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## *The Bully, Victim, and Witness Relationship Defined*

### **Maggie**

Maggie has several close friends at school but is not considered popular. The girls meet early in the morning each day, have lunch together, and meet after school before going home.

There is another group of girls who has a problem with one of Maggie's friends.

One day after school the large group of girls surrounded Maggie's friend. They called her names and pushed her. A security guard ran toward the group, and the girls scattered. Maggie stayed to comfort her friend and walked her home from school.

A few days later when Maggie arrived at school, she saw the same girls blocking her entrance to the school. They became verbally abusive and tried to trip her.

The next day the girls were there again, so Maggie couldn't pass. This time they pulled at her coat and knocked her books on the ground. In the library later that week, Maggie saw a newly created

computer screen saver with her name and face transposed onto a farm animal in a very compromising position.

The next morning, Maggie was sick and didn't go to school. Her mother didn't think she seemed sick but let her stay home. When the same thing happened the next morning, Maggie's mother knew something was wrong.

Each day, students like Maggie encounter physical, verbal, and cyber bullying at the hands of classmates. Each day, students avoid going to school and create somatic symptoms because of the fear of bullying behavior. Bullying is one form of problem behavior that concerns students, teachers and administrators, and parents because of its potential impact on the students' well-being.

In this chapter, bullying behaviors are defined, connections among bullying and aggression and conflict are discussed, and trends in bullying and victimization are highlighted.

## **BULLYING DEFINED**

Bullying is most commonly defined as a set of aggressive behaviors toward others that are characterized by three criteria:

1. Bullying is intentional aggression that may be physical, verbal, sexual, or more indirect (relational). Bullying behaviors also may be demonstrated through technology such as cell phones and computers.
2. Bullying exposes victims to repeated aggression over an extended period of time. Currently, researchers are not certain how to quantify "period of time." Specifically, it is not certain how much time it might take for bullying to impact a victim's psychological well-being.
3. Bullying occurs within an interpersonal relationship characterized by a real or perceived imbalance of power. Such power may originate from physical size or strength, or from psychological power, with children who have great peer influence exhibiting greater power in bully-victim relationships.

Research has identified bullying as ongoing, unsolicited, and frequently not physically injurious (Hoover, Oliver, & Thomson, 1993). Rather, physical and verbal bullying are only part of the school experience, and there are various sources of subtle bullying that inflicts psychological and

emotional harm on victims (Batsche, 1997). In contrast to physical bullying, relational bullying involves interpersonally manipulative behaviors (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995) including direct control (“You can’t be my friend unless . . .”), rejection (spreading rumors or lies), and social exclusion (excluding a peer from play or a peer relationship). Relational bullying has been found in children as young as 3 years (Crick, Casas, & Ku, 1999), while more covert forms of relational bullying have been found in middle childhood and adolescence (Yoon, Barton, & Taiariol, 2004).

Although most bully-victim relationships involve only one type of bullying, some bullies incorporate physical, verbal, sexual, and/or relational behaviors within their relationships. In our portrait of Maggie, the bully and her peer group members demonstrated physical, verbal, and a newly described form of bullying: cyber bullying.

Physical, verbal, relational, and sexual bullying behaviors may occur over an extended period of time in a variety of contexts, including the classroom, hallways, playground, or traveling to and from school. Cyber bullying allows students to continue bullying beyond the school day, through the use of cell phones and computer chat rooms.

Cyber bullies (also known as “griefers”) are now using the anonymity of the Web to carry out verbal and relational bullying without seeing its effects on victims or running the risk of being discovered. The issue of cyber bullying is becoming more prevalent with the widespread use of wireless devices such as cell phones and hand-held computers. Cyber bullying is occurring more frequently in affluent suburbs across the country, where computer use is high and children are technologically adept. Long-term effects of cyber bullying have not yet been identified.

In a suburb of Chicago, several students were suspended following an incident of cyber bullying. The school discovered a sophisticated Web site on which students chose the “victim of the month.” Students in the high school were provided opportunities to vote for their “favorite,” who then became the target for several male bullies. In another incident, a California student accused a fellow student of using a camera phone to take inappropriate pictures of her in the locker room and then posting the pictures on a commonly viewed Web site. These are only two examples of a growing trend of cyber bullying by today’s youth.

