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Don't Hate, Just Mediate: Understanding the Impact of a Conflict Mediation Program on Adolescents' Experiences with Conflict, Safety and Help Seeking in Urban Schools

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Don't hate, just mediate: understanding the impact of a conflict mediation program on  
adolescents' experiences with conflict, safety and help seeking in urban schools

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree Doctor of  
Philosophy in Education

by

Jonathan Gillespie

2014



## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Don't hate, just mediate: understanding the impact of a conflict mediation program on adolescents' experiences with conflict, safety and help seeking in urban schools

by

Jonathan Gillespie

Doctor of Philosophy in Education

University of California, Los Angeles, 2014

Professor Wellford Wilms, Chair

Conflict, bullying and harassment are serious concerns in our public schools. This kind of school violence threatens not only students' health and safety, but also their ability to learn and have positive, educational experiences. Numerous individual and environmental factors contribute to students' decisions about how to respond to conflict or seek help for these problems. Conflict mediation is one type of program that has received widespread support and adoption; however, the results of many school-based, anti-violence interventions have been mixed. This study was one of the first to investigate the effects of a mentor-based, conflict mediation program that places undergraduate mediators in several secondary schools of a large, urban school district. This study used mixed research methods to examine adolescent students' exposure to violence and help seeking attitudes and the perceptions of students who participated in the conflict mediation program. Survey

results indicated that students in the program schools often reported higher exposure to conflict than national surveys with verbal bullying being the most frequent type. In addition, students generally reported favorable attitudes about help seeking. The small schools and the high schools reported the greatest willingness to seek help, which needs further exploration in future research. Program participants indicated that negative affect was the only measure that decreased significantly from pre- to post-test. However, the student interview data suggested that the most important benefits of the mediation program included reductions in feelings of anger and developing relationships with the undergraduate mediators who acted as mentors to the students. Furthermore, the student interviews revealed several factors in the environment such as peer culture and a school's response to conflict, which, if left unaddressed, may attenuate or even undermine the anticipated benefits of the program. Taking these findings together, the conflict mediation program appears to meet the developmental needs of adolescents by creating safe, confidential spaces for students to work through problems independently with their peers. It also represents a unique approach for reducing conflict by providing an alternative to the top down, disciplinary strategies commonly used to deal with conflict and aggression.

The dissertation of Jonathan Gillespie is approved.

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2014

## DEDICATION

I'd like to dedicate this to Carl Rogers,  
who taught me that my experience counts for  
more than I could ever hope to learn from school  
(the irony of getting this from his book is not lost on me).

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## **Introduction**

School violence including conflict, bullying and peer harassment is a serious problem for educators and research has consistently documented its harmful effects on students' emotional and physical health as well as their ability to learn in school. Federal education policy highlights the seriousness of the problem by funding extensive research and data collection on school violence as well as ensuring that schools gather and report on their safety statistics (Merrell, Gueldner, Ross, & Isava, 2008). While acute incidents of violence in school have steadily declined since the 1990s, research also indicates that bullying, intimidation and verbal and physical aggression still represent major threats to students' safety especially since they may be more difficult to detect in schools than overt violence (Mayer & Furlong, 2010). These covert kinds of aggression appear to peak during middle school and adolescents generally report high exposure to these incidents because, in part, peers relationships become increasingly important. Furthermore, the psychological, emotional and physical costs of threats to students' safety are also serious, and, if not adequately addressed, may escalate into even more serious conflicts, violence or even suicide. The present study focuses middle and high school students' experiences with the relatively less severe, but more common types of conflict and the extent to which a conflict mediation intervention may reduce the burden of conflict and violence in schools.

Effective school interventions that reduce violence and improve safety in school must consider multiple influences on students' behaviors and responses to conflict. This study adopts a social-ecological perspective on adolescent development, which provides a useful framework for organizing the environmental and individual factors that contribute to students' choices about how they respond to conflict in schools. Students may respond to

conflict in either aggressive or prosocial ways as well as seek help from adults for peer related problems. For adolescents in particular, a school's safety climate, relationships with teachers, peer and family influences and their own emotions and skills all represent potential factors that may affect the strategies they adopt for resolving conflicts. Programs at the middle and high school level need to consider the social context of adolescence in order to be most effective. While research has contributed to our understanding of school violence interventions, one criticism of these programs is that they are not adapted to the local context or the perspectives of the communities that experience the problem (Swearer, Espelage, Vaillancourt, & Hymel, 2010; Ringeisen, Henderson, & Hoagwood, 2003).

Schools need effective solutions for responding to conflicts and promoting a safe climate for students. School-wide strategies as well as targeted interventions can reduce aggressive behaviors and conflicts in school by establishing clear discipline and anti-bullying guidelines, creating a positive school culture, and teaching students prosocial skills. However, evidence on the effectiveness of many school-wide programs is mixed and interventions proven in one context may fail in others. Conflict resolution and mediation programs are one type of anti-violence programming that has been widely adopted in schools. Mediation programs in particular help students respond to conflicts in nonviolent ways by providing them with a safe space in schools where they can work out problems with their peers and learn new skills for resolving conflicts. While there is already a large body of research on conflict mediation programs, not enough attention has been given to the contextual factors that influence the experiences of student disputants especially in ethnically diverse, urban schools where the potential for conflict is high. Furthermore, the role of emotions in students' decisions for handling conflict needs further exploration.

## **The Current Study**

This study investigated the experiences of middle and high school students in a conflict mediation program across four schools in a large, urban school district. To my knowledge, this study is unique because it is the first to investigate the impact of a university-school district, collaborative mediation program that trains undergraduate students as volunteer mediators and deploys them in schools to help resolve conflicts. In previous studies, cross-age mediators generally included middle or high school students serving as mentors to peer mediators (Jones, 2004). However, some research has included university students who provided mentorship to middle school mediators in a low-income school district in California, but still the focus was on a peer mediation model (Lane-Garon, 1998; Cassinerio & Lane-Garon, 2006). In addition, this study focused on the perspectives of the disputants rather than mediators including contextual or environmental factors that influence outcomes, which needs further attention in research on conflict mediation programs (Lane-Garon & Richardson, 2003). Lastly, student's emotional experiences have been neglected in conflict mediation research (Johnson & Johnson, 1996), and this study represents an attempt to fill some of these aforementioned gaps in the literature.

This study uses a mixed-methods, multiple case study design in order to understand students' exposure to conflict and their experiences in a mediation program across several school sites. The defining element of a case study in comparison to other research designs is the bounded nature of the unit of analysis rather than the subject area of investigation (Merriam, 2002). For this study, the conflict mediation program's implementation across four, typical school sites determined the selection of the participants as well as the study's focus on student experiences across multiple topic areas within this bounded system. In



addition, the case study provides several advantages over other research designs for examining program effects. For example, the case study allows for the mixed-methods collection of multiple sources of data in a real world context and provides an in-depth understanding of both process and outcomes (Yin, 1992). A case study approach may also improve the utilization of research findings because it gathers both context and implementation data, which may be useful for program administrators (Yin, 1992). The present study attempted to understand a conflict mediation program in a multiple school context and utilized three, distinct sources of data including classroom and program questionnaires and participant interviews. The rationale for a mixed-methods approach included the ability to compare and enhance the results of one method with another and to develop quantitative variables from qualitative, contextual information (Schensul, Schensul, & LeCompte, 2013a). This study had two primary phases that included, first, the collection of classroom-level data on the school context and, second, the collection of pre-post and interview data on the program outcomes and the context of implementation.

### **Research Questions**

This study attempted to understand the experiences of students who participated in a conflict mediation program and included two main areas of investigation: 1) the school context and students' exposure to conflict and 2) the program context and student perspectives on the impact of the conflict mediation program. Two guiding research questions represented this study's primary areas of inquiry:

1. How frequently do students experience conflict or violence and what are their attitudes about help seeking?

- a. Which groups of students might be most at risk for problems associated with exposure to violence?
  - b. What differences are there, if any, among the schools?
2. What is the impact of a conflict mediation program on students' brief, emotional adjustment, approach to conflict resolution and attitudes about help seeking?
  - a. How do students describe their experiences in the program and their levels of program satisfaction?
  - b. What contextual factors contribute to students' decisions to resolve conflicts nonviolently and their willingness to seek help?

This study's findings are especially relevant to the field of conflict resolution because of the unique characteristics of the student populations, the school sites, and the mentoring aspects of the intervention. The mixed methods approach should contribute important contextual information for multiple audiences including the school site staff, program administrators, and other potential coordinators who may want to develop similar mediation programs in other schools sites that face similar challenges. In summary, this study's findings support three main conclusions about factors that influence students' responses to conflict. First, reductions in feelings of negative emotions including anger are related to students' abilities to adopt nonviolent, conflict resolution strategies. Second, the use of undergraduates as program facilitators allows students to form positive relationships with older students who provide important mentorship to them. Third, the environmental context in terms of school or adult response to conflict and peer culture both strongly influence student's decisions about how they resolve conflict nonviolently.

Finally, I have shared some of these findings with the current cohort of UCLA mediators and will share results with each of the school sites as well as next year's class of mediators.

## **Literature Review**

### **Violence, Bullying and Conflict in School**

**Definition of the problem.** This study draws on several traditions in the literature of examining student safety and school violence. For example, three different but related perspectives in school safety research include investigations of school violence, bullying and conflicts, which all represent various threats to student safety and range in severity from high to low. School violence falls along a continuum of negative behaviors that range from rare, "high-level" incidents such as school shootings, homicides, or other serious, violent crimes on one end to chronic, "low-level" behaviors like fighting, bullying, intimidation, harassment and other kinds of incivility on the other side (Meyer-Adams & Conner, 2008). Researchers have also defined violence in school as the act or intent of harming, damaging, threatening, or intimidating another person through the use of physical force (Yoon, Barton, & Taiariol, 2004). While physical violence represents a severe threat to safety, low-level incidents like bullying and other types of conflicts are the major concern of this study. The concept of bullying, which researchers believe captures the majority of low-level incidents of violence, is defined as frequent, aggressive behavior directed toward a peer over time that is often unprovoked, but also includes an imbalance of power between the bully and the victim (Johnson & Johnson, 2007; Olweus, 1996; Olweus & Limber, 2010). While bullying may also represent a type of conflict, conflict appears distinct from bullying in that it is a natural part of all social life and appears in positive relationships as well as negative ones (Johnson & Johnson, 1996). However, there

is also considerable overlap between the two and researchers have generally viewed conflicts in schools as incidents of verbal and physical aggression, which can include arguments, gossip, fighting, harassment, dating and various kinds of relationship issues (Johnson & Johnson, 1996). Similar to physical violence, the consequences of bullying and conflict are significant and appear to lead to more severe conflicts or violent acts.

Researchers have attempted to understand the relationship between high- and low-level violence and found some evidence that less severe, but more common types of aggressive behaviors increase the odds of committing more serious and violent crimes (Meyer-Adams & Conner, 2008; Nansel, Overpeck, Haynie, Ruan, & Scheidt, 2003). Even among low-level conflict, social aggression can precede and lead to physical violence (Talbot, Celinska, Simpson, & Coe, 2002). While low-level violence may not be as harmful or traumatic as high-level crime, researchers believe aggressive behaviors such as bullying and peer victimization have lasting, negative effects on students' mental health and academic functioning (Cornell & Mayer, 2010). In fact, recent research indicates that these low-level conflicts are responsible for a greater share of psychological burden such as anxiety, fear or avoidance, and are even harder for schools to address than more visible types of violence such as assaults (Mayer & Furlong, 2010). Schools and educators require effective approaches for reducing all kinds of violence in schools, but may need to be especially vigilant when it comes to elusive, low-level violence such as bullying and other forms of peer harassment, victimization and conflict. For the present study, "bullying" is sometimes used interchangeably with "conflict" as it has received considerable attention in the literature and both terms share the lower end of the school violence continuum.

**Prevalence rates.** Just how frequent is low-level violence in schools? Bullying, which includes verbal, physical and psychological aggression, attacks, threats, teasing, personal theft and social exclusion, represents one of the most common forms of low-level violence. Several national surveys as well as many smaller scale studies suggest that these behaviors are common in schools (Farrington & Ttofi, 2009; Meyer-Adams & Conner, 2008). Nansel and colleagues (2001) reported one of the earliest estimates on the prevalence of bullying using World Health Organization survey data from 1998. They found that 30% of US students in grades 6 – 10 reported some involvement in bullying as a victim, bully, or both. In their study, middle school students also reported even higher rates of bullying than high school students. Similarly, survey data from the Indicators of School Crime and Safety (ISCS) in 2005 showed that about 32% of students, ages 12 – 18, reported being bullied at school while 43% of middle schools reported weekly incidents of bullying (Dinkes, Cataldi, & Lin-Kelly, 2008). Some recent research has found alarming high levels of bullying with rates reaching nearly 70% for any type of involvement (bully or victim) in one sample of 1,100 students from nine elementary and middle schools (Swearer, Wang, Maag, Siebecker, & Frerichs, 2012).

Recent national survey data also find similar rates although these surveys included only victim reports of bullying (e.g., called names, insulted, target of rumors, teased, pushed, threatened, excluded, property stolen or destroyed, etc.) rather than being a bully. The 2011 Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) found that 20% of high school students reported bullying at school and 16% experienced bullying on the Internet, or cyberbullying, a newly added survey item (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2012a). The YRBS with middle school students found that 44% of them reported bullying at school and 23%

reported cyberbullying (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2012b). In 2009, the ISCS survey indicated that approximately 28% of students, ages 12-18, reported experiences of bullying, which peaked in 6th grade around 39% and decreased each year through high school to around 20% in 12th grade (Robers, Zhang, & Truman, 2012). Across studies, low-level, violent behaviors and conflicts appear to be widespread, affecting anywhere from one-third to three-fourths of all students, and reach their highest point during middle school (Bauer, Lozano, & Rivara, 2007; Goldstein, Young, & Boyd, 2007; Johnson & Johnson, 2007; Nansel et al., 2001; Nansel, Haynie, & Simons-Morton, 2003).

**Consequences of conflict.** The accumulation of research evidence suggests that the experience of peer victimization has negative and persistent consequences for adolescents. Involvement as a bully, victim or both has been associated with various problems such as depression, anxiety, low academic achievement, distress and substance use (Hertz, Donato, & Wright, 2013). Early research also found negative effects of bullying on students' social functioning. For example, involvement with bullying had associations with difficulties making friends, poorer relationships, increased fighting, and feelings of loneliness or isolation (Nansel et al., 2001). Other researchers also documented similar consequences for bullies and victims such as reporting less life satisfaction overall and receiving less social support from their teachers and peers (Flaspohler, Elfstrom, Vanderzee, Sink, & Birchmeier, 2009). Moreover, these researchers found that students who reported both victim and bully status had worse outcomes than either one alone. Researchers also found that student bullies were at greater risk than bully victims for exhibiting more serious forms of violence such as physical fights and carrying weapons to school, although, on the other hand, they also reported less difficulty with making friends (Nansel, Overpeck, et al.,

2003). In addition to the negative effects on social functioning, researchers have also examined the effects of bullying on student perceptions of school climate. Students involved in bullying or relational aggression report more negative views about the climate including lowered perceptions of safety (Goldstein et al., 2007; Nansel, Haynie, et al., 2003).

While most studies on the consequences of bullying are cross-sectional and capture single points in time, longitudinal findings also support the long-term impact of these harmful experiences. For example, Nansel, Haynie and colleagues (2003) found evidence in their middle school sample that 6th graders involved in bullying continued to report lower levels of psychosocial adjustment well into the end of 7th grade. Similarly, Juvonen, Wang, and Espinoza (2010) found that being a victim of high levels of bullying behaviors was significantly associated with lower levels of academic engagement and grades over the course of the three years of middle school measured during the study. Given the robust findings of negative consequences across psychological and academic domains for both bullies and victims that persist over time, schools would certainly be remiss and could even be considered legally neglectful of children's wellbeing if they ignore these problems of low-level violence, bullying and harassment in schools (Mayer & Furlong, 2010).

### **Contributing Factors to Students' Responses to Conflict**

**Theoretical framework: social-ecological model of conflict.** In order to understand the various influences on youth and conflict in schools, researchers recommend the adoption of a social-ecological perspective on student behavior, which highlights the interactions in the environment between students and their peers, teachers, schools, parents and community members (Swearer et al., 2010). According to this framework, students' perceptions of the surrounding context, such as the family,

classroom, school or community, will have an effect on their behavior, motivations and overall adaptation in the larger social setting (Eccles & Roesser, 2009). For example, if students perceive the school environment as one where adults are responsive to incidents of violence, they are more likely to feel safe, act less aggressively, and perceive the climate more positively. Of particular interest in this study are the social and individual factors that influence how adolescents choose from a range of potentially equally valid responses to conflict. According to various theories of conflict strategies, individuals have several different ways they can respond to conflicts, which fall along a continuum of competitive behaviors on one end to cooperative actions on the other (Johnson & Johnson, 1996; Lane-Garon, 1998). On the competitive side, youth may use verbal or physical force, coercion, manipulation, withdrawal or avoidance, and on the cooperative side, they may exhibit appeasing, compromising, problem-solving or negotiating kinds of activities. In theory, youth confront situations when any of these strategies could represent a valid response to the conflict. However, an explicit goal of conflict education programs is to assist youth with developing skills in problem solving and negotiation, as “untrained” students tend to gravitate towards more competitive responses (Johnson & Johnson, 1996). An integration of social-ecological and conflict strategy theories would then suggest that multiple factors influence students’ decisions to choose an appropriate strategy for handling conflict, which may vary depending on the context. For example, previous research has examined individual and environmental factors that influence urban, adolescents decisions about how to respond to conflict nonviolently (Farrell et al., 2008; Farrell et al., 2010). At the individual level, youth reported that problem-solving and emotional regulation skills, beliefs, values, goals, perceived consequences and attributions are all factors that



contribute to their conflict choices. Youth also reported multiple environmental factors that affected their decisions such as family endorsement and messages about fighting, parental modeling, peer pressures, supervision at school and exposure to neighborhood violence. Taken together, this research suggests that while cooperative strategies for conflict are the most desirable for reducing violence from a school's perspective, it also indicates that various influences in the environment may contribute to or even endorse competitive or aggressive approaches as well (Anderson, 1999). This expanded view of development has implications not only for understanding the transactional relationship between student behaviors and the surrounding context, but it also suggests the necessity of intervening at different levels of the environment as well as the individual student level in order to reduce conflict and violence in schools (Mayer & Furlong, 2010).

**School climate and adolescent outcomes.** School climate is a key aspect of the social environment for students and has a range of effects on various outcomes related to learning, social-emotional adjustment, behavior and physical safety. School climate may be difficult to define, but some researchers have described it as the nature of the relationships among school staff and students including how often and how well they interact with one another (Kuperminc, Leadbeater, Emmons, & Blatt, 1997). Other research has identified the most important dimensions of school climate, which include academics (teaching and learning), safety (physical and emotional), relationships (students and teachers), the physical environment and the school improvement process (Cohen, McCabe, Michelli, & Pickeral, 2009; Thapa, Cohen, Guffey, & Higgins-D'Alessandro, 2013). All of these dimensions have some implications for conflicts in schools, but the most relevant aspects for the current study include the safety and relationships. Within these two domains, a

school's conflict resolution "climate" can be thought of as the conflict dynamics within a school, which includes the amount of conflict among students, between students and teachers as well as the school staff's response to conflict in each of these relationships (LaRusso & Selman, 2011). From a social-ecological perspective, school climate should play a significant role in influencing student approaches to conflict. However, despite the evidence linking positive climate to reductions in violence well as improved learning outcomes, the application of these research findings to practice has been slow and school-based interventions still lack climate components (Cohen et al., 2009).

Research evidence points to a relationship between a school's safety climate and various adolescent outcomes such as learning, social-emotional adjustment and risk behaviors. For example, in a large study of middle school students, Brand, Felner, Shim, Seitsinger and Dumas (2003) found that student reported indicators of mental health such as low self-esteem, depression and anxiety were significantly associated with negative views of school climate after controlling for school-level differences in socio-economic status (SES). In terms of school climate and learning, the authors also found that student academic achievement was related to specific sub-dimensions of school climate including safety and the quality of peer relationships. Other research also supports a relationship between school safety and learning. Using 10<sup>th</sup> grade data from the Educational Longitudinal Study of 2002, Ripski and Gregory (2009) found that student reported perceptions of hostility or lack of safety in the school's climate were associated with lower academic engagement levels and reading achievement. Other research has also found correlations between negative perceptions of school climate and internalizing and externalizing problems and increases in risk-taking behaviors (Kuperminc et al., 1997;

LaRusso & Selman, 2011). School climate in general and safety in particular appear to be an important part of the social environment not only for adolescents' adjustment and learning, but also as a potential contributing factor to their response to conflict.

**The effects of school climate on student responses to conflict.** Other important research has investigated the relationship between school climate and how students choose to respond to their own conflicts. Certain aspects of a school's climate such as levels of aggression, interpersonal relationships and school policies or norms about conflict may have important effects on how students decide on a strategy for resolving conflict. In addition, while students can respond to conflicts in either competitive or cooperative ways, they may also choose to seek help from adults in situations when the stressors of the conflict exceed their capacity to handle it on their own (Newman, 2008). Importantly, if students are willing to seek help for conflicts, this may also contribute to an atmosphere with less tolerance for low level violence and an improved climate of safety overall. Therefore, this next section will consider how school climate influences students' aggressive or nonviolent responses and their attitudes about seeking help for conflicts. I will then end with a discussion of how a school's response to conflict, particularly in terms of its cultural norms and discipline policies, affects these student behaviors.

***School climate and students' responses to conflict.*** School climate appears to have an effect on student's behaviors and a negative climate may predict or increase the likelihood that students will engage in more acts of aggression or competitive responses to conflict. Many studies looked at the relationship between school climate and student risk behaviors such as aggression or delinquency and a few exceptions also considered how climate might influence a student's response to conflict more specifically. Early research

found significant associations between student perceptions of negative school climates and behavioral problems such as defiance, acting out, aggression, and delinquency (Kasen, Johnson, & Cohen, 1990; Kuperminc et al., 1997). More recent studies have also found similar results where a positive school climate was associated with fewer risk behaviors and better emotional adjustment (LaRusso & Selman, 2011; Way, Reddy, & Rhodes, 2007). However, while the measures of risky behaviors included aggressive behaviors and fighting, they were not disaggregated from other kinds of risk taking such as breaking rules, drugs or sex. Furthermore, the direction of effects in many of these studies must be considered “tentative” since most of the data is cross-sectional even though some studies attempted to determine directionality with advanced, multi-level models.

Other research has examined the relationship between school climate and students' approaches to conflict more directly. One study considered how several factors including a school's norms about aggressive behavior, interpersonal relationship climate among teachers and students, and the school's response to violence might affect student's individual levels of aggression and self-efficacy for nonviolent responses to conflict (Henry, Farrell, Schoeny, Tolan, & Dymnicki, 2011). The results indicated that school norms against aggression, positive interpersonal climate and greater teacher awareness of and reporting of conflict all predicted lower physical aggression and greater self-efficacy for nonviolent responses at the individual, student level. The authors also indicated that these school level effects were stronger for girls than boys and became weaker from 6<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> grade, which suggests that effects of school climate may decrease over time. Similarly, other research has also found an interactive relationship between student perceptions of school climate and students' responses to conflict that appears to change over time. Meyer-Adams and Conner

(2008) looked at how school climate, or the psychosocial environment, was related to middle school student perceptions of safety and their aggressive or avoidant responses to bullying. They found that a negative school climate was associated with a greater likelihood of aggressive and avoidant responses to conflict, which also appeared to be cyclical in nature. As students became increasingly bullied or victimized at school, they reported more negative views of school climate. As student perceptions of school climate decreased, in turn, the students were more likely to respond to harassment in aggressive or violent ways, which also further compromised students' ability to learn in school. Consistent across several of these studies is that student perceptions of climate are not fixed, but, beginning in 6<sup>th</sup> grade, decrease over time across the middle school years (Way et al., 2007). While school climate appears to exert an influence on students' response to conflict, it also seems important for schools to implement approaches to improve their safety and relationship climates as early as possible and at multiple levels of the environment in order to reduce or prevent low-level violence in schools.

***School climate and help seeking.*** Help seeking represents an alternative response to peer conflicts that not only is nonviolent, but also may be constructive if it helps students reduce stress and preserve their relationships with peers or adults. In general, anywhere from a quarter to one third of students have sought help for bullying conflicts and about 10% of students report they would seek help for personal problems (Eliot, Cornell, Gregory, & Fan, 2010). Students may be reluctant to seek help for a variety of reasons and there are a host of potential factors that influence their decisions to seek help including the severity and chronicity of the conflict, the availability of supportive helpers or teachers, popularity status, social competence and past experiences with seeking help (Newman,

2008). In early adolescence, girls and younger students are also more likely to seek help than boys and older students and there appears to be some disagreement about whether more victimization is also associated with increased help seeking (Hunter, Boyle, & Warden, 2004; Unnever & Cornell, 2004; Williams & Cornell, 2006; Yablon, 2010). Very few studies have considered race and help seeking explicitly, and when they do discuss race, it is usually in a post-hoc manner with no consistent findings among studies, although one study suggested that African- and Native-American students might have the lowest scores (Eliot et al, 2010; Unnever & Cornell, 2004; Williams & Cornell, 2006). Despite individual differences in help seeking, students are more likely than adults to be reliable informants of bullying and threats of violence in school, although they may be much less likely to seek help when they perceive their school climate and relationships with teachers as unsupportive (Eliot et al., 2010; Greene, 2003). Thus, in addition to individual factors, school climate can have a direct impact on students' willingness to report conflict to adults.

Similar to student strategies for resolving conflicts, researchers have also investigated how school climate may affect students' willingness to seek help for exposure to conflict, threats or victimization in schools. A school's safety climate in terms of the prevalence of bullying and other forms of conflict appears to have a relationship to students' willingness to seek help. For example, various studies have found that the presence of bullying and teasing as well as aggressive attitudes at the school level are negatively correlated with students' help seeking attitudes (Unnever & Cornell, 2004; Bandyopadhyay, Cornell, & Konold, 2009; Klein, Cornell, & Konold, 2012). In addition, low scores on a measure of school disorder, which included disciplinary incidents, reports of bullying and violence and students' aggressive attitudes, was associated with high scores in

willingness to seek help among 9<sup>th</sup> grade students (Bandyopadhyay et al., 2009). Other research examined school climate in terms of its tolerance for bullying, which included norms about the acceptability of conflict and teacher awareness of and response to conflict, and found that students were more willing to report problems when schools had climates less tolerant of bullying (Unnever & Cornell, 2004; Williams & Cornell, 2006). Lastly, a supportive school climate, as defined by student perceptions that teachers are caring, respectful and interested, had a significant relationship with students' willingness to seek help for bullying and threats (Elliot et al., 2011). Taken together, these results suggest that an important part of the relationship between school climate and help seeking is how schools establish expectations about conflict. Considering that less than 25% of students seek assistance with their experiences of victimization, schools that change how they respond to conflict by improving their collective responsibility for violence and bullying may improve help seeking attitudes and reduce the amount of aggression or bullying that goes unreported in schools (Eliot et al., 2010; Henry et al., 2011).

***School responses to conflict.*** Schools have a variety of means at their disposal for responding to student conflicts and low-level violence, which certainly has an impact on students' decisions about how to handle conflict, whether they seek help for problems and their overall perceptions of the climate of the school. Seemingly common, but inappropriate behaviors like name-calling or spreading rumors, if ignored by adults or other students, can escalate into more severe conflicts with even greater consequences (Talbot, 2002; Theberge & Karan, 2004). Schools have traditionally responded to disruptions with punishments that exclude students from the learning process such as office referrals, suspensions or expulsions, which may exacerbate student delinquency rather than address

the underlying causes of the behaviors (Osher, Bear, Sprague, & Doyle, 2010). For example, repeated suspensions can increase the risk of repeating a grade, dropping out of school, and entering the juvenile justice system for at-risk students (Fabelo, 2011). However, some studies find that, in certain situations, students approve of these kinds of discipline policies and see them as fair or effective punishment for aggressive behaviors, although this may only be true in schools with already high suspension or expulsion rates (Talbot, 2002). Furthermore, students also acknowledge that knowing about the consequences for breaking rules acts as a real disincentive for fighting or responding to conflict aggressively (Farrell et al., 2010). In addition, exclusionary discipline policies may discourage rather than support students' efforts to seek help for conflicts. Given these effects of school discipline on student behaviors, it is important for schools to consider the impact of their responses to conflict on students' own decision-making processes for resolving problems especially when the majority of conflicts never reach the attention of adults.

As noted earlier, researchers have found that cultural norms against violence and effectively responding to violent incidents reduces the levels of aggression and violence at school (Henry et al., 2011). Schools appear to communicate and establish their culture and norms about conflict through the actions of their teachers and, most importantly, their relationships with students. Just as peer bystanders play a role in bullying and harassment, adult bystanders who do not actively intervene in conflicts also convey an implicit message of tolerance for aggressive behaviors (LaRusso & Selman, 2011). Teachers who receive training in awareness of conflict and how to respond to it are more likely to intervene in an effective manner, which also promotes a more positive and safe school culture (Greene, 2003). Other kinds of teacher behaviors such as forming close relationships with students,



providing support for nonviolence and close supervision of spaces in schools also helps students with positive conflict resolution (Farrell et al, 2010). Furthermore students are more likely to endorse appropriate conflict resolution strategies in schools with positive climates where teachers listen and negotiate with students rather than coerce, intimidate or engage in power struggles with them (LaRusso & Selman, 2011). When students primarily view their teachers as evaluators or disciplinarians, they are also much less likely to seek help for problems from them (Lindsay, 1998). In conclusion, school discipline policies and school climates appear to influence how students respond to and seek help for conflicts. Teacher behaviors and relationships with students also appear to be critical components for establishing a positive school climate that supports students' use of prosocial conflict strategies.

**Peer & family influences.** Peers and families represent significant relationships in the social milieu for adolescents and can potentially influence their responses to conflict in positive or negative ways. Adolescence is a developmental time when the peer group in particular becomes increasingly important for social status, feeling accepted and establishing independence from adults (Espelage, 2002; Espelage & Swearer, 2003). Because of the greater prominence of peers, interpersonal conflicts also increases and youth learn to acquire new developmental and social cognitive skills such as managing peer conflicts, problem solving, perspective taking, emotional regulation, goal formation and negotiation (Yoon et al., 2004; Lane-Garon, 1998; Gerrard & Lipsey, 2007). However, peers also appear to strongly influence aggressive and bullying behaviors of adolescents. One theory on social dominance suggests that aggressive students or bullies do not lack social skills, but seek to increase their status amongst their peers by harassing other

students, which may occur most often in transitions to new settings such as middle school, where students attempt to reestablish dominant or popular peer groups (Espelage & Swearer, 2003; Juvonen & Graham, 2014). Another theory based on the stage fit of adolescence suggests that students form peer groups based on similarity and, as a result, aggressors or bullies would negatively influence one another and engage in similar levels of aggressive behaviors (Espelage & Swearer, 2003). Furthermore, conflict is often a group activity where peer bystanders play a central role in influencing students' aggressive behaviors by either aligning themselves with an aggressor or deliberately choosing not to aid a victim (Greene, 2003; Oliver & Candappa, 2007). Peer bystanders may also be interested in their own status or reputation and associate themselves with a more popular aggressor especially if the victim is perceived as weak and submissive (Juvonen & Graham, 2014). Peers also influence students' willingness to seek help for conflicts and often in negative ways. Qualitative research findings reveal student perspectives on how peers norms make it difficult for them to seek help for conflicts at school. Adolescents report elevated concerns over their image and reputation and feel considerable pressure to demonstrate autonomy and self-reliance while avoiding the appearance of weakness. As a result, students tend to hold somewhat negative attitudes towards seeking help for problems and may feel shame for turning to adults for help (deLara, 2012). However, in one study, adolescents did not report any drawbacks for speaking with a confidential source of help, which, when available, respects their need for privacy and provides reassurance that adults will not become overinvolved (Oliver & Candappa, 2007).

