THE FUNCTION OF SCHOOL BULLYING

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Counselling (MC)

City University of Seattle

Vancouver BC, Canada site

November, 2019

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Abstract

This thesis investigates why bullies bully others. There are two bullying subgroups; bullies, which have been renamed to alpha-bullies for this thesis, and bully-victims. Alpha-bullies bully others frequently without being bullied, while bully-victims both bully others and are themselves bullied. A prediction is made that, in determining why bullies bully others, the answer to this question will be different for each of the two bullying groups. A thorough investigation is made into the contingencies of reinforcement, the relationships between antecedents, behavior, and consequences, to determine which contingencies reinforce the behaviors of each group. It is determined that Alpha-bullies bully others to project dominance and protect their upward social movements and their position in their status hierarchy. Bullying among alpha bullies is given the functional description, a description of the behavior which outlines it's purpose, peer-oppression. Bully-victims are determined to have learned to interact with others through bullying by having this behavior role-modeled for them at home, school, and in other settings. They have internalized the bullying behaviors of important role models in their lives and engage in bullying to their own detriment. The bullying behaviors of bully-victims is given the functional description, internalized peer-oppression. The prediction that the bullying of the two subgroups would be functionally different is determined to be probable, and a conclusion is made that bullying in school represents a system of privilege and oppression. The implications of these findings are discussed.

Keywords: alpha-bully, bully-victim, victim, bullying, contingency of reinforcement

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my appreciation to the faculty and staff at City University of Seattle, Vancouver campus for their continued support throughout my education and through the process of writing this thesis.

I would like to thank Bruce Hardy for his guidance, support, and patience throughout the process of writing this thesis. I am indebted to Bruce for the input he has given at every stage of this writing process, and for the encouragement he has given which has helped me maintain the confidence and work ethic to see this project through to the very best of my ability. I would also like to thank Bruce for mishearing my initial thesis idea, "the function of beliefs" as "the function of bullying", thus pointing me towards this valuable topic of study entirely by accident.

I would like to thank my cats, Jasper and Kahlua, for spending countless hours with me as I wrote this thesis. Without the support they offered through sleeping on my lap, encouraging me to take breaks so that I can pet them, and bugging me for food, the process of researching and writing this thesis would have been significantly lonelier and more tedious.

Finally, I would like to extend my most heartfelt appreciation to my partner, Erin Huddleston. She has listened to me talk about this topic for an unquantifiable amount of time and continued to offer valuable feedback and an overall interest in the topic. The love, support, and care she has offered me throughout the writing of this thesis is beyond measure, and I see no way that I could have completed it without her. Her encouragement allowed me to see that I could complete a master's degree and write a thesis, and though it is my name on the project, this thesis is her accomplishment as well.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCING THE TOPIC

Introduction

No matter how you fit into the social makeup of grade school, or what your school was like, you will almost certainly remember that bullying was a part of the school experience. Every person in grade school will have had some interaction with bullying; as a witness, as a target, as a perpetrator, or some combination of the three. Though researchers have only studied bullying since the 1970's (Olweus, 1973; Olweus, 2003), there is reason to believe that it has always been part of human cultures. Evidence of bullying behaviors, which include hazing, physical and verbal abuse, exclusion, and isolation, can be found in the historical records of many diverse cultures (Volk, Camilleri, Dane, & Marini, 2012) dating as far back as ancient Greece (Golden, 1990). Bullying is a worldwide phenomenon, with "[an estimated] 246 million children and adolescents experience[ing] school violence and bullying in some form every year" (UNESCO, 2017, p. 9). Bullying is so commonplace that it has embedded itself into our culture, and our psyches. The bully has become a common archetype in literature, television, movies, and videogames. Commonly, bullies are portrayed as villains; heartless and cruel tormentors that the hero of the story must find a way to stand up to and resist, freeing everyone from the bully's reign of terror while gaining the affections of the hero's primary love interest. Trying to address the issue of bullying is a daunting task, and the more you look into the literature, the more complex and overwhelming this topic becomes. My original intent was to write the definitive manuscript on bullying, but I have since come to realize that such a document would have to be 5,000 pages long and would likely become outdated in 5-10 years. Instead, I have decided to ask a simple question. Why do bullies bully others?

Definition of Terms

Before investigating this question in earnest, it is important to clarify a number of the terms which will be commonly used throughout this thesis. Although some of these terms are common vernacular, slight differences can often arise in how researchers define their terms which can impact the way they interpret their findings. It will benefit the reader to know precisely how I interpret these terms to avoid confusion. The definitions I am offering here are not necessarily the definitions another researcher would offer, but I do attempt to keep these definitions consistent with other research, the literature from which the term originates, or the common understanding of that term. The definition of "being bullied" is the definition offered by Olweus (1993), which states that "a student is being bullied or victimized when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other students" (p.9). "Bullying" is defined as a power imbalance in which one or more individuals engage in negative actions, or aggressive behaviors, towards a less powerful individual with the intent to inflict physical or psychological harm and/or discomfort (Olweus, 2003). Bullying, by this definition, is intentionally harmful to the target, and is necessarily directed at one or more individuals with less power than the perpetrator(s) in that context. "Power" represents the characteristics and assets that one possesses which offer them an advantage over other individuals in a given interaction, such that it is difficult for less powerful individuals to defend themselves if the more powerful individual chooses to harm them in some way (Olweus, 2003; Vaillancourt, Hymel, & Mcdougall, 2003). Although power is contextual, it is often the case that certain individuals consistently have more power, while others consistently have less. Power will be expanded on later this chapter.

Four classifications are used to define any given individual's relationship to bullying; alpha-bully, bully-victim, victim, and non-involved. These categories may not represent a fully

accurate representation of an individual's relationship to bullying, but these are the categories

most commonly used in research (Veenstra et al., 2005). "Alpha-bully" is a term of my creation

used to refer to individuals who bully others frequently enough to be regarded by their peers as

bullies, yet aren't themselves bullied enough to be considered victims. These individuals are

usually referred to as "bullies" in the research literature, but I chose to affix "alpha" to this group

in order to clarify that I am not referring to all individuals who bully others, and to reflect the

high levels of power and social status these individuals typically possess (Farmer et al., 2010).

"Bully-victims" refers to individuals who both, bully others frequently enough to be regarded by

their peers as bullies, and are bullied enough to be coded as victims in research studies (Veenstra

et al., 2005). "Bullies", in this thesis, will be used to refer to both groups collectively without

distinguishing whether a given bully is victimized or not.

     "Victim" refers to individuals who are bullied frequently enough that being bullied is

characteristic of their relationship to bullying in general. In research, victims are often

determined through self-report, or peer-reports which indicate that many of their peers bully

them frequently (Veenstra et al., 2005). In general, I prefer the term "target" for the reason that a

person doesn't need to be the recipient of bullying to be victimized, and referring to someone as

a victim in general may carry unfair implications or stigma regarding how they interact with

others. However, "victim" is the term used in research, and when I refer to someone as a victim

in this thesis, it is specifically in relation to bullying behaviors. I may use "victim" and "target"

interchangeably. "Non-involved" or "uninvolved" simply refers to individuals who do not bully

enough to be considered either type of bully and are not bullied enough to be considered a

victim, or target. I do not personally believe that being classified as non-involved necessarily

means that an individual never bullies, or is never bullied, but rather that they fail to meet the threshold for any of the other classifications.

Since this thesis discusses behavior at length, it is necessary to define some terms that relate to behavior. First, "reinforcement" refers to the consequences of a behavior which increase the likelihood that the individual will behave in a similar way in the future, under similar circumstances (Skinner, 1969). "Punishment" has the opposite effect, in that the behavior in question becomes less likely to occur again in the future (Skinner, 1969). Reinforcement and punishment, in this context, refers to the specific effect that a given consequence has on a behavior. This is different than the behavior of reinforcing or punishing a behavior. For example, a teacher may try to reinforce a student's behavior of answering questions in class by offering them praise. However, it is possible that the praise offered to the student motivates other students to harass them, in which case, the teacher's effort to reinforce a behavior has had a punishing effect. Similarly, a school principle may punish a student for bad behavior by assigning them an out-of-school suspension. This suspension may have the effect of making the student look cool to their classmates, as well as giving them a reprieve from having to go to school, which they may thoroughly enjoy. In this case, efforts to punish a behavior would have a reinforcing effect. It is important to remember that reinforcement and punishment, in terms of the effect that a consequence has on behavior, is not the same as a person's efforts to reinforce or punish a behavior.

A consequence which reinforces one person's behavior, may be a punishment to another person for the same behavior. Regarding the out-of-school suspension, whether that consequence is reinforcing, or punishing will depend on the student experiencing the consequence and how they feel about being suspended; some students may enjoy it, and others may not. A behavior

may also become less likely to occur again in the future simply through a lack of reinforcing consequences and in the absence of punishment (Skinner, 1969). Suppose a student approaches a teacher for help after being bullied, and the teacher does nothing about it. The lack of a reinforcing consequence may diminish the likelihood that the student approaches a teacher for help after being bullied in the future. One more behavioral term, and perhaps the most important one for this thesis, is "contingency of reinforcement".

A contingency of reinforcement is the relationship between antecedents (what happens before the behavior), behaviors (what the individual does), and consequences (what happens after the behavior) (Skinner, 1969). For example, a student may come to learn that; in math class (antecedent), if they let other students copy their homework (behavior), then the other students will like them more (consequence). In this case, the student has learned a contingency of reinforcement which results in other students liking them more, increasing the likelihood of them behaving in a similar way in the future. The same student may come to learn that in English class (antecedent), if they let other students copy their homework (behavior), the teacher will realize that they let other students copy their homework and they'll get in trouble (consequence). In this case, the behavior is very similar, but the contingency of reinforcement is different between the two settings and the student has learned that their behavior will be rewarded in math class, but punished in English class. As a final example, it may be the case for a student that when they're with their friends (antecedent), if they behave more aggressively (behavior), they gain more acceptance and status within the group (consequence). The student in this example may not be aware of this contingency, and may not have the conscious motivation of gaining group acceptance or status when they behave aggressively, and yet the acceptance and status they gain from behaving aggressively may reinforce their behavior regardless of their awareness or their

conscious motivations. It is crucial to remember that an individual does not need to be aware of a contingency of reinforcement for it to affect their behavior.

Nature of the Study

Given the significant trauma that is caused by school bullying (Stuart & Jose, 2014), and a wide spread interest in mitigating this problem (Ttofi & Farrington, 2011), examining why bullies target their peers may provide important information that can be used when conceptualizing ways to address the issue. With this in mind, the focus of this thesis will be towards building a better understanding of bullies from which to derive new strategies for dealing with this issue, instead of determining which of the current methods of addressing bullying works best. Regarding the question, "why do bullies bully others?", some points of clarification need to be made before investigating in earnest. Fist, the question here is "why do *bullies* bully others?", which is to say that I am only investigating reasons why people who are designated as bullies in the research literature bully others. Much of the bullying research recognizes two distinct groups of bullies, commonly referred to as "bullies" or "pure bullies", and "bully-victims" (Veenstra et al., 2005). Using the term "bullies" to collectively describe both bullying groups, as well as using it to describe one bullying subgroup is needlessly confusing in my opinion, so I have coined the term "alpha-bullies" to refer to participants who bully others but aren't themselves bullied. The term "bully-victims" is much clearer, in that it refers to participants who both bully others and get bullied by others (Farmer et al., 2010). As such, my simple question has become two questions; "why do alpha-bullies bully others?", and "why do bully-victims bully others?". Given that "bullies" don't constitute a single homogenous group, I feel it necessary to examine each of the two subgroups separately. I predict that this will reveal

two distinctly different answers to the question "why do bullies bully others?", but I will expand

more on this prediction later.

Why do bullies *bully* others? The definition that I offered in the previous section is the

definition which most research I've encountered adheres to. I have chosen to adhere to this

definition to be consistent with the research literature. This definition of bullying also adds to my

third point of clarification; why do bullies bully *others*? The "other", in this case, represents

targets of bullying behaviors, or victims, who are on the disadvantaged side of a power

imbalance. Given this aspect of the definition of bullying, it can be reasonably assumed that

research participants who are designated as victims or bully-victims get harassed by peers who

possess more contextual power than they do. Power, in this case, may represent either explicit or

implicit power (Vaillancourt, Hymel, & McDougall, 2003). Explicit power it thought to be

utilized by all bullies, where the bully is able to use qualities such as size, strength, or aggression

in order to explicitly and forcefully exert their power over peers who they are able to elicit fear,

submission, or compliance from (Vaillancourt et al., 2003). I would also argue that "wit" may

fall under this category, where the bully is adept at verbally harassing their peers in ways that are

hurtful to the target and may be embraced by other peers.

Implicit power comes from a person's inferred social status, where the general support

that an individual receives from their peers (especially more powerful peers) affords them more

power in their peer interactions (Vaillancourt et al., 2003). This power often derives from

socially valued traits and assets, such as attractiveness, athletic ability, "coolness", charisma,

wealth, powerful alliances, and other qualities which make an individual more popular among

their peers (Vaillancourt et al., 2003). If you think back on your own grade school experiences,

you'll likely remember at least one individual who could be considered powerful and/or popular

among their peers, and at least one individual who did not possess this type of power. Findings

generally indicate that alpha-bullies possess both implicit and explicit power, whereas bully-

victims typically only possess explicit power (Vaillancourt et al., 2003). Further, one's reliance

on implicit power instead of explicit power may contribute to their social status within their peer

groups, given that implicit power is associated with greater status (Vaillancourt et al., 2003).

This relationship between the use of power and gains in status alludes to the next point of

clarification; *Why* do bullies bully others?

It can easily be taken for granted what it means to ask, "*why* do bullies bully others?",

but it is my approach to determining "*why*" a behavior persists which has the largest impact on

the nature of this study. I will be taking a functional behavioral approach to the question of *why*,

which is based on B.F. Skinner's (1969) way of conceptualizing behavior. Essentially, this

approach to studying bullying behavior examines the relationship between the behavior and the

environmental outcomes, with the basic assumption that behaviors which are rewarded will

increase in frequency, and those that are not will decrease in frequency. This approach studies

contingencies of reinforcement. It is often the case that the antecedent and the consequences are

related, in that what precedes a behavior is the subject's desire for a certain consequence.

However, the subject's desired consequence may not always match the actual consequences. My

primary focus is on consequences as opposed to motivations in determining *why* bullies bully

others. For example, if I were trying to determine *why* a person is running, I would look at the

outcome of their running behavior. In a race, the environmental outcome may be winning a

running competition and being rewarded for doing so. As such, I could say that the person is

racing to win. They may be motivated by a desire to win a race, and rewarded by the

consequences of winning that race. However, it may not always be that straightforward.

A person's conscious motivation for racing may be to win. However, winning that race may have the consequence of impressing desired romantic interests, or making the individual more popular with their peers. It is possible, in this case, that gains in popularity have a stronger influence on the runner's likelihood of racing again in the future than winning does. When I offer a functional description of a behavior, I am attempting to describe what the strongest reinforcing factor of that behavior is, regardless of what the conscious motivation for that behavior was. In the case of the runner's behavior of running in races, I may offer a functional description of "vying for popularity/status" to reflect findings that status gains are more predictive of running in races than winning is. In this sense, *why* somebody exhibits a certain behavior is dependent on what reinforces that behavior. There is likely not a single way of functionally describing many behaviors, such as in the case of the runner, who's running may be equally reinforced by racing, winning, and by showing off. As such, when I offer a functional description of bullying behaviors, I am making a statement as to which of the environmental outcomes to their bullying behaviors most likely perpetuates bullying, and/or, which of the environmental outcomes of bullying behaviors contributes to the most useful understanding of that behavior when working to reduce bullying in schools. Additionally, this method of studying behavior has the potential to reveal that two individuals exhibiting what appears to be the same behavior, may be reinforced differently by the outcomes.

The observable aspects of an individual's behavior represent the "structure" of that behavior. In the case of the runner, the structure of their behavior is running in a race against other runners. The outcomes of the behavior which make that behavior more likely to occur in the future, otherwise known as the reinforcement of that behavior, represent the function. Two racers, showing the same structure of their behaviors, may having differing functions to their

behavior. One racer may be racing because of the reinforcement their running behavior receives from winning, whereas the other racer may be racing because of the reinforcement their running behavior receives from impressing their peers. For another example, the structure of a person's behavior may be getting up, grabbing a glass, and filling it with water; in which case, the function of the behavior might be "getting water". However, another person may be getting that water for someone else, in which case the function is "giving water". This is not a perfect way of studying behavior, but I believe that it offers a simple logic that helps turn my attention to key points of interest that I can expand on using other theoretical frameworks to help understand the issue.

Purpose of the Study

Alpha-bullies and bully-victims are classified as bullies based on the structure of a behavior they exhibit, which we call "bullying". My goal is to study the function of this bullying behavior for each of the two groups. That is, I plan to make a statement about what appears to me as the most reinforcing environmental outcome of their behaviors. My statement of the function of their behavior will be made to apply to the groups as a whole, instead of the individuals in that group. Given that bullying research tends to classify participants into groups, and study them on a group level, this thesis will be more grounded in the research if I also study alpha-bullies and bully-victims on a group level. In other words, this thesis focuses on behaviors that are characteristic of certain groups, and how that behavior is reinforced generally in society. I believe that examining the function of bullying in a more global sense opens possibilities for interventions with more far-reaching applicability. Regarding alpha-bullies and bully-victims, I believe it is important to study the two groups separately, because there appears to be meaningful differences in the outcomes for members of those two groups.

Generally speaking, alpha-bullies have much more positive outcomes than bully-victims. Alpha-bullies are popular, bully-victims are not. Bully-victims appear to be more susceptible to negative outcomes associated with bullying, such as delinquency, addiction, depression and anxiety, suffering from abuse, and suicide (Stuart & Jose, 2014). Some researchers believe that bully-victims are vying for the same benefits realized by alpha-bullies, but that they are failing to get those benefits (Evans, & Smokowski, 2016). However, it seems strange to me that a behavior would persist in the absence of meaningful rewards. Instead, I believe that there must be some other reinforcement for the bullying behaviors of bully-victims, which is meaningfully different from the reinforcements realized by alpha-bullies. In summary, regarding the question of "*why* do bullies bully others?", the *why* part of the question is somewhat interpretive, and for the purpose of this thesis, *why* will refer to what outcomes reinforce the bullying behaviors of the alpha-bully group, and of the bully-victim group. My decision to separate "why do bullies bully others?" into the two questions, "why do alpha-bullies bully others?" and "why do bully-victims bully others?" relates to my central hypothesis.

My central hypothesis is; the bullying behaviors of alpha-bullies and bully-victims are structurally similar, but functionally different. This is essentially the claim that the bullying behaviors of the two groups are reinforced by different outcomes, a claim that I will test by trying to find the function of bullying behaviors for each group separately. I believe that this hypothesis is important to test before conceptualizing bullying interventions for the simple reason that interventions may apply to one group and not the other. For example, suppose there was a need to prevent people from buying oregano plants. Then suppose two distinct groups of oregano plant buyers emerge; one who buys oregano plants for cooking purposes, and one who buys them for decoration. Providing dried oregano would only address the target behavior

(buying oregano plants), of the cooking group, but not the decoration group. Similarly, providing fake oregano plants only addresses the behavior of the decoration group, and not the cooking group. In this case, it would be difficult to see that people are buying oregano plants for purely decorative reasons since we generally consider oregano to be a cooking herb, and there are so many nicer looking plants to decorate with. The behavior of the decoration group is counter-intuitive, and likely wouldn't be considered without a closer examination. As such, solutions would most likely only be made to affect the cooking group's behaviors. Due to meaningful within group differences that emerged among oregano plant buyers, common assumptions made about oregano plant buyers were challenged, and solutions can be made which address each group's behaviors.