Figure 1.1 summarizes and defines types of bullying behaviors.

## THE ROLE OF CONFLICT AND AGGRESSION

Bullying behaviors differ from common conflict and aggressive behaviors, and understanding the differences among conflict, aggression, and bullying is an important first step to preventing and intervening in bullying relationships in the school community.

Figure 1.1 Bullying Behaviors

Bullying behavior is intentional aggression that may be physical, verbal, relational, sexual, or demonstrated through “cyber” methods.

**Physical**

Hitting, kicking, punching, pushing, choking

*Every day for two weeks in the beginning of the school year, Ryan would come home with bruises on his arms and neck. He told me that he played football at lunch and that it always got a little rough. I thought he must have stopped playing because the bruising stopped, but one day I saw him changing out of his school uniform and he had terrible bruises on his legs and cuts around his ankles. He finally told me that kids at school were constantly kicking and hitting him in the locker room. Just the other day they decided to practice “hog tying” his feet with strapping tape.*

—Jannice, mother of Ryan (age 9)

**Verbal**

Threatening, teasing, name calling

*My daughter Mary Jane has to wear thick glasses as a result of recent eye surgery. She was never really popular, but now she is taunted and teased every day about the way she looks. Several students just won’t leave her alone.*

—Meredith, mother of Mary Jane (age 6)

**Relational**

Spreading rumors, ostracizing or exclusionary behaviors

*My wife and I just went through a sticky divorce, and I got sole custody of our three children. We moved a short distance from our home. My daughter complained of stomach pains and didn’t want to go to school. I thought she just missed her mom, but she finally told me that her classmates were avoiding her like the plague because someone started the rumor that her mother was unfit and didn’t get custody because she was a drug-using prostitute.*

—Martin, father of Karen (age 13)

**Sexual**

Inappropriate touching, threatening, or teasing that are sexually harassing

*My daughter, Lynette, now refuses to wear some of her new, favorite school clothes. She finally confessed that she was ridiculed in school for her clothes being too revealing. One day during gym class, some of the other girls took her favorite (dry clean only) blouse and threw it in the showers to shrink it even more. They said they were tired of my daughter getting all of the attention from the boys.*

—Tina, mother of Lynette (age 12)

**Cyber**

Bullying behaviors expressed through modern conveniences such as Internet chat rooms, hand-held walkie-talkies, and cellular phones

*My son, Samuel, won’t attend his physical education class anymore, and he is dangerously close to earning a failing grade. He finally confided that a classmate took his picture while showering using a picture phone. The student has placed his naked picture on the bathroom wall in school.*

—Peter, father of Samuel (age 12)

## Conflict

Conflict involves the opposition of two persons or things and is a naturally occurring human behavior that begins in early infancy and continues throughout the life span. Conflict is an essential component of all healthy relationships; experts note that either too little or too much conflict may signal a psychopathological relationship (Furman & Buhrmester, 1985).

Conflict and its constructive resolution often result in much cognitive and social growth and positive social interactions. Children who exhibit better problem-solving methods during conflict situations tend to enjoy healthier relationships with their peers than children who use destructive methods of resolving conflict (for example, physical fighting).

For example, two friends, Andy and Philip, need to select one topic for a class project, but they both have very different ideas. Andy wants to do the project on animals, while Philip wants to do the project on cars. Andy and Philip select the topic of stars, a topic that they both enjoy, and they complete the project successfully. Andy and Philip's experience with each other reinforces the use of collaboration as a conflict resolution technique and also establishes a beginning point of positive interactions between the two.

On the other hand, Philip could have given in to Andy and completed the project on animals. The conflict resolution strategy of giving in to Andy would have established an inequality in the relationship, whereby Philip might not have been interested in continuing a relationship. In many cases, conflict resolution strategy selection sets the tone of relationships for children. Collaborative strategies indicate more positive, longer-term friendships, and destructive strategies more often result in negative, shorter-term interactions between children.

