What Elementary Students Experience Outside of the Classroom:

Children's Responses to Social Exclusion

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Abstract

Social exclusion and the behaviors, thoughts, and feelings it evokes in children were examined in the present study. Two forms of exclusion were identified: being rejected and being ignored. Surveys were administered to third and fifth grade students in a Northeastern suburb in the United States to see how children respond overall and if younger and older elementary school students respond similarly. The students were asked to imagine themselves in four different peer situations in which they were included, rejected, or ignored and indicate how they would respond. Developmental differences and implications of the findings for counselors are discussed.

Keywords: social exclusion, children, bullying, relational aggression

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Interactions from one person to another begin from the moment of birth. Humans, through communication, are social beings. Social culture encourages performance of pro-social acts in order to belong (Twenge, Baumeister, DeWall, Ciarocco, & Bartels, 2007). People have a strong motivation to form and maintain social relationships (DeWall, Baumeister, & Vohs, 2008). Society helps build and maintain social relationships. People value these relationships, and have a need for social acceptance as they learn through socialization. Social connection has become one of the most fundamental human needs (Molden, Lucas, Gardner, Dean, & Knowles, 2009). Social connection and acceptance can lead to and maintain a state of well-being. But what happens when people are socially rejected or ignored? How do they respond? And at what age do they learn how to cope with social exclusion?

Social exclusion evokes powerful behaviors, thoughts, and feelings. These negative emotions can bring about physiological pain (Molden et al., 2009). When an individual is rejected by a group of peers, there are certain behaviors and outcomes of the rejection. Behavioral responses to rejection can include aggression, anxiety, loneliness, depression, lower self-esteem, and overall decreased social behavior (van Prooijen, van de Bos, & Wilke, 2004). Research has shown that social exclusion or rejection is linked to antisocial behavior. Children may see the world as hostile and respond in kind (Twenge et al., 2007). A lack of acceptance within a group of peers, or social rejection can lead to physical acts of violence towards others, or isolation. Investigations of acts of violence, such as school shootings, have shown that the

perpetrators were socially rejected by peers or partners in one form or another (DeWall et al., 2009).

In a study done with college-age students, two different forms of social exclusion were identified: being rejected and being ignored (Molden et al., 2009). Rejection is a form of exclusion that is active, direct, and explicit; it involves collaborating with others to marginalize someone (e.g., spreading damaging rumors; Kerr & Levine, 2008). Being ignored is a form of exclusion that is passive, indirect, and implicit; it includes not acknowledging an individual in a social setting. Molden and colleagues (2009) designed a study in which students recalled past experiences of being rejected or ignored. Two coders then classified participants' responses of how they reacted to their exclusion, focusing on whether participants chose to reengage or withdraw from social contact. The authors found, as hypothesized, that each form of exclusion lead to a different set of behaviors, thoughts, and feelings. Being rejected led to responses that can be categorized as prevention-focused (e.g., withdrawal from social contact, thinking about actions that they should not have done, and possible increased feelings of agitation). Being ignored led to promotion-focused responses (e.g., reengagement in social contact, thinking about actions that they should have taken, and increased feelings of dejection).

Differences in responses to being rejected and being ignored may be due to differences in the perceived motivation and antisocial behavior of the aggressor (Molden et al., 2009). While rejection is a direct focus towards one’s actions, being ignored is indirect. The stress expressed by individuals when feeling ignored is due to the absence of feedback and perceived lack of social connection. Like being rejected, those being

ignored need to receive positive feedback to obtain a sense of belonging. Unlike those who are rejected, it is a lack of any feedback, not receiving negative feedback that affects them. The clear absence of positive feedback discourages further social contact.

Social exclusion threatens the potential positive experiences of human interaction and decreases self-esteem. Self-esteem is based on the quantity and quality of social relationships, and adults possess a highly sensitive monitoring system for detecting threats of social exclusion (Kerr & Levine, 2008). Adults have developed a learned system to detect threats of being ignored or rejected. When individuals are socially excluded, the desire to find acceptance is intensified (Dewall et al., 2009).

