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Self-Perceptions and Peer Influence on Bullying Behavior

Jaime Strickler

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SELF-PERCEPTIONS AND PEER INFLUENCE ON BULLYING BEHAVIOR

An Abstract of a Thesis
Submitted
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Specialist in Education

Jaime Strickler
University of Northern Iowa
July 2006
ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to determine the self-perceptions of bullies and peer influence on bullying behavior. These variables were chosen in an attempt to understand some of the potential causes of bullying behavior and to examine their effects during bullying episodes.

While the self-perceptions of bullies may be positive or negative, it is unclear as to the direction of influence between self-perceptions and bullying. Peer influence on bullying can vary from situation to situation, but it is clear that peers do have an influence in bullying situations.
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This study by: Jaime Strickler

Entitled: Self-perception and Peer Influence on Bullying Behavior

Has been approved as meeting the requirement for the Degree of Specialist in Education

Date 4/13/06
Dr. Radhi Al-Mabuk, Chair, Thesis Committee

Date 6/13/06
Dr. Charlotte Haselhuhn, Thesis Committee Member

Date 6/13/06
Dr. Kimberly Knesting, Thesis Committee Member

Date 6/27/06
Dr. Susan J. Kod"ll, Dean, Graduate College
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

It begins with a nickname, such as “nerd” or “dork”. The nickname catches on amongst the other students in the class and replaces the child’s real name as he or she begins to lose all self-confidence. The assigned nickname leads to isolation in nearly all activities at recess, in the lunchroom, and even in the hallways. Within weeks, or even days, this child has become the focus of jokes and hurtful teasing. These daily degrading acts begin to take a toll on the targeted child, who has by now become fearful of school. His or her anxiety level escalates, the child refuses to talk in class for fear of adding more fuel to the fire, and eventually this child becomes depressed about the entire situation. Some of the children in the classroom are beginning to notice the damaging effects of their behavior and they stop taunting this child, although they do nothing to stop the others. While some of the children stop, a small group continues to taunt this child, even escalating their actions to include physical abuse such as pinching or hitting. This child continues to endure the abuse with the hope that someday someone will notice what is happening and do something to stop it.

Statement of the Problem

In recent years, numerous stories of children who could not continue to endure abuse from their classmates have been reported. Some students have taken drastic steps in an attempt to stop it all. While some students turn to revenge to end their pain, others turn to suicide in an attempt to make it all go away. In 1998, two students who were considered outsiders attacked Columbine high school. They were targeting specific
students, such as jocks, possibly in an attempt to seek revenge for years of isolation. The true motives of the Columbine attackers may never be known, because after killing 13 classmates and teachers, they took their own lives. While the interest in bullying has been around since the late 1960's, the media reports of tragedies such as the Columbine attack are what create a considerable degree of unease and tension among the general public, school officials, and politicians. Mass media articles depict the very tragic consequences to bullying that fuels a need for action, especially research into the dynamics of bullying.

**What is Bullying?**

It is extremely difficult to determine at what point behavior turns into bullying. Society has come to expect a certain degree of teasing among children, but at what point does that teasing become bullying? While the definition of bullying varies from source to source, two key components identified by Olweus (1999) are generally included. The first is repetition. A victim is often targeted numerous times over a certain period of time, which can be days to years. The second component is an imbalance of power. This imbalance can be due to physical size, the number of people involved, or psychological resilience. Part of the problem in identifying a universal definition of bullying is the lack of consistency from case to case. Each individual case of bullying behavior is different. While some components are found in the majority of cases, not a single case of bullying involves the same mechanisms. Thus, based on the two components identified by Olweus (1999), bullying can be defined as a subset of aggressive behavior characterized by repetition and an imbalance of power.
Research has demonstrated that bullying can occur anywhere. Bullying behavior has been revealed in 16 European countries, the United States, Canada, Japan, Australia, and New Zealand (Smith, Morita, Junger-Tas, Olweus, Catalano & Slee, 1999). What is even more remarkable is the similarities that have been found in these different cultures, indicating that bullying is a human problem, not a cultural problem. Olweus (1993) found that approximately 15% of the total elementary school and junior high school students in Norway were involved in bully/victim problems. Thus, one out of seven children was involved in bullying behavior at some point, whether it be as a victim, a bully, or both. These survey results are alarming, especially when one thinks of the possible outcomes associated with bullying.

These decades of research have revealed numerous aspects of the bully-victim relationship, the effects of bullying on the victim, and the effects on the bully himself/herself. The dynamics that are involved in the bully-victim relationship vary from situation to situation, but the key element appears to be an imbalance in the relationship (Olweus, 1993). As the percentage of students who are bullied decreases with higher grades, the percentage of students bullying increases with higher grade levels, indicating an inverse relationship (Olweus, 1993; Sourander, Helstela, Helenius, & Piha, 2000). Another interesting aspect is the likelihood that a bully is also a victim at some point. It was previously thought that the bully and victim groups were mutually exclusive, but research has demonstrated that this is not the case (Olweus, 1993; Smith et. al. 1999). This blurring of the lines of the groups involved in bullying has made the identification of characteristics of these groups difficult, though not impossible.
As with any form of abuse, the victim of bullying suffers greatly. He or she is often anxious, insecure, sensitive, physically weaker, and has low self-esteem (Olweus, 1993; Fried & Fried, 1996; Harachi, Catalano, & Hawkins, 1999). In addition to possessing these characteristics, the child manifests them in his or her daily activities, thus making the child vulnerable to others. These characteristics may exist within the child before being bullied, but they increase in severity after bullying. These same studies indicate that long-term problems such as depression, difficulty adjusting to new situations, and are more likely to be referred for psychiatric consultation (Dawkins, 1995; Kumpulainen et al. 1998). While many victims of bullying may demonstrate some of these characteristics, not every victim will. Each person reacts to an event in a different manner, thus creating different outcomes. The same is true in how different people approach a situation.

