Portrayal of Bullying in Selected Picture Books: A Content Analysis

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This article discusses findings and implications from a research study using content analysis to investigate one question: How is bullying portrayed in selected picture books? The question is important because bullying has been, and continues to be, a pervasive problem in and out of school. This research study is needed because it investigates portrayals of the bully, bullied, and bystanders, unlike previous research that focused only on the bully. This article provides a review of research on bullying, highlighting international and national research that used content analysis to analyze picture books on bullying. It discusses content analysis as the research methodology, and describes data sources, data categories, data collection methods, and data analysis procedures. It ends by identifying major findings, discussing implications of findings, and describing limitations of the study.

Keywords: bullying, portrayal, picture books, content analysis

Introduction

Bullying has been, and continues to be, a significant and pervasive problem in and out of school (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2016). In fact, instances of bullying today are on the rise, so much so, that it is considered a serious public health problem by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (2006). In school, teachers often use picture books that deal with bullying "to address, and perhaps deter, this behavior…knowing that in the hands of the right teacher at the right moment, a picture book can be a powerful tool for engaging students in dialogue that either ends the bullying or gives victims and bystanders the knowledge and confidence to face it" (Entenman, Murnen, & Hendricks, 2005, p. 362). At the same time, teachers also understand that selecting appropriate picture books on bullying is as important as using them with students.

Selecting appropriate picture books on bullying is complex. Teachers need to consider type (fiction or nonfiction) and content of the book (physical, emotional, psychological, cyber bullying), context of bullying (in school or out of school), and how the bullying is resolved or unresolved (bullying stops or continues). A good start is to analyze portrayals of bullying in picture books. This analysis provides information to help teachers select picture books that will help students better understand, recognize, and, ultimately, prevent bullying in and out of schools (Daniel, 2014).

This research study investigated one question: How is bullying portrayed in selected picture books? The purpose of this study was to conduct a content analysis of the portrayal of bullying in selected picture books, and present findings

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from this analysis that will provide K-8 teachers understandings and insights for selecting picture books on bullying to share with students.

This article begins by describing the operational definition of bullying used in this study, followed by a description of the problem. Next, it provides a review of research on bullying, highlighting international and national research that used content analysis to analyze picture books on bullying. Then, it describes the significance of the study, identifies the research question, discusses content analysis as the research methodology, identifies the research team, as well as describes data sources, data categories, data collection methods, and data analysis procedures. It ends by discussing major findings and implications of findings and identifying limitations of the study.

Operational Definition

Bullying is complex, and therefore is defined in multiple ways. It is defined as "a specific type of aggression in which behavior towards others is intended to harm, occurs repeatedly over time, and involves an imbalance of power in which the person with power attacks the less powerful victim" (Nansel et al., 2001, p. 2095). It is also defined as "a pattern of repeated physical or psychological intimidation" (Beane, 2011, p. 5), deliberate, repeated, aggressive behavior against an individual who finds it difficult to defend him-or herself (Olweus, 1999). In the context of school it is defined as a student "being exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more students" (Olweus, 2001, p. 9).

In this study bullying is operationally defined as "any unwanted aggressive behavior(s) by another youth or group of youths who are not siblings or current dating partners that involves an observed or perceived power imbalance and is repeated multiple times or is highly likely to be repeated…bullying may inflict harm or distress on the targeted youth including physical, psychological, social, or educational harm" (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2016, p. 3). This definition was used for several reasons. First, the National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine is a national, highly reputable professional organization with an extensive and impressive history of research across a variety of sciences. Second, it provides one of the most recent, updated, and comprehensive definition of bullying. Finally, after researching and discussing a variety of definitions, the research team believed that this definition of bullying was the easiest and most effective definition to operationalize, especially when applying it to picture books.

Description of the Problem

In the context of school, bullying is a significant and pervasive problem in and out of school. It begins in preschool, increases throughout elementary school, peaks in middle school, affects nearly one in three middle school children, and is considered the most prevalent form of youth violence (Juvonen & Graham, 2014).

It is also referred to as peer victimization and crosses different age ranges and cultures.

Bullying is prevalent in school (Andreou & Bonoti, 2010), making school an unsafe place for the bullied (Eleni, 2014). Over twenty years ago, Banks (1997) found that as many as 7% of 8th graders do not go to school and stay at home at least once a month because of bullying. Since that time, little has changed; in fact, bullying has become worse. Students' concerns at school continue to "revolve around safety as much as achievement, as the perpetrators of peer harassment are perceived as more aggressive and the victims of their abuse report feeling more vulnerable" (Graham, 2010, p. 66). Today, bullying is so serious that approximately "…160,000 kids skip school every day for fear of being bullied and 280,000 students are physically attacked in schools every month" (Bennett, 2018).

Many attempts have been made to stop bullying. In the United States all fifty states have passed laws against bullying and websites have been developed to help individuals and families combat bullying (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2016). In addition, public schools and school districts have developed policies to combat bullying in classrooms and on school grounds. Schools have purchased or developed anti-bullying programs that specifically encourage students to turn to teachers if they are bullied. When reported, student suspension and related exclusionary techniques remain the default response by school staff and administrators in bullying situations. These responses, however, do not appear to be effective and may result in increased academic and behavioral problems for youth. In the end these efforts, and others like them, have produced minimal, if any, change in bullying behaviors (Merrell, Gueldner, Ross & Isava, 2008).

In addition, bullying remains a persistent problem for many individuals and groups of individuals, especially disenfranchised and marginalized groups, and results in devastating and long-term physical, psychological, social, or educational harm (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (2016). In fact, many individuals "remain haunted by the humiliation long into adulthood" (Weissbourd & Jones, 2012, p. 27) and struggle with health concerns like depression, anxiety, panic disorders, and fear of being out in public (Public News Service, 2013).

