Evaluation of a Brief, School-Based Bullying Bystander Intervention for Elementary School Students

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This study evaluated a brief, bystander bullying intervention for elementary school students. Students in the intervention group reported an increase in knowledge and confidence to act as “defenders.” Students in the intervention group also reported an increase in self-esteem relative to the control group, although this finding was limited to sixth-grade students. The study found no group differences in sense of school belonging. This article discusses implications for school counselors.

Bullying and the Associated Negative Consequences
Bullying is a widespread social problem with approximately 25% of students in the United States reporting being bullied at school (U.S. Department of Education, 2015; Zhang, 2017).

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found that bystanders are at greater risk of substance abuse than students who are bullied and are at higher risk of negative nonclinical outcomes including concerns about schoolwork, drugs and alcohol, body image, and interpersonal and familial problems compared to students who perpetrate bullying behaviors.

**Bystander Roles**

Research indicates 60% of elementary school students report witnessing bullying at school (Aboud & Miller, 2007). For these students, intervening requires a willingness to engage in risk-taking behavior (Pozzoli & Gini, 2010). For example, when students intervene on behalf of victims, they also risk being victimized themselves by aggressive peers who view the protective behavior negatively (Meter & Card, 2015). Thus, students respond differently to bullying incidences when they witness bullying behaviors.

**Bystanders are at greater risk of substance abuse than students who are bullied and are at higher risk of negative nonclinical outcomes.**

Bystanders are students who witness bullying without being directly involved as a victim or perpetrator and who can have a significant impact on the bullying incident (Padgett & Notar, 2013). Researchers have also used the term “upstanders” to refer to students who act as defenders on behalf of victims of bullying (Dunn, 2009). Researchers have categorized student bystander responses into four distinct roles: (a) “assistants” who actively and directly help the bully victimize a target, (b) “reinforcers” who laugh at or simply witness the situation, (c) “outsiders” who often disengage or walk away from the group, and (d) “defenders” who intervene and/or console the target of bullying (Salmivalli, 2014; Salmivalli, Voeten, & Poskiparta, 2011). On the other hand, in elementary school classrooms, when bystanders reinforce students who bully or rarely defend victims, students who are victims report increased social anxiety and peer rejection (Kärnä, Voeten, Poskiparta, & Salmivalli, 2010). Furthermore, student defenders in elementary school report decreased loneliness and increased social support (Olenik-Shemesh et al., 2015).

**Self-Esteem and Sense of School Belonging**

Researchers have identified both self-esteem (Grills & Ollendick, 2002; Kowalski & Limber, 2013; Raskauskas, Rubiano, Offen, & Wayland, 2015) and sense of school belonging (Duggins, Kuperminc, Henrich, Smalls-Glover, & Perilla, 2016; Eliot, Cornell, Gregory, & Fan, 2010; Goldweber, Waasdorp, & Bradshaw, 2013) as psychological buffers against bullying. Specifically, students with high self-esteem report being targets of bullying less frequently than students with low self-esteem (Kowalski & Limber, 2013). Further, for students who are victimized, high self-esteem also serves as a buffer against anxiety (Grills & Ollendick, 2002) and academic problems (Raskauskas et al., 2015). Similarly, a strong sense of school belonging is protective against both victimization (Duggins et al., 2016) and bullying perpetration (Goldweber et al., 2013). Students who have a positive perception of teachers and school
staff are more willing to seek help for bullying (Eliot et al., 2010). However, students who perpetrate bullying behaviors and who are victims of bullying report decreased sense of school belonging and poor relationships with teachers (Raskauskas, Gregory, Harvey, Rifshara, & Evans, 2010). These studies support the efficacy of comprehensive, school-wide bystander interventions in decreasing anxiety and negative perceptions of peers (Williford et al., 2012) and increasing empathy toward victims and commitment to intervene on behalf of victims (Kärnä et al., 2011).