A good deal of media attention has been paid to the topic of bullying and its effects on school children, including suicide (Paul, 2010). Research on social exclusion has shown a range of negative effects on children, including detriments to children's collective health (Prilleltensky, 2010), physical health (Cacioppo, Hawkley, & Berntson, 2003; Uchino, Cacioppo, & Kiecolt-Glaser, 1996), personality formation in terms of selfish and antisocial tendencies (DeWall & Richman, 2011) and aggression (DeWall, Twenge, Bushman, Im, & Williams, 2010; Low, Frey, & Brockman, 2010), attitude formation (DeWall, 2010), and overall psychological well-being (Bloom, White, & Asher, 1979; Leary, 1990). Social exclusion has been seen to decrease prosocial behavior (Twenge, et al., 2007), and increase self-defeating behavior in children (Baumeister, DeWall, Ciarocco, & Twenge, 2005; Oaten, Wiliams, Jones, & Zadro, 2008; Twenge, Catanese, & Baumeister, 2002).

While research has shown the negative effects of social exclusion on children, little research exists concerning children's responses to social exclusion. At a time when

bullying is making headlines, the need to understand how children respond to social exclusion is increasingly important. School counselors and other professionals working with children may benefit from learning about children's behaviors, thoughts, and feelings in response to different social situations that involve social exclusion and inclusion. Understanding how children respond can be helpful in planning and understanding intervention efforts.

The goal of the authors' study is to determine if children generate promotion- and prevention-focused responses to social exclusion, and if developmental differences can be detected between third and fifth graders' responses. It was hypothesized that children who are rejected would exhibit a set of prevention-focused responses, and children who are ignored would exhibit a set of promotion-focused responses.

Method

Participants

Participants were 110 third and fifth grade students from a large elementary school in a Northeastern suburb in the United States. The sample had roughly equal proportions of males and females (50.9% versus 49.1%, respectively), and third and fifth graders (44.5% versus 55.5%, respectively). The participants ranged in age from 8-11 years old (M = 9.68, SD = 1.26), as is typical of these grade levels. They were predominantly White and non-Hispanic or Latino (89.1%), with smaller percentages of participants self-identifying as American Indian or Alaska Native (5.5%), Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (4.5%), or Black or African American (1%). The majority of the participants reported living with both of their parents (83.6%), with substantially less reporting living with only one parent (11.8%), or another custodial status (4.5%).

Instruments

A demographic questionnaire was designed for this study. It included the following demographic information: age, gender, ethnicity, race, grade level, living arrangements, and identification of how they treat and are treated by peers in terms of social inclusion and exclusion. This was included as two questions with four possible answer choices: “When kids are playing and hanging out you feel you are left out...” and “When you are on the playground at school and you ask one of your classmates to play or hang out with them they say yes…” The possible answer choices were ‘all of the time’, ‘most of the time’, ‘some of the time’, or ‘none of the time’. A final question was asked to assess how children treat their peers: “When you are playing or hanging out and you see others sitting or playing by themselves you usually…” with three possible answer choices of ‘ask them to join you,’ ‘play with the kids that are already playing,’ or ‘tell those kids that they cannot play with you and your friends.’

The Social Exclusion and Inclusion Index (SEII) was developed for this study by Milone, McGrath, D’Angelo, and Chiffriller (2009) to assess children’s responses to developmentally appropriate social situations. The SEII is a 36-item multiple-choice questionnaire that includes three versions of four social scenarios wherein the child imagines either being included, ignored, or rejected by peers. The questionnaire was designed for third grade reading level, and piloted with second grade students. Once determined second graders could read it, it was administered to third and fifth graders. The questionnaire was also given to third grade teachers to confirm that the students would be able to understand it. The format and scenarios chosen for this instrument were designed to be appropriate for elementary school children. For example, one

scenario asked the child to imagine hearing peers discuss a birthday party to which he was not invited (i.e., ignored scenario). The alternate versions of this scenario would be either that he is invited to the birthday party (i.e., inclusion scenario), or that he is told specifically that he is not invited (i.e., rejection scenario). For each of these scenarios the child is asked via multiple-choice formatted questions how he/she might respond in terms of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. The responses for each scenario (i.e., ignored, rejected, and included) were judged to be very consistent (Cronbach's alpha = .98, .93, and .97). Reliability coefficients for all subscales (i.e., do, think, and feel for each scenario) ranged from .92 to .98 with the exception of what children would do when rejected (.61). This will be addressed in the discussion section.