Research on Bullying

Much research has been conducted on the topic of bullying. Historically, research was first conducted in Scandinavia and resulted in many ground-breaking studies that later influenced and encouraged research on bullying in the United States.

Research in Scandinavia

In the early 1970s Olweus (1986), a Scandinavian researcher and often referred to as a pioneer and founding father on bullying research, conducted the

first systematic research study in the world on bullying. This study was significant because, prior to the early 1990s, research on the topic of bullying outside of Scandinavia was very limited (Olweus, 2007).

In the 1980s Olweus (1993) surveyed more than 150,000 Scandinavian students and found that approximately 15% of students ages 8–16 were involved in bullying, either as bullies, victims, or both bully and victim. Findings also indicated that "approximately 9% of all students were victims and 6–7% bullied other students regularly…only a small proportion of the victims also engaged in bullying other students" (Olweus, 2003, p. 48).

These studies are important because they found common types of bullying, including verbal bullying, spreading rumors, sexual bullying, racial bullying, physical bullying, and cyber bullying (Luxenberg, Limber, & Olweus, 2015). Although these studies were conducted in Scandinavia, other research has been conducted that investigated bullying across cultures. Due and Holstein (2008) reported that "although rates of involvement in bullying vary between cultures, in a survey of 66 countries it was found that on average 31% of adolescents surveyed had experienced peer victimization within the past two months, with rates as high as 60% in some countries" (p. 692).

Research in the United States

Much research has been conducted in the United States on bullying, especially in the context of schooling. In 2001, Olweus (2003) conducted a survey on bullying that involved approximately 11,000 students in the United States from 54 elementary and junior high schools and found that "the percentage of victimized students had increased by approximately 50% from 1983, and the percentage of students who were involved (as bullies, victims, or bully-victims) in frequent and serious bullying problems—occurring at least once a week—had increased by approximately 65%" (p. 49). Similarly, Nansel, et al. (2001) found in a national study involving more than 15,000 U.S. students in grades six through ten that 17% of students reported being bullied during the school year. Approximately 19% said they bullied others and 6% reported bullying others and being a victim of bullying. Blosnich and Bossarte (2011) found that approximately 3.2 million children in the United States in grades six through ten are estimated to be bullied every year, making bullying the most prevalent form of school violence. Rivara and Le Menestrel (2016) found that "school-based bullying likely affects between 18 and 31% of children and youth, and the prevalence of cyber victimization ranges from 7 to 15% of youth" (p. 2). Lastly, the U.S Secret Service and the U.S. Department of Education (2018) investigated 37 school shootings and found that about two-thirds of student shooters felt bullied, harassed, threatened, or injured by others (American Psychological Association, 2018).

Content Analysis

A limited number of studies exist that used content analysis as a research methodology to analyze picture books dealing with bullying themes. Of these,

many studies have been published in education and library science journals (Flanagan et al., 2013; Quinn et al., 2003). These studies found the importance of picture books to teach about, and intervene in, bullying situations, as well as teach important information about bullying.

Oppliger and Davis (2016) conducted a content analysis on picture books for preschoolers and found that bullies were twice as likely to be male, although the sex of victims was evenly split between males and females. Teasing and name calling were the most prevalent types of bullying, and female perpetrators were just as likely to physically bully their victims as male perpetrators. Moulton, Heath, Prater, and Dyches (2011) conducted a content analysis of thirty-eight picture books published from 2004-2010 and found that most books featured male bullies with both female and male victims. These victims were bullied because of differences in height between the bully and the bullied, with the bullied physically shorter and smaller than the bully. Others were bullied because of differences in personality traits, personal and social behaviors, and physical characteristics other than height.

Some studies used content analysis on picture books dealing with bullying themes specifically focused on coping strategies used by the bullied (Kochenderfer-Ladd, 2004; Entenmen, Murnen, & Hendricks, 2005). Flanagan, et al. (2013) found that the bullied used 22 different coping strategies to combat bullying. These strategies included bystander-intervention, active acceptance, befriending, tricking and scaring the bully, and verbal confrontation. The bullied used violence as the most common coping strategy, and in one-third of the stories, the victim stopped the bullying through counterattack and revenge. Overall, these studies found that coping strategies vary in effectiveness at reducing future bullying.

Other studies used content analysis to analyze how bullying episodes were resolved at the end of the story. In an analysis of 33 picture books with bullying themes, Daniel (2014) found five major categories for resolving bullying episodes. These categories included: victim stands up to the bully; parent or authority figure intervenes in the bullying situation; bully apologizes for the bullying behavior and the story ends happily; bully gets what he/she deserves; and resolution to the bullying behavior was not evident in the story.

Major Findings Across Content Analysis Studies

There are several major findings across studies that used content analysis to analyze picture books with bullying themes. One finding is that bullying is a sensitive issue, especially for young children and, therefore, picture books often use animals, rather than humans, as main characters. Oppliger and Davis (2016) note that picture books often use "illustrations of anthropomorphized animals and other creatures that are likely to shield children from identifying too closely with the stories' victims who are experiencing distress" (p. 516).

Another finding is that picture books are important because students as young as preschool age, but as old as high school and even college, learn from these books on how to identify and respond to bullies (Freeman, 2014). These books are also valuable because they are effective at teaching empathy. Often, children who

bully others experience enjoyment in exercising power and status over victims (Rigby, 1998), and fail to develop empathy for others (Olweus, 1984). Picture books can help students experience vicariously, through bullied characters, what it can feel like to be bullied (Nikolajeva, 2013). Making empathetic connections from picture books with bullying themes helps students learn about bullying. They often tell engaging stories in which the bullied comes to realize that bullies are the minority and peers and bystanders are the majority. They emphasize that the bullied is not alone and isolated, and that bystanders and peers are valuable resources in bullying situations.

