

Bullies, Victims, and Bystanders

Understanding
Child and Adult
Participant
Vantage Points

Edited by
Lisa H. Rosen, Shannon R. Scott,
Samuel Y. Kim



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1

Bullying Through Different Perspectives: An Introduction to Multiple Vantage Points

Samuel Y. Kim, Lisa H. Rosen, Shannon R. Scott,
and Briana Paulman

Demetra and Sophia walk down the hallway of the school talking about their last class. As they pass Mr. Simone's class, Nash knocks Demetra down for the fourth time that week. Sophia quickly walks down the hallway away from both of them. As Nash kicks her, Demetra curls up in a ball not only to block Nash's kicks, but also to block the sound of Rafferty cheering Nash on and throwing books at her. She meets the eyes of Ajani who watches and giggles from the crowd. Rachel walks up and sees Demetra on the ground. She yells at everyone to stop and calls Mr. Simone's name as she helps Demetra up from

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the ground. Rachel escorts Demetra to Mr. Simone's classroom and stays with her until Demetra's parents arrive.

Imagine the above scenario that was adapted from one of the author's lived experiences with names changed. As can be seen from this vignette, bullying is a complex series of events that can involve and impact more than just a bully and victim. Traditionally, research has focused on the bully-victim dyad, and as such, the focus would be solely on Nash and Demetra. However, as was first articulated in the pioneering work of Salmivalli, Lagerspetz, Björkqvist, Österman, and Kaukialnen (1996) and clearly evident in the above scenario, bullying is largely a group process in which bystanders can help fuel or combat bullying. The students in this scenario take on multiple roles including those that support the bully as evident in the actions of the assistant to the bully (Rafferty) and the reinforcer of the bully (Ajani). However, bystanders can also behave in ways that support the victim as seen in the behavior of the defender (Rachel). Still, peers can behave in ways that do not explicitly assist the bully or victim as in the case of the outsider (Sophia) who distances herself both physically and emotionally. Teachers, such as Mr. Simone, and other significant adults also have the potential to influence bullying dynamics. Each chapter in this book highlights a particular participant role. By viewing bullying through the eyes of each individual role, this book provides an in-depth exploration of bullying as a group process with special attention to implications for prevention and intervention.

Definition and Forms of Bullying

Most people feel that they know bullying when they see it, but it is critical to understand how bullying is defined in the research literature. The most common definition of bullying is based on Dan Olweus' (1993) seminal work in which he proposed three essential components to bullying: (1) a power imbalance, (2) repetition, and (3) an intention to harm. The first component, imbalance of power, can refer to either the bully having greater physical power (e.g., size, strength) or social power

(e.g., popularity, social hierarchy). Second, the behavior must be repetitive; bullying is not considered a singular incident, but rather is behavior that occurs on a continued basis. Finally, the bully acts with an intention to harm his or her victim. Although other definitions have been proposed, the work of Olweus forms the basis of definitions put forth by the American Psychological Association and the National Association of School Psychologists (Hymel & Swearer, 2015). The contributors in this book refer back to this classic definition.

Bullying behaviors can take different forms, which further adds to the complexity of understanding bullying (Gladden, Vivolo-Kantor, Hamburger, & Lumpkin, 2014). Even though teachers tend to think of physical bullying (Bauman & Del Rio, 2006), bullying can also take the forms of verbal attacks, relational bullying, and property damage (Hymel & Swearer, 2015; Mynard & Joseph, 2000; Olweus, 2010). More recently, attention has also been aimed at understanding cyberbullying (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009).

Researchers have sought to differentiate these forms of bullying (Gladden et al., 2014; Mynard & Joseph, 2000; Rosen, Scott, & DeOrnellas, 2017). Physical bullying refers to a direct physical attack on an individual such as hitting, pinching, kicking, or biting. Verbal bullying, on the other hand, refers to the use of language to inflict harm on another (e.g., teasing and name-calling). Social bullying can be more nuanced, and although teachers often consider this a less serious form (Bauman & Del Rio, 2006), it can be quite hurtful to victims (Paquette & Underwood, 1999). Social bullying, similar to what has been termed relational or indirect bullying, is intended to harm the victim's social status or relationships (Underwood, 2003). Common forms of social aggression include social exclusion and gossip (Paquette & Underwood, 1999). Social aggression may become more common and take more complex forms in adolescence as greater importance is devoted to popularity (Pouwels, Lansu, & Cillessen, 2018; Underwood, 2003). Though not as frequently examined, property damage can be considered a form of bullying, which involves destruction or any change to the property that is carried out with the intention of harming someone (Mynard & Joseph, 2000).