Bullies are often depicted in the media as highly aggressive children with low self-esteem who gain popularity and attention through degrading others. While these characteristics may be representative in some cases, they are not generally characteristic of each bully. Some of the characteristics that bullies may possess are impulsivity, a need to dominate others, a positive view of themselves, physical strength, and a positive attitude toward aggression (Olweus, 1993; Fried & Fried, 1996; Harachi, Catalano, & Hawkins, 1999). These researchers also found that popularity is a characteristic for younger bullies, but this popularity decreases with age. The long-term consequences for bullies are usually very sobering. In a longitudinal study conducted by Eron, Huesmann, Dubow, Romanoff, and Yarmel (1987), twenty-two years after a child was identified as a
bully he/she had a one in four chance of having a criminal record compared to a one in twenty chance for other children. This statistic alone indicates the need to research the causes of bullying in an attempt to create an intervention to stop its occurrence.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter includes a review of the literature on bullying and is organized in two major sections: self-perceptions of bullies and peers and bullying.

Self-Perceptions of Bullies

How a person perceives himself/herself can influence his/her daily emotions, thoughts, and behaviors. There are many terms that are used when describing how one feels about himself. Self-concept and self-esteem are terms that are associated with global feelings of self-worth, while self-efficacy is related to a person’s beliefs in their capabilities in a specific area, such as social situations (Natvig, Albrektsen, & Qvarnstrom, 2001). This research paper focuses on self-efficacy related to social situations, because how a person feels about their ability to communicate/act in social situations is probably highly related to how that person acts in a bullying situation.

Regardless of the term used to describe how people feel about themselves, these beliefs can easily influence a person’s behavior. When these behaviors deviate from the norm, such as bullying behavior, the question of how this person’s self-concept differs from the self-concept of a child who does not bully fuels great debate and research. Research in the past few years has focused on determining how a bully’s self-concept differs from the average child. While the results have proven inconclusive in determining the relationship between bullying behavior and self-esteem, some interesting findings have developed.

Being a bully may relate to many personality factors, including self-esteem, levels
of happiness, and liking for school. These relationships were investigated by Rigby and Slee (1993) in an attempt to determine the differences between bullies and those not involved in bullying. Adolescents between the ages of 12 and 18 comprised the sample of 1,162 students who completed the questionnaires related to bullying, self-esteem, liking for school, and overall happiness. The self-esteem of the bullies was found to be slightly above average, while their overall happiness and liking for school was slightly less than average. This dislike for school should be expected, considering that students who bully would most likely be in trouble more often at school. This overall finding of above average self-esteem of bullies contradicts what generally is expected of aggressive students based on their portrayal in media reports.

In 1982, Bjorkqvist, Ekman, and Lagerspetz conducted a study to determine how adolescent bullies view themselves, how it differs from how they would like to be, and how they feel the social norms require them to be. A measure of self-esteem was created by the discrepancy between how these students viewed themselves and how they would like to be. These perceptions of bullies were then compared with the perceptions of average students, who were not directly involved in bully/victim situations. Peer ratings were done in order to determine which categories students fell into, bullies, victims, or control. The participants all completed questionnaires related to their current status, ideal status, and normative status in the seven factors of intelligence, dominance, dominated by feelings, perseverance, depression, impulsiveness, and personal attractiveness.

The results indicated some important differences between bullies and the other groups. On the scale of dominance, bullies felt their ideal status was much higher than
the other groups’ ideals and bullies felt that the social norms required more dominance. Bullies also scored higher than the control group on impulsiveness and slightly higher on dominated by feelings. All of the other scales indicated that bullies fell within the same range as average children, thus indicating no real differences in terms of self-perceptions. In terms of gender differences related to bullying status, none were observed. Both male and female bullies demonstrated equally elevated expectations when compared to the other groups. The higher expectations for dominance, impulsiveness, and domination by emotions indicate that bullies may be motivated by desires to fit society’s norms, as well as a lack of control in certain situations.

The issue of control was also investigated in 2000 by Andreou, who investigated the relationship between bullying behavior and three psychological concepts: self-esteem, Machiavellianism, and locus of control. Scales relating to these three concepts, as well as bullying, were completed by 181 third through sixth grade students. The findings indicated that when a child scored high on the bullying scale, he or she scored lower on scales of scholastic competence, social acceptance, behavioral conduct, and global self-worth, regardless of gender. These results indicated that bullies tend to have lower self-esteem related to academic achievement and social acceptance. High scores on the bullying scale also indicated high Machiavellianism and a low internal locus of control belief, which is supported by the findings of Bjorkqvist, Ekman, and Lagerspetz (1982).

The inclusion of more than one area in determining the self-esteem of bullies led O’Moore and Kirkham (2001) to conduct a study that included multiple areas of perceived competence. This study also included a very large sample size of 13,112
children ages eight to eighteen years. These students completed a self-report questionnaire on school bullying and the Piers-Harris Self-Concept Scale. This scale included subscales related to global self-esteem, behavior, intellectual and school status, physical appearance and attributes, anxiety, popularity, and happiness and satisfaction.