While family influences are not a central part of this study, parental attitudes about conflict and aggression represent another aspect of the social environment that may affect

adolescents' responses to conflict. There is large literature on how high risk neighborhoods influence parental socialization and child-rearing practices. In terms of messages about conflict and aggression in these settings, again, qualitative studies help illuminate the various ways parents may influence their adolescent children's behaviors. Parents implement several strategies to help protect their children from dangerous situations and avoid violence. Parents actively monitor their children's activities and friendship groups, model nonviolent strategies for resolving peer conflicts, provide support or guidance for how to deescalate and avoid conflict, and set disciplinary guidelines for involvement in violence (Johnson, Cheng, Finigan, Bradshaw, & Haynie, 2012; Farrell et al., 2010). In urban communities with high levels of violence, parents may also view conflict and violence as unavoidable and endorse aggressive or physical responses to conflict when their child was the victim of violence first, although avoidance was almost always the preferred response (Johnson et al., 2012). In one study, as many as 25% of adolescent respondents indicated that they received explicit messages from family members sanctioning aggression as a valid response to conflict (Farrell et al., 2010). Furthermore, youth report that a lack of family support could also negatively influence their response to conflict if they believed their parents were not concerned about them or would not get involved (Farrell et al., 2010). These familial messages about how to respond to conflict are important influences to consider from an ecological perspective on adolescence and conflict resolution.

**Individual factors in student responses to conflict.** There are a number of individual factors that influence students' responses to conflict situations and whether they seek out help for these problems. Furthermore, depending on the theoretical lens through which conflict dynamics are examined, any number of these factors may surface as more

important or central to how students ultimately go about responding to and negotiating conflicts with their peers. While an exhaustive review of the various psychological theories on cognitive development and social information processing is beyond the scope of this study, taking a closer look at some implications of theory from the literature on conflict resolution in schools may be more instructive for highlighting important, individual characteristics. Conflicts may be resolved competitively or cooperatively through a continuum of low- to high-level strategies that includes impulsive actions, unilateral decision-making, reciprocal exchanges, or mutual collaboration (Lane-Garon, 1998). In addition, two major motivations for resolving conflict include achieving one's goals or interests and preserving some degree or quality of a relationship with the other person (Johnson & Johnson, 1996). The importance each of these motivations and the level of development of the disputants both contribute to the way an individual student would choose to respond to the conflict. For example, older students, students with higher cognitive or social skills or students with a history of friendship are more likely to use higher-level strategies for resolving their conflicts. In various ways, gender also appears to be related to the underlying motivations and selection of the conflict approach (Johnson & Johnson, 1996). Other empirical work seems to support this theory of conflict resolution strategies with adolescents. In their own words, youth indicate that many different factors influence whether or not they would respond to conflicts nonviolently including their problem-solving and emotional regulation skills, self-efficacy for a prosocial strategy, goals and values, perceived consequences of an aggressive response, relationship history and attributions of the other person's behavior (Farrell et al., 2008). Out of the variety of potential factors that may contribute to a prosocial response, problem-solving and

emotional regulation skills and relationship preservation goals or values were some of the most influential factors for the students in that study.

In fact, research has established an empirical link between conflict and emotions. In a recent study with adolescents in urban, at-risk settings, researchers found that low coping skills for anger and sadness had associations with higher rates of both physical and relational types of aggression (Sullivan, Helms, Kliwer, & Goodman, 2010). In addition, the authors also found that youth who were most at-risk for aggressive behaviors struggled with both low coping skills *and* low expression of their emotions. In Farrell and colleagues' (2008) interviews with urban, African-American teens about their conflict choices, they observed that being able to regulate emotions was an important precursor for avoiding fights and physical violence. While this also supports early research on the empirical relationship between emotion and aggression, other researchers have examined how responding to peer conflict or harassment by seeking help may also alleviate negative feelings. For example, the act of seeking help is one way of coping with an external stressor, such as a peer conflict, which in itself may reduce anger, anxiety or fear (Newman, 2008; Oliver & Candappa, 2007). Students also appear to be more likely to seek help in situations when they have high emotional responses to conflict, which could also be partially responsible for noticeable changes in feelings after they confide in another person (Hunter et al., 2004). In an effort to build on these research findings, the current study attempts to measure changes in student's emotions as well as their endorsement of or belief in a nonviolent response to conflict as important indicators of the impact of a conflict mediation program on middle and high school students.

## **Interventions to Reduce Conflict in Schools**

Interventions that attempt to reduce school violence and bullying can also be organized around a social-ecological framework. According to this heuristic, in order to maximize effectiveness, interventions should incorporate components from each level of the social environment such as individual skill building; peer involvement; teacher training or classroom-based approaches; school-wide policies and norms including discipline, parent and community involvement strategies; and culturally specific adaptations (Espelage & Swearer, 2003; Swearer et al., 2010). However, as one might expect, the extent to which interventions are designed to include multiple levels or more than one program element is fairly limited. Most anti-violence programs primarily target individuals or groups with skill development, but others may attempt to change the culture of an entire school. In individual-based approaches, teachers, counselors, or trained facilitators may use anti-violence curriculums or other methods to teach empathy, pro-social or conflict resolution skills (Espelage & Swearer, 2003). School-wide approaches can focus on universal prevention programs, discipline policies, awareness campaigns and behavior modeling such as the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (OBPP) or the Peace-Builders Program (Flannery et al., 2003; Olweus & Limber, 2010).

**School-wide, anti-violence/bullying programs.** The research base on school-wide, anti-bullying programs has reached sufficient size in order to justify several meta-analyses on program effectiveness. Across most studies, the evidence appears to be mixed, with many studies reporting null effects or little reduction in student reports of victimization (Farrington & Ttofi, 2009; Merrell et al., 2008; Smith, Schneider, Smith, & Ananiadou, 2004; Swearer et al., 2010). Most studies report the largest changes in students'

attitudinal measures regarding bullying, conflict, or violence, and show the least amount of evidence of change on measures of behavior (Merrell et al., 2008). At best, school-wide anti-bullying approaches were found to reduce incidents of bullying by as much as 20% (Farrington & Ttofi, 2009). However, even if programs had positive effects on some measures, effect sizes were generally too low to deserve recommendation (Merrell et al., 2008). Effective elements of programs seemed to include parent and teacher trainings, classroom management intervention, increased supervision, and effective discipline and anti-bullying policies. The involvement of the peer group, which was recommended in the literature by some researchers, could even have possible iatrogenic effects (Farrington & Ttofi, 2009). In a randomized control trial of the OBPP, one-third of the sample reported experiences of bullying; however, researchers did not find reductions in reports of victimization except among white students nor any significant, positive changes in indicators of school culture such as safety, support or engagement (Bauer et al., 2007). Of course, it is concerning that school-wide approaches, which in theory should adhere to an ecological view of student development, do not demonstrate encouraging results. More recent reviews suggest that the latest iterations of these programs include methodological improvements and show some potential for reducing bullying or aggressive behaviors, although several of them have not yet entered US schools (Juvonen & Graham, 2014).

Researchers have several hypotheses about what may contribute to the inconclusive evidence on school-based, anti-bullying programs including barriers to successful program implementation and methodological problems in the evaluation research. One of the most common implementation barriers observed across studies was fidelity to the original intervention model. When researchers attempted to measure fidelity with mixed-methods,

observations, or qualitative interviews, they often found that program implementation and integrity were not always consistent among schools (Bauer et al., 2007; Smith et al., 2004). Also, many of the school-wide, anti-bullying interventions targeted all students when, in reality, a much smaller percentage (10 – 20%) of students were responsible for most of the aggressive or bullying behaviors (Swearer et al., 2012). Other researchers have noted that a student's risk level for involvement in antisocial behaviors at school including violence can moderate the effects of the intervention (Wright, John, Livingstone, Shepherd, & Duku, 2007). In other words, low-risk students may benefit more from the program than high-risk students. While not an entirely surprising finding by itself, these researchers also noted that future interventions should include strategies for engaging high-risk students, or those more likely to engage in aggressive behavior. Lastly, methodological limitations often hamper researchers' ability to detect real effects. For example, the majority of studies measured outcomes with student self-report and neglect to include other methods or informants such as parents, family members, adult staff at school or other members of the community (Coyle, 2012). Other criticisms include the failure of interventions to faithfully adopt a socio-ecological perspective by not considering the cultural backgrounds of vulnerable groups and not measuring effects at other levels of the environment such as the school climate or neighborhood (Swearer et al., 2012). These difficulties with the implementation and assessment of school-wide programs also raise concerns about the reliability and effectiveness of these programs across multiple settings (Chambless & Hollon, 1998). In an attempt to address some of these methodological problems, the current study uses a mixed-methods, case study approach to understand the context or conditions that could potentially moderate the impact of the program.



**Conflict resolution education landscape.** Conflict Resolution Education (CRE) programs may offer some advantages over school-wide, anti-bullying programs. Not only can conflict programs help reduce incidents of low level violence and aggression in schools, but they can also support a school-wide strategy for implementing positive alternatives to traditional discipline practices (Smith, Daunic, Miller, & Robinson, 2002). CRE offers many of the same core features as positive behavior supports (PBS) and social-emotional learning (SEL) approaches, which have garnered significant research and community support over the last several years (Smith et al., 2002; Osher et al, 2010). For example, CRE may offer both preventative and targeted components for addressing behavioral problems similar to PBS as well as teach students important affective and cognitive skills to improve self-discipline as in SEL approaches (Osher et al, 2010). CRE as a school-based intervention has grown in popularity in the last decade as researchers now estimate that as many as 25% of all schools (or, about 20,000 out of 85,000 schools) across the country utilize some form of CRE to address the concerns of violence and conflict among students (Jones, 2004; Garrard & Lipsey, 2007). CRE can be divided into three, broad approaches to teaching conflict resolution skills including 1) direct skills instruction, 2) curriculum integration, and 3) conflict mediation programs (Garrard & Lipsey, 2007). In addition, it may be helpful to identify the four, core characteristics of CRE programs, which include one or more of the program strategies as outlined above, the grade level, the target population and the program implementation features of fidelity, maintenance, and coordination (Jones, 2004). Direct skills and conflict mediation approaches may be universal or targeted, while curriculum approaches are generally universal. The strategies may involve teaching

students social-emotional or conflict management skills either through a specialized curriculum or by diffusing conflict resolution principles into general education classes. The conflict mediation program in this study falls under the third area of mediation-based programs. However, regardless of the exact intervention model, all CRE programs share four broad objectives, which include creating a 1) safe and 2) constructive learning environment, 3) improving the social-emotional development of students, and 4) building a larger community based on principles of resolving conflict constructively (Jones, 2004).

In general, CRE programs have received considerable attention in the literature as a way of combatting violence, pervasive bullying, and peer conflicts in schools (Johnson & Johnson, 1996; Garrard & Lipsey, 2007). Several benefits have been associated with school-based, CRE programs including improved interpersonal interactions, conflict management skills, and school climate; as well as reductions in incidents of fighting, bullying, and discipline referrals (Johnson & Johnson, 1996; Garrard & Lipsey, 2007; Smith et al., 2002). In addition, when students are able to resolve their own problems, teachers spend less time managing conflicts in the classroom and student perceptions of school safety improve (Heydenberk, Heydenberk, & Tzenova, 2006). However, not all research findings on CRE are positive and many studies show mixed or even null results (Garrard & Lipsey, 2007). Unfortunately, though US schools are somewhat saturated with school-wide conflict resolution programs, they appear to suffer from low rates of utilization despite their widespread adoption. Some research indicates that only 8% of students used conflict mediation when as many as 95% of students in the school reported they were aware of its existence (Theberge & Karan, 2004). Much like anti-bullying efforts, CRE programs are also inherently plagued by issues common to all universal prevention programs such as low

treatment dosages, failure to move beyond classroom based skills, and inability to engage high-risk students or shift cultural norms (Shuval et al., 2010). Other researchers have been even more scathing in their criticisms of CRE and have attacked basic assumptions of these programs such as: all students involved in conflicts have the same needs regardless of risk level and all students have deficits in social information processing that need to be fixed (Webster, 1993). In other words, many CRE programs may fail because they do not take into consideration how the surrounding context may influence students' decisions about how to resolve to conflict. For example, a few studies found that students in suburban schools reported conflicts primarily over control of resources and preferences compared to relationship conflicts in urban schools (Johnson & Johnson, 1996). However, program improvement research on CRE can address some of these limitations by paying special attention to the core characteristics outlined by Jones (2004) such as the target grade, population and implementation barriers.

**Conflict mediation and program outcomes.** Schools have implemented mediation programs at all grade levels; however, research indicates that mediation is most effective for high school followed by middle school youth in comparison to elementary school students (Garrard & Lipsey, 2007). Many conflict mediation programs make use of peer/student volunteers, who are often the same age or developmental level as the disputants, or those students directly involved in the conflict. Less frequently, in a mentor-mediator model, older students or adults assist younger, peer mediators with facilitation of the mediation sessions and may conduct their own mediations (Cassinerio & Lane-Garon, 2006). Traditionally, mediation programs consist of “cadres” of volunteer, peer mediators who facilitate a scripted mediation process for two disputants over a wide range of

potential conflicts including relational aggression, physical or verbal bullying or interpersonal problems (Johnson & Johnson, 2007). The mediators receive formal, mediation training in facilitation and conflict resolution skills. A mediation program may also be universal or class-linked, but it can also be selective or indicated for students who are at risk for social or physical conflicts or were already involved in a serious conflict and referred by an administrator.

Conflict mediation programs with peers in particular represent a large portion of CRE interventions reported in the literature. In a review of a forty year period that included only research studies with control groups and pre-post measures, conflict mediation programs demonstrated nearly twice the effect size than direct skills instruction and curriculum integration approaches (Garrard & Lipsey, 2007). However, peer mediation models also have their own strengths and weaknesses. Previous research has found that conflict mediation programs teach students perspective taking, empathy, and emotional regulation skills, which are all associated with positive adjustment outcomes for youth (Lane-Garon, 1998; Cassinerio & Lane-Garon, 2006; Heydenberk et al., 2006). Deficiencies in these skills also have associations with worse academic performance and mental health outcomes for students. In fact, many of the characteristics of resilient students such as social competence, problem-solving skills and a sense of autonomy are also the building blocks of being able to resolve conflicts successfully (Crawford & Bodine, 1996). In addition, researchers have found that curricular-based, conflict resolution education as well as peer mediation both demonstrate positive effects on student learning. Heyndeberk and colleagues (2006), who looked at conflict resolution education in elementary classrooms over the course of one school year, found improvements in conflict-related

skills including self-regulation, problem solving, and empathy. Steps in the conflict mediation process may also help slow down Other research on peer mediation programs with elementary and middle school students found similar evidence for student gains in cognitive and affective forms of perspective taking and empathy based skills (Lane-Garon, 1998; Cassinerio & Lane-Garon, 2006). However, the researchers also noted that disputant participants did not benefit as much as their peer mediators in perceptions of school climate, and, similar to the current study, participants did not report any change on a measure of conflict resolution strategies. Researchers conclude that, in general, peer mediation is more effective than classroom-based approaches at teaching conflict resolution skills, which might be explained by the high correlations found between modeling and learning new skills (Garrard & Lipsey, 2007; Harris, 2005).

One measure common to almost all research on mediation programs is participant satisfaction. Satisfaction is often a gauge of several different aspects of the mediation experience including mediator effectiveness, fidelity and helpfulness of the program from the participants' perspective. Traditionally, disputants have often equated fairness in their mediations with program satisfaction (Nix & Hale, 2007), and some students report that one of the most helpful mediator skills is impartiality (Harris, 2005). Researchers also see program satisfaction as a type of social validity, or the extent to which students (or adults) accept a program as credible or helpful, which is important to consider because it influences how likely students are to use the program and recommend it to others (Smith et al., 2002). If the target population is high-risk and does not view mediation with some degree of social validity, they will most likely underutilize the program or avoid it

altogether. Researchers recommend that this should be assessed in future research or in evaluations of conflict mediation programs (Smith et al., 2002).

### **Conflict Mediation and the Current Study**

Jones' (2004) framework for identifying the four core characteristics of CRE programs is useful for placing the current case study in the context of previous research on conflict mediation. Again, these characteristics include the program model, the grade level, target population and implementation factors of fidelity, longevity and coordination or integration within the school system. This study investigated the impact of a mentor mediation program and may be the first to include college students instead of peers as mediators in school settings. This study also included both middle and high school students, who were mostly Latino, but included a mix of other groups as well, in a large, urban school district. The target population at each school varied somewhat, but was mostly available to all students in the school and, in some cases, included referrals from administrators for disciplinary incidents. In terms of implementation, the mediation program has a multi-year presence in all three schools. Two schools integrated the program into their discipline systems and another school integrated the program into an existing, peer-based, conflict education program. This study also focused on the impact of the mediation program from the perspectives of the disputants rather than the mediators, which has been understudied in previous research.

These program and study characteristics are fairly unique within the existing research on CRE programs. The majority of research on conflict mediation focused on white, elementary school students of relatively low risk; curricular components in addition to peer mediation; and the experiences of peer mediators rather than the disputants (Jones,

2004; Garrard & Lipsey, 2007). Some studies, however, were more similar and included middle and high school students of color and focused on the perspectives of the disputants rather than the mediators (Harris, 2005; Nix & Hale, 2007). Because the majority of research on conflict mediation has focused on peer mediators, much less is known about the impact of the program from the perspectives of the disputants including reasons for program satisfaction and dissatisfaction (Nix & Hale, 2007). In addition, I only found one other researcher who also used university students as mentors to peer mediators, but they did not mediate the conflicts themselves (Lane-Garon, 1998; Lane-Garon & Richardson, 2003; Cassinerio & Lane-Garon, 2006). In particular, Lane-Garon's work on mentor mediation with students from Cal State University, Fresno has included schools that are predominately Latino and low-income and, therefore, her research figures prominently in the discussion of this study's results.

While this study does not explicitly attempt to address gaps in the knowledge base, it should contribute to some areas where further research is needed. Some have argued that sufficient quantitative research already exists on the effectiveness of conflict mediation, but the field needs more qualitative work to determine the contextual factors that influence outcomes (Lane-Garon & Richardson, 2003). One of this study's research questions attempts to meet this need by soliciting students' opinions about various environmental factors that may facilitate or inhibit their use of conflict mediation. Furthermore, previous research has not always yielded consistent results on how programs differentially affect mediators, disputants, and non-participants, or those who never entered any mediation (Cassinerio & Lane-Garon, 2006). The first research question of this study attempted to understand the experiences of conflict and help seeking from the

perspective of all students in the program's school and not just from the students who participated in the program. In addition, several student participants in this study were not involved in the conflict directly, but were included as witnesses or third parties to the conflict. There are also additional gaps that are not explicitly or only partially addressed in this study, but should be considered more extensively in future research on conflict mediation. These include an assessment of the types of students who benefit the most or least from the program, the program elements that mediate specific outcomes, and ways that conflict resolution skills may generalize to settings outside of scripted mediation sessions (Jones, 2004; Daunic, Smith, Robinson, Miller, & Landry, 2000; Nix & Hale, 2007).

## **Methods**

### **Description of UCLA Mediation Program**

A collaborative effort among UCLA's School of Education, the Institute for Nonviolence in Los Angeles, and the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) is responsible for implementing a conflict mediation program across five secondary schools in LAUSD including three of the schools in this study. Professor Wilms, the faculty advisor of this research study, teaches an undergraduate, Education course at UCLA called "Restoring Civility: Understanding, Using and Resolving Conflict", which trains undergraduates as volunteer mediators and places them in several partner schools as part of the class's practicum component. The undergraduates receive training in facilitating mediation sessions during Fall Quarter and go out to their school sites to conduct mediations in Winter Quarter of the academic year. Some students volunteer to stay with the program for an additional quarter in the Spring of the same school year.



The UCLA conflict mediation program is based upon the ITUNA approach to dispute resolution, which is an acronym for a 5-step process that mediators use for facilitating a conflict mediation session: 1) Information, 2) Talking and being heard, 3) Understanding, 4) Negotiating, and 5) Agreement. In the first step, information, the mediators share information with the disputants about what will happen during the mediation, review the ground rules, and explain the goals of the session. In the second step, talking and being heard, the mediators facilitate a dialogue among the disputants where they share their sides of the story and listen to the other person share his or hers. In the third step, understanding, the mediators attempt to have the disputants understand the positions of the other parties, but, in theory, this outcome can happen on its own after disputants listen to the other person's side of the story. In the fourth step, negotiation, the mediators facilitate a conversation about what each party is willing to do in order to resolve the conflict. Mediators encourage disputants to come up with their own agreements, but may also suggest certain kinds of actions or solutions during this step. In the fifth and final step, agreement, the disputants reach a specific agreement about their conflict and generally put this in writing and sign the document as a way of staying accountable to the mediation. In theory, ITUNA provides a kind of scripted process for mediators to follow, but in reality, mediations often include many deviations from these specified steps.

One of the strengths of the mediation program is that each school site may tailor the implementation of the intervention in a way that best suits their needs. For example, students may be referred by a variety of sources for equally varied reasons. Teachers may make referrals or students may refer themselves to the conflict mediation program depending on the school's implementation. Examples of appropriate referrals generally

include student conflicts such as gossiping, verbal altercations, teasing/bullying, fighting, harassment and other kinds of low-level incidents. While teachers or even the students themselves may make referrals for mediation, participation in the mediation program is usually voluntary; however, some schools have mandated mediation in certain situations. Teams of undergraduate students serve as volunteer mediators and are assigned to each of the participating schools sites. Once the mediators receive a referral, they meet with the students together or separately, if necessary, and follow the ITUNA process for arriving at an agreement between two or more student disputants. Conflict mediation sessions often include only two students, but they can include several more people especially when the incident involves multiple people such as other witnesses or third parties to the conflict. Dyadic mediation sessions are often less complex than three, four, or five or more parties in a single conflict. However, mediators receive their ITUNA training in their undergraduate course during the Fall Quarter at UCLA before they enter the field and facilitate mediations.

## **Participants**

**School site selection.** This study took place in two separate phases in four schools in a large, urban school district in Los Angeles. The four sites in the current study included two middle schools: Tom Joad Middle School (Joad), a regular public school; and Jim Casy Middle School (Casy), a small charter school; and two high schools: Rose of Sharon High School (Sharon), a small pilot school; and George Milton High School (Milton), a regular public school<sup>1</sup>. These schools are located in different areas of the city including West, South and Northeast LA. While the study design changed several times over the course of the 2012-'13 school year, the final study in its current form included all four schools for phase 1 and only three schools for phase 2. Phase 1 of the study included recruitment and data

collection for the classroom questionnaires in which all four schools participated. In phase 2 of the study, I collected pre-post measurement data and interviews from students who participated in the conflict mediation program in all of the schools except for Joad. I was not able to finish phase 2 at Joad and made the decision to continue phase 2 in Casy, Sharon and Milton because the conflict mediation program already had an established history in these schools and there was a higher likelihood of reaching an adequate sample size<sup>2</sup>.

**Phase 1: classroom sample.** A total of four schools and 848 students participated in the first phase of the study, which occurred in Winter and Spring Quarter of the 2012 – 2013 academic school year (see Table 1). There is a fairly even distribution of students across all grades except for 12<sup>th</sup> because not as many students participated from Milton. The classroom sample has slightly more females than males. It is also majority Latino at all schools, but almost exclusively so at the small schools, Casy and Sharon. Milton was the most ethnically diverse school. I also looked for any statistical differences among the four schools. The two middle schools did not differ by percentage of students per grade in the sample; however, the two high schools had significant differences in proportions because of convenience sampling at Milton. The schools did not significantly differ by gender, but a visual inspection of the data revealed that there were differences by race. However, in terms of majority groups, there were no significant racial differences between Casy and Sharon for Latinos, or between Milton and Joad for blacks and Latinos.

Table 1

*Characteristics of Classroom Sample in Four Participating Schools (N = 848)*

	Casy <i>n (%)</i>	Sharon <i>n (%)</i>	Milton <i>n (%)</i>	Joad <i>n (%)</i>	Total <i>n (%)</i>
Type	Charter	Pilot	Regular	Regular	
Sample size	220 (26)	240 (28)	212 (25)	176 (21)	848
# of classrooms	11	12	8	8	39

Grade					
Middle school					
6	129 (37)	--	--	47 (27)	176 (21)
7	133 (33)	--	--	61 (35)	194 (23)
8	134 (30)	--	--	68 (39)	202 (24)
High school*					
9	--	66 (28)	61 (29)		127 (15)
10	--	74 (31)	46 (22)		120 (14)
11	--	46 (19)	70 (33)		116 (14)
12	--	54 (23)	35 (17)		89 (10)
Gender					
Female	122 (55)	138 (58)	115 (55)	92 (52)	467 (55)
Male	98 (45)	100 (42)	95 (45)	84 (48)	377 (44)
Race/Ethnicity					
Latino	204 (94)	216 (90)	116 (55)	118 (67)	654 (77)
Black	4 (2)	2 (1)	37 (17)	38 (22)	81 (10)
Asian	3 (1)	12 (5)	17 (8)	0 (0)	64 (08)
White	2 (1)	4 (2)	23 (11)	2 (1)	31 (04)
Other/mixed	5 (2)	5 (2)	19 (9)	17 (10)	46 (05)

\*Significant chi-squared test value < .01

**Phase 2: intervention sample.** A total of 52 students participated in 21 mediations across the three program schools in Spring Quarter of 2013. Out of these 52 students, I included 40 (77%) in the quantitative analysis who had a complete set of both pre- and post-questionnaires (see Table 2). 12 students did not complete either a pre- or post-questionnaire for various reasons including my own inability to follow-up with students because of time or logistical problems, being expelled from school or not returning consent forms. For the qualitative analysis, I included 45 student and 11 undergraduate mediator interviews. In the analytic sample (n = 40), about 45% of participants were from the middle school, Casy, and the remaining 55% were from the two high schools, Sharon (25%) and Milton (30%). The majority of participants were in 6<sup>th</sup> (23%) and 9<sup>th</sup> (28%) grades and the least represented grade was 11<sup>th</sup> (5%). The sample was also predominantly female (73%). Casy and Sharon were the most unbalanced while Milton had an even split. The participant sample was also predominately Latino (73%) with blacks (18%) and Asians (10%)

comprising the remainder. Race was similar to gender in that both Casy and Sharon were nearly all Latino while Milton contained most of the ethnic diversity.

Table 2

*Characteristics of Intervention Sample in Three Participating Schools (N = 40 matched pairs)*

	Casy <i>n (%)</i>	Sharon <i>n (%)</i>	Milton <i>n (%)</i>	Total <i>n (%)</i>
# of mediations	10 (48)	4 (19)	7 (33)	21
# of participants	25 (48)	13 (25)	14 (27)	52
Matched pairs	18 (45)	10 (25)	12 (30)	40
Student Interviews	22 (49)	13 (29)	10 (22)	45
Mediator Interviews	3 (33)	2 (22)	4 (44)	9
Grade				
Middle school	18 (45)			
6	9 (23)	--	--	--
7	5 (13)	--	--	--
8	4 (10)	--	--	--
High school		10 (25)	12 (30)	22 (55)
9	--	1 (10)	10 (83)	11 (28)
10	--	4 (40)	0 (0)	4 (10)
11	--	1 (10)	1 (08)	2 (05)
12	--	4 (40)	1 (08)	5 (13)
Gender				
Female	15 (83)	8 (80)	6 (50)	29 (73)
Male	3 (17)	2 (20)	6 (50)	11 (28)
Race/Ethnicity				
Latino	18 (100)	8 (80)	3 (25)	29 (73)
Black	0 (0)	0 (0)	7 (58)	7 (18)
Asian	0 (0)	2 (20)	2 (17)	4 (10)
White	--	--	--	--
Other/mixed	--	--	--	--

**Procedures**

**Phase 1: classroom sample.** Classroom nomination and recruitment in each of the four schools worked slightly differently. Because Casy and Sharon were small schools, I was able to collect data from all the classrooms in the schools with the exception of one class at Casy that chose not to participate. Joad and Milton were much larger schools and I had to selectively sample classrooms from each grade in order to make the sample as representative of the school as possible. For these two schools, the classrooms were not selected randomly, but at the recommendation of the conflict mediation program

coordinator. At Joad, I collected data from two classrooms (high and low ability) in each grade level (6<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup>) in addition to two special education classes for a total of 8 classrooms. The special education classes were resource classrooms, which meant that the students were integrated into the general education classes for the rest of the school day. In these classes, I took special care to explain the questionnaires and answer student questions about the meaning of each survey item. At Milton, the situation was more complicated since there were six individual learning academies within the school. I attempted to collect data from each grade in each academy, but this was not always possible because of logistic and timing difficulties with the school site coordinator. Unfortunately, school informants at Milton also suggested that there were in fact significant behavioral and academic differences among the individual academies. In the end, I was able to recruit a total of 8 classrooms from 5 different academies, which included two 12<sup>th</sup> grade classrooms a humanities academy; one 11<sup>th</sup> grade class from a science academy and another from an arts academy; one 10<sup>th</sup> grade class from an arts academy and another from a humanities academy; and two 9<sup>th</sup> grade classrooms from a science academy.

To recruit students into this phase of the study, the program coordinator and I first spoke to each teacher about the purpose of the research. The teachers provided verbal consent to include their class and recommended a period to return and speak to the class as a whole about the study. I then visited each classroom that agreed to participate and made an announcement to the students about the study's purpose and its voluntary and confidential nature. I passed out youth and parent assent forms and students had the opportunity to take them home and obtain a parent or guardian signature before filling out the classroom questionnaire. Students who returned to school with assent forms

completed were able to take the classroom questionnaire. Casy had a 76% average, student response rate in classrooms that choose to participate with all required consent forms; Sharon had a rate of 71%; and Milton had a rate of 66%. Despite the variations in classroom recruitment and participation rates among the sites, each school represented about  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the total sample (see Table 1).

**Phase 2: intervention sample.** I recruited both undergraduate mediators and students from the three program schools to participate in phase 2 of the study. As part of their class requirements at UCLA, the undergraduates kept a fixed schedule and usually went to the school one day per week to conduct mediations in the schools. Most of the time, all the mediators assigned to a school went there on the same day. I selected each mediator who completed at least one mediation to participate in the study, which included everyone in the three schools except one mediator from Milton who did not conduct any mediations. Before interviewing them, I reviewed the purpose of the study, solicited each mediator's consent to participate and had them sign the adult assent form. In their interviews, I asked the mediators to refer to one specific mediation they conducted that quarter in their answers to the questions from the interview schedule. In order to thank the mediators for their participation, I gave each of them a toy stress ball.

I recruited student participants from a pool of referrals to the mediation program. The site coordinators at each school had a slightly different system for handling program referrals. At Casy, the site coordinator was the Dean of Students who kept a list of student referrals each week for the mediators, which mostly came from discipline or behavior issues in class, but also included self-referrals. At Sharon, the site coordinator was the Principal, who also kept a list of students who needed new mediations each week. These

students were referred mostly because of behavior issues, but occasionally they included self-referrals as well. At Milton, the referral process was not as straightforward. The site coordinator was the Assistant Principal of a humanities academy, but for some reason, there were very few mediation referrals to the program. After some discussion and negotiation, the referral process was expanded to the Deans of Students, who had more access to students involved in conflicts at the school. The Deans also maintained a list of students who were referred to them for disciplinary issues and there were generally no self-referrals. It was common at all three schools to have a waiting period of several days from time of the conflict and referral until the actual mediation took place since the mediators only came to the site about one day per week.

All middle and high school students who were referred to the mediation program were part of a potential pool of participants for phase 2 of the study. Students always had the option of participating in the mediation program while maintaining their right to not to participate in the study. Casey was responsible for the bulk of the student (49%) and mediation (46%) referrals while Sharon and Milton referred far less students and conducted fewer mediations (about 25% respectively) to the program (see Table 3). Ultimately, I was able to follow 21 mediation sessions across all three schools, which included, on average, about 2.6 students per mediation. Mediation sessions at Sharon tended to include more students while mediations at Milton usually only included about 2 students each on average. Before the mediators met with the students for the mediation sessions, I was able to retrieve a list of referrals from the site coordinators. I reviewed the study information with the students and sent a written assent form home with them for their parents' signature, which they returned before participating in the study. Out of 74



students who were referred for mediations, I recruited 52 students to participate in the study with consent (70%), which resulted in 40 pairs of matching pre- and post-tests and 45 student interviews. Students left the selection pool at any point for a variety of reasons including no mediation ever occurring after the referral, inappropriate referrals for mediation, being expelled from school, refusing to participate, missing a certain component of the study or not returning assent forms. I administered pre-questionnaires to eligible students before the mediators met with them for their mediation sessions. I also administered post-questionnaires and conducted individual interviews with students after the mediation sessions, but, unfortunately, the time it took me to follow-up with them was not always consistent. On average, it took me about 2 weeks to follow-up with students, although this varied slightly by school (see Table 3). I conducted all interviews in a confidential space in the students' schools and offered them a choice of stickers, pencils/pens, or toy stress balls as a gift to thank them for their time in the study.