Without any knowledge of the functional differences between the structurally similar oregano plant buying behaviors of each group, it would be very difficult to conceive of ways to fully address the problem behavior. Similarly, without any knowledge of the functional differences between the structurally similar bullying behaviors of each bullying group, it is difficult to conceive of ways to address bullying. Since two meaningfully different bullying groups exist, they need to be examined separately to determine if meaningful functional differences are present. This study will be a thorough examination of each of the two research questions; "why do alpha-bullies bully others?" and "why do bully-victims bully others?". In addition to these two primary research questions, I will be looking for answers to the following questions; What are some of the contingencies of reinforcement for bullying? What can be said of the archetypical alpha-bully, and of the archetypical bully-victim? In what ways are the two groups different from each other? How does the research literature characterize bullies? What makes the problem worse, and what makes it better?

Assumptions, Limits, and Scope

As I attempt to find the answers to these questions, I will assume the validity of major psychological theoretical frameworks, and reserve the right to use whichever framework seems appropriate at the time. For instance, while this thesis is not explicitly intended to view matters from a behavioral lens or from an attachment perspective, I will use these perspectives and others, if and when the research literature suggests that these perspectives are appropriate or necessary for understanding the issue. In addition to this, I will adhere to the social constructionist view that there is not a single "truth", or a single way of understanding an issue (Burr, 2003). With this in mind, my writing would be most accurately understood as one way of interpreting bullies, instead of the definitive way of interpreting bullies. Recognizing that there may not be a single "true" way of understanding an issue allows room for alternative paradigms to arise which offer new insights not previously considered by the prevailing schools of thought.

There are some assumptions that will be made which are important to know before continuing any further. First is the assumption that the research literature on bullying provides a reliable source of knowledge for understanding the issue of bullying. While I don't express any doubts about this assumption, I recognize the possibility that modern ways of understanding an issue will become outdated in the future. My next assumption is that major psychological frameworks, such as behavioral science, attachment theory, or social-constructionism, are not in conflict with each other and can each contribute to a robust understanding of the issue. This also assumes the validity of each of these frameworks. Lastly, I assume that people are not born as bullies.

This assumption will affect how I interpret the results of research which implicate personality traits, cognitive differences, or other fixed internal qualities as the reasons why

people bully others. While I accept that so-called psychopathic traits, or other fixed internal qualities may make a person more susceptible to becoming a bully, I will always view such qualities on their own as insufficient to determine why bullies bully others. For instance, if trait dominance were the single largest predictor of future bullying behaviors, I would assume that the propensity for dominant individuals to bully others derives from interactions between them and their environment as opposed to the dominance trait on its own. I reject the view that such an individual was always going to be a bully. Nonetheless, fixed internal qualities may be an important factor in conceptualizing why bullies bully others, and findings that strongly correlate fixed internal qualities with bullying behaviors indicate that there are problems with how our environment responds to those individuals, in my opinion.

The scope of this thesis will only cover the in-person bullying behaviors of school-aged alpha-bullies and bully-victims. Since the majority of the research used in this thesis will reflect the bullying behaviors of school-aged individuals, my conclusions will also be specific to school-aged individuals so as to limit the potential for unsubstantiated generalizations. Workplace bullying, or other forms of adult bullying will not be considered. Cyberbullying and "mobbing" (the collective effort to bully individuals) will also not be considered. Workplace bullying, adult bullying, cyberbullying, and mobbing are each large topic areas unto themselves, requiring a significant amount of work to understand, which would extend the scope of this thesis far beyond what can be adequately explored within the typical length of a thesis. Additionally, since the alpha-bully and bully-victim groups are predominantly defined in research which focuses on individual, in-person school bullying, I would have to generalize their applicability to these other bullying topics which may weaken the overall strength of my findings. It is possible that alpha-bullies and bully-victims exhibit online, mobbing, adult, or workplace behaviors which are

significantly different than their behaviors in a school-setting, or that these group designations hold no weight in these circumstances at all. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to prove that alpha-bully and bully-victim group designations are descriptive of individuals who bully people online, as a group, at work, and/or in their adult years.

This thesis will not offer an exhaustive view of alpha-bullies and bully-victims, and will only cover what is needed in order to address the central hypothesis. Further, while one of the objectives of this paper is to clarify the issue of bullying to inform possible interventions, it is not within the scope of this thesis to determine what the best solutions are. It is also not within the scope of this paper to determine how best to counsel students that bully others. Although some implications of my findings on interventions and counselling methods for addressing bullying will be discussed, the priority of this thesis is to understand the issue of bullying in schools. Determining in this thesis how best to address the issue could potentially undermine the point of this thesis; which is to enable the reader to generate new ideas about how to address the issue of bullying through an enhanced understanding of the issue. Additionally, recommending to the reader how they should engage bullies, or address the problem, would require its own thesis-length investigation in order for my recommendations to be appropriately supported by research. Additionally, there are no firsthand accounts from bullies, and no interviews were conducted for this thesis. The entirety of this thesis is derived from research, which represents one of the limitations of this investigation. This thesis is subject my own biases and ways of seeing the world, as well as my own limited time and resources. I do not have additional authors to rely on, or any research software. Every study referenced in this thesis has been read by me personally, and my representation of those studies is limited by my capacity for understanding and accurately describing the research.

How I Relate to the Research

I do not have significant personal experiences with bullying. Although I would most likely have been coded as non-involved in bullying research, I was also complicit in the collective efforts to bully certain individuals, much to my regret. It is from my personal experience as a "non-involved" student who contributed to the collective harassment of specific individuals that makes me skeptical that students coded as "non-involved" are necessarily innocent of bullying their peers. Additionally, the fact that I wouldn't have been coded as a "victim" does not mean that I was never bullied. People I would identify as bullies did make repeated attempts to harass me, but these attempts were usually short-lived. My propensity towards explosive and uncontrolled rage as a child likely made me a difficult target, and I doubt that bullies were interested in dealing with my aggressive, spasmatic episodes. My lack of experience as a bully or a victim, as well as my contributions to harassing universally disliked targets, may affect my views of the topic area in ways that the reader may find either helpful, or limiting to my ability to understand the issue. I maintain, however, that my general lack of involvement in bullying offers me a calm and objective view of the issue which is not subject to desires for either condemning or condoning the behavior of bullies. My feeling is that, while bullying is awful and violent behavior which is not acceptable and does significant long-lasting harm, bullies still need to be shown compassion if there is any hope to remediate their harmful behaviors.

Significance

Bullying is a pervasive issue, which does serious harm (Stuart & Jose, 2014). Undoubtedly, every person who went to school will remember that some amount of bullying took place. This issue has received more attention over the past decades, and a considerable

amount of effort and resources are being put towards addressing the issue (Ttofi & Farrington, 2011). Many of these efforts have been met with limited success (Ferguson, Miguel, Kilburn, John, & Sanchez, 2007), and despite the good work that many people are doing, bullying is still present worldwide. It is still a normalized aspect of grade school education. Without a thorough understanding of bullying behaviors, it will be very difficult to conceive of effective interventions. Furthermore, without an understanding of why bullies bully their peers, uninformed interventions may run the risk of inadvertently reinforcing bullying behaviors instead of diminishing them. Behaviors are influenced by environmental contingencies of reinforcement which either increase or decrease the likelihood that they happen again in the future. Given that a person's behaviors are intrinsically linked to their environments, it is worth investigating which aspects of that environment make the behavior more likely.

In the case of bullying, those looking to reduce the likelihood that bullying will take place in the future would do well to consider how the structure of the bully's environment is affecting their bullying behaviors. Interventions which address bullying after it occurs, such as punishments or laws around bullying, may help the issue, but these types of interventions may simply add a step to the sequence of events from which bullying arises instead of changing that sequence of events. Such a sequence of events may look like this; environmental antecedents, bullying behaviors, natural environmental outcomes, punishment. It is likely that punishments and laws represent an after-the-fact intervention which only occurs after the behavior was reinforced by something else. Additionally, punishments may fail to have the intended effect, and if a bully is facing legal consequences for their bullying behaviors, that represents a failure to intervene effectively before the behavior escalated to that point. I predict that it will be more effective to look at environmental antecedents and environmental outcomes related to bullying

and try to change aspects of the bully's environment which contribute to their behavior, instead of responding to it after the fact. That is, it will be more effective to change the sequence of events instead of adding to the sequence of events. This is where the importance of determining why bullies bully others becomes more clear.

Answering "why do bullies bully others" can offer insights into the environmental antecedents and consequences associated with bullying and clarify what structural changes to the bully's environment have the best chance of either preventing bullying behaviors, or reducing their likelihood to occur again in the future. However, because two clearly distinguished bullying subgroups emerge in the literature, this question needs to be asked for each of them. As previously mentioned, structurally similar behaviors between two subgroups potentially have different functions. Interventions which address the contingencies of reinforcement that make alpha-bullies more likely to bully may have no effect on bully-victims and vice-versa. This is the importance of testing my hypothesis, that the bullying behaviors of these two groups are structurally similar but functionally different. Testing this hypothesis will help determine whether the behaviors of both groups can be targeted with one intervention, or whether different approaches are required, and what the nature of those approaches might be. Further, if my hypothesis is correct, then I will have provided evidence that "bullying" only describes the structure of at least two functionally different behaviors. Additionally, this type of in-depth exploration can offer a clearer view of bullies which might illuminate strategies for interventions not previously considered. At the very least, having a better understanding of bullies may make it easier to respond to them with compassion, or reveal ways of interacting with bullies that help them curtail their bullying behaviors. I will first investigate why alpha-bullies bully others before

investigating why bully-victims bully others. Then, I will offer some implications and final

thoughts at the end.

CHAPTER 2

ALPHA-BULLIES

Introduction

People who are identified by their peers as "bullies" are often thought to possess deficits in social interactions or are thought to have been poorly influenced by poor environmental and social circumstances (Volk, Camilleri, Dane, & Marini, 2012). Certainly, there is comfort in the idea that bullying is maladaptive, and that nobody benefits from it. However, research consistently indicates that alpha-bullies enjoy a wide array of benefits while incurring very few costs (Reijntjes et al., 2013). Alpha-bullies seem to be so successful that it is difficult to even suggest that it is in their interest to stop bullying people. Further, the differences between alpha-bullies and bully-victims in terms of characteristics (Cook, Williams, Guerra, Kim, & Sadek, 2010), social status and popularity (Farmer et al., 2010), and mental health (Stuart & José, 2014; Isolan, Salum, Osowski, Zottis, & Manfro, 2013), are so prominent that it appears as though alpha-bullies and bully-victims have very little in common aside from the fact that their peers identify them as bullies. In this chapter, I will explore the benefits of being an alpha-bully among school-aged children and adolescents. I refer to the group of bullies who aren't classified as bully-victims as "alpha-bullies", since they are frequently well positioned in their social hierarchies (Farmer et al., 2010; Vaillancourt, Hymel, & Patricia, 2003; Reijntjes et al., 2013; Perren & Alsaker, 2006). I will attempt to discern the function of bullying among alpha-bullies in accordance with my hypothesis that bullying behaviors among alpha-bullies and bully-victims are structurally similar, but functionally different.

The Benefits of Being an "Alpha-Bully"

The results of research studies regarding the benefits of bullying can, at times, be misleading. Most of the research in this area divides participants into groups, typically including bullies, bully-victims, victims, and non-involved (Veenstra et al., 2005). Each participant is then measured on a number of characteristics, such as social status, number of friends, aggression, and/or whichever characteristics are relevant to the study in question. The results of each group are compared to each other, and inferences are made. What is misleading about this method of study, is that all the results are correlated with group membership as opposed to the bullying behavior itself. That is to say, these studies don't measure the benefits of bullying others, they measure the benefits associated with being among those identified as a bully. Nonetheless, being an alpha-bully is associated with a wide array of benefits. Among the most preeminent benefits enjoyed by alpha-bullies is their social status (Vaillancourt et al., 2003; Reijntjes et al., 2013).

Popularity

Alpha-bullies are typically popular and possess large quantities of friends (Farmer et al., 2010). In a study examining the link between externalizing behaviors and bully status, it was found that children with externalizing behaviors were more likely to become bullies if they had more friends (Jia & Mikami, 2015). Additionally, they found that having more friends was a protective factor against becoming a victim. One might assume that the friendships being formed are among other bullies, but in the case of alpha-bullies, results from a study done by Farmer et al. (2010) suggest otherwise. They found that alpha-bullies tended to be members of peer groups with few bullies, and even fewer were victims. Although alpha-bullies are often disliked by many of their peers (Jia & Mikami, 2015; Farmer et al., 2010), their perceived popularity is consistently high (Reijntjes et al., 2013). The large majority of children studied by Reijntjes et al. (2013) who showed high rates of bullying others were perceived to have high levels of

popularity by their peers. These children were also disliked by many of their peers, consistent

with findings from Jia and Mikami (2015) and Farmer et al. (2010). This trend was found in a

Canadian study on the relationship between bullying and social power as well (Vaillancourt et

al., 2003). It may be that alpha-bullies are strategic in who they target, ensuring that they do not

bully or anger people with the power and alliances to diminish their social status. In this case, the

large number of students reporting that they dislike alpha-bullies may be irrelevant to the power

structure of the class or school, and therefore viewed as an acceptable loss to the alpha-bully.

Also, having a larger number of friends may diminish the costs associated with bullying others,

in addition to offering the alpha-bully a familiarity with the social hierarchy in place which

determines who they can and can't bully without consequence. Since their friend groups

sometimes include victims, an alpha-bully may inadvertently alienate the peers they wish to be

friends with if they find victims before establishing their group.

Hierarchy

Classrooms with higher levels of status hierarchies have been found to also exhibit higher

levels of bullying (Garandeau, Lee, & Salmivalli, 2014). Additionally, students perceived as

more popular in the classroom were more likely to be bullies, whereas students perceived as

being less popular were more likely to be victims (José, 2016). However, it is not the case that

initially high levels of bullying within the class increase the degree of status hierarchy

(Garandeau et al., 2014). As it relates to alpha-bullies, there is no evidence to suggest that they

create status hierarchies through bullying, but they do engage in more bullying when a well-

defined status hierarchy is in place (Garandeau et al., 2014). The benefit of this interaction for

alpha-bullies relates to their tendency to rank highly in status-hierarchies due to their popularity

and other positive qualities which will be discussed below. When classroom aggression increases

with a high degree of status hierarchy, alpha-bullies are generally spared from the adverse effects

of this dynamic by virtue of the fact that their high rank leads them to be aggressors instead of

victims (José, 2016). Further, aggressive students have been found to be more popular and better

liked in classrooms with a higher degree of status hierarchy (Garandeau et al., 2011). It would

seem that in a hierarchical classroom culture which may be generally regarded as unpleasant or

actively harmful, alpha-bullies continue to benefit. Whereas many students will have varying

classroom experiences depending on the overall culture of the class (Garandeau, Ahn, & Rodkin,

2011), alpha-bullies are more likely to have consistently positive classroom experiences

regardless of the class culture.

Socially Valued Characteristics

There are numerous socially valued characteristics associated with being an alpha-bully

(Farmer et al., 2010). These characteristics include assertiveness, leadership skills, risk taking,

organizational skills, psychological insight, individuality, resistance to authority, and

extroversion (Simplicio, 2013). These characteristics paint the picture of an individual who has

the charisma and the will to be an important figure among their peers, as well as the social

competencies to both gain and manage that type of attention. They also appear to have the

mental fortitude to stand up under the pressure of authority and hold true to their own beliefs. In

addition to these characteristics, alpha-bullies are perceived by their peers as wearing stylish

clothing, being physically attractive (particularly among girls), and as being superior athletes

(particularly among boys) (Vaillancourt et al., 2003). Given the desirability of these

characteristics, one may wonder what functional value bullying others could possibly have

beyond the value of the many strengths alpha-bullies exhibit. It seems as though the path of least

resistance for these individuals to attain high status would be to simply rely on their abundance

of desirable characteristics and to avoid the effort and risk of punishment associated with

bullying. In my view, the sheer quantity of positive characteristics associated with alpha-bullies

makes it difficult to assert that bullying assigns them any benefits that they don't already have.

The implications of this will be discussed later in the chapter.

Mental Health

There is evidence to suggest that the overall mental health of alpha-bullies is at least

better than that of victims and bully-victims (Stuart & José, 2014; Isolan et al., 2013). Alpha-

bullies may experience less stress than their peers, and have been found to have fewer health

issues associated with stress than peers who lack social or physical resources (Newman et al.,

2005; Sapolsky, 2004; as cited by Volk, Camilleri, Dane, & Marini, 2012). They have been

found to show fewer symptoms of depression than victims or bully-victims, and exhibit higher

levels of self-esteem than their peers (Koh & Wong, 2015; Seals & Young, 2003). Typically,

average or high self-esteem can be expected to correlate with higher levels of happiness and

satisfaction (Koh & Wong, 2015). Alpha-bullies do not show elevated internalizing symptoms,

nor do they perceive themselves as having difficulties in the social domain (Reijntjes et al.,

2013). Alpha-bullies show similar rates of anxiety to that of students who are uninvolved with

bullying, whereas victims and bully-victims present significantly more anxiety symptoms (Isolan

et al., 2013). Further, alpha-bullies tend to report feeling integrated in their peer group, and

report fewer feelings of loneliness than their victimized peers (Vaillancourt et al., 2003). Overall,

individuals who are perceived by their peers as being alpha-bullies generally exhibit strong

mental health.

Sexual Access

Though this claim is purely inferential, research does suggest that bullies have increased sexual access (Volk et al., 2012; Koh & Wong, 2017). Some research has found that bullies are more active with members of the opposite sex, are younger when they enter puberty and when they start dating, report more opportunities for dating and for sex, and are more likely to be in a dating relationship (Connolly, Pepler, Craig, & Taradash, 2000). Additionally, Vancouver-based researchers found that bullies possess higher social status and self-esteem than their peers, which they propose are two key factors to providing sexual access (Koh & Wong, 2015). However, unless research is presented that demonstrates an association between bully status and frequency of sex, this proposed association will remain tenuous. Even if such research were to be done, I would be wary of a report bias from the participants either overstating their sexual frequency, or not being comfortable in sharing that information.

A Lack of Cost

Coinciding with the numerous benefits associated with being identified as an alpha-bully, there are little or no costs to speak of (Reijntjes et al., 2013). Regardless of whether there are long-term costs to being an alpha-bully, these would not be proximal to the bully, and therefore are unlikely to be taken into consideration when deciding to target others (Reijntjes et al., 2013). There are a few key areas from which one might expect to incur costs for bullying others, but there does not seem to be any source of meaningful deterrents to bullying behaviors.

Social Status

With regards to peer preference, research shows that alpha-bullies are both liked and disliked by their peers, and that they are reasonably well accepted in the classroom (Reijntjes et al., 2013; Garandeau et al, 2011; José, 2016; Vaillancourt et al., 2003; Jia & Mikami, 2015). While the proportion of students who tend to dislike alpha-bullies might be considered a cost, it

may be the case that alpha-bullies are unaware of what their peers think of them (Vaillancourt et al., 2003), and therefore don't experience their dislike as a cost. Further, considering that alpha-bullies tend to associate with non-victims in general (Farmer et al., 2010), they may not care that they are disliked by many of their peers, as it would be reasonable to expect that a large portion of students reporting that they dislike the alpha-bullies in their class are themselves victims. Additionally, students are unlikely to challenge or criticize alpha-bullies directly, considering the risks involved with doing so (Vaillancourt et al., 2003). Given that a higher degree of status hierarchy in the classroom leads to higher levels of bullying, some have proposed that high status individuals bully in order to maintain their rank (Garandeau et al., 2014). While this point is up for debate, what is certain is that these individuals do not seem to lose status in these settings (Garandeau et al., 2014). Therefore, it would seem that bullying is not connected to any meaningful losses in popularity or likeability from the perspective of an alpha-bully.