The results of these questionnaires indicated some interesting differences between those who bully and those who do not. The global self-esteem scores of the children who reported bullying were lower than those students who had not bullied. The results further indicated that the more frequently the children were involved in bullying, the lower these scores of global self-esteem were. These results were found for all ages involved in the study. Those children in primary school who bullied demonstrated greater feelings of inadequacy in relation to behavior, intellectual and school status, physical appearance, anxiety, popularity, and happiness and satisfaction. Adolescents involved in bullying perceived themselves as more troublesome, to have lower intellectual and school status, and to be more unhappy and dissatisfied. An interesting finding related to the anxiety level of the adolescent bullies. They were found to be the least anxious of all other groups in their age level, as well as rating themselves more physically attractive and popular than the other groups. These higher levels of confidence in these areas may explain why bullies are perceived to be more confident than they actually are in some circumstances.

The perceptions that peers have of bullies’ self-esteem were investigated by Salmivalli, Kaukiainen, Kaistaniemi, and Lagerspetz (1999) in an attempt to compare the peer-evaluated self-esteem to the self-evaluated self-esteem of bullies. Adolescents ages
14 to 15 comprised the sample of 316 eighth graders. These students completed the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, which included a section for peer evaluations for each member of the class. They also completed a Participant Role Questionnaire to determine their bullying behavior. The results indicated no significant differences between peer evaluations and self-evaluations of self-esteem of bullies and indicated few differences between bullies and those not involved in the bullying situation in terms of self-esteem. In terms of gender differences, this study indicates that females had slightly lower scores on self-evaluations of self-esteem than boys did. Thus, this study corroborates the theory that bullies do not differ from their peers in terms of their levels of self-esteem.

Johnson and Lewis (1999) found similar results in their study on self-perceptions of bullies. The social and academic self-concept and self-esteem of adolescent bullies was investigated to determine if significant differences existed between this group and students that were not involved in bullying behavior. The 212 participants consisted of tenth graders who completed self-report surveys to determine their bully status, as well as the Perceived Competence Scale for Children, which has four scales related to athleticism, social, scholastic, and global self-worth.

The results of this study indicated that students involved in bullying behavior were not significantly different from their peers in their self-perceptions of social competence and self-esteem, with both groups falling above average. The scholastic self-concept of students involved in bullying was slightly lower than those not involved, but this was not found to be statistically significant. These results indicate that the bullies
involved in this study thought of themselves as fairly popular individuals with areas of concern related to academic achievement, which was also reported by Andreou (2000).

The many contradictions surrounding the issue of self-esteem of bullies has led many to research the topic in more depth. In 2001, Marsh, Parada, Yeung, and Healey investigated the issue of self-esteem and bullying behavior in an attempt to find support for the theory that bullying behavior increases self-esteem. Thus, bullying behavior is a means for students to raise their self-esteem levels to an average range, which explains the various contradictory results of previous studies. This longitudinal study included 4,216 participants in eighth through twelfth grades. The students completed three self-concept scales and self-reports relating to their bullying behaviors at three points in their educational careers: eighth grade, tenth grade, and twelfth grade.

In terms of gender differences, the results indicated that females had significantly lower scores for the general self-concept when compared to boys. However, the same overall patterns emerged for both males and females in terms of bullying behavior. As previous studies have demonstrated, it appears that the student’s bullying participant role seems to play a much larger role than gender in their self-concept levels.

While the results indicated that the self-esteem levels of bullies was slightly lower than average, an interesting pattern evolved. The students that were found to be bullies had the lowest self-esteem levels in grade eight. However, their self-esteem levels increased in tenth grade, thus indicating that their bullying behavior did not decrease their self-esteem levels over that particular time period. Marsh et. al. (2001) posited that these students engage in bullying in an attempt to gain more self-esteem. These increases in
self-esteem were not found between tenth and twelfth grades, which suggests that the theory that bullying increases self-esteem may only be applicable to younger children.

This theory finds further support in Natvig, Albrektsen, and Qvarnstrom’s 2001 study. The sample included 885 students ages thirteen, fourteen and fifteen. The information was obtained through questionnaires relating to bullying, self-efficacy beliefs, social support, and decision control. The results indicated that students at age thirteen with high self-efficacy were at a lower risk for bullying. However, students ages fourteen and fifteen with high self-efficacy levels were at a high risk for bullying behavior. These results indicate that high self-efficacy is not necessarily a predictor of bullying behavior. The younger students that had a higher self-efficacy rating were rated low in terms of bullying behavior, but the older students with high self-efficacy were rated at a higher level of bullying behavior. The finding that high self-efficacy is associated with bullying lends further support to the theory presented by Marsh et. al (2001).

In summary, these studies provide contradictory information regarding the self-concepts of bullies. While some provide support for low levels of self-esteem in bullies, others provide support for slightly above average levels of self-esteem in bullies. When the concept of self-esteem is broken down into multiple areas, it has been demonstrated that bullies have high levels of self-esteem related to their dominance, physical attractiveness, and popularity. Low levels of self-esteem have been associated with academic achievement and social acceptance. Thus, while bullies may feel popular, they may also feel less accepted in the social area. Bullies feel like they are known throughout
the school and they may have many friends at school, but they also feel like the other
students do not necessarily agree with them or accept them for who they are. Bullies have
also demonstrated that they can be more impulsive, unhappy, and dissatisfied. Also, in
terms of gender differences of bullies in relation to self-esteem it appears that females
tend to have slightly lower self-esteem levels than males. However, the same patterns
that have been demonstrated for males in terms of self-esteem have also been
demonstrated for females, with little difference other than slightly lower self-esteem
levels. Although these findings do not indicate a clear answer to the question of the
relationship of bullying and self-esteem, they do provide important clues related to the
issue.