Table 3

*Program Characteristics in Three Participating Schools, Spring 2013*

	Casy <i>n (%)</i>	Sharon <i>n (%)</i>	Milton <i>n (%)</i>	Total <i>n (%)</i>
# of students referred	36 (49)	19 (26)	19 (26)	74
# of student participants	25 (48)	13 (25)	14 (27)	52
# of mediations referred	12 (46)	5 (19)	9 (35)	26
# of mediations conducted	10 (48)	4 (19)	7 (33)	21
# of mediators	3	2	4	9
Avg # of students/mediation	2.5	3.3	2	2.6
Avg # of days between mediation and post-test	14.5	21.8	10.1	15.5

**Measures**

There were three different components to the study including the 1) classroom and 2) pre-post phases and 3) student and mediator interviews. In this section, I review the measures I used for each of these three parts. Tables 4 and 5 have a complete list of the

psychometric properties of each measure in phases 1 and 2 of the study (see Appendix A for the classroom questionnaire and Appendix B for the pre-post questionnaire). The third component of the study includes student and mediator interviews schedules (see Appendix C for the student interview and Appendix D for the mediator interview). I also created several independent, or moderator, variables based on students' interviews and then applied these codes to the data. I review these variables at the end of the section.

**Phase 1: classroom questionnaires.** All measures on the classroom questionnaire were taken almost exclusively from existing surveys or studies on school violence and bullying (except as indicated). The two primary sources for the measures include the School Crime Supplement (SCS) to the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) released by the National Center for Education Statistics (DeVoe & Bauer, 2011), and the School Climate Bullying Survey (SCBS) published by Cornell (2012), which was built on decades of research by other notable people in the field such as D. Olweus.

***Exposure to conflict measures.***

*Physical fighting.* This question asked students if they were in a physical fight at school in the last year. I coded students' answers as yes (=1) or no (=0). 84% of students responded no to this question and 16% of students responded yes. This question was specifically taken from the SCS portion of the NCVS (DeVoe, & Bauer, 2011).

*Witness fighting.* This question asked students how often they witness physical fights at school. Students reported their answers on a frequency scale that included: never (=0), once/year (=1), once/month (=2), once/week (=3), and every day (=4). The mode, or most commonly reported answer, was once/year (M = 1.3, SD = 1.1). I developed this question for the study.

*Witness bullying.* This question asked students how often they witness any kind of bullying or harassment that happens to others at school. Students reported their answers on a frequency scale that included: never (=0), once/year (=1), once/month (=2), once/week (=3), and every day (=4). The mode was never ( $M = 1.6$ ,  $SD = 1.5$ ). I developed this question for the study.

*Witness any bullying/harassment composite.* I also created a composite measure for witnessing any bullying or harassment that combined students' answers from the two witness questions. The composite variable was based on the highest reported frequency of witnessing either fighting or bullying. For example, if a student witnessed weekly bullying but no fighting, then this student would receive a weekly score for the composite. Scores were recorded on the same scale as the other questions: never (=0), once/year (=1), once/month (=2), once/week (=3), and every day (=4). The mode was once/year ( $M = 2.0$ ,  $SD = 1.4$ ).

*Bullying and harassment victimization.* A series of four questions asked students how often they were victims of four different types of bullying and harassment in school including physical, verbal and cyber bullying and racial harassment. I provided a brief description of what bullying/harassment meant and included a definition for each type that I instructed students to read before they responded. Students reported their answers on a frequency scale that included: never (=0), once/year (=1), once/month (=2), once/week (=3), and every day (=4). For physical ( $M = 0.4$ ,  $SD = 1.0$ ), verbal ( $M = 0.7$ ,  $SD = 1.3$ ), and cyber bullying ( $M = 0.2$ ,  $SD = 0.6$ ), and racial harassment ( $M = 0.4$ ,  $SD = 1.0$ ), the mode was never for each of these types. These four questions were specifically taken from SCBS

(Cornell, 2012), although I adapted the frequency scale from similar questions on bullying in the SCS portion of the NCVS (DeVoe, & Bauer, 2011).

*Experience any bullying/harassment composite.* I also created a composite measure for the experience of bullying or harassment that combined students' reports across the various types. The composite variable was based on the highest reported frequency from any of the four subtypes. For example, if a student reported weekly, verbal bullying but no other kinds, this student would receive a weekly score for the composite. Scores were recorded according to the same frequency scale as the other measures: never (=0), once/year (=1), once/month (=2), once/week (=3), and every day (=4). This composite provided a more consistent way of comparing student reports of any bullying or victimization experiences to other research that did not specify the exact type. The mode for this composite was never ( $M = 1.0$ ,  $SD = 1.4$ ). I developed this composite for the study.

***Help seeking measures.***

*Seeking help.* This question asked students who reported any experience of bullying or harassment if they went to anyone for help at school for the last time it happened to them. I coded students' answers as yes (=1) or no (=0). 52% of students responded no to this question and 48% of students responded yes. This question was adapted from the SCS portion of the NCVS (DeVoe, & Bauer, 2011).

*Snitching.* This question asked students if they could report a threat or conflict in school without being considered a "snitch". I coded students' answers as yes (=1) or no (=0). 63% of students responded yes to this question and 37% of students responded no. This question was adapted from the SCS portion of the NCVS (DeVoe, & Bauer, 2011).

*Willingness to seek help scale.* This 9-item measure asked students how much they agreed or disagreed with statements about getting help for problems or conflicts in school. The composite captured several areas of help seeking attitudes including student perceptions of acceptability of getting help, teachers' responsiveness to help seeking and peer norms about seeking help. Examples of statements in the measure included "I would tell someone if another student was...bullying or harassing me", or "brought a weapon to school", or "was going to hurt another student"; "It's okay for students talk to someone if they're being bullied or harassed"; and "teachers care about me" or "teachers would do something about it if I told them I was being bullied or harassed". Students reported their answers on a 4-point agreement scale that included: strongly agree (=1), somewhat agree (=2), somewhat disagree (=3), and strongly disagree (=4). Scores were reverse-coded so a higher score indicated a greater willingness to seek help (M = 3.1, SD = 0.6). The reliability coefficient (alpha) for this measure was .84 with the classroom sample. The help seeking scale was specifically taken from SCBS (Cornell, 2012) and a large number of other studies have also used and validated the measure (Williams & Cornell, 2006; Eliot et al., 2010; Bandyopadhyay et al., 2009).

Table 4

*Descriptive Statistics of Exposure to Violence and Help Seeking variables from Classroom Questionnaires (N = 848)*

	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Min	Max	<i>% missing</i>
Exposure to violence							
Physically fought	843	--	--	--	--	--	<1
Yes	139	16	--	--	--	--	--
No	704	84	--	--	--	--	--
Witness fights	844	--	1.3	1.1	0	4	<1
Witness bullying	833	--	1.6	1.5	0	4	02
Witness any conflict	848	--	2.0	1.4	0	4	0
Physically bullied	844	--	0.4	1.0	0	4	<1
Verbally bullied	843	--	0.7	1.3	0	4	<1

Cyber bullied <sup>a</sup>	664	--	0.2	0.6	0	4	01
Racially harassed	847	--	0.4	1.0	0	4	<1
Experience any bullying	848	--	1.0	1.4	0	4	0
Help seeking							
Sought help	348	--					30 <sup>b</sup>
Yes	181	48	--	--	--	--	--
No	167	52	--	--	--	--	--
Not snitching	751	--					11 <sup>b</sup>
Yes	472	63	--	--	--	--	--
No	279	37	--	--	--	--	--
Help seeking scale	833	--	3.1	0.6	1	4	02

<sup>a</sup> not included at Joad

<sup>b</sup> high % missing because of poor placement on questionnaire

## **Phase 2: intervention pre-post questionnaires.**

**Positive/Negative Affect Scale (PANAS).** For negative and positive affect, students responded to a list of words that captured negative and positive feelings before and after their mediations. I prompted students to report on how much they felt each of the words when they thought about the primary person from their conflict. The scale has 5 words for positive affect and 5 for negative affect for a total of 10 items, which were distributed in a random order on the questionnaire. Examples of words included “upset”, “sad”, “afraid”, “strong”, “interested”, “excited”, etc. Students reported their answers on a 5-point scale from “not at all” (=1) to “extremely” (=5). I averaged the negative and positive items together to create negative (pre: M = 2.1, SD = 1.0; post: M = 1.4, SD = 0.5) and positive (pre: M = 2.2, SD = 1.1; post: M = 2.1, SD = 0.9) composite scores. For negative affect, the reliability coefficients (alphas) for this measure were .80 (pre) and .77 (post) with the intervention sample. For positive affect, the reliability coefficients (alphas) for this measure were .65 (pre) and .61 (post) with the intervention sample. This scale was adapted from previous validation research on the PANAS, which included both a short (10-

item) version as well as a version validated for use with children (Laurent & Catanzaro, 1999; Thompson, 2007).

***Endorsement of nonviolent strategies to conflict and anger.*** In order to assess beliefs or attitudes about conflict strategies, students answered 8 questions about how they would respond to a potential conflict when they were angry with someone. The measure asked students how likely they were to adopt a series of nonviolent behaviors. Examples of questions include how likely are you to “ignore the situation?”, “try to talk it out?”, “suggest a mediation?”, “try to see the other person’s point of view?”, etc. Students reported their answers on a 4-point scale from “Very unlikely” (=1) to “Very likely” (=4). One item in the measure was reverse coded and then all items were averaged together to create a composite measure (pre: M = 2.4, SD = 0.5; post: M = 2.5, SD = 0.5). The reliability coefficients (alphas) for this measure were .69 (pre) and .52 (post) with the intervention sample. Higher scores on the measure would indicate a greater endorsement of nonviolent behaviors to resolve conflicts when students are angry. This scale was taken directly from the Youth Violence Compendium, which was adapted from a previous study on middle school students in grades 6 – 8 and showed excellent internal consistency, alpha = .84 (Dahlberg, Toal, Swahn, & Behrens, 2005).

***Willingness to seek help scale.*** This was the same scale used in the classroom questionnaire. Please refer to Phase 1 of the Measures section for a complete description. A higher score indicates greater willingness to seek help (pre: M = 3.1, SD = 0.5; post: M = 3.2, SD = 0.5). The reliability coefficients (alphas) for this measure were .67 (pre) and .77 (post) with the intervention sample.

**Mediation satisfaction.** In order to assess satisfaction, I used a 5-item measure that asked students how they felt about participating in the mediation program. Examples of items in this measure asked students if they liked mediation, were treated fairly, would return again or recommend it to their friends. Students reported their answers on a 4-point agreement scale that ranged from strongly agree (=1) to strongly disagree (=4). A higher score on this scale indicated higher satisfaction with various aspects of the mediation program. Items were averaged together to create a single, composite satisfaction score ( $M = 3.2$ ,  $SD = 0.7$ ). The reliability coefficient (alpha) for this measure was .88 with the intervention sample. This measure was adapted from two previous studies on conflict mediation that also assessed participants' satisfaction with their participation in the program and reported excellent internal consistency (Harris, 2005; Long, Fabricius, Musheno, & Palumbo, 1998).

Table 5

*Descriptive Statistics of Measures from Pre-Post Intervention Questionnaires (N = 40)*

	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Min	Max	% missing
Pre-test						
Negative Affect subscale	40	2.1	1.0	1	5	0
Positive Affect subscale	37	2.2	1.1	1	4.4	8
Nonviolent Response Endorsement	39	2.4	0.5	1.4	3.4	3
Help seeking scale	40	3.1	0.5	1.7	4	0
Post-test						
Negative Affect subscale	40	1.4	0.5	1	3	0
Positive Affect subscale	40	2.1	0.9	1	4	0
Nonviolent Response Endorsement	39	2.5	0.5	1.3	3.5	3
Help seeking scale	37	3.2	0.5	2.1	4	8
Mediation Satisfaction <sup>a</sup>	39	3.2	0.7	1	4	3

<sup>a</sup> Post-test only

**Intervention follow-up interview schedules.** I used two interview schedules to gather additional data from the students and the undergraduate mediators about their perspectives on peer conflicts and their experiences in the mediation program. These



interviews were meant to supplement the questionnaire data and provide a deeper look into the many contextual factors that could potentially influence students' experiences with resolving conflicts nonviolently. Both the student and mediator interview schedules went through similar phases of development. I adapted both interview protocols from a previously published study that focused specifically on disputant perspectives of the mediation process including learning new skills, satisfaction and other kinds of outcomes (Harris, 2005). Initially, I modified these interview schedules in order to create more overlap with this study's outcomes on the pre-post questionnaires. In addition, I broadened the focus of Harris' (2005) interviews from an emphasis on the mediation process itself to encompass various social-ecological factors that might also contribute to students' decisions of how to respond to conflict. In this section, I will review the content of each interview schedule as well as some moderator factors that arose from the student interviews, which appeared to have an effect on the program outcomes.

***Student interview schedule.*** The student interviews allowed me to gather additional perspectives on several important aspects of the mediation process including changes in key outcomes areas, their relationships with the mediators, program satisfaction and various kinds of barriers to responding to conflict nonviolently as well as accessing the program. Using the interview schedules from Harris' (2005) study as a starting point, I developed a 7-question interview that asked students about their experience in mediation from the point of referral to how the mediation agreement had been working. After interviewing some participants, I modified the schedule several times by eliminating or rewording questions that elicited only short or one-word answers. I also had initially decided not to ask students about the details of their conflict, but soon realized

this made the rest of the interview extremely difficult because it was hard to ask any follow up questions. The final version of the interview included seven thematic areas with additional prompts under each of these categories. These topic areas included: 1) a students' history of participation in mediation; 2) details of the current conflict that brought the students to mediation; 3) the mediation process including students' relationships with the mediators; 4) mediation outcomes mostly related to the disputants' relationships with each other after the mediation; 5) the process of learning conflict resolution skills; 6) program satisfaction; and 7) barriers to accessing program or seeking help and areas in need of improvement. I asked questions about mediation outcomes that specifically overlapped with the pre- and post-test measures in order to triangulate results and enhance the interpretation of the quantitative findings. The final version of the interview protocol appears in Appendix C.

***Mediator interview schedule.*** Interviews with the undergraduate mediators also provided me with an additional perspective on students' experiences with conflict and the program. Students who are in the same conflict often have different perspectives of what happened and may not always reach a resolution successfully. My interviews with the mediators were sometimes able to resolve these kinds of discrepancies with students' accounts of the conflict. Mediators were often able to provide a third party, neutral perspective of the situation, which was also useful for adding an additional layer of information about the conflict that students may not have been comfortable sharing with me as an unfamiliar adult or interviewer. I also developed the mediator interviews in a fashion similar as the student ones by taking Harris' (2005) schedule as a starting point, which focused on mediator modeling and disputant learning outcomes. For this interview, I

focused instead on two major goals including soliciting mediator perspectives on the conflict in order to validate students' reports and gathering contextual information about their relationships with students and program implementation. Similar to the student interviews, the mediator schedules went through one or two revisions such as modifying questions that did not generate sufficient or useful information. The final interview protocol had five thematic areas including 1) the mediation context, or details about who was involved and what happened; 2) the mediation process including how they engaged with students and facilitated the session; 3) mediation outcomes including their own perspective on how successful they felt it was; 4) learning outcomes for both students and the mediators themselves; and 5) areas for improvement including their own abilities as mediators and the program itself (see Appendix D for the complete interview protocol).

**Independent variables derived from interviews.** After reviewing and coding the student and mediator interviews, several factors arose from the data that seemed to contribute to students' experiences in a systematic way. These contributing factors appeared to act as potential moderators (or independent variables) because students' comments suggested they had an impact on outcomes including their emotions, learning, resolutions or sense of satisfaction with the program. I developed three of these independent variables from the qualitative data and I review each of them here as I tested them in the quantitative, pre-post analysis.

**Relationship history.** Students' comments suggested that having a prior history of friendship affected their experience in mediation. I created a dichotomous, relationship status variable and coded students whenever possible as either 0) not friends, or just acquaintances with no previous relationship among disputants; or 1) friends who had an

existing friendship or relationship with the disputant prior to the conflict. I coded this variable using information from both the student and mediator interviews. According to this coding scheme, 58% of students (n = 23) had a relationship history and 42% of students (n = 17) did not have a relationship history.

**Role in conflict.** Students' comments suggested that their role in the conflict may have resulted in different outcomes or influenced their experiences in mediation. I created a role in conflict variable that labeled students as 1) an *instigator/aggressor* when the disputant appeared to be a bully or the primary aggressor; 2) a *victim* when the student primarily appeared to be the target of aggression in the conflict; or 3) a *disputant* when there was not enough information or the students' roles in the conflict were either equal or unclear. I also used information from both the student and mediator interviews to code this variable. According to this coding scheme, 52% of students (n = 21) were disputants, 25% of students were aggressors (n = 10), and 23% of students were victims (n = 9).

**Type of conflict.** Students' comments suggested that the type of the conflict may have influenced their experiences or key outcomes in the mediation. I created a type of conflict variable and assigned codes to students as being either in 1) a *social* conflict when it was primarily related to friendship problems or arguments, or included only verbal aggression such as rumors, gossip or verbal harassment; 2) a *physical* conflict when the dispute included aspects of physical aggression such as threats, violence, or physical bullying. I coded this variable in a mutually exclusive way so that conflicts could not be both social and physical, although the majority of conflicts began primarily as social. I also used information from both the student and mediator interviews. I initially developed this variable as an indicator of level of severity, ranging from low to high, but ultimately

decided that this method was a more objective way of labeling the conflicts. According to this coding scheme, 53% of students ( $n = 21$ ) were in conflicts that were primarily social in nature while 47% of students were in conflicts with physical aspects ( $n = 19$ ).

## Data Analysis

**Phase 1: classroom sample.** In the first phase of the study, data analysis of the classroom questionnaires consisted of several parts including data entry, preparation and statistical analysis of relationships among the variables of interest. First, I assigned coding schemes to all the questions from questionnaires and entered all of the data anonymously into Excel. I cleaned the data as much as possible by flagging entries that either had blanks or the same answers across the entire questionnaire. Lastly, I imported the data and performed all statistical procedures in Stata 12. I looked at the classroom data in three different ways including 1) correlations among all the variables, 2) between school differences, and 3) within school, group differences for the whole sample and within two of the four schools.

First, I calculated correlations among the classroom variables using Spearman's rank-order correlation coefficient (*rho*) because of the ordinal and non-normal nature of many of the variables (see Table 6 in Results). Most of the questions are either categorical or ordinal because they ask about frequency and, in general, the results were highly and positively skewed towards "never", or less frequent exposure.

Second, I looked for school differences in demographics and most of the variables in the classroom sample (see Table 7 in Results). In order to determine whether a specific school had a significant relationship with any of the variables, I used two different tests depending on whether they were categorical, ordinal or interval. Thus, I used a chi-squared

test of independence when both the independent (e.g., school) variable (IV) and dependent (e.g., physical fighting) variable (DV) were categorical; and I used the Kruskal-Wallis rank test when the DV was ordinal rather than categorical, i.e., when questions asked how often something happened. The help seeking scale was the only interval DV in the classroom sample; however, in this case, the Kruskal-Wallis test was still preferable to ANOVA because the schools did not have equal variances according to a significant Bartlett's test statistic ( $p < .01$ ), which failed the assumption of homoscedasticity for the ANOVA test.

Third, I looked for group differences within the classroom sample as a whole in addition to two of the four schools (see Tables 8, 9 and 10 in Results). For the two schools, I chose Joad and Milton for closer analysis because they reported the highest levels of conflict and had the most ethnic diversity among the four schools. Again, in order to examine significant mean differences among groups, I used several variations of chi-squared distribution tests as well as rank order tests depending on the nature of the data, e.g., categorical or ordinal, and the number of grouping levels in the IV's, e.g., two for gender, five for ethnicity, etc. For tests with categorical variables, I used a chi-squared test of independence for gender (categorical) and physical fighting (categorical), but I used Fisher's exact test for when any of the cell sizes were less than 5 such as in the case of race (categorical) and physical fighting (categorical). For tests with ordinal DV's, I either used the Wilcoxon-Mann-Whitney test for two-level IV's such as gender and the Kruskal-Wallis rank test for IV's with three or more levels such as race. Again, the data failed the assumption of homoscedasticity, which precluded the use of the ANOVA family of tests and required me to use alternative, nonparametric tests for analyzing group mean differences. In cases when I detected significant group differences (e.g., with race) and a visual

inspection of the data did not reveal an obvious group difference, I conducted a simple, linear regression with Bonferroni adjustments for multiple comparisons in order to determine which groups were responsible for the statistically significant differences.

**Phase 2: intervention sample.** In the second phase of the study, I conducted mixed methods analyses of the intervention samples, which included the pre-post questionnaire sample and the student and mediator interviews. The quantitative procedures in this phase consisted of several parts including data preparation, analysis of pre-post changes and examination of additional factors, or IV's (so-called moderators), related to changes in outcomes, if any. I also conducted the analysis of qualitative data in several steps including transcription of interviews, thematic content coding and comparison or integration of major themes with the quantitative findings. I review each of these treatments of the quantitative and qualitative data in turn here.

**Quantitative data analysis.** For the pre-post measures, I first developed and assigned codes to all the measures from questionnaires and entered the data into Excel without student identifiers. I cleaned the data by assigning missing values to empty cells and eliminating suspicious entries. Lastly, I imported the data and performed all statistical procedures using Stata 12. For an analysis of program effects, I included only students with matching pairs of pre- and post-tests ( $n = 40$ ) and excluded students who only had either one pre- or post-test. First, I calculated mean scores with standard deviations for all outcome measures in the sample (see Table 11 in Results). In order to look for statistically significant changes in outcomes from pre- to post-test, I used a Wilcoxon signed rank sum test, which is a special version (nonparametric) of the paired samples t-test for use with

ordinal (e.g., Likert or frequency scales) rather than interval or scale variables. I measured all outcomes either as ranks or an expression of agreement with statements.

Next, I examined additional factors, sometimes called independent or moderator variables, which also may have been related to the changes in the outcomes. For example, certain groups of students may report a greater degree of change than others in a consistent or systematic way. I tested a series of these variables to see if any of them had a significant association with the change in outcome scores from pre- to post-test. In order to make this assessment, I created an additional variable for each outcome that recorded the amount and direction of a change for each student. I categorized students into two groups based on their direction of change, which included 1) positive change and 2) negative or no change. I then conducted two different kinds of statistical tests of association to determine whether the outcomes had a significant relationship with this change variable or grouping. I used a Pearson correlation ( $r$ ) coefficient value when the IV and DV were both interval in nature: for example, with measurement time (IV) and the change in negative outcome (DV). In most cases, however, the IV and DV were categorical. For example, the analyses included IV's like gender, school, or role in conflict and the DV was transformed to represent either positive or no/negative change as described earlier. In this case, I used Fisher's exact test, which is similar to a chi-squared test for examining the significance of the association between two categorical variables in a contingency table. However, Fisher's test is preferable to chi-squared when any of the cell sizes in the table are less than 10. Dichotomizing the outcome variables into groups of change or no change and presenting them in a table was also helpful for understanding the data in a visual way.



***Qualitative data analysis.*** The last procedure for data analysis in this study was the review of student and mediator interviews. This data analysis procedure was a multi-stage process that started with recording and transcribing all the interviews. Even as I began to transcribe, it became apparent that certain themes were present across multiple interviews and I took notes on my observations of patterns in students' comments during the transcription process. After I completed the transcriptions, I had an unorganized list of themes, which I needed to further revise in the subsequent steps of the data analysis. I used Microsoft Word rather than a qualitative data analysis software package for the analysis because I wanted to preserve the flexibility of the coding process, and not make it either overly rigid or distract myself from the meaning of the data. In addition, I also believe I did not have the volume of qualitative data to justify the use of a specialized program in terms of a utility, time or cost investment. In Word, I first created a document with a list of major theme areas and I then listed representative quotes underneath each of these major headings. I counted the number of students who referenced these theme areas and developed definitions for each code after reaching a certain level of saturation. In order to ensure the evidence was representative, I also noted the gender, grade level and school for all sources of the quotes.

Because of the mixed-methods nature of this study, I did not necessarily approach the data here as a "blank slate", i.e., take a grounded approach to the analysis, but rather I attempted to organize students comments around this study's theoretical framework, which provides a way of structuring and interpreting the data according to outcome areas I had already determined to be significant (Sipe & Ghiso, 2004). While this type of horizontal analysis may impose a structure onto the data at higher levels of inference such as pre-

selecting important domains or factors, I was able to adopt a more inductive, or “bottom up”, approach with the data as I identified various sub-factors or themes within these major domain and factor areas (Schensul et al., 2013a). For example, based on my literature review of conflict resolution, I had already identified emotional affect as an important area to study and then used semi-structured interviews in order to further clarify and draw out examples of students’ emotional experiences during the mediation process (Schensul, Scheunsul, & LeCompte, 2013b).

Most of my coding and interpreting of the data occurred at this mid-level location between formative theory and the experiences of the participants. I read through the students’ and mediators’ transcripts several times in order to draw inferences from the data. First, I read all the transcripts by school starting with the middle school and moving through each of the high schools. I pulled out key quotes from students and mediators that seemed to represent various factors or variables in each of the major outcome areas. However, the quotes often touched on different, but related aspects of the major domain areas, which required me to begin the process of assigning codes to the quotes and organizing them based on their shared qualities (Schensul, Scheunsul, & LeCompte, 2013c). Next, I was able to focus on groupings of quotes within a code and make assertions about how the code was significant or related to the high-level outcome area (Erickson, 1986). In order to support my assertions with appropriate evidence, I included events that occurred both frequently and rarely in the data and also made use of disconfirming or contradictory examples when possible to strengthen the plausibility of the conclusions (Erickson, 1986). Also at the advice of Erickson (1986), in order to demonstrate this process to the reader, I presented quotes as evidence or support for my assertions in the narrative and I attempted

to introduce each quote and offer an interpretation afterwards. Of course, this recursive process of building and consolidating thematic categories is never completely objective and it may hide from the reader the extent to which I have introduced my own biases or positions into the coding scheme (Sipe & Ghiso, 2004). Lastly, however, I attempted to offer explanations of the quantitative results with evidence from the qualitative data, whenever possible, as a way of providing a more complete picture of the meaning of the data. The consideration of multiple sources together may hopefully convince the reader that my assertions are at least somewhat credible in the absence of alternative ways of establishing trustworthiness such member checking or peer review of my data (Kiyama, 2010).

### **Quantitative Results**

This study included two primary sources of quantitative data in order to understand students' exposure to conflict at the classroom level and participants' experiences in the conflict mediation program. The first data source was classroom questionnaires where students reported on the frequency of exposure to violence and their attitudes about help seeking. I collected this data at four school sites including two middle schools, Casy and Joad, and two high schools, Sharon and Milton. The second data source was pre- and post-questionnaires that assessed students' experiences in the conflict mediation program. I collected this data at three schools including Casy, Sharon and Milton.

#### **Phase 1: Classroom Questionnaire Results**

The classroom questionnaires contained rich sources of data about students' exposure to aggressive incidents like fighting, bullying and harassment as well as their help seeking behaviors and attitudes for these kinds of problems in their schools. The classroom data help answer the first research question about the prevalence of conflict in the

program schools, the nature of students' help seeking attitudes or behaviors, and any group differences among the students or the schools. Results indicated that there were several significant group differences among students and schools. Male students consistently reported higher levels of exposure to violence and lower levels of help seeking than female students. Black students consistently reported the highest levels of exposure to violence and the lowest levels of help seeking. Grade level, and by proxy, age, was negatively associated with exposure to violence and positively associated with help seeking attitudes and behaviors. For differences among schools, Joad had the highest levels of conflict while Sharon had the lowest levels of conflict, but the highest levels of help seeking scores. I present these findings in the next sections in the following order: 1) correlations among all the variables from the classroom questionnaires, 2) significant differences among the four schools, and 3) group differences by gender, ethnicity and grade level within the entire sample and then between Joad and Milton because students reported the highest levels of conflict in these two schools.

**Correlational analyses.** There were relatively few surprises among the correlations and most were in the expected direction; however, some noteworthy patterns emerged among the demographic, exposure to violence, and help seeking variables (see Table 6). Among the demographic variables, gender had highest correlation with reports of physical fighting followed by racial harassment and help seeking attitudes. Male gender was positively correlated with these aggressive behaviors and negatively correlated with help seeking, as one might expect, but there was no correlation between gender and any specific type of bullying. Perhaps expectedly, race had the highest correlations with reports of racial harassment. As expected, grade level was also negatively correlated with all types

of exposure to violence. In other words, students reported lower levels of conflict as their grade level increased. Grade level was also positively correlated with help seeking, which indicates that older students report more favorable help seeking attitudes.

Both witnessing and experiencing bullying or physical fights were positively correlated with each other while they were also negatively correlated with help seeking attitudes, which would be in the expected directions. Cyber bullying was the only type of aggressive behavior that did not have a significant correlation with any demographic variable, which is likely the result of few reports for this type of behavior. While help seeking was negatively correlated with all types of exposure to violence, it had the highest correlation with witnessing violence and the lowest correlations with actual experiences of bullying or aggression. Help seeking was also positively correlated with the other questions about getting help for conflicts. Student who felt they could get help without being a “snitch” had the highest, positive correlation with general attitudes about help seeking. Among actual students who reported getting help for their last conflict in school, the only significant correlation was with witnessing bullying, though this relationship was not very strong. Lastly, looking at the composite variables for exposure to violence, students who reported any experiences with bullying were most often verbally bullied, and students who witnessed conflicts were more likely to witness bullying compared to physical fights.

**Between school differences in the classroom sample.** I also examined school differences in student reports of exposure to violence and help seeking in the classroom questionnaires. Looking across the entire sample, there were significant school differences for almost every indicator of exposure to violence and help seeking (see Table 7). These stark findings suggest that there may be important differences in the environment or

Table 6

*Correlation Matrix for Classroom Surveys Across Schools (N = 799)*<sup>a</sup>

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
Demographics														
1. Gender	--													
2. Race	.02	--												
3. Grade	-.00	.08*	--											
Exposure to violence														
4. Physically fought	.16**	.09	-.13**	--										
5. Witness fights	.09**	.16**	-.16**	.26**	--									
6. Witness bullying	.02	.08*	-.17**	.19**	.38**	--								
7. Physically bullied	.05	.02	-.20**	.22**	.24**	.34**	--							
8. Verbally bullied	.06	.10**	-.17**	.19**	.25**	.42**	.54**	--						
9. Cyber bullied <sup>b</sup>	-.04	.06	-.02	.15**	.25**	.21**	.42**	.37**	--					
10. Racially harassed	.12**	.18**	-.05	.20**	.18**	.31**	.27**	.36**	.25**	--				
Help seeking														
11. Help seeking scale	-.12**	-.10**	.09*	-.18**	-.30**	-.31**	-.19**	-.20**	-.13**	-.22**	--			
12. Sought help <sup>c</sup>	-.10	-.02	-.04	-.06	-.05	-.16*	.03	-.08	-.02	-.10	.18**	--		
13. Not switching	-.09*	.01	.06	-.12**	-.12**	-.11**	-.03	.00	-.01	-.10**	.32**	0.19**	--	
Composites														
14. Witness Any Conflict	.02	.10**	-.24**	.23**	.66**	.84**	.34**	.40**	.24**	.29**	-.34**	-.13*	-.12**	--
15. Experience Any Bullying	.09*	.14**	-.18**	.25**	.31**	.46**	.60**	.83**	.43**	.59**	-.26**	-.07	-.04	.46**

\* p &lt; .05

\*\* p &lt; .01

<sup>a</sup> Spearman's rank-order correlations ( $\rho$ )<sup>b</sup> Only includes 3 schools: Casy, Sharon & Milton (N = 623)<sup>c</sup> Only answered by students who reported any kind of bullying or harassment (n = 329)

culture among the four schools especially as they relate to school violence or safety. For example, Joad clearly had the highest mean score for every indicator of exposure to violence while Sharon had the lowest scores. Casy and Milton ranked similarly in the middle of these two schools. Milton and Casy's similar exposure to violence scores is somewhat concerning because of the negative correlation between conflict and grade level, which indicates that high school grades should report lower scores than middle school grades. For help seeking attitudes, Milton and Joad had the lowest scores and Sharon had the highest score; however, given the positive correlation between grade level and help seeking, Milton appeared to have lower scores than expected.

