

Differential Perceptions of Bullying in the Schools: A Comparison of Student, Parent,
Teacher, School Counselor, and Principal Reports

Rebecca A. Newgent, Karyl L. Lounsbery, Elizabeth A. Keller, Crystal R. Baker,
Timothy A. Cavell, and Erica M. Boughfman

University of Arkansas

Abstract

Differential perceptions among students, parents, and school personnel in relation to peer victimization were examined. Data were collected at three time points. Students reported lower overall levels of peer victimization at Time 1 than did parents and lower levels of verbal victimization than did teachers. Students reported victimization declined significantly after the transition to middle school. Implications for prevention and intervention by school counselors are provided.

Differential Perceptions of Bullying in the Schools: A Comparison of Student, Parent, Teacher, School Counselor, and Principal Reports

The phenomenon of school bullying has been studied in depth for the last thirty years starting with Olweus' book *Aggression in the Schools: Bullies and Whipping Boys*, first published in 1978. Estimates of the frequency and severity of school bullying can vary greatly depending how one defines bullying and who is asked to report on bullying. It is likely that students, teachers, parents, principals, and school counselors will view the problem of bullying differently within their schools. The possibility that school personnel differ substantially in their perceptions of school bullying although plausible, has seldom been the focus of empirical study. We present both quantitative and qualitative data on the question of differential perceptions among students, parents, and school personnel. Also addressed are the implications that our findings have for intervening on behalf of children who are bullied by their peers.

Definitions of Bullying

Olweus (1993; Solberg & Olweus, 2003) defined *bullying* as aggressive behavior (a) used repeatedly, (b) with the intent to harm, (c) by a perpetrator who holds greater power than the victim. Scholars routinely assess three types of peer victimization in samples of elementary school children: direct physical aggression, direct verbal aggression, and indirect relational aggression (Bjorkqvist, Lagerspertz, & Kaukiainen, 1992; Ladd & Kochenderfer-Ladd, 2002). Studies exploring the manner in which research participants define school bullying have yielded mixed findings. Some find that teachers and other adults define bullying rather narrowly as physical aggression only (Monks & Smith, 2006; Naylor, Cowie, Cossin, de Bettencourt, & Lemme, 2006). Other

studies find that teachers do recognize relational and other non-physical forms of bullying (Bauman & del Rio, 2005; Mishna, 2004). Findings are similarly mixed on whether students consider non-physical aggression as a form of bullying (Bauman & del Rio, 2005; Monks & Smith, 2006; Naylor et al., 2006).

Findings are more consistent on whether bullying involves a power imbalance, with most studies indicating that teachers and students generally agree with this aspect of school bullying (Mishna, 2004; Monks & Smith, 2006; Naylor et al., 2006). There is some evidence, however, that pre-service teachers fail to recognize an imbalance of power as an essential part of bullying (Bauman & del Rio, 2005). Bauman and del Rio (2005) also found that pre-service teachers were less likely to include intention to harm or repeated acts over time in their definition of bullying. These findings run counter to what is generally reported by teachers and by students (Mishna, 2004; Monks & Smith, 2006). Finally, Naylor et al. found that girls, more than boys, defined bullying by the impact on the victim, but that teachers gave greater weight to the impact of bullying than did students.

Prevalence Rates of Bullying

It is estimated that between 4 and 16% of schoolchildren are bullied on a regular basis (Janauskeine, Kardelis, Sukys, & Kardeliene, 2008; Kochenderfer-Ladd & Wardrop, 2001; Olweus, 1997; Roland & Galloway, 2004; Sapouna, 2008; Scheithauer, Hayer, Petermann, & Jüger, 2006; Viljoen, O'Neill, & Sidhu, 2005). Research has consistently shown that male bullies outnumber female bullies (Olweus, 1991; Roland & Galloway, 2004; Sapouna, 2008), and most researchers find that boys are more likely to be victimized than girls (Bradshaw, O'Brennan, & Sawyer, 2008; Kaltiala-Heino,

Rimpela, Rantanen, & Rimpela, 2000; Ladd & Burgess, 1999; Olweus, 1991; Seals & Young, 2003; Terranova, Morris, & Boxer, 2008). Other researchers report little or no difference in the rates of victimization for boys and girls (Sapouna, 2008; Scheithauer et al., 2006; Viljoen et al., 2005), a trend that is perhaps more commonly found in studies conducted outside the United States (see Bradshaw et al., 2008; Terranova et al., 2008). There is also evidence that gender differences are a function of the type of victimization perpetrated, with boys more often the victims of physical bullying (e.g., Stockdale, Hangaduambo, Duys, Larson, & Sarvela, 2002) and girls more often the victim of relational bullying (Bradshaw et al. 2008; Terranova et al.).