Mental Health

Alpha-bullies show fewer signs of depression, anxiety, and other internalizing symptoms than their victimized peers (Isolan et al., 2013). Additionally, they have higher self-esteem, confidence (Stuart & José, 2014), self-perceived social competence (Reijntjes et al., 2013), and report feeling more support (Stuart & José, 2014) than their victimized peers. Further, the only negative psychiatric outcome that alpha-bullies show an increased risk for in early adulthood is antisocial personality disorder (Copeland, Wolke, Angold, & Costello, 2013). It would seem as though there are not any mental health draw-backs to being an alpha-bully. However, it may be the case that alpha-bullies are unaware of how they are perceived by their peers (Vaillancourt et al., 2003), and what the impact of their behavior is on their targets (McAdams & Schmidt, 2007). An awareness of these things may alter an alpha-bully's self-concept.

It is common for alpha-bullies rationalize their aggressive behavior (Brendgen, Vitaro, Tremblay, & Lavoie, 2001; as cited by McAdams & Schmidt, 2007) and devise reasons as to why punishments assigned by authorities are unfair (Sanders, 2004; as cited by McAdams & Schmidt, 2007). Alpha-bullies remove some of the potential for the consequences of their behavior to negatively affect their mental health or self-concept by use of the defense mechanism; rationalization (Tsang, 2002). Increasing one's ability to empathize with others has been shown to prevent socially aggressive behaviors (Espelage, Mebane, & Adams, 2004; as cited by McAdams & Schmidt, 2007), indicating that some level of remorse for harmful behaviors may be associated with an increase in empathy (McAdams & Schmidt, 2007). However, since it may be in the best interest of an alpha-bully to continue victimizing others, they are likely not motivated to adopt a more empathetic disposition (McAdams & Schmidt, 2007), protecting themselves from a possible cost associated with bullying. There is a consensus among the self-esteem literature that individuals with high self-esteem are the most likely to aggress others when threats to their ego are made (Baumeister, Smart, & Boden 1996; as cited by Vaillancourt et al., 2003). This further supports the notion that alpha-bullies actively protect themselves from the potential deleterious mental health effects of victimizing others.

Punishment

A 2010 study examining the factors associated with an increased reporting of bullying to school officials found that 64 percent of their respondents who experienced bullying did not report it to school officials (Petrosino, Guckenburg, DeVoe, & Hanson, 2010). A global status report on school violence and bullying from UNESCO (2017) reports that 30 percent of children do not tell anyone when they've been bullied, 30 percent tell a friend or sibling, 30 percent tell an adult they trust, and less than 10 percent tell a teacher, the individual most likely to punish a

bully. Questions about whether or which punishments leads to behavioral change, and an evaluation of the costs incurred by the bully when punishments are implemented are secondary to the fact that the majority of bullying incidents go unpunished. Given that one of the positive qualities alpha-bullies commonly exhibit is a willingness to take risks (Simplicio, 2013), a less than 50 percent chance of a bullying incident even being reported, no less punished, seems like the kind of risk that alpha-bullies are willing to take. Additionally, alpha-bullies' opposition to authority (Simplicio, 2013) and their tendency to devise reasons why their punishment is unfair or unwarranted (Sanders, 2004, as cited by McAdams & Schmidt, 2007) may cause the alpha-bully to interpret their punishment not as a cost incurred by bullying, but as a result of authoritarian oppression. I am skeptical as to how a school authority using their power to impose negative consequences on a bully models anything other than an approximation of the behavior the bully is being punished for in the first place. Considering that children are more likely to act aggressively when aggressive acts are modeled for them by an adult (Bandura, 1963), aggressively punishing a bully may be counterproductive. In these cases, not only would a bully who views their punishment as unfair not perceive there to be costs associated with their bullying, but their bullying behavior may be reinforced by certain types of punishment.

Teachers tend to respond differently to different types of bullying, and are both less likely to intervene in relational bullying, and take less severe actions towards relational bullying than they do for physical or verbal bullying (Bauman & Del Rio, 2006). This inconsistency may inadvertently promote subtler forms of bullying, as opposed to deterring bullying all together (Bauman & Del Rio, 2006). Overall, while punishments from adults do add some cost to bullying for alpha-bullies (Volk et al, 2012), the type of punishment, the manner in which it is given, and the consistency of the punishment all present limitations to the perceived cost of

bullying others from the alpha-bully's perspective. However, there have been reductions in bullying in schools as a result of Iowa's anti-bullying laws, which mandates bullying intervention and clearly defined consequences for bullying from schools (Ramirez et al., 2016). It is unclear whether the aspect of these law which require institutionalized consequences for bullying had an effect on bullying prevalence, or whether the reduction was accounted for by the other provisions of these laws. Nonetheless, clearly defined consequences for bullying that are sensible, applied in a non-aggressive manner, and consistently implemented may provide a cost to bullying that bullies respond to by bullying less. Even with these measures in place, it may be the case that any type of publicly visible punishment reinforces bullying behaviors, as these may actually serve to make an alpha-bully "cooler" and more popular in the eyes of their peers, thus aiding their status goals in the short term.

Another source of punishment may potentially come from the victim. Whether the victim reacts in an extreme or aggressive manner, has powerful alliances from which to solicit retaliation on their behalf, or garners enough support and compassion from their peers that the bully loses status for targeting them, there are numerous potential costs to the bully for choosing their target poorly. However, there is evidence that alpha-bullies strategically choose their targets so as to incur the least amount of costs or punishments for their selection, which by extension evidences the adaptive, proactive, and goal-driven nature of the bullying behavior shown by alpha-bullies.

Strategic Target Selection and Social Permission

Considering that bullying, by definition, involves a power imbalance between the perpetrator and the target (Olweus, 1997), it goes without saying that part of the alpha-bully's selection process is finding targets who are less powerful. However, simply having less power

than the alpha-bully does not alone make somebody a smart choice of target. If a target has the support of powerful individuals, or if a bully's choice of target and/or the way they bully that target is seen as taboo (ex. A male bully punching a female target), the bully could stand to lose status. Therefore, if bullying is functionally adaptive in the bully's social environment, then they can be expected to be selective in who they choose to bully. It should be noted, however, that a bully may not be cognizant of the strategic value that their selection process has. Instead, a repertoire of behavior regarding the selection of targets becomes reinforced by a combination of operant conditioning and the presence of implicit and explicit rule-governed learning.

Social Status

Given that alpha-bullies generally have high social status among their peers (Farmer et al., 2010), it stands to reason that their targets would generally have lower status even if they were picked at random. However, it can be seen across numerous studies that victims aren't just lower in status than alpha-bullies, they tend to be among the lowest status individuals overall (Farmer et al., 2010; Veenstra et al., 2005; Cook et al., 2010; Jia & Mikami, 2015; José, 2016; Reijntjes et al., 2013). It is standard for victims to be rejected and isolated by their peers (Cook et al., 2010). This lack of social connection makes victims vulnerable (Mouttapa, Valente, Gallaher, Rohrbach, & Unger, 2004), as it reduces the likelihood of an alpha-bully suffering any peer induced consequences (such as loss in status) for targeting them (Vaillancourt et al., 2003). Considering that bullies with higher status engage in more bullying than lower status bullies (Garandeau et al., 2011; Vaillancourt et al., 2003), and that more bullying occurs overall when there is a larger divide between high status students and low status students (Garandeau et al., 2014), a larger difference in status between an alpha-bully and their target seems to provide proportionately more encouragement for the bully to victimize their target. It may be the case

that other students are less willing to challenge or criticize higher status peers (Vaillancourt et al., 2003), and that they are less bothered by the victimization of a low status peer.

Since research that looks at the social status of students in a class does so through peer nominations (José, 2016; Garandeau et al., 2014; Garandeau et al., 2011), it is likely the case that the students are well aware of the approximate social status of each of their peers. Therefore, socially adept students (such as alpha-bullies) are most likely aware of the implicit rules in place dictating who they are and are not allowed to target. They may then choose among the peers they are allowed to target and bully that peer without losing status. In this sense, the alpha-bully is granted social permission to target certain individuals. Bully-victims tend to be widely disliked among their peers, are typically not perceived as being popular or as having high status, and are more likely to form groups comprised of other socially marginalized children (Farmer et al., 2010). This means that the social permission to target bully-victims is likely quite high, which is reflected by their high rates of victimization (Farmer et al., 2010). Nonetheless, bully-victims are not as scrutinous as alpha-bullies in who they aggress, making them more likely to respond in a costly way despite losing status for aggressing a higher-status individual. As such, low-status victims are the best choice of target for alpha-bullies, since they are passive, tend not to be reactively aggressive (Menesini et al., 2000), are likely to be socially isolated (Veenstra et al., 2005), have few friends (Farmer et al., 2010), tend not to have aggressive friends who will defend them (Mouttapa et al., 2004), and are not likely to report an incident (Petrosino et al., 2010). The adaptive benefit of targeting low-status, socially rejected peers is reflected by the high rates at which these individuals are targeted (Pellegrini & Long, 2002; Farmer et al., 2010).

Gender

Research indicates that female bullies who act in overtly or physically aggressive ways are more disliked by their peers than males showing the same behavior (Garandeau et al., 2011; Jia & Mikami, 2015). It appears that, not only does one need social permission for who they can target without losing status, but social permission may be required for the manner in which one bullies. There is pressure on youth to act in accordance to social expectations based on their gender, and female bullies who behave in overtly and physically aggressive ways have been found to exhibit more traditionally masculine traits (Morales, Yubero, & Larrañaga, 2016). Conversely, girls who are perceived by their peers as more popular are generally seen as being highly attractive (Vaillancourt et al., 2003) and they tend to engage in relational forms of bullying as opposed to overtly physical bullying (Veenstra et al., 2005; Evans & Smokowski, 2016). It may be the case that female bullies are expected to bully others in ways that are more consistent with the qualities that make them popular. Since being highly athletic and physical are qualities which make male bullies more popular (Vaillancourt et al., 2003), forms of bullying which utilize the traits that make them popular are more accepted, and thus male bullies have social permission to be physically dominating to their targets. Since athleticism and physicality are not as valued for female bullies, bullying in ways that utilize those traits are less permissible to their peers, and likely more visible since being physically dominating is a traditionally male quality, and a female displaying that quality violates people's expectations. In order to maintain their social status, female bullies prefer relational forms of bullying, since they have more social permission to bully others in this way. Since aggression is generally seen as a masculine trait (Morales et al., 2016), and bullying is itself a form of aggression (Olweus, 1997), then boys most likely have more social permission to engage in all forms of bullying than girls. Unsurprisingly, boys are far more likely to be an alpha-bully than girls (Veenstra et al., 2005). Further, it has

been found that boys are more likely to target other boys (Pellegrini & Long, 2002), and alpha-bullies are less likely than bully-victims to target girls (Rodkin, Espelage, & Hanish, 2015). This indicates that male bullies have more social permission to target boys than girls. The fact that alpha-bullies are less likely than bully-victims to choose female targets demonstrates the strategic nature of their target selection, and alludes to a functional difference between the bullying behaviors of alpha-bullies and bully-victims.

Prejudicial Factors

There are many structures in society which assign power to one group and diminish the power of another. These include racism, patriarchy, ableism, and heteronormativity, among others. It stands to reason that members of groups which have less power in society may also have less power in school, and may be vulnerable to bullying as a result. Since a power differential between perpetrator and target is intrinsic to the concept of bullying (Olweus, 1997), then it should be expected that members of oppressed groups would be bullied more frequently simply for the reason that they have proportionately less power than their counterparts who belong to more privileged groups.

Despite the finding that male alpha-bullies are less likely to target girls (Rodkin et al., 2015), girls have been found to be more likely than boys to be bullied (Berger & Rodkin, 2009; UNESCO, 2017). This finding is inconsistent, as there have been studies which have found no difference between levels of victimization among boys and girls, and some studies find that boys are bullied more, but girls have a higher world-wide prevalence of bullying victimization (UNESCO, 2017). However, the inconsistency of these findings indicates that region-specific contingencies of reinforcement for bullying girls may be in place, assigning more or less social permission for targeting girls depending on where one lives.

"According to a 2016 UN report, children in vulnerable situations, who face stigma, discrimination or exclusion are more likely to be bullied in person and online" (UNESCO, 2017 p. 17). Gender, poverty or social status, disability, ethnic, linguistic, or cultural differences, physical appearance, sexual orientation, and gender identity and expression have all been identified as drivers of school violence and bullying (UNESCO, 2017). In particular, UNICEF found in 2016 that roughly 25% of reported bullying related to physical appearance, 25% to gender or sexual orientation, 25% to ethnicity or national origin, and 25% to other reasons (UNESCO, 2017). There is extensive literature which confirms the increased risk of being bullied that is associated with membership to less privileged groups (Misawa, 2010; Bajaj, Gaffar-Kucher, & Desai, 2016; Pittet, Berchtold, Akre, Michaud, & Suris, 2010; Weiner, Day, & Galvan, 2013), with the degree of risk being affected by the regional culture in which one lives. For instance, Islamophobia in the United States creates a particularly potent risk of being bullied for children and adolescents who are perceived as being Muslim (Bajaj, 2016).

When discrimination against certain populations becomes culturally ingrained, the attitudes that children and adolescents have towards members of discriminated populations may be affected such that children from those populations become more socially isolated in their peer groups, making them more vulnerable. Further, these discriminatory ideals may affect the attitudes that alpha-bullies have towards discriminated against children, as well as convey to them rules regarding the contingencies of reinforcement for bullying those children. When public figures target certain groups without incurring real costs and maintain their positions of power after doing so, children and adolescents are taught that they can also target those groups without losing status. I predict that as long as certain groups are openly targeted for discrimination by a large number of people in very visible ways, that children and adolescents from those groups will

continue to be bullied more frequently, regardless of whether their bullies hold prejudicial ideals. It is simply a matter of rule-governed learning in which social permission is granted for bullying members of discriminated groups. However, it is important to consider the make-up and culture of schools on an individual basis. One study found that rates of bullying victimization for black or white students was more correlated with whether the student was part of a minority group within the school, as opposed to within their state or country (Fisher et al., 2015).

Social permission for targeting members of certain groups may vary from school to school, such that it is possible for alpha-bullies to lose status due to the perception that their choice of target is taboo. A white alpha-bully targeting a black victim may be perceived as racist, a male alpha-bully physically bullying a female target may be perceived as weak, or an able-bodied alpha-bully aggressing a target confined to a wheelchair may be perceived as cruel. Although members of less powerful groups are bullied more overall, an alpha-bully must be attuned to the rules in place in their particular environment dictating who they are and aren't allowed to bully without losing status.

Target Qualities

There are numerous qualities indicative of the average victim which make them objectively easier to bully. I would like to clarify, however, that by no means is it the fault of the target that they've been victimized. Bullying victimization of all forms, in all contexts, is undeserved, unmerited, and unjustified. Nonetheless, research indicates a number of qualities which victims often have in common.

Victims of bullying frequently report low self-confidence (Elsea et al., 2004; Haynie et al., 2001; Juvonen et al., 2000; as cited by Popp, 2012), which ensures that the victim will not try to change the situation, due to their accompanying low self-efficacy to change the bullying

dynamic to something more favorable to them (Popp, 2012). Victims also report lower self-esteem than their peers (Elsea et al., 2004; Haynie et al., 2001; Juvonen et al., 2000; as cited by Popp, 2012), which may cause them to blame themselves for the bullying and develop feelings that they deserve to be bullied (Popp, 2012). In fact, it has been suggested that low self-esteem correlates with victimization more than any other quality (Sekol & Farrington, 2016), indicating that low self-esteem consistently mitigates the costs associated with bullying that individual. It is likely that individuals with low self-esteem feel less self-efficacious when it comes to forming social connections which may help protect them from bullies. Additionally, their low self-esteem may signal their vulnerability to bullies, conveying to the bully that they are a potentially suitable target (Sekol & Farrington, 2016). Victims have been found to be especially neurotic (Sekol & Farrington, 2016), which likely interacts with the victim's self-esteem, confidence, and with their ability to form protective social connections. Additionally, their neuroticism compromises their emotional stability, and makes them prone to hypersensitivity as well (Sekol & Farrington, 2016). This may make it more difficult for victims to withstand bullying attempts, and may also make them more likely to react in ways that perpetuate conflict, which they are likely to lose.

Lacking in agreeableness and conscientiousness are associated with female victimization, but not male victimization (Sekol & Farrington, 2016). It is possible that since females are more likely to engage in relational forms of bullying (Pellegrini, Bartini, & Brooks, 1999; Veenstra et al., 2005; Evans & Smokowski, 2016), qualities which make females less relationally competent make them more vulnerable to this type of attack. This would fit well with the observation that male victims are less athletic and physically inclined than male bullies (Menesini et al., 2000), and given that males are more likely to engage in physical forms of bullying (Pellegrini, Bartini,

& Brooks, 1999; Veenstra et al., 2005; Evans & Smokowski, 2016), qualities which make males

less physically competent make them more vulnerable to physical attacks.

Victims tend to be more compliant and acquiescent than their bullying counterparts, and

show a more submissive style of interaction (Menesini, Melan, & Pignatti, 2000). It is likely that

alpha-bullies, who show more dominant interactional styles (Menesini et al., 2000), naturally

gravitate towards more submissive individuals to exert their dominance over because they feel

more self-efficacious in their ability to dominate peers who are unlikely to resist them. Further,

the submission demonstrated by their victims likely reinforces their motivations for bullying

them in the first place (Menesini et al., 2000). Through this dynamic, victims unwittingly, and

inadvertently collude with their aggressors in forming a cyclical interaction style whereby the

alpha-bully continues to dominate the victim and continues to be reinforced by the victim's

submission to them (Menesini et al., 2000).

Finally, while this isn't an inherent characteristic of the victim, research indicates that

people who have been victimized in the past are more likely to be victimized again in the future

(Hanish & Guerra, 2004). If an individual is observed to be victimized with little consequence

and/or noticeable benefit, this provides a proof of concept for the viability of that target to other

individuals looking for someone to bully. In this way, rules regarding the contingencies of

reinforcement for interacting with that individual have been formed. It is more strategic to target

an individual who has been established as "fair game", in that the perpetrators will not lose

status, and may even gain status for targeting that individual.

Although an alpha-bully's feelings towards their target likely factor into their choice to

bully them, it stands to reason that the strategic nature of their target selection indicates a

functionally adaptive purpose behind their behavior. Each of the factors examined here in

relation to strategic target selection has a common theme; they each confer diminished power to the victim. While this may seem obvious, due to the fact that a power differential is required for bullying to occur (Olweus, 1997), I posit that any factor which increases the likelihood of being targeted by an alpha-bully inevitably correlates with lower status and power because the true function of bullying for an alpha-bully relates to dominance.

The Function of Bullying

In the previous chapter, I predicted that the bullying behaviors perpetrated by alpha-bullies and bully-victims are structurally similar, but functionally different. I would like to remind the reader of the comparison made in that chapter between racing for the reward of winning and racing to impress one's peers. The structure of each behavior is the same, but the functions, or the purposes of those behaviors are different. The structural aspects of those behaviors are reinforced by different contingencies of reinforcement, and therefore interact with the environment differently. In line with this, I will now make an argument for what I predict the function of bullying is, only in the case of alpha-bullies. I will compare this prediction with my prediction of the function of bullying for bully-victims in chapter 3.

Status Goals

Consistent with the idea that alpha-bullying relates to dominance, one might expect that alpha-bullies have status or dominance related goals. Research indicates that alpha-bullies do have status goals, particularly during adolescence (Sijtsema, Veenstra, Lindenberg, & Salmivalli, 2009). Male bullies rate especially high on status goals (Sijtsema et al., 2009), possibly due to social and cultural factors which make status goals more accessible to boys, as well potential gender-based differences in dominance traits or aggression. This fits well with the finding that bullies are overrepresented by males (Berger & Rodkin, 2009).