Out of the three program intervention schools (not including Joad), Casy had the highest mean scores for all types of bullying, which is consistent with the correlational findings between grade level and bullying. Milton also had the highest reports of racial harassment out of these three schools (on par with Joad), which is noteworthy given the greater racial diversity of its student body. In terms of help seeking variables, the only significant difference among the schools was on the help seeking scale with Sharon having the highest mean score. Though not statistically significant, students at Sharon were most likely to report that they would not be considered "snitches" for reporting problems at school and students at Casy were most likely to report getting help for their last school conflict. Cyber bullying was also the only exposure to violence indicator with no significant school differences probably because of low frequencies reported for this type of behavior. In summary, I found significant school differences for almost all exposure to violence variables and the measure of help seeking attitudes. Joad had the highest mean exposure to violence scores, which sometimes approached two to three times the levels of other

schools. Sharon had the lowest levels of conflict and the highest level of help seeking attitudes reported by students. These findings suggest real differences among the schools, which could have some effect on students' experiences in the mediation program as well.

Table 7

*School Differences in Exposure to Violence and Help Seeking Variables in Classroom Surveys (N = 848)*

Classroom Items	Casy % or M(SD) <sup>d</sup>	Sharon % or M(SD)	Milton % or M(SD)	Joad % or M(SD)	Total % M(SD)
Sample size, <i>n</i>	220	240	212	176	848
Witness any conflict* <sup>a</sup>	2.0 (1.4)	1.2 (1.2)	2.1 (1.1)	2.8 (1.1)	2.0 (1.4)
Any amount	81	63	94	96	82
Weekly or more	37	18	39	65	37
Witness fights	1.0 (1.0)	0.7 (0.9)	1.5 (0.9)	2.3 (1.1)	1.3 (1.1)
Any amount	58	50	89	92	71
Weekly or more	09	03	06	43	14
Witness bullying	1.8 (1.5)	1.0 (1.3)	1.6 (1.4)	2.2 (1.6)	1.6 (1.5)
Any amount	71	46	72	72	64
Weekly or more	36	16	28	49	31
Experience any bullying* <sup>a</sup>	1.1 (1.4)	0.5 (1.1)	1.0 (1.4)	1.5 (1.6)	1.0 (1.4)
Any amount	49	24	43	57	42
Weekly or more	21	09	21	33	20
Physically bullied	0.5 (1.0)	0.2 (0.7)	0.3 (0.8)	0.8 (1.3)	0.4 (1.0)
Any amount	26	10	13	28	19
Weekly or more	09	03	06	17	08
Verbally bullied	0.9 (1.3)	0.4 (1.0)	0.7 (1.2)	1.2 (1.5)	.07 (1.3)
Any amount	37	18	32	44	32
Weekly or more	17	06	11	26	14
Cyber bullied	0.3 (0.7)	0.1 (0.5)	0.2 (0.7)	-- <sup>c</sup>	0.2 (.06)
Any amount	14	05	12	-- <sup>c</sup>	10
Weekly or more	04	01	01	-- <sup>c</sup>	03
Racially harassed	0.4 (0.8)	0.2 (0.7)	0.6 (1.1)	0.6 (1.1)	0.4 (1.0)
Any amount	20	09	27	24	19
Weekly or more	04	03	11	09	06
Physically fought* <sup>b</sup>	16	09	15	29	16
Help seeking scale* <sup>a</sup>	3.1 (0.6)	3.3 (0.6)	3.0 (0.7)	3.0 (0.5)	3.1 (0.5)
Sought help <sup>b</sup>	59	51	43	53	52
Report without snitching <sup>b</sup>	57	70	62	63	63

\* Significant school difference ( $p < .05$ )

<sup>a</sup> Kruskal-Wallis rank test

<sup>b</sup> Chi-squared test

<sup>c</sup> Item not included at Joad

<sup>d</sup> Range: 0-never, 1-yearly, 2-monthly, 3-weekly, 4-daily



**Within school and between group differences.** I also considered differences by gender, race and grade level in the whole classroom sample and at two schools, Joad and Milton, because they tended to report the highest levels of conflict and had the most ethnic diversity. Looking at the classroom sample as a whole, almost all exposure to violence and help seeking variables had significant mean differences for gender, race, and grade level with only two exceptions (see Table 8). There were no significant grade level differences for racial harassment and no gender differences for witnessing any conflict including fighting or bullying. Consistent with the correlation findings, male students reported higher levels of fighting and experienced more bullying and racial harassment than female students. Female students also had higher help seeking scores than male students. Also consistent with correlation findings, there were significant grade level differences for all variables except racial harassment, which indicated that middle school students reported exposure to violence with greater frequency and lower levels of help seeking compared to high school students.

There were significant racial differences among all of the measures including exposure to violence and help seeking. Black students consistently reported higher frequencies of exposure to violence across all categories sometimes at levels of two to three times higher than other racial groups. They also reported the lowest help seeking scores compared to other racial groups, which is somewhat concerning given that they also reported the highest levels of exposure to conflict. There were also significant gender and race differences in reports of racial harassment. Interestingly, Latino students reported the lowest levels of racial harassment while also representing the largest, single ethnic group among all the schools. Although black students were the second largest ethnic group in the

sample, they were still a small minority compared to Latinos; however, they reported equally high levels of racial harassment as other minority groups in the sample including whites and other/mixed racial groups.

Table 8

*Group Differences in Exposure to Violence and Help Seeking in Classroom Surveys Across the Whole Sample (N = 848)*

Independent Vars.	Physically Fought n (%)	Racial Harassment M (SD)	Witness Any Conflict M (SD)	Experience Any Bullying M (SD)	Help Seeking M (SD)
Gender	.000* <sup>a</sup>	.001* <sup>c</sup>	.469 <sup>c</sup>	.005* <sup>c</sup>	.000* <sup>c</sup>
Female	51 (11)	0.3 (0.8)	1.9 (1.3)	0.9 (1.3)	3.2 (0.6)
Male	86 (23)	0.5 (1.1)	2.0 (1.4)	1.2 (1.5)	3.0 (0.7)
Race	.003* <sup>b</sup>	.014* <sup>d</sup>	.001* <sup>d</sup>	.001* <sup>d</sup>	.000* <sup>d</sup>
Latino	95 (15)	0.3 (0.8)	1.9 (1.4)	0.9 (1.4)	3.2 (0.6)
Black	25 (31)	0.8 (1.3)	2.7 (1.3) <sup>e</sup>	1.7 (1.7) <sup>e</sup>	2.9 (0.6) <sup>e</sup>
Asian	03 (09)	0.4 (0.8)	1.5 (1.1)	0.6 (0.9)	3.3 (0.5)
White	04 (13)	0.8 (1.4)	2.0 (1.2)	1.2 (1.5)	3.0 (0.8)
Other/mixed	11 (24)	0.8 (1.3)	2.1 (1.4)	1.4 (1.6)	3.0 (0.8)
Grade Level	.000* <sup>a</sup>	.138 <sup>c</sup>	.000* <sup>c</sup>	.000* <sup>c</sup>	.001* <sup>c</sup>
Middle School	86 (22)	0.4 (1.0)	2.3 (1.4)	1.3 (1.5)	3.1 (0.6)
High School	53 (12)	0.4 (0.9)	1.6 (1.3)	0.8 (1.3)	3.2 (0.7)

\* Significant test value (p < .05)

<sup>a</sup> Pearson chi-square

<sup>b</sup> Fisher's exact test

<sup>c</sup> Wilcoxon-Mann-Whitney test

<sup>d</sup> Kruskal-Wallis rank test

<sup>e</sup> Significant differences w/ Latinos and Asians

I also looked for similar group differences at Joad and Milton, which had the greatest ethnic diversity and the highest levels of conflict among the four schools. The most striking difference in these within-school analyses compared to the whole sample was the lack of significant group differences, which may have resulted from the reduced sample size. In other words, there may have been insufficient power to detect significant differences also, in part, because of the reduced range of the data that results from highly skewed distributions in the frequency variables.

At Joad, significant gender differences persisted for physical fighting, racial harassment and help seeking, but there were no longer any differences in witnessing conflict or experiencing any kind of bullying (see Table 9). Racial group differences also changed on a few indicators, although differences in the experience of any bullying and help seeking remained significant. For any type of bullying, there were no significant differences between black and Latino students, but the few white students reported extremely high levels. A sub-analysis of only blacks and Latinos on help seeking revealed a significant difference between these two groups ( $p < .05$ ). There were no significant grade level differences among any of the variables at Joad.

Students at Milton, by contrast, appeared to more closely resemble the overall trends in the entire sample; however, there were also far fewer significant group differences (see Table 10). Males reported greater exposure to bullying including racial harassment and lower levels of help seeking compared to females. Despite Milton's ethnic diversity, there were no significant racial group differences on any of the measures even though black students reported the highest mean levels of exposure to violence. Grade level differences were also consistent with the findings from the whole sample. There were significant grade level differences for witnessing conflict and help seeking, but not for the other variables. In general, grade level was negatively correlated with exposure to violence and positively correlated with help seeking, which was not the case for Joad, but was the case for the whole sample.

Table 9

*Group Differences in Exposure to Violence and Help Seeking in Classroom Surveys at Joad (N = 176)*

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Physically Fought	Racial Harassment	Witness Any Conflict	Experience Any Bullying	Help Seeking
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Independent Vars.	n (%)	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)
Gender	.001* <sup>a</sup>	.006* <sup>c</sup>	.946 <sup>c</sup>	.143 <sup>c</sup>	.001* <sup>c</sup>
Female	17 (18)	0.3 (0.9)	2.9 (1.1)	1.4 (1.5)	3.1 (0.5)
Male	34 (40)	0.8 (1.3)	2.8 (1.2)	1.7 (1.6)	2.9 (0.6)
Race	.284 <sup>b</sup>	.283 <sup>d</sup>	.064 <sup>d</sup>	.043* <sup>d</sup>	.024* <sup>d</sup>
Latino	30 (25)	0.4 (0.9)	2.7 (1.1)	1.3 (1.5)	3.0 (0.6)
Black	14 (37)	0.7 (1.2)	3.2 (1.1)	1.8 (1.7)	2.8 (0.5)
Asian	-- (--)	-- (--)	-- (--)	-- (--)	-- (--)
White	0 (0)	2.0 (2.8)	3.5 (0.7)	3.5 (0.7)	3.7 (0.3)
Other/mixed	07 (41)	1.1 (1.6)	2.8 (1.2)	2.2 (1.7)	3.0 (0.5)
Grade	.097 <sup>a</sup>	.867 <sup>d</sup>	.840 <sup>d</sup>	.823 <sup>d</sup>	.064 <sup>d</sup>
6 <sup>th</sup>	18 (38)	0.5 (1.0)	2.8 (1.2)	1.7 (1.6)	3.1 (0.6)
7 <sup>th</sup>	12 (20)	0.5 (1.0)	2.9 (1.0)	1.5 (1.6)	3.1 (0.5)
8 <sup>th</sup>	21 (31)	0.7 (1.3)	2.9 (1.2)	1.5 (1.6)	2.9 (0.6)

\* Significant test value (p < .05)

<sup>a</sup> Pearson chi-square

<sup>b</sup> Fisher's exact test

<sup>c</sup> Wilcoxon-Mann-Whitney test

<sup>d</sup> Kruskal-Wallis rank test

Table 10

*Group Differences in Exposure to Violence and Help Seeking in Classroom Surveys at Milton (N = 212)*

Independent Vars.	Physically Fought n (%)	Racial Harassment M (SD)	Witness Any Conflict M (SD)	Experience Any Bullying M (SD)	Help Seeking M (SD)
Gender	.567 <sup>a</sup>	.042* <sup>c</sup>	.146 <sup>c</sup>	.011* <sup>c</sup>	.500 <sup>c</sup>
Female	15 (13)	0.4 (1.0)	1.9 (1.1)	0.8 (1.2)	3.0 (0.6)
Male	15 (16)	0.8 (1.3)	2.2 (1.2)	1.3 (1.5)	2.9 (0.8)
Race	.425 <sup>b</sup>	.538 <sup>d</sup>	.775 <sup>d</sup>	.211 <sup>d</sup>	.823 <sup>d</sup>
Latino	14 (12)	0.5 (1.0)	2.1 (1.1)	0.9 (1.3)	3.0 (0.7)
Black	09 (25)	0.9 (1.5)	2.2 (1.1)	1.6 (1.7)	2.9 (0.6)
Asian	03 (18)	0.7 (0.9)	2.1 (1.0)	1.1 (1.0)	3.1 (0.5)
White	03 (13)	0.6 (1.2)	2.0 (1.1)	1.0 (1.4)	2.9 (0.9)
Other/mixed	03 (16)	0.6 (1.1)	1.8 (1.2)	0.7 (1.1)	2.8 (1.0)
Grade	.052 <sup>a</sup>	.334 <sup>d</sup>	.001* <sup>d</sup>	.175 <sup>d</sup>	.020* <sup>d</sup>
9 <sup>th</sup>	15 (25)	0.7 (1.2)	2.3 (1.1)	1.3 (1.5)	2.9 (0.5)
10 <sup>th</sup>	07 (16)	0.8 (1.4)	2.5 (1.1)	1.2 (1.5)	2.6 (0.9)
11 <sup>th</sup>	05 (07)	0.4 (1.0)	1.7 (1.0)	0.8 (1.3)	3.1 (0.6)
12 <sup>th</sup>	05 (14)	0.5 (1.1)	1.8 (1.1)	0.8 (1.4)	3.1 (0.8)

\* Significant test value (p < .05)

<sup>a</sup> Pearson chi-square

<sup>b</sup> Fisher's exact test

<sup>c</sup> Wilcoxon-Mann-Whitney test

<sup>d</sup> Kruskal-Wallis rank test

## Phase 2: Pre-Post Mediation Program Results

The data from the program questionnaires helped answer the second research question about whether students experienced any changes in major outcome areas including program satisfaction. In this section, I report on each of the five main outcome areas including negative affect, positive affect, nonviolent response endorsement, help seeking attitudes and program satisfaction. In summary, only negative affect showed a significant change from pre- to post-test, while there were no significant differences for the other outcomes (see Table 11). However, this may be a particularly meaningful finding for this study because of how negative feelings like anger influence students' decisions or efforts to resolve conflict in peaceful ways.

Table 11

*Primary Outcome Scores from Pre to Post Intervention (n = 40) <sup>a</sup>*

Outcome Measure (DV)	Pre-test M (SD)	Post-test M (SD)	n
Negative affect *	2.1 (1.0)	1.4 (0.5)	40
Positive affect	2.2 (1.1)	2.1 (0.9)	37
Nonviolent response	2.4 (0.5)	2.5 (0.5)	38
Help seeking	3.1 (0.5)	3.2 (0.5)	37
Satisfaction	-- <sup>b</sup>	3.3 (0.7)	46

\*  $p < .001$

<sup>a</sup> For a breakdown of outcomes by school, see Appendix E

<sup>b</sup> Included in post-test only

**Negative affect.** In the first outcome area, negative affect, I asked students to rank how much they felt a list of negative emotions when they thought about the main person with whom they had a conflict. Students reported a substantial decrease from 2.1 to 1.4 (pre: SD = 1.0; post: SD = .5) in negative emotions after they participated in the mediation, which was statistically significant ( $p < .001$ ) and in the expected direction. I also found three potential factors that influenced the change in negative emotions including 1)

measurement time, or the number of days that passed from the date of the intervention to the date of the post-test; 2) grade level defined by middle and high school; and 3) the school where the intervention took place (see Table 12). I excluded other potential, independent variables from the discussion here because they did not have a statistically significant relationship with the change in negative affect.

First, I considered measurement time as one possible influence on student reports of a change in negative emotions after the mediation. Time appeared to be moderately and negatively correlated ( $r = -.31$ ;  $p < .05$ ) with a decrease in students' negative affect scores from pre- to post-test. More students (76%) reported decreases in negative affect scores who took the post-test two weeks or more after their mediation session compared with students (57%) who took the test within two weeks. In other words, students who took the post-test more than two weeks after the mediation were more likely to report a drop in feelings like anger or sadness than students who took it less than two weeks after their mediation. Next, I found that a student's grade level or school was significantly related to the change in negative affect ( $p < .05$ ). More high school students (82%) reported drops in negative emotions than middle school students (44%) by an apparently large margin. This was true for both high schools even though one of them had slightly more students who reported decreases in negative affect. By contrast, more middle school students (56%) reported either no change or an increase in negative emotions compared to the number of middle school students (44%) who reported a drop in anger or other negative feelings. In summary, I found three positive findings for student reports of negative affect: 1) negative affect decreased from pre- to post-test for most students; 2) measurement time was associated with the change in negative affect; and 3) grade level and school were also

associated with the change. Though significant, the quantitative findings are somewhat limited because they do not necessarily reveal how or why negative emotions decreased after the mediation. However, findings do indicate which groups of students from the sample might be more likely to experience this drop in affect.

Table 12

*Numbers of Participants Reporting Change in Negative Affect Scores from Pre- to Post-test (n = 40)*

Independent Variable (IV)	Change in Negative Affect			p-value
	Down (%)	No change or up (%)	Total	
Measurement time				.049* <sup>a</sup>
< 2 weeks	13 (57)	10 (43)	23	
> 2 weeks	13 (76)	4 (24)	17	
Grade Level				.02* <sup>b</sup>
Middle	8 (44)	10 (56)	18	
High	18 (82)	4 (18)	22	
School				.04* <sup>b</sup>
Casy	8 (44)	10 (56)	18	
Sharon	9 (90)	1 (10)	10	
Milton	9 (75)	3 (25)	12	
Total Sample	26 (65)	14 (35)	40	

\* significant ( $p < .05$ )

<sup>a</sup> correlation ( $r$ ) significance value used

<sup>b</sup> Fisher's exact test

**Positive affect.** In the second outcome area, positive affect, I asked participants to rank how much they felt “alert, excited, strong, interested and energetic” when they thought about the main person in their conflict. Students reported almost no differences in mean positive affect scores, which changed from 2.2 to 2.1 (pre: SD = 1.1; post: SD = 0.9) after they participated in the mediation. This change was very small and non-significant. However, two additional factors, or independent variables, revealed more about the nature of change in positive affect (see Table 13). Results indicated that having a history of

friendship was significantly correlated with students' reports of change in positive affect ( $p < .05$ ). 71% of students who said they were friends with the other person prior to the conflict reported an increase in positive feelings compared to only 29% of students who were not friends. I also found that gender approached significance even with a relatively small number of boys in the sample ( $p = .06$ ). 59% of girls reported increases in positive affect compared to only 20% of the boys. All other independent variables from the study were tested, but none were significantly associated with the change in positive affect. In summary, while there was no real change in positive affect, there was a significant association between a change in positive affect and a history of friendship. Gender also appeared to be related to a change in positive affect and a larger sample of boys may have resulted in a significant finding.

Table 13

*Numbers of Participants Reporting Change in Positive Affect Scores from Pre- to Post-test (N = 40)*

Independent Variable (IV)	Change in Positive Affect			p-value
	Up (%)	No change or down (%)	Total	
History of friendship				.02* <sup>a</sup>
Yes	12 (71)	5 (29)	17	
No	6 (30)	14 (70)	20	
Gender				.06 <sup>a b</sup>
Female	16 (59)	11 (41)	27	
Male	2 (20)	8 (80)	10	

\* significant ( $p < .05$ )

<sup>a</sup> Fisher's exact test

<sup>b</sup> approaching significance

**Nonviolent response endorsement.** In the third outcome area, nonviolent response endorsement, I asked participants to rank on a scale from one to four how likely they were to respond with various prosocial actions when angry at someone such as



“ignore the person, talk it out, suggest a mediation, calm down, see the other person’s point of view”, or etc. Students reported almost no difference in nonviolent response endorsement from pre- to post-test, which changed from 2.4 to 2.5 (SD = .05, pre and post). All other independent variables from the study were tested, but none were significantly associated with a change in nonviolent response. In an analysis of individual scores, 17 students (44%) reported a lower score, 16 students (42%) reported a higher score, and 5 students (13%) reported no change at all from pre- to post-test (see Table 14). This general breakdown does not necessarily suggest any observable patterns in changes in students’ attitudes about nonviolent response.

Table 14

*Direction of Change in Students’ Nonviolent Response Scores from Pre- to Post-test (N = 38)*

Direction of Change	Frequency (%)
No change (=)	5 (13)
Down (-)	17 (44)
Up (+)	16 (42)
Total	38 (100)

**Help seeking attitudes.** In the fourth outcome area, attitudes about seeking help, I asked students to indicate on a scale from one to four how much they agreed or disagreed with a series of statements about getting help for various kinds of problems or conflicts in school. Students reported almost no difference in help seeking from pre- to post-test, which changed from 3.1 to 3.2 (SD = .05, pre and post). I also tested other independent variables, but none were significantly associated with a change in students’ beliefs about help seeking. In an analysis of individual scores, 16 students (43%) reported lower scores, 20 students (54%) reported higher scores and 1 student (13%) reported no change from pre-

to post-test (see Table 15). These results do not necessarily suggest any observable patterns in students' attitudes about help seeking after participating in the mediation except for a slight majority of students who reported increases in their scores.

Table 15

*Direction of Change in Help Seeking Scores from Pre- to Post-test (n = 37)*

Direction of change	Frequency (%)
No Change (=)	1 (3)
Down (-)	16 (43)
Up (+)	20 (54)
Total	37 (100)

**Program satisfaction.** In the fifth outcome area, program satisfaction, I asked students to indicate on a scale from one to four how much they agreed or disagreed with several statements about their experiences in mediation. Students reported a fairly high degree of program satisfaction with a mean score of 3.3 (SD = .7) for the sample (n = 46). About 24% of students had scores of less than three and 76% had scores of three or higher. I also tested students' scores of program satisfaction for associations with other independent variables and found that gender was significant (see Table 16). More female students (86%) reported average satisfaction scores of three or greater compared to male students (45%) with similarly high levels of satisfaction ( $p < .05$ ). All other independent variables from the study were tested, but none were significantly associated with satisfaction. Unlike the other outcome areas, program satisfaction did not have any pre-test scores so there was no measurement of change over time. Although the sample size of boys was small, it was somewhat disconcerting, but not necessarily surprising, to learn that they reported less satisfaction than girls.

Table 16

*Number of Participants Reporting More or Less Program Satisfaction at Post-test (N = 46)*

	Program Satisfaction		Total	p-value
	More satisfied <sup>a</sup> (%)	Less Satisfied <sup>b</sup> (%)		
Gender				.01 <sup>c</sup>
Female	30 (86)	5 (14)	35	
Male	5 (45)	6 (55)	11	
Total	35 (76)	11 (24)	46	

<sup>a</sup> avg. satisfaction score  $\geq 3$

<sup>b</sup> avg. satisfaction score  $< 3$

<sup>c</sup> Fisher's exact test

### Qualitative Results

I also conducted follow-up interviews with all students who took the pre- and post-questionnaires at the three school sites including Casy, Sharon and Milton. I used this data along with interviews with the mediators to create a more complete picture of students' experiences in the program. The qualitative data from these two sets of interviews helped answer the second research question about students' experiences in the mediation program and the contextual factors that influence students' responses to conflict. In fact, these data revealed a rich description of students' experiences in the program that the quantitative data was not able to provide. Many students were candid in their responses and discussed a wide range of themes in their interviews (see Table 17). Some students, particularly the younger ones, however, had more concise comments. In this chapter, I present quotes as evidence to support the major themes that characterize students' experiences in the program. I was less likely to include exemplary quotes from terse students, although I was purposeful my attempt to provide a balanced description of the salient themes, which meant including as much disconfirming evidence as possible.

The qualitative findings here suggest that the mediation program has significant potential for reducing conflict in schools as well as teaching students alternative ways of resolving conflicts before they escalate into greater violence. Three major findings follow from the results of the coding analysis presented in Table 17. First, students described how feelings of anger and their ability to manage these difficult emotions played a large role in their sense of self-efficacy for peaceful conflict resolution, or, in other words, whether they felt they could respond to conflicts nonviolently. Second, contextual factors including peer culture and students' relationships with adults also had a significant influence on their decisions to respond to conflict or seek help for their problems. Third, students described how the undergraduate students not only mediated their conflicts, but they also acted as mentors to them and provided them with personal guidance and motivation. To be fair, not all students had positive experiences in the program and several other factors contributed to their varying levels of satisfaction with the program. Despite significant room for improvement, students' comments suggested that the mediation program provided them with a unique way of resolving problems, learning new skills and developing positive relationships that would not be available to them in their schools otherwise.

Table 17

*List of Themes from Student and Mediator Interviews*

Major Themes		Subtheme 1		Subtheme 2
Changes in negative emotions	->	Direct effects	->	Expressing emotions
		Indirect effects	->	Passive relief of feelings Passage of time
Learning nonviolent responses to conflict during mediation	->	Learning to manage anger Perspective-taking Recommending mediation Exceptions to learning (or no learning)		
Contextual influences on responses to conflict &	->	Peer norms	->	Maintaining an image Consequences for snitching

help seeking		Adult relationships -> & response to conflict	Time available Confidentiality Responsiveness
Mediators as Mentors	->	Shared backgrounds More than just mediation Mediator self-disclosure	
Program Satisfaction	->	Helps with self-expression Unique process Helps avoid fighting Dissatisfaction	-> Lack of investment Lack of confidentiality Lack of neutrality Emotionally challenging Poor facilitation

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### Changes in Negative Emotions

Students' individual comments about their participation in the program may help explain some of the reduction in negative affect. In the follow-up interviews, I asked students to recall how they felt before and after the mediation regarding the main person from their conflict. As expected, students gave a range of answers about their feelings. I coded their responses for negative emotions and identified several subthemes. First, students described how participating in the mediation session helped them express themselves including their emotions. Second, their comments suggested that the mediation partially reduced the severity of their negative feelings in some indirect ways. Third, the passage of time appeared to influence students' feelings of anger, sadness or fear, although this did not always occur in a linear fashion as the quantitative results might suggest.

**Direct effects: expressing emotions.** In several cases, students attributed the change in their feelings, such as anger, to having the opportunity to express their emotions to someone else during the mediation. One middle school student who was involved in a

conflict as a victim of bullying described how her anger seemed to just 'go away' after talking it out:

It [the conflict] made me feel sad...I felt like I must've thought wrong...that we could be friends, and that we could do things we wanted to do from the very first. Because, before, I was really angry. Now, I'm not that angry. I felt better than I was before when the fight or problem happened. I talked it out. It just went out and no problems are stuck inside anymore.

Similarly, other students also described how their negative emotions changed after talking about them. In the next example, a high school student described how expressing herself helped alleviate some of her negative feelings that preceded the mediation session:

It [the conflict] got me mad and upset because it didn't only affect them, it affected me too. I was sad too. At first, I had nothing to do with it, but then they brought me into it. [After the mediation], it did change. It was good. I had a chance to talk and tell them how I was feeling and tell them my side of the story. I think it helped me out because I talk to both of them now. I have no problems with them anymore. I still talk to them, but we're not as close as before probably because of the problems and what was being said.

While this student experienced a decrease in negative emotions after talking about how she felt, her example also suggests that restoring the friendship to pre-conflict status might not be very realistic. In the last example, two middle students in a dating relationship came to a mediation session because of rumors students had spread about them. Independently, both students acknowledged feeling better after talking about the problem. When I asked the first student about her feelings toward her boyfriend both before and after, she replied:

Sad because we got in an argument, but then when I found out he called the mediation, I knew that he cared. I felt a little bit better... They [my feelings] changed a little. I heard what he had to say and I said my feelings. I knew how he felt and he knew I how I felt, so they changed a little bit. I felt a little better since he heard what I had to say and I heard what he had to say.

I also asked the second student how he felt about his girlfriend both before and after the mediation session and he responded similarly:

I was mad at her believing it [the rumors] even though it wasn't true. I was sad to know that she was sad. [After the mediation], I felt better. We felt better because we had to talk it out. I told her that it wasn't true what people were saying, the rumors. She understood me so that was pretty much it.

For both of these students, having the opportunity to express and validate each other's feelings appeared to play a significant role in reducing their negative emotions. The comments here suggest that, at a minimum, some students find mediation helpful for alleviating negative or unwanted emotions even if they do not always remain friends.

### **Indirect effects.**

*Passive relief of feelings.* The change in negative feelings can also happen more passively as a residual effect of simply going through the mediation process. As the last example illustrated, the student reported feeling better after discovering that the other student initiated a mediation session. Furthermore, even a less than ideal outcome to a conflict can help mitigate students' negative emotions. For example, I asked a middle school student about her feelings before and after her mediation for a verbal conflict with a group of her friends and she responded that she initially felt:

Upset. I was shocked. Angry because they don't have a reason to be mad. [afterwards]  
Relief. Now I know who my true friends are and I can stay away from them.

While she didn't attribute the change in her feelings to the mediation itself, learning where she stood with her friends brought her some degree of comfort even if the outcome wasn't the most desirable. Gaining more information or insight about the conflict itself appears to help students cope with negative feelings even if the quality of their friendships never returns to pre-conflict levels. In the next example, consider a high school student's comments about an especially difficult conflict involving rumors and multiple people:

It all started out with rumors from guys. I kinda despised her for what she said because I thought she was a friend. [I felt] like appalled and vivid. [Afterwards], it changed

dramatically because I saw the truth. It wasn't as I thought and it wasn't as she thought on both sides. We kind of cleared it up. So now it's over and it's neutral. There's the awkwardness of what happened, so we can't get to that level that we used to be as friends.

Several students commented similarly that they felt less angry after hearing the "truth" about what transpired between them and the other parties in a conflict. One conclusion from this might be that the mediation process does not eliminate all negative emotions, but instead partially alleviates very strong feelings of anger or fear. For example, one high school student who was bullied and physically threatened by another group of students to the point where she did not want to come to school shared the following:

I was angry because, me and the other girl, we never really talked bad about them to other people. When we heard that these girls were talking about us and they were telling other people our business, it got us angry because we didn't want anyone to know what was going on. We were just angry that they knew we never said anything, but they did say something to other people. [Afterwards] I still kind of have that anger towards them, but I try to distance myself from it because I don't want it to affect me, my personality, or my attitude towards people. I don't have a problem with them, it's just the whole knowing what they said still gets to me. Other than that, it's not a big deal. It's not where I was feeling weird coming to school sometimes because I didn't want to see them.

While this student recognized that she still felt angry after the mediation, she also acknowledged that she no longer felt as uncomfortable going to school as she did before the mediation.

Taking these students' comments together, negative emotions appear to change not only as a direct result of expressing one's emotions during the sessions, but also indirectly as the mediation process unfolds and students gain a deeper understanding of their relationships or the conflict itself comes to a resolution. Lastly, in some cases, participating in the mediation process may partially reduce the intensity of students' negative emotions even if they persist to a lesser degree after the mediation session.



***The passage of time.*** Measurement time was a significant factor associated with the drop in students' negative emotions after the mediation. If the adage that time heals all wounds is true, several of the students I interviewed more than two weeks after their mediations made comments that seemed to support this saying. However, negative affect did not always decrease steadily, but rather some students reported fluctuations in their emotions over time. First, as an example of the linear case, I interviewed one middle school student more than two weeks after her mediation took place. Not unexpectedly, this student's emotions appeared to succumb to the dulling effect of time:

Yeah, because, as far as I know, I don't feel any hatred or jealousy towards her. Honestly, I don't even know what were fighting about anymore. I just forgot about it. So everything's good.

Another student who I met with, unfortunately, more than one month after the mediation, remarked similarly that she was also "over" it:

It doesn't bother. It's just like 'whatevers' now. [It used to bother me] in the first two days, but not anymore.

Comments like these two examples seem to suggest that emotions associated with the conflict become less intense and could be forgotten entirely after a certain amount of time.