Cyberbullying involves aggression through electronic devices (e.g., cell phones and social media; Hinduja & Patchin, 2009), and many contributors to this book identify this as an area for future research on participant roles. Cyberbullying presents a number of conceptual and practical challenges (Volk, Dane, & Marini, 2014). For example, identifying a power imbalance can be difficult as the traditional metric of physical size is not apparent. Those who perpetrate cyberbullying may have greater power in their ability to reach a wide audience quickly. However, perpetrators of cyberbullying can act anonymously, which further makes it difficult to discern power imbalances and can contribute to aggressors feeling more empowered. Importantly, cyberbullying can occur at any time—day or night—and without geographical limitations, which may lead to victims feeling more vulnerable (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009). Further, the potential for cyberbullying to unfold in front of a wide audience can translate into a larger number of bystanders, whether or not they wish to be involved (Cohen-Almagor, 2018).

Prevalence of Bullying

Bullying is not a rare phenomenon, and consequently, is of serious concern to educators and parents (Rosen et al., 2017). However, answering the question of how common bullying is can be quite a difficult endeavor. Reported prevalence rates have varied greatly with estimates of bullying perpetration ranging from 10 to 90% of students and estimates of bullying victimization ranging from 9 to 98% of students (Modecki, Minchin, Harbaugh, Guerra, & Runions, 2014). A number of explanations have been proposed for this wide variability including differences in how bullying perpetration and victimization are measured as well as sampling issues (Cook, Williams, Guerra, Kim, & Sadek, 2010; Hymel & Swearer, 2015; Leff, Kupersmidt, Patterson, & Power, 1999; Modecki et al., 2014).

Although there is substantial variability in prevalence rates, many researchers draw from the work of Nansel and colleagues (2001) who surveyed a large, nationally representative sample of American students. Approximately 30% of the 15,686 participants reported moderate to

frequent involvement in bullying. Of these students, 13% reported bullying perpetration, 11% reported bullying victimization, and 6% reported both bullying perpetration and victimization.

To further examine prevalence rates, Modecki and colleagues (2014) conducted a meta-analysis of 80 studies. Whereas Nansel and colleagues (2001) focused on estimates of moderate to frequent bullying involvement, Modecki and colleagues sought to identify mean prevalence rates of traditional bullying and cyberbullying. The mean prevalence rate of traditional bullying perpetration (35%) was higher than the mean prevalence rate of cyberbullying perpetration (16%). Correspondingly, the mean prevalence rate of traditional bullying victimization (36%) was higher than the mean prevalence rate of cyberbullying victimization (15%).

In examining these prevalence rates, it is important to note that researchers have commonly focused on the bully-victim dyad. These findings highlight the importance of examining the role of the bystander, which is more common than either the victim or bully role (Salmivalli et al., 1996). As noted by many contributors, the vast majority of bullying episodes (85–88%) occur in front of an audience (Craig & Pepler, 1997; Hawkins, Pepler, & Craig, 2001). Consequently, it is critical to understand the prevalence of different bystander roles. Throughout this book, contributors discuss prevalence rates for the different bullying roles with attention to differences based on gender and age.

Impact of Bullying

In the opening vignette, most would focus on the ramifications of the experience for Demetra. However, this book seeks to understand the impact of bullying on each participant's role. More is known about the associations with adjustment for the victim and bully role while the other roles have received less research attention. We briefly outline these associations here, and contributors will provide a more in-depth examination in the following chapters.