In a 2017 study examining the relationship between dominance and various personality traits, it was found that "content assessing dominant attitudes and behaviors defines both grandiose narcissism and mania-relevant measures to a considerable degree […] (and) structural analysis of narcissism and mania indicators suggested that they converged to define a Social Ascendancy factor—which correlated strongly positively with extraversion" (Stanton et al., 2017, p. 616). This indicates a strong relationship between qualities which define dominance and qualities which define social ascendancy (ex. leadership, assertiveness, desire for attention, entitlement, exploitation, and overall narcissism) (Stanton et al., 2017). Additionally, this study found that social ascendancy was a robust predictor of assertiveness, which in turn is strongly associated with dominance. The fact that social ascendancy correlates strongly with extraversion fits with the findings that alpha-bullies tend to have high-status in their peer groups and have a large quantity of friends (Farmer et al., 2010). Further, antagonism relates to dominance behaviors characterized by a lack of empathy and prioritization of one's own needs over that of others (Stanton et al., 2017). This 2017 study did not examine how these factors relate to bullying, yet the findings paint an image of a dominant, assertive, self-interested individual who is driven towards attainment of high social status and shows a strong ability to make social connections, as well as a willingness to antagonize and aggress others as it suits their needs. This profile is a perfect fit with the research discussed so far in this chapter.

Dominance

Dominance theory is a theory in the literature on bullying which examines individual-based social hierarchies and proposes that bullying is used as a means of establishing and maintaining dominance (Evans & Smokowski, 2016; Long & Pellegrini, 2003). This is supported by findings that youth who desire dominance bully others to gain social status (Long &

Pellegrini, 2003). Additionally, aggression is usually exhibited at higher frequencies when first establishing a social hierarchy, and then decreases after it is established (Long & Pellegrini, 2003; Pellegrini & Long, 2002). Dominance theory suggests that bullying is used as a way to vie for a dominant position in the peer group during the formation of a social hierarchy, and used with much less frequency over time to maintain one's position of dominance (Evans & Smokowski, 2016). This decrease in the frequency of bullying behaviors is supported by research which indicates that bullying perpetration decreases over time as a function of age (Long & Pellegrini, 2003; Cook et al., 2010). While dominance theory makes a lot of sense in the context of this chapter, I think that there has been a causal attribution error made in this conceptualization of bullying.

Dominance theory presents the use of bullying in social hierarchies as being accountable for net gains in status (Evans & Smokowski, 2016). However, two specific findings that make me doubt a direct correlation between bullying and gains in status. First, is the finding that alpha-bullies with more power bully more than those with less power (Garandeau et al., 2011; Vaillancourt et al., 2003). If bullying were directly associated with gaining social status, then it would stand to reason that the lower power alpha-bullies would bully more than high power alpha-bullies in an attempt to gain more power. Research instead indicates that people work harder to maintain the status they have, or to avoid a loss in status, than they do to achieve a higher status (Pettit, Yong, & Spataro, 2010, as cited by Garandeau et al., 2011). This fits with dominance theory's claim that bullying is used to maintain status, but not with the claim that it is used to gain it.

The second finding that makes me doubt that bullying provides increases in power directly is the finding that high levels of bullying do not increase the degree of status hierarchy in

a classroom (Garandeau et al., 2014). A higher degree of status hierarchy indicates a higher

within-group variation in individual status (Garandeau et al., 2014). If it were the case the

bullying assigned power directly, it should be the case that bullying increases the level of status

hierarchy in a classroom. However, the causal effects are the reverse, such that high levels of

initial bullying do not increase status hierarchy, but high levels of initial status hierarchy do

increase bullying (Garandeau et al., 2014). This again supports the idea that bullying helps to

maintain status, but not to gain it. Long and Pellegrini (2003) found a high covariance between

bullying and dominance, such that increases or decreases in dominance were associated with the

same for levels of bullying. They suggested that this was due to the use of bullying to attain

dominance. I maintain that bullying is an expression of dominance and that situations in which

dominance becomes more relevant, such as in the establishment of a social hierarchy, cause more

dominant individuals to behave in ways that project their dominance, such as bullying others.

A recent study investigated how people infer dominance in social interactions (Ueda &

Yoshikawa, 2018). They would be shown pictures of two faces showing different facial

expressions, and asked to assess the level of dominance in each individual. Interestingly, while

angry faces were perceived as more dominant individually or in a physical altercation, happy

facial expressions were perceived to be more dominant in social interactions and non-violent

confrontations. Although cultural differences may affect this relationship, and this research was

not conducted by North-American researchers, their results held true for white participants as

well as south Asian participants, indicating some cross-cultural applicability. While these

findings don't suggest much about bullying by themselves, taken with all the research presented

in this chapter, it suggests that while an alpha-bully's interactions with friends and high-status

peers are structurally different from their interactions with their targets, these behaviors may be functionally similar; they both project dominance.

It may be the case that, among alpha-bullies, bullying lower status peers and certain positive status-affirming interactions with non-targets (being affable, likeable, charismatic, showing leadership qualities, etc.) are two sides of the same coin. Each is an expression of the individual's dominance where the particular behavior shown is dependent on the context. Although it is beyond the scope of this paper to determine which behaviors constitute pro-social dominance displays, this theory has a lot of appeal. It should be noted, however, that there are likely temperamental or psychopathic traits that contribute a dominant individual's inclination to bully others. Therefore, I suggest that while not all dominant individuals are alpha-bullies, all alpha-bullies are dominant individuals.

Conceptualizing bullying behaviors shown by alpha-bullies as just one of the many expressions of dominance in dominant individuals simplifies the issue of bullying significantly, and offers great potential for future research to look at questions such as; which pro-social behaviors are dominance displays in dominant individuals; what is the exact nature of the relationships between dominance, aggression, and status; is the frequency or intensity of anti-social dominance displays correlated with the frequency or intensity of pro-social dominance displays; which characteristics relate to anti-social versus pro-social displays of dominance, and so on. However, in this paper I promised to try and conceptualize the function of bullying for alpha-bullies, and it is time that I do so.

I predict that the function of bullying in alpha-bullies is to exert dominance. This is different from attaining status or dominance, but it is related to one's ability to do so. By exerting dominance, an individual's dominance is projected to others, and this informs others that

attempts to challenge their social status will be costly. The reasons why dominance, bullying,

and status appear so closely related is that dominant individuals both seek status, and seek to

project dominance, and that an increase in trait dominance should lead to an increase in each

behavior. Therefore, it appears that bullying helps to gain status directly, but in truth, alpha-

bullies engage in other behaviors that help them gain status while simultaneously bullying others.

By projecting their dominance through bullying (one way of exerting dominance), alpha-bullies

are able to protect and maintain their status, as well as ensure that their efforts to gain status

aren't blocked by other dominant individuals. In this sense, bullying aids in protecting upwards

status movement, but does not itself account for upward movement. The entangled nature of

these factors creates the appearance of causal relationships, which causes many researchers to

infer that bullying accounts for gains in status, which is understandable. However, I posit that my

explanation of bullying behaviors in alpha-bullies is congruent with all the research (at least all

the research I've seen).

The reason why bullying dips after social hierarchy is established is because the stability

of the hierarchy after it is formed creates less of a need for individuals to protect their status

gains and movements. Environmental contingencies of reinforcement dictate the relationship

between certain behaviors and their effects such that behaviors which are positively reinforced

should become more frequent. This would explain why higher degrees of status hierarchy cause

higher status individuals to bully more; their behaviors are likely more reinforced in those

settings due to the power differential between them and their peers. A similar rationale explains

why higher status alpha-bullies bully more frequently than lower status alpha-bullies. However,

it is not necessarily the case that understanding the effects of their bullying is reinforced by

environmental contingencies. That is to say, alpha-bullies probably don't think about the benefits

of bullying, they just do it because the behavior has been reinforced. It is not necessarily part of

their conscious thought processes that bullying their peers will net them certain benefits. It is,

however, a behavioral consequence of their dominant personalities. Conscious or not, alpha-

bullies oppress their peers through bullying, and this oppression is connected to great personal

gains.

        "Oppression is the experience of repeated, widespread, systemic injustice. It need not be

extreme and involve the legal system (…) nor violent" (Deutsch, 2006, p. 10). "While specific

privileged groups are the beneficiaries of the oppression of other groups, and thus have an

interest in the continuation of the status quo, they do not typically understand themselves to be

agents of oppression." (Deutsch, 2006, p. 10). Alpha-bullies enact repeated injustices towards

less powerful individuals in ways that need not be rule based or violent. They are the

beneficiaries of their bullying behaviors, and have an unconscious vested interest in the

continuation of their bullying dynamic. Alpha-bullies often rationalize their bullying behaviors,

see them as less extreme than they are, view their target as deserving harassment, and view their

punishments as unjust. This fit's with Deutsch's (2006) description of oppressors very closely. I

have suggested that the function of bullying for alpha-bullies is to exert and project dominance.

Often, a behavior has both a structural description and a functional description. For example, in

the case of someone running to catch a bus, the structural description of that behavior is running,

while the functional description is catching a bus. In the case of bullying among alpha-bullies, I

propose that bullying is the structural description of their behavior, but that the functional

description should be "peer-oppression".

Conclusion

This research has shown alpha-bullies to be generally liked by their peers, perceived as being highly popular, and as having large peer networks. Conversely, they have been shown to be more aggressive than their lower-status or non-bullying peers, are disliked by many peers, and demonstrate increasing levels of aggression based on the degree of status hierarchy. Alpha-bullies experience many benefits associated with being an alpha-bully, with few accompanying costs. They tend to direct bullying behaviors towards individuals who show clear signs of having little social power, and/or are unlikely to report the abuse. When observed in their interactions with peers who are identified as victims, bullies show very clear signs of dominance, leadership, and directiveness (Menesini et al., 2000). Alpha-bullies tend to have many positive characteristics which aid their status goals and help them achieve popularity and dominance in their peer networks. Alpha-bullies seem to have a very positive image to many of their peers, while simultaneously having a very negative image to many other peers. This discrepancy can be somewhat confusing when trying to understand the nature of an alpha-bully's behaviors. However, when their positive status-affirming behaviors and their bullying behaviors are conceptualized as contextual dominance-based behaviors, the two types of behaviors become congruent with each other.

It appears to many that bullying accounts for gains in status, but under this framework, bullying predominantly works to oppress lower-status peers and thus communicate an alpha-bully's dominance so as to protect their status from being challenged or diminished. The resounding similarities between this account of bullying and the oppression that occurs in society at large provides my justification for coining the term "peer-oppression" as the functional description of bullying behaviors among alpha-bullies. Additionally, I believe that offering the term peer-oppression will make it easier for researchers, academics, and society at large to talk

about bullying and find answers and interventions. For instance, peer-oppression may be sufficient but not necessary to maintain status. One would expect a slew of research indicating that all popular children and adolescents are bullies if peer-oppression were necessary to maintain status gains, but this is not the case. Therefore, there is some hope that alternative means of protecting status gains and projecting dominance can be taught to alpha-bullies. Implications for interventions will be discussed in the final chapter.

Part of the reason why research in this area is so difficult is that much of the research does not distinguish between bullies (alpha-bullies, as I've called them) and bully-victims. I believe that when the behaviors of each group aren't evaluated separately, the function of their behaviors is impossible to determine. In the next chapter, I intend to identify the function of bullying among bully-victims in an effort to prove or disprove my hypothesis that bullying from alpha-bullies and bullying from bully-victims are structurally similar, but functionally different.

CHAPTER 3

BULLY-VICTIMS

Introduction

"Bully-victims", in the research literature, refers to participants who have been identified as frequently engaging in bullying behaviors towards other individuals, while also being frequent targets of bullying behaviors perpetrated by others (Goldberg, Olweus, & Endresen, 2007). Bully-victims have been found to engage in more bullying behavior than alpha-bullies, and are more frequently victimized than victims (Demaray & Malecki, 2003). One might therefore expect that bully-victims are the most likely to suffer from the various consequences of bullying. Indeed, bully-victims are frequently found to have worse outcomes than alpha-bullies, victims, or non-involved people (Stuart & Jose, 2014).

In the research I've looked at, bully-victims tend to be smallest group in any study that divides alpha-bullies, and bully-victims into different groups. That is to say, fewer participants are identified as bully-victims than are identified as alpha-bullies, victims, or non-involved, across the majority of studies which make such classifications (Pellegrini, Bartini, & Brooks, 1999; Goldweber, Waasdorp, & Bradshaw, 2013; Holt & Espelage, 2007; Espelage & Holt, 2013; Ziv, Leibovich, & Schechtman, 2013; Bradshaw, O'Brennan, & Sawyer, 2008; Farmer et al., 2010). This is a somewhat unexpected finding considering that the traditional view of bullies as individuals who possess deficits in social interactions and who have been poorly influenced by environmental deficiencies (Volk, Camilleri, Dane, & Marini, 2012) is a closer fit for bully-victims than it is for alpha-bullies (Cook, Williams, Guerra, Kim, & Sadek, 2010). Bully-victims represent the minority of the bullying population, and yet may represent the most prominent image of what a bully is like. The focus of this chapter will be to find the function of bullying

among the bully-victim population, and in the process, either confirm or disconfirm my central

hypothesis. However, I maintain that the more important goal of this chapter will be to

understand the bully-victim not as a callous, socially-deficient, conduct-disordered problem, but

as a vulnerable individual who is not treated fairly, who has learned that they are in conflict with

the world, and who is in desperate need for compassionate intervention.

Unlike alpha-bullies, bully-victims are not found to benefit greatly from their group

membership. In fact, membership to the bully-victim group in the research literature is connected

to such a wide array of draw-backs, punishments, and disadvantages, that it would appear more

beneficial for bully-victims to discontinue their bullying behaviors and simply become victims,

since victims have slightly better outcomes (Stuart & Jose, 2014). However, it is important to

remember that rewards and punishments do not necessarily produce predictable effects, and that

people sometimes act in a way that appears to contradict the contingencies of reinforcement that

are in place (Skinner, 1969). Additionally, consequences which are not proximal to the

individual, or which they are not cognizant of (such as long-term outcomes) are not likely to

factor into their decisions to engage in certain behaviors (Reijntjes et al., 2013). Nonetheless, the

fact that the bullying behaviors of bully-victims contribute to worse outcomes for them

complicates the matter of finding the function of bullying among these individuals. Therefore, I

will investigate the etiology of bully-victims, both for clues as to the function of their bullying

behaviors, and to gain a better understanding of bully-victims in general.

Becoming a Bully-Victim

The typical bully-victim, according Cook et al. (2010);

...has comorbid externalizing and internalizing problems, holds significantly

negative attitudes and beliefs about [themself] and others, is low in social

competence, does not have adequate social problem-solving skills, performs

poorly academically, and is not only rejected and isolated by peers, but also

negatively influenced by the peers with whom [they interact]. (p. 76)

It would be presumptuous to suggest that there is a single pathway towards becoming a bully-

victim, but there may be common pathways towards many of the characteristics described here.

Potential contributions from family, environment, and individual factors will be looked at in

order to understand what the possible motivations are for bullying others among bully-victims.

The first factor I will be looking at is the family.

Family

It stands to reason that the attitudes and beliefs about bullying held by parents may be

taught to their children, either directly or inadvertently. Harcourt, Jasperse, and Green (2014)

found a number of major themes regarding what parents think and believe about bullying. First,

is that there is a lot of variation in how parents define bullying. Many parents do not consider the

repetitive nature of bullying in their descriptions of the behavior, many have difficulty

identifying which behaviors constitute bullying and which are developmentally normal, and

many parents did not view the aggressive behaviors of children six and under as problematic. In

a number of the studies looked at by Harcourt et al., (2014), parents viewed bullying as a normal

part of growing up, as inevitable, or as an unchangeable aspect of the school environment.

Further, many of the parents diminished the significance of verbal or relational bullying, while

many others suggested that bullying was the victim's problem, not the bully, and that it is the

victim's responsibility to fix the situation. Although parents tend to react proactively when they

find out that their own child is being bullied (Harcourt et al., 2014), the beliefs and knowledge

about bullying held by parents may affect their children's perceptions of bullying before it

becomes an issue that the parents are aware of.

The families of bully-victims have been found to score low on measures of cohesion,

albeit not as low as the families of alpha-bullies (Stevens, De Bourdeaudhuij, & Van Oost,

2002). Bully-victims tend to perceive a power-imbalance between their parents favoring the

father, and tend to report themselves having more power within their family than do alpha-

bullies, victims, or non-involved children (Stevens et al., 2002). Further, bully-victims tend to

view their families as having high levels of punishment, conflict, and control. The presence of

inaccurate or insufficient parental monitoring, inconsistent and harsh discipline, authoritarian

child-rearing practices, the reinforcement of aggressive behavior, and few prosocial interactions

have all been observed to be common among the families of bully-victims (Stevens et al., 2002).

Additionally, a moderate association has been found between bully-victim status and negative

parental behaviors such as abuse, neglect, and maladaptive parenting (Lereya, Samara, & Wolke,

2013). Importantly, the families of bully-victims have been observed to have inconsistent

discipline and monitoring (Stevens et al., 2002), which is striking considering the inconsistency

of the role played by a bully-victim.

Regarding bullying among siblings, children experiencing or engaging in bullying among

their siblings are more likely to fall into a bully-victims status, likely due to circumstantial power

dynamics and consistent exposure between siblings (Dantchev & Wolke, 2019). Power is likely

to shift back and forth between siblings, allowing them to take turns using this power to aggress

each other in various ways. When factors that relate to more stable power dynamics are present,

such as age, gender, or strength, siblings are more likely to have the status of alpha-bully or

victim (Dantchev & Wolke, 2019). It was recently found that parenting factors, such as parent-

to-child maltreatment are not strongly associated with sibling bullying (Dantchev & Wolke, 2019). However, a conflicting partnership between parents is associated with bully-victim status among their children. Lastly, it has been found that children who are victimized by their siblings at age five are more likely to become bully-victims at age twelve (Dantchev & Wolke, 2019).

In line with social learning theory (Bandura, 1971), children likely learn a lot about their own interactions with others from witnessing that of their parents. Seeing a power imbalance between parents offers a child a significant amount of exposure to interactions between individuals with a power imbalance compared to interactions between individuals where power imbalances don't exist or are not acted on. It is important to remember that bully-victims claim to witness a power imbalance (Stevens et al., 2002), which suggests that there are aspects of their parents' interactions which make the power imbalance apparent, potentially even resembling bully/victim dynamics. High levels of conflict and control within a family may make children accustomed to and comfortable engaging in conflict, and may reveal functional benefits to having control over another individual. Since punishment is inherently a use of one's power over another in order to modify that person's behavior to the preferences of the one enacting the punishment, it seems that high levels of punishment within a family may be communicating certain contingencies of reinforcement regarding the use of power, or at the very least, normalizing the use of power against the will of another person. For example, if a child behaves in a way that the parents don't like, and the parents are very punitive of the child, and the child no longer engages in that behavior, the child has likely learned that they too can utilize the power they have to change the behaviors of other people.

Parental behaviors which are aggressive in nature, should inevitably increase levels of aggression in children, according to the results of Bandura, Ross, & Ross' (1963) research. The

closer in similarity a model is to the viewing child, the more likely the child is to replicate that behavior (Bandura et al., 1963). Given the likely similarities between parent and child, it should stand to reason that one's parents are more potent models for children, and that children are more likely to replicate aggressive interactions modeled by their parents than modeled by an unrelated or dissimilar person. The association between maladaptive parental behaviors and bully-victim status should not come as a surprise, given the results of Bandura et al.'s (1963) research. Additionally, inconsistent discipline may fail to communicate the intent of the discipline, and instead normalize inconsistent power interactions, stoking the expectation of sometimes being victimized, and other times not, with no clear rules for what to expect. This may foster beliefs about the world as being hostile by nature, and idea which will be explored in more depth later this chapter.