Procedure

After receiving IRB approval and permission from the assistant superintendent and the principal of an elementary school in a Northeastern suburb, two third and two fifth grade classes were selected for participation. Consent forms were sent home to the parents to read and sign if they were willing to allow their children to participate. For those parents who consented, their child(ren) verbally assented to participate. The children were asked to complete a demographic questionnaire as well as the SEII. They were given a decorative pencil and an eraser as a reward for participation. All data was collected at one time during a recess period. Descriptive statistics were calculated for the demographic variables and responses to the SEII were analyzed via cross tabulations and both one-sample (i.e., goodness-of-fit) and two-sample (i.e., test for independence) chi-squares, since the data is measured on a nominal scale.

Results

Prevalence of Social Exclusion

To assess the prevalence of social inclusion and exclusion, the children were asked how frequently they are included in social situations, and how frequently they include others in social situations, and the frequencies were tabulated. An equal number of students reported typically being included (36.4%) or rejected (36.4%) in social situations with peers, with slightly less students reporting typically being ignored (27.3%). Interestingly, the majority of students indicated that they themselves typically include peers in social situations (67.3%), while fewer students reported that they ignore peers (26.4%), and very few indicated that they reject peers (6.4%).

Children's Responses to Social Exclusion

One-sample chi-square analyses were conducted to assess whether children overall typically respond differently, in terms of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors to different peer social situations in which they are excluded or included (See Table 1). Chi-squares for thoughts, feelings, and behaviors for all three scenarios (i.e., rejected, ignored, and included) were all significant at the .001 level. Effects sizes were in the medium to large range (Cohen, 1988).

Table 1

One-Sample Chi-Square Analyses on Children's Responses to Inclusion and Exclusion

	N	Obs. freq	Exp. freq	X^2	df	*p*	Cramer Phi	Square Root
Rejected Thoughts	440			201.52	3	<.001	0.153	0.758977273
Prev vs. prom		197, 83	140	46.41	1	<.001		
Prev vs. neut		197, 156	176.5	4.76	1	0.029		
Prev vs. inclu		197, 4	100.5	185.32	1	<.001		
Rejected Feelings	440			367.66	3	<.001	0.279	0.647409091
Prev vs. prom		269, 48	158.5	154.07	1	<.001		

	N	Obs. freq	Exp. freq	X^2	df	*p*	Cramer Phi	Square Root
Prev vs. neut		269, 119	194	57.99	1	<.001		
Prev vs. inclu		269, 4	136.5	257.23	1	<.001		
Rejected Behaviors	440			298.09	3	<.001	0.226	0.641613636
Prev vs. prom		238, 46	142	129.8	1	<.001		
Prev vs. neut		238, 149	193.5	20.47	1	<.001		
Prev vs. inclu		238, 7	122.5	217.8	1	<.001		
Ignored Thoughts	440			284.86	3	<.001	0.216	0.677477273
Prom vs. prev		181, 45	113	81.84	1	<.001		
Prom vs. neut		181, 212	196.5	2.445	1	0.118		
Prom vs. inclu		181, 2	91.5	175.09	1	<.001		
Ignored Feelings	440			282.31	3	<.001	0.214	0.458
Prom vs. prev		247, 72	159.5	96	1	<.001		
Prom vs. neut		247, 115	181	48.13	1	<.001		
Prom vs. inclu		247, 6	126.5	229.57	1	<.001		
Ignored Behaviors	440			333.95	3	<.001	0.253	0.835590909
Prom vs. prev		191, 26	108.5	125.46	1	<.001		
Prom vs. neut		191, 219	205	1.91	1	0.17		
Prom vs. inclu		191, 4	97.5	179.33	1	<.001		
Included Thoughts	440			668.82	3	<.001	0.507	2.239545455
Inclu vs. prev		334, 1	167.5	331.01	1	<.001		
Inclu vs. prom		334, 3	168.5	325.12	1	<.001		
Inclu vs. neut		334, 102	218	123.45	1	<.001		
Included Feelings	440			981.73	3	<.001	0.744	1.520045455
Inclu vs. prev		393, 2	197.5	387.04	1	<.001		
Inclu vs. prom		393, 1	197	390.01	1	<.001		
Inclu vs. neut		393, 44	218.5	279.72	1	<.001		
Included Behaviors	440			985.4	3	<.001	0.747	2.231204545
Inclu vs. prev		394, 1	197.5	391.01	1	<.001		
Inclu vs. prom		394, 6	200	376.36	1	<.001		
Inclu vs. neut		394, 39	216.5	291.05	1	<.001		