A large body of research has documented negative adjustment difficulties for victims (Hymel & Swearer, 2015; Sigurdson, Wallander, & Sund, 2014). Longitudinal investigations suggest that being bullied in childhood can also predict adult maladjustment (McDougall & Vaillancourt, 2015). As will be outlined later, both concurrent and longitudinal research indicates that victimization is associated with internalizing symptoms, such as depression and anxiety (Brunstein Klomek, Marrocco, Kleinman, Schonfeld, & Gould, 2007; Prinstein, Boergers, & Vernberg, 2001; Storch, Brassard, & Masia-Warner, 2003; Storch & Masia-Warner, 2004). Beyond internalizing symptoms, victimization is associated with externalizing problems such as delinquency and substance use (Sullivan, Farrell, & Kliewer, 2006). In addition, victimization has been linked with physical health; victimized youth report increased somatic complaints, decreased quality of sleep, and disrupted eating behavior (Hatzinger et al., 2008; Nishina & Juvonen, 2005; van den Berg, Wertheim, Thompson, & Paxton, 2002). Finally, victimization by peers is associated with poorer educational outcomes (Buhs, Ladd, & Herald-Brown, 2010; Hughes, Gaines, & Pryor, 2015; Kochenderfer & Ladd, 1996; Schwartz, Gorman, Nakamoto, & Toblin, 2005).

The impact of engaging in bullying behavior has also been examined. Perpetration of peer aggression may be associated with internalizing difficulties (Crick, Ostrov, & Werner, 2006; Underwood, 2011). Further, peer aggression may predict delinquency, conduct problems, and academic difficulties (Coyne, Nelson, & Underwood, 2011; Feldman et al., 2014; Smith, Polenik, Nakasita, & Jones, 2012; Underwood, 2011). Not only is there an immediate association between aggression and maladjustment in childhood and adolescence, there is also longitudinal work suggesting that maladjustment in adulthood (e.g., lower educational attainment and increased unemployment) can be predicted by being identified as a bully in adolescence (Sigurdson et al., 2014).

Beyond the bully-victim dyad, there is evidence that peers can influence victims' adjustment. For example, those who are victimized show fewer negative outcomes when more of their peers are also bullied (McDougall & Vaillancourt, 2015). Further, social support from peers can serve as a protective function (McDougall & Vaillancourt, 2015). In

particular, defending behavior can play an important protective role for victimized youth (Kärnä et al., 2011; Salmivalli, 2010).

Of critical importance, research has demonstrated that witnessing peer victimization, even one episode, may be related to increased maladjustment for the bystander including anxiety, depression, substance use, and somatic complaints (Rivers, Potteat, Noret, & Ashurst, 2009). Bystanders who have previously been the victims of peer aggression may be at a greater risk for maladjustment when witnessing bullying (Werth, Nickerson, Aloe, & Swearer, 2015). The negative outcomes of bullying on victims, aggressors, and bystanders suggest the need to continue to combat bullying from a social ecological framework as will be highlighted throughout this book.

Social Ecological Framework of Bullying

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems Theory has been widely applied to further our understanding of bullying (Espelage & Swearer, 2010; Lambe, Cioppa, Hong, & Craig, 2019; Lee, 2011; Rosen et al., 2017; Swearer et al., 2012). In line with a social ecological view of bullying, "children are viewed as the center of their world, and they interact with their own ecological environments. This indicates that their behaviors are influenced by not only their own traits but also by the ecological contexts with which they are interacting" (Lee, 2011, p. 4). Thus, an individual child, with his or her unique attributes (e.g., gender, age, attitudes toward aggression, personality), can be viewed as the center of nested environmental contexts, and the child's interactions with these environmental systems shape his or her development (Ettekal & Mahoney, 2017; Lambe et al., 2019; Lee, 2011). The child's immediate environment, termed the microsystem, includes the influence of peers, parents, and teachers (Ettekal & Mahoney, 2017). The most distal environmental context, the macrosystem, includes societal characteristics (e.g., individualistic/collectivist culture; Lee, 2011).

The participant role approach is consistent with a social ecological view of bullying (Lambe et al., 2019), and the contributors of this book draw extensively on this framework. Accordingly, each chapter outlines

the child-level correlates of participant roles (e.g., social status, anti-bullying attitudes, empathy, moral disengagement, and self-efficacy). However, as highlighted by the social ecological framework, contributors also highlight important environmental influences as well as discuss how child-level and contextual factors interact. Lambe and colleagues (2019) note that “an approach that takes these multiple levels into account may help us to best understand the factors that promote defending behavior, as defending is more than a product of individual differences” (pp. 51–52). Given the importance of the adults in the school and home context, a chapter is devoted to these influences. In this chapter, important connections between microsystems, which Bronfenbrenner termed mesosystems (Ettekal & Mahoney, 2017), are described (e.g., parent-peer and parent-teacher connections). Providing a comprehensive view of environmental factors influencing bullying is of critical importance because there is “growing recognition that effective bullying prevention programs should be situated within a social-ecological framework... addressing the characteristics of the individuals involved and the multiple contexts in which they are embedded” (Holt, Raczynskib, Frey, Hymel, & Limber, 2013, p. 239). Therefore, our hope is that the focus on child-level and environmental correlates of each role can help guide prevention and intervention work.