Experiences of bullying among siblings may more directly teach children about what to expect from their peer interactions. It is hard to account for all of the lessons that might be learned in this type of environment, but given that it might be reasonable to expect that they will either be a bully or a victim in many scenarios, they may vie to be the bully in avoidance of becoming the victim. It is possible that either being a bully or a victim in sibling interactions fosters more dichotomous thinking patterns, which will be discussed later in this chapter. Observing conflictual interactions between their parents is associated with increased sibling bullying (Dantchev & Wolke, 2019), which suggests that parents who model conflictual interactions normalize conflict to their children, increasing the likelihood that children will behave in a similar way. Finally, the observation that children who are victimized by their siblings at age five are more likely to become bully-victims at age twelve seems to suggest that being victimized is a major pathway towards becoming a bully-victim. Harsh or punishing

parental interactions may also be received as victimization, which would further support the notion that victimization leads to bully-victim status. Given the general lack of knowledge on the part of parents about bullying, it may be very difficult for parents to identify bullying behaviors in their children, or to realize the connections between their own behaviors and their children's development of bully-victim behavior. Further, parents' attitudes towards bullying may inadvertently support their movement towards becoming a bully-victim. In particular, attitudes which blame victims, or suggest that victims should be the ones to do something about bullying incidents, may be particularly potent in reinforcing ideas that entrench children into bully-victim status.

While this section focuses rather heavily on parents, it is not my intent to blame parents for their children's bullying behaviors, even when those parents have particularly harmful parenting techniques. The parents have also undergone their own learning which may reinforce bullying behaviors, and they cannot be fully held to account for that. Additionally, there are many other factors that contribute to the etiology of a bully-victim, and it would be unfair to place responsibility squarely on the shoulders of parents.

Environment

While it is not my intent to be blaming of parents or families, it is noteworthy that schools with higher proportions of students reporting family dysfunction at home also present a higher risk of bullying behavior among their students (Merrin, Espleage, & Hong, 2018). Given the common factors among the families of alpha-bullies and bully-victims, which are largely dysfunctional (Stevens et al., 2002), it is not particularly surprising that schools with high concentrations of these types of families would be associated with a significantly increased risk of bullying. Although it seems reasonable to expect school connectedness and school risk

(measured by prevalence of student substance use, presence of weapons, gang activities, and students selling drugs) to also be associated with increased risk of bullying, these factors were not found to significantly correlate with the prevalence of bullying (Merrin et al., 2018). However, school climate (rated by student reports support and care shown by school staff and administration) has been found to associate with risk of bullying, and school-level deprivation has been found to increase the risk of bullying among youth from nondeprived backgrounds, but not among youth from deprived backgrounds (Merrin et al., 2018). Here, individual deprivation is measured by eligibility for free school meals, and school deprivation is measured by the proportion of students who are eligible for free school meals (Merrin et al., 2018).

Interestingly, socio-economic status does not provide much guidance in determining which youth or schools are at risk of increased bullying perpetration (Tippet & Wolke, 2014). However, victims and bully-victims were found to be more likely to come from low SES backgrounds, and less likely to come from high SES background (Tippet & Wolke, 2014). Given the association between SES and dysfunctional home environments, it may be the case that children of low SES families are more likely to learn maladaptive ways of interacting with others that leave them more vulnerable to bully-victim dynamics (Tippet & Wolke, 2014). When this is factored into the association between SES and victim or bully-victim status, the association becomes much weaker (Tippet & Wolke, 2014), again pointing to social learning as a primary etiological factor in becoming a bully-victim. The remaining effect of SES on bully-victim status may be accounted for by the diminished relational power that low SES affords children.

Students from lower SES than their peers may be strategic targets for harassment from alpha-bullies, who are adept at leveraging the power they have over other youth for their own personal gain (Tippet & Wolke, 2014). Therefore, schools may experience increased rates of

bullying perpetration in association with deprivation not because deprived students are bullying others, but because they themselves are being targeted. Eligibility for free school meals, in combination with other SES markers, likely diminishes a student's position in status hierarchies. When a high proportion of students are eligible for free school meals, there is likely a higher degree of status hierarchy within the school. A higher degree of status hierarchy in school is associated with more aggressive behavior on the part of high-status students (Garandeau, Ahn, & Rodkin, 2011). This is important for understanding the etiology of bully-victims for two reasons. First, one can't be a bully-victim without being victimized, and so increased levels of aggression/victimization likely associate with a higher number of bully-victims. Second, there is good reason to believe that it is the experience of being victimized that leads to becoming a bully-victim, and that bully-victims tend not to begin bullying others until after they are bullied themselves (Lereya, Copeland, Zammit, & Wolke, 2015).

Very few bully-victims are found to have been alpha-bullies previously, who are now being victimized (Lereya et al., 2015). The pathway of an alpha-bully becoming a bully-victim has been found to be very unlikely (Lereya et al., 2015). Instead the majority of bully-victims in secondary school were found to have been either victims or bully-victims at age 10 (Lereya et al., 2015). This indicates that victimization plays a larger role in the development of bully-victims than does their bullying of others. The bullying behavior among bully-victims is likely a reaction to being victimized, as opposed to their victimization being a reaction from their environment to their bullying behavior (Lereya et al., 2015). Therefore, it might be said that the experience of becoming a bully-victim is defined by experiences of victimization, and how one responds to being victimized. Findings indicate that children who are bullied show negative biases in their cognitive processing, a heightened expectation of threat and danger, changes in the

stress response system which may increase levels of impulsivity and aggression, and a

conditioned fear response which may lead the child to fight back, even if it is preemptive or

unnecessary (Lereya et al., 2015). Additionally. bully-victims have been found to interpret others

as being purposefully hostile and tend to state a desire to retaliate (Ziv et al., 2013).

      While these factors could be interpreted as individual factors, and not environmental

factors, I interpret these findings as being indicative of the effects that being victimized has on

what one learns about their environment. If a child has a home environment such as the one

described earlier to be common among bully-victims, and then is victimized at school, then it is

not just their interpretation that their environment is hostile, it is the truth. It is important to

remember that the environment interacts differently with different people. The same environment

can be supportive for one person, and very hostile to another, depending on how that

environment interacts with the individual. This characteristic of the environment is why low SES

was found to be associate with being victimized (Tippet & Wolke, 2014), and why race

associates with bullying as well (Goldweber et al., 2013).

      With regards to African American youth, research results regarding their bullying

involvement have been mixed (Goldweber et al., 2013). However, it has been suggested that

African American youth are less likely to report victimization, which would understandably

skew the results of research that uses self-report measures (Goldweber et al., 2013). Taking this

into consideration, Goldweber et al. (2013) found in their research that "African American youth

were more likely than their peers to be characterized by the victim and bully-victim groups than

the low involvement group" (p. 215). Further, there were not significant differences between

their membership in the victim and bully-victim groups. Additionally, youth characterized by the

bully-victim group were more likely to be African American than those characterized by other groups.

   While there is nothing inherent in an African American identity that predisposes one towards a victim or bully-victim status, the social environment interacts with African American students differently than it does with Caucasian students. Some of these differences include disproportionate disciplinary actions, increased perceptions of student aggressiveness, varying and hidden biases held by those who interact with them, and societal power structures which leave non-privileged individuals less powerful and more vulnerable, to name a few (Goldweber et al., 2013). The prevalence of racially biased victimization also changes by location, with urban environments having the highest rates (Goldweber et al., 2013). While exploring the racialized victimization of African American youth could be a thesis unto itself, it is beyond the scope of this paper to understand fully the interplay between privilege, power, victimization, and vulnerability to bully-victim status. However, it is clear from this example that aspects of the environment interact with a child's identity to make them more or less vulnerable to victimization, and more or less likely to behave aggressively towards others.

   Generally speaking, males are found to behave more aggressively towards others than females, and are more frequently identified as bullies (Veenstra et al., 2005). Additionally, females are found to engage in more relational forms of bullying, whereas males are found to engage in more overtly aggressive forms of bullying (Vaillancourt, Hymel, & McDougall, 2003). Some might suggest that there are biological factors which account for this difference, and certainly, male alpha-bullies are known to use their greater size and physicality to coerce peers (Vaillancourt et al., 2003). An association between size and bullying would be insufficient to suggest that biological factors account for the differences in bullying between boys and girls,

even if boys are physically larger, as size is still not an inherent quality of being male or female.

Instead, testosterone appears to be a likely candidate for explaining possible biological

differences between the bullying rates of boys and girls, since testosterone is often thought to be

associated with aggression, and males are thought to have higher levels of testosterone

(Vaillancourt, deCatanzaro, Duku, & Muir, 2009). Indeed, bullied boys are found to have

increased levels of testosterone, and bullied girls have lower levels (Vaillancourt et al., 2009),

which appears to indicate a possible reason why boys may be more likely to become bully-

victims and girls may be more likely to be victims. However, no causal directionality has been

established with these results, and the researchers speculate that testosterone levels increase or

decrease after being bullied in accordance with that individual's intended response to the

bullying incident (Vaillancourt et al., 2009). Since there are differences in how males and

females typically respond to bullying incidents, it may be that these differences account for the

differences in testosterone, and not the other way around (Vaillancourt et al., 2009).

It is widely regarded that female culture in school values relational competence, whereas

male culture in school values physicality (Vaillancourt et al., 2003), and it seems as though the

increasing testosterone in bullied males and decreasing testosterone in bullied females

conveniently coincides with these expectations; where males may be expected to respond with

aggressive posturing, and females may be expected to respond with compliance and tact.

Therefore, if testosterone levels in the bullied individual is effected by their intended response,

and their intended response is affected by socially constructed gender expectations, then the

gender differences found among bullied individuals are most likely accounted for by how the

environment interacts with gender, and not by biological differences. Research from Morales,

Yubero, and Larrañaga (2016) fits with this notion, as their findings indicate that "adherence to

masculinity gender traits are positively associated with being a bully for males and females" (p.

176). Interestingly, while both personal and socially construed masculinity had significant effects

on bullying behaviors in both males and females, femininity was only associated with a

reduction of bullying behaviors for girls (Morales et al., 2016). This may indicate cultural

restrictions on how males are expected to be and act, a socially constructed power differential

between genders that affords more opportunities for males to abuse their power, cultural

messaging which places undue value on masculine traits and devalues feminine traits, among

many other aspects of how gender interacts with the social environment.

On the point of cultural messaging, television exerts a large influence on people's

attitudes toward gender (Morales et al., 2016), and men's media use is associated with their

adherence to masculinity ideology (Giaccardi et al., 2016). Further, disparaging messages about

women in media can lead to sexist behaviors in men (Morales et al., 2016). Bully-victims are

known to watch a lot of television, and television watching has been found to have a large effect

on the probability of being a bully (Barboza et al., 2009). While some cite the association

between depictions of violence and aggressive behavior as the reason for this increase in bullying

behavior (Barboza et al., 2009), it may equally or more so be the portrayal of damaging

messages (such as toxic masculine norms) that accounts for this association. A critical finding to

consider, however, is that individuals with high television consumption who also have high

levels of teacher support are not more likely to bully others (Barboza et al., 2009). This makes

sense, considering Barboza et al.'s (2009) finding that deficits in social support may give rise to

bullying behaviors.

The television consumption among bully-victims may be a symptom of an overall lack of

support or engagement from critical people in their lives. It may be that television is a primary

source of learning about social expectations for bully-victims, since there's reason to believe that

their parents don't provide a safe or reliable resource to learn such things (Stevens et al., 2002).

Internalizing media portrayals of masculinity and objectifying women may also contribute to the

finding that bully-victims are more likely than other bullies to target girls (Rodkin, Espelage, &

Hanish, 2015), particularly since there may not be any positive role models in their life to check

these messages against. I would be reluctant to simply this as a matter of reducing television

consumption to reduce bullying, however, as television might be an important coping mechanism

for youth with little or no social support, and removing that without otherwise resourcing them

could be hazardous for their well-being. Considering that students who watch high amounts of

television but have high amounts of teacher support don't show increases in bullying behaviors

(Barboza et al., 2009), it would be reasonable to hope that teachers could simply offer the same

support to bully-victims and help reduce the effect television appears to have on their behavior.

However, as will be discussed later this chapter, bully-victims don't report having support from

teachers, and often report being treated very poorly by them (Berkowitz & Benbenishty, 2012).

With a difficult home situation (Stevens et al., 2002), little or no perceived teach support

(Berkowitz & Benbenishty, 2012), and violent and sexist messages from media (Morales et al.,

2016), it would seem that the last place bully-victims might learn pro-social interactional styles

is from their friends. However, the friends that bully-victims tend to associate with are well

documented to make matters worse (Barboza et al., 2009).

  Bully-victims differ quite drastically from alpha-bullies in terms of their social

relationships. Whereas alpha-bullies maintain large friend groups, mostly composed of

individuals not involved in bullying, bully-victims are frequently rejected and disliked by their

peers, and mostly form friend groups consisting of other bullies and victims (Farmer et al.,

2010). While support received from friends is, and should be, regarded as a positive resource in a

person's life, friend support is frequently found to be associated with increased instances of

bullying (Barboza et al., 2009). Conversely, emotional alienation from friends decreases bullying

perpetration (Barboza et al., 2009). A lack of friends is a common characteristic of victims, since

not having friends for support, defense, or alliances leaves one vulnerable to harassment (Jia &

Mikami, 2015). As such, it is possible that belonging to a friend group accounts for transitions

between victim status and bully-victim status, but this is only speculation. Regardless, given that

the friend groups of bully-victims are usually bullies and victims themselves, it is likely that the

group of friends reinforce each other's beliefs and perspectives that encourage bullying

behaviors. Previously, it was stated that bully-victims are more likely to interpret others as

having hostile intent (Ziv et al., 2013). Additionally, bully-victims have likely learned that their

environment is hostile, given their typical family lives and lack of social supports. In a group of

friends, all of which are likely to have had similar experiences, there may not be a diversity of

perspectives to challenge hostile interpretations of the environment and others in it. Members of

the group that engage in bullying behaviors likely act as role models for that behavior,

encouraging each other to engage in more bullying behaviors. After all, Bandura et al. (1963) did

find that role models for aggressive behaviors which share characteristics with the subject are

particularly effective at instilling aggression in the subject. This could then create a cycle of role

modeling aggression within the group that quickly escalates.

Overall, bully-victims appear to experience their environment quite differently than other

youth. There is a lack of support in most or all areas of their lives, and they are frequently

rejected and targeted by others. The question I most find myself asking is; "where do bully-

victims ever learn positive social skills?". The answer I've come to is; "potentially nowhere,

depending on their circumstance". It isn't difficult to see how a near complete lack of prosocial

role models might lead a child to lack prosocial interaction in their social lives. There is a berth

of research that points to "individual" factors, or "psychopathic traits", or otherwise internalizing

attributions of bullying behaviors. While some of the descriptions of internal factors in bully-

victims are accurate, I don't see it as appropriate to interpret these factors in a way that implies

certain children are bound to become bullies. I see these "internal factors" as a result of

environmental interactions with the individual to which the individual has adapted to. As such, it

is important when reading this next section that any of the information provided not be used as

justification to label someone as a "bad" kid. Instead, they should be taken as the internalized

consequences of a challenging environment.

Internal Factors

In this section, I will be looking at research regarding cognitive characteristics,

psychopathic traits, and attachment as they relate to bully-victim status. I do not consider these to

be intrinsic qualities of the individual, and I still maintain that they arise from interactions with

the environment. However, researchers may have a difficult time tracking when and how these

qualities arise. To research the relationship between these qualities and the environment would

likely require invasive research on subjects before they develop these qualities, which is likely at

a very young age. Identifying which subjects to observe before developing these cognitive and

personality traits would be very difficult. Since all the research linking cognitive or personality

characteristics to bullying will examine subjects who already possess these characteristics, it may

give the impression that these are static and unchanging qualities of the subject. It is important to

remember, however, that research only represents a snap shot of a specific aspect of a person's

life in a particular context, and that subjects identified as having certain cognitive or personality

qualities are not defined by those qualities in their daily life as they are in the research.

Nevertheless, the findings from this type of research is still valuable and may provide insights

that help both to understand bully-victims, and to understand the function of bullying in this

group.

On a cognitive level, bully-victims have been found to show poor inhibition (self-

control), working memory problems, and a higher likelihood of earing low non-verbal IQ scores

(Verlinden et al., 2014). Bully-victims are commonly found to have difficulties with social

competence (Cook et al., 2010; Vaillancourt et al., 2003; Farmer et al., 2010). They tend to have

inadequate social problem-solving skills (Cook et al., 2010), few socially valued characteristics

(Farmer et al., 2010), and perceive others as having hostile intent (Ziv et al., 2013). These

characteristics, combined with the cognitive impulsivity observed in those who bully others

(Walters & Espelage, 2018), may help to understand why bully-victims have aggressive

strategies for interacting with peers (van Dijk, Poorthuis, & Malti, 2017). It appears to be

difficult for bully-victims to remember and implement appropriate behavioral strategies, or to

resist aggressive impulses when they arise (Verlinden et al., 2014). These qualities tend to result

in peer rejection (Farmer et al., 2010), which likely makes issues around social competence and

understanding worse. Although earlier I suggested that experiences of victimization precede

bullying behaviors in bully-victims, it seems also to be the case that subsequent aggression may

lead to further victimization and rejection (Farmer et al., 2010; van Dijk et al., 2017). It is

unsurprising to me that bully-victims would have difficulties in the social domain, considering

that so many of them have difficult home lives, social deprivation, a lack of support, and may

have witnessed or been subject to frequent victimization at home. Witnessing and being subject

to hostile or inconsistent interactions may reinforce behaviors which appear maladaptive in the

school environment, but are in tune with contingencies of reinforcement that exist outside of school.

Bully-victims tend to have negative self-beliefs (Cook et al., 2010), and body dissatisfaction has been found to be strongly associated with bullying behaviors (Holubcikova et al., 2015). It wouldn't be unreasonable to expect that negative beliefs about the self might relate to hostile intent attributions towards others, considering that the negative beliefs one has about themselves may cause them to view themselves as more likely to be harassed, which is not totally unfounded. Body dissatisfaction is likely associated with an aspect of one's body which, while not inherently negative, is likely to be picked up on by other students, marking that individual as a target for harassment. The expectation of harassment might be enough for the individual to respond to others as though they have hostile intent. For bully-victims, this response is likely to be impulsive, and reactively aggressive (Bradshaw et al., 2008). Internally, it would be difficult to envision how one would become friends with other students, if the truth from their perspective involves negative self-beliefs. The subsequent aggression towards, and rejection from other students likely reinforces their internal working model of themselves and the world. Associating with other bullies and victims, as bully-victims often do (Farmer et al., 2010), is likely to add a level of confidence in their internal working model of the world which views others as hostile, and further reinforce the behaviors that ultimately brought these youth together. Given the overall lack of social support, and the overall social deprivation that bully-victims often experience (Morcillo et al., 2015; Barboza et al., 2009), finding a friend group of other social "outcasts" is likely to provide powerful reinforcement for the behaviors that led them to the friend group, as well as the behaviors which are also engaged in by other members of the group. However, it may be the case that so called "psychopathic traits" make an individual more

inclined to act aggressively towards others to begin with, and there is a lot of research around this topic (Fanti, Frick, & Georgiou, 2009; Ragatz, Anderson, Fremouw, & Schwartz, 2011; Fanti & Kimonis, 2013).

Regarding the psychopathic trait common referred to as callous-unemotionality, it has been found that callousness (lack of empathy, guilt, and remorse for misdeeds) is more predictive of bully-victim status than alpha-bully status, whereas traits of uncaring and unemotionality were less descriptive of bully-victims than alpha bullies (Fanti et al., 2009). Nonetheless, callous-unemotionality was found to have some predictive power of either bullying group (alpha-bully or bully-victim), whereas this trait did not at all predict victim or uninvolved status (Fanti et al., 2009). Another study found that, of the three psychopathy traits common examined (callous-unemotionality, narcissism, and impulsivity), impulsivity was more characteristic of bully-victims and victims, and narcissism was more characteristic of alpha-bullies, with callous-unemotionality being descriptive of both bullying subgroups (Fanti et al., 2009). One more study compliments these findings, adding that bully-victims are further distinguished from alpha-bullies by showing more criminal thinking, reactive aggression, and secondary psychopathy (irresponsibility, tendency to be self-defeating) (Ragatz et al., 2011). However, the subjects in each of these studies were beyond the age of 10, so it is unclear whether the qualities cause one to become a bully, or merely correlate with bully status.