Self-reports of victimization tend to decrease with age, peaking in elementary school and declining steadily across the later grades (Kochenderfer-Ladd & Pelletier, 2008; Olweus, 1997; Sapouna, 2008; Scheithauer et al., 2006). Grade-related declines in self-reports of being bullied stand in contrast to findings indicating that rates of bullying are fairly stable over time and may increase until the end of high school (Olweus, 1991; Roland & Galloway, 2004; Sapouna, 2008; Smith, Madsen, & Moody, 1999). Some scholars suggest these trends reflect a tendency for most elementary age children to learn to cope effectively with bullying, so that by middle school there are fewer victims. The remaining victims, however, tend to be readily identified and more seriously victimized (Hodges, Malone, & Perry, 1997; Nicolaides, Toda, & Smith, 2002).

Differences in Perceptions of Bullying

Previous investigators have explored a variety of topics when comparing differential perceptions of school bullying. Among these are characteristics of individual bullies or victims, such as family problems and diagnosable disorders (e.g., Friesen,

Jonsson, & Persson, 2007; Kaltiala-Heino et al., 2000), low self-esteem as a contributing factor (e.g., Bradshaw, Sawyer, & O'Brennan, 2007), types and perceived efficacy of strategies for dealing with school bullying (e.g., Kochenderfer & Ladd, 1997; Kochenderfer-Ladd & Pelletier, 2008; Yoon, 2004), likelihood of telling adults about being bullied (e.g., Smith & Shu, 2000), and likelihood that teachers will intervene (e.g., Bauman & del Rio, 2005; Yoon & Kerber, 2003).

Recently, Bradshaw et al. (2007) found that approximately 70% of elementary school staff (teachers, school psychologists, guidance counselors) thought that 10% or less of their students were victims of frequent (\geq twice a month) bullying. In contrast, 33% of the students reported being victims of frequent bullying (Bradshaw et al., 2007). Interestingly, school staff were more likely than students to report that bullying occurred in classrooms, in hallways, and in the cafeteria. Bradshaw et al. (2007) noted, however, that school staff were asked about occasions when they witnessed bullying whereas students were asked about occasions when they personally experienced bullying.

In a study of rural elementary teachers, parents, and students, Stockdale et al. (2002) found that teachers perceived verbal and exclusionary bullying as occurring more frequently than did parents and students. Teachers, however, perceived aggressive bullying as occurring less often than did parents and students (Stockdale et al.). In line with Bradshaw et al. (2007), Stockdale et al. found that teachers' estimates of the frequency of bullying in various school locations were generally higher than the estimates of students and parents.

In a related study, Yoon and Kerber (2003) reported that teachers were more likely to perceive verbal and physical bullying as more serious and more likely to occur

than social exclusion situations. Yoon and Kerber found that teachers were more likely to get involved in physical and verbal bullying than in social exclusion and those teachers reported less empathy toward the victims of social exclusion. Yoon (2004) found that teachers were more likely to intervene when they perceived bullying as serious and felt empathy for the victims.

The Present Study

Given that students and school staff can differ in how they define school bullying, it is not surprising to find differences in their perceptions of the frequency and severity of peer victimization. Such differences, however, are not simply a matter of semantics. A tendency for school staff to underestimate or downplay the severity of school bullying can have important practical implications for children who are chronically bullied and at risk for later maladjustment. Bullied children face an imbalance of power (Craig & Pepler, 1997; Olweus, 1993) but are often reluctant to ask for help or accept help (Fekkes, Pijpers, & Verloove-Vanhorick, 2005; Rigby, 2005; Unnever & Cornell, 2004; Whitney & Smith, 1993). Another issue is whether bullied children, acting alone, can overcome a peer context that tacitly supports school bullying (Kochenderfer-Ladd & Skinner, 2002; Salmivalli, 1999). Even when peers hold anti-bullying attitudes, they are often constrained by group norms that discourage defending the victims of school bullying (Salmivalli & Voeten, 2004).