Peers and Bullying

A student may bully for any number of reasons, but, as with any behavior,
something must be achieved in order for the behavior to continue. A student may gain a
toy that he or she wanted, a place in line, or even a group of friends based on his or her
bullying behavior. Other than physical items gained through bullying, more important
reinforcement for this behavior may be the student’s peers, whether it is intentional or
not. More often than not, bullying occurs in social situations with an audience
(Bjorkqvist, Ekman, & Lagerspetz, 1982; Olweus, 1993; Salmivalli, Lagerspetz,
Bjorkqvist, Osterman, & Kaukiainen 1996). This audience of peers may inadvertently
reinforce the bully’s behavior by simply observing the situation or by considering the
bully their friend. A peer may go a step further and laugh at the victim with the bully or
even join in the bullying. In either situation, these peers, whether they realized it or not, were contributing to the bullying by encouraging the bully.

O'Connell, Pepler and Craig (1999) conducted a study to examine the roles the peers play in bullying situations. Based on a previous study they conducted, they uncovered that while children are aware of a bullying situation and express unease about it, they rarely intervene to help the victim (O'Connell et al., 1997). They hypothesized that a diffusion of responsibility occurred during bullying situations, thus reducing their probability to intervene. This hypothesis led to their 1999 study to examine the effects that bullies have on peers and peers have on bullies. They hypothesized that bullies model for peers, thus demonstrating that aggression can be successful and without consequences. In turn, peers reinforce bullies by their attention and engagement in the bullying situations.

To test these hypotheses, O'Connell et al. (1999) videotaped groups of children ages five through twelve while playing with other children on the playground. These focal children were part of a larger study in which they provided self-report information on bullying, peer nominations of bullies/victims, and teacher nominations. The children wore waist pouches containing wireless FM transmitters, while the children not involved wore empty pouches. Video equipment was placed around the playground and each child was taped for ten minutes at each observation phase. A total of 120 hours of video tape was collected over three years, from a sample of 120 children each year.

From these data, 185 video segments contained bullying. Approximately 53.5% of these bullying segments included a peer group (two or more peers). Fifty-three of the
bullying segments that contained a peer group were included in the final sample, due to poor picture quality and multiple bullying situations with the same bully. The average number of peers involved was four, but the range was from two to fourteen. As the number of peers increased, so did the length of the bullying episode. Peers acted as reinforcement for the bullying in multiple ways including physically or verbally joining in 20.7% of the time and watching 53.9% of the time. Peers intervened 25.4% of the time. Thus, 74.6% of the bullying episodes included reinforcement from peers. Also, the fact that the length of the bullying episode increased as more peers became involved clearly suggests that peers influence bullying.

Clearly the presence of peers influences bullies, but the question of how peers are directly involved has led to further research on this topic. Salmivalli et al. (1996) investigated specifically what other students do when a bully is harassing a victim. They also wanted to investigate how well students were aware of their roles and how social status related to these roles. Five hundred and seventy-three children aged 12 to 13 completed questionnaires relating to self-perceived roles in bullying situations, peer-perceived roles in bullying situations, and peer nomination portion to determine popularity levels. The questionnaire contained five subscales that became the roles that children fit into: bully, reinforcer of the bully, assistant to the bully, defender of the victim, and outsider. Bullies were actively involved in the bullying with a leader role. Assistants were also actively involved, but more of a follower than a leader. Reinforcers contribute to the bullying by laughing, watching, and being present. Defenders make active efforts to stop the bullying, while outsiders do nothing and avoid the situation.
Children were further divided into sociometric groups of popular, rejected, neglected, controversial, and average based on peer nominations of who was liked the most/least.

The most common roles identified were outsider, reinforcer, and defender. Peer estimates and self-perceived participation in the role of bully were very different. Students underestimated their tendency to act as a bully and overestimated their tendency to act as a reinforcer, defender, and outsider. This tendency to underestimate aggressive acts and overestimate prosocial/withdrawing behavior indicates that these children want to be viewed in a positive light and understand that aggressive behavior is not the way to achieve that goal.

The status groups' responses revealed that those students who were classified as assistants and reinforcers were considered popular, while defenders of the victim scored the highest for social acceptance. Bullies fell into either the rejected category or the controversial category, which indicates that bullies are viewed as aggressive, but also as social leaders (Coie, Dodge, & Cappotelli, 1982). In a two-year follow up study, these roles had remained stable, with a slight increase in the number of bullies and assistants. This like/dislike relationship of bullies may indicate why they perceive themselves as popular, but at the same time not socially accepted (O’Moore & Kirkham, 2001; Andreou, 2000).

In order to clarify the roles that peers play in social situations, Cairns, Cairns, Neckerman, Gest, and Gariepy (1988) interviewed and observed 80 fourth and seventh graders regarding their aggressive behavior. The children were matched by sex, race, classroom, physical size, socioeconomic status, and chronological age. The only
difference in a pair was their level of aggressiveness, either highly aggressive or nonaggressive. Teachers, counselors, and principals nominated children as highly aggressive or nonaggressive based on their experiences with the child. These children completed questionnaires regarding their roles in social networks, nominated peers as aggressive or best friends, and completed competency scales relating to aggression, popularity, and academic success. The researchers then interviewed and observed the children in their classrooms in an attempt to validate the results identified through these measurements.