Follow up tests were conducted to determine if responses for each scenario were consistent with previously reported (Molden et al., 2009) college students' responses to being rejected and ignored (See Table 1). For the rejected scenarios, children responded significantly more often with a prevention response in terms of thoughts

(e.g., think about mistakes they made), feelings (e.g., confused or frustrated), and behaviors (e.g., walk away), than any other response. All differences were significant at the .001 level with the exception of the difference in the number of prevention and neutral thoughts (X^2 [1, N = 353] = 4.76, p = .029) in response to being rejected. For the ignored scenarios, children responded significantly more often with a promotion response (e.g., talk about it with other kids, think about what they could do differently, and feel sad or lonely) than any other response with the exception of there was no significant difference in the number of promotion and neutral behaviors (X^2 [1, N = 310] = 1.91, p = .17) or promotion and neutral thoughts (X^2 [1, N = 393] = 2.445, p = .12) in response to being ignored.

As a validity check, follow up tests were conducted to determine if children responded to scenarios in which they were included more-often with a response consistent with inclusion (i.e., perceiving oneself as well-liked, feeling proud, and smiling). For the included scenarios, children responded significantly more often with an included response than a promotion, prevention, or neutral response in terms of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. All tests were significant at the .001 level (See Table 1).

Comparison of Third and Fifth Grade Children

Two-sample chi-square analyses were conducted to determine if there were any differences in the way that third and fifth graders respond in terms of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors to being rejected, ignored, or included (See Table 2). For the rejected scenarios, differences between third and fifth graders in terms thoughts (X^2 [3, N = 440] = 51.65, p < .001, Cramer's V = 0.343), feelings (X^2 [3, N = 440] = 16.17, p < .001,

Cramer's V = 0.192), and behaviors (X^2 [3, N = 440] = 14.97, p = .002, Cramer's V = 0.184) were all significant. The effect sizes were in the medium to large range (Cohen, 1988). Follow up tests were conducted to determine which grade level, if any, was significantly more likely to give each response. For the rejected scenarios, fifth graders were significantly more likely than third graders to respond with prevention-focused thoughts and behaviors and neutral feelings. Third graders were significantly more likely than fifth graders to respond with promotion- and included-focused thoughts, feelings, and behaviors in response to being rejected.

Table 2

Two-Sample Chi-Square Analyses Comparing Third and Fifth Graders' Responses to Exclusion and Inclusion