Given the multiple definitions of bullying, differing statistics on prevalence rates, and different perceptions of victimization, one may wonder how different these perceptions may be throughout a school system. The purpose of this study is to investigate the differential perceptions of bullying in the schools over time and between

constituents. More specifically, are there differential perceptions of the amount of bullying in the schools as identified by students and teachers over time? Additionally, during a given year, are there differential perceptions of the amount of bullying in the schools as identified by students, parents, teachers, school counselors, and principals?

Method

Participants

The data for this study were collected as part of a larger effort to study the correlates of peer victimization. The current study focused on 4th and 5th grade students enrolled in four different elementary schools (within the same school district) in the mid-south United States. Also participating were parents of a subsample of 120 children who had participated in a separate, individual child interview phase of data collection, teachers, principals, and schools counselors. Schools were selected in consultation with the Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction. Selection was initially based upon need and for a balance in socioeconomic status and racial composition. After initial selection, the Assistant Superintendent contacted the school principals and set up a meeting with us to discuss our research proposal. All principals agreed to participate in our research program. All students in the 4th and 5th grades (at the onset of the study) who returned informed consent/child assent forms were eligible to participate.

Data were collected at three time points: fall semester of Year 1 (Time 1), spring semester of Year 1 (Time 2), and fall semester of Year 2 (Time 3). Participating at Time 1 were 378 students, 67 parents, 20 teachers, four school counselors, and four principals. One hundred seventy-five students (46.6%) were in the 4th grade and 203

students (53.7%) were in the 5th grade. One hundred eighty-six students (49.2%) were male and 192 students (50.8%) were female. Student ethnicity comprised of 191 (50.6%) European-American, 155 (41%) Hispanic, eight (2.2%) biracial, and the remaining 24 students (6.3%) were comprised of other racial/ethnic groups. Eleven (55%) of the teachers taught 4th grade and 9 (45%) of the teachers taught 5th grade. Seventeen (85%) were female and three (15%) were male. They ranged in teaching experience from 3.5 years to 25 years ($M = 9.34$; $SD = 6.02$). All teachers reported that they had training in managing classroom behavior and 18 (90%) reported that they had training in dealing with bullying at school. All school counselor and school principals were female. School counselors ranged in experience from 4.5 years to 19 years ($M = 9.88$; $SD = 6.36$) and school principals ranged in experience from 5 years to 7 years ($M = 6.25$; $SD = 0.96$). Participating at Time 2 were 342 students and 24 teachers. One hundred seventy-three students (50.6%) were in the 4th grade and 169 students (49.4%) were in the 5th grade. One hundred sixty-six students (48.5%) were male and 176 students (51.5%) were female. Student ethnicity comprised of 162 (47.4%) European-American, 138 (40.4%) and the remaining 42 students (12.3%) were comprised of other racial/ethnic groups. Participating at Time 3 were 333 students. One hundred fifty-three students (45.9%) were in the 5th grade and 180 students (54.1%) were in the 6th grade. One hundred fifty-seven students (47.1%) were male and 176 students (52.8%) were female.

Instruments

Peer victimization (quantitative data). Reports of peer victimization were obtained from students, parents, and teachers. A 13-item version of the *School*

Experiences Questionnaire (Kochenderfer-Ladd, 2004) was used to assess student's self-rated experiences with verbal, physical, and relational forms of peer victimization. Ratings were made using a three-point scale (1 = *never*, 2 = *sometimes*, 3 = *a lot*), with each type of victimization represented by three items. Internal consistency estimates for combined student reports of peer victimization were .89 (Time 1), .90 (Time 2), and .89 (Time 3). Also included in the scale were four filler items that assessed peers' prosocial overtures. Parents and teachers rated all eligible students on the extent to which they experienced physical, verbal, and relational aggression. A single item was used to assess each type of victimization and items were rated on a 3-point scale (1 = *never*, 2 = *sometimes*, 3 = *a lot*). Internal consistency estimates for combined teacher reports of peer victimization were .88 (Time 1) and .91 (Time 2) for teachers and .77 (Time 1) for parents. See Appendix for a summary of instrument items.

