takes a toy from a boy. This is an unusual scenario in that it contradicts gender expectations; girls are typically portrayed as the victims of aggressive behavior or as perpetrating bullying
against other girls. However unsophisticated the example, the curriculum draws no attention to this subtle role reversal, and there is no indication that this is intentionally included to provoke discussion or expansive thinking about gender, what amounts to a lost opportunity to unpack gender conformity and nonconformity in the classroom. The stated intent of the roleplay just described is to teach students to identify feelings, control anger and use calming techniques; as such, *Al’s Pals* renders gender incidental as if gender inequality has no bearing on feelings and, in particular, anger (14-6). Curiously, *Al’s Pals* is the only one of the curricula reviewed to have a short lesson on appropriate and inappropriate touch, suggestive of contemporary feminist arguments in favor of the teaching of consent and the need for prevention to unpack dynamics of gender inequality within incidents of harassment and assault. However, the gendered nature of abuse and assault is conspicuously absent from *Al’s Pals*. Instead, in a call and response-type pattern, the teacher questions the students about being touched in certain places or whether uncomfortable touch is okay. In unison, the students respond “No!” or “I don’t like it!” Rather than a follow up discussion about violence, victimization, unwanted touch or another strategy to provide insight about gender, the lesson ends with practice identifying body parts by playing the Hokey-Pokey and singing “Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes” (29-34).

In addition to the lost opportunity to problematize gender, bullying has been recognized as a location for the propagation of an assumed norm of binary gender. In their 2012 Huffington Post piece, Payne and Smith discuss bullying and its treatment in the elementary classroom as useful tools for the overt and covert instruction of children to perform, without question, according to traditional expectations for their assigned and expected gender and sexual identity. Payne and Smith illustrate a deeply embedded bias toward a binary conceptualization of gender showing itself via the unconscious gendered lens through which students are differently
evaluated for identical behavior. Girls who interrupt are rude and willfully noncompliant; boys who do the same are either assertive or unable to comply with class rules. Boys are praised for skill and assertiveness as a positive spin on what is considered a natural inclination toward competition and unruliness, while girls are expected to perform within the confines of an expected femininity. Payne and Smith remark that gendered admonitions which are typically used to correct behavior - “Boys don’t hit girls!”; “It’s unladylike to swear” - affirm a gender binary and police even the slightest transgression of normative behavior (2012). And, while these ideas about gender are not new, their relationship to bullying prevention education as part of the contemporary landscape of gender inequality continues to receive little acknowledgment.

Attention to non-binary gender, even a subtle – yet, intentional - hint embedded in an example of nonconforming gendered behavior, is absent from all the curricula. When compared to the others, the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program’s treatment of gender offers food-for-thought, regardless, the program’s acceptance of binary gender is never questioned. Olweus is unique amongst the curricula included in this study. It is well-known, has the unambiguous purpose of reducing bullying among school-aged children and, most importantly, is explicitly driven by social justice principles at the heart of which is a philosophy that all students have a fundamental right to feel safe at school. Olweus is minimally attentive to the issue of power in that it links bullying behavior to unearned privilege which causes individuals to feel license to treat others unfairly or poorly (333). Further, Olweus dedicates significant space to the topic of gender, and, in contrast to those programs which value diversity simply for the sake of a cursory acceptance of difference, this curriculum incorporates an intentional examination of the relationship between gender and bullying. Relying on traditional markers of gender, boys are portrayed as aggressive and more likely to engage in anti-social behavior; however, in a curious
twist, this characterization is used to describe male victims as well as male perpetrators (Teachers’ Guide:17-22). *Olweus* is careful to warn that it is false to assume 1) that all bullies are boys and 2) that all victims are those who stand out as different (Teachers’ Guide:28-31). Its claim that anyone can bully and be bullied assumes a level playing field and supersedes the brief consideration of the power and hierarchy embedded in aggressive and violent interactions, a playing out of Ringrose and Renolds’ normative cruelties (Teachers’ Guide:118; Ringrose 2010). To simply assert that both boys and girls bully and are bullied suggests an equity which simply does not exist. In doing this, *Olweus* reinforces conformity to traditional gender categories, fails to sever the link between boys and aggression and ignores those aspects of gendered power implicated in a stratified social order.

When compared to the other programs reviewed, *Olweus* provides the only, and a fairly sophisticated, articulation of gender bias. The authors acknowledge that children are bombarded with messages which reinforce expected behavior for boys and girls. They describe this gender socialization as producing biased thinking and the ensuing imperative to conform as eliciting the hurtful actions targeted, in the form of bullying, to those who do not conform (134 and 138). As a preface to an activity in which students identify gender-based put-downs, the *Olweus* program states,

> [i] is important that all children have the opportunity to flourish and grow, free from the influence of negative stereotypes of all kinds. Because stereotypes about gender are so prevalent and can become ingrained at an early age, adults need to address these biases proactively to help young students view the roles for boys and girls and women and men less rigidly (138-139).

The *Olweus Program* stands alone in its attribution of boys’ participation in bullying to early gender socialization. It sets itself apart from other programs in that it explicitly connects masculine aggression with defiance, anger and a positive attitude toward, and increased
engagement in, all types of crime, from prejudice and harassment to hazing and hate crimes (209 and 325; Teachers’ Guide:25).

Despite this relatively sophisticated perspective on gender bias, the treatment of gender in *Olweus* is contradictory and, frustratingly, falls short of engaging with a deeper feminist critique and analysis of gender stratification. On the one hand, gender conformity makes an appearance within the curriculum. Students, for example, are directed to act out specific vignettes, some of which seem to play with gender stereotypes (207); these situations involve a hypothetical female student with really short hair and baseball cap who is told she looks like a boy and a boy who is made fun of because his best friend is a girl. Described in another exercise is a boy who cries easily and still another who is into fashion and not sports (329). On the other hand, these examples of nonconformity to expected gendered practices are not used as vehicles to examine the relationship between inequality and bullying. Instead, and despite the background on gender and stereotypes provided for teachers, students practice assertiveness skills rather than develop their critical thinking about the policing of gendered behavior and the relationship of gender conformity to inequality. It is gender norms and their rigidity which the program targets, the narrowly define characteristics and behaviors assigned to gender categories. This focus, in turn, results in the simplistic, and, for the most part, inaccurate assertion that boys and girls have equal capabilities and opportunities. Never are the gender constructs underlying these norms questioned; there is no clear critique of gender as a master status, as an institution designed in such a way as to naturalize inequality. The curriculum maintains a focus on the individual’s relationship to the norms associated with their assigned gender. The emphasis is also on individual response, such that, in the face of a put down, students are taught to summon their
courage, use assertive body language and a strong tone of voice and say “Stop that!” or “I need help!” (202-207 and 44-45). For instance, the curriculum reads:

Now, let’s pretend that you’re getting on the bus, and when you start to sit down, a student shouts at you: “You can’t sit near us! Go sit over there!” … say “Yes, I can!” in a confident way (45).

This simply pits an individual’s aggression against another individual’s refusal skills. Further, teachers are provided with four strategies for responding to stereotypes which link boys to toughness and girls to niceness: 1) teaching students to demonstrate courage (208-209); 2) redesigning games to remove competition and aggression, namely Simon Says and Duck-Duck-Goose (13; Teachers’ Guide:28-31); 3) avoiding the use of single-gender groupings; and, 4) teaching calming strategies (Teachers’ Guide:42-49). And, although the curriculum promises that these strategies will lead to a positive classroom environment, there seems to be a significant gap between embracing the extent of gender’s relationship to bullying, the information provided to teachers as background and the activities or lessons of the program provided for students. As part of the program, students discuss what it means to be a “real” or “normal” girl or boy and the negative consequences to noncompliance; they are urged to not let attitudes about gender limit them (313). But, the suggestion which follows is that the expression of gender bias can to be quashed with a “stop that!” A nickname activity for kindergarten through second grade prompts teachers to point out gender and cultural differences in naming and to note any putdowns that arise when discussing this with students. Then, teachers are directed to create rules, if necessary, to ensure that offensive nicknames - reflective of cultural and family norms - are avoided (127).

The identification of words or beliefs which are unacceptable at school and should be omitted from the classroom (311) is an approach oddly reminiscent of the discredited and ineffective practice of zero-tolerance (or, an enforced, complete ban).
Engaging in prevention efforts which are specific and promising involves an examination of the root causes found at the heart of the problem. And, although an understanding of the link between gender bias and bullying is a significant part of the *Olweus* approach, the program fails to offer opportunities to students to consider what underlies the gender stereotypes associated with bullying. At no time are the fixed categories of male and female questioned; gender is clearly defined as “whether you are a boy or a girl” (135). Nowhere do students discuss the ways in which traditionally gendered attributes police our actions, beliefs and thoughts. Gender stereotypes are linked to aggression but never are the students engaged in an examination of masculinity and the centrality of aggression to masculine identity. Instead of planting the seeds for the development of a critical eye, students are told to act non-judgmentally by avoiding using statements from a list of gender-based put-downs (139), and teachers are instructed to keep an eye out for messages that might give the impression that boys and girls can’t do the same things (140). In a brief, yet encouraging, activity about stereotypes, the curriculum is clear:

> It may be impossible to avoid stereotypes about how boys or girls are supposed to act in our society. But, we can learn to recognize, question, and speak up about stereotypes when we see them. We can also make a pledge to follow our dreams, even if those dreams don’t seem to fit into what others think we should do. Remember, there are no limits to what boys or girls can do if they set their minds to it (316).

By not challenging biological explanations of gender - be it a binary schema of male/female or the naturalizing and ranking of gendered traits- the hidden messages in these curricula actively promote gender inequality. If the door isn’t opened a crack to the possibility of uncoupling masculinity (and, its associated traits) from power and dominance, and, in turn, leaving conformist ideas about masculinity and femininity intact, the status quo relationship between masculinity and aggression will continue to fuel bullying behavior.
While *Olweus* contains an analysis of gender not found in the other curricula reviewed, it is still appropriate to describe the program as gender-blind. *Olweus* does acknowledge that children are schooled in gender bias as part of their early socialization and that gender stereotypes have harmful consequences (134-141). It connects difference and stereotypes with privilege and injustice (153 and 311-333), recommending understanding other cultures and making friends with those who are different. Pairing these with a goal of tolerance and the embrace of diversity (9-10), however, leaves the nature of the underlying dynamic of inequality unpacked and subsumed into an idea that we should all be equal and would be if we acted as such (remember claims of girl power, empowerment without access to actual power). This is further reflected in *Olweus*’ suggestion that, rather than an analysis of social, economic, political hierarchies, developing a language to express the valuing of others as humans and the respect of human rights is key to preventing bullying (144, 279, 303-4 and 9).

Similar sentiments - the prioritizing of tolerance, diversity, equality, in part - are found in all four focus groups as objections were consistently raised to delving into the nature of the gender distinctions at play within bullying interactions. Each time, for example, the topic turned to boys and bullying, the groups erupted into a flurry of cross talk and interruptions, seeming to block even a hint of blame or causality. Participants often contrasted male/physical bullying with female/psychological bullying, but always to emphasize equity within the difference, as if to take the burden off boys and render the evidence about male aggression and involvement in bullying irrelevant. Using the idea that boys should never hit girls as a strategy to control bullying behavior was met with strong negative reactions. Aghast, one focus group participant shared this story, with much agreement expressed by the others:
… today, I had a boy stab a girl with a pencil and scratched her, didn’t puncture, thank god. But I took her, took him to the principal’s office and he said “why would you do that to a girl?” Like if it was any different if he had done it to a boy. The point was that he stabbed somebody with a pencil. Right? Not that it was a girl. And, I hear that a lot: “you hit a girl? Why would you hit a girl?” Why would you hit anybody? I, I try to keep gender out of it except for knowing the difference between a boy and a girl (FG#4).

Repeated objections to a boys-will-be-boys attitude suggests, perhaps, that gender blindness is preferable to unpacking masculine aggression, that the naming of patriarchy must be avoided, and that ascribing accountability to men, masculinity and male dominance is objectionable.

Teachers appeared compelled to portray girls as just as accountable and equally, if not more, aggressive as boys. Consider the following excerpts from one focus group discussion (FG#1):

I think girls are harsher than boys…slyer, slyer…more verbal than physical; they are more emotional.

…when boys bully it’s going to be physical, where they are pushing and during the game, like getting too physical in football or something. but a girl is gonna like change your belief about yourself or something. And they can be slyer about it, like, it’s not so overt, like, this it’s like pretty obvious, but with girls, I feel like, it’s more like snipping all the time and then so it’s harder to detect.

I feel like girls have more problems too with… like, I feel like you can look at a group of boys and know who doesn’t really like each other and who is friends but I feel like girls fall into that trap where they bully their friends and don’t realize it, you know that really weird fine line where you don’t always know, like you were saying…you’re with a friend you realize that friend actually doesn’t treat me that well or something, even though we’ve always been friends. I feel like that’s more common in girls.

This type of characterization of girl versus boy bullying is consistent across all the focus groups.

Boy bullying is described as concrete, predictable, often partnered with other negative behaviors in school and typically viewed as harmless and expected. Girl bullying, in contrast, is described as hard to detect, sneaky, malicious and often done by students who may otherwise appear quiet
and well-behaved. This is womanhood-in-training, conditioning young students by exposing them to common ideologies which characterize women as naturally sly, untrustworthy and blameful. One teacher sums up what seems to be the most common understanding of gender among focus group participants and one that hints at a belief in the biological roots of gendered traits:

It’s funny. I’m reading a book with my students and we talked about that; um, it’s a book about boys bullying each other. And, I said, what if this was girls because we want to look at it from a different perspective? And, we did have that conversation about how the girls were being um described in the book as... It’s very small in the book, like, like a chapter about them bullying and it’s…and the words they use in the book about girls being vicious and tearing each other apart, and the boys will punch each other and that will be it. And, you know, that resonates with me too and I try to have them pick that out...so that they can discuss that a little bit too, so that they can see that, that’s a gender bias…[The students] mostly thought that it was true. That, that’s how life is, that boys will get a punch and it will be over and girls will drag it out. (FG#2)

This reflects an understanding of gender bias which privileges male experience; in other words, asserting that girls play a significant role in bullying, engaging in perhaps a more complex or insidious type of bullying, suggests an equity while erasing how these ideas support male privilege, undermine feminist gains and induct children into systems of inequality. Consider the response to these differences by one focus group participant:

…I’d go in between two boys and break up a fight and I’d want to get back up if I was going to break up two girls because girls…and their mouths are vicious and if you’re saying really mean and hurtful things, okay, if someone walks up, they use physical force like this you can say what a jerk, they hit me but when someone says something that’s mean and it’s something that really hurts you [its your insecurity], you play that over and over again, so I feel like sometimes verbal is worse than give em a sock and get it over with…its like you can’t stop it, with a punch you can put your hand up and block it but you can’t like put your hands over someone’s mouth, you know (FG#1).

This complicated, unknowable and hurtful bullying carried out by girls needs to be controlled. Yet, at the same time, girl bullying is minimized, treated as a silly part of
friendship, suggesting a tension between what is portrayed as inconsequential behavior
and that which needs to be tamed. Repeatedly, girls were characterized as such:

Bullying is harder to target because...cause girls are supposed to be quiet and
pretty and, you know, prim and... girls can be all of those things and still be
terrible people. They can be quiet and pretty and proper and still be not good
people (FG#3).

Girls are just awful...I feel like with boys its straight, to the point and its done.
Whereas girls will hold, like hold, a grudge: “you can’t sit with me at lunch you
have to sit...at the other side of the table”, everybody in on it...remember... lets
not talk to this one today...and it seems like all the girls know who is the...but
then they best friends...I had girls who were so cliquey and like they would all of
a sudden one girl would be against this girl so then no one would talk to this girl
for the whole day but then the next day these two are best friends and they won’t
get away from each other so its like are you really fighting or like what’s going on
here? Are you really serious when you’re being mean to each other or are you just
doing it to, trying to be cool...? (FG#3).

Descriptions of girl bullying describes a dual nature that behind (or, co-existent with) a
stereotypical (and, deceptive) femininity is autonomy, agency and enough power to earn
girl’s contribution to bullying the label of vicious. Casting girls’ behavior as dangerous
taps into durable tensions - long-standing thematic juxtapositions (danger/pleasure,
virgin/whore) which pose lose-lose options to girls and are suggestive of female
empowerment while offering no power. In response, prevention efforts don’t address the
levels at which girl bullying is said to operate, its psychological, emotional and social
roots and impacts. The drive to control girl bullying is, rather, about its potential power to
transform normative gendered practices and reshape the social order. It is the intangible
quality, potential for harm and deceptive character of girl bullying which turns it into a
social problem of epidemic proportions.

My findings highlight the chasm between what occurs at the elementary level and
the vision of scholars who advocate bringing anti-sexism teaching into the classroom.
Vanita Sundaram, professor of Education and Public Health (2015) suggests that one way to reduce gendered aggression - or, in the case of her article, to address the link between conservative gender attitudes and teens’ tolerance of intimate partner violence - is to teach about sexism and gender in ways which contribute to the debunking of biological-based explanations of gender and essentialist notions that violent behavior is a natural and expected expression of gender. She writes that teaching students that violence is wrong does not interrupt its acceptance, rather a remedy rests in a critical examination of expected behaviors (2015). Martha Kempner, former Vice President at the Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (Kemper 2014) urges schools to stop policing gender norms. She writes of North Carolina’s Grayson Bruce, whose elementary school asked him to hide his My Little Pony lunchbox to remedy bullying by his classmates, and of Sunnie Kahle, a third grader in Virginia whose Christian school asked her to leave the school until she started looking more feminine. Similar calls for preschools and elementary classrooms to address gender bias are justified by research which shows a link between the reinforcement of typical gender norms in early childhood settings and an achievement gap between boys and girls, such that skills for success in STEM fields are underemphasized for girls, and boys are less likely to seek needed academic support (Brown 2015). Furthermore, messages of gender inequality are promoted in multiple ways: the separation of children into boy/girl lines or play areas or the allowance of negative comments or jokes to go unaddressed signify unequal status; nevertheless, there are no indications that gender bias is given attention in the classrooms of young children (Sundaram 2015; Chapman 2014). Of course, the obstacles to getting started are many: the lack of age-appropriate materials, teacher training and support from
administrators and parents in the face of controversy, as well as the tension between
education which supports student learning and the requirement of standardized testing, to
name a few. Additionally, models of authentic and equitable classrooms which are fully
rooted in intersectional approaches and sustainable throughout the duration of a student’s
education and into their outside life are hard to come by. Nevertheless, it is when children
are made aware of their gender performance that we see inklings of positive change in the
form of less mocking for gender nonconformity. Anti-sexist teaching is that which
provides alternatives by deliberately encouraging and rewarding behaviors and self-
expression outside of the traits and expectations firmly associated with masculinity and
femininity; it marks sexist language. It results in an increased engagement in
nontraditionally gendered activities, particularly academic endeavors, and less physical
fighting. And, it counters current educational approaches which devalue girls and women,
thereby promoting violence, maltreatment, stereotypes and disadvantage (Issadore 2015;
Kearl 2016; Steinfeldt 2012). This is in contrast to the anxiety, insecurity, stress and low
self-esteem arising when behavior is regulated according to strict conformity to gender
norms (Culp-Ressler 2014). What results is the lost opportunity to teach in ways which
facilitate the transgression of confining gender norms or, at the very least, instill in young
children the belief that such transgression is possible and even encouraged (Klein 2012).