Still another finding from all the studies that used content analysis on picture books with bullying themes is that teachers are an important component of any multicomponent schoolwide program tocombat bullying. Teachers can help students learn coping strategies for dealing with bullying behavior (Freeman, 2014). Specifically, teachers can use literature, particularly picture book stories with bullying themes, as a curricular and instructional resource to combat bullying (Quinn et al., 2003). Bullying experts, practitioners, and laymen all recognize "the value of utilizing stories in helping children cope with bullying" (Heath et al., 2011, p. 12). Teachers can use picture books to help students understand bullying and its harmful effects and set a positive classroom environment (Freeman, 2014).

A final finding is that it is important for teachers to be able to carefully select and use picture books in the classroom to combat bullying. Teachers need to be aware of the number and variety of books that can be used to discourage bullying among young children so they can carefully screen picture books before selecting and sharing them with children (Flanagan et al., 2013). Carefully selected picture books should promote healthy interpersonal relationships (teacher/student and student/student) and encourage prosocial behavior, such as kindness, inclusiveness, and empathy—critical ingredients in sensitively responding to other's feelings, rather than antisocial and aggressive behavior, like bullying (Henkin, 2005). What is most important is that the core messages in a picture book "should align with expectations for desired behavior, particularly how bullying is resolved and how adults, victims, and bystanders respond" (Heath et al., 2011, p. 12).

Significance of Study

This study is significant for several reasons. Only a limited number of studies have used content analysis as a research methodology to analyze picture books with bullying themes, and of those, these studies focused on picture books primarily for very young children in preschool and primary grades, K-2. This study used content analysis of picture books to focus on a wider range of grade levels, K-8, highlighting two grade bands: PK3: Preschool through grade 3 and MG: Middle Grades, 4-8. Moreover, previous studies used content analysis of picture books to focus mostly on the bullied. This study used content analysis of picture books to focus on the bully, bullied, and bystanders. Lastly, previous studies used content analysis of picture books to focus on one category of bullying, namely, coping strategies used by the bullied. This study used content analysis of picture books to

examine multiple categories, e.g., characteristics of the bullied and bully, context for bullying, and presence of bystanders, etc.

Research Methodology

This study used content analysis as the research methodology. Content analysis is a qualitative research methodology that focuses on describing and interpreting written artifacts (Krippendorff, 2018). It "involves the inspection of patterns in written texts, often drawing on combinations of inductive, deductive, and abductive analytical techniques" (Hoffman, Wilson, Martinez, & Sailors, 2011, p. 29). The goal of content analysis is to generate "knowledge and understanding of the phenomenon under study" (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1278). Here, the phenomenon and unit of study was a picture book on the topic of bullying.

This study followed specific steps for conducting qualitative content analysis (Wildemuth, 2009). These steps included: prepare the data set, define the unit of analysis, develop categories and coding scheme, test coding scheme on sample of text, code all texts, assess coding consistency, draw conclusions from coded data, and report methods and findings.

Research Team

A total of 18 individuals participated in data collection. These participants included one principal researcher, one assistant researcher, two graduate research assistants, and fourteen graduate students. The principal researcher is a professor in literacy education at a large midwestern university. The assistant researcher is an assistant professor in literacy education at a regional, midwestern university. The two research assistants and fourteen other participants are graduate students pursuing a masters of reading specialization degree at the same large midwestern university as the principal researcher.

Data Source

The data source was a collection of 124 picture books with bullying themes. This source represented a sample of convenience. The two principal investigators possess extensive collections of picture books that each uses when teaching their respective undergraduate and graduate classes. These investigators searched their collections and selected picture books based on specific criteria developed by the research team. Table 1 illustrates criteria used to select picture and an example of each criterion.

Table 1. Criteria for Selection and Example of Picture Book

Criteria	Example
Books are picture books that contain traditional story elements.	*The Recess Queen* (O'Neill, 2002)
Books are narratives, fiction or nonfiction.	*The Bully and the Shrimp* (Allison, 2014)
The words "bully", "bullied", and "teasing" are included in the title, e.g., or; the words "bully," "bullied" or "teasing" were included in the synopsis for the book, but not in the title, or; words "bully", "bullied", and "teasing" are not in the title or the synopsis but the book addresses bullying in the narrative.	*Bobby the Blue-Footed Booby Gets Bullied?* (Bowles, 2016)
Books are appropriate for grades K-8.	*Leave Me Alone* (Gray, 2011)
Books are readily accessible and available to teachers. No rare or out-of-print books. No self-published books. No books published in electronic forms.	*Nobody Knew What To Do* (McCain, 2017)
Books do not deal with sibling rivalry.	*Karate Girl* (Leary, 2003)
Books are not published in commercial programs or anthologies.	*Henry and the Bully* (Carlson, 2010)

Data Categories

In content analysis methodology, analytical constructs may be formulated in three ways: previous research, knowledge and experience of experts, and existing practices or theories (White & Marsh, 2006). The principal investigators used previous research to develop a set of a-priori categories that functioned as the focus for the content analysis of picture books. The rationale for categories was that adapting or "adopting coding schemes developed in previous studies has the advantage of supporting the accumulation and comparison of research findings across multiple studies" (Wildemuth, 2009, p. 311). These a-priori categories were found in a review of the professional literature (Wiseman & Jones, 2018).

In addition to a-priori, other categories were added by the research team. These categories were added because they reflected personal interests about bullying shared by members of the team and were intended to broaden and extend the a-priori categories found in the professional literature. In the end, a combined total of 19 descriptive and interpretive categories were the focus of analysis. Descriptive categories included range of copyright dates, grade bands, race or ethnicity of bully and bullied, bully as bullied, gender of bully and bullied, primary focus, frequency of bullying, presence of bystanders, number of bystanders, context for bullying, and cyberbullying. Interpretive categories included identity of bully, characteristics of bully, behavior of bully, identity of bullied, characteristics of bullied, coping strategies used by bullied, identity of bystander, characteristics of bystander, and bystander response to bullying.