It has been found that early markers of insecure attachments (at 6 months of age) are associated with callous-unemotionality later on (Wagner et al., 2016), that children age 3-5 showing conduct problems and callous-unemotionality over time also showed high levels of fearlessness and psychopathic traits over time (with increases or decreases in CP and CU associating with increases or decreases to the fearlessness and psychopathic traits) (Klingzell et

al., 2016), and that individuals with more secure attachments to their parents are less likely to

bully others (the predictive value of parental attachment on bullying behaviors was large and

significant) (Murphy, Liable, & Augustine 2017). Given that there appears to be an association

between markers of early attachment and callous-unemotionality, an association between

callous-unemotionality and other psychopathic traits, an association between psychopathic traits

and bullying, and an association between attachment security and bullying, I am inclined to

believe that attachment security may be a causal factor for both bullying, and psychopathic traits.

Several studies have identified a positive association between insecure parental

attachment and bullying behaviors (Murphy et al., 2017; Walden & Beran, 2010; Eliot &

Cornell, 2009; Innamorati et al., 2018). For clarity, findings from these studies indicate that

individuals with less attachment security to their parents or others are more likely to bully their

peers than are individuals with more attachment security. Additionally, individuals with lower

quality attachment relationships were more frequently found to be victims of bullying (Murphy

et al., 2017; Walden & Beran, 2010). Further, it was found that among individuals with lower

parental attachment security, those with higher peer attachment security were less likely to bully

others (Murphy et al., 2017). This is interesting, considering the findings from other studies

which indicate that friendships contribute to an increase in bullying behaviors (Barboza et al.,

2009). Regarding psychopathy, attachment insecurity has been found in multiple studies to

predict psychopathic traits, such as those described earlier (Christian, Sellbom, & Wilkinson.

2017; Schimmenti et al., 2014; Mack, Hackney, & Pyle, 2011). It would appear then, that

attachment plays a critical role in the development of bullying behaviors.

Attachment security has a large impact on the development of a child's social

competence (Bowlby, 1969; Murphy et al., 2017), and plays a critical role in how children relate

to themselves and others (Murphy et al., 2017). Children who are rejected, neglected, or

inconsistently attended to, construct negative internal working models of themselves and others,

and are likely to be rejecting or ambivalent towards their relationships (Murphy et al., 2017).

Children with secure parental attachments, on the other hand, are typically more socially

competent, more accepted by peers, have higher quality relationships, and show better emotional

regulation compared to insecurely attached individuals (Berlin, Cassidy, & Appleyard, 2008;

Sroufe, 2005). Insecurely attached individuals share a lot in common with what research says

about bully-victims, including poor emotional regulation, poor social problem-solving skills, and

problematic social information processing (Murphy et al., 2017).

For bully-victims, possessing negative internal working models of others lines up with

other research indicating that they make hostile intent attributions to others (Ziv et al., 2013). If

their internal working models of others in the world around them are consistently negative, and

the environment in which they live is predominantly human-made, then it may be the case that

the environment as a whole appears hostile to bully-victims. Repeated punishing interactions

with others, such as victimization and a troublesome homelife, would likely reinforce this view

of the world, stoking their expectations of being treated with hostile intent. I would ask the

reader to consider, if the world really were hostile, and other people in the world really did have

hostile intent towards you, how would you respond to that? What would you do to protect

yourself? The answer to these questions will be different from person to person, but I remember

as a child I would respond to hostile others with explosive reactionary anger, so I can somewhat

relate to what bully-victims might be feeling when they are provoked.

It is possible that bully-victims experience a low threshold for provocation, or even

become provoked preemptively by the expectation of hostility. However, research clearly

indicates that the aggression from bully-victims is not entirely reactionary (Ragatz et al., 2011), and there is evidence to suggest that bullying others makes them feel better about themselves (Johnston et al., 2014). Even still, it is not difficult to imagine how the contingencies of reinforcement in a world that appears very hostile might favor aggression. With low attachment security, children are known to view themselves and others as unworthy (Murphy et al., 2017). Given the negative self-beliefs and poor mental health that bully-victims tend to show (Cook et al. 2010; Lereya et al., 2015), it may be the case that they view themselves as deserving of the poor treatment they receive in their lives. If they view themselves and others as unworthy, the feelings they have about themselves may generalize to others as well, offering them the point of view that others also deserve to receive poor treatment, providing them justification for bullying. The evidence thus far, through my interpretation, appears to indicate a predominantly social-learning and attachment-based etiology of bully-victim status.

There are still a number of factors which I think are relevant to the understanding of bully-victims and the function of bullying in this group, which I have left out of the discussion up to this point. I felt that these factors were descriptive of the experience of already being a bully-victim and wanted to present these factors together to provide an image of what being a bully-victim is like. Further, looking into the experience of being a bully-victim may provide clues as to the contingencies of reinforcement which maintain bullying behaviors in this group.

Being a Bully-Victim

Aspects of the lived experience of bully-victims regarding family and social life have been covered already, since these factors may also contribute to the development and maintenance of bullying in this group. As such, I won't be restating those factors in this section, but I encourage the reader to bear in mind the impact that friends and family have on the daily

lives of bully-victims as they read this section. I also encourage the reader to consider how the factors outlined in this section combine with family and social factors to reinforce a view of the world as being hostile.

Given their propensity towards aggression and violence (Perren & Hornung, 2005), it would be understandable to expect that bully-victim status associates with the perpetration of dating abuse and violence. However, to the surprise of researchers, findings strongly suggest that bully-victims are not the perpetrators of dating violence but are instead the victims of it (Espelage & Holt, 2007; Foshee et al., 2016). In fact, bully-victims report significantly more dating violence and peer sexual harassment than any other bullying subgroup (alpha-bully, victim, uninvolved), and suffer more emotional abuse in dating relationships than victims or uninvolved students (Espelage & Holt, 2007). The association between bullying perpetration and dating violence perpetration is strongest when there is no bullying victimization (Foshee et al., 2016). Foshee et al. (2016) found that "those who perpetrated the most dating violence were those perpetrating the greatest amount of bullying, but experiencing no bullying victimization. This was the case for both boys and girls" (p. 75). Additionally, anger was found to mediate the association between bullying perpetration and dating violence perpetration at all levels of bullying victimization, whereas depression, anxiety, and social status did not mediate this association whatsoever (Foshee et al., 2016). Being the recipient of sexual harassment did, however, moderate the association between bully-victim status and anxiety/depression, which indicates that anxiety and depression are not causes of sexual harassment, but are results of it (Espelage & Holt, 2007).

It is possible that existing anxiety and depression make one more vulnerable to dating abuse, as these qualities often relate to self-blaming attributions, negative self-beliefs, perceived

controllability of the abuse, and perceived stability of the abuse (ie. will the abuse stop, and can I

do anything to stop it?) (Espelage & Holt, 2007; Lereya et al., 2015). Additionally, it was

mentioned earlier that bully-victims often come from a difficult homelife, and have poor

attachment security. It may be the case, as is often proposed in attachment theory, that the

attachments which one shares with their parents influence the ways that individuals form

intimate relationships later in life (Collins & Read, 1990). Individuals who experience abuse and

neglect at home may be predisposed to find intimate relationships that are characterized by

similar types of neglect and abuse. Given that insecurely attached individuals are more likely to

be perpetrators and victims of bullying (Walden & Beran, 2010), as well as the victims of

aggression in dating relationships (Karakurt, Keiley, & Posada, 2013), it begins to make sense

why bully-victims would be the recipients of dating abuse, and not the perpetrators of it. It would

appear as though there is an overall lack of safety for bully-victims in their families, social

settings, and in their dating relationships. One would hope that bully-victims would at least be

able to garner support and safety from their schools. Sadly, this does not seem to be the case.

    Bully-victims report feeling less connected to their school, and less safe than all other

students (Bradshaw et al., 2008). They also report the lowest level of teacher support, and miss

more school because of fear than any other group (Berkowitz & Benbenishty, 2012). Bully-

victims often have negative relationships with teachers (Berkowitz & Benbenishty, 2012), and

are the most likely students to suffer maltreatment by school staff (Khoury-Kassabri, 2009).

Overall, bully-victims report low levels of social support from teachers, parents, and other

students (Demaray & Malecki, 2003; Holt & Espelage, 2007), yet bully-victims and victims rate

social support as being more important than do alpha-bullies or uninvolved youth (Demaray &

Malecki, 2003). This relationship to teachers and school staff seems to parallel the relationship to

parents mentioned earlier, in which the bully-victim has needs which are not being met, and instead suffer from neglect and abuse. Bully-victims suffer from neglect, abuse, and rejection from peers, family, school staff, and intimate partners. Unsurprisingly, bully-victim status has been found to associate with a range of mental health problems, particularly depression and anxiety (Lereya et al., 2015; Isolan, Salum, Osowski, Zottis, & Manfro, 2013).

The lived experience of a bully-victim appears to involve many layers of neglect and abuse. Considering the negative relationships they experience with family, peers, school staff, and intimate partners, I find myself wondering asking the question; "If bully-victims were to learn a more adaptive way of relating to others, where and from whom are they going to learn that?". Although bully-victims often experience some support from their friends, findings indicate more peer support for bully-victims and victims associates with higher levels of anxiety and depression (Holt & Espelage, 2007). While there are no definitive findings that explain this association, there are a number of reasons why it might be there. First, the study doesn't specify which peers are providing this support.

Given the frequency with which bully-victims are bullied, it is possible that the same peers which are providing support are also victimizing bully-victims. This dissonance in their relationships with peers may be confusing and more assaulting to the well-being of bully-victims, since being victimized by the same individuals who support them likely sends negative messages about their self-worth, and creates expectations of abuse coming from individuals they're supposed to be able to trust. Inconsistency in parental responsiveness, monitoring, and punishment was found to relate to bully-victim status, so perhaps it's possible that this type of inconsistency from peers has a similar effect. Alternatively, or additionally, since bully-victims often become a part of groups consisting of other bullies and victims, it may be that the peers

they receive support from have their own difficulties relating to others and forming secure

attachments, which may result in an entire group of friends trying to support each other, but only

being able to show their support in damaging ways. Either way, I believe a sufficient amount of

information has been looked at in order to provide some understanding of bully-victims, as well

a prediction as to the function of bullying in this group.

Beholding a Bully-Victim

Bully-victims bully more than alpha-bullies, and are victimized more than victims

(Demaray & Malecki, 2003). Their relationships with their parents are often fraught, and harmful

parenting techniques are predictive of bully-victim status later on (Stevens et al., 2002).

Parenting characterized by neglect, abuse, and inconsistent monitoring and punishment, creates

the foundation of an insecure attachment relationship with their children (Walden & Beran,

2010). Findings strongly indicate the predictive power of harmful parenting and insecure

attachments on bully-victim status (Stevens et al., 2002; Walden & Beran, 2010). Among

siblings, behaviors learned from the parents are likely to enter into their relationship, creating

bully/victim dynamics that may reinforce bullying behaviors early on (Dantchev & Wolke,

2019). In accordance with social learning theory (Bandura, 1971), having aggressive and

bullying behaviors modeled for them by parents and siblings should increase aggressive and

bullying behaviors in children (Bandura et al., 1963). Observing family members provides the

earliest opportunity to see how people to relate to power, and observing frequent abuses or

misuses of power in the home stokes expectations for how others will relate to power, and how

they themselves should relate to power.

Insecure attachment can instill negative internal working models of the self and others in

the world, and predispose one towards forming insecure attachments and negative relationships

in the future (Murphy et al., 2017; Karakurt et al., 2013). Additionally, children may have a lot

of difficulty developing adequate social skills and competencies if their home lives are

characterized by discord, and coming from such a home may impact the cognitive capabilities of

a child in terms of social understanding, working memory, and skills related to academic

performance (Lugo-Gil & Tamis-LeMonda, 2008). Given findings that indicate a positive

association between parenting quality and cognitive development (Lugo-Gil & Tamis-LeMonda,

2008), children with difficult home lives may be doubly disadvantaged. It is not unreasonable

that, if one's family behaves in a hostile manner at the home, a child may begin to expect

hostility from other people as well. Hostile intent attributions projected onto others, likely causes

one to react to others with the expectation of conflict. This, combined with their impeded social

competencies, may cause them to behave in a way that is not popular with other children.

Additionally, having observed aggressive behaviors in the home, and likely having been bullied

at home, these children are likely to be predisposed towards aggressive behaviors, which would

also make them unpopular with teachers. Their unpopularity with other students, and the absence

of a trusting relationship with teachers or parents, makes bully-victims particularly vulnerable to

harassment, and it would appear that their peers are aware of this vulnerability and capitalize on

it.

       The peer subjugation that bully-victims experience offers them a view of how powerful

peers relate to power, in that they abuse it and treat others poorly. This is in line with their

previous observations regarding how their parents relate to power. Additionally, this relationship

to power is reinforced by social messages regarding race, gender, ability, sexuality, and other

sources of privilege. Given that bully-victims consume a lot of television, with little likelihood of

having these messages contextualized by the adults in their lives, there is a good chance that they

are internalizing messages supporting objectification, abuse, and other misuses of power towards less powerful individuals. They also may have witnessed or had their own experiences regarding intergroup dynamics of power, privilege, and abuse. These dynamics are likely to play out at school, where any characteristic of one's self or identity may be used against them when they're being bullied (UNESCO, 2017). The question then becomes; "if an individual repeatedly and consistently observes people relating to power by using it against the will of less powerful individuals, how can they be expected to relate to power when they have it?".

The answer to this question will likely result from an interaction between witnessing the abuse of power and one's own characteristics. Individuals with psychopathic traits such as callous-unemotionality and impulsiveness (which I maintained are learned ways of being, instilled in them through life experience), in addition to their temperament and the exact nature of their lived experience, are likely more capable of replicating the abuses of power they've witnessed in their lives through the aggressive abuse of power towards others. A person who responds in this way repeatedly, who also has a history of being victimized themselves, is now a bully-victim. This reality likely makes them even less popular, especially considering that their observed deficits in working memory and difficulties understanding and applying social rules makes them less likely to use these power abuses strategically to their own benefit. This results in highly visible, non-strategic target selection and abuse, such as when boys target girls, or bully-victims target individuals who are liked by, or have alliances with more powerful peers. Non-strategic bullying marks a bully-victim for peer retaliations, and punishment from teachers and parents. Despite the best intentions from adults, being overly-punitive of bully-victims is likely to show, once again, the coercive use of power against the will of a less powerful individual, confirming the bully-victim's expectations for how to relate to power.

The bully-victim is likely to form friendships with other bullies and victims, all of whom perpetrate and/or are subjected to the coercive use of power against the will of less powerful individuals. Given a lack of support in other areas, this group may become a bully-victim's primary source of support, where bully/victim interactions are central to the group's identity and culture. Their own perpetration of bullying, and their group's reinforcement of that behavior, likely creates a dissonance in the youth resulting from their experiences of victimization that is difficult for them to identify or understand, and this may be a reason why bully-victims show more depression when they have more peer support. The experiences that bully-victims have in their social world likely builds an image of themselves that is self-deprecating and contributes to their internal working model of themselves in relation to others. When looking for intimate relationships, these negative beliefs likely affect the bully-victim's expectations for how they should be treated in a relationship, and their viability as a partner. This leaves them vulnerable to relationship abuse, since they are unlikely to avoid or leave abusive relationships due to a belief that they either can't do better, or don't deserve to (Sprecher, 1998). By this point, a bully-victim may have suffered bullying, harassment, and abuse from every category of person that has power over them (parents, teachers, peers, partners). While this is merely a description of a caricature of a bully-victim, the aspects of this example provided reflect the findings in the research I've presented thus far. Within this description lies what I believe the function of bullying among bully-victims is.

Before I state the function of bullying in this group as I see it, it is important not to take this conclusion as necessarily applicable to all bully-victims. For that matter, the same can be said for the function of bullying among alpha-bullies I provided earlier. Each individual is unique and dynamic, and it could be the case that the function of bullying for some bully-victims

is the same as that for alpha-bullies. There are some researchers who believe that bully-victims

bully others in an unsuccessful attempt to gain power (Evans, & Smokowski, 2016). I am

skeptical of this explanation, since it is difficult for me to see how an unsuccessful attempt to

gain power would reinforce bullying behaviors across multiple years and settings. Almost

universally, bully-victims have very low social rank and are disliked by peers, and given that

they are bullied more frequently than victims are (Demaray & Malecki, 2003), it is almost

surprising that they bully at all, since behaviors tend to diminish in frequency after consistent

punishment (Skinner, 1969). I see it as very unlikely that the function of bullying among bully-

victims is the same as that for alpha-bullies, wherein the bullying protects their upward social

movements. Since they make little to no social upward movement, there would be nothing to

protect. Therefore, in the context of bullying research, I believe the function of bullying among

bully-victims is different than that for alpha-bullies. If the function of bullying is different

between these two groups, then what is the function of bullying for bully-victims?

The inconvenient answer to the function of bullying for bully-victims is that I'm unsure,

and I think there's more than one. I am confident in having answered the research question, since

it seems apparent that bullying behaviors for bully-victims do not interact with the environment

in a way that helps confer social power to the perpetrator. However, there may be within group

hierarchies among the friend groups of bully-victims defined by a culture of bullying, in which

bullying does confer power within the group. Under this framework, their experiences of

victimization, and witnessing of the benefits conferred to alpha-bullies, may reveal contingencies

of reinforcement to the bully-victim which they then try replicate for themselves. Although they

are not experiencing gains in school-wide social power, they may experience gains in group-

based social power. Alternatively, since bully-victims have difficulties with social relationships,

the bullying may be an effort to fit in with other bully-victims. In this case, the function of

bullying could be to mark the bully-victim's viability for membership to specific groups. Since

the world may appear hostile to the bully-victim anyways, the fact that they upset the majority of

their peers with their behaviors is likely not perceived as an actual loss, in that they were never

going to have approval from those people anyways.

      One function of bullying for this group may be self-defense. It stands to reason that

someone who reacts on impulse with aggression may be a difficult target for harassment.

Clearly, this strategy doesn't work very well, since bully-victims are bullied more than victims

are (Demaray & Malecki, 2003), but if this strategy is reinforced some of the time, that could be

enough. So long as the bully-victim believes that others are targeting them less on account of

their own bullying behaviors, this will likely provide powerful reinforcement for the behavior,

and may even give the appearance that bullying is their best or only defense against being

victimized. Alternatively, bullying others may not have any impact on the frequency with which

the bully-victim is targeted, but may instead impact the manner in which they are targeted. It is

possible that those who target a bully-victim may respond to the bully-victim's displays of

aggression by opting for methods of harassment that the bully-victim finds more tolerable. For

example, a bully-victim who physically aggresses weaker peers may be less likely to be

physically aggressed themselves, even if they aren't bullied less on a whole. They may find

relational forms of bullying more tolerable than being physically bullied, and so their aggression

is likely to be reinforced in this case.

      Emotional congruence may be another function of bullying, wherein the bully-victim

behaves in a way that is congruent with what they're feeling, as opposed to bottling that feeling

up. Since bully-victims are the most likely group to miss school due to fear (Berkowitz &

Benbenishty, 2012), it is possible that fear is the motivation for bullying behaviors, as bully-victims react to their fear with a fight response. However, this explanation has some holes in it, as they are victimizing individuals whom they less likely to be afraid of. There would have to be a generalized fear of the environment for this explanation to check out in my mind. It may also be the case that bully-victims take a dichotomous view of personal interactions, where one is either a bully or a victim, and their bullying of others marks an attempt to create relationships in which they are not the victims themselves. The finding that bully-victims feel good after bullying (Johnston et al., 2014) others may support this notion, since it probably feels good to not be the recipient of power abuses in certain conflictual relationships. Alternatively, bullying for bully-victims may be reinforced by the fact that they have power, since a power-differential is necessarily present in bullying (Vaillancourt et al., 2003). I view this as one of the more likely functions of bullying, but it takes some explanation.