Based on these measures, aggressive children were found to be less popular than controls, yet their self-rated popularity was the same as the controls. Also, there were no differences between the groups in terms of how often they were nominated by peers as “best friend”. This finding further adds to the view of bullies as controversial individuals in the social setting. Further analysis revealed that aggressive participants tended to hang out with aggressive peers. This indicates that their aggressive behavior is accepted and encouraged by their social network. While bullying may be unacceptable to some peers, it appears to be accepted and encouraged by others.

Similar findings were reported by Boulton and Smith (1994). This study investigated the peer perceptions of bullies, victims, and those not involved as well as the relationship between bully/victim status and peer acceptance or rejection. Students were observed in the classroom and interviewed, and they completed the Self-Perception Profile for Children on four occasions over the course of a year (October, March, June,
and October). Peer nominations were also obtained at each of these points to determine sociometric status and bully/victim status.

The results revealed that 12.7% of the sample was considered bullies, which was a fairly stable percentage throughout the study. No significant differences emerged between the groups in relationship to self-perceived competence in any of the six areas (scholastic, social, athletic, physical, behavioral, and global). In relation to peer perceptions, bullies received more "starts fights", "disrupts", and "leader" nominations than any other group. Bullies also occupied the rejected and controversial groups pertaining to sociometric status more often than the victims or not involved children. The combination of the finding of bullies as leaders as well as disliked lends further support to the idea of bullies as controversial. While they appear to have supportive social networks, other peers also perceive them negatively. However, these peers see bullies as leaders, which can be viewed as a positive attribute. This controversial view of bullies may lead to further bullying behavior.

This controversial standing of bullies may be explained by the qualitative differences in their bullying behavior. For example, some bullies may act aggressively in response to a personal attack while others act aggressively to obtain something. Peers may view these differences and form different impressions of the students involved, thus creating both liked and disliked students that all fall into the category of bullies. In 1991, Coie, Dodge, Terry, and Wright investigated these issues by observing groups of elementary aged children in playgroups. These groups were formed based on age (first or third grade) and sociometric status: two average status boys, two rejected boys, one
popular boy, and one neglected boy. These children had no prior acquaintance with one another and were classified in sociometric status and aggressive status based on peer nominations.

These play groups met for five 45-minute sessions during one week of the summer. These supervised sessions were structured for the first half and involved free play in the second half. The supervisor of these sessions left the room for ten minutes during each half of the session, thus allowing twenty minutes of unsupervised play. These sessions were taped and the aggressive episodes were coded as provoked, instrumental (e.g. grabbing a toy), or bullying. The predominant type of aggression demonstrated was bullying (49%) and rejected, aggressive children were most often the bullies. The results further indicated that during a bullying episode, the victim was more likely to give in, thus communicating to the bully that this aggression is an effective way to get what you want. This reinforcement for the bully may indicate that he/she is in control, thus he/she does not really receive an indication of dislike from the victim or peers. This miscommunication may explain the differences in how bullies perceive themselves and others perceive them.

In summary, these studies indicate that while bullies perceive themselves as popular individuals, their peers have a controversial perception of them. Peers view bullies as leaders, yet they also indicate a dislike for them. This controversial perception of bullies does not prohibit peers from encouraging and reinforcing the bully’s behavior. During a bullying episode, peers are likely involved in a variety of roles and it is also likely that their involvement increases the length of the episode. Peers are most often
involved in the bullying episode as reinforcers, defenders, or outsiders. While bullies are perceived as disliked, the peers that play roles of reinforcers or assistants are viewed as popular individuals. This complex relationship indicates that being a leader in a bullying episode is looked down upon, but involvement in the form of following this bully and actively bullying the victim or laughing is acceptable behavior. This contradictory information may lead the bully to incorrectly infer the results of their behavior, but also the causes.
CHAPTER 3

METHOD

The specific question to be answered by this research is if there is a difference in levels of self-efficacy for peer interactions depending on which participant role a student plays during a bullying situation and the gender of the student. The roles that student's play in bullying situations have been identified by previous research as bully, assistant, reinforcer, defender, outsider, and victim. The hypothesis is that the role a student plays in the bullying situation will affect his or her level of self-efficacy for peer interactions. The more involved the student is in the act of bullying (with bullies being most involved, then assistant, followed by reinforcer, defender, and victim; with outsiders not being involved at all, thus not included in the hypothesis), the higher the level of self-efficacy for peer interactions. Also, based on previous research, no significant differences based on gender are expected.

The assumptions in this study are that students fall into one of the participant roles mentioned above and that self-efficacy is related to bullying behavior. The main limitation is that the data will be collected via self-report on a questionnaire. Previous studies that utilized a questionnaire also included a peer and/or teacher nomination component. Due to confidentiality concerns, nominations could not be used in this study, which may affect the number of students in the less socially desirable participant roles. Peers and teachers are more likely to nominate a student that demonstrates bullying behavior, than the actual bully, which may limit the distribution of students in the various
participant roles. Self-report questionnaires require a certain amount of trust that the student’s will be truthful.