*Power and the Aggressive Male*

In the absence of evidence that prevention programs look critically at the roots of
bullying in order to begin to undermine conformity to traditional ideas of gender, it follows that,
by leaving the association between masculinity and aggression intact, anti-bullying education can
be read as counter-productive and self-perpetuating. The avoidance of this link - paired with research showing minimal or no positive effects of prevention education on rates of bullying - feeds the bullying relationship by leaving the salience of male aggression uncontested (Merrell 2008). And, although acknowledgment of power differences between bully and recipient (or, victim) of bullying may be mentioned in many bullying descriptions, nowhere is a critique of power employed as a prevention strategy; female empowerment functions as the façade for a lack of female power and an untouched male dominance. Neither the teachers nor the curricula demonstrate an embrace of teaching pedagogy with social justice aims, and, in this case, classroom work with a goal of reducing sexism.

The curriculum *Bully-Proof Your School (BPYS)*, a comparatively short intervention, considers the topic of power, albeit employing an underdeveloped and restrained analysis. Rather than embracing an examination of inequality or contextualizing power within the larger milieu of social hierarchy, *BPYS* narrowly defines bullying as the act of an individual willfully using power to repeatedly hurt another who is physically, emotionally or cognitively disadvantaged and lacking effective coping skills (5-6). Inherent in the purpose and design of the initiative is a shifting of power in that its primary objective is to target the ‘silent majority’, what the writers claim is 85 percent, or the bulk, of students who are not involved in bullying. By teaching specific skills - about friendship and problem solving- the program aims to shift the balance of power from the hands of the silent majority into those of the “caring majority” and to transform the school into a safe and bully-free school environment (2). To find the concept of power so deliberately integrated into a program design is unique; however, *BPYS* conceptualizes power in terms of the individual, as a weakness or pathology which is specifically tied to a unique profile of deficiencies. It constructs a picture of the bully as having difficulties at home
and resulting in a child with unresolved emotional problems who lacks compassion, affect, empathy, guilt and who needs to be in charge. This bully is typically failing academically, feels as though his/their actions are justified and recognizes that aggressive behaviors are rewarded (6-7 and 47-48). In contrast, the victim profile can be read as feminine - passive, insecure, weak, fearful, reactive, anxious, cries easily and unable to defend him/themselves (7, 11 and 39). This is clearly not a centralizing of power as it plays out on a social level; there is no articulation of the connection between aggression and gender normativity. Instead, BPYS is designed to teach individual skills to those who do not fit the bully profile in order to amass a substantive caring majority (2) whose “power is implicit by number, and explicit by positive acts of kindness (xi)”.

Gender plays a very limited role in the BPYS paradigm. As is ordinarily found in the curricula, BPYS embraces the distinction that the bullying of boys is more physical, swift, effective and, thus, easy to spot, while when girls bully, the behavior is insidious, cunning and difficult to identify (6-9). Throughout BPYS there are hints of an assumed gender binary as well as gender expectations. For instance, skill practice occurs through a series of role plays, each of which has a designation of “female” or “male”. The scenario in each roleplay is gendered; one involves a group of girls leaving another out during recess; another is about an artistic boy being called a sissy; and, still another targets a girl facing rumors about sexual contact with an older boyfriend (79-91). One girl is described as having odd mannerisms, although pretty; one boy’s learning disability earns him the title of “dumb kid” and, finally, a boy reacts with anger to his parents’ divorce and acts out aggressively. Nowhere is the gendered aspect of these cases mentioned; at no time are teachers instructed to question with students why they are taught that certain traits are naturally associated with being male or female. Never does the curriculum promote a discussion of the different interpretations - and, manifestations - of masculinity and
femininity which reflect varied cultural meanings and social contexts. Instead, the distinction between girl vs boy bullying is taken for granted, masculine aggression remains unquestioned and conventional ideas about gender assumed and, thus, promoted. Further, gender inequality is ignored. In BPYS, the purpose of role play is to practice skills and to develop courage in order to respond with caring strategies (problem solving, getting facts, showing empathy, speaking out and so forth); in fact, the student who displayed the best caring is rewarded at the end of the week (104-107). A similar description is true for Positive Action, a program with hundreds of lessons and only a handful that even reference gender and none of which pay overt attention to gender conformity and gender bias. Like BPYS, Positive Action includes examples of female friendship (1-112-113), teasing boys who cry (1-165-7) and displays of traditional masculinity (2-149-51). Instead of providing an opportunity to analyze gender normativity, these are used, instead, to promote the importance of responding positively, rather than negatively, in both thought and action to bullying. These situations are integrated in ways which imply that gender is incidental and doesn’t need to be questioned. In fact, the scenario used in the focus groups for this project was adapted from Positive Action and, without prompting participants with questions about gender, the topic was never raised as an important factor to consider. In sum, if power - and, in the case of this project, power in regard to gender - is a significant factor operating at the root of bullying and male dominance is claimed via conformity to a masculinity expressed, in part, through aggressive behavior, prevention education which fails to address gender inequality should ultimately backfire. Instead, it follows that school-based anti-bullying programs promote or enhance the very conditions which contribute to the flourishing of bullying behavior in the first place.
In this chapter I set out to identify and analyze messages about gender within school-based bullying programs. Specifically, I looked at the role schools play in the socialization of students into gendered beings and the extent to which conformity to traditional and hegemonic gender norms, particularly the link between masculine normativity and aggression, is being reinforced through school based bullying prevention initiatives. My findings shed light on how power is treated and gender is characterized within bullying prevention education, and how these, in turn, serve the role of schools in perpetuating social stratification. The data reveal a superficial embrace of inclusion and diversity paired with gender blindness, a reification of an essential and binary picture of gender and the confining of a perceived female power by casting it as out of control and potentially dangerous. This diverts attention from substantive change and a lack of attention to the need to uncouple normative masculinity and aggression.

If bullying, in part, involves an acting out of normative masculinity, the analysis here suggests that, in order to bring about a reduction in bullying, prevention efforts might benefit from a questioning and an undermining of long standing gender norms. Prioritizing the education of students to recognize and critique systems of power and privilege might prove to be tremendously valuable. The documented success of educational institutions in schooling children in ways which maintain social inequality based on gender, race and class, in particular, highlights the remoteness of the potentiality for anti-bullying work to embrace strategies to weaken its role as a perpetuator of inequity. This contradicts the recommendations of sociological researchers discussing bullying prevention programs with Dr. Elizabeth Payne, Director of the Queering Education Research Institute:

Firstly, schools need to begin asking and answering difficult questions about gender, power, and systems of privilege. Students and teachers need to be provided with opportunities to recognize and explore the effects of these systems and the outcomes of their behaviors, including opportunities to learn about diverse
lives and identities, or to interrogate their own and others' positions of privilege—particularly around gender and sexuality. In short, rather than attempting to pathologize or celebrate particular individuals (which is exactly what traditional, popular anti-bullying initiatives have done), there need to be moments that facilitate recognition and change of systemic cultures… (2015).

In sum, bullying prevention education reflects contemporary contestations over the nature and function of gender which are broadly occurring and have large-scale implications well beyond the classroom. It also exposes the entanglement of other dominant cultural themes which will be explored in the two chapters which follow.
Chapter 5: Happy Talk and the Magic of the Smile (PA170)

As a citizen, grandparent, father, and professional, it is clear to me that the mission of schools must include teaching kindness. Without it, communities, families, schools, and classrooms become places of incivility where lasting learning is unlikely to take place . . . [W]e need to be prepared to teach kindness, because it can be delayed due to maltreatment early in life. It can be smothered under the weight of poverty, and it can be derailed by victimization later in life... Kindness can be taught, and it is a defining aspect of civilized human life. It belongs in every home, school, neighborhood, and society. Maurice Elias, PhD, Rutgers University Psychology Department (Currie 2014)

Teachable, civilized and universal. Associated with these attributes, it is not a surprise that the theme of kindness dominates bullying prevention. A quick search of what seems like an endless number of web-based materials, a glance at the many poster campaigns and a shopping spree through the vast amount of online merchandise and paraphernalia reveal kindness positioned as the panacea. Teaching compassion and kind behavior is promoted as an easy fix for an epidemic of bad behavior. This is reminiscent of the way mindfulness has become the trendy treatment to counter this current generation’s idea of success, severe competitiveness, and the resulting high levels of stress. With bullying, disrespect and a lack of self-control are pegged as characteristic of an unmanageable population of young people whose behavior can be easily modified through an individual commitment to goodness. Programs are filled with peace pledges, pay-it-forward activities, kindness contests and kindness-day celebrations. Awards, certificates, posters, t-shirts, “kindness matters” wrist bands and an array of jewelry have become the symbols of a pro-kindness movement. Scientific evidence built on an interpretation of research findings which reveal an association between the stimulation of brain function and endorphins with acts of altruism and generosity is cited as proof for a range of positive health benefits from kindness, greater happiness, improved academic performance and lowered rates of bullying (Currie 2014). This speaks to a level of analysis in which certain manifestations of
kindness may benefit the individual but are insufficient for addressing factors beyond micro considerations.

This theme of kindness speaks to the project’s research questions which direct an analysis of school-based bullying prevention using a focus of gender to examine the role of bullying and bullying prevention in the maintenance of social inequality. The previous chapter describes gender’s role in school-based anti-bullying programs as threefold, 1) part of a universal and perfunctory embrace of diversity masked by a guise of equity yet at the expense of an examination of systemic inequality, 2) promoting obsolete constructs of gender as both binary and biological, and 3) linked to gendered characteristics which produce harmful behaviors, in this case, a masculine aggression embedded in acts of bullying. This chapter begins to examine the dominant messages found in the data collected and the role these messages play in social stratification by gender. I specifically focus here on the trope of kindness, why it dominates bullying prevention efforts and how it functions as a “valuable” go-to tool for policing behavior and maintaining confining parameters for the gendered socialization of children.

The data collected for this project offers evidence of the ubiquitous reign of the kindness trope. For example, central to the mission of the Tribes curriculum is the creation of a caring culture; three of the program’s four foundational agreements illustrate this: 1) attentive listening, 2) appreciation/no put downs, and 3) mutual respect. Incorporated into Al’s Pals mission is the fostering of positive social-emotional growth to create a caring classroom environment. Positive Action’s core philosophy states that feeling good about oneself results in positive behavior, defined broadly as the universally valued characteristics and actions of encouragement, honesty, caring, having a big heart and getting along with others (1-177, 2-156-7, 4-139). BPYS’s stated purpose is to build and strengthen a caring majority of students which would transform the
school into a safe and caring community. And finally, Olweus’ goal is to create a preventative culture of respect, such that if individuals treat each other well, bullying will be unacceptable within the school environment.

The full sample of curricula materials show a deep and consistent engagement with the themes of kindness, respect and positivity; these can be categorized, for the most part, in two ways. First is an emphasis on teaching the individual student the skills to be polite. BPYS students develop kindness laws, keep a kindness journal and are rewarded with prizes in recognition of acts of kindness. Al’s Pals participants sing a song about the “power” words: “please” and “thank you”. And, a stand-out activity for Olweus’ students involves the practice of giving and receiving compliments. These are just a few examples of many. The second category is sometimes referred to as an “ecological” or whole school approach, the purpose of which is to build a school culture which can be characterized as respectful, caring and not tolerant of bullying behavior. To varying degrees, all of the curricula pursue this idea, targeting factors which reflect a scope of analysis larger than the individual. Al’s Pals charges educators with creating “kinder, gentler classrooms”, environments of caring, acceptance, kindness, and cooperation in which children can thrive. BPYS aims for a civil and caring culture which would increase attachment to the school and result in improved attendance and academic achievement. Learning tribes are small components of a larger caring environment driving the Tribes program; Olweus’ goal is to create a safe and positive school climate; and Positive Action encourages students to do positive acts outside of school in order to spread a positive environment to home and elsewhere. Pairing culture change with individual skill building is clearly a prominent approach employed in the service of bullying prevention. Here I argue that these school based
initiatives are indicative of a cultural discourse involving the widespread imposition of civility on top of a social order built firmly on inequality.

Imposing civility and emphasizing kindness 1) deflects discussions which challenge our stratified social order by glossing over issues of conflict, difference and power and valuing how we speak over what we speak about; 2) facilitates the policing of behavior by creating a disconnect between expected behavior and children’s observations and experiences both in and outside of school; and, 3) suggests a feminized response to aggressive masculinity in which traits typically gendered as female are evoked to tame a wild masculinity. These three points provide the framework for a discussion of a kindness cure for bullying which follows a brief historical overview included to help problematize and clarify the concepts of kindness and civility.

THE RULE OF CIVILITY

In 2014 the New Yorker, with a circulation of over one million, published The Civility Wars, a piece by contributing writer and Vassar professor, Hua Hsu, in which he provides a short history of the Johns Hopkins University’s Civility Institute, opened by Pier Massimo Forni in 1997 to conduct research and outreach targeting both individual and institutional politeness. Hsu goes on to describe the diffusion of civility discourse, referring to it as a code of kindness used to impose an elitist picture of proper behavior, ultimately functioning as a call to fall in line (2014). Referencing surveys which document a widespread public perception of a universally intensified incivility, Hsu describes the impact and reach of this code of kindness as dampening the

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\[17 \text{ The data from global communications firm Weber Shandwick’s sixth Civility in America survey (2016) finds that civility is a “crisis affecting public discourse and political action”. 95% of Americas consider civility a problem; 75% say civility continues to decline and is at a crisis level; and 76% perceived incivility being an obstacle to the discussion of controversial issues.}\]
expression of hostility and conflict and sanitizing disagreement by pervading legal questioning, higher education practice, broadcasting guidelines and political debates. Civility is thus used to contain speech, to dictate individual behavior, to operationalize fears of new technology and to drive institutional policy. According to Hsu, “it has become easier to fixate on incivility than to reckon with whatever ideas rude language might describe” (2014).

To understand contemporary civility involves distinguishing between individual and institutional civility. At present, articles discussing civility in politics are easy to locate, particularly in an election year when candidates, their supporters, the media, political parties and our electoral system come under close scrutiny. On the one hand, the issues of personal responsibility and behavior come into question. Typically, civility is considered to start with a deep and genuine sense of respect for others which is shown outwardly by polite behavior. “It is patience, grace, and strength of character (Florida State 2013)”. On the other hand, concern over civility raises questions about democracy and the social rules established to guide how we question, manage difference and maintain fairness (Wallach Scott 2016). Highlighting bullying, road rage, political intolerance and anti-immigrant or homophobic hate speech, Forni describes our national character in terms of incivility with uninhibited speech and a lack of constructive dialogue. For Forni, incivility is a sign of the times: economic and political instability resulting in blame, anger, scapegoating and, according to the Southern Poverty Law Center, an explosion of hate groups (Diversity Inc.). And, this tension over civil dialogue has become a hot topic on college campuses where the discussion frequently involves the place of anger within examinations of historical and contemporary injustice. According to University of Colorado’s Conflict Information Consortium, which was started in 1988 by sociologists Guy and Heidi Burgess,
[a] civil society cannot avoid tough but important issues, simply because they are unpleasant to address… In short, any reasonable definition of civility must recognize that the many differing interests which divide our increasingly diverse society will produce an endless series of confrontations over difficult moral and distributional issues (1997).

While some uphold civility as of significant value in and of itself, some recognize the imperative to address the challenging issues which civility runs the risk of masking. Still others see civility as the roadblock. Using a discourse of optimism, journalist Scott Timberg remarks that, at a time like the present, when the country is “grappling with racism, rape culture, runaway law enforcement and out of control income inequality”, optimism operates as patriotism and Christian virtue, it is a false hope which keeps powerless workers docile and it replaces realism with empty cheerleading (2015). In her 2009 book, Bright-Sided: How the Relentless Promotion of Positive Thinking Has Undermined America, Barbara Ehrenreich skewers optimism with a scathing critique of popular psychology and, what she calls, the lucrative cult of positive thinking. Highlighting weaknesses in order to undermine the research which associates positive thinking, optimism and gratitude with happiness and a slew of health benefits, Ehrenreich critiques optimism as sugar-coating and, like Timberg, advocates for a return to realism (2010). And, finally, writer and editor Jason Parham offers an additional example of a well-articulated interpretation of contemporary kindness ideologies which he characterizes as employing civility for the purposes of discipline and control. He evokes the work of theorists who address the ways in which power gives the privileged few access to defining the terms of dominant ideological trends which are made to appear as natural and fundamental - good versus bad; right versus wrong. In the case of civility, he writes that it involves “being told how to properly act or express yourself by someone who does not inhabit the same cultural space as you”. Addressing civility in the context of contemporary racial conflict and the Black Lives Movement, Parham writes,
Let’s talk about what it means to be black in a society that, for generations, has insisted on your civility. And not just any society, but one, in fact, that has profited from the suppression of your collective power through the dismantling of voting rights laws, redlining, the denial of access to wealth, and the creation of the prison industrial complex, among other horrors (2015).

Like Hsu and Ehrenreich, Parham advocates realism, yet with a sense of urgency. He continues,

[a]t this juncture in American history…when communities of black people are subject to multiple threats …asking black protestors to fall back in line, redirect, and lower the pitch of their suffering only fortifies the unjust structures the Black Lives Matter movement is fighting to dismantle (2015).

What to some is a simple matter of respect, is, in fact, a policing of the language and behavior of disenfranchised populations. Civility silences; it reduces the expression of opinion, discontent and rage to a problem of language or demeanor, thus diminishing the importance of those expressions, suppressing critique and the potential for change. Suzanna Walters’ Tolerance Trap provides a model for a critique of civility. Walters dives into a poignant analysis of tolerance as a misdirected and dangerous endpoint for the cause of queer rights; a “watered-down goal of tolerance and acceptance… [which gives] the illusion of progress…rather than a deep claim for full civil rights” (2014:3 and 11). Interestingly, Walters mentions school curricula to demonstrate that, like the relationship of kindness to bullying, setting a bar of tolerance stymies efforts seeking deeper change. She writes,

[w]hat tolerance offers is a wagging finger to outright bullying or, in some cases, gay-straight alliances to soften the blow of entrenched teenage homophobia. What real inclusion argues, instead, is that real change operates not just on gays but on straights as well. So a curriculum that didn’t assume a heterosexual norm (for every classroom example, for every reading, for every essay assignment), would have the dual effect of recognizing gay students and simultaneous challenging straight ones (262).

A recent surge in the number of colleges and universities implementing civility campaigns may reflect attempts to quiet increasing racial and gender-based conflicts. The Kent
Campus of Florida State College has embraced civility, putting the golden rule to work in multiple ways and toward multiple ends. Civility is used to promote respect for the environment; students are specifically encouraged to throw away trash and not tag bathroom walls. They are directed to watch their language - avoiding interruptions, using pleasantries, controlling tone and volume and avoiding anger and rudeness. The school’s Student Assistance Program (SAP) markets its work using the language of civility, labeling help-seeking from the SAP as responsible, civil and compassionate behavior. In other words, according to the Civility Campaign’s blog, addressing damaging messages received about oneself early on in order to halt the manifestation of harmful behaviors is a civil - or, generous, polite, caring - act. And, finally Florida State’s program uses civility to address the control of violence and aggression, labeling physical and sexual aggression as uncivil behavior and suggesting that healthy boundaries are an antidote to such violence. Ultimately, faculty, staff and students who demonstrate even small acts of kindness are rewarded, culminating in the crowning of a Civility Rock Star (Florida State 2013).