**WHEN BYSTANDERS INTERVENE OR DEFEND THE TARGET, BULLYING BEHAVIOR DECREASES.**

Students who witness bullying report negative consequences (Rivers et al., 2009) and may also become victims themselves (Meter & Card, 2015) or engage in probullying behaviors (Saarento & Salmivalli, 2015). Therefore, identifying protective factors for these students is important. Because research indicates elementary school students who act as defenders report increased confidence and a higher sense of support than those who act passively (Olenik-Shemesh et al., 2015), training elementary school bystanders to take on the defender role may increase their self-esteem and sense of belonging, thus buffering them against negative outcomes and future victimization.

**Bystander Intervention Programs**

Given the extent of the problem of bullying, all 50 states in the U.S. have legislation that requires school personnel to intervene and protect students against school bullying (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2015). The current standard for school-based bullying prevention and intervention is comprehensive, school-wide programs (Ttofi & Farrington, 2011). According to a meta-analysis, although bystander intervention is an important component of combating school bullying, few programs include this as part of comprehensive interventions (Polanin, Espelage, & Pigott, 2012). Moreover, only a few studies have examined the impact of bystander interventions on students who are trained to intervene as defenders among elementary school students (Kärnä et al., 2011; Williford et al., 2012). Thus, an important role for the school counselor is effectively implementing programs that reduce bullying to create a safe school climate and promoting emotional and social skills so students learn acceptable behaviors that improve social interactions (ASCA, 2014). These interactions include creating positive and supportive relationships with one another, demonstrating empathy, and engaging as advocates with the ability to assert themselves when necessary (ASCA, 2014).

Initial research on the STAC program provides support for its effectiveness in teaching student bystanders intervention strategies they can use to act as defenders (Midgett, 2016; Midgett et al., 2015). Specifically, researchers found that after completing the STAC program, middle school students reported an increase in their ability to identify different types of bullying behavior, knowledge of the STAC strategies, and general confidence intervening in bullying situations (Midgett et al., 2015). Researchers also demonstrated preliminary support for the STAC intervention in training elementary school students as defenders, with the greatest effects found among fifth-grade students (Midgett, 2016). Although these studies serve as an important first step in learning about whether STAC is effective in instructing students to intervene as defenders, neither study included a control group or investigated socioemotional outcomes for the students trained to act as defenders.

**The STAC Program**

STAC is a school-based, brief bystander intervention that encourages students to act as defenders on behalf of victims of bullying (Midgett et al., 2015). Bystanders are taught the STAC strategies: “stealing the show,” “turning it over,” “accompanying others,” and “coaching compassion.” A unique feature of the STAC program is that it is designed to be implemented by school counselors rather than taught through a teacher-delivered curriculum. Shifting program leadership to school counselors is consistent with the ASCA National Model (American School Counselor Association [ASCA], 2012), which identifies the role of the school counselor as a systemic change agent, promoting student achievement through school-wide initiatives, including programs that promote a safe learning environment.

**The Current Study**

Despite evidence that acting as a defender can reduce bullying and is associated with positive adjustment among elementary school student bystanders, to our knowledge, only one study to date (Williford et al., 2012) has investigated the impact of brief, bystander programs on socioemotional outcomes for elementary students trained to act as defenders. Thus, the purpose of this study is to extend the literature by evaluating a brief, bystander intervention on training bystanders to be defenders to increase the socioemotional
adjustment of these students. More specifically, this study investigated the impact of a brief, bystander intervention, STAC, on increasing reports of knowledge and confidence related to becoming a defender and on increasing self-esteem and sense of school belonging among elementary students trained to act as defenders.

In terms of differences in outcomes by grade level, researchers have found that students in fifth grade differentiate aggressive and prosocial behaviors at a higher level than students in third grade (Sullivan & Stoner, 2011). Prior research examining the STAC program indicates the training was most effective for fifth-grade students (Midgnett, 2016). Therefore, another aim of this study was to examine grade level as a moderator of intervention effects, thereby investigating if one grade level is optimal in terms of bystanders’ likelihood to benefit from being trained to act as defenders.