	Third graders			Fifth graders						
	Obs. freq	Exp. freq	Adj. resid	Obs. freq	Exp. freq	Adj. resid	X^2	df	*p*	Cramer's V
Rejected Thoughts							51.65	3	<.001	0.343
Prevention	58	87.8	-5.7*	139	109.2	5.7*				
Promotion	61	37	5.9*	22	46	-5.9*				
Neutral	73	69.5	0.7	83	86.5	-0.7				
Included	4	1.8	2.2*	0	2.2	-2.2*				
Rejected Feelings							16.17	3	0.001	0.192
Prevention	121	119.8	0.2	148	149.2	-0.2				
Promotion	30	21.4	2.7*	18	26.6	-2.7*				
Neutral	41	53	-2.6*	78	66	2.6*				
Included	4	1.8	2.2*	0	2.2	-2.2*				
Rejected Behaviors							14.97	3	0.002	0.184
Prevention	94	106	-2.3*	144	132	2.3*				
Promotion	27	20.5	2.0*	19	25.5	-2.0*				
Neutral	68	66.4	0.3	81	82.6	-0.3				
Included	7	3.1	3.0*	0	3.9	-3.0*				
Ignored Thoughts							55.92	3	<.001	0.356
Prevention	36	20	5.1*	9	25	-5.1*				
Promotion	47	80.6	-6.6*	134	100.4	6.6*				
Neutral	111	94.4	3.2*	101	117.6	-3.2*				
Included	2	0.9	1.6	0	1.1	-1.6				

	Third graders			Fifth graders						
	Obs. freq	Exp. freq	Adj. resid	Obs. freq	Exp. freq	Adj. resid	X^2	df	*p*	Cramer's V
Ignored Feelings							68.47	3	<.001	0.394
Prevention	63	32.1	8*	9	39.9	-8.0*				
Promotion	82	110	-5.4*	165	137	5.4*				
Neutral	47	51.2	-0.9	68	63.8	0.9				
Included	4	2.7	1.1	2	3.3	-1.1				
Ignored Behaviors							40.95	3	<.001	0.305
Prevention	25	11.6	5.5*	1	14.4	-5.5*				
Promotion	66	85.1	-3.7*	125	105.9	3.7*				
Neutral	101	97.6	0.7	118	121.4	-0.7				
Included	4	1.8	2.2*	0	2.2	-2.2*				
Included Thoughts							12.59	3	0.006	0.169
Prevention	1	0.4	1.1	0	0.6	-1.1				
Promotion	3	1.3	1.9	0	1.7	-1.9				
Neutral	57	45.4	2.6*	45	56.6	-2.6*				
Included	135	148.8	-3.1*	199	185.2	3.1*				
Included Feelings							9.62	3	0.022	0.148
Prevention	2	0.9	1.6	0	1.1	-1.6				
Promotion	1	0.4	1.1	0	0.6	-1.1				
Neutral	27	19.6	2.4*	17	24.4	-2.4*				
Included	166	175.1	-2.8*	227	217.9	2.8*				
Included Behaviors							12.61	3	0.006	0.169
Prevention	0	0.4	-0.9	1	0.6	0.9				
Promotion	6	2.7	2.8*	0	3.3	-2.8*				
Neutral	11	17.4	-2.2*	28	21.6	2.2*				
Included	179	175.5	1.1	215	218.5	-1.1				

For the ignored scenarios, differences between third and fifth graders in terms of thoughts (X^2 [3, N = 440] = 55.92), feelings (X^2 [3, N = 440] = 68.47), and behaviors (X^2 [3, N = 440] = 40.95) were all significant at the .001 level. The effect sizes were all large (Cohen, 1988). Follow up tests revealed that fifth graders were significantly more likely than third graders to respond to being ignored with promotion-focused thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Third graders were significantly more likely than fifth graders to

respond to being ignored with prevention- and neutral-focused thoughts, prevention-focused feelings, and both prevention- and included-focused behaviors.

As a validity check, third and fifth graders were compared in their responses in terms of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors to situations in which they were included. For these included scenarios, differences between third and fifth graders in terms thoughts (X^2 [3, N = 440] = 12.59, p = .006), feelings (X^2 [3, N = 440] = 9.62, p = .022), and behaviors (X^2 [3, N = 440] = 12.61, p = .006) were all significant. The effect sizes were all medium (Cohen, 1988). In situations wherein they are included, fifth graders are significantly more likely than third graders to respond with included-focused thoughts and feelings as well as neutral-focused thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Third graders were significantly more likely than fifth graders to respond with neutral-focused thoughts and feelings and promotion-focused behaviors.