At the same time that schools are using civility to promote health and happiness, calls for civility are causing significant disruptions on college campuses. When University of California at Berkeley’s Chancellor sent out a campus-wide email commemorating the 50th anniversary of the Free Speech Movement, whose beginnings are credited to Berkeley, he wrote “free speech is only legitimate when it is ‘civil’ and ‘courteous’: ‘Free speech and civility are two sides of a single coin – the coin of open, democratic society.’” Interpreting this as a threat to academic freedom, the Chancellor’s email was met with widespread negative reaction (Flaherty 2014). For the most part, critics label a growing emphasis on respect and courtesy in higher education as censorship, accompanied by widespread fears that challenging speech and debate will have
broadly-based negative consequences on intellectual freedom (Hayes 2014; Sainath 2014). There are many instances illustrating limits placed on free speech enacted by university administrators in response to student protest deemed too controversial, off-putting or divisive. Mock-eviction flyers at Northeastern University, red-paint covered sheets at a die-in at John Jay College and a Palestinian rights discussion at Brooklyn College led to backlash on the grounds of incivility (Sainath 2014). As such, the treatment of civility as praiseworthy, ideal behavior significantly contribute to the power of civility discourse to suppress dissent, silence anger and hinder social change.

Similar to the growth of civility in higher education is a trend in public schools toward the implementation of civility policies, or guidelines for courteous communication, as well as broad-based kindness initiatives with the intent of building a safe and happy school environment. These are justified in the media as a response to the perception that this historic moment is experiencing a growth in aggression and anger (Education World) and that children, part of a technically savvy, yet socially deficient, generation Z, need to learn courteous behavior early to stave off harmful behavior and social disintegration. Daniel Perlstein, Ph.D., of

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18 Northeastern, in fact, recently implemented a year-long civility initiative. Its mission involves 1) countering conflicts based on religion, race, ethnicity, citizenship, sexual orientation or other individual traits by recognizing diversity and building bridges across difference and 2) the prevention of violence, resolution of conflict and building of peace via civility and ethical reasoning on campus and in the wider world (http://www.northeastern.edu/civilityseries/).

19 The online options for kindness-centered programming seem endless. There isn’t a central clearing house to catalogue these anti-bullying initiatives, determine their scope and identify differences. A handful of examples offer a glimpse into the possibilities: the “Kindness Above Malice Foundation” raises money for school-based anti-bullying programs which aim to build self-esteem (http://www.kindnessabovemalice.org/the-foundation/); the “Random Acts of Kindness Foundation” provides resources and materials to spread kindness in schools, home and community (https://www.randomactsofkindness.org/kindness-links/685-anti-bullying-resources); Disney’s bullying prevention program is called “ChooseKindness” (http://citizenship.disney.com/be-inspired); GLSEN’s is entitled “Respect! Empathy! Action!”; and, “Kindness U” describes itself as a movement to empower young people to end bullying, inequality, entitlement and poverty through kindness (http://kindnessu.com/what-is-kindness-u). The Ripple Kindness Program links bullying, kindness with brain science. It claims that kindness is a natural anti-depressant because it causes a release of serotonin in our brain, and serotonin plays an important part in learning, memory, mood, sleep, health and digestion, heightening one’s sense of well-being, increasing energy and giving a wonderful feeling of positivity and self-worth. (http://ripplekindness.org/).
Berkeley’s Graduate School of Education, offers unique insight via his suggestion that an emphasis on kindness tempers more punitive reactions which have occurred in response to school shootings, starting with Columbine. School districts have spent millions of dollars on security - armed guards, metal detectors and motion-sensitive cameras, hundreds of hours creating new policies and tremendous effort crafting and implementing punishments for the violation of rigid zero tolerance rules. These types of measures, writes Perlstein in his article *Failing at Kindness: Why Fear of Violence Endangers Children* (2000), mirror the increasingly punitive quality of our juvenile justice system as evidenced by a swell in the numbers of young people being tried as adults and receiving harsher sentences (76). He sums up by admitting that compassion is certainly preferable to punishment such that the current push for cultures of kindness is understandable. Perlstein cautions, however, that educators cannot ignore larger social tensions, reminding us that current efforts to impose kindness as a remedy for school-based bullying involves ignoring larger social tensions.

**STOMPING OUT BULLYING WITH KINDNESS, ACCORDING TO THE DATA**

Whether occurring as a reaction to youth violence or part of a cultural tsunami in which conflict and disagreement is pitted against generosity and respect, the topic of kindness is, without a doubt, one of the most significant and frequently occurring themes in my data; this includes both the curriculum materials reviewed and the focus group discussions. Describing her school’s approach, one focus group participant articulated the idea that of upmost importance is creating a school culture in which respect and kindness dominate, a sentiment shared by many:

> We work all the time on the culture. Treating each other with respect… I think that makes a huge difference. It’s about the expectations set in the school. In our school the expectation is that you are going to treat everyone with respect. In the morning announcements they say follow the golden rule. It’s kind of funny
because I don’t think they really understand what follow the golden rule is. I always get a kick out of hearing the kids say follow the golden rule. It permeates. (FG#1).

The very nature of anti-bullying programming which aims to create a culture of kindness involves a glossing over of those substantive, systemic issues which, for some, result in discomfort and conflict, yet, for all result in an avoidance of critical interrogation. As in the quote above, and with great frequency, the programs and implementers studied look for guidance and legitimacy to the golden rule - the idea of treating another as one would like to be treated. The code of conduct in Positive Action, for example, emphasizes the need to get along by treating others how you want to be treated, stating clearly that asserting the golden rule is an act of prevention. It stops children from engaging in behavior they would not want directed toward them, and it promotes the kind of behavior which makes them feel good about themselves (152, 137-149), suggesting mutuality or reciprocity.

Evoking the golden rule, however, is not a neutral act of promoting a benign concept as it has deeply religious roots; and, while most religious and spiritual transitions embrace the idea of selfless reciprocity, many which predate Christian scripture, the golden rule is claimed by Christians as coming directly from the teachings of Jesus. Despite being a core component of early religious education, the golden rule has become a familiar concept with a shared understanding which is read as safe and noncontroversial with veiled moral undertones. It is cast in the contemporary language of individualism such that the golden rule’s directive to see oneself as another, and vice versa, becomes a description of individual impulse, motivation and action. And, because it is assumed to have universal appeal and a positive connotation, a religious maxim is rendered unproblematic. The golden rule’s close relationship to the concept of empathy furthers it reach; empathy appears repeatedly as both a component of a caring
environment and as a trait lacking in the profile of a typical bully (BPYS: 6-7). Empathy, according to *Positive Action* is a “super power” (156); its use in promoting compassion is believed to be a benign contribution to kindness in the public education setting while ignoring how inequality taints reciprocity as well as the religiosity and moralism by which bullying behavior is judged (Plumadore and Muehlherr 2009; Robinson 2016).

The idea that using kindness to create better people and to establish a climate of civility is a universally agreed-upon, objective and unobjectionable quest is nothing new. Neither is the understanding that it is privilege which provides the opportunity to ignore inequities and disadvantage when defining the nature of kindness and civility and determining their centrality to the conceptualization of an ideal, and bully-free, environment. Character education, for instance, has a long history of use as an educational strategy in which certain ethical and civic virtues are promoted in the name of the common good. In brief, character education is a broad term for deliberately teaching and modeling behaviors in order to build children’s character. At times, the term has been synonymous with social/emotional learning, cooperative learning, service learning, citizenship education, values clarification, life skills training and, even, health education. Traced back to colonial America, character education initially reflected a close alignment between public school education and the teaching of the church. This overt religiosity was, at different points in time, contested; in particular, questions have been raised about who determines the content of character education, what values are promoted and to what end. Albeit, and ostensibly without specific religious reference, character education continues to involve the modeling of correct behaviors, ones which rely on what is portrayed as a fixed set of universally agreed-upon values and the fortification of the parameters of tolerated behavior. While there is no official set of behaviors or values, they are rooted in a conservative and
religious tradition, reflect the needs and virtues of those with the status to shape cultural meanings and treated as non-objectionable. Teaching towards moral development is incorporated into many aspects of public education, although it is used specifically to remedy those obstacles related to personal deficits which present unique challenges to the academic and healthy development of children.

Even when promoting a limited set of acceptable values and behaviors is cast as uncontestable, painting bullying as a crisis of epidemic proportions justifies educational responses reminiscent of character education which tightly contain the behavior of young people. One of the important aspects of character promoted by Tribes is mutual respect. In class, students complete two columns on chart paper, one listing what is mutual respect and the other listing what mutual respect is not. Students are directed to consider what respect looks like, sounds like and feels like; teachers are told to raise examples of bullying to prompt students in their brainstorming and discussion. This is followed by an activity in which each student is given a 3 by 5 card containing a bullying scenario. After reading the scenario aloud, students are asked what they would do differently, what respectful action would they take (Tribes Learning Community Testimonial). This activity, like many others, hones in on one core skill and provides clear parameters for the students by setting behavioral expectations, suggesting right and wrong action and establishing mandates for compliance. In doing so, the strategy instills messages about good behavior into the early socialization of children with the stated aim of controlling bullying and the hidden benefit of reproducing a narrowly defined set of values.

There is no shortage of examples of kindness - and, its surrogates, respect, good behavior, right action and so forth - playing a front-and-center role in bullying prevention. This is the case for all the programs reviewed for this project and reflected in much of the focus groups. As I
mentioned at the start of this chapter, there are three emphases which offer a means to categorize my findings and a framework to provide examples and interpretation of this dominant discourse of civility and kindness. These three areas are as follows:

1) the discourse deflects discussions which challenge the order of things by glossing over issues of conflict, difference and power and valuing how we speak over what we speak about;

2) this kindness paradigm facilitates the policing of behavior by creating a disconnect between expected behavior and children’s observations and experiences both in and outside of school;

3) the discourse represents a feminized response to an aggression read as masculine which stymies productive change about equity and difference in our contemporary world.

PUT ON YOUR “SEE-GOOD” GLASSES

The entirety of Positive Action, a voluminous curriculum, embraces positivity; the program is built on a premise which states: “we feel good about ourselves when we act in positive ways, and our actions make others feel good about themselves, encouraging them to act in positive ways!” (K-i) The intent of the program is to transform the classroom into a kingdom of positive action; an environment in which, because good feelings about oneself result in an inner motivation to engage in positive action, negative thoughts and behaviors will be replaced by the positive. Each class develops a Code of Conduct, a set of rules for behavior which mirrors the six key traits which guide the curriculum - respect, empathy, friendliness, kindness, cooperation and positiveness (K-152-3). Each student signs off on the code, agreeing to behave according to these rules throughout the year (K-155); teachers are instructed to acknowledge compliance and reinforce good behavior by regularly complementing positive action (K-175). Notably, to teach about the trait of positivity, the kindergarten students are told the story of Helen Keller, described as someone who could feel sorry for herself but whose positive outlook
allowed her to do her best. Overcoming tremendous difficulty and achieving success is attributed solely to her positive attitude. Further, in order to build empathy for those with disadvantage, students are instructed to close their eyes and put their fingers in their ears, so that they can know what it’s like to have no sight or hearing (K-175). The story is used to 1) provide an example of the value of a positive attitude, despite hardship and 2) to recognize that the conviction of her teacher, and others surrounding Keller, is what led to positive action, something students can do for each other through compliments, support and the avoidance of teasing (K-176).

Despite this top coat of positivity, built into Positive Action are opportunities to address the reality of the classroom, to engage in the realism which Ehrenreich and others advocate. These opportunities are traded for an imposed practice of kindness. Any expression of negativity is quashed; instead, the expectation of a positive attitude is made crystal clear. In fact, children are forced to sign off on the rules and act accordingly despite hardship or disadvantage. For example, the program introduces the concepts of thankfulness and gratitude in the first grade; one related activity instructs students to count their blessings and to read the following poem:

Blessings
I look around and all I see
Are blessings that are mine,
Things for which I’m thankful.
So I will not cry or whine
About the little things in life
That most folks gripe about.
I have so many blessings,
That I want to sing and shout! (1-134)

Not only does a simple piece about blessings bring a religious tone into the classroom, students also receive clear messages about what attitudes and behaviors are to be tolerated. In fact, while compliance is rewarded, there are consequences for non-compliance. First grade
students take a test\textsuperscript{20} about caring and thoughtful action; failing to correctly answer ten questions risks getting stuck in what the curriculum refers to, but never defines, as the “Unhappy Circle” (1-181). This is similar to the program’s description of the bully as being stuck in “a negative Thoughts-Actions-Feelings Circle”. Explained as such, “[b]ullies think negative thoughts, do negative actions, and feel terrible about themselves because they don’t treat others as they want to be treated” (1-165). Once again, the golden rule is employed to impose a set of sanctioned attitudes and behaviors which are presented as universal and unobjectionable. Appropriate or correct action is made clear, tinged with religiosity and cheerfulness.

The test is followed by singing original \textit{Positive Action} songs, a series of tunes aligned with the lessons of the main curriculum. “Get Along” (Allred Lyrics (1982):14) emphasizes what it takes to create a positive classroom environment:

\begin{quote}
\textit{...Be kind by helping others.}
\textit{Share and cooperate.}
\textit{These are the keys to feeling great and}
\textit{Getting along, get along, get along.}
\textit{Get along, get along, get along.}
\textit{Treating others positively,}
\textit{That’s the way I’d like them to treat me}
\textit{So we can get along, we can}
\textit{Get along, get along, get along.}
\textit{Get along, get along, get along.}
\textit{Get along.}
\end{quote}

And while getting along, sharing, cooperating and being empathetic may be important foundational behaviors and concepts for children to learn, suggesting that these are the keys to harmony - specifically in the context of a curriculum used for bullying prevention - leaves social

\textsuperscript{20} Sample test questions (with the correct responses) include (1-178):

\begin{itemize}
\item Do you feel good about yourself when you do nice things for others? (Yes)
\item Is looking for the bad in others a positive action? (No)
\item Do you know inside when you are not acting within your Code of Conduct? (Yes)
\end{itemize}
dynamics unspoken and places the blame for failure squarely on the shoulder of young children who don’t, can’t or won’t enact a set of narrowly defined behaviors which are expected to be universally relevant.

In third grade, students participate in the “See-Good Glasses” activity in which they are instructed to cut a pair of glasses out of paper, put them on, turn to the person beside them and remark on something that is good in that person (3-139). Four lessons later, these same students cut out paper telephones to use to practice saying positive things to each other from a “Happy Talk” list which, in part, includes the following pleasantries:

- Please.
- Thank you.
- I like your ___.
- You do that well.
- I’m sorry.
- Can I help? (3-147, 149 and 153)

Students learn early on that recognizing and complimenting positive attributes in others is expected of them. Training students to see, hear and say the positive, and to do so with empathy, allows them to think these actions are sufficient for creating a culture without bullying.

Avoiding areas of conflict, difference and power occurs throughout the program. When one feels “down inside”, Positive Action suggests trying a positive action in order to feel happier. Smile and be friendly. Make friends with people who enjoy life and are cheerful. Tell jokes and riddles. Play games. Look at clouds and sunsets. Brush your worries away (1-32 and 1-126). Positive Action is clearly an upbeat program with the precise purpose of creating classrooms which enforce positivity; and, it sets out a clear process for achieving this - feel good about yourself and all that you do will be positive. Positive Action is a strong illustration of a program which deflects attention from inequality, difference and inclusion; its exclusive emphasis on kindness and positivity is a straight-forward example of glossing over the complexities of
bullying by ignoring the messages embedded in bullying and anti-bullying education which reinforce power inequities. It fails to challenge the order of things by valuing how we practice kindness rather than diving into what lies underneath. And, it imposes a uniform code of “civil” behavior, defined by those with privilege and allowing them to retain their advantage by suppressing dissent, critique and realism.

ENFORCING KIND AND NICE

Although nice is seen as a remedy for bullying, the absence of being nice is not the same as bullying. Focus group participants, in fact, were cautious to differentiate between being mean and making a mistake or bad choice, characterized as typical child behaviors v. bullying, perceived as a persistent problem behavior. Multiple participants clarified that the definition of bullying specifies 1) a repeated behavior and 2) a difference in power:

Well, I mean, it’s bullying, obviously, because it becomes systematic and it’s a, there’s a pattern, right, and that’s the whole thing about bullying. It’s not just an isolated incident. It’s a pattern of bullying, right? (FG#2)

The issue of mislabeling negative behavior as bullying was raised over and over during the focus groups. And, although there were agreed-upon elements of a definition, a pattern of behavior paired with a power differential, application of the definition seemed to cause more confusion than clarification. In addition, the definition never seemed to have any bearing on prevention efforts; as much as participants were focused on weeding out those interactions that didn’t meet the definition of bullying, the definition offered little insight into those instances that did meet the criteria. For instance, an examination of the concept of power was never paired with acceptance of power as a defining characteristic of bullying. Who interprets the criteria defining bullying and how the criteria are interpreted is left unquestioned. This is in contrast with other forms of violence for which definitions and interpretations are hotly contested; consider, for
example, the position of the target to define an incident as sexual harassment or current discussions of consent, at the heart of which are debates about capacity and coercion.

For the most part, parents were seen as especially guilty of labeling all difficult behavior as bullying, almost responsible for thwarting the school’s attempt to act decisively. Not only were parents portrayed as over-protective and quick to dramatize any negative behavior directed at their children, parents were seen as modeling behavior which undermined prevention efforts. Many stories were shared which illustrated the disconnect between the expected behavior of children in school and the actual behavior of their parents in the home. Teachers freely shared instances of screaming parents with no apparent problem solving skills who fail to show their child how to interact in a more civil way. Or, helicopter parents who automatically step in and fix everything, so that their child never becomes autonomous or learns to problem solve or communicate. One participant pointed out that she is teaching her kindergarten students to play together nicely but rarely sees parents modeling similar behavior. Another questioned how best to implement bullying prevention which teaches children to be good people when what’s important happens early and at home. As Pascoe has pointed out (2014), we foist behavioral expectations onto our children which do not align with what they observe in other settings. We blame children when they fail, despite enacting the same behavior ourselves. We mandate kind behavior at the expense of acknowledging systemic failure, giving mixed messages and valuing the application of empty platitudes to remedy a social system which feels out-of-control.21

21 Diversity, Inc. remarks “Experts in civility note that it is difficult for society to expect or demand that teenagers and children stop bullying and tormenting one another when adults and political leaders are leading by example” (2016).
Not only was the policing of behavior through the enforcement of “kind and nice” a common theme among focus group participants, it continued to be a central theme throughout the curricula reviewed. The messages contained in the Al’s Pals program are almost identical to those contained in Positive Action. Led by a puppet named Al, students go through a list of contrasting situations to identify reactions: how might you feel if you are playing with a ball and someone asks “may I play, too”? What if that person says “move, I want that now”? Al sums up the activity this way:

It really does look like our words can change how people feel. My friends and I try to use kind words because they make people happy and help them get along better. Then we can have fun together. That’s much better than using mean words. They hurt people’s feelings and can even make people fight with each other (21-3).

And, although it is implied that how to do this is common knowledge and needs no instructions, Al’s Pals teachers are told to model speaking kindly, to engage in respectful communication and to reinforce the use of appropriate language in order to establish a positive environment in which children feel valued (21-4).