To achieve these aims, the authors randomly assigned students to an intervention group or a wait-list control group. The authors hypothesized that, at a 30-day follow-up, (a) students in the intervention group would report an increase in ability to identify bullying behaviors, knowledge of the STAC strategies, and confidence in intervening in bullying situations compared to those in the control group, (b) students in the intervention group would report an increase in self-esteem measured by the Single-Item Self-Esteem Scale (SISE; Robins, Hendin, & Trezensiewski, 2001) and sense of school belonging measured by the Psychological Sense of School Membership Scale (PSSM; Goodenow, 1993) compared to students in the control group, and (c) grade level would moderate intervention effects with greater effects demonstrated among students in higher grade levels.

**METHODS**

**Participants**

Elementary school students from an urban, public Northwestern school participated in this study. The school’s population included approximately 458 students (51% female, 49% male), with 81% of students identifying as White, 10% Hispanic, 5% Asian American, 2% African American, and 2% as two or more races. Of the students at this school, 45% qualified for free lunch and an additional 8% qualified for reduced-price lunch. The school is located in a school district in which all elementary schools include kindergarten through sixth grade. The sample of 63 elementary school students included 55.6% females and 44.4% males enrolled in fourth grade (n = 22), fifth (n = 20), and sixth (n = 21) grades. Participants ranged in age from 9-12 years (M = 10.54; SD = 0.93), with reported racial backgrounds of 71.4% White, 11.1% Native American, 3.2% African American, and 14.3% other. Overall, 92.1% (n = 58) of the 63 participants completed the 30-day follow-up assessment. The authors found no differences in the rate of attrition across the two groups, χ²(1) = 1.84, p > .05.

**Procedure**

The research team for this study consisted of two counselor educators in a program that includes school counseling and a school counseling graduate student. Members of the research team worked with the counselor at the selected school to conduct the study procedures. The school counselor selected 71 students (22-24 per grade level) to participate in the program. In collaboration with teachers, the school counselor selected students perceived by the counselor and teachers as possessing maturity, leadership, and responsibility to pilot the program at her school. To determine leadership potential, the school counselor relied on the teachers’ experience with students in the classroom setting and her experiences working with students during classroom lessons, one-on-one brief counseling meetings, and small group meetings. The school counselor selected student leaders to participate because of their potential to act as role models defending victims of bullying at school. After the students were selected, the school counselor briefly met with each student to discuss potential interest in the program. Of the 71 identified students, 67 (94%) students expressed interest in participating. Interested students received an informed consent form to be signed by a parent or guardian and returned to the school counselor. The school counselor followed up with a phone call to parents or guardians when necessary. Of these 67 parents or guardians, 63 (94%) provided written consent for their child to participate. The school counselor then met with each of these students briefly to explain the research in more detail and collect student assent. All students with parental or guardian consent assented to participate.

**Although Bystander Intervention Is an Important Component of Combating School Bullying, Few Programs Include This.**

The participating elementary school students were randomly assigned to the intervention or wait-list control group. Of the 63 eligible students, 50.8% (n = 32) were assigned to the intervention group and 49.2% (n = 31) to the wait-list control group. A series of chi-square and independent sample t-test analyses revealed no demographic differences between students in the intervention and wait-list control groups.

All students were given the research questionnaires, which included the Student-Advocates Pre- and Post-Scale, SISE, PSSM, and demographic questions at baseline (the first week of March) and at a 30-day follow-up (the first week of April). The first author and research assistants read...
A BRIEF, COUNSELOR-LED BYSTANDER INTERVENTION CAN INCREASE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENTS’ REPORTED KNOWLEDGE AND CONFIDENCE TO ACT APPROPRIATELY WHEN THEY OBSERVE BULLYING.

The authors selected the SISE because it adequately measures subjective feelings of self-worth among elementary aged children, providing a practical alternative to longer measures of self-esteem (Robins et al., 2001).