Contrary to these examples, negative affect does not always change in a linear fashion, i.e., from high to low, or vice versa. The original conflict or a related problem could flare up again at any time after the mediation, which may change the trajectory of students' feelings. For example, two high school girls with a history of friendship had used mediation to address a conflict in their relationship. One of these students described how her feelings of anger fluctuated up and down for weeks after the mediation:

I was really upset at her and it was frustrating that I wasn't getting answers from her and I was getting answers from other people... After the mediation, for a couple hours, er for a day or so, it made me feel much better...But with this friend, she had told our good friend a

couple of things about...she wasn't being very truthful or very genuine in mediation. So after I found that out, it made me feel totally upset again and enraged with her. Other than that, we're okay.

The other student in this conflict also commented on how her own feelings went in different directions for at least two weeks after the mediation:

I was ready to talk to her. I think all I was trying to do was tell her how I've been feeling. I was upset. I wasn't angry. I was displeased because I expected a lot from her... Yeah it [how I felt] did [change]. It took awhile. I told her I needed space and eventually when I talk to you, that's when it changes. So it did take awhile, about two weeks, because it was on and off. Yeah, it's not the same. We don't hang out, but we talk and she tried to open up. And I tried too also, but it's not the same.

In these examples and others, the amount of time that passed after a mediation session appeared to have an effect on how students rated and talked about their negative feelings. While the majority of cases seemed to follow a linear, decreasing trend in feelings of anger, sadness or fear, it was not completely unusual for students' emotions to ebb and flow over time especially if the original conflict resurfaced or one student discovered another was being disingenuous in the mediation.

### **Learning to Respond to Conflict Nonviolently**

During their individual interviews, students talked at length about how they would respond to potential conflicts in the future. Some students discussed specific techniques they learned from the mediators about responding to conflicts more peacefully or effectively. Other times, students admitted to not learning anything new or helpful from participating in the mediations. Students often described how they wanted to be more successful at managing their anger, but they also recognized how difficult it was for them to control their emotions in these situations. While not all comments were positive, it was encouraging to hear students talk about learning practical skills from the mediators and how they might apply them to future conflicts. I organized students' learning and attitudes

about nonviolent responses to conflict into four main areas. First, I discuss how students learned more effective ways of managing their anger from participating in the mediations. Second, I review their comments about learning to see another person's perspective during a conflict as well as some exceptions or limitations to this skill area. Third, I discuss students' use of mediation itself as a tool for dealing with conflict. Finally, of course, not all students spoke positively about learning nonviolent responses to conflict, so I conclude this section with examples of students' divergent opinions or experiences in this area.

**Learning to manage anger.** Students' comments revealed that the ability to control anger has a large influence on how likely they are to respond to conflict nonviolently. When prompted, most of the students could parrot the appropriate course of action to take in a conflict, but they were also keenly aware of the difficulty of practicing these ideals especially in the heat of the moment. Despite the challenges, students still attributed some of what they learned about responding to conflict to the mediation program. In the first example, a middle school student described how she was going to physically fight another student because she was so angry. After I asked her what she thought she had learned from the mediation, she said that the mediators taught her:

How to move on. They taught me how to hold back from being so angry and letting it all out. They taught me how to hold it in and just be strong. I'd either come to mediation or just talk to them one-on-one and make an agreement that I don't want conflict anymore. And if they [the other person] don't want to, then I'd just give them their space.

As this student points out, an important first step to effectively responding to conflict includes controlling difficult emotions like anger. Mediators are also in a position to talk about how to control anger more effectively even if students aren't always successful at it. One high school student involved in a conflict about rumors with a group of three other

girls described how the mediators helped her with this, but also acknowledged how hard it was for her to put these skills in practice:

They gave me ideas about how I can calm myself down, but sometimes it doesn't work. So they showed me new things to do, and I should join sports and stuff, and it'll help. And it does... [I learned] I shouldn't listen to what other people tell me. If things are brought to my attention like that, I should sit down with her calmly and not just react in a second. I said it was a good idea, but I have a hard time. I really do have anger issues. When I find something out or when I'm mad, I snap.

In these examples, the mediators helped teach students new ways of controlling their anger, which would allow them to respond more effectively to their conflicts with other students. However, some students, especially those with difficulties controlling their anger, may need more practice than one meeting with the mediators in order to adequately internalize the skills that allow them to respond to conflicts nonviolently.

Besides teaching practical skills, participating in mediation sessions also seems to help students develop a greater awareness of how anger affects the way they respond to conflict. For some students, the mediations provided an opportunity for them to reflect on how their emotions affected their decisions and responses to conflict. For example, one high school student was in a conflict that began with rumors and escalated into threats of physical violence against her. This student described in detail how she learned that her emotions were a real barrier to effectively working with another person in a conflict:

It's hard. It's really hard because it doesn't feel good to have these things said about you or said towards you to your face and react in a calm way. Because there were times when you wanted to say something in a mean way because you think that that's how your point is going to get across, but I think that's the hardest part; to keep your cool and just respect them because if you're angry with them, you don't really care about how they feel. You just want to attack them. [laughing] I think that's the hardest part, but it's [the mediation] a good experience because it helps you with other situations related to that...I think just the way that we handle things: not jumping to conclusions when somebody says something towards you, or not reacting in a certain way because people want that from you; they want a reaction to start something bigger; not to tell everybody your business either. I think

that's a really big one because then people twist what you say and they tell people your business especially in a small school. So that's not a good thing to do.

While this student recognized the difficulty of controlling her anger, she also appeared to gain a deeper perspective on the consequences of her actions on others. The student then went on to describe how she would approach a similar conflict about rumors in the future:

I think I would confront the person directly. I would be a little scared. I don't like physical violence. It kind of scares me a little. I don't think anything's going to get resolved out of physical violence. I think if you talk to the person and just kind of clear what happened, then that's a better way to solve the situation.

Another student, who was part of the group of girls that instigated the threats against the student from the last example, described how the mediation taught her the importance of gathering more information before her anger takes over:

Looking back, I was like, 'what the hell? That was stupid. Why did I do that?' Talking it out was such a better way to get the truth out and it was so much calmer. We had both sides from each other and it was like, okay, okay, this was it. We just brainstormed things out that we had thought we had heard. It was just so much more helpful than doing it on your own. [I learned] to question people. I'm not going to rely...I told them, 'this is an experience I'm taking to college.' Don't believe everything you hear. If I do hear something, I'm going to go up to them and question them calmly...because I'm an angry person! I'm an angry person.

This student recognized that her anger could interfere with her ability to remain calm, which is often an important prerequisite for peacefully resolving conflicts with others.

In these examples, the mediation process seemed to represent a unique experience for students. It helped them learn not only about alternative responses to conflict, but also about how their own emotions can influence their reactions in undesirable ways. The mediation sessions also appeared to provide a certain level of structure and safety, which may further facilitate the development of these kinds of insights.

While the students in these examples appeared to learn from their mediations, it's difficult, or impossible rather, to know whether their future behavior would actually

change without the additional scaffolding provided by the mediators. Students who are more likely to be involved in conflicts may need multiple opportunities to practice. When it comes to self-regulation, as another high school student put it, learning how to manage anger, especially under duress, is likely to be a long-term process:

I might like forget the whole self-control thing and I might go back at it, but then I might think about it and be like, alright, whatever, and just leave it alone... so I would try to take it into the right hands and not the wrong hands and just be like, okay, whatever, they're gonna be petty, just do what you got to do...because I do want to go to college and I want to have a successful life. If it does get to the point where it's just like, 'okay, I've had enough,' I would go to the Deans and have a mediation. My mom even tells me like, 'you talk back and you do this!' And I'm like, 'okay, I have to work on self-control even more,' because I'm just now getting self-control. I think I might just snap back and be like, 'okay, I shouldn't have gone that way. I should've went the right way.'

Across multiple conflicts and mediations sessions, students described how their ability to control anger plays a large role in how well they respond to conflict. Students could also point to specific suggestions from the mediators and parts of the mediation process that taught them valuable lessons about how to control difficult emotions in future conflicts. However, in their interviews, the students also reminded us that this is not easy to do – in fact, for many students, participating in the mediation may only represent the first step in a much longer process of learning how to respond to conflict nonviolently.

**Perspective taking.** During their individual interviews, students repeatedly commented on how taking another person's perspective was an important skill they learned from participating in mediation. Hearing from an opposing party seemed to give them a better grasp of the current conflict that brought them to mediation and how they might respond to future conflicts in less aggressive way. A mediator at one of the high schools explained remarkably well how this process unfolds during a mediation session:

I think what helps is when they're honest, especially when the victim is honest about how she feels. I think also seeing the human emotions...when they see someone else tearing up,

having a hard time talking about the situation. I think it almost creates some kind of, not just guilt, but they sympathize with that person. They don't see the actual damage they're causing to someone else until it's in their face and they see them crying or having a hard time dealing with it. At least, in that situation, that's how I felt. We were able to have them apologize because they saw the other person crying.

Being able to actually see the consequences of their actions on another person from a conflict had a profound impact on students. In the next example, one middle school student went to a mediation session with one of her "former" friends who had insulted her in front of her peers. She commented on how the mediators helped her see things differently:

They understood us. They kept on like, 'yeah I get you.' It wasn't "if" and "but". They were trying to pull out both of our points of view, not just mine or hers. I got to see why she was mad and if I was in her shoes, I would be upset too. That helped because I think she's mad just to be mad, and if I was in her shoes, I understand why she's mad.

When students hear about the other person's experience in a controlled setting, they have an opportunity to look behind the externalized emotions and understand the problem on a deeper level. This ability to see things from another's perspective may be an important antecedent to resolving these conflicts nonviolently.

A bullying incident from the middle school illustrates how perspective taking is a significant part of learning about how to resolve or prevent conflicts for both "bullies", or perpetrators of the aggression, and the victims. In this example, a group of three girls was harassing another student who had a reputation for being a victim in other incidents of bullying at their school. A notable, but certainly all too common aspect of this incident was that, to some extent, the aggressors seemed to lack awareness of the full impact of their behaviors on the victim. One of the bullies described how she felt when she heard the victim share where she was coming from:

Everyone told their part of the story, which helped. [Victim's name] said that because she doesn't really have anyone who likes her, she says she has a lot of problems. She said that

she had overreacted because no one was on her side. I felt bad because I turned against her and she didn't have anyone.

In a similar fashion, one of the other aggressors disclosed that talking about the conflict made her reflect on a time in her past when she was also the victim of bullying:

[Mediator's name] was asking us, 'do you think you can be friends?' Even [the victim] was sharing stories of her past and we knew what it was like for her so we felt sorry for her. We kept telling stories back and forth and we realized that our stories are kind of the same because [friend's name] and me were kind of getting bullied when we were younger and so was [victim's name]. Nobody liked her. It made us feel that we saw the other person's point of view.

In addition, the mediator facilitated the process of helping the students to reflect on their involvement by sharing one of her own experiences. One of the so-called bullies commented on how this helped her to see the victim's point of view:

I felt like, 'oh I never knew this was going to happen.' I thought she was going to smile. I thought she was going to laugh. I never wanted that to happen... She [the mediator] talked about it, and also that she went back to her stories about when she was bullied, when she was bossed around, and we can see what [the victim] felt.

According to this student, the mediator helped the students empathize with the victim by disclosing her own personal experiences with bullying. No matter what their role was in the conflict, students frequently made comments about perspective taking similar to the ones presented here. After participating in the mediations, students appeared to benefit from an increased awareness of the emotional impact of their actions on others. Often times, the mediators were instrumental in facilitating this unique learning opportunity.

While there were several examples like these where students benefited from seeing another person's point of view, they were not always able to make connections between their own behaviors and their effects on the other person. For example, in a conflict involving two high school boys in the locker room, one of the students seemed to initially understand where the other one was coming from:



It's understandable, because, honestly, if I'm in a bad mood especially...he didn't really say why he was in a bad mood, but I guess it was just that day because he usually messes around in class and I was like, 'oh okay. I guess it's just his bad mood, so he took it a little bit too far that day.'

The student's comments seemed to imply that he understood why the other student reacted angrily; however, later in the interview, the student also described how he didn't quite understand why his response of laughing at the student had escalated the problem:

He just said it ticked him off a little bit and it got him annoyed because it's like I'm just trying to test him because you know how he said, 'laugh one more time, and I'm going to beat you up.' And I just kept doing it and I guess I was testing him...That's my way of 'retaliating' the mediators said: 'oh is this your way of retaliating?' I was like, oh that's how I do it...I purposely did that. I don't see why is it so bad when you're just laughing because I was just genuinely cracking up when he's threatening me because I just think it's pretty funny when people make threats at me especially since I'm a pretty positive person in school.

The mediator in this conflict also made a similar observation about this student implying that he didn't really grasp the full impact of his actions. At the other high school, one of the mediators similarly commented that a student from her session had difficulties with seeing the problem from the other person's perspective:

I think she understood what mediation was, but I don't think she understood that you shouldn't just blame the other person and not look at things from the other person's perspective, which is important in mediation for it to work. It was not going to be possible to get her to admit to things or to really look at things from the other person's perspective. She was not really listening...as in she didn't care. It was going in one ear and out the other. But if someone's 15, it's not uncommon to not really understand the situation.

While perspective taking is an important part of resolving conflicts, these examples suggest that several barriers that can interfere with this learning process. In the first conflict from the locker room, the mediators may have neglected to surface the underlying emotions behind the boy's anger. In the second example, the student may have lacked a sufficient level of investment, or, even, maturity for making this type of empathic connection. These outcomes are not always guaranteed and may require a certain level of skill in facilitation.

**Recommending mediation.** Students who participate in mediations sessions may learn new, prosocial ways of handling conflict, but they may not always be successful at implementing them in the moment without some assistance or scaffolding from a third party. As an additional approach to resolving conflicts nonviolently, I asked students if they would use mediation themselves or recommend it to others for similar conflicts in the future. The majority of students seemed to endorse this strategy while some acknowledged important limitations or caveats. One high school student who was involved with spreading rumors about another student said she would recommend this approach:

Yes. The way I would've taken it and the way I know my friends are, it's just like, 'yeah, let's go get them. Let's go talk shit.' Here it's like, you're not going to get a conclusion out of that there. In here, you get to talk it out. You get to tell your story to someone. The other person gets to tell their story. There's a bystander [mediator] who will always point out the things you would never catch on your own.

Unfortunately, there is no way to know if the student would actually follow her own endorsement of this nonviolent approach; however, the student recognizes that mediation has certain advantages over aggressive responses such as reaching an actual resolution.

Another high school student, who had used mediation the previous school year, described how her past experience with the mediators actually helped with her present conflict:

It definitely opened my eyes a little more. I had dealt with something similar to this before and I didn't react in a good way. By them telling me how to react was really helpful for me for future situations. Because in this situation, I didn't really say anything. I just ignored it, but it got to the point where it escalated in me. And with the previous situation, I would backfire or say something and they would say something and it was just a back and forth argument. But now, we resourced to mediation so the back and forth wouldn't get bigger. I feel that if there wasn't a mediator, it would've gotten physical so they did help a lot.

Not only did the mediation prevent possible violence between her and the other girls, but it also helped her refrain from "backfiring", as she put it, or letting anger dictate her response

to the conflict. Consistent with previous themes on nonviolent responses from the data, the mediation session allowed her to express herself in a more constructive, peaceful manner.

While many students endorsed mediation as an alternative strategy for conflict resolution, not all of them said they would return to mediation or recommend it to others. Students who had more unsatisfactory experiences or a more pessimistic outlook about their peers' adoption of mediation did not recommend this approach. For example, one high school student who was the victim of rumors and called inappropriate sexual names by other girls did not view mediation very favorably:

I wouldn't go back to this thing [mediation] because I already went through it. Just for talking again, I wouldn't want to go through the process, like calling me and calling the girls and having a meeting. I just wouldn't want to go through it again. [I would feel] more frustrated because people won't be completely honest. I would probably just ignore it.

This student's frustration with her experience is not entirely unexpected especially in these situations that involve very sensitive conflicts and multiple students. Also, dissatisfaction with the mediation process may discourage students' endorsement of mediation as a realistic, nonviolent strategy to resolve conflict. For example, another high school student described how he wouldn't necessarily recommend mediation to his peers because, in his view, it's just not a good fit for how they choose to handle their conflicts:

I guess people who are more understandable would take mediation more serious and other people who are just more reckless and are like, 'oh I'm going to beat him up no matter what...', and I actually know people like that. Nothing's going to stop them. Not even a little ticket or consequences will stop them. They're just going to do it. Even after a mediation, they're going to get even more pissed because they have to see that person. Everyone's different.

This student accurately notes that no single strategy will work for all students or all types of conflicts. Similar to the examples presented here, other students also shared the feeling

that mediation may not be very effective in some extreme situations, although most students viewed mediation as an acceptable approach for resolving conflict.

**Exceptions to learning nonviolent strategies.** In addition to these comments about learning new, nonviolent responses to conflict, students and mediators also provided counter examples of not gaining any new, prosocial skills from their mediations. For example, I asked one of the high school students I interviewed if she had learned anything from her participation in mediation and she responded:

Not really, not more than I already know...I didn't want to have anything to do with her. I was just done. There was no reason for her to say anything to me, and if she does, I would just either ignore it or I would say something back...

While the student's honesty here was at least refreshing, in general, students may not always report positive learning experiences especially if the outcome of the mediation was negative or the intensity of the conflict was high. In another example, one high school student was skeptical about taking anything of value from his mediation experience:

They [the mediators] talk a lot. They give a lot of information and whatnot, but yeah I guess. I probably learned to talk one-on-one. I don't know honestly. It's just the whole process. The mediators are just there, the middleman. Honestly, we didn't need the mediators.

In fact, another middle school boy also complained that the mediators talked too much, although the sample was not large enough to know if these were isolated incidents. When I asked another high school student how she would respond if a boy from class teased her in the future, she spoke candidly about how she would handle it:

I would tell him to chill out or just to stop joking around with me. At first, I would try to talk about it, but I'm saying...let's say we're talking about it, and if he like touches me and if it hurts me, of course I'm going to do something back. I'm not going to necessarily let myself, but I'm going to do something back. I would try to solve it by telling him, like don't play with me like this or something because I'm going to end up hurting you or something like that. I think I would just be like, oh maybe you should calm down because you know that you and I are friends.

In this example, trying to assess the student's learning is difficult because she referenced both nonviolent and aggressive responses to the conflict. In fact, the student also claimed that she would revert to physical aggression out of self-defense if her verbal rebuffs failed. Not only is further probing necessary to determine whether this student learned anything from the mediation directly, her comments also raise additional questions about situations when aggressive or violent responses to conflict might be warranted.

Students may also be less likely to report learning new ways of responding to conflict because of poor facilitation of the mediation sessions. For example, novice mediators could lack the adequate experience, training or skills necessary for addressing the sensitive and complex nature of conflicts. I asked one of the mediators at a high school if she thought her students learned anything from her mediation for an intense, verbal altercation that started online:

No, not really. I try to say it whenever I have a mediation, especially to seniors, the older students: what happens in high school is petty drama and it's not going to affect you for the rest of your life unless it's really something big. So I had that Twitter one [conflict]. I was just like, 'you guys, really think about this. This is nothing. You're graduating in a month. Get over it.' It's kind of harsh, but it's the truth. I try to say that, is it really worth it? Is it really worth this fight? Maybe that's what they learned [laughing].

The mediator's apparently insensitive remarks about how she viewed the students' conflict may have limited their ability to learn new ways of responding to conflict nonviolently.

However, the mediator also emphasized that students just ignore the problem, which could be effective in some situations, but, unfortunately, may not have been the appropriate response for these students here. These less positive examples of students' experiences suggest that multiple factors are likely to contribute to student learning such as satisfaction with the outcome, the intensity of the conflict or the experience of the mediators.

The lack of uniformity in students' reports of learning nonviolent responses to conflict seemed to be consistent with the quantitative findings, which did not support a single trend in this outcome area. For many students, it was easier to verbally state the "correct" way to handle conflict than to put these beliefs into practice because of difficulties with anger. In this regard, mediations may only be a first step in otherwise lengthy learning process. However, students also reported positive learning experiences related to nonviolent approaches including the importance of managing anger, taking others' perspectives and recommending mediation for future conflicts. Despite the complexity of measuring this outcome area, it was clear that some students reported positive learning experiences and derived real benefits or skills from their participation.

### **Contextual Influences on Responses to Conflict: Peers and Adults**

The qualitative data revealed several factors in the environment that influenced their response to conflict and their decisions to seek help. Peer pressures against "snitching" and cultural norms about asking for help were significant barriers for many of the adolescents in this study. In their interviews, students also described various characteristics of their relationships with adults that influenced how they responded to conflict or sought help for problems. Interview questions about the differences between mediators and teachers illustrated these important aspects of the adults' response to conflict. Students' comments suggested that they were more likely to seek out help when their relationships with adults had high levels of trust and responsiveness. Students' described these relationships as ones where adults had adequate time available, protected their confidentiality and provided effective assistance. While seeking help can be daunting

for adolescents, it also appears to be a viable way for students and adults to work together to prevent the escalation of conflict into more severe forms of violence.

**Peer norms.** During the interviews, students discussed various kinds of barriers or challenges they encountered if they wanted to resolve conflicts with their classmates. Many of their comments indicated that peer attitudes about acceptable behavior and concerns over reputation, which we often associate with adolescence, deter students from finding constructive solutions for their conflicts. For example, one student at a high school commented on how the pressure to conform makes it difficult for students to not only make good decisions during conflicts, but also follow the advice that adults give them about their problems:

I would still give it [mediation] to anybody and tell them to go, but it's just how certain people are. They just don't want to hear that, or they just don't want to go with that. They'll just go right back and be like, 'whatever, that didn't mean anything.' It really has something to do with society. You want to act like the next person so you're going to do what the next person does. You're gonna act all hard and be like oh whatever, I don't care; then go back to being how you were instead of taking the advice that people are trying to give you and just use it and be like, 'oh, I don't have to act like that. I can act like my own person. I can be whoever I want to be.'

Many of the students in this study also shared this description of peer culture, norms about "snitching" and the need to maintain an image of toughness or independence. One high school student who was harassed with sexually inappropriate comments described how the pressure to act independently discourages students from seeking help:

Because like I said, they feel like it's not going to help. A lot of influences from the school tell them, 'you know, if you tell someone, you're a snitch. If you tell someone, it's because you can't do it yourself.' And I feel like that's a lot [of pressure]...not because of you adults, but as in the kids, they feel like they're either going to be snitching or...since they feel like my friend can beat that guy up, then I could too. I feel like they don't come to you guys just because their friends [would say], "you're snitching or you're not going to help". You have to be the bigger person and you deal with it yourself, but I feel like if they did know and talk to you guys, they would think differently. But as long as they have those guys and girls who influence them, it's not going to work.

In a similar fashion, one high school boy described how maintaining an image or reputation of toughness may be just as important of a survival strategy as not being labeled a snitch:

They'll probably think that they'll [the mediators] get them in trouble or something like that. They'll probably think it won't help when it really does. The other person that's involved will probably think the person would...probably look at them like as a bitch and shit. He'll probably think he ratted on him or something like that. They have their own reasons for getting in the fight. If you snitch on them, you get it twice as worse...you're getting the other person in trouble and that's just another reason to kick their ass [laughs].

In this example, the student described several negative consequences for so-called snitching such as appearing weak as well as getting beat up. Unfortunately, the pressure to avoid being a 'snitch' is so strong that students may ultimately choose to escalate the conflict in the absence of a viable alternative. As one high school student who was harassed in the classroom put it:

I would be scared to tell him that I would tell a teacher because you know how people start calling you a 'snitch', so I would just talk back I guess. Usually that's what happens.

In all three schools, students often pointed out that serious consequences resulted if peers discovered their attempts to tell someone about a conflict. One of the mediators described the difficulty she had with addressing this aspect of peer culture with her students:

They said they're scared. They're scared of the consequences. Considering it's a middle school, the most important thing to them is people spreading rumors, people telling your secrets, your reputation at school. The biggest issue for them is if we tell on them, we're going to have to face the consequences because we snitched, or they'll start spreading rumors and telling everyone we're tattle-tells...But when we brought up the whole "telling someone" and they were afraid of the consequences, they brought up, what if they start spreading rumors about me? And that's where I got stuck because I didn't know what to tell them. That is really big, especially in middle school...

Aggressive behaviors such as spreading rumors, damaging others' reputations and physical violence are all ways that students may retaliate when peers violate these cultural norms.



Unfortunately, as a result, the consequence of snitching may hamper students' motivation to seek help from adults as a possible nonviolent response to conflicts.

While certain aspects of peer culture in adolescence make it difficult to get help, these barriers are not completely immune to outside influences. Some students, who might be considered mavericks among their peers, did not seem as concerned about their reputations. One of the mediators at a high school noted that some of the students in her mediations learned about how projecting an image of toughness could be a way of achieving an ulterior motive such as hiding feelings of hurt or vulnerability:

And for that person to see them in a different light too because they're over here thinking this person has this image and she's tough. From a lot of the students, it sounds like they want to have this image with their peers because it gives them some kind of status. The fact that they were able to see beneath that, I think that was a breakthrough.

Participation in mediation can expose students to alternative perspectives on their problems, which, as this mediator points out, was a key part of resolving this conflict.

However, not all students respond to peer attitudes or cultural norms in exactly the same way. In fact, some students reported that they were not very concerned about their image or reputation amongst their peers. When I asked one high school student about whether she was concerned about seeking help for a conflict, perhaps as a sign of maturity, she said:

No, there's the, 'oh, you're a snitcher.' I would rather be called that than to get in a physical fight or for the problem to get bigger, so I'd rather just settle down the problem.

When I asked another student at the other high school about getting help, she also shared the previous student's sentiment and declared similarly:

Like they'll think I'm a tattle-tell or something? That doesn't bother me. When I was little, I would tell on people and they would be like, 'oh you're a snitch.' I really don't care what people think about me.

Of course, while only a few students made comments like this, it's important to note that peer attitudes about these behaviors does not affect all students in the same way; however, the majority of students' comments remind us that certain aspects of peer culture present real barriers to seeking help and the consequences for violating these norms are real.

**Adult relationships and response to conflicts.** Since the mediators have a much different role than most of the adult staff on campus, I had a unique opportunity to examine students' relationships with these groups of adults influenced their responses to conflicts and help seeking. For example, I asked students about their perspectives on getting help from teachers compared to the mediators at school. Their responses revealed several relationship qualities that seemed to influence the likelihood that students would seek help for a conflict. Students said they would be more likely to get help from adults who had enough time available to devote to their problem, who protected their confidentiality, and who were responsive to their needs. Students trusted so-called responsive adults with their conflicts because they provided a high level of competent support and did not discipline them for having problems.

**Time available.** Several students mentioned that the amount of time available was an important difference between the teachers and the mediators in their schools. Some students, perhaps accurately, perceived their teachers and administrators as being too busy with other things to help them with non-academic problems or, when they did help, they tried to solve the problem too quickly. One student at the middle school summed it up succinctly:

Sometimes the teachers have time, but sometimes they don't. You could talk to the mediators for a while and they could hear us out and sometimes the teachers don't have that much time.

Another middle school student made a similar comment, but instead focused on how the teacher responded to her problem more quickly in comparison to the mediators:

She [the mediator] paid a little more attention. She focused on our problem because you guys are here for that. She focused on our problems, but other teachers will just try to solve it fast.

At one of the high schools, a student made an almost identical remark by comparing the mediator to her school's principal who, I should acknowledge, often made it a point to be aware of what her students went through:

Just the fact that she [the mediator] was very focused on the situation and she made sure she was paying attention. Whenever she would understand exactly what I saying, she made me stop and asked me and took her time. If I would do that with my principal, she would always be like "okay, hurry, hurry, hurry. I have to do this and I have to do that." It wasn't the same, but with her it was more like taking the time because we practically stayed there the whole day.

While this student's situation may have been unusual because the mediators spent almost their entire day on the conflict, the additional time that mediators devoted to a problem seemed to be positively associated with students' attitudes about seeking help.

***Confidentiality.*** Whether adults would handle students' conflicts or problems confidentially was another important factor related to help seeking. The confidential nature of mediation was arguably one of the most important qualities that set mediators apart from teachers or other school staff. One high school student commented on how this mattered for her:

Yes, everything I told them [the mediators], they're not going to tell nobody. If you tell a teacher something, they'll go tell somebody. I know that whatever I say is going to stay right there in the group versus if I tell a teacher something and I don't want nobody else to know, and they're going to tell somebody else.

In a similar way, one middle school student even remarked how mediators resemble close friends who don't share sensitive information with anyone else:

I guess she's [the mediator is] like a friend to me. With my teachers, say Ms. Lisa, I don't think I would talk to her about my personal things. Knowing that [the mediator's name]...her work is about not saying anything and helping us out. That makes me feel better.

Having the trust that someone will keep your problems confidential is critical when students decide where they should go for help. One high school student observed that while the trustworthiness of teachers varies, mediators were consistently more reliable when it comes to protecting confidentiality:

So you wouldn't really know if they [the teachers] would go back or tell. Some teachers I do know won't do that. They'll just keep it between you and them. And they'll be like, 'if you need to talk, just come in at any time.' Like Ms. [teacher's name], I can tell her anything and she'll just be okay. Some teachers, they'll just be like 'okay', and the next thing you know, you get home, 'oh what happened at school?' I want somebody you can talk to and it's just between me and them. With the mediators, I feel like it's just between all of us unless the other person goes back and tells. I'd rather have conversations like this because I know for a fact that they won't tell unless you say something like, 'oh I want to kill that person,' or whatever.

Although I only presented three quotes here, privacy arose repeatedly in student's comments about whether they perceived the adults around them as viable sources of help. While it almost goes without saying, students across all grade levels and schools valued confidentiality very highly when seeking help for their conflicts. The professional role of teachers and mediators to some extent determines the information they share with others, but the way the adults choose to respond to student disclosures also makes a difference.

***Responsiveness.*** Students acknowledged significant differences in the ways teachers and mediators responded to their problems. In addition to time and confidentiality, the *responsiveness* of the adult was an important contributor to students' willingness to seek help for their conflicts. Students commented on how they disliked or even feared the way their schools and teachers would punish them if they found out about their conflicts. On the other hand, students also recognized that differences in the

professional capacity or training of the teachers and mediators was somewhat responsible for the type or quality of the help they received. Responsive adults, or those who were less likely to punish students and more likely to provide them with effective support for their conflicts, seemed to be associated with favorable attitudes towards seeking help among the students in this study.

*School discipline.* Some students who participated in mediation seemed to fear that teachers or administrators would discipline them for their involvement in a conflict, which, as one can imagine, would have a deleterious effect on their motivation to seek help. In the first of several examples, a high school student who endorsed going to adult for help, commented on how a school's disciplinary response can negatively influence decisions to get help:

I think some kids don't feel comfortable because they feel like they're going to get in trouble for going to them [school staff], 'oh and what did *you* do?' but I think it's better to go to at least an adult.

In the next example, a middle student described how her school would respond to student problems in a different way than the mediators:

It [the mediation] was different because teachers don't do that. They just tell Ms. [Dean's name] that we called each other names and we get in trouble. We didn't really get in trouble. We just talked about our problems.

While the student does not directly discuss the helpfulness of either approach, one implication is that students may be less inclined to seek help from adults under the threat of punishment. In another example, even after the conflict was brought to the attention of the school staff, a high school student was still reluctant to talk about her problem because she wanted to avoid any potential consequences:

My teacher stopped me and he was like, 'you know you need calm down. You've been doing good. You're going to let a little incident like this lose your chance here. It's not even worth

it,' because this is my last chance here. I was so mad I couldn't like stay still. I had to move around so he brought me to office and he was trying to calm me down, but it wasn't working out. I was just really mad so I had to talk to the counselor. I didn't want to tell her anything because I was trying to avoid any situation so I had decided to let it go...

Similar to the last example, the student then went on to compare how the teachers responded to her problem in a different way than the mediators:

Yeah, because the teacher, it's like whatever you can say, you can get in trouble for it even if you're just talking to them. Teachers don't really hear you out. They cut you off. With them [the mediators], they let me talk until I was done. Then they talked and they gave me their opinion, and I gave them mine.

Consistent with previous quotes, this student offered several examples of how the mediators were more responsive than the teachers by not getting them in trouble for talking and spending more time on the problem. As this case and others illustrate, a response that penalizes students for talking about or becoming involved in conflicts may reduce the likelihood that students would turn to adults for help with their problems.