Data Collection

Data collection was a multi-stage process. Stage 1: All members of the research team were organized into pairs (8 pairs), not including the principal investigators. Stage 2: Each pair randomly selected approximately fifteen picture books, out of an initial total of 135, and spent time browsing each book. Pairs browsed each book looking for text evidence that indicated each book met all criteria. Books that did not meet all criteria were withdrawn. If any book was deemed questionable in terms of meeting all criteria, members shared this book with another pair of members of members. The other pair browsed the book and discussed it with the first pair to make a determination as to make a determination as to whether the book did or did not meet all criteria. Based on this discussion, both set of pairs decided whether the book should be included or withdrawn from the data set. If both pairs could not agree to include or withdraw the books, both principal researchers read and discussed the books and made the final determination. Using this process, a total of 11 picture books in the end were excluded from the original total of 135 picture books, making the final data set a total of 124 picture books.

Stage 3: After browsing, each pair rotated their collection of books to a different pair of members. Then, each pair spent time browsing each book in the new set to determine the appropriate grade band (PK3: Preschool through Grade 3 or MG: Middle Grades 4-8) for each book. Each pair identified and discussed factors such as the age (or reasonable approximation) of the bully, age of the bullied, story setting, and type of bullying, as well as recommended grade levels specified by the publisher, identification of Lexile scores, and other information about the book that helped determine grade band. Each pair discussed each book, reached consensus, and recorded the grade band for each picture book. When books were questionable, the same process described in stage two was used again. However, additional books were not withdrawn from the data set.

Stage 4: The principal investigators created an Excel spreadsheet that identified and organized all 19 categories. This spreadsheet functioned as a shared organizational device for members of the research team to code and record data collected on each picture book. The principal investigators digitally shared the Excel spreadsheet with all members of the research team.

Stage 5: Before data collection began, the principal investigators selected one picture book from the data set and read aloud the book to the research team. Afterwards, this book was utilized to demonstrate how to code and record data on the Excel spreadsheet. The principal investigators facilitated a discussion with, and invited questions from, the research team and also invited them to ask questions in order to ensure that all members clearly understood the data collection, coding, and recording process.

Stage 6: Lastly, each pair selected a set of picture books based on a specific grade band. Each pair read the books separately, and afterwards met to discuss, collaboratively code, and record data on the Excel spreadsheet based on all categories for each book. All pairs continued this data collection process until all 124 picture books had been read, discussed, and coded on the Excel spreadsheet.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted by four members of the research team: the principal researchers and two graduate students who also participated in data collection. All members of the research team were invited to participate in data analysis and two accepted. The unit of analysis was a picture book, and the focus was on how bullying was portrayed across books in the data set. Data analysis was qualitative and collaborative and focused on using a-priori and other categories to create descriptive and interpretive findings. As with data collection, data analysis involved a multi-stage process.

Stage 1: Members of the data analysis team focused on analyzing each of the nineteen categories separately. Stage 2: Members read all data collected in each category without pausing at any point for reflection or stopping to record preliminary impressions of the data. At this stage, the purpose was for members to create an overall impression of the data for each category. Stage 3: Members read all data collected in each category once again. This time, however, members paused while reading to reflect on the data and record preliminary impressions. At this stage the purpose was for members to write short summaries of preliminary impressions of the data for each category. Stage 4: Members met regularly to share, discuss, and reflect on individual summaries of preliminary findings. The purpose of these meetings was to reach group consensus on findings for each category. Stage 5: This process continued until all members reached group consensus for all nineteen categories.

Findings

Findings are presented across two categories: descriptive and interpretive.

Descriptive Findings

Descriptive findings were based on analysis of data in the following categories: range of copyright dates, grade band, race or ethnicity of bully and bullied, bully as bullied, gender of bully and bullied, primary focus, frequency of bullying, presence and number of bystanders, context for bullying, and cyberbullying.

Range of Copyright Dates

The purpose of analyzing copyright dates was to determine to what extent picture books in the data set were not recently published, somewhat recently published, or recently published. The copyright date of each book was recorded with the code as either published recently, not recently, or somewhat recently. All copyright dates were identified, recorded, and organized the by decade. Table 2 illustrates copyright dates ranging from 1960-2010.

Table 2. Range of Copyright Dates

Decade	Frequency	%
1960	1	1.1
1970	3	2.1
1980	10	8.1
1990	25	20.2
2000	47	37.9
2010	38	30.6
TOTAL	124	100.0

Of 124 picture books published across six decades, a total of 4 (3.2%) books were published in the 1960-1970 decades and were categorized as not recently published. Of the remaining 120 books, a total of 35 (28.3%) books were published in the 1980-1990 decades and were categorized as somewhat recently published. The remaining 85 (68.5%) books were published in the 2000-2010 decades and were categorized as recently published.

Grade Bands. The purpose of analyzing grade bands was to determine the targeted audience for the books., e.g., preschool to grade 3 or middle grades 4-8. A grade band was determined from a variety of factors, such as portrayal of a general age of characters, simplicity and complexity of language, publisher suggested reading grade levels, simplicity or difficulty of plot, and characteristics of settings. Table 3 illustrates findings from an analysis of grade bands. Most picture books targeted the grade band of preschool through grade 3.

Table 3. Grade Band

Grade Band	Frequency	%
PK3: Preschool to grade 3	88	71
MG: Middle grades 4-8	36	29
TOTAL	124	100.0

Race or Ethnicity of the Bully

The purpose of this category was to analyze the race or ethnicity of the bully and bullied. Table 4 illustrates that the bully was portrayed as Caucasian more than other races or ethnicities. Similarly, Table 4 illustrates that the bullied was portrayed primarily as Caucasian, then African American, Asian, Caucasian, and Hispanic.