Psychological Sense of School Membership Scale. Sense of school belonging was measured using the PSSM (Goodenow, 1993). The PSSM comprises 18 self-report items that measure students’ perception of belonging to their school. Examples include: “People notice when I am good at something,” “I am treated with as much respect as other students,” and “Teachers here are not interested in people like me.” Items are rated on a 5-point Likert Scale ranging from Not at all true to Completely true. Five items were reverse scored with all items summed to create a total scale score. Overall, the PSSM has well-established concurrent and predictive validity and supported factor structures for middle school students (You, Ritchey, Furlong, Shocet, & Boman, 2011). Students who score high on school belonging measured by the PSSM also report high scores on measures assessing school success (McMahon, Parnes, Keys, & Viola, 2008), school attendance (Sanchez, Colon, & Esparza, 2005) and grade point average (Booker, 2007). Researchers also found an inverse relationship between the PSSM and reported depression (Sanchez et al., 2005) and anxiety (McMahon et al., 2008). Researchers have reported test-retest reliability of .78 for the PSSM over a 4-week period (Hagborg, 1994) and .56 - .60 over a 12-month period (Shocet, Dadds, Ham, & Montague, 2006). Reported coefficient alphas range from .78 - .95 for elementary and middle school samples (You et al., 2011). For this sample, Chronbach’s alpha was $\alpha = .85$. Although the PSSM was originally validated with middle school student samples (Goodenow, 1993), the authors selected the PSSM because it is a commonly used measure of school belonging in research with elementary school students (Espelage, Hong, Rao, & Thornberg, 2015; Gutman & Midgley, 2000; Im, Hughes, Kwok,
Puckett, & Cerdia, 2013; McMahon, Wernsman, & Rose, 2009; Sari, 2012). Moreover, validation samples include sixth-grade students (Espelage et al., 2015; Gutman & Midgley, 2000; Im et al., 2013; McMahon et al., 2009; Sari, 2012), which are included as part of the elementary school sample in the current study.

**The STAC Intervention**

The first author, a middle school counselor, and two counseling graduate students collaborated to develop the STAC intervention to train students to become “defenders.” The authors developed the program in response to a request from a local school counselor whose school did not have the resources to adopt a comprehensive, school-wide intervention. The school counselor was involved in every step of the program development, reviewing the work conducted by the team and providing feedback for program design and implementation. The STAC program includes both didactic and role-playing components and is adapted from CARES, which is the bystander component of Bully-Proofing, a comprehensive school-wide intervention (Garrity, Jens, Porter, Sager, & Short-Camilli, 2004). The program was developed initially as a 90-minute training for middle school students and was adapted to 75 minutes for elementary school students. To adapt the program to the elementary school level, the researchers shortened the didactic component and consulted with an elementary school counselor who reviewed the program and helped modify the role plays so scenarios would be appropriate for this age group. Graduate students provided the STAC program. The intervention is a training session that includes a didactic component and an experiential role-playing component that are used to train the students in the four STAC Strategies (for details, see Midglett et al., 2015). Following the training, the first and third authors conducted two 20-minute group meetings over the next 30 days. The program delivery (including the didactic and role-play-
after they were targeted and inviting them to go for a walk during recess.

“Coaching Compassion.” Coaching compassion involves gently confronting the bully either during or after the bullying incident to communicate that his or her behavior is unacceptable. The defender also encourages the student who bullied to consider what it would feel like to be the target in the situation, thereby fostering empathy toward the target. Defenders were encouraged to implement coaching compassion when they have a relationship with the student who bullied or if the student who bullied is in a younger grade and the defender believes the younger student will respect them.

**Post-Training Groups.** Students who participated in the STAC training met with the first author and a research assistant, a master’s student in school counseling, for two 20-minute group meetings per grade level after the training was conducted. During these meetings, the researchers helped students recall the STAC strategies and discussed with students which strategies they had utilized and whether they seemed to be effective in stopping bullying. The researchers also answered any questions from students related to being a defender and helped them brainstorm effective ways to implement the strategies, use more than one strategy to intervene, and, when appropriate, to work as a team to intervene during or after a bullying incident.

**DATA ANALYSIS**

The authors used SPSS version 21.0 to conduct all analyses. They conducted three GLM repeated measures analyses of variance (ANOVAs) to examine differences, from baseline to follow-up assessments, in knowledge and confidence to act as a defender, self-esteem, and sense of belonging. The three independent variables were time (baseline, follow-up), group (intervention, control), and grade (fourth, fifth, sixth). The authors included grade level as an independent variable to examine grade as a moderator of intervention effects. They used an alpha level of $p < .05$ to determine statistical significance and used partial eta squared ($\eta^2_p$) as the measure of effect size.