Bullying Through My Eyes: Overview of Bullying Roles

Early work on school bullying was largely limited to the bully-victim dyad (Salmivalli & Voeten, 2004; Sutton & Smith, 1999). The innovative research of Salmivalli and colleagues brought to light the important roles bystanders can play in school bullying (Salmivalli, 1999, 2010). Even though the view of bullying as a group process has been widely adopted and has spurred a great deal of research on the different bullying roles (Ross, Lund, Sabey, & Charlton, 2017; Salmivalli & Voeten, 2004; Smokowski & Evans, 2019), less is known about the roles of assistants, reinforcers, and outsiders than the roles of bully, defender, and victim. The major aim of this book is to synthesize the growing body of research

on each participant role while also highlighting the potential of teachers and parents to influence the likelihood of students adopting different roles.

Bullying roles can be viewed as a spectrum with the bully on one side and the victim on the other (Olweus et al., 2007; Ross et al., 2017). When bullying is viewed as a group process, those roles in the middle of the spectrum are of critical importance. According to the functional perspective, bullies aggress against the victim because doing so serves a particular purpose. That is, students are much more likely to engage in behavior that is reinforced than behavior that is not reinforced or met with some form of punishment by the peer group (Ross et al., 2017).

This book is organized to begin with the bully end of the spectrum, progressing to those roles that support the bully before moving to the supporters of victims. Following this brief introduction of bullying as a group process, Mayeux and O'Mealey provide a thorough overview of the first role—the bully—in Chapter 2. Monks and O'Toole highlight how the assistant and reinforcer roles encourage the bully's behavior in Chapter 3. In Chapter 4, Macheck and colleagues then address the role of outsider, which is one that does not actively support either the bully or the victim. Progressing toward the victim end of the bullying roles spectrum, Fredrick and colleagues in Chapter 5 focus on defenders who either directly or indirectly intervene in bullying episodes to aid the victim. Schwartz and colleagues describe the final bullying role—the victim—in Chapter 6. Although not a part of the bullying spectrum, Yoon and colleagues in Chapter 7 detail how teachers and parents can exert significant influence on peer dynamics in general, as well as specifically affect the participants in bullying.

The chapters in this book follow a similar format. Each chapter begins with a definition of the highlighted role. Contributors discuss both individual-level and environmental correlates associated with each role. Further, contributors outline the associations between the focus role and adjustment outcomes. Bystanders (including adults) can take on roles that either encourage the bully or support the victim, which in turn, holds important implications for anti-bullying efforts. As such, each chapter outlines suggestions for prevention and intervention framed for the particular bullying role. Chapters end with the discussion of future

research directions as well as how the bullying role will likely be impacted by technological and societal changes. The final chapter in this volume draws across the different bullying roles presented to outline a road map for bullying prevention and intervention efforts.

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2

The Vantage Point of a Bully

Lara Mayeux and Molly O'Mealey

Decades of research attest to the importance of understanding the underlying causes, peer group dynamics, and adjustment problems associated with bullying in the peer group (e.g., Juvonen & Graham, 2014). The effects of victimization on children and adolescents who become the targets of a bully's wrath can be severe and long-lasting, and bullying itself is associated with a host of maladaptive behavioral and psychosocial outcomes (Rodkin, Espelage, & Hanish, 2015). Recent research has identified multiple participant roles in the peer group dynamics of bullying (e.g., Salmivalli, Lagerspetz, Björkqvist, Österman, & Kaukiainen, 1996); in this chapter, we focus on the bullies themselves.

A bully repeatedly and intentionally harms another person who is less strong or less powerful (Olweus, 1994). Bullying is best conceptualized as a type of proactive, unprovoked aggression that has some kind of instrumental goal or hostile intent (Salmivalli, 2010) and, rather than being applied indiscriminately, is typically focused on a small number

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