Interviews (qualitative data). Individual interviews were used to assess perceptions of school bullying by school counselors and principals. Relevant for this study were the following two questions: (a) "In general, do you characterize bullying as a problem in your school?" and (b) "In general, how often do you encounter bullying behavior?"

Procedures

Prior to participation, written parental consent and child/student assent were obtained for all participating students. Student responses to peer victimization were assessed in the fall semester (Time 1) and spring semester (Time 2) of their 4th and 5th grade year and again in the fall semester (Time 3) of their 5th and 6th grade years, respectively. Students completed the self-report questionnaire in a group setting (e.g.,

classroom, school cafeteria) overseen by trained graduate research assistants. Parents completed and returned ratings of peer victimization by mail. Teachers completed ratings of peer victimization at school and returned the questionnaire to the graduate research assistants. Interviews with school counselor and principals were individually administered by one of the primary researchers and all answers were recorded verbatim. The quantitative data were analyzed by the 1st author and the qualitative data were analyzed by the 1st and 4th authors.

Results

Student Perceptions

Students reported relational victimization as the most frequent form of peer victimization during Time 1 ($M = 1.60$, $SD = .48$) and physical as the least frequent form of peer victimization ($M = 1.45$, $SD = .48$). At Time 2, relational victimization was again reported as the most frequent form of victimization ($M = 1.57$, $SD = .48$) followed by verbal victimization ($M = 1.56$, $SD = .55$). Student reports of victimization at Time 3 were consistent with previous reports in that relational victimization was the most frequently reported ($M = 1.51$, $SD = .48$). Collapsing across the three types of victimization revealed that students' overall ratings of peer victimization increased from Time 1 to Time 2 and then decreased at Time 3. The drop in overall level of peer victimization was greater for those students who transitioned into the middle school (see Table 1). Results of independent t tests indicate that there was no significant difference on student reported victimization between 5th and 6th graders (Time 3) on verbal victimization, $t(331) = 1.20$, $p = .23$, $d = .35$, physical victimization $t(331) = 1.41$, $p = .16$, $d = .16$, or relational victimization $t(331) = .82$, $p = .41$, $d = .09$. Results, however, of dependent

Table 1

Student and Teacher Perceptions of Victimization over Time

Type of Victimization	Fall (Time 1)				Spring (Time 2)				Fall (Time 3)					
	Student (<i>n</i> = 378)		Teacher (<i>n</i> = 20)		Student (<i>n</i> = 342)		Teacher (<i>n</i> = 24)		Student (<i>n</i> = 333)		5 th graders (<i>n</i> = 153)		6 th graders (<i>n</i> = 180)	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Verbal	1.51	.50	1.59	.56	1.56	.55	1.48	.57	1.48	.49	1.48	.50	1.41	.48
Physical	1.45	.48	1.43	.55	1.52	.53	1.46	.55	1.45	.46	1.43	.46	1.48	.45
Relational	1.60	.48	1.59	.61	1.57	.48	1.47	.57	1.51	.48	1.52	.50	1.48	.45
Combined	1.52	.41	1.52	.47	1.57	.44	1.45	.48	1.48	.39	1.48	.41	1.42	.37

Note. Score reported are means. 1 = never, 2 = sometimes, 3 = a lot. Combined = mean of all three types of victimization.

t tests indicate that there was a significant reduction on student reported victimization between Time 2 and Time 3 when considering grade. For students originally in the 4th grade (Time 2) and who advanced to the 5th grade (Time 3), results of dependent *t* tests indicate a significant reduction on verbal victimization, $t(146) = 3.132, p = .002, d = .24$, and combined victimization, $t(146) = 2.266, p = .025, d = .19$. No other significant results were found for this group. For students originally in the 5th grade (Time 2) and transitioned to 6th grade at a middle school (Time 3), results of dependent *t* tests indicate significant reductions on verbal victimization, $t(167) = 4.448, p < .001, d = .39$, physical victimization, $t(167) = 3.980, p < .001, d = .35$, relational victimization, $t(166) = 2.286, p = .024, d = .21$, and combined victimization, $t(167) = 4.717, p < .001, d = .42$. Overall, students reported lower levels of peer victimization for all three types during Time 1 than parents and lower levels of verbal victimization when compared to teachers (see Table 2).