All people, whether aware of it or not, have been observing the ways that other people relate to power for their entire lives. For bully-victims, seeing abuses of power in their family and among their peers may teach them that the coercive use of power against the will of a less powerful individual is "what you do" when you have power, and that bullying is "how you know" you have power. Therefore, in the presence of an individual the bully-victim has power over, the only way they know how to relate to that power is by using it against the less powerful individual through bullying behaviors. This may simply be how power works in the mind of a bully-victim. In this case, the function of bullying could simply be the knowledge of how to act in certain situations, which would make sense given findings which indicate that they have difficulty in social situations. Alternatively, the function could be knowing they have power, and feeling that power, in the context of a lifetime of not having power and being the recipient of

power abuses. This creates a "pay it forward" effect, where for the bully-victim, "it's my turn" to

have and feel power. It would be naïve to deny that it feels good to have power, and in the

absence of prosocial ways of having and using power, there may be an intrinsic satisfaction tied

to antisocial ways of having and using power. Findings indicate that bullying others makes the

perpetrator feel good (Johnston et al., 2014), and this may help to explain why. It is also possible

that bullying provides the negative reinforcement of removing the feeling of powerlessness. The

presence of callous-unemotionality and anger may help to encourage the individual to resort to

these means of feeling power. Nonetheless, the bully-victim does suffer consequences of these

actions, since bullying is linked to depression (Seals & Young, 2003). This is my preferred

function of bullying, if I were to state only one. However, I do believe that there are many

functions of bullying for bully-victims, and that the function depends more on the individual than

it does on their research classification; bully-victim. My investigation into the function of

bullying for bully-victims has provided a scattered answer, but there is a way to tie all these

functions together.

     In the previous chapter, I suggested the term "peer oppression" as the functional

description for bullying behavior among alpha-bullies. Through the investigation made in this

chapter, I have found good cause to suggest "internalized peer oppression" as the functional

description for bullying among bully-victims. Internalized oppression is a process by which an

oppressed group begins to use the methods of their oppressors against themselves, and desire to

become more like the privileged group due to the higher social value placed on that group (David

& Derthick 2014). An example of internalized oppression provided by David & Derthick (2014),

is the use of skin-whitening products in much of the world. The World Health Organization has

linked these products to scarring, skin rashes, kidney failure, and mental health concerns. A

devaluation of a characteristic of non-white individuals has occurred (ie. their skin colour), and many respond to this by trying to become more like the privileged group. While more proximal reinforcements for trying to appear more white might include the satisfaction of having what the individual views as a more pleasing appearance, a perception that whiter skin confers better work or social prospects, an effort to fit in with friends, or a wide range of other reinforcers, the valuation of white skin is itself a function of the white supremacist oppression that has occurred across the world. Therefore, despite the proximal reinforcements experienced on a personal level for those engaging in skin-whitening, the presence of skin-whitening products in society functions as an adherence to the prejudicial values laid out by a privileged group. Valuing white skin over darker skin is one of many forms of oppression, and whitening one's own skin in adherence to these values represents the internalization of this oppression.

Many parallels can be drawn to bullying behaviors. Alpha-bullies are high up in the social hierarchies at school, and bullying is one of their means of oppression. They decide, based on values of their choosing, who should be bullied and who shouldn't. For bully-victims, who are typically victimized before they begin bullying others (Lereya et al., 2015), adherence to the practice of bullying others, and the targeting of certain individuals who are bullied enough to be classified as victims, represents an internalization of the values laid out by the alpha-bullies and other role models. Given that alpha-bullies are, by definition, not victimized by their peers, they continue to be privileged when individuals other than alpha-bullies bully others. Bully-victims, on the other hand, appear to become even more disliked by their peers as a result of bullying others, and so their adherence to the values of bullying comes at a personal cost, and may even contribute to the continued oppression of bully-victims. Even though many of the functions of bullying I suggested earlier may serve as more proximal reinforcements for this behavior, the

bullying behaviors of victimized individuals is itself a function of the peer oppression they are made to endure. David & Derthick (2014) provide a partial list of the characteristics of internalized oppression, many of which fit quite well with the research provided thus far.

Aspects of bully-victims' experience which adhere to the characteristics of internalized oppression are as follows;

Bully-victims uncritically devalue their own groups or selves (as is seen with their negative self-beliefs), and may or may not also uncritically value another group (such as alpha-bullies). This is a common experience for members of various oppressed groups (which may help to explain why African American students are more likely to become bully-victims). Some members of oppressed groups experience this internalized oppression while others do not, the severity of the internalized oppression differs between individuals, and the manifestations of internalized oppression differs between individuals and between groups (think of within group differences between bully-victims, and group differences between bully-victims and victims). "It may be passed on from generation to generation or from one person to the next through socialization and continued experiences of oppression" (p. 23) (consider the effects that parents and school staff have on bullying behaviors). "It can develop at a very young age and last a lifetime" (p. 23) and "It may exist and operate automatically, outside of awareness, intention, or control" (p. 23) (consider the etiology described earlier, and the difficulties in social information processing that bully-victims may have). It is a result of, and perpetuating force of oppression, maintaining structures of power that benefit the privileged (consider that there are common traits of both victims and alpha-bullies that are predictive of their group membership and act as reasons to, or not to bully someone). "It engages the oppressed in the work of their own oppression through intrapersonal and intragroup violence and destruction" (p. 23). It affects the ways people think

and feel about themselves and others, as well as how they behave generally, and towards other

oppressed individuals. Although this characteristic is not addressed by anything provided in this

chapter, whether or not peer oppression influences how bully-victims think and feel about, and

behave towards the dominant group (alpha-bullies) would be a worthwhile topic of investigation.

"It has serious consequences for behavioral and mental health" (p. 23), bully-victims are known

to be at risk of many consequences that would satisfy this characteristic. The internalized

oppression is a result of learning and conditioning experiences, and it can be unlearned. This last

characteristic is crucially important to the understanding of how to help bully-victims. This is the

end of the partial list of characteristics of internalized oppression provided by David and

Derthick (2014), and nearly every item has applicability to bully-victims. I believe this to be

powerful support to the conceptualization of bullying behaviors from bully-victims as a function

of internalized peer oppression.

Conclusion

A lot of information has been provided in this chapter regarding the development and

lived experience of bully-victims. Bully-victims may undergo a lifetime of victimization, and

their particular life experiences are bound to affect their knowledge and understanding of their

social environments. They are frequently the victim of, and a witness to the abuses of power

made by others, potentially with such frequency that they have no other working model for how

to relate to power when they have it. Bully-victims lack social supports in all areas of their lives,

and many are subject to an overall social deprivation which leaves them seriously disadvantaged

by the time they enter the school environment. Learning which predisposes them towards

bully/victim dynamics seem to have a hugely negative effect on their social competencies and

their popularity at school. These disadvantages work against them in a cycle which both harms

them and reinforces behaviors which contribute to their own harm. It is crucial when interacting

with bully-victims that their social learning be taken into account, as reacting to them in overly

punitive or otherwise coercive ways will contribute to the learning that has harmed them so

much to begin with. I have made several conclusions regarding the function of bullying in this

group, and I am confident in my assessment of bullying in this group as a function of internalized

peer oppression. I am also confident that bullying behaviors between the two bullying subgroups

is structurally similar, but functionally different. However, I still feel a level of uncertainty in my

assessment of bully-victims, which I maintain is a good thing, since certainty can often impede

curiosity and prevent one from asking questions that are crucial to understanding the experiences

of another.

In the final chapter, I will discuss some implications and suggestions for the treatment and

intervention of bullying behaviors in both groups. I will also discuss the limitations of this study,

and make recommendations for future research and conceptualizations of bullying behaviors. I

will then offer some final thoughts with regards to bullying behaviors.

CHAPTER 4

FINAL THOUGHTS

Summary of Findings

The goal in writing this thesis was to determine and clarify the contingencies of reinforcement which propagate bullying behaviors so as to identify key areas to address when working to combat the problem of bullying in school. I hypothesized that bullying behaviors among alpha-bullies and bully-victims would be functionally different; in that I would find differing contingencies of reinforcement when studying one group to the exclusion of the other. It should be noted that I do not believe it is possible to know with certainty what motivates and reinforces each individual bully's bullying behaviors without knowing the individual more personally. However, I still believe that I have offered a strong argument that confirms my hypothesis.

Regarding alpha-bullies, I concluded that their bullying behaviors are a manifestation of their dominance behaviors. Bullying in this group works more to protect upward social movement than it does to create it; it projects the dominance of the alpha-bully, and the likely costs associated with challenging them. Alpha-bullies tend to show both bullying behaviors and prosocial behaviors (Farmer et al., 2010), and I believe that the targets of each type of behavior can be reasonably predicted by the anticipated effects on the alpha-bully's overall social status. That is to say, alpha-bullies are unlikely to bully a target if doing so would diminish their social status. Additionally, they are likely to show prosocial behaviors towards individuals when doing so either improves or insulates their social status. The strategic nature of an alpha-bully's target selection suggests that there is an awareness and attunement to the contingencies in place for bullying each individual, and that their choice of target is made with specific care for how

harassing that target will affect the power they hold within the social hierarchy of their class, and

of their school. In this way, the bullying behaviors of alpha-bullies appear to propagate a system

of oppression within their school that privileges the powerful alpha-bullies (and their allies), and

disadvantages individuals of their choosing. It is important to note that alpha-bullies are typically

already privileged and powerful due to the numerous socially desirable traits they possess

(Vaillancourt et al., 2003). Their bullying behaviors represent an abuse of the power they already

hold, as opposed to an effort to gain power. This quality of the bullying behavior of alpha-bullies

makes it remarkably similar to the way oppression works in broader society (Deutsch, 2006).

This is why I have offered the functional description, peer-oppression, for the bullying behaviors

of alpha-bullies within the school environment.

It was much more difficult to determine the function of bullying among bully-victims.

This behavior appears to not benefit them in any meaningful way regarding their position in their

social hierarchies (Farmer et al., 2010). There may be more proximal benefits to bullying which

motivate bully-victims (such as feeling better about themselves, an attempt to dissuade others

from harassing them, or participating in the culture of a small group of friends), but the majority

of research in this area suggests that students identified as bully-victims suffer worse outcomes

than their peers (Stuart & Jose, 2014). Research appears to indicate that bully-victims would be

better off if they stopped bullying others and simply became victims. This finding makes it very

difficult to identify what motivates bullying behaviors in this group from a functional analytic

perspective. However, when looking at the typical life experiences of bully-victims (as detailed

in the bullying literature), a trend starts to emerge. Bully-victims often have a history of being

targeted by or witnessing the coercive use of power that one has over another individual across

many settings. Bullying literature indicates that it is typical for a bully-victim to be victimized by

their parents (Stevens et al., 2002), siblings (Dantchev & Wolke, 2019), peers (Cook et al.,

2010), teachers (Berkowitz & Benbenishty, 2012), and relationship partners (Espelage & Holt,

2007). Each of these relationships offers role models for the bully-victim which show them a

way of interacting with power that is predicated on the abuse of less powerful individuals.

Without specific intervention, a bully-victim may never learn prosocial ways of holding power.

As such, it may be the case that the only way they know how to interact with power when they

have it is to abuse other individuals. Making things more difficult, is the finding that bully-

victims have certain cognitive disadvantages that make it more difficult for them to critically

analyze how their behaviors affect others (Verlinden et al., 2014). Additionally, insecure parental

and peer attachments appear to be predictive of bully-victim status (Murphy et al., 2017; Walden

& Beran, 2010; Eliot & Cornell, 2009; Innamorati et al., 2018) and contributes the quality and

structure of their personal relationships.

Given the consistently poor treatment they are subjected to, and their witnessing of

bullying behaviors throughout their lives, bully-victims would be well within reason to believe

their environment is hostile, and that others have hostile intent towards them. This characteristic

of the bully-victim's environment is the support for my view that bullying among bully-victims

represents an internalization of the behaviors they are targeted by and a witness to, as opposed to

a view which suggests that bullying others stems from internal qualities. Put simply, a bully-

victim's tendency to bully others stems from their environment, as opposed to their own

characteristics. It is, however, likely that certain characteristics make individuals more

vulnerable to becoming bully-victims. I offered the functional description of bullying behaviors

in this group; internalized peer oppression. Since I suggested that the bullying behaviors of

alpha-bullies is peer oppression, and that the bullying behaviors of bully-victims is an

internalization of the behaviors directed at them or shown to them, internalized peer oppression

seems descriptive of the bullying behaviors of this group. It also closely resembles the

characteristics of internalized oppression put forward by David & Derthick (2014). Given these

findings, I have arrived at the conclusion that my central hypothesis; the bullying behaviors of

alpha-bullies and bully-victims are structurally similar but functionally different, is at least

plausible. In my opinion, there is more evidence to suggest my hypothesis is correct, than there is

to suggest that it is incorrect.

Implications

While my research led me to frame bullying in terms of school-based oppression, this is

likely not the only conclusion I could have arrived at. However, I believe it offers a useful frame

of reference for examining the ways that bullying in school perpetuates school-based structural

inequalities. There is also evidence that societal based structural inequalities influence the

bullying structure within school. For example, males are more likely to bully (Veenstra et al.,

2005), African American students are proportionately more likely to be victims or bully-victims

(Goldweber et al., 2013), and world-wide bullying statistics indicate that females and LGBTQ

youth are more likely to be the targets of bullying behaviors (UNESCO, 2017). Each of these

characteristics of bullying prevalence mirrors oppression in society at large, in terms of who

benefits, who is worse off, and who is more likely to exhibit internalized oppression. As a result,

one of my main conclusions is that bullying in school represents a school-based system of

privilege and oppression. However, my classifications of bullying behaviors may miss or ignore

details from the lives of those affected by bullying, and the particulars of an individual's life

should be privileged over broader classifications when helping individual students. Nonetheless,

there does appear to be a dynamic system of oppression that influences the bullying behaviors of

school-aged youth. I predict that bullying in school and oppression in society are inextricably

linked in a two-way interaction. That is, witnessing oppression in society makes students more

inclined to bully others and determines which youth are more vulnerable, and the structure of

bullying in school that benefits certain individuals to the detriment of others makes perpetrators

more inclined to support systems of oppression outside of the school environment. It is beyond

the scope of this thesis to confirm or deny this prediction, but I believe that it is a worthwhile

area of study.

One of my conclusions in this thesis is that bully-victims have had bullying behaviors

modeled for them across many settings, especially at home, and that this role-modeling

contributes to their overall bullying behaviors. The same research that describes how parents

role-model bullying behaviors to their children also describe a similar dynamic in the families of

alpha-bullies, wherein their parents typically have a power imbalance between them, and the

more powerful parent demonstrates the coercive use of this power (Stevens et al., 2002). It would

appear that the presence of role models who relate to their power by abusing less powerful

individuals is an etiological factor that alpha-bullies and bully-victims share in common.

Therefore, with regards to intervention, I see it as crucial that teachers and other potential role

models demonstrate a prosocial use of the power they hold. A harsh or aggressively assigned

punishment laid against bullies may make the problem worse. Despite best intentions, the way

teachers punish students can resemble a coercive use of their power against the will of the less

powerful students, which closely fits the key characteristics of bullying. Obviously, any type of

physical punishment, aside from being morally wrong, will resemble bullying behavior very

closely. Further, students may simply learn how to avoid punishment, as opposed to changing

their behavior in any meaningful way. Some evidence of this can be seen in alpha-bullies'

harassment of youth who do not report being victimized (Petrosino, Guckenburg, DeVoe, & Hanson, 2010; UNESCO, 2017). In addition to these types of punishment likely not having the intended effect, they may simply represent an after-the-fact intervention which does nothing to affect the contingencies which reinforce bullying, and the bullying has likely already been reinforced by the time these punishments take place. Since bullies often view their punishments as unjust (McAdams & Schmidt, 2007), this may only serve to diminish trust between the student and the teacher. Since the teacher is well positioned to help reduce the likelihood of bullying in the future, losing the bully's trust is a wasted opportunity.

Instead, I would recommend taking time at the beginning of a term to clarify the contingencies in place for addressing certain behaviors, and the reasons why those behaviors will not be condoned in class. There is evidence to support the idea that clearly defined contingencies help reduce bullying behaviors (Ramirez et al., 2016), so advance warning of consequences may aid bullying prevention efforts. Further, I would suggest to teachers that they also take time to hear suggestions from students for what would help them feel safe in class. Then, a class contract can start to emerge, as the class negotiates what guidelines contribute to a comfortable class environment for everyone. In addition to helping teachers be responsive to the needs of their students, this would demonstrate how to relate to the power one holds in a way that prioritizes the welfare of others and is prosocial in nature. This can set an example of what considerations need to take place when an individual holds power over others.

When a bully is punished for their behavior, the bully may feel less like they're being unjustly done by, since it has been made clear that these contingencies are in place to help keep other students safe, and the bully will have had advance warning of what the response to certain actions will be. In this way, punishment for bullies can be assigned from a place of compassion,

and goals involving understanding what has led the bully to victimize others can be made the priority instead of the punishment itself. Insecure attachment is linked to bullying (Murphy et al., 2017; Walden & Beran, 2010; Eliot & Cornell, 2009; Innamorati et al., 2018), so if a teacher is responsive to the needs of students, offers consistent, predictable, and reliable support, while also being consistent, predictable, and reliable in the way they assign punishment and clearly state the rationale for their punishments, then bullies have an opportunity to observe and learn some of the qualities of secure attachment relationships. This may help them form secure attachments later on. The way that teachers manage the power they hold over students may be remembered by the students for the rest of their lives. This presents an opportunity to demonstrate a positive and prosocial relationship to power.

I wish to avoid making definitive claims for how counsellors should treat clients who are bullies, since I don't believe that one part of one chapter is enough space to explore that topic. The scope of this thesis involves understanding bullies to help inform treatment, not determining which treatments are best suited for dealing with bullies. However, this thesis does allude to some considerations to make when deciding how best to show up for a client who bullies others, and I also have some personal opinions to offer on the topic. For bully-victims, acknowledging their own victimization may help to scaffold an understanding of the effects that their bullying has on others. It may also present an opportunity to invite the client to explore the varying forms of victimization they've suffered and to heal from it. Bully-victims may not have a chance in their day-to-day lives to acknowledge that the way they have been treated is not normal or acceptable, or to explore how their victimization impacts them emotionally and in their relationships with others. It may also help to consciously show markers of a secure attachment relationship when forming the client-counsellor relationship with a bully-victim.

Since insecure attachment relationships are predictive of bully-victim status (Murphy et al., 2017), it is safe to assume that keeping attachment theory in mind and consciously demonstrating the qualities of a reliable caregiver may be beneficial. Bully-victims are well within reason to assume that their environment, and the people in it, are hostile. As a counsellor, part of the therapeutic task should be to demonstrate an exception to this belief, in order to instill a belief that certain people in their environment may not be hostile. Since bully-victims have been found to make hostile intent attributions to others (Ziv et al., 2013), they may need help to avoid carrying the expectation of hostile interactions into new relationships. It is important to help bully-victims come to the realization that the whole world isn't hostile, while acknowledging the fact that it is reasonable for the bully-victim to have come to that conclusion, given their interactions with other people. This way, bully-victims may focus less energy on protecting themselves from everybody and learn how to tell when it's safe to be vulnerable, and when they really do need to protect themselves.

Given the fact that many bully-victims supposedly have poor social skills, some psychoeducation regarding social interactions, and reading people's intent may help them to realize that many of their interactions don't need to be hostile in nature. However, it is important to acknowledge the poor treatment that bully-victims receive, since inadvertently blaming bully-victims for all their negative social interactions constitutes victim-blaming, and this will likely ruin the trust between counselor and client. If my conclusions are to be trusted, remember that they've internalized the tools of their oppressors in a way that hurts themselves and propagates their own oppression; they are the oppressed, not the oppressors. Blaming them for how they've been affected by oppression in home or at school won't make sense to them, because it is not grounded in logic. Being a bully-victim can be acknowledged as something that has helped the

bully-victim up until now, but that this way of coping also hurts themselves and others. There are more beneficial tools that the bully-victim can learn which will help them better adjust to their environment and help them heal from the abuses they've suffered.