Discussion

Regarding the prevalence of social exclusion, students were roughly equally distributed across reporting that they are either typically included (36.4%), ignored (27.3), or rejected (36.4%) while the vast majority of students also reported that they typically include their peers (67.3%) with very few admitting that they reject peers (6.4%). This discrepancy between how students perceive themselves to be treated and how they report treating their peers is noteworthy. What might explain this discrepancy? Reasons for secrecy in general, or in this case, withholding truthful information include shame and fear of punishment (Last & Aharoni-Etzioni, 2001). Children who typically reject their peers may have not answered truthfully for fear of getting in trouble with authority figures, i.e., teachers. Children who did not admit to rejecting their peers may

have felt guilty or ashamed. Another explanation may be that children believe themselves to be innocent bystanders when in actuality they are either the aggressor or simply playing a passive role in the rejection process. Children simply may not be aware that their words or actions, or lack thereof, may alienate and threaten another child's sense of belonging in the group. For example, children may not be aware that they are acting in the role of the "assistant" and that their behavior reinforces the aggressor and therefore, increases the likelihood of the bully excluding another child (Rivers & Noret, 2010).

Results confirm that overall children's responses to exclusion are similar to those of college-aged students. When rejected, children tend to choose more prevention-focused reactions, such as crying or walking away from the situation. When ignored, children tend to choose more promotion and growth responses, such as thinking about what they could do differently next time to be noticed and acknowledged. Lastly, children who perceive themselves as included tend to feel proud. These findings suggest that elementary school students are already socialized and can recognize and feel the differences between rejection and being ignored, and that their responses to it are socially appropriate.

The results of the present study also revealed that there are some differences between third and fifth graders' way of responding. The comparison of third and fifth graders suggested that fifth grader responses were most similar to college-age students (Molden et al., 2009), in that fifth graders responded more often with the situation-appropriate prevention or promotion responses than third graders. One exception to this is that when rejected, fifth graders were more likely than third graders to endorse neutral

feelings, or report feeling the same as before the social interaction, while college students typically gave a prevention-focused, more situation-appropriate response. This finding is difficult to interpret. These results may be a result of children not understanding their feelings and may choose neutral because it meets their need for ease. Another possibility is the social desirability factor: children may not want to admit negative feelings such as confusion or frustration as there may be more of a stigma in reporting prevention-focused behaviors such as crying. Evidence for this interpretation is that the prevention-focused option was “cry or walk away” and repeatedly children called over the administrator to say they would not cry, but they would walk away, and they were not sure if the option was appropriate.

There were significant differences between third and fifth graders in each of the conditions (rejected, ignored, and included). For example, when ignored the fifth graders were significantly more likely than third graders to respond with promotion-focused thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. However, third graders were significantly more likely to respond with included, neutral, and prevention-focused responses when ignored. These findings suggest that third graders are not as well socialized as fifth graders, and that this is a critical three-year span in their social development. Additionally, third graders were significantly more likely than fifth graders to promote themselves when rejected, rather than choosing prevention-responses, which suggests that third graders are still willing to try to be included and do not yet show signs of learned hopelessness when rejected.

Implications for School Counselors

Given that “bullying” and relational aggression in elementary school children is becoming an increasing topic of concern (Paul, 2010), these findings are imperative for school counselors. Knowing how children respond to different forms of exclusion can help counselors in terms of intervention and possible prevention of social exclusion. As previously stated, there is a need to understand how children respond to social exclusion due to the increased focus on bullying and relational or social aggression in elementary school children. Counselors can utilize this information to implement a screening process to better identify those students being subjected to forms of exclusion. For example, if counselors are working with a child who cried or walked away from a social interaction, and is having a hard time describing the situation, this could suggest that the child may have been rejected. Alternatively, if they are working with an upset child who is wondering what he or she did wrong, or discussing a social interaction with his or her peers, that could suggest that the child was ignored. This would aid in the counselor’s ability to connect with the child and understand his or her experience.