Parent Perceptions

Parents reported verbal victimization as the most frequent form of peer victimization during Time 1 ($M = 1.77, SD = .64$) and physical victimization as the least frequent form of peer victimization ($M = 1.52, SD = .59$). Overall, parents reported higher levels of peer victimization for all three types during Time 1 than students or teachers (see Table 2).

Teacher Perceptions

Teachers reported verbal victimization as the most frequent form of peer victimization during Time 1 ($M = 1.59, SD = .56$) and physical victimization as the least frequent form of peer victimization ($M = 1.46, SD = .55$). During Time 2, verbal

Table 2

Comparison of Student, Parent, Teacher, School Counselor, and Principal Perceptions of Victimization at One Point in Time

Type of Victimization	Student (<i>n</i> = 378)		Parent (<i>n</i> = 67)		Teacher (<i>n</i> = 20)		School Counselor (<i>n</i> = 4)		Principal (<i>n</i> = 4)	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Is bullying a problem?	Encounter bully behavior?	Is bullying a problem?	Encounter bully behavior?
Verbal	1.51	.50	1.77	.64	1.59	.56	Yes.	Daily.	At times.	Once every other week.
Physical	1.45	.48	1.52	.59	1.43	.55	Kids will say yes.	Two instances this year. Daily friendship issues.	No.	Not every day. Varies.
Relational	1.60	.48	1.69	.57	1.59	.61	Yes.	Every week.	No.	Once a month is too much – occasional.
Combined	1.52	.41	1.67	.49	1.52	.47	Not major problem.	Average three times per week.	No.	Three incidents.

Note. Score reported are means. 1 = never, 2 = sometimes, 3 = a lot. Combined = mean of all three types of victimization.

victimization was again reported as the most frequent ($M = 1.43$, $SD = .57$) followed by relational victimization ($M = 1.47$, $SD = .57$). Teachers' perceived combined level of peer victimization decreased from Time 1 to Time 2 (see Table 1). Overall, teachers reported lower levels of peer victimization for all three types during Time 1 than parents and similar levels of peer victimization to students, with the exception of verbal victimization (see Table 2).

School Counselor Perceptions

In general, school counselors characterize bullying as a problem in their schools, but not a major problem (see Table 2). School counselor A indicated that bullying is a problem in her school, stating, "Mostly because it's a problem everywhere. It is an inherent part of how we live right now." She also indicated that she encounters bully behavior of some kind on a daily basis. School counselor B stated that kids say "yes" there is a problem with bullying in her school. She indicated that hurt feelings surrounding relationships and friendships seem to be the most prominent problem. School counselor B also indicated, "there were two instances this year" of bully encounters for repeated victims and several daily friendship issues. School counselor C indicated that bullying is a problem in her school, "but nothing major." She also indicated that she encounters bully behavior every week. Finally, school counselor D indicated that bullying was not a major problem in her school. She noted, "There is intimidation by some, but it is limited to a few per grade level. It doesn't consume my time on a daily basis." School counselor D also indicated that she encounters bullying behavior an average of three times per week and that there seems to be more in the spring (i.e., bickering, verbal harassment).

Principal Perceptions

In general, principals did not characterize bullying as a problem in their schools. Principal A indicated that bullying is a problem in her school “at times” (see Table 2). She also indicated that she encounters bullying behavior about once every other week. Principals B, C, and D each indicated that bullying was not a problem in their schools. Principal B stated that “Kids don’t usually realize it (that they are bullying), but they get sent to the Principal’s office – not every day. It varies.” Principal C stated that it “has to do with the definitions as kids are learning to communicate with each other.” When asked how often she encounters bullying behavior, she stated, “Once a month is too much – occasionally.” Finally, Principal D indicated that she encounters bullying behavior involving her students occurs “usually on the trip home from school and there were three incidents” (see Table 2).