BPYS similarly looks to kindness as a panacea for what the materials refer to as a climate of bullying in which bullies use aggression to create fear in others. It seeks to remedy the struggles for dominance which occur in elementary school and result in an imbalance of power which disrupts the educational process and can lead to destructive acts of retaliation with lethal weapons (xi). The potential for change is located in the program’s construct of a caring majority, that which is considered a “powerful resource with which to maintain the value of kindness and decency…an untapped reservoir of strength, the leverage for impacting change in creating a safe school environment for all children” (xi). BPYS links enacting kindness to moral development and sets in place a system to ensure kindness is taught, modeled and reinforced.
(18). Each class develops “kindness laws”. Teachers are instructed to keep of log documenting acts of caring and to implement an “I Caught You Caring Reinforcement Program”. Frequent recognition of random acts of kindness will reinforce the individual behavior, most importantly compliance with kindness laws, which will result in a bullying-free school climate (28, 41 and 105). A tip for teachers strongly suggests that it be impressed upon children that uncaring bully behavior will not be tolerated (42)

The stated goal of the Tribes program is to create learning communities that are dedicated to safe, caring and positive action for all students (31-34). But, despite this meso-level target, Tribes ignores the systemic nature of bullying. And, it glosses over the challenging aspects of bullying, in keeping with the other programs. It advocates pushing the imposition of kindness and codes of conduct, which can be read as a version of the discredited zero tolerance anti-bullying strategy, yet with a positive spin. In Tribes, as with all the programs reviewed, children are not taught to express dissenting opinions or negativity, nor do they learn that feeling hurt and angry in the face of experiences of difference and discrimination is normal and, even, instructive.

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22 Another example is an activity recommended by a number of online sources and originating from the Bully Proof Your Classroom program, Wrinkled Wanda. This is a strategy easily found on the web, adapted by many, written into song, recommended for both teacher training and classroom use and described as teaching skills which diffuse power struggles. The original – and, typically found - version reads as follows. Note that omission of an analysis of power, gender, race, individualism and the like; this reduces the activity to a symbolic gesture without meaning or impact.

- On chart paper, have the participants trace an outline of a full body person... Once the outline has been traced, the participants will write unkind, rude, & disrespectful statements all over the outline...like, “You’re a loser, Nobody likes you, You are dumb”. Identify the drawing as a girl named Wanda. After Wanda is completely filled with a variety of negative comments, have the participants crumple the drawing, & then un-crumple it. Post the wrinkled drawings around the room. Explain to the class that these drawings are examples of what negative comments can do to a person who is bullied. Bullying comments can destroy a person’s self-image & often leads to a defeated body language in the victim.
- Next have the participants do the drawing again. This time write as many positive comments on the drawing as possible... like, “You did such a nice job, or I enjoy your friendship. Fill it with really nice statements. Cut this drawing out, but don’t wrinkle it. Post these drawings around the room. This person is now just called Wanda. What is the difference between the two? (Burns 2012)
They never engage in a critical assessment of the contexts in which they live. Rather, all eggs are put in the kindness basket and Tribes’ students are told that part of their contribution to a kind and cooperative community is to erase put-downs by replacing them with appreciation, warmth, relaxation and smiles (108). It is suggested to teachers that they initiate an anti-put-down-campaign (117) which directs students to express the “warm fuzzies”. A notable Tribes activity involves holding a funeral for put downs. Children write down hurtful remarks or behaviors on slips of paper which are read aloud by a few, selected students. Then, the class shares feelings in response to the put-downs, goes outside, lights a fire in a trashcan and throw the slips with put-downs into the fire. The activity concludes with an invitation to the group to make statements of good bye (250).

Olweus, too, singles out caring as the fix for school environments conducive of bullying and, hence, characterized by fear and low success. Incorporating elements similar to those which are included in the other curricula, Olweus coaches teachers to establish a caring, positive, encouraging and respectful classroom environment (Teachers’ Guide:63 and 73); it embraces the notion that being kind makes us feel good and do better (27) and it incorporates practice giving compliments to others in order to demonstrate caring (182-3 and 194). And, although punitive consequences for acts of bullying might be needed, it is the positive, non-aggressive, behavior that need to be praised and rewarded with fun activities, privileges like extra recess or class parties, treats or points toward items to be purchased (Teachers’ Guide:58-60).

This idea of using material rewards to control behavior was a common topic of discussion in the focus groups. There are many examples of attempts to control behavior with rewards, placing material value on what is expected behavior and, for some, marking the absence of
rewards with shame and embarrassment. Many participants spoke of efforts to recognize students who comply with the expected nice and kind behavior with material rewards:

We do have ambassador to peace one a month. And, we have to nominate somebody and they get breakfast and they have the safety pledge…(FG#4)

…once a month we pick two students from each class that earn a pillar award and they get a certificate, they get their like picture in like the newsletter, or something like that. Ah, it’s, it’s cute. Um, so, throughout the day I say “oh, I see someone showing their you know pillar of respect today’’ and we actually have pillars around the school… (FG#4)

We have a program like that in my school and we have like prek through 8 who gets it. And, we have, like, it’s called the Cougar Cart because we are the cougars. We bring them random stuff. They have like pouches and like pencils they can buy and they just save up to get like an ice cream on Friday or extra gym or like the big prize is like a bowling trip or you can do like pizza with the president, pizza with the president? Pizza with the principal. But they like it. (FG#4)

…they get points everyday. And, if they got their points, they would get a reward at the end of the day. But, they got money throughout the day - bucks, B bucks. And, they got to go to the store once a week and my kindergarteners didn’t know on Wednesday to save their money for the following Wednesday , especially the ones with severe behaviors . One of them would tear them up and eat them and then on Wednesday he’d be like ‘why can’t I go to the store’, you know…(FG#4)

For the most part, focus group participants did not question the logic of rewarding good behavior; the bulk of the discussion was about mechanics. What prizes worked best?

How did you store student tickets or fake dollars as they accumulated over the week?

Does any school reward an individual’s behavior with something for the entire class?

And, what rewards work with which grade levels. Regardless, the implications of moderating children’s behavior or the impact of the ensuing messages on the socialization process were not of issue. Instead, a remedy was sought out that was well-expressed by the following:
This might be naïve, but I feel like you know teaching them about being respectful and being responsible and being a good person and caring blah blah blah at five that, and this is super naïve since I know it’s probably not true, but I think I’m hoping that they’re not going to need a bullying program when they get to 4th and 5th grade because there’s gonna be, so wonderful and learned from me that, how important it is to be a good person and they wouldn’t do something like that, you know (FG#4).

This speaker is attempting to articulate the unyielding belief that bullying is a problem behavior that can be eliminated by planting the seeds of goodness early and conditioning behavior via rewards and punishments.

VICIOUS TONGUES AND THE FEMINIZATION OF AGGRESSION

The core qualities common to most anti-bullying education are discussed as if neutral, neither attributed to a certain gender, race nor other distinctly defined population. However, when looking through a lens of gender, it is interesting to note that many of them - kindness, compassion and caring, for example - are core qualities associated with quintessential femininity and, by contrasting these with masculine traits, a binary conceptualization of gender is confirmed and the link between masculinity and aggression, discussed in the previous chapter, reinforced. Exactly what purpose this serves is not entirely clear; the possibilities are many. Is it that a feminization of behavior is considered to have a tempering effect on bullying? Do feminine characteristics counterbalance masculine aggression? Is civility devalued when defined by feminine traits, which, in turn, begs the question of whether an unequal society, in which things feminine are devalued, can be civil society? Consider the following focus group comment,

I mean, I think this situation, if it was girls, the teacher would have tackled it more aggressively because girls aren’t supposed to be physical, girls are, like its much more acceptable for boys to act out in a physical manner which I also think why our bullying programs target that kinds of behavior more so and girls since it’s less acceptable to be physically aggressive, I think the aggressiveness is like a much deeper more…like it comes out in a nastier form and its harder to target because of that…cause girls are supposed to be quiet and pretty and you know
regardless, there is no evidence of a consideration of responses to bullying targeted to specific meanings and expressions of gender. the data collected for this project show no indication that bullying prevention is approached with a critical eye to the ways in which girls are socialized and how that might manifest in particular kinds of bullying behaviors, in other words, that verbal and psychological bullying is, in fact, the result of what girls have been taught is acceptable female behavior. Instead, what is expressed is a discomfort, a lack of familiarity, a fear of something into which educators seem to have little insight and a discomfort regarding appropriate responses and remedies:

I think when girls bully, when I was at the middle school, girls can have really vicious tongues and , if you ask me, okay, when I was working at the middle school, I’d go in between two boys and break up a fight and I’d want to get back-up if I was going to break up two girls because girls…and their mouths are vicious and if you’re saying really mean and hurtful things, okay, if someone walks up, they use physical force like this you can say what a jerk, they hit me but when someone says something that’s mean and it’s something that really hurts you [its your insecurity], you play that over and over again, so I feel like sometimes verbal is worse than give em a sock and get it over with. (FG#1)

It’s as if the unknown aspect of responding to an unkind and uncivil girl poses more of a challenge than a violent boy.

indoctrination with a smile

In 1998, law professor Randall Kennedy wrote that civility was at odds with “invigorated liberalism” which insists on “grappling with the substance of controversies; and a willingness to fight loudly, openly, militantly, even rudely for policies and values that will increase freedom, equality, and happiness in America and around the world”. Kennedy wrote that many who
promote civility are doing so in reaction to what they see as a moral collapse; [t]hey focus more indignation on the raunchy lyrics of gangsta rap than the horrific indifference that makes possible the miserable conditions that those lyrics often vividly portray” (1998). In other words, civility is a great distractor, what Kennedy refers to as “a genteel way to mask the inevitable tensions and antagonisms of democratic society”. Critics of civility consider the ways in which quests for common goals or a neutral language via sights narrowly set on bipartisanship or political correctness silences debate. Others refer to an imaginary past of polite rhetoric and good manners transforming conflict into agreement. Civility culture raises many questions about homogeneity and pluralism, about the existence of a common good, about the value of dissent, about systems of morality and about collective blindness in the face of a broken democracy. Regardless of the answers, these are cultural themes with unique contemporary manifestations which emerge in the data on school-based bullying prevention, a sight where the strategies employed by educational institutions which serve the social order and the socialization of children to enact these mandates can be closely examined. While the real global picture contains ideological disagreements, productive (and, unproductive) debate, conflict and attempts at resolution, constant change and hatred, our children experience indoctrination with a smile.
Chapter 6: Individualism, Medicalization and Evidence-based Practice – “Salt water makes a thirsty person thirstier: the key to positive action is to feel good about yourself” (PA34)

…[B]ullying is not so much an epidemic of a pathological way of interacting, but a common mode of social reproduction. It allows adults to tell them “it gets better,” as if the adult world is rife with equality and kindness and not one that encourages social inequality through social policy and cultural norms. It allows the rest of society to evade blame for perpetuating the structural and cultural inequalities that young people play out interactionally. (Pascoe 2014-2015)

This opening quote from CJ Pascoe’s work encapsulates much of my argument, the approach I bring to my data influenced by her theoretically-driven articulation of a bullying paradigm. This perspective is rare and exclusively found in the work of a handful of social scientists. Instead, what is revealed in most other discussions is the pervasive use of a language of epidemic firmly situating bullying in a frame of health-related crisis. In a medicalized discourse emphasizing its prevalence, severity and impact, bullying is often discussed with a sense of immediacy. This emergency has, in turn, prompted states to require that schools act, resulting in a scrambling to implement programs and a relatively haphazard and piecemeal adoption of curriculum components and activities with minimal forethought, strategic planning or accountability.

This discourse of medicalization supports the almost universal locating of elementary bullying prevention within the realm of school-based health education, a field for which there is often insufficient funding, personnel and time allocated to its implementation. Historically, schools have had an ambivalent relationship with health education; and despite a considerable amount of research confirming a link between health and academic achievement, there continues to be a lack of consensus as to the school’s role and responsibility vis a vis the well-being of its’ students. As a discrete content area, health education lacks the consideration afforded other school subjects, specifically educational standards and mechanisms of accountability. This
contributes to the undervaluing of health education, placing it low on the priority list for schools, despite the sense of urgency often assigned to its component topic areas. The medical emergency that is bullying has prompted the recent state mandates, which force schools to implement anti-bullying education; yet, the location within health education relegates prevention efforts to an educational area often treated as an afterthought.\(^{23}\)

Health education has also been given little attention within the field of sociology. It would be a challenge to find evidence of a sustained examination of prevention and health promotion, although the field provides valuable guidance when it comes to examining the linkages between health and social structures. The work of a handful of medical sociologists has also helped to deepen the understanding of school-based health education but limited to the topics of sexuality education and, to some extent, drug and alcohol education. The sparse application of the tools of sociology has, in my opinion, left a hole in the sociological literature as well as academic understandings of health education. Not only is bullying prevention underanalyzed, but the relationship between health education, social stratification and the gendered socialization of children remains unexamined. For this project, medical sociology directs the asking of specific questions which address the theoretical and practical grounds used to justify, shape and promote a tightly prescribed approach to bullying prevention education and speaks to the themes of medicalization, individualism and science-based practice. These topics make up the content of this chapter.

\(^{23}\) It is important to note that, although often an afterthought, health education tends to elicit greater controversy than any other subject area. Faced with the political and moral agenda of the organized right and the opposition of parents who believe that many components of health education undermine their role as the teachers of values within their families, school administrators find themselves in a difficult position and hard-pressed to fully embrace health education. For many schools, implementing health education is an uphill battle and, even when districts put programming in place, it is, often, limited and ineffective.
I have, thus far, provided evidence of the relationship between bullying and structural inequality, emphasizing the ways in which the current state of bullying prevention promotes conformity to conventional gender norms and capitalizes on the association between masculinity and aggression. This, in turn, strengthens a climate that is conducive to bullying and furthers a dominant cultural discourse that creates a hostile environment for critical debate and change, the change that might affect gender inequality or allow for the effective and sustainable prevention of bullying. Next, I have argued that elementary bullying prevention is dominated by a kindness narrative that reflects the imposition of civility on a grand scale. In very specific ways, the medicalization of bullying - in short, casting it as a pathological condition and in need of medical treatment (Conrad 2005) - further cements these paradigms. Here I argue that the practice of bullying prevention is enshrouded in the language and approaches of medical science and public health and that this, in turn, serves the paradigm of gender inequality previously established.

WHY MEDICALIZATION?

Sociological understandings of medicalization highlight how behaviors, such as bullying, are pathologized and reduced to physical, biological and individual explanations, rather than social, cultural and environmental ones. As would logically follow, remedies are sought from a bio-medical paradigm rather than structural or institutional ones. This raises unique questions regarding the consequences of placing bullying within the health education context; and, it shines a spotlight on how bullying prevention reflects historical shifts in the medical and public health fields. School-based health education has long been tasked with responding to those behaviors of young people with potentially significant implications for health - teen pregnancy, underage and/or illegal drug and alcohol use, sexually transmitted infections and interpersonal violence-
but pressed to do so without regard for structural concerns. When applied to my argument regarding bullying prevention education, medicalization can be viewed as yet another tool used by educational institutions to distract from the systemic factors. Two themes emerge from my data which help to reveal the relationship between medicalization and bullying prevention - the focus on individualism as a means of promoting neoliberal ideologies and the use of a medicalized discourse of scientific or evidence-based theory to elevate school-based prevention into the realm of uncontestable truths.

INDIVIDUALISM

The biomedical emphasis long dominating medical practice isolates patients from their social environment and divorces them from large-scale political and economic forces that affect health. This narrow focus on the individual is a key feature of the medicalization of bullying and bullying prevention. It involves, in essence, equating the perpetrator and target with a set of symptoms such that causation for particular behavior(s) is sought within the profile of the individual and remedy is contingent on individual will and capacity. From the perspective of the medical institution, individualism assists in securing an exclusive relationship between clinician and patient, preserving the role of practitioner with a high level of authority intact. Besides preserving an imbalance of power within the clinical relationship, the negative repercussions of individualism include narrowly-defined and ineffective solutions as well as individual blame and stigma with possible consequences for future care seeking (Conrad 2005, 2007 and 2010; Brown 1995).

It is important to mention that the individualism dominating healthcare reflects the neoliberalism at the heart of U.S. policy, politics and social structures, with its embrace of market-driven ideology which prioritizes self-interest, awards individual merit and, with
moralizing overtones, blames failure on a lack of individual hard work and personal weakness. By employing a medical paradigm, bullying prevention supports aspects of the neoliberalist character of contemporary educational institutions which maintain a strict focus on individual achievement and “engender a climate where structural inequalities are converted into individual problems” (Smith 2012). Smith recalls Hirschi’s Social Control Theory to explain that the individualism at the heart of neoliberalist ideology weakens social ties, frees the individual from social restraints or sanctions and facilitates engagement in deviant behavior (2012). Aligned with this perspective, bullying prevention’s wholehearted embrace of individualism is read as reinforcing the maintenance of a neoliberal and stratified social organism and facilitates, oddly enough, bullying and bullying prevention’s begetting of bullying. In other words, rather than analyzing bullying’s deep rootedness in the structural, by giving prominence to the profile of the bully and target of bullying and to individual skill development, bullying prevention reflects and promotes individualism, a quintessential ideology at the heart of our cultural psyche.

**BULLYING PROFILES**

There is no body of evidence supporting an agreed-upon picture of either a bully or a target of bullying. However, there is much overlap in the descriptions contained in popular conceptualizations and affirmed in my data that reveals a shared belief that the identification of a set of core individual characteristics will provide the basis from which a targeted response may be crafted. A construct common to discussions of a profile is that children lack certain skills which, with the right teaching, practice, support and hard work, can be mastered and used in to prevent bulling. *Al’s Pals*, for example, characterizes the bully as deficient in social skills, lacking in empathy and unable to handle anger and frustration in *acceptable* ways (Wingspan
2013). *BPYS*’ profile is similar; it pinpoints distinct contributing factors - the bullying victim’s shy and inhibited personality, weak physical make up, mental health impacted by the effects of trauma and loss and parents who are named as having a role in creating young victims (140). Isolating these factors problematizes what might otherwise be normal personal traits (shyness, for example), casts young people as needing to be fixed, places blame, and limits remedies to those tightly circumscribing the individual while obscuring the role of social and other contextual factors in bullying victimization.

What is evident in the data from both the curriculum review and the teacher focus groups is that examining the forces of homophobia, racism, sexism and other forms of bias and mechanisms for policing behavior does not take priority over the characterization of bullying as, on the one hand, a silly, developmentally appropriate and equal-opportunity behavior and, on the other hand, an epidemic of damaged children living in the way of harm. Both the bully’s deviant label and the casting of the victim as flawed are rooted in family dysfunction, dysregulated skills along a continuum of aggressiveness and assertiveness and generalized social deficits. The *Olweus* program sets up a dualistic picture in which the bullying perpetrator, in all likelihood, is raised by uninvolved parents and in situations lacking warmth, without limits on aggression and having witnessed violence. In contrast, victimized students are submissive, sensitive, insecure, weak and with few friends (Teachers’ Guide:10-23). Similarly, *Al’s Pals* preface states that the prevention of bullying involves counteracting the internalization of negative influences from poor role models and peers who engage in unhealthy, risky behaviors (v). Children in the *Tribes* program are directed to locate individual deficiency within a message of hope; they sing the following:
See Me Beautiful
Song by Red Grammer

See me beautiful…
Look for the best in me
It’s what I really am
And, all I want to be,
It may take some time
It may be hard to find…
See me beautiful. (Intro Packet:34)

That certain attributes are valued as deficient and heaped onto the individual remains unexamined; instead, as Tribes suggests, the simple remedy is a positive attitude.