**Methods**

The design of the study consisted of two independent variables (participant role and gender) and one dependent variable (self-efficacy level in peer interactions). The first independent variable has six levels: bully, assistant, reinforcer, defender, outsider, and victim. The second independent variable, gender, has two levels: male or female. The dependent variable, self-efficacy level in peer interactions, can further be broken down into self-efficacy for conflict situations or for nonconflict situations.

**Participants**

The sample consisted of the students in a local middle school in Henry County, Iowa. This age group was chosen due to previous research results indicating that bullies at this age are still perceived as popular. When these same students reach high school, their popularity declines. Also, middle school has been identified in past research as a peak time for bullying to occur. This middle school consists of grades six through eight and includes all of the children of this age within this small town. Of the 456 students at this middle school, 206 chose to participate following parental permission. The age range for the student participants was ages 11 to 15, with the majority of the participants aged 12 to 13 (71.9%), with a slightly unequal number of girls (46.1%) compared to boys (50%). Approximately 4% of the participants did not indicate their gender when filling out the questionnaire.
Questionnaire

Two instruments were administered to the students (see Appendix). The first is the Participant Role Questionnaire (Salmivalli et. al, 1996). The original questionnaire contained 50 bullying situation behavioral descriptions, which the students evaluated on a three point scale (0=never, 1=sometimes, and 2=often) how well children in their class, including themselves, fit these behaviors. Five subscales describing tendencies to act as bully, reinforcer of the bully, assistant to the bully, defender of the victim, victim, and outsider were formed. The internal reliability levels for these subscales on the original questionnaire range from 0.81 to 0.93 (Salmivalli et. al.).

Sutton and Smith (1999) modified the questionnaire to include only 21 items, due to time constraints and confusion about what a few of the behavioral descriptions were describing. Five raters, including Salmivalli, were included in the process to cut the items from 50 to 21. Items were kept if at least four of the five raters picked them. The reliability of subscales of the abbreviated scale ranges from 0.67 to 0.88 across multiple studies.

The form of the questionnaire used in this study is more closely linked with the revised edition. However, there have been a few modifications. First, the questionnaire was used as a self-report inventory only. Previously, it included a rating of each of the student’s classmates. However, this aspect was eliminated due to concerns about confidentiality and about the students’ level of comfort about “telling” on their friends. Secondly, the version of the questionnaire used includes 22 items, rather than the revised 21-item version. The additional item, which was included on the original questionnaire,
was added in the victim subscale in order to gain more insight into that subcategory. The question that was added was “Often teased by others in the class”.

The scoring procedures to determine the student’s participant role are as follows: The response of “sometimes” was scored as one, a response of “often” received a score of two, while the response of “never” received zero points. Based on this rating system, the mean for each subscale (bully, assistant, reinforcer, defender, outsider, and victim) was calculated using all of the student’s responses. Each participant’s individual subscale mean was compared to the total group’s subscale means. If the participant’s individual mean was greater than the total mean for the subscale and the participant scored higher on that mean than any other, that was considered to be his or her role. All of these scoring procedures follow the original procedure outlined by Salmivalli et. al., 1996.

The second instrument used in this study is the Children’s Self-Efficacy for Peer Interaction Scale (CSPI; Wheeler & Ladd, 1982). The items on the scale consist of a statement describing a social situation followed by an incomplete statement requiring the child to evaluate his or her ability to perform a verbal persuasive skill on a four-point scale from very hard (1 point) to very easy (4 points). Of the 22 items, 12 depict conflict situations while the other ten are not confrontational. Thus, self-efficacy ratings for nonconflict situations and conflict situations will be obtained, as well as an overall self-efficacy level. The original item pool was developed from behavioral observations of elementary-school-age children during persuasive interactions. A pilot study was then conducted and the items were revised based on that data. Finally, interviews were conducted with children to ensure that children’s understanding of the items on the
revised scale corresponded to the construct of self-efficacy. The resulting 22-items have an internal reliability level of 0.85 and comprise the questionnaire that was used in the present study.

Total scores on the CSPI may range from 1.0 up to 4.0. The total scores were calculated by simply adding the participants' responses, then dividing that number by the number of items. Scores for nonconflict and conflict situations were calculated in the same manner. The student’s scores for nonconflict items were added up, then divided by the number of nonconflict items (10). The same procedure was followed for conflict items (divided by 12) in order to account for the difference in conflict versus nonconflict items. The higher the student’s score, the higher the child’s self-perceived levels of self-efficacy for peer situations.

The classroom teachers administered the questionnaires to those students who had obtained parental permission during the spring semester. Those students who did not wish to participate were allowed to work on other assignments or go to the library. The questionnaires were preceded by a definition of bullying (see Appendix), which the students used to answer the items. When they were done, the students placed their questionnaires in an envelope to ensure that other students did not see what they had written. Students were allowed to ask questions or voice concerns about bullying throughout the administration of the questionnaires, as well as in the future. The school was provided with information about bullying, as well as techniques to limit the bullying behavior in a school setting.
CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

A 2 x 6 analysis of variance (ANOVA) was first done to investigate the effects of sex and role on self-efficacy for social situations. Participant roles will be presented first, with frequencies for each role. The self-efficacy ratings will then follow. Multivariate analyses of variance (MANOVA) was used to further break the dependent variable into conflict situations versus nonconflict situations.