Discussion

Differential Perceptions over Time

Results of student perceptions of victimization indicate that there is a general decrease in victimization over time. Within a single academic year, this decline was evident only with respect to relational victimization; across academic years, the decline was found for all three types of victimization. We also found that declines in self-rated victimization were greater for those students who transitioned from elementary to middle school (with the exception of physical victimization). Teacher ratings of peer victimization decreased over time with the exception of physical victimization. These results support prior research indicating that teacher-rated peer victimization tends to

decrease over time, especially for students transitioning to upper grades (Bradshaw et al., 2007; Sapouna, 2008).

Differential Perceptions among Constituents

Data collected from students, parents, teachers, school counselors, and principals reveal important discrepancies among constituents. Parent ratings of victimization were higher on all three types of victimization than student ratings. Teacher ratings of victimization were generally consistent with students' ratings, with the exception of verbal types of victimization, which was slightly higher for teachers. It is possible that parent-rated victimization was higher than teacher-rated victimization because parents rated only their child's level of victimization, whereas teachers were asked to rate all participating students. Another possibility is that parents who have a student who is bullied may be more sensitive to their own child's victimization experiences and more likely to be told by the child of those experiences. This result is consistent. Smith and Shu (2000) found only 35% of victims told their teacher whereas 45% told their parents.

School counselors in two of the four schools participating reported that bullying behavior was a problem. One school counselor believed that the students saw bullying as a problem, but she did not. Another school counselor denied that bullying was a problem at her school. The school counselor who saw bullying as a problem reported that they encounter bullying behavior daily or weekly. Interestingly, the school counselor who denied that bullying is a problem reported that she encounters bullying an average of three times per week. Because it is common for school counselors to be the identified school personnel to address bullying behaviors, inconsistencies between school

counselors, and students, parents, or teachers could have important implications. One explanation for this inconsistency is that not all bullying behavior comes to the attention of the school counselor. Clearly, some of the problems involving bullying are dealt with at the teacher level and perhaps only severe cases of bullying are brought to the attention of the school counselor. The qualitative nature of the data may also impede accurate comparisons to student, teacher, and parent quantitative data.

Only one of the four school principals in this study perceived bullying to be a problem, and then only “at times.” That principal reported encountering bullying behavior once every other week, whereas the principals who said bullying was not a problem reported that they seldom encounter bullying behavior. These findings indicate that principals’ perceptions of peer victimization are even more discrepant than school counselors’ perceptions when compared to students, teachers, and parents. Given the likelihood that teachers and school counselors are dealing with most instances of school bullying, it makes sense that school principals would under-estimate the extent to which bullying behavior is a problem in their school. Additionally, the qualitative nature of the data may also account for some of the differences found between constituents.

Implications for School Counselors

School counselors, educators, administrators, parents, and students alike should be well informed about the warning signs, causes, and impact of bully victimization. Thus despite broad agreement about what “bullying” looks like, it seems that students, parents, and school staff vary in what they consider the threshold for defining a bullying incident. Differences in how one defines bullying behavior can leave many holes in efforts to detect and prevent future victimization. One potential strategy for removing the

ambiguity that surrounds the concept of "bullying" would be for school staff, parents, and students to define collectively and collaboratively what "bullying" is for their particular school culture. As this study shows, the perceptions of bullying differ between stakeholders and this approach would give school counselors the opportunity to maintain dialogue with stakeholders regarding current perceptions of bullying. In doing so, a firm message is communicated to all stakeholders about the value of creating and maintaining a safe school environment that promotes a bully-free atmosphere. This strategy is consistent with the ASCA National Model (American School Counselor Association; ASCA, 2005) that encourages school counselors to work collaboratively with stakeholders for the benefit of all students. By including all stakeholders in program development, school counselors can be more effective with the programs they provide. Additionally, including stakeholders in this collaborative process encourages accountability with other adults to play a part in detecting and intervening with bullying situations as necessary.