Table 4. Race or Ethnicity of Bully

Race or Ethnicity	Frequency	%
African American	4	3.2
Asian	3	2.4
Caucasian	55	44.4
Hispanic	1	8.0
Other	61	33.9
TOTAL	105	84.7
Note: "Other" included nonhuman characters		

Bully as Possibly Bullied

The purpose of analyzing the bully as possibly bullied was to portray a possible cause for bullying, such as, the bully engaged in bullying because s/he was also bullied. Table 5 illustrates that 10% of picture books portrayed a possible cause of bullying was due to being bullied at some time.

Table 5. Bully as Possibly Bullied

Bully as Possibly Bullied	Frequency	%
No	111	89.5
Yes	13	10.5
TOTAL	124	100.0

Gender of Bully and Bullied

The purpose of this category was to analyzing gender of the bully and bullied. Table 6 illustrates that the bully was portrayed as male more than female.

Table 6. Gender of Bully

Gender of Bully	Frequency	%
Female	28	22.6
Male	73	58.9
Neither	23	18.5
TOTAL	124	100.0

Note: "Neither" included nonhuman characters.

Similarly, Table 7 illustrates that the bullied was portrayed as male more than female.

Table 7. Gender of Bullied

Gender of Bullied	Frequency	%
Female	37	29.7
Male	67	59.2
Neither	20	16.1
TOTAL	124	

Note: "Neither" included nonhuman characters.

Primary Focus

The purpose of analyzing of this category was to determine whether the primary focus of the picture book was on the bully or the bullied, or both. Table 8 illustrates that the primary focus was placed on the bullied, secondarily on both the bully and the bullied, and less on the bully.

Table 8. Primary Focus

Primary Focus	Frequency	%
Bully	20	16.1
Bullied	79	63.8
Both	25	20.1
TOTAL	124	100.0

Frequency of Bullying

The purpose of analyzing the frequency of bullying was to determine whether bullying was portrayed as a single instance or repeated instances over time. Table 9 illustrates that bullying was portrayed as a frequent and repetitive act occurring over time, rather than a single, isolated incident.

Table 9. Frequency of Bullying

Frequency of Bullying	Frequency	%
Single	20	16.1
Repetitive	104	83.9
TOTAL	124	100.0

Presence and Number of Bystanders

The purpose of analyzing bystanders was to portray presence and number of bystanders during bullying. Table 10 illustrates that at least one bystander was present most of the time when bullying incidents occurred.

Table 10. Presence of Bystanders

Presence of Bystanders	Frequency	%
No	31	25.0
Yes	93	75.0
TOTAL	124	100.0

Table 11 illustrates a numeric range of bystanders present during incidents of bullying, ranging from one bystander to more than five.

Table 11. Range of Bystanders

Number of Bystanders	Frequency	%
1	19	15.3
2	12	9.7
3	9	7.3
4	5	4.0
5 or more	48	38.7
None	31	25.0
TOTAL	124	100.0

Context for Bullying

The purpose of analyzing context for bullying was to determine a context, a sense of the place and situation, where bullying occurred. Table 12 illustrates a variety of contexts in which incidents of bullying occurred. School was a major context. A total of 71 picture books portrayed incidents of bullying in the classroom, at school, and on school grounds.

Table 12. Context for Bullying

Context for Bullying	Frequency	%
Classroom	4	3.2
Community	18	14.5
Neighborhood	15	12.1
School	31	25.0
School Grounds	36	29.0
Other	20	16.2
TOTAL	124	100.0

Cyberbullying

The purpose of analyzing cyberbullying was to determine the use of technology as a tool for bullying, if at all. Table 13 illustrates that cyberbullying was infrequently portrayed across the picture books.

Table 13. Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying	Frequency	%
Yes	5	4.0
No	119	96.0
TOTAL	124	100.0

Interpretive Findings

Interpretive findings were based on analysis of categories including identity of bully, characteristics of bully, behavior of bully, stigma of bullied, identity of bullied, coping strategies used by bullied, characteristics of bullied, coping strategies used by bullied, identity of bystander, characteristics of bystander, and bystander response to bullying.

Identity of Bully

The identity of the bully was recorded as either human or nonhuman. Most bullies were portrayed as human, and specifically students and classmates. Moreover, they were portrayed as notorious children in the neighborhood and community with a history of bullying. Nonhuman bullies were mostly animals, including guinea pigs, bulls, foxes, dogs, fish, crabs, raccoons, mice, gorillas, bears, and crocodiles, roosters, goats, and ducks.

Characteristics of Bully

In the PreK-3 grade band (PK3), a total of eighteen different words were used to portray the bully. The most common words were *big* and *mean*, followed closely by *bossy* and *strong*. Other words included *ornery*, *scary*, and *liar* In the Middle Grades grade band (MG), the most common word used to portray the bully was *mean*, followed by *big, tall, huge,* and *fat*, followed by *rude* and *uptight*.

Behavior of Bully

Across both grade bands, the behavior of the bully was portrayed as a person who possessed an unwillingness or inability to tolerate differences, specifically physical, social, and cultural differences. Physically, bullies used their physical size and appearance to bully others. Socially, bullies were portrayed as having few, if any, friends and possessing low self-esteem. They were portrayed as people who felt different than others, jealous of others, awkward around others, and inadequate in some way. To compensate for feeling different, bullies engaged in bullying to exert power over others.

In the PreK-3 grade band grade band, the behavior of the bully was primarily portrayed as a person who bullied because they were physically *big* and imposingly *large*. The bully wanted and needed to feel powerful and tough. Consequently, they acted mean and bragged incessantly. Moreover, bullies bullied other people because they wanted something that belonged to someone else, typically a valued object, e.g., food, sporting equipment, piece of clothing. Bullies also bullied other people because they had no friends, struggled to make new friends, and turned to bullying to compensate for having no friends.