*Professional capacity.* Variations in the type or quality of help students receive for conflicts, however, may simply reflect differences in the professional capacities of the adults at the school. For example, teachers may have more time commitments or less formal training in conflict resolution than the mediators. In one example, a high school student described how she considered the responsibilities of the adults at school when deciding where to get help:

I feel like talking to a teacher here is kind of, not awkward, but kind of uncomfortable because they're my teachers and I see them every day. I don't know who they are, but I see them, so I'm just with them, but with the mediators, I don't see them every day, so if I were to talk to them, I'd pick them over a teacher because I feel like mediators are more helpful. They're focused on one thing and teachers are focused on school and subjects and all that.

Students like this one here who participated in the program may also discover that the mediators have specialized training for responding to conflicts. Another high school student commented on how the mediators' techniques were helpful to her:

I feel like with the mediation people, they're more like...they tell us the ground rules and things like that. Just the fact that they're saying you can't do this, you have to be respectful, and everyone was calm, no one was cussing. If I were to talk with my teachers, and they would tell the girl, the girl would be cussing.

Sometimes students may perceive the specific strategies that mediators employ during mediation sessions as more effective than what their teachers provide. In the last example, a middle school student observed how teachers don't always respond in the most constructive way even though they may have sincere intentions to help:

The mediators understood more and the teachers will try to go into a conflict with you. They'll fix the problem, but then they'll say, 'well why did you do that. You shouldn't....' They'll put more into it, and they'll fight back what we're saying, and the mediators don't do that.

These examples may help explain some of the differences in student perceptions of teachers and mediators, which include factors associated with their professional capacities and training at school. Students may see mediators as more responsive because of their specialized training or techniques for handling conflicts.

### **Mediators as Mentors**

Another major theme in the qualitative data was how students experienced their mediators as mentors, or adults who were more than just simply facilitators of their mediation sessions. Students made ample references to their relationships with the mediators and reported that they discussed a range of topics beyond the original conflict. Students also identified with the mediators' social background and life experiences. I organized student comments about their relationships with the mediators into three sub-

areas including their observations about shared similarities in background, life advice the mediators gave to the students, and how mediators used disclosures about their own experiences to build rapport with the students. In these ways, the mediators appeared to act as mentors to the students, which was a consistent theme in students' discussions of their relationships with them.

**Shared backgrounds.** In the first subtopic of mentoring, students talked about how the mediators were similar to them in terms of age, gender or social background. Both middle and high school students found it helpful that the mediators were closer in age to them than other teachers or adults on campus. One middle school student who had a social conflict with another girl said she felt:

Comfortable because they [the mediators] didn't seem like they were that...like if it was someone older, then I'd feel kind of weird because they're like older. With them, they went through it; they're probably going through it.

Another high school student who also had a social conflict with one of her best friends at school described the age of the mediators as a kind of "sweet spot" that was particularly helpful for her:

I liked the fact that these are roughly people who aren't too old and do have a sense of understanding. They're young enough to understand where we're coming from and have a point of view where it's not that you're not too young and it's sort of immature, but they have this logic behind it and they do have this matureness in it. I liked that very much.

Other students also referenced gender as something they appreciated about their mediators. In fact, gender was significantly associated with program satisfaction as twice as many female students as males reported high feelings of satisfaction. Male students, however, made up a much smaller percentage of the student participants and, in addition, only two out of ten mediators in total were male from all three participating schools. While students' comments did not go in depth about why gender was important to them, they



briefly mentioned it in their interviews nonetheless. I asked a middle school student if she was satisfied with the mediators and she responded:

Yes, because she's a girl. She goes through that, like fights with her friends. She can kind of relate to it.

A high school student who was involved in a conflict about rumors similarly remarked:

It was good because we were all girls and there were girls too. They said they had experience. They're wiser so they know what to do.

As their comments indicate, some students attributed their similarities in age and gender with the mediators to their feelings of satisfaction with the program. Though speculative, shared social characteristics in other forms such as ethnicity or cultural background may also have also been important to the students. While students did not specifically address these additional aspects, I discuss the potential impact of my own social identify on their comments in the discussion chapter.

**More than just mediation.** In the second subtopic of mentoring, some students observed that their relationships with the mediators were exceptionally supportive as they received useful advice about their situations and other aspects of their lives. For example, one high school student described how she appreciated the way the mediators supported her during the mediation session:

What comes to mind is definitely like a counselor or a therapist. They do give the same advice and they do have that listening that a counselor or a therapist would have. Just from personal experience, when I think of these mediators, I don't think of them just facilitating or supervising a conflict, I do see them as people who do help others with conflict and they do engage with wanting to resolve the conflict in a good manner, even if two people aren't still friends but they ended on a good note.

This student suggests that the mediators were especially invested in the outcome of her problems above and beyond their assistance with facilitating the session. Another high

school student commented on how the mediator not only talked to her about college, but also helped her with other relationships or concerns in her life:

That's what mediation is there for...I would just go to them and I would talk about my other life problems and my other relationships with people and they would just give me advice on what to do, what's the best option for me, and I took it. Even though I'm going through this stuff, I'm learning to kind of fix my own problems and cope with my situation. It's not just about college; it's life in general.

Indeed the number of stressors often increases as students navigate the various stages of adolescence and it should come as no surprise that mediators find opportunities to provide additional support and mentorship. Shared social characteristics like age, gender or culture may also encourage greater trust between the students and mediators compared to other school staff, for example. Though these comments were few in number, it seems that some mediators were able to step outside of their formal roles and tailor their assistance to the students' presenting needs and life circumstances.

**Mediator self-disclosure.** In third and last subtopic of mentoring, one of the most important ways the mediators engaged with students was through their use of self, which happened most often in selective, personal disclosures. Some mediators were explicit in their comments about using this kind of strategy to build rapport with students. For example, one of the mediators at the small high school described how she used this approach with students:

What helped to engage with them was the whole talk about school and me being a college student and me putting myself in their shoes. That's always how I try to build rapport and engage with the student...just coming to their level. I always emphasize to them before we start the mediation what my role is here...that I'm not an authority and I don't work here. I'm neutral to the situation. I think right away that let's them put them guard down and lets them be honest about what's really going on because there is stuff that I know that is shared with me and [the other mediator] that they would not feel comfortable telling [the principal], or any other authority here on campus.

In this example, the mediator highlights her identity in order to draw a distinction between her self and the rest of the school staff. Another mediator at the middle school commented on how she disclosed to her group of students an example of a conflict with one of her own friends from middle school:

I took this mediation close to heart because I had a best friend. I knew her for a while and I felt forced to have that friendship because of the time that I've known her, but it was kind of similar to like, oh she's shady, but I've known her for this long. I honestly put that on the table and was like, 'just because you've known a person for this amount of time, that doesn't mean you're forced to be their friend. It's a matter of how you treat each other and the relationship you all have created.' I mean people change and you experience different things. It's just a matter of where do you want to take it now. I shared that with them. So in the mediation sessions, I felt like we did more than mediate. We mentored and gave them advice about life...because no one is there for you. For myself, no one was there for me telling me like, 'oh this happened, and this and this happens.' So it was kind of like a mentoring guidance of what happens in life, with friends, with people.

Sharing personal stories like this was an important technique that mediators used to build rapport with students and provide them with timely advice. These disclosures did not go unnoticed by the students. In fact, they played a powerful role in building trust and helping students feel comfortable during the mediation sessions. One of the students recalled how she identified with her mediator's story about when she was a high school student:

She kind of opened up first. The mediators did. She said her side of the story when she was a teenager. She was like, 'I was not like this [the way I am now]. I did not help people. I was one angry girl. I was just like you, but worse.' She started telling her side of the story, which was like, okay I can kind of relate to this, which kind of made me open up and tell her, okay, this is my story. I'm not just telling my story to some random person who doesn't really care, but they know where I'm coming from because we went through the same thing just in high school.

Not only can an approach like this result in greater trust for some students, but it also helps students feel more motivated to participate in the session, which, in turn, can lead to more effective results overall. One high school student talked about how he was able to reveal more about himself after listening to the mediator share her own college experiences:

I actually felt pretty comfortable talking to one of the mediators because, at the end, she had some questions about colleges and she's a UCLA student, so I actually got some information about college, so I got more open speaking I guess. Either way, she was like, 'oh it would be great if you tell the truth.' There's nothing to hide, especially something this little...but at one point, I did explain my background and certain things to the mediator... She told me that she got to UCLA with a 3.4. I was like, wow. She told me to do more clubs and stuff like that and it'll look really good on your application. That's when I started giving her more about myself.

After the mediator shared her own experience and showed interest in the student's future goals, he acknowledged that felt more comfortable participating in the process. In fact, college was a frequent topic of discussion with high school students especially. While some mediators may have focused on this area more than others, it was clear that some students really appreciated these discussions. When I asked one high school student if she learned anything from the mediators, she described how she gained advice about conflict resolution as well as motivation for college:

Just like how they said it's always going to be like that about rumors. It wasn't going to stop, but just to focus on college and school. They were giving me school advice, like how they both started and how they're ending. One of the girls, she said she didn't go to college right away, but she went after and she recommends me to go right away. I really liked that because sometimes my counselor doesn't say that to me, so I really liked that from her. She was motivating me to do it.

Similarly, a high school student's testimony about his experience with his mediator was particularly convincing because, according to one of the mediators, other school staff had described this student as a "troublemaker" with little interest in school. Towards the end of our interview, I asked this student what he thought about his mediator:

She told me about her past and how I'm going through the same things she went through when she was my age. I thought it was pretty cool. She didn't really like high school or school in general, and she's going to college now and shit. That's pretty cool. I don't know... [It made me think] that I could go to college one day.

For this student as well as others, the mentoring aspect of their relationships with the mediators appeared to convey direct benefits including increased trust, participation and

feelings of satisfaction with the program. Shared similarities that came from mediators' personal disclosures of their own life experiences related to conflicts or going to college helped build rapport with students. It seems likely that mediators who employed this kind of mentoring based approach were able to not only create more trusting relationships with students, but also positively influence their motivation, sense of satisfaction and engagement in the mediation process.

### **Program Satisfaction**

Similar to the other major areas, the qualitative data revealed several themes related to program satisfaction. I organized student comments into three main areas of general satisfaction with the program including helping students with self-expression, seeing mediation as a unique process, and helping students avoid physical fights. In each of these areas of program satisfaction, students generally described various aspects of the program that were enjoyable or especially helpful to them. I also view these areas as important contributions of the mediation program to students' social development as well as the prevention of violence and improved safety at school. Finally, I close this section with several important reasons that students felt dissatisfied with the program.

Considering the reasons that students feel both satisfied and dissatisfied allows for a better assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the conflict mediation program and the extent to which it meets students' needs for resolving peer conflicts in prosocial ways.

**Self-expression.** In the first subtopic of general satisfaction, some students commented on the benefits of being able to express one's self or emotions. Students found it difficult to talk about their feelings especially in the physical presence of another student or if others had responded negatively to them for this in the past. Given these challenges,

however, students were still able to comment on how mediation helped them to express their feelings more openly. In a bullying conflict, one middle school student described how she felt after expressing herself:

I felt surprised because I had shared my feelings with everyone and they didn't do anything. They just went with it. Usually when I say my feelings, everyone's against me. They knew my feelings about what happened with the problem and they find out why I made a joke out of it. It didn't hurt, it helped.

In a structured setting such as mediation, students may be more likely to have a positive experience after they share their feelings about a conflict instead of being ridiculed or harassed by their peers. Another student in this same mediation on bullying also similarly commented on how it helped her afterwards:

I felt like I was better than I was before because before I wouldn't talk as much and I would always keep my problems [to myself], but when I was there, I would always say them out loud and I started being more out there instead of inside my shell.

Talking to someone in a conflict directly about how you feel can be difficult even for students who are more confident with expressing themselves in general. One high school student commented on how the mediators made this easier for her:

The many things I liked about it is that I was able to express everything that I could not express to other people. I'm really, really good at expressing how I feel talking to my sister and my siblings, but with them [the mediators] they were exactly like my sisters. It was just super easy to just say it, but when it comes to the person I have to talk to, it's hard. I feel really comfortable with them...it's not really hard to open up, so that's why it was easy.

As these students attest, in some situations, the mediators were able to help facilitate dialogue despite serious challenges that come with having negative experiences or fears related to expressing emotions to another person in a conflict. While outside the scope of this research project, it is possible that these kinds of experiences would provide some degree of positive reinforcement for students' future attempts at self-expression as well.

**Mediation as a unique process.** The second subtheme in general satisfaction was that students seemed to appreciate the unique aspects of the conflict mediation process that they would not otherwise experience in their schools. For example, students commented on how they appreciated the fairness of the mediators, the controlled structure of the mediations and having a sense of autonomy over the outcome of their conflict. One high school student talked about how the mediators' impartial response to her situation helped them arrive at a solution:

Since they [the mediators] were the bystanders, they didn't take one side or the other. They put it all out there. They said it as it was, what it seemed like. She pointed out some important points and perspectives that she saw. After that, me and the girl were like we agree on that, she has a point. It was brought to a further conclusion.

A high school student at another school talked about how the structured mediation process helped her avoid the way conflicts typically get resolved in her experience:

I think I strongly agreed on a part [of the survey] because they did have control on us with the talking. I just felt like it was really organized. Where if it had been somebody else, we would've just been yelling at each other. I think it was really good to have it set up like that: where it's just the 2 of us and like no other people were able to put their input or say, 'no, you're lying,' or you're this that, or whatever. They actually had us take turns and say what we actually felt about the whole situation...getting your point across, actually having time to be the only one talking, not talking over each other, to actually say what you have to say, no argument, or saying you did something wrong, just actually saying how you felt. I liked that part of it because in most cases, you really don't get that. You just get, it's time to argue, go. That was the best part of it.

The mediation sessions provide students with the opportunity to hear another person's perspective, which is crucial for reaching an acceptable resolution. Many students recognized how difficult it was to accomplish this kind of understanding on their own. For some, the presence of a neutral, third party facilitator was a real improvement over the way they normally approached conflicts. Another unique benefit that mediation provided

was having some sense of autonomy over the situation. For example, one middle school student described how the mediators let her decide how to move forward:

I liked the way they let us both talk and got both sides of the story first. I liked the way they asked us what we wanted. They didn't just say, "oh you guys just need to get along," like most of the teachers and principals here. They let us speak and that's what I liked: that I could choose what I wanted to do instead of being forced to talk to her again or something like that.

The student's comment also seems to suggest that there are indeed differences in how schools and mediators respond to the same conflict whereas schools may rely more on proscriptive solutions instead of allowing students to act more independently.

**Avoiding physical fights.** In the last subtopic of general satisfaction, students described how mediation helped them avoid escalating their conflict into something more serious such as a physical altercation. One high school student talked about how he might have ended up in a fight without mediation:

I think if the mediation wasn't here, he probably would've told me he wanted to fight me and we would've ended up fighting. I know personally, since he's my friend, I would've told him to calm down before anything bad happens... It actually solved what me and [student's name]...we were close to fighting and mediation actually helped us. We ended up talking as friends again, so it was pretty cool.

Another high school student also echoed this sentiment about how mediation helped her avoid a physical confrontation:

I probably still would've gone to the Deans, but without mediation, we probably still would've gone to the Deans and the next day we would've had another argument. And she would threaten to jump me or whatever and eventually...she talks like all this mess like, 'oh I'm gonna sock you right now. I'm gonna jump you.' I said, 'then do it. If you're talking all this, then do it.' I think probably without mediation, I think we would've kinda fought. I would go to the Deans and suggest mediation again because it helped. I don't know how it helped, but we're not arguing anymore.

Even though this student acknowledged she probably would have asked the Deans for help, she also remarked that the mediation program helped prevent the conflict from flaring up



again. Of course, without long term follow-up, there is no way to actually know whether students would behave differently from what they report in their interviews. The student's comment does not necessarily reveal why they stopped arguing; however, she does say she would return to mediation, which suggests that something about the process was helpful for resolving her conflict and, at best, may have prevented future violence.

**Dissatisfaction with mediation.** Despite the overall reports of high satisfaction, many students still mentioned that they felt unhappy, or dissatisfied, with their participation in the conflict mediation program. Some reasons reflected the natural variation that exists in program quality or facilitation while others were related to the difficult nature of conflict itself for both students and mediators. I organized student feelings of dissatisfaction into five subtopic areas including a lack of investment, a lack of confidentiality, mediator biases, emotionally difficult nature of conflict, and facilitation problems including a lack of mediator experience. It was also interesting to note that some of these problem areas were unique to either the middle school or high school level. The discussion of student dissatisfaction is important not only because it provides a balanced perspective to the previous sections, but it also suggests additional ways the program could be improved in the future.

**Lack of investment.** In the first subtopic area of dissatisfaction, several students made negative comments about how either the students or the mediators were not very invested in the mediation process. This appeared as a lack of participation, not taking the process seriously or making light of the situation. In the first example, two high school students in the same mediation were particularly frustrated with each other. One student

described how she did not believe the other student was talking as much as she could have, which likely contributed to her feelings of dissatisfaction with the process:

I don't think anybody can really get you to talk, say what you have to say, but I wish she would've actually talked or just participated a little more. I just felt like she was just sitting there...“talk! I know we don't like each other, but just talk. Say something!” I just felt like me and the mediators were just there. Say something! It's not just my mediation. It's yours too. It's for us both to say what we have to say. I just felt like I was getting nothing out of her.

Interestingly, the student on the other side of this mediation was irritated with the previous commenter as well. From her perspective, the other student was not only being dishonest, but she also felt like she would be attacked for what she said:

To me, to hear her side of the story, it was just like whatever because it was a lie, so I'm just like whatever. I know the truth and I was just like whatever about it. If she wants to lie, that's on her... I knew what happened. The people that were around us knew what happened. She brought up all this other stuff that never even happened. And if I said that she said something, she would be like, 'oh no, I didn't say that.'

The example illustrates how students can have negative experiences when they perceive, either accurately or not, that the other party is not fully engaged in the process. On the other hand, students also became displeased when they thought the mediators did not take their concerns seriously. One middle school student reported that the mediator treated her problem as if it were a “joke”:

She [the mediator] wasn't helpful. She was just there. And some of the girls are like giggly about it. They weren't that serious about it. So she didn't really help at all. Yeah, like some people said that she thought it was a joke, but it wasn't.

In this case, it may be possible that the mediator misunderstood the seriousness of the conflict, but the student's detection of a lack of sincerity from the others had a negative effect on her experience. In fact, this was not an isolated incident. Another student at the same middle school described how the mediators were dismissive of her problem:

What I didn't like was sometimes they're [the mediators] just mad and they just don't fix the problem. They like just say, 'why are you guys doing that,' and all that. They could do that better I guess.

While we may never know the mediators' true intentions or conduct here, the student implies that mediator was not very responsive to her needs. For these students, their perceptions of a lack of engagement or investment on the part of the other students or the mediators appeared to contribute to their feelings of program dissatisfaction.

***Lack of confidentiality.*** The second subtopic area of dissatisfaction included breaks in confidentiality that happened in some of the mediations. Only middle school students commented on this during my interviews; however, confidentiality is a major feature of the mediation process and almost all students are concerned if others will respect this rule. In one example, a middle school student commented quite simply that she did have much confidence in the ability of her peers to maintain her privacy:

Talking about the problem when they're there, I'll feel uncomfortable. I think they're going to tell their friends.

Even more troubling, in another example, a student was unfairly accused of breaking confidentiality when other classmates found out about the mediation from someone else:

My friend that saw her sign up for mediation had told the girls, that's why...because we were both emotional so we were both crying. And the girls were like, 'oh you guys came out of mediation.' And then I got in trouble because, as they said, it has to be confidential, so they thought I told them and I got in trouble.

This student's experience also highlights the challenges of maintaining confidentiality throughout the entire process from the time of referral all the way up to returning to class. However, given the sensitivity of this area, it is also seems significant that complaints about breaches in confidentiality did not arise more often in the students' comments.

***Lack of neutrality.*** In the third subtopic area of dissatisfaction, some students perceived a lack of mediator neutrality during their sessions, which only arose in interviews with high school students. Student perceptions of mediator bias appeared to have a negative effect on their satisfaction. For example, one student, who thought another student had intentionally hit her with an orange at lunch, described how the mediator seemed to take the other student's side by referring to the incident as an accident:

What I didn't like was that how in one part she [the mediator] would say that it was an accident and then it wasn't. She would say that, basically, it was an accident like if she was standing there.

Even if the mediator was ambivalent or unclear about what happened, the student was dissatisfied because she perceived bias in the mediator's response. This bias may even be transmitted nonverbally as the next student's example illustrates. This high school student described a sensitive situation where he felt like the mediators were judging him:

I think they [the mediators] did pretty good, but the only thing I didn't like was just how they were looking at me. Well they were looking at [other student's name] too but they weren't looking at him the same way they were looking at me...I'm going to be really honest. All 3 of them were looking at me as if I was racist and I felt uncomfortable. I think they thought I was racist for awhile because of what I told [other student's name]. It made me a little bit uncomfortable because they were just looking at me like that.

This student also reported a low satisfaction rating of his mediation session and, taken together, these two examples suggest how both verbal and nonverbal communication by the mediators can result in perceptions of impartiality toward one student or another.

***Emotional challenges.*** In the fourth subtopic area of dissatisfaction, students described the challenging nature of responding to conflict, which often included difficult or intense emotions. Some students, especially those in high school, commented on how it was hard to confront or talk directly to someone when they had strong feelings of anger or frustration. One high school student remarked how she didn't even want to be in the same

physical space as the other student because she harbored strong, negative feelings towards her:

I didn't like that, after they asked me questions, they put us in the same room together. Yeah, I just didn't want to be in the same room with her. When we have the same class together, she used to roll her eyes at me and stuff, so I didn't want to be in the same room as her. But then I just decided that it would help.

Similarly, another student commented on how her feelings of anger made it difficult for her to participate in the mediation session:

I didn't want to meet with the person because I still had feelings. I still was really mad. I didn't like the fact that even after I had given my story, she was still looking like the victim when even the mediation people saw that she did her wrong part too, but I still looked like the one attacking her.

While this student's dissatisfaction appeared to result from a combination of factors including her anger and feeling misunderstood, the process of working through sensitive issues may be especially challenging for students, or anyone for that matter. One high school student aptly noted that even though she wasn't accustomed to the process, she still recognized it was an important skill to learn for the future:

I think the one thing I didn't like about it just because...it's not something that I'm used to...is to talk about it with a person who you are directly having conflict with because it's not something a lot of people do nowadays. It's definitely something I'm still trying to learn as I'm growing up. That was something I don't like, but I know I will like it eventually and I'm still learning.

These students remind us about the inherently difficult nature of working with someone directly when negative feelings abound. While the emotional context of conflict resolution may be unavoidable, it may unintentionally increase students' feelings of dissatisfaction if the mediators do not adequately address it during their mediation sessions.

**Poor facilitation.** The fifth and last subtopic area of dissatisfaction among the students included poor or inexperienced facilitation of the mediation sessions. Some

degree of skill is involved in the successful completion of a conflict mediation session.

Novice mediators may be more likely to skip steps in the mediation process, misuse certain techniques or neglect important emotional cues. In the first example, one high school student who participated in the mediation program for two years described a negative experience from her first year:

The people that came and talked to me, they weren't the same ones. They kept changing. I had to explain it a lot of times. I was okay with it. I had to explain. They would do some things...they would try to make us calm down, but it would only make me more mad...I guess it was only the first year or something like that...we had mediation and they made us sign a contract at the end. Three weeks after that, we got in a fight with the girl. When we had the mediation, they clearly saw how she didn't agree. She didn't like it. I knew that she wasn't going to respect it.

Not only were the mediators inconsistent in their follow-ups with the students, they also may have neglected the students' underlying emotions by prematurely signing a contract when the students did not fully agree with the resolution. Even worse, this same student went on to describe a near traumatizing experiment the mediators attempted with her during her session from the previous school year. Not surprisingly, the result had a kind of iatrogenic effect on the student:

I actually saw improvements this time from last time. They didn't make us do some weird, cheesy stuff. They made me and that girl write a card to each other saying what we liked and disliked about them, give it to them, and I was just like, 'oh my god, I can't wait to read that note!' It was all negativity and I just didn't want to read that. Honestly, that's what I thought when I walked in. I was like, oh they're going to make us write something and I didn't want to [laughing].

However, I should note that this student also reported an improvement in the second year of the mediation program at her school. In the next example, one high school student's dissatisfaction revealed the importance of enforcing ground rules in communication such as taking turns or being respectful. The student described how the mediators did not adequately address the way the students disrespected each other during the session:

I think they handled it well, but I think they should've been like...she said that I had said something about her and I did. They said don't [interrupt her]...let the person talk, just listen and then once it's your turn to talk. But, I did interrupt her because I felt like, 'don't lie because I really didn't say that.' We had witnesses there. I can bring your friends and I can bring my friends and tell you I never said that. The mediators were like, 'okay, don't jump in. Just wait your turn.' There were a couple of noises, you know, like if somebody says something and you go, 'ohh, whatever...' and that was done a couple of times, and I would just look at her and then continue talking or whatever. I think there somebody should've said, 'don't do that. That's disrespectful.' So that made me say, 'don't lie,' because she did it to me.

New mediators can have difficulty reigning in these micro-aggressions such as offhand remarks or interruptions especially when they arise frequently in the session. As this student's experience suggests, however, a failure to enforce respectful standards of communication can also result in an unsatisfactory mediation experience for everyone.

While the majority of students reported that they felt satisfied with the program, dissatisfaction was nonetheless a prominent theme from the students' comments. The most likely culprits in the majority of students' negative experiences included a lack of investment from students or mediators in the process, a lack of confidentiality, a lack of mediator neutrality, the difficult nature of conflict and, finally, poor facilitation of mediation sessions. Even so, most if not all of these problematic areas that students identified also provide excellent opportunities for program improvement in the future.

### **Discussion**

This study attempted to answer questions about the impact of a conflict mediation program in several secondary schools of a large, urban school district. The study found that school violence and conflict are an unfortunate and all too common reality that student participants must confront on a frequent, and for some, even daily basis. Out of a separate group of students who participated in the conflict mediation program, the study found that the mediation program helped students resolve conflicts with their peers, taught them new

coping and conflict resolution skills and provided them with mentorship and guidance for working through problems in nonviolent ways. Students also shared their perspectives on how adults could best support them in their efforts to seek help for and resolve conflicts.

One of the major challenges of this study was documenting the impact of the program across multiple sites with a high degree of variability in the program's implementation and the school environment. However, this variation also contributed to a range of student experiences, both positive and negative, which provided insightful feedback, criticisms and suggestions for areas of improvement. In this chapter, I will first discuss the results of the classroom questionnaires on the school context and, second, highlight the three main findings from the qualitative results. For the first two findings, I argue that the mediation program has two areas of high impact including helping students manage their negative emotions and providing students with access to undergraduate mentors. For the third finding area, I underscore the important ways that contextual factors including adult response to student conflict and peer culture influence student decisions about how they respond to conflicts. I then describe the implications for research as well as the implementation of the mediation program. Lastly, I review the limitations of the study and close with some final reflections on the process of conducting a dissertation study under the imperfect and sometimes chaotic conditions in schools.

### **The School Context: Exposure to Conflict and Help Seeking**

**Exposure to conflict.** Students in the four participating schools who took the classroom questionnaires reported high levels of conflict including bullying and fighting that sometimes exceeded rates from previous research. While there were notable differences among schools, the rates of bullying victimization often exceeded those



reported in large-scale samples though the rates of physical fighting were at similar levels. Students in the present study reported higher rates of any kind of bullying, although cyberbullying and fighting (at the high school level) were nearly identical to previous research. Joad appeared to be an outlier among the schools in terms of high reports of conflict, which seemed to surpass the rates found in other middle school survey data. Across all schools, students consistently reported a high degree of “low level” conflict including both bullying and harassment, which would make these schools prime candidates for any interventions that seeks to reduce conflict or violence and improve school safety. Researchers on bullying in schools have suggested that when prevalence rates reach such high levels, students may accept these behaviors as normal and resign themselves to a kind of helplessness where they feel they have nothing to gain by seeking help for conflict (deLara, 2012). Any intervention that both prevents conflict from escalating into violence as well as improves students’ willingness to seek help for conflict would be especially helpful for creating a positive school climate where students feel safe and supported if they should decide to get help for their problems.

Grade level and gender differences in exposure to conflict were also consistent with previous research, although race differences were slightly more complicated. Reports of victimization were highest in 6<sup>th</sup> grade and decreased linearly to their lowest point in 12<sup>th</sup> grade. Male students consistently reported higher involvement in all kinds of conflict than females for physical fighting as well as witnessing and experiencing bullying or harassment. Black students also reported the highest levels of conflict compared to other racial groups while Asians reported the lowest levels. Latinos, who made up the majority of the sample, were most similar to, though still higher than, Asians in reporting relatively low

levels of conflict. White students often reported the second highest rates of exposure to conflict and were the top reporters of racial harassment, although their numbers represented a very small proportion of the overall sample. These findings are consistent with previous research on group differences with the exception of race (Wang, Iannotti, & Nansel, 2009; Swearer et al., 2012). Racial differences are more complex and may depend on a number of factors such as how bullying is defined or the racial composition of the school. In terms of the students in the present study, however, male students in the earlier grades and those from ethnic minority groups in the sample, such as black and white students, would be most at risk for exposure to conflict, although this general conclusion may not be true for each subtype of bullying or harassment. At the very least, the finding that students most commonly reported verbal bullying (32%) out of all types suggests that conflict mediation is an appropriate intervention in these schools.

**Willingness to seek help.** Across the sample, students generally reported favorable attitudes toward help seeking. The two “small schools”, Casy and Sharon, appeared to have a better help-seeking atmosphere than the regular, public schools, Milton and Joad. Casy had the highest percentage (59) of students who said they got help the last time they were bullied or harassed at school and Sharon had the highest percentage (70) of students who said they could report a problem without being considered a snitch. While the two small schools ranked the highest on these two questions, there were no statistically significant differences among the schools. In two previous studies, 75% of students had told anyone they were bullied and, more stringently, 40% of students said they notified an adult after being bullied (Unnever & Cornell, 2004; Robers, Kemp, & Truman, 2013). The question

about getting help in the current study falls within this range and seems consistent with these findings from previous research.

Help seeking scores and group differences were also consistent with findings from previous research with the exception of a student's grade level. The average score of 3.1 for the sample was slightly higher than an average score of 2.8 from a previous study using the same scale with 9<sup>th</sup> graders only (Eliot et al., 2010). Help seeking at the "small schools", Sharon and Casy, was higher than the regular public schools, Milton and Joad. Indeed, the average help seeking score of 3.3 at Sharon was significantly higher than the other three schools. Group differences in help seeking were also similar to previous studies with the exception of a student's grade level. For example, girls were more willing than boys to seek help for conflict or problems, which was a consistent finding in previous research. In the present study, Asians reported the highest levels of help seeking (3.3) closely followed by Latinos (3.2), while black (2.9) and white students (3.0) were the least willing to seek help. This is mostly consistent with previous research, which found that Asian and white students were most willing to seek help and black and Native American students were the least likely, while Latino students were in the middle of the high and low groups (Unnervet & Cornell, 2004; Eliot et al., 2010). Still other researchers found no significant differences at all by racial group (Williams & Cornell, 2006). These findings of higher help seeking levels among Latino students are perhaps not completely surprising since the two small schools, Casy and Sharon, which report the highest help seeking scores, are also almost entirely Latino. However, Latinos are still among the highest reporters of willingness to seek help even at Joad and Milton, though they are still the majority ethnic group there as well.

However, the positive association between help seeking and grade level was even more surprising. Previous researchers found that 8<sup>th</sup> grade students were less willing to seek help than 6<sup>th</sup> graders and speculated that increased independence or ability to solve problems might explain these differences (Unnervver & Cornell, 2004; Williams & Cornell, 2006). In this study, a positive correlation was found between help seeking and grade, although the difference between middle school (3.1) and high school students (3.2) was slight but significant. This suggests that the relationship between help seeking and grade may not be consistently linear from middle to high school, although school level factors certainly appear to play a role in students' willingness to seek help for conflicts.