The current study also revealed discrepancies in how students, parents, and school personnel understood or viewed the spectrum of bullying behavior. Of particular concern is that students rated relational bullying as the most prevalent form of bullying at each time point, but teachers reported verbal bullying as most frequent. This discrepancy between students and educators could lead victimized children to feel unprotected by school leaders. Students might come to believe that if bullying is not outwardly displayed with words or gestures that educators will discount the seriousness of the issue. When school leaders believe that bullying is largely verbal or physical, students might refrain from reporting other types of bullying and lose their voice in

efforts to promote a safe school. Differences between student and parent perceptions may further this issue. Using a psychoeducational approach to discuss the diverse types of bullying behavior could enhance awareness among students, parents, and school personnel, a needed step in efforts to detect and prevent future victimization. Psychoeducation could include in-service presentations to school stakeholders about bullying warning signs and active steps to minimize bullying once it is detected. For students, psychoeducation can occur in the classroom or small groups. Special topics such as "what is bullying," "how to handle bullying," or "how to create safe schools" can be explicated and discussed among the stakeholders. For parents, brief discussions could be held at bi-annual parent-teacher conferences or made into a school play put on by students. Such discussions not only raise awareness about bullying but also invite students and school leaders to take ownership in efforts to detect and prevent future bullying.

According to the ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2005), one of the responsibilities of school counselors is to disseminate information to students and other stakeholders. Through guidance curriculum lessons on bullying, detection, and prevention, and through individual student planning, school counselors can use their leadership position to impart fundamental knowledge about the problem of school bullying that can lead to change in the school system. Further, inviting parents to attend workshops or groups related to bully prevention will give them guidance on how to address this topic with their children. Comprehensive bully prevention plans, information on indicators of bullying within school environments, along with anti-bullying curricula for students can be accessed from several allying organizations, including the Department of Education

(www.ed.gov/), ASCA (www.schoolcounselor.org), and American Counseling Association (www.counseling.org). Counseling resource centers, such as the Self-Esteem Shop (www.selfesteemshop.com), can also offer an array of relevant anti-bullying activities and books that reinforce bully-free curriculum through guidance lessons and individual student planning. One final step in ensuring whole-student support for bullying detection and intervention could be to send a flyer or memo home to parents informing them of upcoming curriculum on bullying. Key terms and concepts could be included on the announcement, along with possible vignettes and follow-up questions, for parents and children to discuss bullying incidents and outcomes together. This added element to curriculum is another way for parents to become involved in systemic support for student safety from bullying.

Another ASCA mission for school counselors is to provide responsive services to students in need. School counselors and administrators are in the unique position to witness bully victimization from an outsider's perspective. Being one-step removed from the bullying incident invites school leaders to observe the situation, acknowledge steps taken (or lack thereof) by the students to resolve the conflict, and offer additional support and interventions as needed. We have observed that some children appear to lack clear problem solving techniques that reduce bullying behavior. This may be due to fear of further victimization or underdeveloped coping skills for interpersonal conflict. In these situations, support from school personnel, such as small group intervention, conflict resolution role-plays, or assertiveness training, can be viable options to help the child cope with the bullying situation. The ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2005) promotes small group counseling as a responsive service for both victims and bullies.

These groups can be a beneficial means to help students cope with and move through bullying-related issues. Books suitable for promoting group counseling dialogue on the topic of school bullying may include *My Secret Bully* by Trudy Ludwig, *The Recess Queen* by Alexis O'Neill, *Enemy Pie* by Derek Munson, or *The English Roses* by Madonna. Each of these books offer many opportunities for children to discuss their own involvement in bullying as well as the experience of others involved (e.g., bullies, bystanders).

One final consideration to note is the increasing importance of accountability. More State Departments of Education, school systems, and funding sources are requiring some type of evaluative outcome of services provided that assesses effectiveness of service provision. This is consistent with the ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2005) in that the model encourages school counselors to demonstrate the effectiveness of the programs they are using. Collaborating with external stakeholders, such as university researchers and faculty from counselor education programs, who are able to provide both services and evaluation of those services, can be an invaluable asset to the school counseling curriculum. Areas for further research may include assessing the effectiveness of bullying curriculum in classroom guidance lessons or small group counseling. As such, school counselors would be demonstrating the applicability for integrating bullying curriculum in both classroom and non-classroom settings. For the school system at large, school counselors can demonstrate accountability by measuring the effectiveness of in-service education on bullying prevention, detection, and intervention with educators and administrators. As all school staff are held responsible in detecting and preventing bullying-related issues, it is

important that future research assess strategies for effective training and psychoeducational dissemination regarding bullying.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