Interestingly, Tribes further juxtaposes the deficient individual with the importance of community so that two often contradictory perspectives are placed side by side. The program states,

…[t]he critical challenge for the 21st … lies in creating connectedness - in building schools across the nation that tap the innate developmental wisdom that is our shared humanity, connecting us to each other and to our shared web of life. On the one hand, Tribes states that “rather than continuing to try to ‘fix kids’, we need to fix the deficit-focused system” (5). On the other hand, and despite an acknowledgement that the brain’s capacity to learn is influenced by experience, environment, beliefs and values (6), the program dives deeply into cognitive neuroscience to explain its prioritization of the individual (60-61). Tribes references a number of disciplines -brain science, multiple intelligence, motivational psychology and youth development. These are portrayed as driving a focus on individual skills and fostering in students a sense of autonomy, social competence, sense of purpose, capacity to problem solve and feelings of belonging and safety, to name only some. This is indicative of a classic medicalized approach in which science supports the view that the root cause of problematic behavior is in individual experience and traits and that fixing the damaged individual is the effective response. All of this occurs at the expense of the pathologized child
who carries the burden of blame and responsibility as well as an analysis of bullying from a socio-cultural location (Ringrose:574-6; Pascoe 2014:1).

INDIVIDUAL SKILLS TO THE RESCUE - THE CURRICULA

“…[S]o many of these kids come from terrible neighborhoods and families with overwhelming problems. Poverty, unemployment, lack of health care, inadequate childcare, juvenile problems, community crime, divorce, alcoholism, drug abuse, and stress surround many of the kids in our classroom” (Tribes:40).

Within the directions for program implementers, the Tribes program includes the above nod to macro factors influencing kids’ behaviors to remind teachers of the harsh world which our students navigate; those who survive successfully are labeled resilient. Further, Tribes emphasizes the need to switch the focus from pathology to competency, wellness and the ability to manage stress. Tribes claims that its primary mission is to foster, not teach, resiliency through its unique learning environments, such that individual students experience and gain the knowledge and skills to succeed even in the face of severe difficulty (40-41). This is read as Tribes’ attempt to bridge the social and the individual; but it sets the roots of bullying in the social and the remedy in the individual. This results in a mismatch of significant proportions.

The message that relying on personal skill to manage in the face of environmental adversity is similarly found in Al’s Pals. In response to disadvantage and aggression, students are taught specific calming down steps, the practice of Stop/Think and the importance of retreating to a mental happy place; undeniably, important stills to possess but, in effect, placing a heavy burden on children to control their reactions in response to structural inequality (V2/36-2-6). Al, the puppet, teaches students that, when angry, stop what they are doing and think about what’s
going on to avoid getting into trouble. The messages of this lesson are apparent in the

“Stop! Think!” Song which includes the following lyrics:

My mother won’t let me go outside
My brother likes to hit me
My sister all she does is cry
My best friend just bit me
It makes me so angry
All I want to do is scream
Stop! Think!
Other kids have better toys
And they won’t let me play
Some kids like to call me names
I wish they’d go away
I get so frustrated
I could kick or punch or shove
Stop! Think!... (10-4)

In the face of difficulty, children are not taught about privilege (to have and not to have), the feelings they may have which accompany an awareness of privilege or potential responses or actions. They are being told that managing the powerful impact of the behaviors referenced in the song is an isolated matter of personal strength. And, they are not taught skills for talking through what has occurred with an adult or the other child involved. What is emphasized is a solution which exclusively involves individual actions and motivations; the strategies embedded in the program direct students away from the conflictual situation toward an acknowledgement of one’s feelings. What is implied is that the conflict ends when personal feelings are acknowledge and, then, quashed. Note a similar sentiment contained elsewhere in *Al’s Pals*:

What if somebody hit me, that would make me mad…what if somebody hurt me…that would make me sad, oh, I’ve got lots of feelings. What if somebody yelled at me, that would make me afraid, what if I didn’t get presents, I’d be disappointed all day, oh, I’ve got feelings. Feelings are okay. It’s what you do that counts. What if I built a castle with blocks…what if somebody knocked it down, I’d get frustrated and shout out loud. What if I wanted to calm down, well, I know how. Oh, I’ve got feelings…. (Lesson 3-4)
Al’s Pals (subtitled Kids Making Healthy Choices) comes from the tradition of life-skills training or social/emotional learning (SEL)\(^2\) and, like many anti-bullying curricula, was originally developed to promote social competency by managing individual attitudes and behaviors in the face of a range of risks faced throughout one’s lifetime. Many broad SEL programs continue to be implemented, although it is more and more common for programs to target single subjects in order to produce specific reductions in a particular risk. Al’s Pals was tweaked to fit the need for bullying prevention programs and marketed as such.\(^2\) Its portrait of the bullying relationship juxtaposes the angry, frustrated, insensitive and out-of-control child who bullies with the child who is victimized due to a lack of assertiveness skills. Each program activity aims to remedy the skill deficits identified; each lesson is categorized by the resiliency skill(s) it targets, giving specific instructions for learning and practicing what is deemed as appropriate behaviors - impulse-control, anger management, using kind words and so forth (Wingspan).

Even Bully-Proof Your School, which is steeped in the language of community building and attention to school culture, has just under the surface a curriculum built to develop individual skills. A one-of-a-kind component is BPYS’ rating system or “Optional Sociogram”, proposed as

\(^2\) Many anti-bullying programs are built on the SEL model Two popular curricula not included in my sample, the Open Circle and Second Step programs, share the feature of identifying a set of core skills, at the heart of which is impulse and anger regulation which students need to master in order to effectively prevent bullying. Claims to the origins of Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) involve competing decades (from the 1960s to the 1990s), disciplines (education to mental health) and models of varied scope and detail, yet there is overlap in the understanding that SEL involves making up for deficits by the teaching of selected skills in an effort to promote success in all areas of life.

\(^2\) This information is contained in most descriptions of the program and can be found in multiple places with little variation. Specifically, this text relies on the program’s website, one-page introductory materials and the preface to the curriculum.
a tool to assist teachers in identifying students at risk for bullying. First, teachers administer a three-question social survey which asks students to:

A. List the three children in your grade who you most like to do things with.
B. List the three children in your grade who you don’t like to spend time with.
C. List the three children in your grade who you think most need a friend.

Using the survey results, teachers rate individual students. Each time a student is listed in response to question A, a child receives a plus sign. A minus sign is put next to those listed in question B. And, a zero is given for each instance a student shows up in the response to question C. Those with the most pluses are considered “popular”. Bullies have a mix of plus and minus signs. Victims are either typed as provocative (with many minus signs and zeros) or passive victims, those who have mostly zeros. Without interpretation reflecting a discussion of the nature of social status, perceptions of friendship or the nature of popularity in this age group (at a particular point in time with SES and race/ethnicity characteristic for that geographic area), the linking of bullying participation with individual student profiles, hierarchically arranged social categories are being imposed and played out, unproblematic, on a small scale within the classroom. Further, once students are categorized, teachers are left to fend for themselves, as BPYS contains no additional instructions (49).

BPYS provides many examples of the disconnect which persists across the curricula between the emphasis on the individual to address a collective social problem. The program’s top goal is to create a caring majority, yet, it claims that the “[s]uccess of the program is based on the individual student’s courage to act” (127and 129). BPYS places a high priority on teaching the skill of using “I” statements, a quintessential individual skill, one which allows students to express subjective feelings and opinions without suggesting that they are fact, representative of the feelings and opinions of others or signifying the needs of the group. And,
lessons about empathy and bystander intervention have the potential to address collective responsibility and community values, for example, but are, nevertheless, presented exclusively as enacting the individual’s role in stopping bullying (17 and 94). In the face of unfriendliness, stand up for yourself (33); when threatened, walk away or respond with humor (Menard 2008:3). BPYS promotes school culture change through the regulation of individual behavior rather than a critique of contemporary social dynamics, even how they are played out on a small scale within the school. Expressed in a series of posters, BPYS describes a school community which is bully-free and a safe place for learning as one built on individual actions and where character development involves enacting multiple skills - controlling individual behaviors, improving individual friendships, following the teachers’ rules and using “I” statements (2, 63; 17, 23 and 33). Teachers of BPYS are directed to be non-punitive but to set clear rules that bullying will not be tolerated; this results in a quasi-zero tolerance approach resting on individual accountability. Compliance is rewarded with compliments and recognition; if a student consistently displays positive behaviors, they are, then, welcome to join the caring majority.

BPYS’ central premise, that a focus on individual characteristics and skill development will build a safe, bully-free school climate, is similarly reflected in the Positive Action Program, although, with its approximate 140 lessons, with a considerably more extensive scope. Positive Action describes itself as built on an “intuitive philosophy that you feel good about yourself when you do positive actions”, such that a positive cycle of thoughts, actions and feelings will result in students who want to learn and do well (xx). Positive Action aims to accomplish this with strategies that are built entirely on individual skills and personal characteristics with an emphasis on developing a strong self-concept, a healthy body and mind, the ability to self-manage, skills for successful social interactions and a self-honesty to drive a quest for continual
There are many reasons why some kids are bullies. They might want to feel important, or more powerful than others. They may feel jealous of others or want attention. But one thing we know about bullies is that deep inside, they feel bad about themselves, and they take it out on others. They may laugh and act like they feel good when they are being bullies, but the good feeling doesn’t last, because it comes from doing bad things to others. What have we learned that we need to do to feel good about ourselves? [students respond:] (Do positive actions.) Yes, the way to feel good about yourself is to do positive actions. And one of those positive actions is to treat others the way we want to be treated. Do bad things leading to not feeling good about self. The way to feel good about yourself is to do positive actions – treating others how you want to be treated” (150).

Following this text, the curriculum instructs the classroom teacher to explain that dealing with bullies involves four individual skills - sticking with friends, ignoring the bully and walking away, telling the bully to stop it and telling an adult. The teacher is, then, directed to remind students that “[e]ach of you is very special, and you deserve to feel cared about…” (2-151). Again, this program pins its success on how students feel about themselves and whether they willingly engage in what has been deemed positive, acceptable and right action. It reminds students, “[y]ou are in control. You can choose to use positive actions in your life and you will want to because of the good feeling you will have…and to be a happy and successful achiever!” (2-132 and 4-7) Activities throughout the curriculum reinforce this key message; second grade students play a smile relay game (2-161) and each third grader takes an oath to follow a code of conduct about doing the right thing. Fifth grade students undertake community service projects; however, the rhetoric which describes this activity emphasizes the individual engaging in positive
action rather than the impact on the community or the benefit of good works to others (5-157-168). No mention is made of social transformation or impacts external to the self, rather making the choice to engage in ‘[p]ositive action is about building intrinsic motivation and fortifying students’ innate self-worth and confidence (5-Intro:vii).

*Olweus* stands apart from the other programs in that an initial reading reveals careful detailing of a bully-free school culture which gives the impression that the entirety of the program is designed to undermine a focus on individualism. It paints a vision of a school climate which is not welcoming to bullying, that promotes a sense of belonging and which is without the fear, disrespect and anti-social behavior characteristic of many U.S. schools (Teachers’ Guide:xi-xiv). There are strong anti-individualist moments throughout the program, for example, *Olweus* insists that self-esteem built on “spotlighting individual achievements” runs the risk of instilling “me” with too much importance, “to the detriment of ‘us’” (*Olweus* 1973:181). Throughout one finds the language of cooperation, collaboration, cohesiveness, mutuality and the value of caring, peaceful school environments. Yet, these ideas and language are never operationalized, leaving students without the skills to put these concepts to work. The following K-5 scope and sequence for the *Olweus* program details only individual skills. It reads as follows:

*Health Education Standards (Grades K–2)*

• identifies and shares feelings in appropriate ways  
• knows ways to seek assistance if worried, abused, or threatened (physically, emotionally, sexually)

*Health Education Standards (Grades 3–5)*

• knows characteristics needed to be a responsible friend and family member  
• knows behaviors that communicate care, consideration, and respect of self and others  
• understands how one responds to the behavior of others and how one’s behavior may evoke responses in others  
• knows strategies for resisting negative peer pressure  
• knows the difference between positive and negative behaviors used in conflict situations
• knows some nonviolent strategies to resolve conflicts
• knows behaviors that are safe, risky, or harmful to self and others (Olweus Scope and Sequence 2007:10)

These reflect an eye towards community and collaboration but only as related to individual action and behavior. It is unlikely that a well-functioning and equitable school culture will result from the coming together of a group of students with finely tuned individual skills. Within an overarching ideology of environmental change is an emphasis on practicing bravery and active listening (55), without mention of community or the group as a discrete entity with properties reminiscent of macro structural institutions.

As previously indicated, Tribes is another example of a more nuanced and macro approach than other programs, but one which stills falls short. It is an especially compelling example as it involves an intricately intertwined pairing of community building and individualism which appear, at times, to be incompatible and, at others, symbiotic. Its unique structure is centered entirely on the learning tribe, the goal of which is to establish collaborative environments free of negative put-downs and inclusive of prohibitions against bullying. This suggests a foundational systems critique, the modeling of alternative communities and a message about the possibility of structural change. But this assumed intent stops at the parameters of the tribe itself. For example, a key task of the tribe is to instruct students to use “I statements”, a commonly-used educational device which forces students to represent only themselves when speaking and to not assume or suggest a shared experience or opinion. The “I statement” helps to establish the parameters of the individual, in contrast to the other, thus the discourse promoted values individualism rather than the collectivism of the learning tribe concept. Using positive statements is encouraged throughout Tribes, so that, despite the unique format of learning
communities, a top priority of the program is to assert that each member’s individual and special talents, interests and hopes are cherished (73-77 and 87-90).

Initially published over forty years ago, *Tribes* reflects historical changes in cultural and political ideologies, early on embracing a description of learning tribes which likens them to positive democratic cultures and, now, described as a research-based model of caring communities which foster resiliency and skill in individual students. The teacher’s job, according to *Tribes*, is to “use strategies that help people express their individuality. As soon as that happens, [the]… class (or staff or organization) will be a strong learning community” (121). By linking a positive classroom to academic and behavioral improvement, *Tribes* attributes value and positive results to the collective. Further, the curriculum developers employ the language of diversity and inclusion throughout, yet despite this, a recognition that difference is linked to long-standing, deeply entrenched social inequalities is absent. Despite changing language, *Tribes* clearly states that its core work is teaching students individual skills:

…[t]he mission of Tribes has been consistent throughout the years “to assure the healthy development of every child in the school community so that each has the knowledge, skills and resiliency to be successful in our rapidly changing world (xi).

The rhetoric of community awkwardly co-exists with a significant emphasis on individual skills – problem solving, goal setting, self-responsibility, social skills, the discovery of one’s personal assets, emotion management and more (Intro packet:20-27). Despite its unique features, similar to the other curricula reviewed is a central tension of neoliberalism, a patriotism which sees the good of the country rising out of individual achievement without acknowledging the role of power and inequality. In spite of the language of dialogue, negotiation, decentralization and consensus (18-24), the work of *Tribes*, as is evident in the majority of the 165 activities, is first and foremost about developing resiliency by empowering individual students to engage in self-
determination in the classroom (6-13). Ultimately, *Tribes* is an example of the most polarized of the programs, having the greatest divide between its rhetoric and its content.

INDIVIDUALISM AND THE FOCUS GROUPS

Division and contradiction is less apparent in the narrative of the focus groups in which medicalized language and the pathologizing of individual children is less overt. My assumption is that front-line staff, the implementers, are not in a position to defend or justify district or school-level curricular decisions. There might be an additional practical or functional purpose to not using negative attributes to characterize the students with whom teachers work every day. Nevertheless, teaching individual skills was an unquestioned, top priority in all the groups, reflecting the assumption that the fix for bullying rests, in great part, on the shoulders of children. Of course, establishing a climate characterized by kindness was discussed, as was the need for administrators to set firm policy regarding punitive consequences for bullying behavior. But, the key component of the classroom content was consistently controlling individual behavior. This involved teaching basic skills, distinguishing bullying from “normal” kid behavior and training children to avoid bad decisions, to problem solve and to interact in “civil” ways (FG#1 and #3). The theme of building character was over and over again emphasized, suggesting that shaping children into “good” people was believed to be the ultimate prevention for bullying (FG#3 and #4). One school, for example, relied on a daily pledge, “I will be worthy of trust…respectful and responsible…”, with the intent that all students begin their day vowing to be a *kid for character* (FG#4). Many examples were provided in which good behavior was rewarded and reinforced with prizes, certificates and parties. One group agreed about the
downside of modeling bad behavior, objecting to roleplays showing what not to do and favoring
the modeling of only good behavior. One teacher shared this example:

  We…use to watch Lamb Chop and Lamb Chop spent twenty minutes talking
  about the word idiot and, then, the lesson was not to use the word idiot…But the
  lesson was not to use the word… [but all that was] learned was a new word.
  Right, you know, and we never watched Lamp Chop again (FG#4)

The unspoken subtext is that, by emphasizing the positive and teaching certain skills, bullying
prevention will turn the broken child into one of good character. One teacher says it plainly,

  This might be naïve, but I feel, like you know, teaching them about being
  respectful and being responsible and being a good person and caring - blah blah
  blah blah blah - at five that, and this is super naïve since I know it’s probably not
  true, but I think I’m hoping that they’re not going to need a bullying program
  when they get to 4th and 5th grade because they’re gonna be so wonderful and
  learned from me that, how important it is to be a good person and they wouldn’t
  do something like that, you know (FG#4).

DEBATING EFFECTIVE PRACTICE

  The medicalized language of individualism and individual pathology is evident in health
education’s reliance on the discourse of medicine and public health to provide legitimacy to its
practice and to claim it as effective. The tension between a focus on the individual and the social
or environmental reflects a conflict of views within public health policy’s quest to identify the
cause of poor health and the most efficient response to improve population health. In their
research on health equity, Baum and Fisher examine the on-going tension between the view that
negative health outcomes are determined by poor behavior and the perspective that underlying
social and economic factors are the primary causes of poor health (Baum & Fisher 2013:214).
  They write that health promotion strategies reliant on individual behavior change to reduce risk
are less likely to be successful than others (215), particularly with under-resourced populations,
and that the contribution of these ill-aligned strategies to the high failure rate of prevention
initiatives is rarely considered in the construction of policy or programming. Baum and Fisher
employ sociological approaches, in particular the work of Pierre Bourdieu, to further articulate their claims and to explain the cyclical nature of the schism between the individual and the social, such that ingrained values and beliefs maintain cultural inequality within a dynamic relationship with healthy practices. They write,

Bourdieu (1984) bridges the agency–structure divide with his theory that explains how individuals accumulate durable and transposable values and dispositions through socialisation and then adapt their ambitions and actions to the social circumstances and context of their lives. He maintains that values, beliefs and worldviews are created through the *habitus* (Bourdieu 1986), which reflects and helps to maintain class, gender or cultural position, and can be more or less supportive of health-promotion practices in everyday life. Bourdieu sees that economic capital is maintained and reproduced through cultural, social and symbolic capital and these capitals are crucial in determining opportunities to adopt healthy lifestyles over the life course (Baum and Fisher: 216).