**School context implications.** Taken together, these findings suggest there are significant differences in the overall climate of schools as well as implications for groups of students would benefit the most from, but may also be the least likely to participate in the mediation program. Sharon was clearly the leader of the four schools in terms of positive climate as students there reported the lowest rates of exposure to violence and the most agreeable attitudes about help seeking. Along these same lines, the students at Joad unfortunately had to contend with more conflict than any other school. The safety related aspects of a school's climate may affect how students interact with the mediation program and, in fact, students at Sharon reported the highest levels of program satisfaction out of all three schools. These differences, however, were not statistically significant and could be attributed to other factors such as the quality of the mediators or any number of differences in program implementation or student and school characteristics.

From the statistics I presented, the students most likely to report exposure to conflict, and, by extension, potentially the best candidates for the conflict mediation

program, would include black and white, young male students with a low willingness to seek help for problems. Indeed, this somewhat fits the description of traditionally estranged youth who are most likely to feel disconnected from school and experience conflict and least likely to use these types of programs (Theberge & Karan, 2004). Perhaps ironically and not unexpectedly, the single largest group of students to participate in the program was Latinas, who are also among the most willing students to seek help. Schools like Joad would clearly benefit the most from conflict mediation, although certainly all schools in the study experience enough conflict to take advantage of these kinds of interventions. Lastly, if conflict mediation programs actually encourage help seeking among participants, this could be associated with gains in a positive school climate. In fact, willingness to seek help may also be a good barometer of a school's climate as previous research found that high help seeking scores were associated with less school disorder (Bandyopadhyay et al., 2009).

The data presented here could also serve as a reasonable baseline for any future assessments of school culture, student exposure to conflict or the impact of interventions that target any of these areas. In addition, previous research has shown that, when asked, school faculty does not always agree on the amount or type of conflict that occurs in their schools (Matloff & Smith, 1999). This type of school data may help staff reach consensus on safety aspects of their school climate and develop a plan for change if necessary. While conflict mediation has much to offer students and schools, in order to truly maximize its potential for reducing conflict and violence, it would be prudent for administrators of these programs to consider contextual factors that may potentially hamper their effectiveness.

## High Impact Areas of the Mediation Program

Despite the modest pre-post findings, students' descriptions of their experiences in conflict mediation suggest that some of the most important benefits included reductions in feelings of anger and developing relationships with the undergraduate mediators who acted as mentors to them. Students reported that participating in conflict mediation helped them manage their anger, which, in many ways, is an important antecedent to the practice of nonviolent responses to conflict. In addition, the undergraduate mediators were able to provide students with safe and confidential spaces for solving conflicts; dedicated time and support beyond the typical staff member; guidance for students' personal concerns; motivation to succeed in school; and, lastly, enhanced feelings of program satisfaction. Together, these various qualities and benefits comprise the kind of *responsive* relationships that may help protect students from the negative effects of high levels of exposure to conflict in school. In the next section, I first review the results of the pre-post measures and then I discuss the significance of these two "high impact" areas of the mediation program.

**Summary of pre-post program outcomes.** Students who participated in the conflict mediation programs at the three schools reported a drop in negative affect, or feelings such as anger or sadness, from an average of 2.1 (SD = 1.0) to 1.4 (SD = 0.5;  $p < .001$ ), but did not report any quantitative change in measures of positive affect, nonviolent response endorsement or help seeking scores. Students, however, did report acceptable levels of program satisfaction (3.3; SD = 0.7; range 1 - 4), which suggests that they believed the program was fair, helpful and enjoyable. Surprisingly, very few studies have looked at either negative or positive affect despite early calls in the conflict resolution literature to

assess emotional changes in participants (Johnson & Johnson, 1996). Also, to my knowledge, no previous studies examined changes in help seeking attitudes.

This study's absence of significant findings in these outcomes is, however, not terribly surprising given the number of factors that could potentially limit the detection of meaningful changes. For example, previous studies found effects for some groups of students but not others such as high and low risk, voluntary and involuntary, and high and low pre-test participants (Harris, 2005; Shuval et al., 2010). Researchers also acknowledged that the short duration of the conflict intervention and powerful school or neighborhood effects such as climate, size or disorder, could all make detecting changes in students' self-reports even more difficult (Shuval et al., 2010). While all of these observations may certainly be true, it would also be reasonable to expect larger effects in this study because, in theory, undergraduate mediators should be able to deliver a higher quality intervention than peer-aged mediators. However, given the significant differences in climate and program implementation among the schools, it would also be unrealistic to expect to find uniform change across these outcome measures. Thus, the positive findings for negative affect are encouraging and the negative results for the rest of the measures are understandable, if not slightly premature, considering the positive comments I received from the student interviews for each of these outcome areas.

The finding of positive program satisfaction, however, was consistent with most previous research on conflict mediation. In other studies, students cited confidentiality, lack of teacher involvement, having a structured opportunity to resolve a problem by talking, and being treated fairly as important reasons for feeling satisfied with the program (Harris, 2005; Nix & Hale, 2007). Consistent with earlier studies, students described how

the mediation program helped them express themselves and avoid fights, and how it also gave them a unique, structured way to resolve their problems. In order to improve the visibility and acceptance of the program by students, program administrators and mediators could also highlight the reasons students gave for their feelings of satisfaction, which may be especially helpful for drawing in the students least likely to participate.

**Reductions in negative affect.** The findings in this study strongly support the ability of conflict mediation to reduce students' negative feelings of anger, but also of sadness, and in some cases, even feelings of fear and school avoidance. An analysis of potential moderators, or additional factors that could affect this change, also revealed that these reductions in negative feelings were greater as more time passed after the conflict, for girls, and for high school rather than middle school students. Students also indicated that mediation alleviated strong feelings by helping them express themselves and giving them deeper insight into their conflicts. While this may seem intuitive, one previous study on peer mediation contradicted this finding somewhat as students reported that defusing anger or other strong emotions was among the least helpful skills of the mediators (Harris, 2005); although, to be fair, a "least helpful" rating didn't necessary mean unhelpful. Unfortunately, as noted earlier, there is a paucity of research on the effects of school-based mediation on student emotions. The finding that girls reported greater reductions in emotions than boys is problematic, however, especially since boys report more exposure to and participation in incidents of conflict at school. From the available data in this study, it is unclear why high school students reported more reductions in anger than middle school students. Conflict theory might suggest that increases in affective or coping skills associated with older students could be an obvious explanation in addition to many other



factors (Johnson & Johnson, 1996). Also, the significant differences among schools in terms of student characteristics makes it difficult to determine whether these grade level effects are not just a reflection of variation among the schools. Unfortunately, the passage of time is another confounding factor that limits confidence in this finding. Because of the challenge of being spread across three schools, I was not able to follow-up with all students within the same, consistent timeframe.

However, students' comments from their interviews about how mediation helped them more effectively manage their negative feelings lends additional support to the finding that negative affect decreased after students participated in mediation. This is consistent with research on conflict resolution that identifies changes in emotions and emotional regulation skills as key factors for success in constructively resolving conflict (Farrell et al., 2008; Sullivan et al., 2010). Indeed, students in the present study reported that conflict mediation helped with awareness, expression, and management of negative feelings including anger, which research suggests may ultimately result in fewer incidents of both verbal and physical conflict at school. In fact, other research also supports findings from this study that the sole act of getting help for problems can provide assistance to students for coping with and alleviating negative emotions (Hunter et al., 2004). Students appear to benefit from just seeking out help from adults or other sources in schools and may experience relief for difficult or negative emotions independent of the actual type of help provided. However, when the quality of help provided is poor or incompetent, adolescents appear to learn from these experiences and may avoid reaching out to adults and making the same mistake twice (Oliver & Candappa, 2007).

**Mentoring and responsive relationships.** Students' comments indicated that one of the most beneficial aspects of the mediation program was the relationship they had with their mediators. The undergraduate mediators were central to students' feelings of satisfaction with the program, but they also played a distinctive role by offering students an alternative to the more traditional relationships they had with teachers and other school staff. Mediators were mentors to students in several ways such as being closer in age than teachers, sharing some similarities in background, providing guidance on personal concerns, and, at times, enhancing their academic aspirations and motivation to succeed in school. In addition, the mediator relationships were *responsive* to students in ways that were different than other adults at school. The mediators were able to provide students with dedicated time, competent support, and safe and confidential spaces for solving conflicts. Mediators did not get students in trouble for their conflicts, which likely contributed to feelings of greater trust. The qualities found in these responsive relationships may provide students with several benefits including an increased willingness to seek help for problems, improved acquisition of new conflict resolution skills, and, ultimately, some degree of protection from the negative effects associated with exposure to high levels of conflict or violence in school.

Previous research has documented how positive relationships with adults provide several benefits for students in schools. The kinds of mentoring relationships reported by students resemble many of the qualities of positive, student-adult relationships that researchers report in the literature. After conducting focus groups with adolescents about reporting bullying at school, researchers concluded that the quality of the adult relationship was a deciding factor for those students who were willing to seek help

compared to those who were not (Oliver & Candappa, 2007). Another study indicated that students with existing adult relationships with high levels of trust and positive experiences of seeking help were associated with a greater likelihood of approaching adults for help with emotional distress (Wilson & Deane, 2001). In addition to trust, other researchers found that adults with supportive qualities such as appearing interested, caring and respectful were all associated with students' willingness to seek help (Elliot et al., 2010). This is consistent with a long history of previous research on general characteristics of helpers that included qualities such as being genuine, empathetic and accepting, as well as specific approach factors that adolescents prefer in adults like making themselves available, having expertise, and being able to relate to teen issues (Lindsey, 1998). Teachers as well as mediators bring many of these qualities to their relationships with students. However, the mediators' ability to provide confidential help differentiates them from most other school staff who traditionally respond more harshly with discipline or consequences, which can undermine feelings of trust between students and adults. A reoccurring theme in this study was that students felt safe discussing their concerns with the mediators because they knew they would respect their privacy. Some students in the study also commented on how previous, negative experiences with getting help from their schools made them feel less willing to get help in the future. In fact, some students in this study had voluntarily returned to mediation several times, which suggests that positive experiences combined with a consistent and accessible mediation program may have a positive influence on students' willingness to seek help.

Other studies have examined how mediators model certain kinds of skills in conflict mediation and how this affects student learning. If students view mediators as mentors, the

learning outcomes could be enhanced even further. Other research on mentor-mediation models with adolescents specifically has recognized the advantages of peer mediators learning from older, more competent adults, but they were not able to describe how the disputants themselves benefited from the mentoring with older mediators (Lane-Garon & Richardson, 2003; Cassinerio & Lane-Garon, 2006). As a theoretical basis for many mediation programs, researchers claim that students derive significant learning benefits from those relationships with mediators where students perceive high levels of similarities, competence and status (Lane-Garon, 2003; Harris, 2005). The expected benefits would be even higher in cross-age relationships where university students mentor younger, adolescent students because, presumably, they have greater competence and status as role models than peer-aged mediators would (Lane-Garon & Richardson, 2003; Cassinerio & Lane-Garon, 2006). While I did not directly observe any of the mediation sessions because of confidentiality concerns, Harris (2005) conducted both surveys and observations of the process and found evidence that modeling occurred during sessions and was significantly related to the amount of students learning. In their interviews with me, students remarked they were able to recognize some shared similarities with their mediators, the competence demonstrated by some of the mediators, and the elevated status of the mediators as college students, which, taken together, implies that students would be in an ideal position to maximize their potential for learning new skills from the mediators. While the use of undergraduate mediators has not been studied extensively, if at all, in the field of conflict mediation, the findings from this study support a mentor-mediator model, which gives students access to trusting and responsive relationships with competent adults who can also model conflict resolution skills in a safe and supportive environment.

## **Environmental Influences on Student Responses to Conflict**

Many of the students' comments from the current study also highlighted several contextual factors that play a significant role in either impeding or supporting a student's choice to respond to conflicts in positive and prosocial ways. The first major theme was that peer culture represents a significant challenge for students as they attempt to seek help and use non-aggressive approaches for resolving conflict. In particular, students often commented on how peer pressures about projecting images of strength and independence and the culture of snitching were substantial deterrents to their own efforts at resolving conflicts peacefully. The second major theme was how school culture influences students' decisions to seek help for problems, such as volunteering for mediation for example, or even putting prosocial conflict skills into practice during an actual conflict. School staff plays a key role in the creation of a safe and supportive climate that emphasizes trusting relationships with adults and encourages help seeking behaviors among students. A student-centered climate where adults are responsive to students' needs and foster trusting relationships with them may help mitigate negative aspects of peer culture, promote the use of help seeking and conflict skills and, ideally, reduce the overall levels of conflict and violence in schools.

**Challenges in adolescence and peer culture.** Students commented on how certain kinds of peer pressures made it difficult for them to seek help for problems or adopt a prosocial approach to conflict even if they had intentions of doing so. Students in this study were under particular pressure to project images of strength and independence, avoid appearing weak and not "snitch" on their classmates for any peer related conflicts. Students also explained that serious consequences would follow if they violated these behavioral

expectations such as getting beat up, excluded from social groups or having their reputations damaged. This is consistent with other empirical research on adolescence, which has noted similar aspects of peer culture including the need to assert toughness and independence, hide weakness, not tell on peers and enforce consequences when norms are violated (DeLara, 2012; Oliver & Candappa, 2007; Farrell et al., 2010). High-risk students may be especially vulnerable to peer influences as well (Wright et al. 2007), which is worrisome as these students are more likely to experience conflict, but less likely to use mediation programs. The culture of not snitching also poses challenges to building a positive school culture based on principles of conflict resolution where programs like mediation would encourage students to get help for peer problems. Other researchers have also acknowledged that certain peer factors create barriers for using mediation specifically such as adolescents' feelings of distrust of adults, need for independence, concern over reputations, prevalence of rumor-based conflicts and misconceptions about the program itself (Theberge & Karn, 2004). In fact, even some mediators expressed difficulties with not knowing exactly how to respond to these aspects of peer culture when students directly inquired about them. Some students in the current study also endorsed aggressive responses under certain circumstances. Students in urban, low-income, communities may have to contend with even harsher behavioral norms where adolescents must respond to certain kinds of aggression or provocations with force or violence or risk serious loss of status or reputation, which may trump the use of prosocial skills learned from programs like conflict resolution or others (Farrell et al., 2010).

The reality of social dynamics during adolescence reminds us that conflict resolution programming must consider cultural expectations of acceptable behavior and

offset any barriers to accessing resources such as adult help or strategies for resolving conflict peacefully. Not all adolescent communities follow the same codes of conduct and an investigation into the surrounding cultural context would be an important planning step before implementing conflict prevention programs. Researchers have found some ethnic group differences in help seeking behaviors as well as responses to conflict (Elliot et al., 2010; Farrell et al., 2010). Though inconclusive, these cultural variations among student groups should still be considered. Implications of these findings may include incorporating additional mediator training or other components, which would directly address ways of responding to difficult peer pressures and cultural messages. Also, a mentor mediator model of conflict mediation has certain advantages over peer-based mediation in terms of its confidential nature. Adolescents may perceive compromises in confidentiality for peer-based programs while those with neutral, third party adults may convey a stronger message of support for privacy (Oliver & Candappa, 2007). Both the findings from this study and previous research indicate that developmental features of adolescence like peer norms represent important challenges in conflict resolution, but if adequately understood, programs may also leverage these factors to enhance their reach and effectiveness.

**School climate and adult response to conflict.** Findings from the current study suggest that schools have a direct impact on how students attempt to resolve their conflicts including efforts to seek outside help if necessary. The ways that schools respond to conflict as well as the quality of relationships that adults develop with students appear to be influential factors in students' decisions to get help. Similarly, a lack of these positive qualities, i.e. a lack of *trust*, such as ineffectual adults, not keeping confidentiality or not taking the problem seriously all contribute to the underreporting of incidents of bullying or

harassment (DeLara, 2012). Students in this study also commented that other important factors included a positive history of getting help, having a conflict of low severity and developing a personal or trusting relationship with an adult. A school's disciplinary response to conflict is also a tricky issue as students report that consequences at school appear to discourage fighting (Farrell et al., 2010). However, as students in this study suggest, a one size fits all response that penalizes any involvement in conflict unfortunately discourages students from trusting adults and seeking help for peer problems. A more nuanced or tiered approach to school discipline that includes thoughtful, alternative responses to aggression and conflict would help create greater trust among students and an overall more positive school climate.

Some researchers conclude that close and supportive relationships with adults may also help students solve problems nonviolently based on empirical links between feelings of belonging in school and reductions in risky behaviors (Farrell et al., 2010). In fact, what may be even more critical is teacher awareness of peer conflict and training in how to respond to it effectively (Greene, 2003). For example, teachers who feel the most prepared to handle bullying are also the most likely to intervene above and beyond students disclosing these incidents (Novick & Isaacs, 2010). In fact, teacher behaviors appear to influence even the delivery of conflict resolution programs as students who received their own training in effective listening techniques tended to judge their untrained teachers more negatively afterwards (Smith et al., 2002). Teacher beliefs about the effectiveness of conflict resolution are also highly related to the adoption and support of mediation programs in schools (Matloff & Smith, 1999). Similarly, if school administrators or staff support are unaware of the importance of developing a positive help seeking culture in



their school and alternative approaches to traditional discipline, they may be contributing, albeit unintentionally, to increased levels of mistrust between students and adults, greater student exposure to conflict and lower levels of help seeking (Lindsay, 1998; Theberge & Karan, 2004). My anecdotal experience with the three schools in this study seems to be consistent with these implications of student-adult relationships and adult responses to conflict. Milton high school, which had one of the lowest help seeking scores and fewest percentage of students reporting getting help for problems among the schools, also had an administrative staff who seemed committed to a punitive approach to discipline. While awareness of serious consequences may actually contribute to less conflict in a school overall, my experience with Milton suggested that the staff's resistance to providing an alternative response to student conflict may have been related to the difficulties the mediators had with implementing the program and getting referrals for mediation.

This combination of factors that includes a school's response to conflict, discipline policies, the quality of student-teacher relationships, and the prevalence of conflict and violence are all important indicators of a school's climate, particularly for student safety. If this aspect of school climate is overly negative, students may have no reason to believe that turning to adults would actually help with their problems especially if they experience conflict as unavoidable or have negative experiences with previous help seeking attempts (DeLara, 2012). A negative school climate may also compromise learning outcomes for students. For example, high levels of conflict could undermine students' sense of self-efficacy for resolving conflict, or a belief that one's skills will produce an acceptable outcome, which would negatively affect the long-term adoption of newly acquired skills (Farrell et al., 2008). The findings from this study indicate that students who have trusting

and responsive relationships with adults are more likely to seek out help for problems, which is a key component of creating a positive school culture and reducing violence and aggression (Henry et al., 2011). In addition, schools that take steps to reduce risks associated with negative peer attitudes about “snitching” or getting help should be more likely to encourage help seeking behaviors among students and create a safer culture (Oliver & Candappa, 2007). The findings in this study also suggest that conflict mediation may reduce the stigma associated with snitching as students have a confidential space to negotiate their problems, which, in theory, is also free from administrator intrusion.

However, a long history of research on school conflict such as bullying, for example, suggests that changing the culture of a school requires a comprehensive, collective effort (Jones, 2004; Olweus & Limber, 2010). Conflict mediation programs are most likely to be successful when they are incorporated into a larger, school-wide strategy to improve the safety and climate of the school. Even then, school climate outcomes are especially resistant to change, although previous research has found some reductions in disciplinary incidents and improvements in peer mediator perceptions of school climate (Smith et al., 2002; Cassinerio & Lane-Garon, 2006). Ideally, a conflict mediation program represents just one piece of a larger strategy to improve the safety climate of the school. The most successful programs would also include high administrative support, high and low risk students, ongoing training for mediators, and staff exposure to the principles of conflict mediation (Lindsay, 1998). In the absence of a rigorous, school-wide approach, however, a mentor mediation program still represents an appropriate and effective strategy for reducing peer stigma and helping students manage conflict and develop responsive and caring relationships with adults.

## Concluding Remarks

The findings from this study suggest that the conflict mediation program, as implemented in the three schools, has both strengths and weaknesses in terms of its potential to help students resolve conflicts and improve the safety climate of schools. In terms of its strengths, first, conflict mediation is an intervention that meets the *developmental* needs of adolescents: it helps students develop social skills, involves the peer group and encourages autonomy by allowing students to resolve their own conflicts. Peer relationships take on critical importance in adolescence and learning how to manage interpersonal conflicts is a key developmental task (Yoon et al., 2004). By discussing conflicts directly with another disputant, some students in the program learned how to see the issues from their peer's perspective. In addition, the mentor model of conflict mediation, used in this program specifically, provides students with access to positive role models who assist students with their social and academic development. This mentoring aspect of the program with college-aged mediators also offsets imbalances of power that frequently accompanies bullying, harassment and other types of peer conflicts (Theberge & Karan, 2004). Furthermore, the mediation program is, to some extent, confidential, which respects the increased privacy and independence needs of adolescents as well as reduces the risks associated with violating peer norms around reputations and snitching (Oliver & Candappa, 2007). While students commented on several limitations to the confidentiality of their mediations, the potential of the program to reduce this cultural barrier for resolving conflict nonviolently and help seeking remains significant.

Second, mediation offers a unique approach for reducing conflict by creating safe, confidential spaces for students when schools traditionally rely on top down, disciplinary

strategies to deal with aggression. Unfortunately, many schools have been notorious for enforcing vertical and punitive discipline practices that punish negative behaviors and reward positive ones, which neglects emerging research on the importance of horizontal and social-emotional approaches (Osher et al., 2010). In fact, zero tolerance policies may have the most detrimental effects as they remove far too many students from the classroom, including many who are most at-risk for academic problems (Cornell & Mayer, 2010). Also, suspensions and other types of traditional discipline methods do not address the underlying causes of violence in which verbal conflicts often precede physical aggression (Talbot et al., 2002; Farrell et al., 2010). In contrast, conflict mediation takes a horizontal approach to conflict as student disputants share a degree of power over the decision-making process and the outcomes (Theberge & Karan, 2004). Many students who participated in conflict mediation felt satisfied because they had never before experienced such a non-punitive approach for dealing with conflicts in school. Students commented on how the fear of punishment was a substantial deterrent for seeking help for their conflicts as well. While conflict mediation was never intended to replace school discipline practices per se, its ability to address underlying causes of physical aggression and violence makes it an ideal intervention for reducing the harmful effects of exposure to conflict in schools.

The strengths of conflict mediation should also be considered alongside realistic expectations about what the program can accomplish. Students did not always report positive experiences, maintain friendships or change their attitudes about nonviolent responses to conflict. In some ways, these attenuated findings conflict with other research that found improvements in student relationships because of mediation specifically (Harris, 2005). In terms of weaknesses, first, mediation is limited in duration, which may

reduce the program's long-term effects. For example, sessions can be short, students usually attend once, and there is often little or no follow-up or reinforcement. This is generally consistent with the consensus in intervention research that short-term programs are the most likely to produce short-term effects (Webster, 1993; Wright et al., 2007; Shuval et al., 2010). However, other meta-analyses conclude that more program hours do not always result in better outcomes as long as there is strong program implementation (Garrard & Lipsey, 2007). Second, the mediation program may fail to include the most at-risk students as well as seem disconnected from the rest of the school. Unfortunately, it is not uncommon to neglect the highest risk students in school-based intervention research (Shuval et al., 2010). Furthermore, tight integration with and lasting change to school culture may be limited without significant administrative support or additional training components for school staff. However, if these schools implement conflict mediation while taking into account the surrounding cultural context including barriers and limitations, it should only improve their ability to offer positive programming that prevents conflict and creates safer schooling experiences for students.

Lastly, this study's findings suggested that several factors must converge in order for students to successfully acquire new conflict resolution skills. While students' comments were mostly consistent with previous research, they also raised concerns about the difficulty of actually applying their skills in specific moments when emotions run highest. Adolescents have even reported elsewhere that they believe fighting is necessary or justified in some situations (Farrell et al., 2008). In fact, adolescents react with a wide range of responses to conflict, from passivity to aggression, which may be appropriate in the context of peer culture, but judged more harshly by adults who have different

expectations of behavior (Theberge & Karan, 2004). In other words, the social context plays a role in how youth respond to conflict and what types of behaviors are considered normative or adaptive to the circumstance. This would seem to suggest that the process of teaching and learning new conflict resolution skills is not simply about the transmission of information, modeling behaviors or shoring up “deficits” in students, but that careful attention must be given to the surrounding context and how the culture of schools, communities and even families influence students’ confidence and beliefs in prosocial responses as viable and effective alternatives to violence. This also implies that adopting a multi-pronged approach to conflict resolution would be most effective for reducing conflict and violence in schools. Despite this challenging proposition, the advantages would include not only imparting new skills to students, but also potentially achieving the same kinds of competencies that researchers have found to make a difference for resilient youth.

### **Research Implications**

This case study on four schools in a large, urban school district contributes important contextual knowledge about students’ exposure to conflict and the impact of a mediation program on student adjustment and development in several secondary schools. The program under investigation was unique in several ways, which offers new insights on conflict mediation with adolescents in urban settings, but also makes interpreting the study’s findings in the context of previous research difficult. To my knowledge, there were no existing studies on mediation programs with undergraduates as mediators in secondary schools. While there are exceptions, the majority of research on conflict mediation has not included students of color, low-income students or urban school settings (Jones, 2004; Garrard & Lipsey, 2007). This study also contributed to the research base on disputants’

perceptions of the mediation process, which has also been neglected to some extent previously. Findings from this study would have high external validity and may inform the evaluation or delivery of other mediation programs in urban school districts, which may have comparable levels of conflict in addition to other cultural similarities.

While many of the results from this study's questionnaires were consistent with previous research, some findings were not easily explained, in part, because of methodological limitations, but also because they were different or not explored by other researchers. For example, this study was unique because it included both middle and high school students and found differences in help seeking attitudes by grade level. Within middle and high schools, help seeking attitudes decreased as grade level increased, but high schoolers, on average, had higher levels of help seeking than middle schoolers, which other studies had not reported previously. The relationship between age or grade level to help seeking still needs further exploration. Also, despite early calls to include emotional affect in studies of school-based mediation (Johnson & Johnson, 1996), this study was one of the first to find significant reductions in negative affect after participation in mediation. While variations in how I delivered the post-questionnaires in combination with the significant interaction between time and negative affect limits the validity of these findings, emotional changes in participants continues to be an important area worth exploring in future research especially given their important role in resolving conflicts (Farrell et al., 2008). Lastly, this study found some differences in help seeking attitudes and behaviors among the schools. In particular, students at the small, pilot and charter public schools appeared to be more willing to seek help for conflicts or, in fact, reported seeking help more frequently. While no reliable conclusions can be made from this finding because there

were so few schools in this study, it raises the question of whether smaller schools create more positive school cultures in terms of safety or student-adult relationships. However, existing evidence on the issue of school size continues to be mixed (Lee & Smith, 1997; Klein & Cornell, 2010).

Findings from the student interviews contributed to a rich understanding of the impact of conflict mediation and the contextual factors that influence these effects. Several reoccurring themes from students' interviews suggested that multiple factors at both an individual and environmental level affected how likely they were to learn new skills from mediation, feel satisfied with the outcomes of mediation and seek help for future peer conflicts in school. For example, students' comments implied that factors like the severity of the conflict, a history of friendship among disputants, prior mediation experience and the students' role in the conflict all had an effect on their attitudes or experiences in the program. Researchers have recommended testing several of these factors in future studies of program effects including the degree of closeness or friendship among students and the type of resolution, but, for some reason, subsequent research has not followed this advice very closely (Johnson & Johnson, 1996; Roberts, Yeomans, & Ferro-Almeida, 2007; Farrell et al., 2008). In addition, participation in the program appeared to have differential effects for students depending on their role in the conflict such as being a victim, bystander or an aggressor. Unfortunately, I did not have a large enough sample to unpack these relationships or find statistical effects. However, given the strong and consistent findings of more beneficial effects for peer mediators than disputants, an investigation of a student's role in peer conflict appears to be long overdue in studies of conflict interventions (Yoon et al., 2004). Lastly, findings on the mentorship qualities of students' relationships with the



mediators were unexpected, but highlight this critical component of cross-age mentoring in mediation. It is also not surprising that this hasn't been examined in previous research because most mediation programs include cadres of peer mediators, which reflects a much different type of relationship. With cross-age mediators, there would also be further potential to build on previous work that opens the "black box" of mediation and looks at the underlying *process* (e.g., how skills are modeled in sessions) in addition to *outcomes* (Harris, 2005). The study of mediation process with older mediators may also prove useful for developing program theories of change since the mediations will arguably be of higher quality than peer models.

### **Program Implications**

While many of the positive findings in this study support the mentor mediation program in its current form, student and mediator comments' also indicate that there is ample room for improvement. Students mentioned several reasons for feeling dissatisfied with the program including not taking mediation seriously, a lack of confidentiality and neutrality, difficulty dealing with strong emotions and poor facilitation of mediation sessions. This is mostly consistent with previous research on dissatisfaction among disputants and underscores the importance of mediator training and levels of preparedness as direct contributors to students' program satisfaction (Nix & Hale, 2007). These mediator factors also raise issues related to program implementation quality, or fidelity, which intervention researchers have studied quite extensively. Historically, research on the effectiveness of evidence-based practices has had a large influence on programs in violence prevention (Cornell & Mayer, 2010). While researchers recognize the importance of intense monitoring of program processes and transactions for maximizing

results (Garrard & Lipsey, 2007), this study along with other research suggests that the process of mediation may be more malleable than other kinds of interventions (Nix & Hale, 2007). This flexibility, or deviations from the “training script”, might actually confer certain kinds of benefits. Disputants may feel less satisfied with their mediations when mediators force them back to the original issue after veering “off course” to vent emotions, or, in other words, when mediators resist departures from the scripted process (Nix & Hale, 2007). However, mediators may also need to maintain a fine balance here because students also report high satisfaction when mediation is a controlled process where mediators treat disputants fairly and enforce ground rules (Harris, 2005). In the present study, many of the students’ complaints as well as my own observations suggested that the mediators did not always implement the program faithfully. However, future training of mediators may need to emphasize how to handle these kinds of disputant departures rather than strict adherence to a predetermined, or an “evidence based”, set of rules and procedures.

The findings from this study and other research suggest that certain contextual factors have a significant impact on the effectiveness of the mediation program. This implies, for example, that the intervention should be well integrated into the culture of the schools as well as adapted to reflect the heightened importance of peers in adolescence. One of the most consistent and reoccurring recommendations in school-based research is the need to adopt whole school approaches for anti-violence interventions, which offer intentional, coordinated and sustained program elements at every level of the school environment (Jones, 2004; Yoon et al., 2004; Theberge & Karan, 2004). Examples of additional school components that could enhance the delivery of the program would include training and building awareness for school staff, administrative buy-in and support,

classroom integration and inclusion of peers at various points in the process such as referrals or in the mediations themselves<sup>3</sup>. Developmental considerations would also include reducing barriers to help seeking behaviors for adolescents by emphasizing a referral process through peer networks or self-referral rather than adults (Wilson & Deane, 2001). In addition, how the referral process is integrated with other school policies for handling conflict such as discipline is extremely important because associating mediation with traditional discipline may deter students from seeking out the program. Mandatory referrals may also discourage motivation and reduce learning benefits, but, on the other hand, they may increase the involvement of high-risk students who wouldn't otherwise participate (Theberge & Karan, 2004). Greater efforts must be made to recruit "high risk" students into the program as previous research as well as evidence from this study indicate that students with the highest exposure to conflict are also the least willing to seek help or participate in mediation. There is a clear message that if these school and social context factors are ignored, programs that target individual students will not produce their desired effects (Coyle, 2008; Farrell et al., 2010).

### **Limitations and Caveats**

It is important to delineate limitations and caveats to the conclusions I make about the relationships among the variables in this study. In order to make claims about this study's findings, I must first draw inferences from the data, which can vary in their degree of validity, or, in other words, the extent to which they are an accurate or truthful representation of reality. Shadish, Cook and Campell (2002) outline a framework for examining the truthfulness of a study that breaks validity down into four, main components including statistical, internal, construct and external types. The authors explain that the

*statistical* subtype includes the validity of inferences about the correlations among the variables; *internal* includes inferences about the relationship between the treatment and outcomes (if A causes B); *construct* includes inferences about the measurement of psychological constructs and their reliability; and *external* includes inferences about whether the observed relationships would also be true for (or generalize to) different people, settings, treatments and outcomes. Extensive reviews on conflict resolution research have also identified a host of methodological problems, which appear in the present study as well, such as a lack of program specificity (i.e., the independent variable), no observations of the mediation process, few or no experimental designs, short-term studies, lack of valid measures and an overreliance on self-report (Johnson & Johnson, 1996). Similar to this study, these so-called “threats to validity” reduce our confidence in causal relationships, but, on the other hand, these kinds of studies also increase our confidence that findings would hold across other settings because researchers conducted all of them in schools. I will consider similar threats to validity according to this framework and some steps I took to address them for each study component including the classroom questionnaires, the pre-post tests and the student interviews.