To be effective in their efforts to detect and prevent school bullying, school administrators will have to guard against the tendency to underestimate the frequency of bullying behavior. The organizational hierarchy within many elementary schools effectively allows classroom teachers to handle most instances of peer victimization. This could lead school counselors and principals to gauging inaccurately the extent to which school bullying exists at their schools. Students need to know that schools are a safe place for both intrapersonal and interpersonal development. For all children to have the opportunity to embrace a positive school experience, it is imperative that school leaders acknowledge the nature of victimization and the long-standing effects of such bullying behaviors. Although most children learn to cope with instances of bullying, some take the role of peer victim into middle school where teasing and other forms of bullying are likely to be more common than in the elementary grades (Hodges et al., 1997; Nicolaidis et al., 2002; Smith et al., 1999).

Further research is needed on ways to strengthen teachers' abilities to recognize and deal with different types of bullying, especially those determined to be socially exclusionary in nature. Because girls are more often the victims of relational bullying than boys (Rivers & Smith, 1994), and because teachers respond less often to instances of relational victimization (see Yoon & Kerber, 2003), bullied girls are at risk for not getting the assistance they need from school personnel. With teachers responding less frequently to social bullying behaviors, this could mean that many girls

are not getting the assistance they need to deal with their problems (see Yoon & Kerber, 2003). Also needed are studies that evaluate efforts by school counselors to build a consensus definition of school bullying that reflects the collective input of all relevant stakeholders, including students, teachers, parents, and school counselors and principals.

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Appendix

Instrument Items Associated with Self-Reports of Peer Victimization

<u>Verbal Victimization</u>	<u>Physical Victimization</u>	<u>Relational Victimization</u>
Called named	Being hit	Retaliation via exclusion
Teased	Kick you	Tell lies about you
Hurtful things said	Pushed	Excluded from play

Instrument Items Associated with Teacher-Reports of Peer Victimization

Verbal Victimization: called names, threatened, made scared

Physical Victimization: hit, pushed, kicked

Relational Victimization: gossiping, excluded, shunned

Instrument Items Associated with Parent-Reports of Peer Victimization

Verbal Victimization: called names, threatened, made scared

Physical Victimization: hit, pushed, kicked

Relational Victimization: gossiping, excluded, shunned

Author Note

Rebecca A. Newgent, Karyl L. Lounsbery, Elizabeth A. Keller, Crystal R. Baker, and Erica M. Boughfman, Counselor Education Program, University of Arkansas; Timothy A. Cavell, Department of Psychology, University of Arkansas.

Crystal R. Baker is now at Ozark Guidance Center, Springdale, Arkansas.

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Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Rebecca A. Newgent, 137 Graduate Education Building, Counselor Education Program, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, Arkansas 72701. E-mail: rnewgent@uark.edu

Rebecca A. Newgent is an Associate Professor of Counseling in the Counselor Education Program and faculty at the National Office for Research on Measurement and Evaluation Systems at the University of Arkansas. Her research interests include clinical counseling and supervision, interventions for at-risk elementary school children (academically, physically, emotionally), and measurement and evaluation in counseling.

Karyl L. Lounsbery is a doctoral student in the Counselor Education Program at the University of Arkansas. Her research interests include gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people's experiences with prejudice, defining gender identity along a continuum, and the religious/spiritual experiences of GLBT people.

Elizabeth A. Keller is a doctoral student in the Counselor Education Program at the University of Arkansas. She earned her master's of science in counseling at Missouri State University and is a certified K-12 school counselor. Her research

interests include expressive arts counseling for individual and group counseling settings, counselor-in-training development, and crisis management and intervention training for school counselors.

Crystal R. Baker is a graduate of the Counselor Education Program at the University of Arkansas. She currently works for Ozark Guidance Center providing school-based counseling services.

Timothy A. Cavell is Professor and Director of Clinical Training in the Department of Psychology at the University of Arkansas. He studies parent- and mentor-based interventions for aggressive or bullied children. He is the author of two books, including *Working with Parents of Aggressive Children: A Practitioner's Guide* (2000).

Erica M. Boughfman is a doctoral candidate in the Counselor Education Program at the University of Arkansas. She currently works for Ozark Guidance Center as a clinical facilitator for the school-based program.