The authors go on to explain that the emphasis within health education on prevention through individual behavioral change is consistent with large-scale political shifts, beginning in the 1980s, to a neoliberalism characterized by an emphasis on free markets and privatization. According to Baum and Fisher, the “individualism of neoliberal theory offers little space to support a view that health is primarily related by the structures which powerfully shape peoples’ lives, including the dominant economic structure” (217). In other words, they attribute poor health outcomes and failed prevention efforts to the underlying and obscured requirements of neoliberal political and economic structures.

How, then, is effective bullying prevention possible when mis-directed approaches are characteristic of health education and reflective of a larger tension surrounding medical and public health practice? Guided by Bourdieu’s description, by socializing children into a binary conceptualization of gender, normalizing and promoting gender conformity, diverting attention from systemic inequality and suppressing its critique with kindness, bullying can be viewed as a
useful vehicle through which schools can fill their role in reproducing structural inequality. This paradigm leaves little room for the identification and implementation of effective bullying prevention based on a clearly defined cause and proven strategies. Instead, health education has capitalized on the language of science as used by the fields of medicine and public health to make claims of research-based evidence to elevate its approach to best practice.

The history of medicine is filled with examples of de-legitimatizing non-mainstream practitioners by labeling their practice quackery or, more recently, dismissing factors that impact health outcomes because they are not measurable or assessed according to very tight parameters cast as objective. Such tactics have, in fact, reduced rogue medicine and, in certain areas, reduced harm, injury and the incidence of certain diseases or conditions. But, they also exclude questions, theories, tactics and research that, reflecting other disciplines or perspectives, might provide valuable insight. School-based health education is an example of a small field torn between the disciplines of public health and public education. It faces the typical obstacles experienced in schools – funding, time and support – and often challenged by a backlash that questions the content, its value and its very place in an educational setting not seen with most other subject areas. In response, the field has adopted the language of health and medicine, perhaps to defend itself or to align itself with the authority of the healthcare fields. An increase in the association of health education with public health, for example, has occurred in the past decade or more, evidenced by the requiring of some programs to collect needs assessment data, develop quantifiable goals and objectives and conduct program evaluation to measure behavioral outcomes (Cooney 2008).

Making bullying prevention legitimate by linking it to science seems at odds with the degree of success of most school-based programs. The many curricula marketed and available to
schools have been the subject of multiple independent and rigorous evaluations; a number of robust meta-analyses compare the intricacies of research designs, theoretical approaches and findings. That most of these evaluations have mixed findings in terms of impact and outcome, many with negative results, raises questions about the potentiality of science-based approaches when it comes to preventing or reducing bullying. Menard’s discussion of the inconclusive results of a BPYS evaluation is summed up as such, “the program does no harm and may do some good” (Menard 2008: 4). Using pre- and post-test survey data, a fairly recent evaluation of the Olweus program found that, despite some minor demographic differences as well as positive outcomes for certain classes regarding the perception of bystander intervention and feeling sorry and wanting to help, the intervention had no effect whatsoever on student victimization (Bauer 2007:7). The authors conclude that there was no overall effect. The multiple evaluations of Positive Action show encouraging results in a number of areas - school engagement, academic performance, self-esteem and a handful of problem behaviors - yet the evidence did not show reductions in aggressive or violent behavior. And, multiple evaluations conducted of the Tribes program show no long-term effects on the behavior of students. Such results might prompt a change of approach; however, little changes.

Despite the poor results of evaluation studies, every program included in my research relied on the language of evidence-based practice to describe and justify its approach. Is this indicative of a disconnect between state mandates and the implementation challenges facing schools with regard to time, funding and support? It is because the disease models, pathologizing and prevention theories of public health and medicine serve grand purposes other than the prevention of bullying? Or, are small, incremental changes, observed by those involved, enough to encourage perseverance without support for reassessment and revision? If the well-known
example of the Drug Abuse Resistance Education (DARE) program is predictive, the question of why the vast majority of US school districts continue to implement a program whose evaluations show either no effect or results that are counterproductive may remain unanswered (Hanson; Lohman 2010).

THE REIGN OF EVIDENCE-BASED-PRACTICE

Evidence-based practice (EBP; also referred to as science-based and research-based) has become the gold standard for much of medicine and public health. In short, EBP reflects a drive to increase efficacy and accountability by implementing best practices as determined by rigorous, scientific assessment (Cooney 2008). Evidence-based prevention efforts were adopted broadly after 1992 when the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) established the National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices. This resource is a collection of approximately 400 scientifically and independently assessed programs that meet a pre-established set of inclusion criteria, which, in essence, gives a governmental stamp of approval for use in the prevention of drug and alcohol use. Describing EBP, SAMHSA writes:

Practicing effective prevention means gathering and using data to guide all prevention decisions—from identifying which substance use problems to address in a community, to choosing the most appropriate ways to address these problems, to determining whether selected interventions and strategies are making progress in meeting prevention needs…It means working with diverse community partners to plan and deliver culturally appropriate, effective, and sustainable prevention practices that are a good fit for the populations being served…It also means understanding and applying prevention research so that prevention efforts are informed by best practice, and shown to influence risk and protective factors associated with prioritized substance misuse and related health problems at the community, state, territory, and tribal levels (SAMHSA 2016).

Employing proven strategies to potentially improve program quality and outcomes makes sense. Federal funding streams and grant programs often require adherence to evidence-based
practice; and, the idea has permeated the literature on a variety of topics which typically fall under the purview of health education, including the prevention of pregnancy, suicide and bullying. By combining sound research methods, epidemiology, prevention theory, critical peer review, tested replicability and governmental mandates, EBP, in theory, should produce programs with greater consistent impact, likelihood of success and freedom from the pitfalls of pressure to use certain programs or strategies due to politics, fear or funding, rather than evidence. However, this is not as simple as it sounds. In a school setting, to follow EBP is next to impossible. This is because of multiple reasons, although, most prominently, the literature on EBP is clear that any deviation from the original research has the potential to affect the results. This means that unless a school-based initiative is implemented to fidelity, there are no guarantees; and, most schools are not positioned to exactly mimic the scope, sequence and other conditions of evaluation research. In fact, although the focus group participants (or, implementers) did not discuss EBP, their mention of erratic training and uneven implementation made clear the inconsistencies between the realities of implementation and the recommendations from research. These factors alone raise questions about the utility of school-based health education and the utility of EBP. The point is not to suggest that anti-bullying programs are a waste of time and resources, but to suggest that using the critical eye of social scientific analysis would facilitate the questioning of EBP from an entirely different perspective causing a rethinking of the current approach.

CRITIQUING SCIENCE-BASED PRACTICE:

State mandates, urgency from the public and the threat of lawsuits (inseparable from a number of high profile legal battles concerning bullying) compel schools to actively respond to bullying. Prevention science functions as a useful tool for legitimating this response, particularly
useful for supporting the location of health education within the school setting. What is perceived as scientific truth counters critics who question the school’s role in teaching non-academic subjects like health promotion and risk reduction. And, the many objections to health education, as a threat to parental control, as a means to impose a certain set of values and as promoting morally questionable discussion and behavior (the history of opposition to health education is too large a subject to fit within the parameters of the current project), is, on occasion, dampened with what is generally considered to be factual evidence and rational argument. In fact, prevention science is a useful tool which has shown many aspects of health education to be critical and invaluable; for example, the field can say with some certainty that AIDS education reduces some risky behaviors, that birth control information is correlated with a decrease in the teen pregnancy rate and that academic performance is improved when schools attend to the health and wellness of their students. These, alone, help to position prevention as indispensable. In addition, scientific evidence can claim responsibility for ending the use of unhelpful practices such as zero tolerance tactics and the exclusive use of punitive responses to unhealthy behavior. Finally, the research-based practice identified by prevention science offers a framework of rationality and hope to those who attribute unhealthy or risky behavior to an “out-of-control” or morally deficient adolescent population. Consider this comprehensive description of science-based prevention:

Changing human behavior is a challenging enterprise. By applying scientific principles and methodologies to prevention we move closer to understanding and identifying causal relationships between an individual’s behavior and variables that influence that behavior. Prevention programs can be developed, implemented or replicated to influence those intervening variables and thereby impact behavior. The emergence of science-based programs, principles and strategies provides prevention programmers with tools to do our work better. As we continue to learn more about the best ways to prevent substance abuse and other high-risk
behaviors, we increase the chances of shaping a healthy future for generations to come (University of Texas at Arlington).

The benefits of scientific evidence to prevention are plentiful; regardless, the research also finds a preponderance of ineffective programs and strategies. The value of school-based health education, then, should not be negated, rather, close examination is useful for challenging and questioning the utility of current practice.

Social science’s critique of mainstream science is instructive when bringing a sociological lens to the study of bullying prevention education. At the heart of this task is a questioning of the validity of science as uncontested fact or objective truth. Feminist theory’s critique of scientific bias is especially useful in that it demystifies the widely accepted belief that scientific inquiry uncovers the essential nature of things or uncontested truths. Feminism’s perspective on science is broadly based and varied, yet significant here is the way in which it reveals the social forces underlying what is passed off as neutral, unbiased evidence. It convincingly proposes that the authority invested in scientific knowledge obscures and renders uncontested the values, beliefs and control of ideologies buried within and shaping the questions, content and products of contemporary scientific inquiry. These distortions, in turn, lend credibility to claims which have, and continue to, reinforce gender and racial inequality, among other forms of bigotry. That bullying prevention uses the language of evidence-based practice while ignoring gender inequality, misrepresenting “girl power” as gender equity, privileging the individualism of neoliberalism, employing the pathologizing of medicalization and adopting a cloak of kindness (among other memes), prompts us to question the premise of the underlying science itself. This supports the raising of different questions regarding our baseline interpretation of bullying and the focus and consequences of anti-bullying curricula. Bourdieu wrote that the “‘pure’ universe of even the ‘purest’ science is a social field like any other, with
its distribution of power and its monopolies, its struggles and strategies, interests and profits…” (1975:19). In other words, it is important to question who is positioned with the necessary level of capital to define the science behind prevention (Bourdieu:6-7). Who crafts the research hypotheses, establishes the benchmarks of success, interprets the findings and translates these into activities? How is it that curricula, commercially developed for purposes other than bullying prevention, are so easily made relevant to bullying (and, perhaps, profitable), particularly when strict adherence is often required in order to achieve positive results? Confirmed by my data is a complete lack of attention to how what is passed off as universally accepted truth about the nature of bullying and its remedy supported by an unbiased and objective scientific knowledge relies on the conditions and understandings of social problems (Bourdieu:4). By shifting the location of our attention and leading us to engage with a unique set of questions, social scientific inquiry may have the potential to reshape our understandings of bullying and bullying prevention, leading to improved outcomes, reformulated outcome measures or a new paradigm entirely.

PREVENTION SCIENCE, BEHAVIOR CHANGE AND ECOLOGICAL THEORY REVEALED IN BULLYING

A shift in perspective nudges forward a closer scrutiny of the dominant public health approaches to prevention. Underpinning anti-bullying curricula is the juxtaposition of behavior change theory and ecological approaches which are sometimes in conflict and sometimes act as partners. Based on their observations of classroom bullying interactions (1998), academic psychologists Rona Atlas and Debra Pepler describe the operating theoretical frameworks as an integration of approaches - the individual, the social-interactional and the ecological. They write of the multidimensional components at play and describe bullying as “… an interaction that
occurs between an individual bully and victim and unfolds within a social ecological context. In sum, the bullying interaction is influenced by a number of factors: (a) the individual characteristics of the bully and victim, (b) the dyadic interactional processes between the individual bully and victim, (c) the presence of peers and teachers, and (d) the context in which bullying behavior unfolds” (1998:86).

Models of behavior change often serve as the theoretical foundation of health promotion and prevention and, although, here and there, some of these theories take the social psychological and the social into consideration, the emphasis is predominantly on individual action. Most commonly used, the Health Belief Model, Stages of Change, Theory of Reasoned Action, Social Learning/Cognitive Theory, encompass a variety of conceptualizations of the steps toward successful individual change, and, although the support and perception of others may be considered important, the emphasis is on personal motivation, self-efficacy, perceptions of risk and the readiness or intention to change (US HHS 2002: Appendix 3). These theories neatly propose linear processes for promoting health in which unique points of weakness are identified and skills and supports can be provided to the individual to facilitate change. Locating the individual in a model allows specific areas to be targeted (a meeting your client “where they are at”, if you will) in order to move the individual to the next step, ideally reducing risk and promoting health. As a concrete, relatively benign yet useful, health intervention, behavior change is widely taught and widely employed as the underpinnings of prevention practice that comes with the stamp of approval of science-based practice. Such models logically and authoritatively put the burden on the individual to fix where they are broken and help to keep the focus off of the structural roots of negative health behaviors and outcomes (Vreeman:52-57).
Even when behavior change theory is paired with ecological strategies, systemic root causes of bullying are ignored. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention describes ecological theory as comprehensive, situating risk within the multiple contexts of the individual, relational and societal. It involves a consideration of “social and cultural norms… [and o]ther larger societal factors includ[ing] the health, economic, educational and social policies that help to maintain economic or social inequalities between groups in society” (CDC 2013; WHO 2017). When applied to bullying prevention, one might expect a focus on the inequitable relationships and environments surrounding young people. Yet, as shown, there is no indication that a focus on inequality takes place. It is possible to read a social ecological approach onto aspects of anti-bullying prevention when the individual is placed in relation to another individual or within the context of the classroom environment. This still represents a narrow and limited focus. In other words, awareness of social inequities is not woven into activities or discussions; there is nothing active or overt which might promote a critical assessment of inequality; and, there is no apparent intention of social change.

Although the potential scope of ecological approaches is large, the application to prevention is limited. Societal level ecological strategies, for the most part, drive efforts for change in the immediate environment rather than placing a critical lens on root cause or macro-level implications. Consider alcohol prevention which aims to raise alcohol taxes or promote taboos against drinking and driving, or anti-smoking campaigns which conduct stings targeting convenience stores in an effort to limit cigarette sales to minors. Despite the potential impact of limiting access or injury related to alcohol and tobacco use, none of these examples addresses underlying causes. The rhetoric of bullying prevention attests to the importance of whole school programs, those which consider the atmosphere or essence of the greater school culture, yet,
ecological anti-bullying strategies tend to involve teaching about civil interaction and practicing
politeness or establishing policies detailing punitive responses for the perpetration of bullying.
At no point does an examination of the social forces underlying bullying occur; never, for
instance, do students deconstruct the link between the social norms pairing aggression and
masculinity or challenge its normalization.

Examples of this tension between the environmental or social and the individual are easy
to come by in the discourse of prevention. From our national health objectives to programs
addressing other areas of adolescent health, calls are found urging that prevention efforts be
rooted in theoretically driven strategies which look beyond the individual and attend to
behavioral antecedents stemming from the context of family, community and social/cultural
sources - poverty, inequality, unemployment, access to education and healthcare (Brindis
2005:14; ODPHP Healthy People 2020; Inman 2011). Even a small, elementary program such
as Al’s Pals, with its songs and puppetry, attempts to embrace a broad perspective when
assuming that by building a classroom environment which promotes caring, kindness and
respect, individual students will develop the resiliency-based social-emotional skills needed to
end bullying. In the center of this paradigm is the transformed school culture which
“discourage[s] teasing, name-calling, and aggression”, where individual positive behavior is both
the result of and creates a positive classroom environment (Wingspan 2013). The intent to
address the ecological is suggested, but the contingent areas of focus are problematic, as shown.
Similarly embedded in the Tribes program is the uncomfortable pairing of an overabundance of
individual skill building and a, somewhat limited, conceptualization of the ecological or
contextual. When describing Tribes, the author Gibbs claims the following,

“[t]he many problems of youth can be lessened and healed by transforming
schools into caring communities, by including youth as leaders in solving
problems and in reaching out in kindness to each other. I believe that John Dewey was right. Each public school should be a model home, a complete community actively developing future compassionate citizens capable of creating, leading and contributing to the kind of democratic communities in which we all long to live” (8).

Interestingly, *Tribes* carefully details the scientific research which informed its development, behavior change theory as well as neuroscientific understandings of the workings of the brain provide a medicalized credibility for *Tribes’* purpose of building resiliency as the key to reducing individual risk. Meanwhile, *Tribes* champions classroom transformation, prioritizes multiculturalism and gender equity and supports systems change (31), yet students learn skills for self-change only leaving a disconnect between this and the state commitment to environmental change.

By parroting the rhetoric of the fields of medicine and public health, school-based health education has access to what has been deemed best practice offering a better shot at positive outcomes as well as legitimacy and scientific justification to promote implementation. But, at what cost? What is to be done if, as I’ve suggested, the limited benefits of bullying prevention is the product of a reductive and safe perspective on the problem; and that by using the tools of evidence-based practice and behavior change theory, bullying prevention serves the needs of neoliberalism and American individualism more effectively than it achieves its stated purpose of reducing bullying? Is this adequate? Is it changeable? Is it important to operationalize prevention efforts that are rooted in theoretically driven strategies which look beyond the individual and attend to the behavioral antecedents stemming from the context of family, community, culture and social context? Is the answer a new body of prevention strategies which link the risk behavior of young people with large-scale ecological considerations and address inequality, discrimination, poverty and more (Brindis:14)? And, while in the next chapter I attempt to
synthesize the findings from this study into a concise set of useful recommendations, the larger themes I have addressed, which speak to the profound, yet invisible, function of bullying and efforts to prevent it, tend to raise complicated questions rather than lead to resolution.
Chapter 7 The Storm, the Whirlwind & the Earthquake

*It is not light that we need, but fire; it is not the gentle shower, but thunder. We need the storm, the whirlwind, and the earthquake.* Frederick Douglass, July 4, 1852

A unique aspect of qualitative research is the opportunity to root the work in human experience. For this project, human experience constitutes a significant portion of my data; it is also fundamental to the feminist theoretical perspective and other key interpretative lenses I’ve opted to use for my analysis. Further, it is my lived experience as a doctoral student in sociology examining health and inequality and a former health educator working with public schools which has shaped my commitment to this project, my understanding of the findings and my interest in its application. I recognize that much of what I anticipated finding regarding gender was, in fact, what I found, particularly the lack of attention to the ways in which inequality shapes the bully/target dynamic as well as institutional responses to bullying. At the same time, it is clear, that the data drove the project in a number of unexpected directions, which may not be surprising when relying on mixed methods and grounded theory. It began as an examination of a group of specific research questions designed to tease out gendered messages within bullying prevention curricula and to identify the ways in which the implementation of bullying prevention socializes children into stratified systems reliant on a gender binary and fraught with narrowly defined gender characteristics and roles. What emerged was a bigger picture revealing bullying prevention’s embodiment of its neoliberal context and a deep concern for the squelching of inquiry and dissent through the promotion of a culture of kindness. These noteworthy findings are problematic. This is especially so when one considers the discrepancy between the repression

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of inquiry and a key belief underscoring this dissertation project, namely that developing
children’s capacity for critical thinking and their understanding of the social world seems to me
to be a viable response to the circumstances of bullying. So, while I address those aspects of
prevention education which divert our attention from an underlying and pervasive gender
inequality, the picture painted here is less about the direct relationship between gender and
bullying prevention and more about the continued perpetuation of systemic stratification and the
quiet suppression of change.