**Statistical validity.** There were several factors that may have limited my ability to detect statistical relationships among the variables in the study. For the classroom questionnaires, many of the questions about exposure to violence were heavily skewed towards “never” or low frequency, which indicated that students either underreported their exposure or the measures were not sensitive enough to detect differences on a weekly, monthly or yearly basis. The reduced range on these measures can weaken their relationship with other variables in the study. The intervention sample was also small,

which may have reduced the likelihood of detecting significant changes from pre- to post-test. Also, based on my observations and interviews with the mediators, the implementation of the intervention seemed to vary widely. These two factors may have contributed to the lack of significant pre-post findings when, if adequately addressed, participating in the intervention could have produced measureable changes in the dependent variables. In order to partially account for these threats to statistical validity, I took several different actions. I would sometimes collapse the range of measures when appropriate to report “any” vs. “no” exposure. As the study progressed, I included three schools instead of one from the original design in order to increase the sample size. Also, as appropriate, I used non-parametric, rank order tests when ANOVA assumptions about the data were violated, which most often occurred because the residuals were either not normal or homogeneous.

**Internal validity.** For the pre-post tests, one of the largest difficulties in determining whether the intervention caused a change in the dependent variables was the “block box” nature of the program. Two factors including the lack of program specificity as well as an inability to observe mediation sessions (i.e., measure fidelity) obscured the actual mediation process and made it difficult to attribute outcomes to specific components of the program. For example, there was no way to know whether a positive relationship with the mediator or adherence to the conflict mediation steps was responsible for reductions in negative affect. Another contributing factor was an inconsistent data collection process. Because I was spread out among three different schools where mediations occurred simultaneously, it was difficult if not impossible to collect data within the same time frame for all participants. I also only collected data during the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter of

the program's implementation during the school year. Unexpected changes in the study design did not allow me to collect data in both the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> quarters of the program. This may have biased the sample towards mediators who were more or less motivated, who had different reasons for participating, or who had more experience than 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter mediators. It's difficult to say whether the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter implementation of the program would have been more effective. On one hand, mediators had less experience in the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter; however, on the other hand, there seemed to be a significant number of mediators in the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter who seemed unmotivated to participate, which raised questions about their intentions in taking the class. This may either over or underestimate the strength of study's findings depending on whether the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter class had more of a motivated or effective team of mediators.

In addition, significant differences among the schools such as size, type, ethnic composition and number of years they participated in the program may have added other unmeasured variables that could have affected the relationship between the program and the outcomes. Lastly, students' initial exposure to an outcome measure in the pre-test may have influenced how they answered the same measure in the post-test, which is always a concern in pre-post designs. In general, these threats to the internal validity of the study make it impossible to determine whether the mediation program actually caused changes in students' responses. However, in order to account for some of these threats, I employed a mixed-methods approach to gather additional, qualitative data on the potential, underlying change processes. I also conducted interviews with mediators in order to gather additional data (albeit self-report) on what actually occurred during the mediation sessions. Both student and mediator sources provided rich descriptions of the context and,

after data analysis, revealed potential explanatory causes for changes that students experienced after they participated in the program. I also attempted to see whether differences in measurement time were related to changes in the outcome measures and, in fact, I found a significant relationship. In the presentation of the qualitative data, I also attempted to highlight strengths, weaknesses and exceptions to common themes in order to present a balanced perspective, i.e., a more valid description of what students said.

**Construct validity.** There were several threats to the construct validity in the study that included my selection of measures and how students responded to my questionnaires and interview questions. First, as noted earlier, all the study data was self-report, or “soft”, and there were no other “hard” measures of student attitudes or behaviors such as direct observations or school records of discipline or referrals. Also, as much as I attempted to make students feel comfortable and assure them their answers were confidential, there was likely some degree of pressure to provide desirable answers especially as it related to their learning or satisfaction with the program and the mediators. Furthermore, students, especially those in middle school, may have felt intimidated during our individual meetings, which also would have affected their responses. In order to address some of these issues, I gathered data using multiple methods including questionnaires and interviews. I used the student questionnaire data to some extent to inform my interpretation and analysis of both student and mediator interview data. As much as possible, I also took the measures in this study from examples in previous research in order to compare findings for consistency. I also only included existing measures that had either been previously validated or shown to have satisfactory ratings of reliability. However, the internal consistency of the nonviolent

response strategy scale was fairly low, which compromises the integrity of this measure. Fortunately, this is good news for the study since the measure did not detect any changes.

**External validity.** There were several threats to external validity in this study as well as additional factors that may strengthen its ability to generalize findings to other students or schools with conflict mediation programs. For the classroom questionnaires, there were differences among the schools in how I sampled classrooms. The two small schools were small enough to include all the classrooms. At the two large schools, I had to rely on a staff member to help select the classrooms, which were chosen in a way convenient to this contact person. While the small schools included complete populations, the larger school samples may not have been representative of their school populations. Both the classroom and intervention samples were primarily female and Latino, which were the groups least likely to report exposure to violence and most likely to report willingness to seek help for conflicts. The findings of the study may not generalize to schools that are not majority Latino. While there were no differences in changes in dependent measures by school, the results also may not apply to large, comprehensive schools since two of the three schools in the sample were small, pilot or charter schools. For the intervention results in particular, participant data also suggests that the sample was predominately “low risk”. Therefore, results may not generalize to higher risk populations. The conclusions I made about contextual factors from the student interviews only included students who participated in mediation, which was not representative of the whole school. For example, these students may have been more likely to seek help or have better relationships with adults, although they did have to experience at least some conflict in order to participate in the program.



Despite the inclusion of schools that significantly differed from each other in multiple ways, I tested for school interactions with outcomes but did not find any differences with the exception of negative affect. I did find significant differences by school and group for the classroom data analysis and this was reported in the study's results. In order to provide a more balanced perspective on conflict and contextual factors for adolescents, researchers recommend recruiting students who were involved in conflict, but did not participate in conflict mediation sessions (Smith et al., 2002). As noted earlier, the absence of these students from the general school population limits the applicability of this study's findings to other schools, but I also highly recommended their inclusion in future research. At the same time, including student perspectives from multiple school sites may also improve the external validity of the current study. The broader diversity of student and mediator experiences across multiple schools should strengthen our confidence that the findings would generalize to other schools within the district.

## **Reflections**

In this concluding section, I discuss several themes about the process of conducting an investigation into the workings of a school-based program, which in this case, happened to be a conflict mediation program, but really could have been any number of similar, social-emotional interventions for students. The singular, overarching theme of this study was how to continually adapt its design to the rapidly shifting conditions and relationships in schools while still attempting to preserve some level of validity and an adequate sample size with meaningful data. Some additional caveats come to mind about the relationships I had with the UCLA mediators and the staff at the schools and how they affected my data

collection process. Lastly, I will close with reflections on the research process and how I might do certain things differently after muddling through this experience.

The design of this study went through several dramatic changes from its initial inception as an action research proposal in only one school. The original intent of the study was to build upon a longstanding university-community partnership, which, in my mind, represents the pinnacle of conducting applied research because it melds the strengths of each institution (Shuval et al., 2010). For example, the university and partnering school, or organization, collaborate together on identifying problems, developing research questions and collecting and interpreting data in order to improve a localized problem, which, in theory, should confer more direct benefits to either students or schools than research conducted by outsiders. Moreover, I had intended to have more overlap between the two phases of the study. I wanted to use school context data from phase 1 to understand the experiences of students in the program reported in phase 2, which would have been easier with one site. I changed school sites three times and ended up with a case study and final sample of four schools, over 800 classroom questionnaires and over 40 students who participated in the mediation program. The sheer size of the study grew to something that was almost unmanageable for one person and it was a far cry from my original intention of taking a deep look at the context of school conflict at one site where I had already become familiar with the school community including some of the students and staff.

While the changes in this study were necessary and often beyond my control, they also introduced several unanticipated challenges. The need to monitor the implementation of the program in three schools was especially difficult. Not only did I have to quickly introduce myself to the school site coordinators and teams of mediators, but I also had to

figure out how the team had implemented the program in each site in order to track mediation referrals and follow up with students in a timely fashion. Also, I had to spread myself across three different schools because I was uncertain about how many referrals and participants I would get for the study until the school year was almost over.

Unfortunately, I believe this resulted in too much data, although this may be preferable to not having enough data from a research perspective.

These growing pains were not just challenging for me, but they also strained my relationships with school staff and the undergraduate mediators. Relationships and trust often take time to build especially in school communities and I only had a few days or weeks to acquaint myself with the coordinators and the mediators. To this day, I'm still not sure if this was only in my own head, but many if not most of the mediators and at least one school site coordinator seemed to view me with suspicion. Despite my best intentions of clarifying my role and explaining the voluntary nature of the study, my relationships with the mediators and some school staff members became strained. In fact, at one point, I was called into a meeting because, apparently, some of the mediators felt intimidated by my presence at their school site. Unfortunately, although I was somewhat aware of how my presence might affect the implementation of the program, I underestimated the extent to which the undergraduate students associated me with an evaluative role of their own performance especially since they were volunteering in the schools for class credit. And, understandably, some of the mediators and school staff were protective of their students and initially did not seem comfortable having an outsider meet with them.

Lastly, trust was also difficult to establish possibly because of differences in identity or social background. Mediators participated in the program through a Chicano Studies

class at UCLA and most were Latina, undergraduate students. There were a few male students and others from different ethnic backgrounds, though they were a small minority. The schools predominately served students of color and many if not most of school staff members I interacted with were also women of color. For all practical purposes, others tend to view me phenotypically as a white male, which I believe accentuated my status as an outsider and was partially responsible for difficulties in creating trust in these relationships especially given the considerable time pressure. Trust is often a sensitive issue in underserved communities and in no way would I minimize the importance of establishing long-term relationships before embarking on a research project that has high potential for either misunderstanding or misuse. My original plan was to stay within one school community; however, out of practical necessity, I had to spread myself across several schools, which introduced unexpected challenges such as these. Although, to be fair, similar issues may have arisen even if I had stayed in only one school site.

As noted earlier, there were many complications in this study and there are several methodological improvements I might make should I ever have another opportunity to conduct a school-based research study. For example, the classroom data from phase 1 provided meaningful data about the context of exposure to violence and student perceptions of the safety climate. This data could be used to inform the data collection in phase 2 by purposefully recruiting students who may be at elevated “risk” for experiencing or participating in school conflict. In terms of the study’s measures, I believe I over-relied on the use of existing measures and did not devote sufficient time to pilot testing them for use in this study. Even though I adapted my exposure to conflict measures from national surveys, many of my frequency scales were not sensitive enough to detect infrequent

reports and were positively skewed towards the “never” end of the spectrum. This lack of range likely obscured significant relationships especially in the within-school analyses. If I had sufficiently pilot tested my questionnaires, hopefully I would have been able to identify these weaknesses and improve them for the actual study. Also, student learning is a complex process and measuring learning outcomes with respect to such a short-term intervention requires very precise measures that are tightly bound to the theoretical model of change. In hindsight, I probably should have chosen a different indicator of learning prosocial conflict resolution strategies that would have been more consistent with either the program theory or the short-term nature of the intervention. In fact, if I had stayed at one school site, I had planned to include other kinds of “hard” measures such as behavioral referrals and discipline incidents, which is another way of understanding the impact of the program on the school community as students often use the program only once.

My own experience with conducting this research study over the past year has also helped me understand the value of having a flexible research design, using multiple methods, and distinguishing between “process” and “outcomes” in intervention research. This study went through numerous changes often in fast succession as the conditions in the schools were constantly changing, which prevented me from sticking to my original plan. A case study in some ways resembles an action research approach as it allows the researcher to make “mid-course corrections” not possible in traditional research designs (Erickson, 2006). In addition, mixed-methods, which is the cornerstone of case studies, provides an additional “safety” plan when the original design does not work as intended. For example, shifting to qualitative or descriptive, process data is especially helpful when either the collection or analysis of quantitative data does not go as planned (Shuval et al., 2010; Smith

et al., 2002). I believe these aspects of my research study were extremely helpful for allowing me to adapt to the challenging conditions of school-based research.

Lastly, the shift in this study's focus from outcomes to process in some ways represents a central lesson of effectiveness research with school-based interventions. As noted earlier in the literature review, whole school, anti-violence interventions have not necessarily lived up to their promises in part because of shortcomings in program implementation or fidelity. The difficulties I had with tracking program referrals and recruiting participants was likely somewhat related to problems with program coordination and implementation in the school sites. In fact, I am almost sure that my presence in the schools increased the number of mediations that took place because of how I had to follow up with both school staff and mediators to track what was happening with the students. Schools are often communities unto themselves and, in some ways, the mediation program looked different at each school site. The quantitative outcome findings in this study were fairly modest, which may reflect some of this variation in program implementation. The use of qualitative methods in this study to collect data on process was also especially instructive in this situation. If this contextual data on the mediation program is included in efforts to improve program fidelity or implementation, then future studies of the mediation program may be in a better position to utilize more quantitatively focused designs such as control groups or even treatment comparisons with peer mediation models, for example. Because of the sometimes disruptive conditions of real world research, it will always remain challenging to understand the true nature of the impact of these kinds of programs without sufficient attention to program coordination and fidelity.

## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> The school names have been changed in this report to protect their privacy.

<sup>2</sup> The school sites in the final study were not the intended sites from the original study design. The changes in the study design and school site selection happened for several different reasons including some factors that were in my control and others that weren't. During the 2012-'13 school year, the UCLA conflict mediation program operated in at least seven different schools in the district. Originally, I had planned to complete a different iteration of this study, which included both phases 1 and 2, at only one school, Joad, where I had established relationships from the previous school year. Joad was also an ideal site because of the program history at the school and the large number of referrals in the previous academic year (see Figure 1). I started to collect classroom data for phase 1 at Joad during Winter Quarter, 2013. However, midway through Winter Quarter, several administrative problems arose and the program was no longer able to stay at Joad for the rest of the year. It was obviously not possible to continue with phase 2 of the study, which is why I have data for all four schools for Phase 1, but not for phase 2. I then switched the site of the study to SOUL, an alternative, charter high school district for students who were at risk of dropping out of school. I chose this new setting because I anticipated a high number of student conflicts and, therefore, a sufficient amount of referrals to the conflict mediation program. Unfortunately, the mediation program was in its first year at the school site and difficulties with integrating the program into the school resulted in almost no referrals during Winter Quarter (see Figure 1).

To minimize the risk of not having enough mediation participants for phase 2, I made the decision to switch to three other school sites that could produce more referrals.

The three schools, Casy, Sharon and Milton, each had teams of mediators continuing into Spring Quarter, 2013, which was the earliest opportunity I had to resume data collection. Because I now only had one quarter instead of two for data collection, I chose to stay in these three schools to increase the odds of recruiting a large enough sample for the second phase. In Spring Quarter, I completed phases 1 and 2 at each of these three schools. As it turned out, the number of mediation referrals in the three program schools during Spring Quarter was roughly equal to Joad’s referrals from Winter Quarter in the previous school year (see Figure 1). The original intention was never to make any comparisons across schools, but rather conduct a focused study of just one school on exposure to conflict, program implementation and effects, and the school climate. However, especially in schools, even the best of intentions do not always work out as expected, so the current study reflects a diversity of student experiences across several different kinds schools, which hopefully will improve the value of the study’s findings.

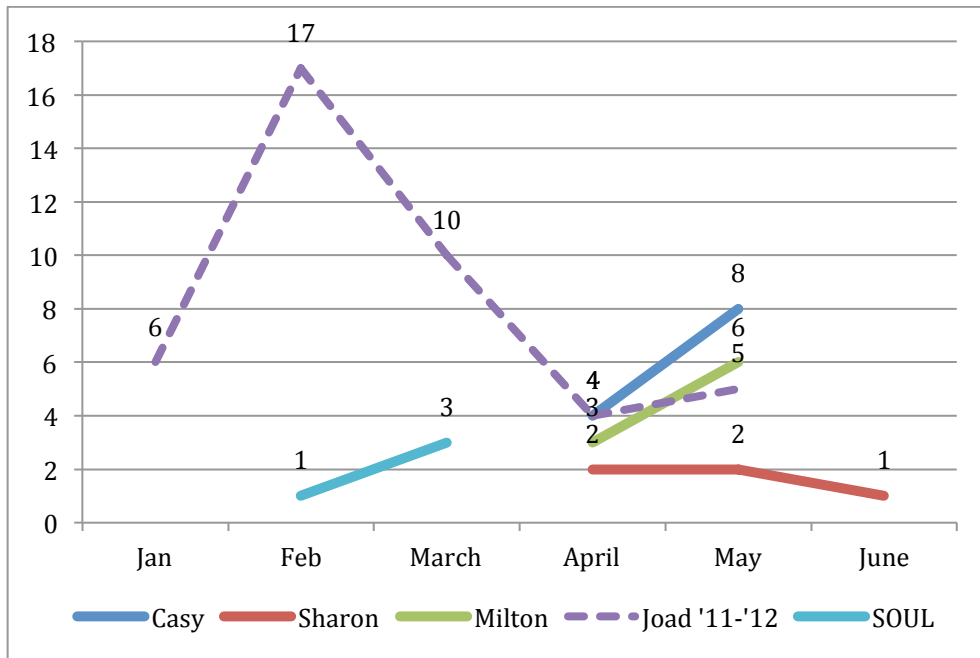


Figure F1: Mediation Referrals, 2012-2013



<sup>3</sup> Milton's HEART program is a good example of incorporating peers into the conflict mediation program model. At Milton, the UCLA undergraduates train high school students as mediators and also work with them on other kinds of school issues related to conflict and social-emotional learning. The HEART students along with the undergraduates make classroom presentations with a performing arts focus on various adolescent issues as well as build awareness about the importance of resolving conflict peacefully.

## Appendix A

### Classroom Questionnaire

Thank you for your interest in taking the School Safety Survey. This survey should only take 5 – 10 minutes of your time. Please answer each question the best you can by circling the correct answer choice. There are no right or wrong answers. Please DO NOT put your name on the survey so your answers will be private. You will not get in trouble for how you respond so please be as honest as possible.

1. What grade are you in? (please circle)

6<sup>th</sup>      7<sup>th</sup>      8<sup>th</sup>      9<sup>th</sup>      10<sup>th</sup>      11<sup>th</sup>      12<sup>th</sup>

2. What is your gender? (please circle)

Male      Female

3. What is your race or ethnic background? (please circle all that apply)

Hispanic/Latino      Black      Asian      White      Other

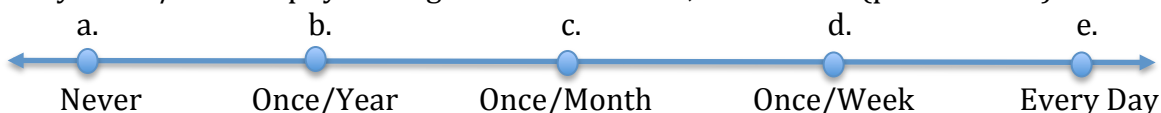
### School Conflict and Bullying Questions

Please circle one answer that best describes what you think for each question.

4. Have you been in a physical fight *at school* in the last year? (please circle)

- a. Yes
- b. No

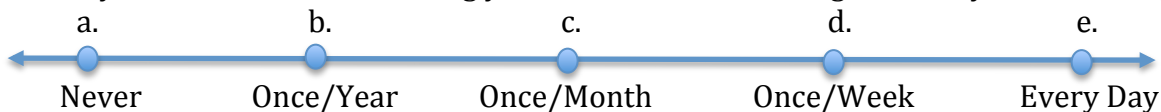
5. Do you see/witness physical fights *at school*? If so, how often? (please circle)



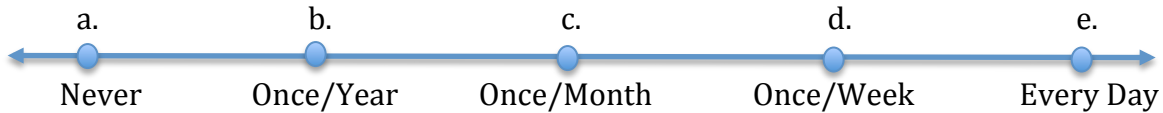
Please answer some questions about what students can do at school that can make you feel bad or hurt your feelings. Sometimes we call this bullying or harassment. Has any student bullied or harassed you? This can include any of these:

6. **Are you *physically* bullied in school? If so, how often?** (please circle)

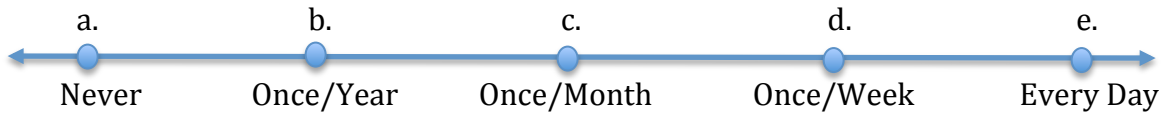
*Examples:* being hit, pushed, slapped, kicked, spit at, or beaten up, had things stolen or destroyed, forced to do something you don't want to do like give money or something



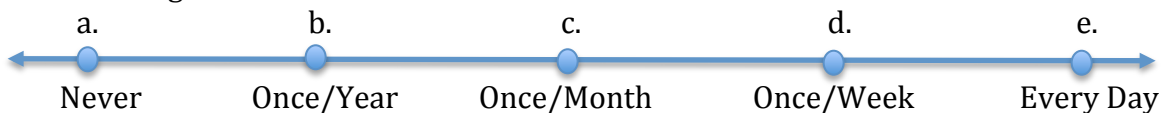
7. **Are you verbally or socially bullied in school? If so, how often?** (please circle)  
*Examples:* called names, teased hurtfully, insulted, made fun of, humiliated, threatened, excluded from a group or activities on purpose, spread rumors or gossiped about you



8. **Are you bullied online, or electronically, by other students at school or at home?**  
*Examples:* using cell phones, texting, Facebook, videos, or other web sites to tease, threaten or put people down.



9. **Are you racially harassed? If so, how often?** (please circle)  
*Examples:* called names or treated differently or badly because of your race, culture, ethnic background

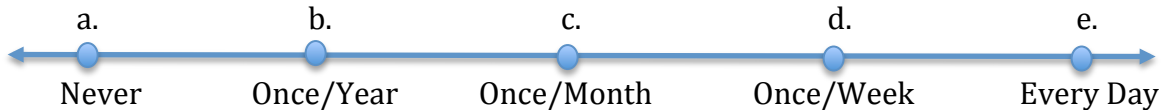


Only answer this next question if you said you were bullied or harassed at least once in questions 6 – 8. If you’ve never been bullied or harassed, please skip this question.

10. Try to think of the last time you were bullied or harassed in school. Did you get help from another student or an adult at school for what happened?

- a. Yes  
     i. If yes, who did you get help from? \_\_\_\_\_
- b. No  
     i. If no, why didn’t you get help? \_\_\_\_\_  
     \_\_\_\_\_  
     \_\_\_\_\_

11. How often do you see any kind of bullying or harassment at school that happens to other people (not including yourself)? (please circle)




12. If you see or witness conflict or bullying at school, does it make it hard for you to get your schoolwork done or concentrate in class? (please circle)



If you hear about a threat to someone’s safety or a conflict at school, can report it to an adult without “snitching”?

- a. Yes
- b. No

For the next set of questions, please circle the answer that best describes how much you agree or disagree with the following statements:

Statement	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
a. (For practice): I like to run during PE.				
1. If I tell a teacher that someone is bullying or harassing me, the teacher will do something about it.				
2. It’s okay for students to talk to someone when other students are being bullied or have conflicts.				
3. Teachers make it clear that bullying and harassment are not acceptable.				
4. There are adults here I can talk to if I have a personal problem.				
5. If another student were bullying or harassing me, I would tell someone about it.				
6. Students here try to stop bullying and fighting when they see it.				
7. Teachers at this school are genuinely concerned about me.				
8. If another student said they were going to hurt someone, I would tell another teacher or adult at school.				
9. If another student brought a weapon to school, like a knife or gun, I would tell someone like another teacher or adult.				

## Appendix B

### Program Post (Pre) Questionnaire

Thank you for your interest in taking the Conflict Mediation Survey. This survey should take less than 10 minutes of your time. There are no right or wrong answers. Please be as honest as possible. Your answers are completely private and you will not get in trouble for any of your answers.

#### Questions About How You Feel

You will see a list of words below that describe different feelings and emotions. Read each word and then circle the appropriate answer next to that word.

Please think of the problem that brought you to the conflict mediation. Tell us how much you have felt this way the last time you saw the person you had a conflict with:

Feeling or Emotion:	Not at all	A little	Moderately	Quite a bit	Extremely
Upset	1	2	3	4	5
Mad	1	2	3	4	5
Alert	1	2	3	4	5
Ashamed	1	2	3	4	5
Excited	1	2	3	4	5
Nervous	1	2	3	4	5
Strong	1	2	3	4	5
Interested	1	2	3	4	5
Afraid	1	2	3	4	5
Energetic	1	2	3	4	5

#### Questions about Anger

The next time you find yourself really angry with someone or something, how likely is it that you would...?

	Very unlikely	Unlikely	Likely	Very likely
1. Ignore the situation?	1	2	3	4
2. Ignore it, but get the person back later?	1	2	3	4
3. Try to talk it out?	1	2	3	4
4. Suggest going to mediation?	1	2	3	4
5. Channel your anger into something constructive?	1	2	3	4
6. Laugh it off?	1	2	3	4
7. Try to calm down?	1	2	3	4

8. Try to see the other person's point of view?      1                  2                  3                  4

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<b>Mediator Feedback Questions</b>
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Please circle your answer based on how much you agree or disagree with these statements.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The mediators clearly explained the rules.	1	2	3	4
The mediators really listened to me.	1	2	3	4
The mediators understood my point of view.	1	2	3	4
The mediators knew what they were doing.	1	2	3	4

One thing I liked about this mediation was:

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One thing I would change about the mediation or do differently for next time is:

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Please circle a number for how much you agree or disagree with each of the following statements.

Statement:	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I liked going to the mediation.	1	2	3	4
The mediators treated me fairly and listened to me.	1	2	3	4
I'm satisfied with the agreement from the mediation.	1	2	3	4
I would use mediation again.	1	2	3	4
I would recommend mediation to my friends or classmates.	1	2	3	4
Since the mediation, I get along better with the other person.	1	2	3	4

For the next set of questions, please circle the number that best describes how much you agree or disagree with the following statements.

Statement:	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
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If I tell a teacher that someone is bullying or harassing me, the teacher will do something about it.

	1	2	3	4
It's okay for students to talk to someone when they have problems or conflicts with other students.				
	1	2	3	4
There are adults here I can talk to if I have a personal problem.				
	1	2	3	4
If I had a problem or a conflict with another student, I would tell someone about it.				
	1	2	3	4
Adults at this school are genuinely concerned about me.				
	1	2	3	4
If another student said they were going to hurt someone,				
	1	2	3	4
I would tell someone like another teacher or adult at school.				
	1	2	3	4
If another student brought a weapon to school, like a knife or gun,				
	1	2	3	4
I would tell someone like another teacher or adult.				
	1	2	3	4

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## Appendix C

### Student Interview Protocol

#### **Q1: Previous Mediation History**

- 1) Was this your first time in mediation? How many times have you been before?
  - a. What did you think of your other mediation(s)? Was it helpful?

#### **Q2: Current Mediation Context**

- 2) How were you sent to the mediation program this time? Did you have a choice?
  - a. How many other students were involved? Individual or group meetings?
  - b. What was your relationship with the other person like before the problem?
  - c. How did you feel about the person when the conflict/problem happened?

#### **Q3: Mediation Process and Relationship to Mediators**

- 3) What did you think about the way the mediators handled your conflict?
  - a. Did they do or say anything that you remember? That was helpful?
  - b. Do you think you learned anything from them? What?
  - c. How did you feel talking about your problem with the mediator? Why?
  - d. How is talking to a mediator different than a teacher or staff at school?
  - e. How did it feel to share your side of the story? How was it to hear the other person's side? What was your reaction?

#### **Q4: Mediation/Program Outcomes**

- 4) Were you able to reach an agreement at the end of the mediation?
  - a. What was it? And how did you come up with that?
  - b. Did the agreement work? Were you satisfied with it?
  - c. If it hasn't been working, why do you think that's the case?
  - d. Did how you feel about the person change after the mediation? How?

#### **Q5: Conflict Resolution Skills/Learning**

- 5) Looking back, how would you normally have tried to solve this conflict/problem if your school didn't have a mediation program?
  - a. What if you had a similar problem in the future with another person and how would you try to solve or fix it then?

#### **Q6: Mediation/Program Satisfaction**

- 6) What did you like about going to mediation? What didn't you like about it?
  - a. Would you try mediation again if you had another problem with someone?
  - b. Would you recommend mediation to your friends? Why/why not?

#### **Q7: Program Improvement/Barriers**

- 7) Can you think of reasons why students wouldn't want to use mediation?
  - a. What would you say to these students to encourage them to use it?
  - b. Is there anything you would change about the mediation program to make it better or to have more students use it at school?



## Appendix D

### Mediator Interview Protocol

#### **Q1: Mediation Context**

Who was involved in the mediation?

How many students? Were they participating voluntarily?

How many times did you meet with them? Follow-ups?

What was their relationship like before/after?

What was your relationship like with the students? Before/after?

#### **Q2: Mediation Process**

How did the mediation session/process go for you?

Did you use the steps (ITUNA)?

How did the students engage in the mediation?

Did they take it seriously? Share their perspectives? Hear the other person's side?

Were there any "breakthrough" moments during the mediation?

#### **Q3: Mediation Outcomes/Program Satisfaction**

How did the mediation end?

What was the agreement and how did you get there? Were you satisfied with it? If not, what could you have done differently? Did they stick to the agreement?

What parts of the mediation were the most challenging?

What parts of the mediation were the most rewarding?

#### **Q4: Learning Outcomes / CR Skills**

Learning:

What do you think the students learned from you? How do you know?

Was there anything non-mediation related you talked about?

How did this mediation affect you? Do you think you learned anything? What?

#### **Q5: Program Improvement**

Summative:

What would you like to improve on for your next mediation? Do differently?

What would you like to repeat/keep the same in your next mediation?

What would you change about the how the program is currently working?

## Appendix E

### Primary Mediation Outcomes by School

Table A1

*Primary outcome scores from pre to post intervention at Casy (n = 18)*

Outcome Measure (DV)	Pre-test M (SD)	Post-test M (SD)	n
Negative affect	1.9 (1.0)	1.7 (0.7)	18
Positive affect	2.1 (1.0)	2.2 (1.0)	16
Nonviolent response	2.2 (0.6)	2.4 (0.5)	17
Help seeking	3.1 (0.5)	3.3 (0.6)	18
Satisfaction	-- <sup>a</sup>	3.3 (0.7)	18

<sup>a</sup> Included in post-test only

Table A2

*Primary outcome scores from pre to post intervention at Sharon (n = 10)*

Outcome Measure (DV)	Pre-test M (SD)	Post-test M (SD)	n
Negative affect *	2.2 (1.0)	1.4 (0.7)	10
Positive affect	2.4 (1.1)	2.4 (0.9)	10
Nonviolent response	2.6 (0.5)	2.6 (0.5)	10
Help seeking	3.2 (0.5)	3.2 (0.5)	9
Satisfaction	-- <sup>a</sup>	3.2 (0.8)	10

\* p < .001

<sup>a</sup> Included in post-test only

Table A3

*Primary outcome scores from pre to post intervention at Milton (n = 12)*

Outcome Measure (DV)	Pre-test M (SD)	Post-test M (SD)	n
Negative affect *	2.0 (1.1)	1.3 (0.4)	12
Positive affect	2.3 (1.2)	1.6 (0.8)	12
Nonviolent response	2.4 (0.4)	2.6 (0.4)	12
Help seeking	2.9 (0.6)	3.1 (0.5)	10
Satisfaction	-- <sup>a</sup>	3.2 (0.6)	11

\* p < .001

<sup>a</sup> Included in post-test only

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