**RESULTS**

The authors examined data for extreme case and for normality and did not identify any outliers. All variables were within the normal range for skew and kurtosis. Means and standard deviations by group and grade level for each outcome variable are presented in Table 1.

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**TABLE 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcomes</th>
<th>Grade Level</th>
<th>Fourth ($n = 20$)</th>
<th>Fifth ($n = 20$)</th>
<th>Sixth ($n = 18$)</th>
<th>Total ($N = 58$)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Peer Advocacy</td>
<td></td>
<td>$M$ ($SD$)</td>
<td>$M$ ($SD$)</td>
<td>$M$ ($SD$)</td>
<td>$M$ ($SD$)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>Baseline</td>
<td>36.27 (4.90)</td>
<td>37.11 (4.29)</td>
<td>39.70 (2.87)</td>
<td>37.67 (4.26)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Follow-up</td>
<td>35.73 (4.90)</td>
<td>37.78 (4.94)</td>
<td>37.80 (4.39)</td>
<td>37.03 (4.69)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intervention</td>
<td>Baseline</td>
<td>35.44 (6.48)</td>
<td>34.90 (3.84)</td>
<td>39.25 (3.11)</td>
<td>36.37 (4.93)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Follow-up</td>
<td>37.89 (4.70)</td>
<td>40.00 (3.43)</td>
<td>41.25 (2.55)</td>
<td>39.67 (3.81)</td>
</tr>
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<td>Self-Esteem</td>
<td></td>
<td>$M$ ($SD$)</td>
<td>$M$ ($SD$)</td>
<td>$M$ ($SD$)</td>
<td>$M$ ($SD$)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>Baseline</td>
<td>5.09 (1.45)</td>
<td>5.78 (1.99)</td>
<td>5.60 (1.35)</td>
<td>5.47 (1.57)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Follow-up</td>
<td>5.09 (2.02)</td>
<td>5.56 (1.88)</td>
<td>5.10 (1.52)</td>
<td>5.23 (1.77)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intervention</td>
<td>Baseline</td>
<td>5.78 (0.97)</td>
<td>5.91 (1.04)</td>
<td>5.50 (1.60)</td>
<td>5.75 (1.18)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Follow-up</td>
<td>5.22 (1.56)</td>
<td>5.36 (1.50)</td>
<td>6.13 (1.46)</td>
<td>5.54 (1.50)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of Belonging</td>
<td></td>
<td>$M$ ($SD$)</td>
<td>$M$ ($SD$)</td>
<td>$M$ ($SD$)</td>
<td>$M$ ($SD$)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>Baseline</td>
<td>73.55 (5.24)</td>
<td>70.44 (10.44)</td>
<td>72.00 (11.00)</td>
<td>72.10 (8.87)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Follow-up</td>
<td>71.52 (9.95)</td>
<td>69.11 (13.39)</td>
<td>72.30 (10.32)</td>
<td>71.86 (10.88)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intervention</td>
<td>Baseline</td>
<td>78.22 (6.85)</td>
<td>71.36 (10.43)</td>
<td>70.88 (15.92)</td>
<td>73.43 (11.46)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Follow-up</td>
<td>78.44 (7.04)</td>
<td>73.09 (12.05)</td>
<td>72.56 (15.23)</td>
<td>74.66 (11.65)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Knowledge and Confidence to Act as a Defender

Results indicated a significant main effect for time, Wilks’ Lambda = .88, \(F(1, 52) = 6.74, p < .01, \eta^2_p = .12\), and significant interaction effect for Time x Group, Wilks’ Lambda = .78, \(F(1, 52) = 14.34, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .22\). Examination of the \(\eta^2_p\) indicates the effect size was large. No other interaction effects were significant. As hypothesized, students in the intervention group reported an increase in knowledge of bullying and the STAC strategies, and in their confidence to act as a defender relative to students in the wait-list control group (see Figure 1).