My familiarity with school-based health education and my training as a social scientist
have provided me with a fairly comprehensive understanding of the practical and political
considerations facing schools combined with the knowledge that all of our significant institutions
function to perpetuate inequality. To recap, I began my inquiry with the following:

1) Are messages about gender embedded in school-based bullying prevention
   education programs such that conformity to traditional and stereotypical ideas
   about boys and girls is promoted; and,

2) In what ways might the implementation of bullying prevention in schools
   contribute to the socialization of children into conventional gender norms,
   particularly reinforcing the link between masculinity and aggressive behavior?

Overall, I did, in fact, find consistent messages about gender embedded across the curricula and
teacher discussions that promote conformity to conventional gendered practices. Much of these
messages reflect descriptions of gender-differentiated bullying; an example of which is the
commonly found juxtaposition of boys’ active bullying and the passive bullying of girls. There is
the wholesale acceptance of an obsolete binary conceptualization of gender, which establishes
and maintains the parameters for normative versus deviant gender identity and gender
expression. At the same time, a lack of attention to gender gives very similar messages
supporting the maintenance of traditional gender norms. This, at times, appears as the post-
feminist theme of a level playing-field and gender transcendence, but not to the extent to which conformity is undermined or visibility facilitates critique. There is appreciation for diversity and inclusion that fails to problematize gender inequality or critically consider power. And, there are the objections to the undervaluing of feminine qualities but not that which deconstructs gendered characteristics or explicitly decouples masculinity from aggression. As shown, these gendered messages -and, in some cases, the absence of messages- fit well into an established paradigm in which educational institutions fill specific roles in the process of maintaining social stratification - that is, teaching and policing children’s positions in a social system of dominance and subordination.

My findings, in fact, confirm Pascoe’s thesis that aggression - and, in the case of her work, homophobic aggression - is a tool for policing masculinity such that school-based bullying is a venue for socializing boys into a rigidly defined masculinity which, in turn, prepares them for adulthood (Pascoe 2011). When bullying prevention is placed in the health education context, it becomes subject to the unique array of factors characteristic of the discipline; in particular, health education is rendered invisible due to its status as an under-resourced low priority for schools. At the same time, bullying prevention gets treated as a highly visible, critical response to crisis and a necessary remedy for the negative consequences of poor behavior, weak character and other social “ills” used to describe this generation of adolescents. Yet, as I have shown in the previous chapter, without a big picture approach aimed at change, bullying prevention appears to be a losing battle. The discursive strategies used to justify bullying prevention as it is, serve the purpose of transmitting dominant cultural themes and ensuring the continuance of inequitable social arrangements. And, as I’ve also addressed, the rhetoric of bullying prevention
affirms the very ideas at the roots of bullying behavior, cleverly creating a system of self-
perpetuation.

What I did not expect to be so pronounced when I began this project was the expression
of distinct cultural themes emblematic of dominant political and economic ideologies. I did not
anticipate the insidious presentation of kindness and the pathologizing and reductive
consequences of medicalization to be so profoundly instructive about the contemporary
messages used to socialize (or, civilize) children. In short, bullying prevention seeks legitimacy
through the use of the language of medicine and public health - evidenced-based practice, social
ecology, behavior change theory and so forth. This results in blaming the individual, falls short
of a consideration of systemic or structural issues and – as discussed in Chapter 1 - doesn’t
reduce bullying. Of course, not all medicalization is harmful, the recognition and medical
response to previously stigmatized conditions has been life changing for many. Civility,
kindness, generosity and warmth, for that matter, are welcomed qualities, contributing to positive
interactions and, in some cases, setting the groundwork for open communication in the case of
conflict or dissent. However, the promotion of civility on a grand scale serves to deflect
discussions which might otherwise challenge the social order, values the way we talk over the
content of what is discussed, glosses over conflict and silences a recognition of the disconnect
between what children observe and experience with what they learn is expected behavior. We
pair this squashing of dissent with mixed messages about civility and the need to conform to
rigid gender norms. We then steep this in a social context which is neoliberalistic in nature and
dominated by discourses which privilege the themes of individualism, medicalization and
scientific truth. This paradigm forces the question of whether preventing bullying is a realistic
goal when the stuff that bullying is made of is left unchallenged and unchanged.
CONSIDERING THE NOW

Interestingly, my findings reveal a number of up-to-the-minute cultural themes. Consider that I started writing this chapter only one week after the March for Women’s Lives, a powerful global protest attracting unexpectedly large numbers of participants who continue to be praised by the media for their orderly behavior, lack of confrontation and conflict and for their many acts of kindness. Reports tell stories of public instances of sharing and smiles (Mashburn 2017). News accounts are filled with descriptions of nice behavior, videos of chants about loving kindness, posters about truth and understanding and quotes from marchers enthusiastically speaking of our common goal of love (Rios 2017). In the words of one march attendee from Pennsylvania when interviewed by her local paper:

Women have historically been the teachers and the caretakers of cultural values…Our role is to nurture and heal. To make things better. We are also natural collaborators and team players. This gives us a lot of power, and accompanying responsibility. I am proud to be in D.C. today marching with other women who share my values for family, sisterhood, unity, equality and diversity. I live on the Eastern Shore of Virginia where these values are reflected every day in the kindness and cooperation of the people (Parker 2017).

I include this because it helps to explain my surprise to find kindness as a dominant theme within bullying prevention discourse and why I read this use of kindness as problematic. While the statement above reminds me of the everyday micro-aggressions women endure when our objections are cast as bitchy or when we are told by strangers to smile; it also tells me that early forms of this same message are promoted in bullying prevention programs. It helps make tangible why I am directed to interpret the messages within anti-bullying programs with the same lens which sees gender bias when women are typecast as kind, nurturing, simple and uncomplicated, in contrast with our aggressive male counterparts (not my dichotomy). It speaks
to the policing of women’s bodies and behaviors with the suggestion that negativity, conflict, anger and dissent is unladylike. And, when kindness is trivialized as a female trait and rendered less than, promoting kindness as a remedy for conflict ignores the association of masculinity with aggression and, it follows logically, contributes to the lack of success of bullying prevention programs.

I recently received an email from a retail store, the owner of which writes an online beauty blog. In the current entry, the author describes the “sense of openness amongst the women” she experienced while attending the women’s march in NYC. She writes, “[t]he smiles from woman to woman, stranger or no, is profoundly uplifting. Trimming the bangs of a woman I’d never met in the event bathroom with the teenie weenie scissors on her jack knife, I heard onlookers say, ‘Cause that’s what women do for women’” (Goldsborough 2017). I include this as an example of what’s haunting me and inundating my inbox, my Facebook feed and my work. While I welcome the sentiment of female generosity, giving and community and see the beauty and power there, what is lacking is critique accompanying the stories which addresses the embedded gender stereotypes, messages of disempowerment and the connection to the bigger picture. Absent is the expression of frustration with the low level of expectation suggested by the narrative, as what is implied is that kindness – that which is private, hidden, adjusts, makes do and takes care - is enough. We are required to have faith in kindness as a remedy for social problems when positioning kindness as the goal, in fact, silences criticism, debate and a demand for change. To the hundreds of times I heard kindness and love shouted at the Women’s March in Boston, an event which, despite a powerful mission statement, was criticized as exclusionary and mainstream, I only once heard a marcher critique structural inequality by shouting down capitalism.
Discussions reflecting this idealization of kindness pepper characterizations of the early Trump presidency. Commentary highlights his no-nonsense approach, his defiance of the “dreaded” political correctness and his uncivil presentation. Writing for her local paper, school librarian Sara Stevenson (Stevenson 2016) refers to Trump’s political discourse as abusive and likens it to school-based bullying. She calls for civility and recommends ignoring Trump’s tweets and tantrums because, as she has observed with her students, one way to stop a bully is to withhold the attention which typically feeds their underlying narcissism. And, just as schools attempt to teach students to be active witnesses, rather than passive bystanders, when confronted with a concerning situation of health and safety, Stevenson claims that the remedy is standing up to bullying. In this manner, the treatment of civility is identical to what is found in anti-bullying materials, reflecting the pitting of a pathologized, narcissistic bully against the weak or deficient individual who needs the will, courage or skills to stand up to bullying. It offers yet another example of a systems-free description of bullying and its resolution - a paradigm also apparent in the disconnect between Melania Trump’s mission to end cyber bullying, at the center of which is civil communication, and the dismissal of her husband’s sexist comments as harmless “boy talk”.

The examples in which Trump’s behavior is likened to bullying are many. On January 26th, 2017, the Washington Blade ran a piece in which DC attorney Lateefah Williams likens Trump’s “boorish…racist, sexist, xenophobic, ablest and homophobic” behavior to children’s bullying (Williams 2017). She suggests that his win signifies the rewards of bad behavior and writes that despite “high-profile anti-bullying campaigns throughout the nation”, adults seem surprised when children imitate the bullying behavior they are quick to model. Williams points out the following:
Trump’s bullying has already impacted both our youth and society as a whole. Immigrant children are being bullied because of Trump’s xenophobic comments about Mexicans and Muslims. Transgender people are being bullied due to irrational fears concerning bathroom access, when all of the folks who are suddenly “scared” have been using restrooms with transgender people, without incident, for years.

She doesn’t offer a plan to fix the problem she addresses other than to urge the reader to fight against bullying and to hold adults who bully accountable. She does, however, use the term *civility* to describe what Trump lacks, never directly examining its meaning, albeit curiously suggestive. This same sentiment appears in the findings from my research; a striking example is one focus group participant who extolled Jackie Robinson’s mild disposition when bullied by white people at a swimming pool; never once in her story are racism, civil rights or the potential for violence mentioned (FG#4).

Almost twenty years ago Harvard Law Professor Randall L. Kennedy described civility as “a genteel way to mask the inevitable tensions and antagonisms of democratic society” (1998), acknowledging a profusion of articles referring to a crisis of civil discourse, of good manners gone. In fact, expressing a bit of disbelief, Kennedy quotes a poll as evidence that between half and three-quarters of the public believes a lack of civility to be a serious problem. In his discussion, Kennedy situates civility firmly within the culture wars of the 1990s and recalls right-wing victories against political correctness - the shutting down of the Mapplethorpe exhibit, for example - and he rebukes liberal attempts to use civil discourse to its advantage - pointing out, in particular, responses to the right’s claims of large-scale social disintegration post the 1960s. These cries for civility, according to Kennedy, obscure the legitimacy of “the egalitarian ethos embodied in the movements of the 1960s for black liberation, women's liberation, and gay liberation” (1998). With attention placed squarely on how we communicate and interact, bigger picture, deeply rooted social forces are overlooked and left unexamined. He
illustrates by noting the uproar over “coarse language, but homeless families and involuntary unemployment only get a shrug” (1998)? Kennedy is clear:

[t]he civility movement is deeply at odds with what an invigorated liberalism requires: intellectual clarity; an insistence upon grappling with the substance of controversies; and a willingness to fight loudly, openly, militantly, even rudely for policies and values that will increase freedom, equality, and happiness in America and around the world (1998).

The downside of civility has been in an active state as of late, strategically operating in multiple spaces and multiple times. Those who closely watch the media, pay attention to political battles and scrutinize culture wars recognize its insidious properties. And, somewhat indirectly, this use of civility is one way in which the gendering of boys and girls in the elementary classroom is linked to big questions of democratic values and equity. While the evaluation research on bullying prevention is disappointing - revealing results ranging from failure to occasional glimmers of hope due to positive results which are often fleeting and challenging to duplicate- and factors point to the possibility that prevention education exacerbates bullying behavior, a lens of interpretive sociology facilitates the analysis of bullying prevention as expressive of ideologies characteristic of contemporary cultural values as I’ve just describe. This, in turn, brings us to a series of questions. How do the research findings expand or redirect the driving questions of this study? Does this result in a referendum on school-based anti-bullying programs which allows us to judge whether the time and money spent on advocating and implementing health education is worthwhile? Might this facilitate a push to revamp the content of anti-bullying curricula? Or, do we conclude that without structural change, the results of prevention efforts will always be limited? Needless-to-say, this research suggests (at least) two different sets of questions about bullying. The first set reflects the interpretive
emphasis seen throughout the previous chapters which reveal what broad cultural themes are embedded in bullying prevention and how its implementation trains young girls and boys to conform to overarching social imperatives. The second involves utility and application and asks if there are lessons to be learned here to direct and support the work of health educators, prevention specialists, curriculum developers and school administrators. The findings of this study have clear implications for school-based anti-bullying prevention. The questions examined here resulting in recommendations which have the potential to inform our fundamental understanding of and approach to bullying and reshape how we implement programs, design curricula and identify evaluation methodology. Perhaps the take-away is that what is currently occurring in elementary classrooms and the measures by which we judge its success need reformulating. As is, they fail to consider the larger contexts in which bullying and its prevention occur, the ideologies embedded in what is being taught and expressed by those who do the teaching, and, finally, the broad consequences for those who receive bullying prevention education as they are trained to function in - and, maintain - the contemporary social order.

NOW IS NOT ENOUGH

Rest assured that some schools are taking strong measures to counter bullying. Whether motivated by compliance with the law, liability concerns or a genuine concern for student safety and well-being, schools are actively implementing programs and have a deluge of materials and models from which to choose. Yet, what’s happening now needs to be rethought and recreated. As sociologist Jessie Klein, author of the Bully Society, writes, “[e]ven schools that take bullying seriously often miss the connection to gender. They may punish the bullies and throw one after
another out of school, but they leave the culture of sexual harassment and bullying firmly intact” (2012:2). It’s important to restate here that this is not a vilification of teachers, administrators, parents or curriculum designers; rather, this is an institutional critique. Most of those who work in this flawed educational system are not afforded the luxury – or, given the funding or go-ahead - to embrace this level of critique as a priority of their focus. However, this does not negate the need for improvement.

Early on I use the language of colorblind racism to describe the treatment of gender in bullying prevention. The important point of comparison lies with the false belief that racism is a thing of the past preventing the confrontation of subtle, insidious and systemic racism. In anti-bullying programs, we see schools stating their commitment to diversity and inclusion and articulating the necessity of establishing a healthy school climate, but one that stops at acceptance:

Um, our, our school, we have a motto that we adopted, maybe, 10 years ago now…and its like Opportunity, Diversity and Respect. And, that diversity piece and that respect piece is supposed to be embedded in everyone’s classroom and um making school a culture that, you know, um, gives people the opportunity, equal opportunity to learn regardless of how they identify themself, gender, race, whatever. I have to say I’m pretty amazed sometimes. We have quite a few students that are transgender um and last year, well, actually two years ago, we started the trans uh gender neutral bathrooms. And, um people are pretty accepting. … Really, it’s pretty amazing sometimes. And, they conduct themselves in a pretty respectful manner…, and you know, they are pretty good at accepting, being accepting of everybody…(FG#2)

And, as I’ve shown, many of the teachers report actively challenging stereotypical boys-will-be-boys type attitudes by forbidding the expression of overt sexism in their classrooms. There are plenty of examples of good intent which lack a deeper analysis of gender inequality. While there might be support for teaching tolerance, simply telling students that difference doesn’t matter
won’t remedy bullying; while praise might help students adjust and feel better about themselves, it doesn’t touch institutionalized inequality:

I think it’s good to start young, like at 3-4-5 years old and tell them that it doesn’t matter, that it’s okay to be different, we need to celebrate that. It doesn’t matter. You can wear whatever you want and you can play with whatever you want. You can play whatever you want and, then, that way it won’t be as foreign to kids, when they get older, if a boy is wearing a dress, or something. Then, that child won’t get bullied, if we start young and say that gender, gender doesn’t own what you do…(FG#1)

The examples fail to show an awareness of gender differences in the requirements for conformity or a systemic dimension to responses to bullying and potential bullying situations:

Well, last year I had a little girl who would wear a tutu every day but her top would be like superman, would be spiderman, would be a superhero and not necessarily like a female super hero…I was like you are so cool that like you are like just rockin it, and don’t, aren’t worried about what anyone is going to say. I feel like you just praise it… (FG#1)

These quotes, of which there are many, suggest a belief - or, misperception- that a fundamental equality exists and is easily enacted with simple encouragement, determination and support. Yet, praise in isolation promotes the glossing over of dynamics which need unpacking, makes individual skills or mindset a central focus and prevents the teaching of critical thinking –all functions problematized earlier. This is demonstrative of the dominant discourses shaping the implementation of bullying prevention. Further, there are no examples from the materials or focus groups in which the discussion of gender inequality is front and center. What remains unclear, however, is whether this reflects an acceptance of gender difference, a belief that sexism is a thing of the past or a hope that if we don’t talk to kids about inequality, it will go away.
Writing about sexuality education, which, like anti-bullying programs, primarily occurs within school-based health education programs, sociologists Catherine Connell and Sinikka Elliott similarly argue that sexuality education “socializes children into systems of inequality” (84) and that, subsequently, changes to sex education “hold the promise of ameliorating larger social inequalities” (84). The authors write that sexuality education, as with other subjects, has a role in the “hidden curriculum” of schools through which children are socialized into the “‘right’ and ‘wrong’ ways to do gender and sexuality” (88). They’ve become effective mechanisms which “maintain systems of inequality” (88) while ignoring “gendered power dynamics” (90). Connell and Elliott are able to describe “[a]n increasing number of educators [who] are engaging in critical pedagogical practices (Friere, 2005) that challenge the reproduction of race, class, gender, and sexual inequalities within the education system” (90) but that rarely leads to change. They, too, conclude that one remedy is teaching using a social justice-informed perspective and employing tactics which teach children to actively resist social injustice. The authors speak of “sexual literacy” (97) and the reconfiguration of sex education in order to teach in ways which help children challenge the dynamics of racism, sexism, classism and heterosexism (97), not only in school, but throughout their lives.

LOOKING FORWARD

Without significant transformation in the systems which maintain inequality, I suspect that bullying prevention will continue to have limited success. If a significant feature of bullying’s rootedness is an acting out of normative masculinity, for example, the analysis here logically follows that, in order to effect a reduction in bullying, prevention efforts must privilege a questioning and an undermining of long standing gender norms and gendered interactions. I recognize that the culture of educational institutions is slow to change, that schools are already
over-burdened and that processes of stratification are interdependent and situated, meaning that what occurs in schools does not happen in a vacuum. However, I suggest that working towards a shift in the hierarchical nature of schools and transforming the relationship of the school to social inequality is a cultural imperative. More specifically, I urge the funders, developers and implementers of school-based bullying prevention to use gender and stratification theories to guide how anti-bullying efforts are conceived and conducted. This could be consonant with establishing an on-going collaboration between the disciplines of sociology, public health and educational practice, affording the bandwidth to allow individual disciplines to make shifts internally while coordinating efforts to address large structural considerations using multiple lenses and strategies.

This raises many questions. How can an under-resourced, broken system make this a priority? If, for the sake of practicality, schools take baby steps, implementing incremental change, will children be presented with an unsettling - and, unfair - sense of discord from the contrast between in-school possibility and the inequality embedded everywhere else? And, while young people are often pegged as agents of change (or, those who will make the world a better place), public schools are not typically seen as such. Metamorphosing from an effective mechanism for the maintenance of inequality to an entity which undermines sexism, racism, homophobia and classism, is a stretch of the imagination. Suffice it to say that my date or these data suggest that health education, and in this case, bullying prevention, is deeply flawed, possibly counter-productive and situated within a complicated and broken system.