In the Middle Grades grade band, the behavior of the bully was portrayed more by social attitudes than physical differences. Unlike the PreK-3 grade band, bullies bullied because they thought bullying was cool and wanted to feel powerful. They also bullied to be *mean* and to *exclude* by not including those they considered to be different. Bullies also bullied out of *jealousy*. They did not want another person to gain a status greater than what they perceived to be their own.

Identity of Bullied

The bullied was portrayed mostly as a single individual who was also a friend or acquaintance of the bully. In other instances, the bullied was portrayed, not as a single person, but as a group of people. For example, the bullied was portrayed as an entire class of students.

Characteristics of Bullied

The bullied were portrayed by several physical characteristics and social situations. These characteristics portrayed the bullied as vulnerable, and a target for bullying. In terms of physical characteristics, common reasons victims were bullied included *having big feet, being small, having freckles or red cheeks,* and

being *hairless.* Other reasons dealt with physical appearance, such as *being small* and *being clumsy.* Social situations included living conditions, such as *living in a junkyard, wearing old clothing, having to wear a shabby coats because they were poor, being in poor health, having poor vision and needing glasses.*

Social characteristics focused on personality issues of the bullied and included being *wimpy, a sissy,* and *a crybaby,* as well as *being new to a school, a neighborhood, or a community.* Boys were specifically targeted for bullying when they *did not conform to gender norms.*

Coping Strategies of Bullied

The bullied used a variety of coping strategies. They included *tell an adult, avoid the bully, stand-up to the bully, ignore the bully, befriend the bully, fight back, trick the bully, develop self-confidence, gang-up on the bully, change self, isolate self from others, yield to bully, become a bully,* and *join the bully.*

Identity of Bystander

Most picture books included at least one bystander. Five types of bystanders were found: classmates, family members, teacher/ school staff, community members, and friends. More bystanders were portrayed in the PK-3 books than the Middle Grades grade band books.

Characteristics of Bystander

Characteristics of bystanders were portrayed in several different ways. The most common characteristics were described as *supportive, defensive, fearful, ignoring the bullying,* and *befriending the bully.*

Bystander Response to Bullying. A total of seven categories were found on the portrayal of bystander response to bullying. These included *doing nothing, laughing, and joining in with the bully, standing-up for the bullied, reacting emotionally, being frightened and scared, giving advice,* and *showing kindness.* The portrayal of bystander response to bullying was mostly positive. Bystander intervention resulted in the decrease or stoppage in bullying, the bullied became friends with the bully, the bullied experienced positive feelings, such as increased *confidence, pride, respect, support, and reassurance.*

In addition, a few books portrayed bystander intervention as ineffective and inconsequential. The intervention was portrayed as ineffective because verbal and physical bullying continued. In other picture books, no bystander intervention was portrayed, and bullying continued.

Conclusions

This section discusses major conclusions across five headings: 1) general, 2) bully, bullied, and bystander, 3) bullies, 4) bullied, and 5) bystander.

General

In general, picture books in this study were found to be recently published. A total of 85 out of 124 (68.5%) picture books were published between 2000-2010, and 110 out of 124 (88.7%) were published between 1990-2010. Thus, most picture books provided reasonably contemporary, rather than outdated, portrayals of bullying situations.

Findings from grade bands were unexpected. Previous studies on bullying found most picture books were targeted for very young children. (PK3). This study analyzed picture books across two grade bands, Preschool through Grade 3 and Middle Grades 4-8, and, like previous studies, found most picture books targeted the Preschool through Grade 3 grade band. Specifically, 71% were found to target this grade band, whereas only 29% targeted the Middle Grades 4-8 grade band.

This finding was unexpected because much research indicates bullying occurs across multiple grade bands. Juvonen and Graham (2014) found that bullying starts as early as preschool, increases throughout elementary school, and peaks in middle school. Because bullying peaks more in middle than primary grades, it was expected that more picture books would be found that targeted the Middle Grades 4-8 grade band. For the most part, the opposite was found. Two possible hypothesizes for this finding might be because the data set was based on a sample of convenience, as well as the Middle Grades 4-8 grade band might not reflect the overall commercial target market for picture books.

Findings from an analysis of cyberbullying were also unexpected. In general, cyberbullying is the use of electronic communication devices to intentionally bully. Technology has been, and continues to be, used pervasively in society. Thus, it was expected that picture books would be found on this topic. The opposite was found. Few picture books were found that portrayed bullies using technology to cyberbully other persons. Only 4% of all picture books portrayed bullies participating in the act of cyberbullying.

In terms of contexts or settings for bullying, Olweus (1993) found that most bullying incidents occurred in unstructured settings. Unstructured settings were places that are not formally organized and involved little or no direct adult supervision. This study also found that most bullying incidents were portrayed in unstructured settings. These settings were mostly school hallways and school grounds and with little, or no, direct adult supervision going on at the time. Other unstructured settings included the neighborhood and community.

Bully, Bullied, and Bystander

The three main characters portrayed in most picture books were the bully, bullied, and bystander. These characters were not portrayed with equal emphasis. The bullied was most emphasized, followed by the bully and then the bystander. One consequence of the overemphasis on the bullied and the underemphasis on the bullied and bystander is that portrayals did not fully capture the inherent complexity of the act of bullying and the variety of people involved and affected by it.

This study found that most books portrayed a singular image of bullying - one bully and one bullied. Other books portrayed different image, but to a much lesser extent. Other images included one bully who bullied multiple children in the neighborhood and community; groups of bullies who bullied groups of students in school hallways and on school playgrounds; and one bully bullying others in a variety of settings where one or more bystanders were present. A singular image of bullying oversimplifies and distorts the act of bullying. Acts of bullying impact many different people in many ways. Thus, more complex, and less simple, portrayals of bullying are needed.