Participant Roles

Approximately 64.6% of the participants could be classified into a participant role based on their responses to the questionnaire. The frequencies of each role are as follows (see Fig. 1): Bully 1.5%, Assistant 1.5%, Reinforcer 3.4%, Defender 27.7%, Outsider 13.6%, and Victim 17.0%, and No Role 35.4%. In order to complete a chi-square test, the categories of bullies, assistants, and reinforcers were collapsed into one cell labeled active participants. There was not a significant sex difference in the distribution of the participant roles ($\chi^2 (4, N=116) = 1.3, p = 0.869$).

Self-Efficacy for Social Situations

The total self-efficacy levels for each role were also calculated (see Table 1). On the average, students’ scores fell into the neutral to somewhat positive range of self-efficacy. The CSPI has a range from 1.00 up to 4.00 and many of the student’s rated their self-efficacy for social situations in the 3.00 to 4.00 range.
No significant differences were found among roles or between genders in overall self-efficacy (See Table 1). Because the self-efficacy levels could further be broken down into conflict situations (C) versus nonconflict situations (NC), a MANOVA was conducted to determine if differences existed in self-efficacy for these two situations based on the roles the students played in the bullying situations or gender (See Table 2). While there were no significant differences in gender for either conflict (p=0.797) or nonconflict (p=0.530) situations, there was a significant difference based on role. The roles that students play in bullying situations does significantly affect their self-efficacy level for conflict situations, but not nonconflict situations.
Table 1: Self-efficacy means by role and sex

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Conflict M (SD)</th>
<th>Nonconflict M (SD)</th>
<th>Total Situations M (SD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bully</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.25 (0.00)</td>
<td>3.30 (0.00)</td>
<td>3.28 (0.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.71 (0.41)</td>
<td>3.25 (0.64)</td>
<td>3.48 (0.52)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.56 (0.39)</td>
<td>3.27 (0.45)</td>
<td>3.41 (0.39)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.06 (0.54)</td>
<td>2.73 (0.32)</td>
<td>2.89 (0.42)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.06 (0.54)</td>
<td>2.73 (0.32)</td>
<td>2.89 (0.42)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reinforcer</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.36 (0.57)</td>
<td>3.33 (0.76)</td>
<td>3.35 (0.60)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.04 (0.71)</td>
<td>3.00 (1.11)</td>
<td>3.02 (0.89)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3.18 (0.62)</td>
<td>3.14 (0.92)</td>
<td>3.16 (0.74)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>3.16 (0.56)</td>
<td>3.03 (0.60)</td>
<td>3.10 (0.54)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>3.16 (0.56)</td>
<td>3.04 (0.57)</td>
<td>3.10 (0.54)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>3.15 (0.55)</td>
<td>3.04 (0.56)</td>
<td>3.10 (0.53)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victim</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2.62 (0.52)</td>
<td>2.69 (0.63)</td>
<td>2.65 (0.53)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>2.66 (0.75)</td>
<td>2.88 (0.82)</td>
<td>2.77 (0.76)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>2.64 (0.64)</td>
<td>2.79 (0.73)</td>
<td>2.72 (0.65)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outsider</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2.88 (0.50)</td>
<td>3.10 (0.37)</td>
<td>3.00 (0.40)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2.93 (0.49)</td>
<td>2.99 (0.70)</td>
<td>2.96 (0.49)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>2.94 (0.50)</td>
<td>3.08 (0.58)</td>
<td>3.00 (0.47)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A Post-Hoc Bonferroni test was completed in order to compare the different self-efficacy levels in conflict situations of the participant roles, with some interesting findings. This additional test revealed that Defenders had significantly higher self-
efficacy ratings for conflict situations, when compared to victims (p=0.002). No other significant relationships were discovered, either in role or gender differences.

Table 2: Multivariate Analyses of Variance for Self-Efficacy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Multivariate ANOVA a</th>
<th>Univariate ANOVA b</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Type of Social Conflict</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nonconflict</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role</td>
<td>2.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>0.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role X Gender</td>
<td>0.46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*a*df*5* = 5  
*b*df*5* = 2  
*p < .05*
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION

The results of this study indicate that no significant differences were observed between males and females in terms of self-efficacy for social situations, for either conflict or nonconflict situations. Students in the Defender role showed higher self-efficacy than those in the Victim role in conflict situations, but there were no differences among participant roles in self-efficacy for nonconflict situations. The effect of bullying participant roles on self-efficacy for social situations does not seem to be different for males or females. This finding is supported by previous research (Bjorkqvist et al, 1982; Wheeler & Ladd, 1982).

However, the finding that females did not significantly differ from males in self-efficacy for social situations was not necessarily expected. The previous studies have indicated that females had lower self-esteem levels when compared to males their age (Marsh et al., 2001; Salmivalli et al., 1999). However, these previous studies have measured more global self-esteem rather than self-esteem related specifically to social situations. The lack of a significant difference between males and females in the current study is of interest because it suggests that female and male middle school students have fairly similar levels of self-efficacy when it comes to social interactions with peers. Similar levels of self-efficacy may not be found in other specific areas, such as academic achievement. Further studies into self-efficacy levels for a variety of social situations and other areas should follow, with the added variable of age groups.

The overall self-efficacy levels were not significantly affected by participant
roles, although a trend was present. The trend suggested an overall pattern that bullies did have the highest levels of self-efficacy for social situations, while victims had the lowest of all of the groups involved. This trend does support the initial hypothesis that the more that a student is involved in bullying situations, the higher their self-efficacy levels for peer interactions. However, the results were not significant. The relative proximity to an appropriate level of significance only adds more fuel to the need for further research in this area. The trend observed in this study suggests that some type of relationship between participant roles and self-efficacy may exist.