Emerging from a roundtable discussion with other social scientists, Dr. Elizabeth Payne, Director of the Queering Education Research Institute, summarizes powerful recommendations for schools:
Firstly, schools need to begin asking and answering difficult questions about gender, power, and systems of privilege. Students and teachers need to be provided with opportunities to recognize and explore the effects of these systems and the outcomes of their behaviors, including opportunities to learn about diverse lives and identities, or to interrogate their own and others’ positions of privilege—particularly around gender and sexuality. In short, rather than attempting to pathologize or celebrate particular individuals (which is exactly what traditional, popular anti-bullying initiatives have done), there need to be moments that facilitate recognition and change of systemic cultures… (Payne 2015).

Calls such as Payne’s – along with appeals for the feminist classroom or early childhood education which brings conscious attention to inequality, as discussed in earlier chapters - have yet to be brought tangibly to the realm of health education or integrated practically and concretely into classroom prevention materials. Looking to social science would serve as a useful (dare I say, vital) source from which to draw theoretical guidance for such endeavors. If bullying prevention – and, health education more broadly - continues to draw on the literature and language of public health for both guidance and legitimacy, building a robust body of public health research informed by the macro, theoretical writings of sociology could provide an invaluable resource, particularly if application was a primary emphasis. Bringing a social scientific perspective on power, cultural capital, conflict theory and a critique of identity categories based on intersectionality, post-structuralism and theories of stratification, for example, to the work of bullying prevention and health promotion would offer a nuanced and complex understanding – and, ideally, alternatives - to the pitfalls of using kindness, civility, individualism and medicalization to prevent bullying. This is a tall task, although I suspect a worthwhile one.

A 2015 article in The Lancet offers a solid example of cross-discipline collaboration; its authors, Jewkes, Flood and Lang, are researchers in gender-based violence and together represent the fields of medicine, public health and sociology. Published in a medical journal, the
article advocates for the engagement of prevention efforts with a critical analysis of gender. It suggests that health education would benefit from the theoretical considerations of sociology and demonstrates that the partnering of public health and social science would be a fruitful pairing. The *Lancet* piece describes a shift in violence prevention efforts towards approaches which seek “to transform the relations, norms, and systems that sustain gender inequality and violence” (1580). Jewkes and her colleagues describe a growing programmatic trend within prevention and intervention programs toward an examination of the role of masculine norms and associated behaviors as they relate to gender equity and systemic change. Speaking predominantly to a healthcare audience, the *Lancet* article uses language familiar to practitioners of prevention; it integrates both theories of change and ecological approaches and filters them through a lens which considers aspect of masculinity which promote violence. The authors write that the current high value placed on evidence-based practice has made articulating both a distinct theoretical approach and empirical basis for prevention programming an unwritten requirement; programs, according to the article, need to be built on an understanding that “many of these behaviours are rooted in expected practices or entitlements that flow from the hegemonic ideals that men should be strong, tough, in control over women and their bodies, heterosexual, and sexually dominant” (1584).

The graphic below (1581) visually represents Jewkes, Flood and Lang’s characterization of the changing views about men within a gendered paradigm of violence prevention. In short, it

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27 According to the Health Communication Capacity Collaborative, a project of USAID, gender transformative approaches (GTA) are programs and interventions that actively challenge gender norms, promote positions of social and political influence for women in communities, and address multi-leveled power inequities between persons of different genders. It calls for the integration of gender issues into all aspects of program and policy conceptualization, development, implementation and evaluation (2014).
describes a limited understanding of men’s location within both the perpetration and eradication of violence evolving into a perspective which is ultimately focused on systemic change (1582):
connections illustrated in the article and actual implementation is large, what appears here is a blueprint. It is, on the one hand, a unique and potentially game changing start and, on the other hand, the article provides a basis for revised benchmarks of program efficacy. In other words, if, as the authors advocate, prevention accounted for the mechanics of power and idealized masculinity, would evaluation measures shift from a reliance on risk behavior to reflect the methods of social science? Of the model programs mentioned in the *Lancet* article, none are located in schools, are implemented in the U.S., target young children or have a focus on bullying, leaving the application of the ideas to the school context as implied suggestions. Yet, as bullying prevention already uses the language of evidence-based practice and social ecology, Jewkes’ work begins to articulate the links between the language of public health and the gender and stratification theories of social science, with results that are instructive and valuable.²⁸

Ultimately, the essential questions boil down to application and utility. How can it possibly be enough to identify obstacles? Research is not needed to tell us that the social scientific literature ignores health education and anti-bullying work, that bullying prevention fails to address gender inequality, that schools under-value health education, that health education is flawed - as are the justifications for the status quo practice of health education, and that the role of education institutions in the process of reproducing inequality involves the infusion of the cultural ideology of neoliberalism in the socialization of children. What seems important is how these points can be useful to the practice of health education going forward.

And, what’s left over is the nagging question of possibility and whether health education and bullying prevention needs to be rooted in a large-scale vision of social justice and social change.

²⁸ Similarly, Barker and colleagues reviewed 58 programs looking at efficacy of questioning gender norms with men on improving health outcomes. In part, their evidence suggest that 1) gender transformative solutions seem to have great success in changing behavior among men and boys and 2) deliberate discussions about the social meanings of masculinity are associated with some of the highest rates and levels of effectiveness (2010).
to be useful. Is it enough to pair social science with public health to influence educational practice in such a way that it undermines the imperatives of civility and individualism and transgresses gender conformity; must the emphasis be on gendered social norms and power to be of use?

On the flip side, educational practice is not the only beneficiary of this significant pairing. Studying the locations at which the multiple topics addressed by this project intersect expands scholarly conceptualizations of social scientific theory by offering new areas of application, inquiry and understandings of contemporary manifestations of the long-studied themes of gender socialization, medicalization, stratification and the like.

In other words, the subjects of bullying and health education offer a unique lens for sociological study. We see the socialization of children into rigid and hierarchically arranged roles occurring within the context of prevention education, enshrouded in the mystique of urgency and crisis, and giving the impression, perhaps, of decisive action when bullying prevention is insidiously begetting bullying. We see what might be described as colorblind sexism or labeled a post-feminist form of gender inequality obscured and operating in children’s every day environment. And, we see clearly the expanded utility of key concepts and approaches from medical sociology for understanding the operation of power within a contemporary language.

A NOTE ABOUT THE LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

While the data is rich and my findings robust, the limitations of the research must be noted. The first of these reflects a potential sampling bias within the process of curricula selection. The initial listing of curricula was compiled from governmental websites, some which
have rigid criteria for inclusion. Some websites are not explicit as to their inclusion criteria; others have different standards for inclusion. This produced lists which were never identical. From this list, I was only able to include programs if accessible, either provided by the publisher or within the project’s budget. This resulted in the omission of at least two often used programs, parts of which I obtained and reviewed, but neither in their entirety. The portions reviewed, however, led me to conclude that the inclusion of either or both would in no way change my general findings. However, not having been able to obtain the full scope of materials resulted in their exclusion from the final data set.

My use of a convenience, rather than a random, sample, similarly raises questions about sampling bias. The choice to conduct focus groups allowed for a conversation which facilitated a deeper level of confidence and critique on the part of the participants. At the same time, given the logistical impossibility of bringing together a representative group of teachers – reflective of state or national demographics, a variety of educational backgrounds or some other variable – my sample was relatively homogenous. For example, according to the National Center for Educational Statistics approximately 83% of elementary school teachers are white, non-Hispanic, about 90% are female and just over half have earned master’s degrees (NCES). My sample reflects a similar pattern to the national picture, one that is typically not reflective of the demographics of the student body in a given district. My population is even more skewed; the vast majority of participants are white women; they work in central or eastern Massachusetts; and, all are enrolled in a program to earn a graduate degree in elementary education. Overall, the institution of education is not characterized by equity – the jobs are low paying, a persistent gender bias results in women filling most of the teaching positions with men in the upper level
administrative position, and districts tend to reflect economic and geographic segregation. This is reflected in my data, as well.

Further—and, perhaps most significant—is the fact of inconsistent implementation. It is possible to interpret haphazard implementation of anti-bullying programming as the manifestation of a crisis response in which schools have rushed to comply with state laws and to be responsive in the face of heightened media attention and occasional hyperbole. Both the focus group data and my experience in the field of health education say otherwise and point to persistent and widespread social and institutional barriers influencing implementation. Despite the availability of commercially prepared curricula, there is no standardization of what, when, who and how programs are conducted, of the scope and frequency of preparatory training or of accountability, supervision and evaluation. As one focus group participant recalled, one year she found a manual in the back of a closet when cleaning up her new classroom and thought the program might be good to try (FG#4).

As part of my intent is to provide food-for-thought for those involved in the implementation of bullying prevention programs, inconsistency is a limitation of the project which also challenges the formulation and administration of most recommendations. If the implementers and designers of bullying prevention were able to embrace a focus on gender inequality (or, if health education embraced a focus on systemic change), rather than the current emphasis on risk behavior and individual change, what mechanisms would need to be in place to sustain such significant change to programming that is under-resourced, uneven and varied in so many ways? How does one effect systemic change when the current state is predictably inconsistent? And, finally, if the neoliberalism, conservatism and individualism promoted by the current configuration of bullying prevention efforts is similarly promoted in other large
institutions, how might health education fare? If health education continues to get little attention can it ever serve the cause of social change?

Future research might link data collection to certain aspects of the state district profiles so that comparisons can be made by kind of community. This might facilitate the identification of distinctions rooted in income, graduation rates, race, SAT scores, teacher salaries and the like and help to reveal information about race-based and income inequality in their interplay with gender. That the items in the district profiles function as indicators of inequity might provide useful points of comparison to shed light on the relationship of bullying prevention to multiple points of disadvantage and privilege. Using a process like the model used here to unpack the discrepant rates of bullying when categorized by race might provide important information about contemporary mechanisms which maintain white privilege. Linking a willingness to attend to systemic and/or institutional factors to politics – whether individual voter registration, aggregated voting history or another measure is used, might also be instructive. Further, creatively and respectfully including the voices of children in this research would allow for the work to be responsive to their life experiences, perspectives and interpretations of gender socialization, bullying, prevention programming and the like – a necessary and obvious voice to give attention. Finally, subsequent research which engages with a deeper and current level of conceptual, theoretical and political complexity might also be revealing and instructive. Consider the impact of non-binary conceptualizations of gender on the socialization of children, bullying, prevention and social scientific research, for example. How might the planned shifting of federal resources away from public schools under the current administration make gender transformative education even more of a remote possibility?
IN SUM

Despite these limitations, this project set out to examine the relationship between gender and bullying prevention with a focus on identifying the role of inequality within the gendered messages delivered to young children. Predictably, progressive conceptualizations of gender were not discovered; rather, bullying prevention promotes conformity to conventional gender norms and helps educational institutions fill their role in maintaining the hierarchical nature of our neoliberal social order. The unique emphasis on civility, individualism and medicalization renders clear the function of bullying prevention in instilling dominant cultural themes into the elementary classroom, an important milieu in which early gendered socialization occurs. The transformative potential of health education remains obscured by the lack of value, resources, efficacy, consistency and coordinated, multi-disciplinary approaches, such that it continues to serve as a site for the reproduction of social inequality. And, in an odd twist, these complex relationships by which bullying begets bullying are ironically enshrouded in kindness, perpetuating the idea that the perfect cure rests in a smile, a handshake and a thank you.
Appendix 1 - State Bullying Laws with Enumerated Characteristics (USDOE:66)

Three Examples:

- North Carolina: "Bullying or harassing behavior includes, but is not limited to, acts reasonably perceived as being motivated by any actual or perceived differentiating characteristic, such as race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, gender, socioeconomic status, academic status, gender identity, physical appearance, sexual orientation, or mental, physical, developmental, or sensory disability, or by association with a person who has or is perceived to have one or more of these characteristics". (US HHS, *Key Components*)

- Massachusetts: The state bullying prevention law was amended in 2014 to require districts to acknowledge those who are victimized “based on actual or perceived differentiating characteristics” and to develop plans to support these students, this includes reporting and referral to DESE’s problem resolution process. (MADESE, Bullying)

- Missouri law cites “a commitment to providing equal protections for all students in its public schools”. (US DOE, *State Bullying Laws*:28)
Appendix 2 – Focus Group Scripts

AIC Script:

Next [Tuesday/Wednesday] night, concurrent with our class meeting, a focus group about elementary bullying prevention will be held. You are being asked to participate because, as a group, you represent seasoned teaching experience [new perspectives being brought to teaching] at an elementary level, as well as a range of professional backgrounds & district profiles.

The group will be conducted during class time & will last 1 to 1.5 hours. It is important to note that your participation is entirely voluntary. There will be no individual advantage if you opt to participate, such as money or favorable grading. And, there will be no punitive consequences if you opt out. In other words, your attendance will not be affected & no material will be presented in your absence that will necessitate make-up work. If you opt not to participate, you can remain in class with me at which time we will hold a short review & engage in planning for a future class meeting.

The group will be led by a researcher from Northeastern University. Prior to the start of the group, she will discuss confidentiality procedures & giving consent to participate & be audio taped. Feel free to ask the researcher any questions about consent. If you indicate interest to speak to her individually, she will make sure to accommodate the request.

Also note that you are not representing the districts for which you teach. No information reported will be attached to the name of the district, & no information shared here will be reported to the district. Your participation will simply serve to enrich the picture of what is currently occurring as schools respond to the increased attention – as well as legal mandates – regarding bullying in our student populations.

1. Moderator/Researcher Script:

My name is Margot Abels & I am a doctoral student at Northeastern University in the Sociology Department. This project is my dissertation research & involves a look at school-based health education via the current emphasis on bullying prevention. In addition to reviewing a number of anti-bullying curricula commonly implemented in elementary classrooms, my intent today is to get from you an idea of how implementation occurs.

As a former employee of the Massachusetts Department of Education & an educational consultant, I have many years of experience working with school faculty & staff providing training & technical assistance, particularly in the area of curriculum development & dissemination. This gives me both a familiarity with the language of K-12 education & a somewhat realistic picture of the supports & obstacles to the implementation of content which is considered outside of the common core, in this case, health & wellness education. I want to acknowledge, upfront, that, despite statewide legislation directing schools to engage in bullying prevention, there is tremendous variation from district to district & classroom to classroom & that the limitations of time, training, competing priorities & resources are very real.
I, alone, will be conducting this focus group, which will be audio taped, although I will take an occasional note throughout. Rest assured that questions will not reflect job requirements or individual performance & are not linked to employment evaluations, raises or promotions in any way. You will be asked about anti-bullying efforts for elementary school students and, very generally, prevention education in your classrooms.

Following the group, I will transcribe the content & conduct all data analysis. For the purpose of transcription, you will be assigned a numerical identification number, so that your name & your district cannot be linked to your responses. Findings about program implementation may be compared to the content of commercially developed curricula materials and/or district profiles; however, this information will be used solely for data analysis & will not be formally or systematically linked to district-level policies, assessments or specific information which could be used to identify you, your school or your district. And, for an additional level of security, all paperwork related to the focus groups & audio tapes will be kept in my office where forms associating participant names with an assigned number will be secured separately from tapes, transcripts & other written materials.

This information is spelled out in the document each of you have been given. You will also notice that included here is my contact information as well as that of the study’s Principal Investigator & the head of the Institutional Review Board at Northeastern. You might want to hang on to this page for a while in case you need to reach any of us with questions or concerns.

And, finally, if our discussion of bullying reminds you of past victimization, the targeting of someone you care about and/or unresolved or mishandled professional or organizational responses to bullying, feel free to leave the group at any time (returning at your discretion). I am also available to speak with you after the group today or at a later time. Both referrals to important agencies & again, my contact information has been given to you.

Before we begin, are there any questions or concerns? Any questions needing to be asked “off line” or in private?

- **Question 1:** Briefly, what bullying prevention education occurs in your school, who is the primary implementer & what is your role vis-à-vis bullying prevention education?

- **Question 2:** Many classroom programs incorporate vignettes which can function as tools to facilitate discussion of common bullying incidents. I’m going to read you a vignette based on one found in a widely used commercially produced curriculum. I’ve given you a copy to follow along & jot down notes, if you’d like. I would like to discuss your thoughts & reactions to the vignette.

- **Prompts:**
  - What do you see as the main themes, dynamics, points which arise in this vignette.
  - What aspects of the vignette would you expect to be addressed by the teacher facilitating this lesson?
What messages might be embedded that are important to highlight for the students?
What are your thoughts on how this might be used effectively?
Would you respond differently if the scenario was changed - for example, if the characters were girls & not boys?

- **Question 3:** There are many who believe that schools play a significant role in teaching young children about gender, such that subtle & overt messages surround students which shape them into “girls” or “boys”. Agree/have observed? What about in the context of bullying prevention efforts? Have you seen gender cues being taught? Thoughts? Reactions?

- **Prompts:**
  - What you observed particular messages about being masculine or feminine being modeled or taught?
  - What about subtle reinforcement?
  - What about the absence of messages?
  - What about learning in a context in which normative gender roles are reinforced or even policed?
  - Are these norms ever disrupted?
  - Additional comments, concluding remarks & thank you.

2. **Vignette²⁹:**

   Jacob was dribbling a basketball in the gym during recess. He didn’t feel like playing with any of the other kids. So he played by himself, pretending he was a basketball star.

   Suddenly, Garrett, a big third grader, swooped in & stole Jacob’s ball.

   “Hey, give that back!” shouted Jacob. “Why should I, punk?” Garrett said.

   Jacob ran at Garrett & tried to get the ball, but Garrett threw it to Bryce, another third grader. As Jacob ran at Bryce, Bryce laughed & threw the ball back to Garrett. The bigger boys kept throwing the ball back & forth, keeping it away from Jacob. This made Jacob really mad, & the madder he got, the more the boys laughed at him.

   Then Garrett fumbled the ball. Jacob grabbed it & began running. But before he got far, Bryce tackled him & held him down. The ball bounded away from Jacob & Garrett grabbed it.

   Just then, the whistle blew; recess was over. Bryce let Jacob get up. Jacob’s knees & elbows were skinned, & they burned. Jacob felt like crying.

²⁹ This vignette was selected from one of the five curricula included in the study - *Positive Action*, Instructors Manual. Lesson 77-Unit 4- Grade 2.
Garrett watched him with a smart-aleck look on his face, & then he threw the ball at Jacob, hard.

“Here’s your ball, you baby, before you start crying”.

“Boo-hoo-hoo,” said Bryce in a snotty voice.

“You’re both stupid & I hate you!” Jacob yelled.

“Not as stupid as you are,” Bryce said, & both of them laughed again.

Then Jacob saw his teacher, Mrs. Neville, walking toward them. “Come on, boys, we’re waiting on you!” She stopped & looked at them carefully. “Is there a problem here?”

“They stole my ball!” Jacob yelled.

Bryce gave Jacob a mean look.

But Garrett said in a very polite voice; “We were just playing, Mrs. Neville. Jacob’s just mad because he fell. That’s all”.

“Jacob, did you hurt yourself? Do you need to see the nurse?” Mrs. Neville asked.

Jacob wanted to say ‘Yes,’ but with Bryce & Garrett watching him, he felt embarrassed & scared, so he said, “No”.

After that, when Garrett & Bryce saw Jacob, they’d push him into the wall or trip him, & pretend it was an accident. “Oh, Jacob, did you hurt yourself?” Bryce would say in a smart-aleck voice. Or, they’d steal the ball, or any other toy he was playing with. “Boo-hoo-hoo,” Garrett would say in a snotty voice.

And, Jacob was so nervous & mad & scared that he started feeling sick every morning before school.
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