Bullies

In many ways bullies defy gender. Both males and females bully, both are bullied, and both are negatively affective from it. There are some important distinctions.

On the one hand, males bully more than females at all educational levels (Smith, Cousins, & Steward, 2005). Males are more likely to be bullies and to be physically bullied more than females (Gruber & Fineran, 2007). This study found that the portrayal of bullies is consistent with these research findings. Oppliger and Davis (2016) found that the portrayal of bullies in picture books were twice as likely to be male. This study also found that the portrayal of bullies was mostly male, and specifically Caucasian male. Approximately 60% of picture books portrayed bullies primarily as one male character with a notorious reputation for bullying.

In addition, males bully more overtly and more physically, especially through physical, emotional, and psychological intimidation (Craig, 2017). This study found portrayals of bullies to be consistent with previous research and described bullies through physical, personal, and social characteristics. Descriptive words and phrases were used to identify those characteristics. In the Preschool through Grade 3 grade band, words that accurately describe physical characteristics of the bully include *big*, *strong*, and *scary*, followed by words that describe personal characteristics and including *mean*, *bossy*, and *ornery*. Similarly, in the Middle Grades 4 - 8 grade band, words that accurately describe physical characteristics include *big, large, tall, huge,* and *fat*, followed by other descriptive words that describe personal characteristics and include *being rude* and *acting uptight*.

Males bully to exert power, gain control, and achieve status, and do so through behaviors such as hitting, kicking, pushing, stealing, and intimidating (Bandsuch, 2017). This study found portrayals of bullies to be consistent with previous research that described reasons why male bullies participated in bullying others. Descriptive words and phrases were used to identify those reasons. Bullies wanted and needed to *feel powerful*. They always acted *mean* and *tough* and *bragged* incessantly. Bullies wanted something that *already belonged to someone else*. Typically, this was a physical object, e.g., somebody else's lunch, toy, soccer ball. Still another reason was that bullies were unwilling or unable to *tolerate difference* of any kind, a portrayal that was particularly evident in the Middle Grades 4-8

grade band. Portrayals of bullies provided no evidence to support the notion that bullies bullied others because they also had been bullied.

Male bullies bullied victims who were *different* from themselves, viewing them as particularly *vulnerable* to bullying. Once selected, they bullied victims by trying to exert power over them in different ways. They (and females) *intentionally excluded* others from activities in the classroom, at school, and in the neighborhood. Bullies were portrayed across both grade bands as persons who bullied from a sense of *possessiveness, resentfulness, jealousy,* and *insecurity*. Ultimately, bullies did not want any other person to gain a *status* equal to or, even worse, greater than what bullies perceived to be their own.

Lastly, bullying involves a gender paradox (Williams, 2015). The paradox is that, while males and females are both bullies, they bully differently, and bullying affects them differently (Craig, 2017). Unlike male bullying, which is mostly overt and physical, female bullying is mostly subtle and relational. Female bullying is characterized as social aggression against other females and typically involves rejection, ostracism, deliberate exclusion, public criticism, and covert verbal attacks like gossip, rumors, insults, and whispering (NEA, 2011). Moreover, females are affected severely by relational bullying. It is as damaging as physical, and the effects are long-lasting (Bandsuch, 2017).

Findings from this study was consistent with previous research findings. Male bullying was portrayed as overt and physical, while female bullying was subtle and relational This study did not find portrayals that indicated any long-lasting effects from the bullying. For example, neither male or female portrayals of bullying indicated any deleterious effects beyond the immediate situation, e.g. depression, withdrawal, isolation, etc.

Bullied

Like findings on the identity of the bully, portrayals of the bullied were mostly male, and specifically Caucasian male. Approximately 60% of picture books portrayed the bullied as one male character who was often a friend or an acquaintance of the bully. Very few books portrayed the bullied as a group of people being bullied, e.g., a classroom of students.

Several reasons were found for why the bullied was bullied. These reasons were based on several social and economic factors, as well as personality traits of the bullied. Descriptive phrases were used to describe reasons for why the bullied was bullied and include *has big feet, is small and week, has freckles and red cheeks, is awkward and clumsy, wears glasses,* and *has weird hair*. Phrases also were used to describe reasons based on social and economic factors, particularly the living conditions of the bullied, and include the bullied *lives in a junkyard, wears old or dirty clothing, owns and wears a shabby coat, lives in poverty, wears the same clothes to school,* and *is unhealthy and sickly.* Still other phrases describe reasons based on personality traits and include the bullied was *a wimp, a sissy, a crybaby*, and males were bullied because they *did not conform to gender norms*. The bullied were also bullied because they were new, *new to a school, to a classroom, to a neighborhood,* and *to a community.*

Lastly, Flanagan et al. (2013), found many coping strategies used by the bullied to combat bullying. Phrases were used to accurately describe these strategies and included *ignore the bully*, *deliberately miss school*, *hide from the bully*, *confront the bully verbally or physically*, *befriend the bully*, *trick the bully*, *gang-up on the bully with friends*, *change physical appearance*, *isolate themselves*, *acquiesce or yield to the bully*, *don't react*, *make changes to self to satisfy the bully*, *develop more self-confidence*, *join the bully*, and *become a bully*.

In this study, *"Tell an Adult"* was also a common coping strategy used by the bullied. Many anti-bullying and suicide awareness programs encourage students to turn to teachers if they are bullied themselves or know of someone who is being bullied (Pytash, 2013). This sounds easy but is not. It is not easy for the bullied to find the courage that it certainly takes to step forward and tell an adult. How does the bullied decide what adult to tell? Why one adult, but not another? Under what circumstances does the bullied report bullying behavior to an adult? What are the consequences if the bullied tells an adult, but the bully continues to bully?