Alpha-bullies, in my opinion, present a more difficult case when engaging with them in counseling. Since they are often more well-adjusted than victims or bully-victims, they may be less likely to show up in counseling for mental health reasons. Further, given the popularity and success that alpha-bullies experience in their social environment, one cannot address the issue of bullying from the perspective that it is not beneficial for them, since this is simply not true. Generally, working with bullies on empathy shows positive results (McAdams & Schmidt, 2007). Given the social intelligence that many alpha-bullies appear to have, they are very likely to understand the impact that their behavior has on others when some work is done to help them see it. Alpha-bullies aren't necessarily insensitive, but some work may need to be done to help them be more sensitive to those that they hurt, and to people in general.

Alpha-bullies tend to justify their bullying of others and interpret their punishment as unjust (McAdams & Schmidt, 2007). A counselor should be careful not to argue against these ideas, since this will place the counselor in opposition to the alpha-bully and ruin the therapeutic alliance. Instead, a counselor would be wise to ask questions that help the alpha-bully arrive to a conclusion on their own that victimizing others is not justified. Acknowledging the many strengths that alpha-bullies have can be a valuable tool (McAdams & Schmidt, 2007). This opens up the opportunity to have conversations about how to hold their power responsibly, and what they can do with their many strengths that doesn't involve victimizing others. Further, if the alpha-bully comes to realize that their strengths are apparent to others, they may also realize (either consciously or unconsciously) that victimizing others is ultimately unnecessary. Alpha-

bullies tend to have home environments in which one parent holds power over the other and abuses that power in varying ways (Stevens et al., 2002). As such, there may be a similar pathology to that of bully-victims, where abusing others is simply the way alpha-bullies have learned to relate to power. This emphasizes the importance of modeling prosocial uses of power when dealing with any bullies. As such, the therapeutic relationship is crucial when dealing with alpha-bullies, because if they really don't want to talk to the counselor they're seeing, then counseling will feel like a coercive use of power against their will on the part of whoever has forced them to go to counseling. I would expect that alpha-bullies are difficult to get into counseling, and that it is difficult to form a positive therapeutic relationship with them, but that once these hurdles are met, they will be exceptional at doing the work involved with counseling, and at understanding the impact their behavior has on other people.

Future directions

My first recommendation for future research is to adopt the "alpha-bully" label, or to designate some other label which clearly identifies that group as separate from bully-victims. Most research refers to alpha-bullies simply as bullies (which is confusing) or as pure bullies (which carries unfair implications towards alpha-bullies). The fact that the two bullying groups aren't more clearly distinguished in the research makes some of the results confusing to read and leaves plenty of space for misinterpretation. Future research on bullying should avoid putting alpha-bullies and bully-victims into one group, since doing so appears to have led to an inaccurate view of who bullies are and what they're like (Volk et al, 2012). It certainly made it much more difficult for me to interpret results from much of the research I've examined. There are significant differences in the characteristics, presentation of bullying behaviors, and etiology

of alpha-bullies and bully-victims (Farmer et al., 2010) which merit clearly distinguishing the two groups in any research where bullies are a focus.

Considering that much of the bullying research uses peer-reports to determine the popularity, likeability, and bullying status of students (Veenstra et al., 2005; Reijntjes et al., 2013), it would be worth investigating who makes which judgements towards who more closely. For example, alpha-bullies are often liked by many students, and disliked by many students. Investigating which students claim to like or dislike alpha-bullies, and which students nominate them as a bully would help clarify the relationships between students, help examine how bullies navigate the political structure of the class, and help examine their awareness of the contingencies of reinforcement for their interactions with each of their peers. If results of this type of examination show that only victims and bully-victims nominate alpha-bullies as bullies, but that everyone nominates bully-victims as bullies, this would show evidence of a strategic target selection process that alpha-bullies consider, and bully-victims do not. This would provide evidence of meaningful differences between the two groups and allude to contingencies of reinforcement that reward the bullying of specific students. Asking students to report who they think they could bully without reprisal from their peers would also offer valuable insight into target selection. Also, an investigation into who targets bully-victims and who targets victims may illuminate the true structure of bullying within schools. I predict that especially powerful alpha-bullies designate targets and solicit the help of students coded as non-involved to subjugate those targets. It may be a misperception that students coded as non-involved don't exhibit bullying behaviors towards others. If each non-involved student targets a victim once, none of those students are likely to be coded as bullies, but the target will certainly be coded as a victim. More attention needs to be paid to the specifics of who is bullying whom in future research.

Earlier, I made the claim that both the bullying and prosocial behaviors shown by alpha-bullies are dominance behaviors. It would be worth investigating whether there is a relationship between bullying, prosocial status-affirming behavior, and trait dominance. While there is research looking at the link between dominance and bullying, I did not find any research investigating whether or not the prosocial status-affirming behaviors of alpha-bullies is linked to dominance. Such research may help create a fuller picture of how alpha-bullies navigate their social environment, though it risks creating an image of alpha-bullies as Machiavellian types who are cold and calculating. I predict that findings of such research would reveal that alpha-bullies who bully more engage in high levels of status affirming behaviors and are also seen as having more desirable traits such as charisma, glibness, and extroversion.

Research needs to be done to determine the relationship between punishment and bullying behaviors. What effect does authoritarian/punitive disciplinary methods have on the reoccurrence of bullying behaviors? I have made a provocative claim that the way teachers punish students often fits the key criteria of bullying, and this claim needs to be tested. In fact, I would test this claim before testing any of the others. The reason for this is the possibility that schools are unintentionally propagating bullying as opposed to mitigating it. Some of the research I have examined thus far suggests that students who bully often do not see why their behavior was wrong, or would contend that their behavior was appropriate, given the situation (McAdams & Schmidt, 2007). If students are punished for their behavior without internalizing what was wrong with it, then the intended effect of the punishment will be lost, and what is left is a teacher or school staff member using their power over the student against their will, which is a key characteristic of bullying. Some students even report abusive behavior directed towards them on the part of teachers as a response to their bullying (Berkowitz & Benbenishty, 2012).

In my view, harsh discipline towards bullies would be akin to slapping a child for punching another child. That is, using an approximation of the to-be-punished behavior in order to punish that behavior does not set an example for an alternative way to act. Given what we know about the effects of role models (Bandura et al., 1963), it stands to reason that any aggressive way of punishing a bully is likely to solicit aggressive behavior from the bully, or from other witnesses of this punishment. Additionally, if desired pro-social behaviors shown by students goes unrewarded, I cannot conceive of how anyone would expect bullying behaviors to ever change. Contingencies put into place for addressing bullying should be made with the safety of other students in mind, not the punishment of the bully. Additional research needs to be conducted to determine what the most effective response to bullying is on the part of the school. My prediction is that findings will show punishment to be among the weakest forms of intervention when it comes to reducing bullying behaviors.

Another potentially fruitful area of research could be to examine how students relate to power, and how role models in their lives relate to power. Such a study would test my claim that bully-victims harass less powerful people partly because that is the majority of how they have seen other people relate to power when they have it. This study could be of significant consequence when conceptualizing how to reduce bullying in schools, because findings which reveal that bullying correlates strongly with the bullying behaviors of role models allude to potential for bullying reduction programs which target teacher behavior as opposed to student behavior. Training teachers to demonstrate a pro-social relationship with the power they have over students could be less costly and more effective than other bullying reduction programs. This is because teachers are probably more likely to be willing participants in an effort to reduce bullying, it is easier to provide oversight for the teacher's behavior, and the teachers will be able

to apply what they've learned across multiple cohorts, which may be preferable to targeting

students with anti-bullying programs every cohort. The utility of this type of intervention is

entirely dependent on whether or not increases in the teacher's pro-social uses of power correlate

with decreases in student bullying behavior. Currently, I am not aware of any such findings, and

a significant amount of research needs to take place to determine the viability of this approach.

Nonetheless, I believe that teachers should consciously demonstrate a pro-social relationship

with power regardless of whether doing so reduces bullying behaviors.

Future research may benefit from examining bullying through the lens of oppression.

Either confirming or denying the applicability of oppression research on bullying research would

offer a lot of useful information regarding the structure of bullying in schools. If findings

indicate that the structure of bullying resembles the structure of oppression, then two vast bodies

of literature previously thought to be disparate could be joined together and provide a clearer

understanding of both topic areas. Undoubtedly, if the two are related, research into oppression

in society would have a lot to add to the bullying research and could have far reaching

implications for how future bullying research is conducted and interpreted. Additionally, if my

prediction that bullying and oppression are inextricably linked in a two-way interaction is

confirmed, then it could be the case that progress made in one area marks progress in the other as

well. In other words, reducing bullying in schools could reduce future oppression in society, and

reducing oppression in society could reduce bullying in schools which could in turn further

reduce oppression in society. If this is true, then anti-bullying initiatives could benefit greatly

from the contributions of experts on oppression in society and anti-oppressive practices. Even

without a specific anti-bullying program in place, schools could see reductions in bullying

resulting from the contributions of experts in anti-oppressive practices.

A considerable amount of metadata analysis should be conducted to determine the extent of overlap between literature and research findings on bullying and on oppression. Additionally, an investigation should be done to determine whether the power structure of oppression in society and that of bullying in school match up in terms of who benefits and who doesn't. I would expect there to not be an exact match between the two power structures, since the culture of grade school may prioritize certain qualities which aren't as important outside of grade school, such as athletic ability. Additionally, some of the effects of oppression in society may not yet have been fully realized for students in grade school. For example, students in grade school may not yet be personally affected or targeted by the way that oppression in society effects their employment prospects, their ability to take out a loan, their prospects for post-secondary education, the oppressive attitudes of older cohorts, their ability to rent or buy housing in their preferred neighborhoods, and/or the cumulative stress of being oppressed in society. However, it still may be the case that the individuals which are more likely to be oppressed in society are more likely to be bullied in school, evidence of which is provided by UNESCO (2017).

Linking bullying and oppression could also help the lay person better understand both issues and make it easier to identify and resist individuals who incite hatred and oppression in society. Teaching students about oppression in grade school may be beyond their capability to interpret in a productive way, but if bullying and oppression are indeed closely related, teaching students about bullying in school could provide a relatable introduction to oppression that students would be able to grasp, regardless of how their identities interact with society. Therefore, it is possible that anti-bullying programs in school could scaffold students towards an understanding of oppression in society and instill them with an introductory level of knowledge of what oppression looks like, as well as foster anti-oppressive attitudes in them while they're

young. On a personal note, I was unequipped to process the scope and impact of oppression in our society for most of my life, since I was not offered the tools to understand it before a master's level education, and my identity places me as a beneficiary of oppression instead of being a victim of it. Had bullying been presented to me as an issue of oppression, I may have been more prepared to understand both issues at a younger age.

Limitations

There are many limitations to this thesis, which the reader should consider before deciding how to interpret my results. The first limitation is the author. Given that this thesis heavily relies on my own interpretive capabilities without the use of any statistical software or a second author, the main points of this thesis will be subject to my own errs in logic, my biases, my schemas, and my capacity for understanding the topic. Any deficiencies that I have regarding deductive and inductive logical reasoning skills may have negatively impacted the logical structure of the arguments made in this thesis, rendering my results suggestive at best. Nonetheless, I am confident that the main points of this paper are grounded in reason and are at least viable points for consideration. Still, it may be the case that I have failed to justify some of my work with research. Given more time and resources, I believe that I would be able to mitigate any weaknesses that this thesis shows, but given that I am one person who is also completing their master's education at the time of writing this paper, I have been unable to address some of weaknesses of this thesis that I otherwise would have with more time or less stress. However, I maintain that grounding this thesis in my interpretations as opposed to purely relying on what the research says has insulated this project from some of the weaknesses that may be present in the research.

I contend that the body of research on bullying has some glaring limitations. First is the lack of consistency in the use of language between different studies. Many studies don't separate alpha-bullies and bully-victims. Supposing that alpha-bullies and bully-victims exhibit functionally different bullying behaviors, any study which does not separate the two groups will amalgamate the findings from each group into one population, which can seriously limit the application of that data to the overall bullying literature. The research is also unclear at times, since the term "bully" interchangeably applies to what I've called "alpha-bullies", and to the entire bullying population comprising of alpha-bullies and bully-victims. Anyone doing keyword searches in larger metadata analyses may detect inappropriate correlations as a result, whereby alpha-bullies are thought to possess many characteristics which are specific to bully-victims. I believe this has already contributed to view of all bullies as being more like bully-victims than what is merited by the research (Volk et al, 2012). It is important to remember that bully-victims are typically the smallest research group in this field (Pellegrini, Bartini, & Brooks, 1999; Goldweber, Waasdorp, & Bradshaw, 2013; Holt & Espelage, 2007; Espelage & Holt, 2013; Ziv, Leibovich, & Schechtman, 2013; Bradshaw, O'Brennan, & Sawyer, 2008; Farmer et al., 2010), and that alpha-bullies show a significant number of characteristic differences from bully-victims (Farmer et al., 2010) that are crucial to understanding this field of research. Additionally, individuals such as myself may become confused trying to parse out which types of bullies each study refers to. If my only contribution to the overall bullying literature is the use of the term "alpha-bullies" or another similar term, then I believe I will have made a significant impact on the way that bullying research data is gathered and interpreted.

Although I feel that the peer-reporting method of determining group membership (bully, bully-victim, victim, non-involved) is fairly reliable, it is possible that there are discrepancies

between the appearance of being a bully and factually satisfying the requirements for the bullying group which may skew interpretations of the research. It is possible that there are undetected alpha-bullies who manage to target others in a way that affords them fewer nominations for bullying-status, and are thus coded as non-involved in the research. Evidence certainly shows that victims often remain silent about incidents where they are targeted by bullies (Petrosino et al., 2010), so the propensity of certain students to bully others may not be common knowledge among classmates. Additionally, the status of "non-involved" may obscure the contribution that "non-involved" students have when it comes to targeting their peers. I predict that the prevalence of bullying is much higher than we typically expect, and I feel that the reason for this is that bullying often occurs as a group effort, instead of the efforts of a specific individual. I certainly would have been coded as non-involved if I participated in bullying research during my grade school years, yet I know I contributed to the overall group effort to bully specific students who were globally disliked by the cohort. The potential for inaccurate bullying group designations may undermine much of the research in this field, and as a result, render some of the points of this thesis inaccurate.

Most of the research studies I encountered only represent snapshots of a particular period of time in the lives of the participants. As a result, research on bullying may fail to detect any transitions between bullying subgroups made by students over long periods of time. It is possible that students change in bullying status over time, or even between classes, such that one student wouldn't be nominated as a bully in one class, but would be in another. There are longitudinal studies which evaluate an extended period of time, but this research may still miss contextual changes in bullying status. One student might not bully others in school, but bully others in different settings such as at home or during team sports. There are limitations to the consistency

of the group memberships assigned to participants and interpreting these classifications as static

across time and space may offer an incomplete view of the issue.

Finally, there may be a number of issues regarding the bullying literature which have not

yet been realized. Research in this field is relatively new, and I would contend that we do not yet

fully understand the issue of bullying. There is a lot of room in the field of bullying research for

novel results to emerge that change or modify our understanding of bullying in schools, and it is

best to maintain a healthy amount of skepticism regarding the way bullying is currently

conceptualized. With this skepticism, however, must come the acknowledgement that any of the

points made in this thesis may be viewed as dated or incorrect in the next ten years, as new

frameworks for understanding bullying emerge. I accept that many of the points made in this

paper could simply be wrong, but as long as they are addressed through research, the points I

have made can contribute a great deal to the bullying literature regardless of whether they reflect

an accurate view of the issue.

Conclusion

The central hypothesis of this thesis claims that the bullying behaviors of alpha-bullies

and bully-victims are structurally similar, but functionally different. Each group would be

motivated differently to engage in their bullying behaviors, and they would not experience the

same rewards for engaging in bullying. I believe I have made a strong argument to suggest that

the bullying behaviors of the two bullying subgroups interact differently with environmental

contingencies of reinforcement as a function of which group the bully belongs to. That is, alpha-

bullies experience different contingencies of reinforcement in response to their bullying

behaviors than do bully-victims. However, I believe that the most valuable contributions of this

thesis stem from the functional descriptions I used to describe the bullying behaviors of each

group. These functional descriptions are "peer-oppression" for alpha-bullies, and "internalized peer-oppression" for bully-victims. These are not conclusions I had foreseen.

Arriving at the conclusion that bullying can be viewed through a framework of oppression is the most meaningful contribution to the bullying literature I could have hoped to make when writing this thesis. I had no plans initially to describe bullying in terms of oppression, and after concluding that alpha-bullies engage in peer-oppression, I still had no plans to work oppression into my description of the bullying behaviors of bully-victims. Despite this, it became clear to me in the process of writing this thesis that conceptualizing bullying in school as a system of oppression works. I would contend that viewing bullying through a framework of oppression offers the most accurate view of the issue. It also suggests that bullying is a more insidious problem than I had previously imagined. Often, bullying is discussed in terms of the negative impact it has on the targets of bullying, and this is a crucial topic of discussion. However, the potential negative impact that bullying has on society as a whole may not yet be understood. This presents as much of an opportunity as it does a problem.

It isn't any secret that society is oppressive. However, if bullying is indeed linked to oppression in society, this offers a chance to address oppressive tendencies and attitudes in students at a young age, in a setting that nearly every person is required to attend; grade school. There is already considerable motivation to reduce bullying in schools, and understanding bullying as oppression may both, clarify more effective ways of addressing bullying in schools, and provide an opportunity to educate students about oppression by addressing it through bullying. Therefore, it is possible to reduce bullying behaviors and oppressive beliefs and tendencies at the same time. Additionally, there is the sad truth that many students have people in their lives with bigoted or otherwise oppressive views. By broaching the topic of oppression

through addressing bullying, a student's understanding of oppression can be scaffolded to the point where they will be able to generalize that knowledge and resist the oppressive attitudes and teachings of other people in their lives.

Using an oppression framework to address bullying is not the only way that bullying can be conceptualized. I don't believe there is a single "correct" way of viewing this issue. However, this view of bullying offers promise for utilizing the vast body of research on oppression to address the issue of bullying, and for enhancing our current understanding of bullying considerably. Had I known that this would be the conclusion I arrived at, I might have changed the topic of this thesis all together to study bullying and oppression, and the link between them. Nonetheless, this thesis works towards providing the reader a better understanding of bullies, why they bully, and what might work when addressing their bullying behaviors. I believe that this understanding will make it easier to offer bullies empathy and compassion when dealing with their aggressive behavior.

Bullies need to be understood. This is especially true for bully-victims, who are often victimized across all settings in their lives, and may not know of a better way to relate to the power they hold over other individuals. The issue of bullying can provoke a lot of strong feelings. These feelings are justified, considering the violent and unacceptable nature of bullying, and the profound effects it can have on the victims. Despite this, any hope of addressing bullying will come from a place of understanding, compassion, and empathy. Bullies need to be offered a way of reforming their behavior, instead of being pushed further into it through strong condemnation. Bullies in school are much too young to be treated like they'll never change their ways, and the more repulsive their behavior becomes, the more in need they are of people who can understand them and help them realize a better way of interacting with the world. In the case

of alpha-bullies, helping them understand how to hold the power they have responsibly can create a better world for everyone when these people come into positions of power later in life. For bully-victims, helping them change may save them from a life of crime, addiction, victimization, mental illness, misery, and of hurting those they love. Dealing with bullies the right way can improve, or even save their lives and the lives of others. Dealing with bullies the right way starts with understanding the problem.

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School Violence and Bullying:Global Status Report Published in 2017 by the United Nations

Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 7, place de Fontenoy, 75352 Paris 07

SP, France© UNESCO 2017