Self-Esteem

Results indicated a significant interaction effect for Time x Group x Grade, Wilks’ Lambda = .89, \(F(1, 52) = 3.37, p < .05, \eta^2_p = .12\). Examination of the \(\eta^2_p\) indicates the effect size was medium. No other main effects or interaction effects were significant. Follow-up analyses indicated a significant Time x Group interaction for sixth-grade students only, Wilks’ Lambda = .78, \(F(1, 16) = 4.42, p < .05, \eta^2_p = .22\). The interaction effect was not significant for fourth-grade students, Wilks’ Lambda = .89, \(F(1, 18) = 2.25, p > .05, \eta^2_p = .11\), or fifth-grade students, Wilks’ Lambda = .98, \(F(1, 18) = 2.00, p > .05, \eta^2_p = .02\). The \(\eta^2_p\) indicates the effect size was large. As seen in Figure 2, sixth-grade students in the intervention group reported an increase in self-esteem, whereas students in the wait-list control group reported a decrease in self-esteem.

Sense of School Belonging

Results indicated no significant main effects or interaction effects for sense of belonging. Contrary to the hypothesis, the authors found no significant differences between the intervention group and wait-list control group.

DISCUSSION

Because bullying begins to escalate in late elementary school (Pellegrini & Van Ryzin, 2011), identifying effective bullying programs that can be implemented at the elementary school level is important. Overall, results provided support for the STAC program as a promising approach for equipping elementary school students who witness bullying with the knowledge and confidence they need to act as “defenders.” Results also provided partial support for the impact of the STAC program on socioemotional adjustment outcomes for students. Specifically, sixth-grade students trained to act as defenders in the STAC program reported a larger increase in self-esteem relative to those in the wait-list control group. There were, however, no significant differences between the two groups in sense of belonging.

As hypothesized, students participating in the STAC program reported a significant increase in knowledge of what different types of bullying look like, and their confidence to act as defenders increased. This is consistent with previous research suggesting that training programs can be effective in reducing bullying (e.g., Pellegrini & Van Ryzin, 2011).
These results extend prior research demonstrating differences among students completing the STAC program (Midgett, 2016; Midgett et al., 2015) by demonstrating these effects using random assignment to experimental condition (intervention vs. control group). Thus, findings indicate that a brief, counselor-led bystander intervention can increase elementary school students’ reported knowledge and confidence to act appropriately when they observe bullying, rather than participating in the bullying either actively or through passive avoidance. However, in contrast to prior research indicating the STAC training is most effective for fifth-grade students (Midgett, 2016), grade level did not moderate these effects. Whether the discrepancy between these two studies is related to differences in the samples or differences in the research methodology (e.g., pre-post design vs. random assignment to experimental condition) is not clear.

In contrast, results only partially supported hypotheses regarding socio-emotional adjustment. As predicted, students in the intervention group reported a larger increase in self-esteem compared to students in the wait-list control group. This is an important finding considering increased self-esteem can serve as a buffer against the negative effects associated with bullying (Grills & Ollendick, 2002; Kowalski & Limber, 2013; Raskauskas et al., 2015). However, this effect was moderated by grade level. Specifically, the difference in self-esteem between the two groups was significant for sixth-grade students only. Thus, participating in the STAC training may provide a buffering effect for sixth-grade students who observe bullying. This finding is consistent with prior research indicating that the training is more effective for older students (Midgett, 2016) and that students in upper elementary school are primed to be trained as defenders (Sullivan & Stoner, 2011). Taken together, these findings suggest that sixth grade may be an optimal time to implement the STAC program to provide a protective effect against negative consequences for bystanders. However, although the SISE has moderate convergent validity among elementary school students, correlations between the SISE and established measures of self-esteem are higher for older students (Robins et al., 2001). Thus, one explanation for changes in self-esteem among sixth-grade students only is that the measure may be more valid for sixth-grade students relative to those in lower grades.