Bystander

Previous studies focused very little, if at all, on portrayals of bystander and bystander responses to bullying. This study investigated both and found that most picture books portrayed at least one bystander in bullying situations, and most included groups of bystanders. These groups included school classmates, family members, teacher and school staff, community members, next-door neighbors, and general friends. While more bystanders were identified and portrayed in the PK-3 grade band, portrayals of bystanders were similar across both grade bands. Bystanders were portrayed mostly as classmates, followed by teachers, family members, community members, and friends.

This study also found a variety of ways bystanders responded to bullying situations and uses phrases that accurately describe these responses. Some responses were positive and helpful, while others were negative and unhelpful. Positive and helpful phrases include bystanders *expressed support the bullied, stood-up for the bullied* (told the bully to stop, asked an nearby adult for help), *gave advice* (recommended the bullied stood-up to the bully, go tell parents or another adult), *showed kindness towards the bullied* (acting helpful or concerned), *offered to fight the bully*, and *walked home with the bullied for protection*, and *befriended the bully* as a strategy to end bullying.

Negative and unhelpful phrases include bystanders *acted shocked by the bully, acted frightened and scared of the bully, expressed fear of the bully, ignored the bully, tolerated the bully and the bullying, did nothing* (did not know how to handle the situation)*, laughed and joined in with the bully reacting emotionally*.

The portrayal of bystander responses to bullying was mostly positive. Bystander responses decreased, and at times stopped, the bully from continuing to bully. At other times, however, portrayal of bystander responses were negative. They portrayed bystanders as well intended, but mostly ineffective. Bystanders were portrayed as reacting emotionally, e.g., *starting to cry, becoming visually upset*, *showing concern but also being confused,* and *being immediately scared*

and frozen about what was happening and ways to stop it, hoping someone else would quickly intervene. Emotional responses were portrayed as ineffective, and the bullying continued.

On the one hand, bystanders were generally portrayed as responsive and helpful to the bullied. In most instances bystanders directly intervened in bullying situations, verbally confronted the bully, and thus stopped the bullying in progress. On the other hand, bystander interventions were portrayed as having no positive and long-lasting effects on bully behavior. Without question, bystander interventions helped to stop the bullying, but only temporarily. Once bystanders left the scene, the bully continued bullying.

Implications

Findings from this study raise important implications for future research on picture books with bullying themes. One implication involves thinking more broadly about bullying. It is important to understand that bullying occurs at all grade levels, but peaks in the middle grades. What literature (picture books, chapter books, graphic novels, poetry, etc.) currently exists that portray bullying by adolescents? How can teachers use this literature with middle grades students to help them better understand and prevent bullying? What literature exists that portrays female bullying? This literature can be used by teachers to raise awareness with students that bullying is an act perpetrated by both males and females.

In addition, most bullies are males, but their victims are not always other boys, but girls. Males bullying females, and vice versa, is referred to as cross-gender bullying (Rodkin, 2008). This kind of bullying is frequent, but not widely understood because it goes largely unreported. What literature exists that portrays cross-gender bullying? What research has been conducted on cross-gender bullying?

Another implication involves thinking about bullying in more complex ways. Bullying is a complex act of aggression with deleterious, long-lasting effects. This study found portrayals of bullying that were more simplistic than complex. They did not portrays the devastating effects of bullying that can haunt the bullied for a lifetime.

Still another implication is the need to conduct research studies on bullying as a curricular and social justice issue. Instances of bullying are increasing around the world and in the United States. Globally, Howard (2018) states that a recent report from the United Nations Children's Fund suggests that "approximately 50% of 13-to-15-year-old students worldwide, or 150 million students, have said they experience violence, such as fights or forms of bullying, from their peers in and around school" (p. 1). In the United States, Wilka (2018) states that in the 2016-2017 school year, survey responses from more than 180,000 students in grades 5-12 and, across 37 states indicated that just over one in four students reported they had been bullied in school. In 2017-2018 school year, survey responses from more than 160,000 students across 27 states indicated that 33% of students reported

being bullied in the 2017-18 school year, and middle grades students experienced bullying at higher rates than high school students – 40% compared to 27% (p. 1).

In response, international and national policies, state laws, and a plethora of programs have been developed to combat bullying. Schools and school districts have developed no-tolerance suspension policies for students who bully. For the most part these efforts have not been effective. One possible explanation for their ineffectiveness is that they represent add-ons to a curriculum. To be effective, bullying should not be an add-on, but rather a put-in to the curriculum.

Bullying should be included into the social studies curriculum for several reasons. One, it is social justice issue. Schools must be safe places for all students, regardless of age, religion, culture, gender, etc. Unfortunately, schools continue to be unsafe places for the bullied. Moreover, social studies curricula are already replete with social justice issues, including civil rights (racism and sexism), immigration laws, freedom of and from religion, the death penalty, access to health care, mental illness, etc. Bullying is also an important social justice issue.

Much research can be conducted on bullying as a curricular issue in social studies. How can bullying be taught in the social studies curriculum throughout grades, K-12? What curricular resources and instructional strategies can be used by social studies teachers to effectively teach students about bullying? What bullying content should be taught?

In addition, much research can be conducted on bullying as a co-curricular or interdisciplinary issue. In English/Language Arts (ELA), what literature exists that teachers can use to engage students in reading, writing, and discussing about bullying? What literacy skills can be taught from literature that deals with bullying themes? How can social studies and ELA teachers collaborate to develop and teach integrated social units on the topic of bullying? These questions, and many others like them, offer much power and potential for conducting research on bullying.

Limitations

The data set of picture books with bullying themes represents a major limitation of this study. The selection of picture books was based solely on a sample of convenience; that is, books personally owned by the principal investigators. Many other picture books have been commercially published with bullying themes, but they were not used in this study.

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