Understanding how children react when socially excluded would also help counselors in their discussion with the parents of a child, who has been rejected or ignored, to be able to explain the child’s behaviors and increase the parent’s understanding and empathy. Schools might develop a protocol to address budding social exclusion cases, with both the victim and the aggressor, which identifies and discusses reactions to different forms of exclusion and their potential harm. Often times the focus is on punishing the aggressor, but not attending to the needs and feelings of

the child who has been rejected or ignored. Starting with background knowledge of how the child is reacting to the stressor would aid in empathy, understanding, and therapeutic bonding and rapport.

Another implication is that although there tends to be a high level of awareness regarding the negative effects of rejection, ignoring children may be subtler but still have harmful effects. Once identified, a number of skills and simple coping mechanisms can be implemented to prevent or offset the detrimental effects exclusion can have on the collective health of children (Prilleltensky, 2010). Counselors can, therefore, teach skills in order to boost self-esteem and promote positive human interactions. Support groups and workshops could be employed to encourage age-appropriate social skills and to increase levels of self-esteem. Mindfulness exercises could be used to lower anxiety and depression and encourage acceptance of one's self (Germer, Siegel, & Fulton, 2013).

The finding that third and fifth graders are already socialized similarly to college-aged students, supports the idea that social exclusion, and our ability to develop socially acceptable responses to it, begins in elementary school, if not earlier (Paul, 2010). The sooner these social and coping skills are added to children's repertoire, the more time they will have to both develop and strengthen these skills so that they are better prepared to face future social interactions. Interventions consistent with Marshall Rosenberg's (2003) nonviolent communication may help to raise children's awareness in regards to the thoughts and feelings of their peers in social interactions. Pre-schools might consider developing programs for parents and children to educate them about the importance of including rather than rejecting or ignoring other children.

Limitations and Recommendations

One limitation may be that the motivational level may have been negatively affected because questionnaires were administered during school recreational time and not class time. Another limitation includes difficulty in comparing the results to previous findings (Molden et al., 2009) given that the present study utilized hypothetical scenarios with multiple-choice responses whereas previous research asked respondents to imagine situations in which they were actually excluded and write their reaction in a free-response format. Although the format and scenarios chosen for this instrument were designed to be more appropriate for elementary school children than reflecting on their past and writing free responses, this instrument has not yet been validated. The reliability coefficients overall for the different scenarios (i.e., ignored, included, and rejected) as well as the subscales (behaviors, thoughts, and feelings for each scenario) were all very high (.92 - .98) with the exception of what children would do (behaviors) when rejected (.61). This is an interesting finding, and worth examining. Why is there such a greater degree of variability in the way children respond in what they would do if they were rejected, or outright excluded? This discrepancy could be attributed to the potential anxiety surrounding the most severe form of exclusion, and not knowing what they would do in that situation. Another potential reason for inconsistent responses could be that many students were resistant to choose the “cry or walk away” response, because they did not want to admit to crying. During administration, multiple students questioned how to answer, indicating that they would walk away but would not cry. They did not seem to understand that the “cry or walk

away” response would still be appropriate in that case. The reliability and validity will be analyzed further for future use and potential revision of this instrument.

Due to the increased media attention surrounding the topic of social exclusion in the form of relational or social aggression (bullying), this topic merits further investigation. Therefore it is recommended that this study be replicated and the instrument further analyzed to assess the generalizability and internal validity of these findings. In addition, it is recommended that in future research this survey be administered during class time to replicate normal testing conditions and potentially increase motivation to ensure accuracy in responses.

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Ms. Kelsey A. Kangos is recent graduate of Pace University’s mental health counseling program. She remains an active member of several research teams within the psychology department, focusing on social exclusion, resilience, and group dynamics. She has her limited permit in New York State and is currently working as a therapist predominantly with children and adolescents. Her previous work experience includes working as a counselor in a residential adolescent treatment facility. Ms. Kangos is in the process of applying to doctoral programs to begin in the fall of 2014.

Ms. Lisa Milone is a recent graduate of Pace University’s mental health counseling program. She is currently working as a behavior specialist at the Devereux Millwood Learning Center, a private school for children with autism in Westchester County, NY. Lisa's interests include child psychopathology and assessment. She will begin her doctoral studies in clinical psychology at Antioch University New England in the fall semester of 2013.