Finally, the authors found no significant differences between the two groups on sense of school belonging. Students invited to participate in the intervention can increase elementary school students’ sense of belonging, even when compared to students in the wait-list control group. This is an important finding considering increased self-esteem can serve as a buffer against the negative effects associated with bullying (Grills & Ollendick, 2002; Kowalski & Limber, 2013; Raskauskas et al., 2015). However, this effect was moderated by grade level. Specifically, the difference in self-esteem between the two groups was significant for sixth-grade students only. Thus, participating in the STAC training may provide a buffering effect for sixth-grade students who observe bullying. This finding is consistent with prior research indicating that the training is more effective for older students (Midgett, 2016) and that students in upper elementary school are primed to be trained as defenders (Sullivan & Stoner, 2011). Taken together, these findings suggest that sixth grade may be an optimal time to implement the STAC program to provide a protective effect against negative consequences for bystanders. However, although the SISE has moderate convergent validity among elementary school students, correlations between the SISE and established measures of self-esteem are higher for older students (Robins et al., 2001). Thus, one explanation for changes in self-esteem among sixth-grade students only is that the measure may be more valid for sixth-grade students relative to those in lower grades.

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being trained as a defender increases self-esteem for students in upper grade levels, or the impact of the STAC program on the prevalence of bullying at school.

**Directions for Future Research**
This study serves as a first step in evaluating the STAC program, but future research is needed to establish the efficacy of the program with elementary school students. Researchers need to include larger and more diverse student samples to increase the generalizability of the results. It is also important to use random selection procedure for recruitment of participants. Further, investigating the effects of the program after training all students at school to act as defenders would be interesting, instead of only selecting leaders to be trained. Another important investigation would be whether students trained in the program utilize the STAC strategies they learn in the training. Measurement of the program’s impact on decreasing bullying also is essential in establishing the efficacy of the STAC program. Researchers can evaluate the efficacy of the STAC program by evaluating school outcome data, including reports of bullying at school from students, teachers, and staff.

**Implications for School Counselors**
This study has practical implications for school counselors. Although comprehensive, school-wide intervention programs are considered a best practice for bullying intervention, these programs can be difficult to implement due to required resources and time allocation. Thus, research investigating brief, cost-effective programs is needed. Results from this study suggest that the STAC program, which shifts implementation from teachers to school counselors and requires few resources for implementation, may be a promising approach to bullying intervention. Although more research is needed to evaluate the efficacy of the program in decreasing bullying behavior, results of this study provide initial support for a counselor-led program that can train students to act as defenders to reduce bullying behavior.

Results from this study provide preliminary evidence suggesting the STAC program can increase self-esteem for older elementary school students trained to act as defenders to stop bullying at school. This is an important finding because high self-esteem buffers students against bullying (Grills & Ollendick, 2002; Kowalski & Limber, 2013; Raskauskas et al., 2015) and students who intervene on behalf of victims can become a target of bullying themselves (Meter & Card, 2015). This is particularly important because bullying begins to escalate in upper elementary school as students prepare to transition to middle school (Pellegrini & Van Ryzin, 2011). School counselors can utilize the STAC program to increase protective factors against bullying for older students by expanding program implementation to all sixth grade students. Further, the STAC program was designed for school counselors to take on a leadership role in program implementation, which is consistent with the ASCA National Model’s (2012) identification of school counselors as systemic change agents implementing programs promoting a safe learning environment and teaching students appropriate social and emotional skills (ASCA, 2014).

Finally, school counselors can adapt the STAC program to meet the needs of their school and incorporate the training into their classroom lesson curriculum. This is consistent with the ASCA National Model’s (2012; 2014) identification of the importance of the school counselor role in delivery of a school counseling core curriculum designed for students’ developmentally appropriate knowledge, attitudes, and skills. School counselors can also conduct follow-up meetings within the context of school counseling program lessons where they discuss the strategies and implementation of using the STAC program to combat bullying at school and to potentially increase student self-esteem. For schools with limited counseling resources, school counselors can work in partnership with a local counselor education program to provide STAC training with the help of counseling students.

**CONCLUSION**
This study evaluated a brief, school-based bystander bullying intervention for elementary school students. Results indicated that students who completed the STAC intervention reported increased knowledge of different types of bullying behavior, knowledge of the STAC strategies, and general confidence intervening as a “defender.” Findings also show partial support that training students to act as defenders may increase socioemotional protective factors against bullying for older students. Overall, results suggest the STAC intervention is a promising counselor-led approach to bystander bullying intervention that can be implemented with significantly fewer resources than comprehensive school-wide programs.

**REFERENCES**