The only significant difference observed in the present study was between the self-efficacy for social situations of Defenders and Victims in conflict situations, with Defenders demonstrating higher levels of self-efficacy for conflict situations. This result makes sense given that Defenders are taking some type of action to stop the bullying situation and in a sense “save” someone else. This finding of Defenders having elevated self-efficacy for conflict peer situations is also consistent with previous findings that they are very high on the social popularity ladder (Salmivalli et al., 1996). Also, victims have previously demonstrated lower levels of self-efficacy than any other group of participants in previous research (Salmivalli et al, 1996.). These findings of significance between Defenders and Victims further supports the need for further research. Current and future research to determine the relationship between participant role and self-efficacy is needed (Andreou, Vlachou, & Didaskalou, 2005; Ando, Asadura, & Simons-Morton, 2005). Further research is also needed to determine why Defenders do what they do and which
aspect influences the other, meaning if the Defenders already have higher self-efficacy or if that is developed as a result of their "defending" behavior in bullying situations.

Overall, this study does provide support for the concept that the majority of students are involved in the bullying situation, in one form or another. Of the 206 students who participated in this study, it was possible to assign a participant role to 133 (64%) of them. That is a significant amount of students who are involved in the bullying situation. It is important to note that this data has also been collected solely through self-reports. While the majority of these students fell in the roles of Defenders, Outsiders, or Victims it is important to find out the student’s motivation for becoming involved, whether in a positive manner or negative. The majority of these students fell into semi-positive roles, 10% of the participants fell into direct bullying roles (bully, reinforcer, or assistant). While it seems that there may be some relationship between these roles and the student’s self-efficacy, it is clear that more factors are involved. Significant differences were found when comparing Defenders and Victims in conflict situations, but more factors may be involved in a variety of other situations. Gaining understanding for why or how students enter these various roles will help professionals design appropriate interventions to eliminate these roles all together.
REFERENCES


I'd like to find out things you know about bullying. Below is a definition of bullying:

It is bullying when one child is repeatedly exposed to harassment and attacks from one or several other children; harassment and attacks may be, for example, shoving or hitting the other one, being sent nasty notes, no one ever talking to him/her, calling him/her names or making jokes about him/her, leaving him/her outside the group, taking his/her things, or any other behavior meant to hurt the other one.

Now think, how you behave in a situation in which someone else is bullied. Evaluate how well you fit the descriptions given below. Go item-by-item and mark “A” if you do it sometimes, “B” if you do it often, and “C” if you do not behave in a way described. Remember that nobody else will find out what you say, so you can be completely honest and no one will get in any trouble.
1. Starts Bullying

2. Joins the bullying if someone else has started it

3. Is usually there, even if not doing anything

4. Tries to cheer the victim up

5. Often left out of a group or clique

6. Is not usually present in bullying situations

7. Gets the others to join in the bullying

8. Tells some adult about the bullying

9. Sticks up for the victim

10. Laughs at people getting bullied or the situation

11. Tells the others to stop bullying

12. Gets bullied

13. Pretends not to notice what is happening

14. Always finds new ways of picking on the victim

15. Helps the bully, maybe by catching the victim

16. Encourages the bully by shouting or saying, “Show him/her!”

17. Tries to make the others stop bullying

18. Often teased by others in the class

19. Doesn’t do anything or take sides

20. Leads a group of friends or clique

21. Gets others to watch
22. Doesn’t even know about the bullying

Below are some situations that frequently happen during a school day or at home.

Rate, using the following scale, how easy or difficult it is for you to do these things

“A”=Very Hard “B”=Hard “C”=Easy “D”=Very Easy

23. Some kids want to play a game. Asking them if you can play is _____ for you.

24. Some kids are arguing about how to play a game. Telling them the rules is _____ for you.

25. Some kids are teasing your friend. Telling them to stop is _____ for you.

26. You want to start a game. Asking other kids to play the game is _____ for you.

27. A kid tries to take your turn during a game. Telling the kid it’s your turn is _____ for you.

28. Some kids are going to lunch. Asking if you can sit with them is _____ for you.

29. A kid cuts in front of you in line. Telling the kid not to cut in is _____ for you.

30. A kid wants to do something that will get you in trouble. Asking the kid to do something else is _____ for you.

31. Some kids are making fun of someone in your classroom. Telling them to stop is _____ for you.

32. Some kids need more people to be on their teams. Asking to be on a team is _____ for you.

33. You have to carry some things home after school. Asking another kid to help you is _____ for you.

34. A kid always wants to be first when you play a game. Telling the kid you are
going first is ____ for you.

35. Your class is going on a trip and everyone needs a partner. Asking someone to be your partner is ____ for you.

36. A kid does not like your friend. Telling the kid to be nice to your friend is ____ for you.

37. Some kids are deciding what game to play. Telling them about a game you like is ____ for you.

38. You are having fun playing a game but the other kids want to stop. Asking them to finish playing is ____ for you.

39. You are working on a project. Asking another kid to help is ____ for you.

40. Some kids are using you play area. Asking them to move is ____ for you.

41. Some kids are deciding what to do after school. Telling them what you want to do is ____ for you.

42. A group of kids wants to play a game that you don’t like. Asking them to play a game you like is ____ for you.

43. Some kids are planning a party. Asking them to invite your friend is ____ for you.

44. A kid is yelling at you. Telling the kid to stop is ____ for you.

Please indicate your gender and age.

45. “A” = Male  “B” = Female