Bully-victim relationships fit well within this depiction of conflict and aggression. As bullies and victims conflict over differences resulting from perceived or real power or hierarchy, it is most likely that they will use competitive methods of conflict resolution, not collaborative ones. Bully-victim relationships will involve short-term, negative conflicts in which participants use strategies such as aggression, giving in, or withdrawing to resolve the conflict. Bullies often choose aggressive methods of conflict resolution, while their victims often use avoidance strategies.

Witnesses in the middle school years tend not to become involved in the bullying episodes because of their concern with issues such as power and hierarchy. Becoming involved in bullying situations may jeopardize the tenuous balance of friendship patterns, which play such a significant role in socioemotional development during early adolescence.

## Aggression

Although conflict and its resolution may occur with or without aggression, aggression usually does not occur without conflict. *Aggression* is

defined as any behavior that results in physical or emotional injury to a person or animal, or one that leads to property damage or destruction. It can be verbal or physical. Not all forms of aggression are considered bullying behaviors.

Children engage in a number of different types of aggression that aren't necessarily bullying behaviors. Four different types of aggression that children express have been identified: accidental, expressive, instrumental, and hostile.

## THE BULLY-VICTIM-WITNESS RELATIONSHIP

Bullying behaviors seldom occur in isolation. In fact, bullying frequently involves the support of peers within the school and is not an isolated event between two individuals.

According to one study, more than 85 percent of all bullying occurs within the context of peer group interactions (Atlas & Pepler, 1998). Although studies on bullying show that most children dislike bullying behaviors (Rigby & Slee, 1991), with 83 percent of youth reporting discomfort while watching these episodes (Craig & Pepler, 1997), bullies usually can find allies who share a dislike for victimized peers. Victims often perceive bystanders—or witnesses—as acting in collusion with the bullies. Some researchers suggest that 87 percent of all students may be identified as part of a bullying episode as a bully, victim, or witness (Huttunen et al., 1996).

Recent research in the fields of psychology and education has explored the relationship between bullies and their victims. Much has been written identifying characteristics of bully and victim, the origins of bullying and victim behaviors, and strategies for diminishing aggressive behavior in

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bullies and developing assertive skills among victims. However, much of this work has viewed the bully and the victim in isolation rather than as part of an interconnected, almost symbiotic relationship, whereby one would not exist without the other. Indeed, the bully-victim relationship is often composed of multiplayer interactions

and is further complicated by influences such as other peers (witnesses), school personnel, and the children's families.

Bully-victim-witness relationships must be viewed within a bidirectional context. Thus, bullies impact behaviors and thoughts of victims; conversely, victims impact behaviors and thoughts of their bullies in a bidirectional fashion. For example, the bully may attack, unnecessarily push, and shove his victim for playing poorly during a football game.

The victim, afraid and injured by the aggression, becomes more timid while playing, influencing greater physical aggression by the bully in response to the victim's poor athletic performance. This is not to suggest that victims of bullying deserve the bullying, but rather to demonstrate that bully-victim relationships depend on characteristic behaviors of both relationship partners. Compounding the situation, influences from other individuals, such as school personnel, family, and peers (witnesses), also impact the quality of the relationship between bullies and their victims.

Although this point is intuitive, remember that the context of the relationship is important before highlighting prevention and intervention strategies. Each member of the relationship plays a role in whether an interaction is positive or negative. Therefore, during a bullying episode, several individuals are involved, not just the bully and victim. Too often, prevention and intervention strategies focus only on changing the behavior of the bully.

Yet it is the bully-victim-witness relationship that must also change. Specific support and intervention must occur for bullies, victims, and witnesses in order to reduce bullying behaviors in schools. Developing and implementing a cookie-cutter approach to reducing bullying behaviors will not result in positive interactions among the participants in the future. It is not effective to target intentional aggression by bullies without focusing on victim behavior as well. Therefore, developing and implementing the prevention and intervention plan requires a conscious effort to target the context of the relationship and its multicomponents.

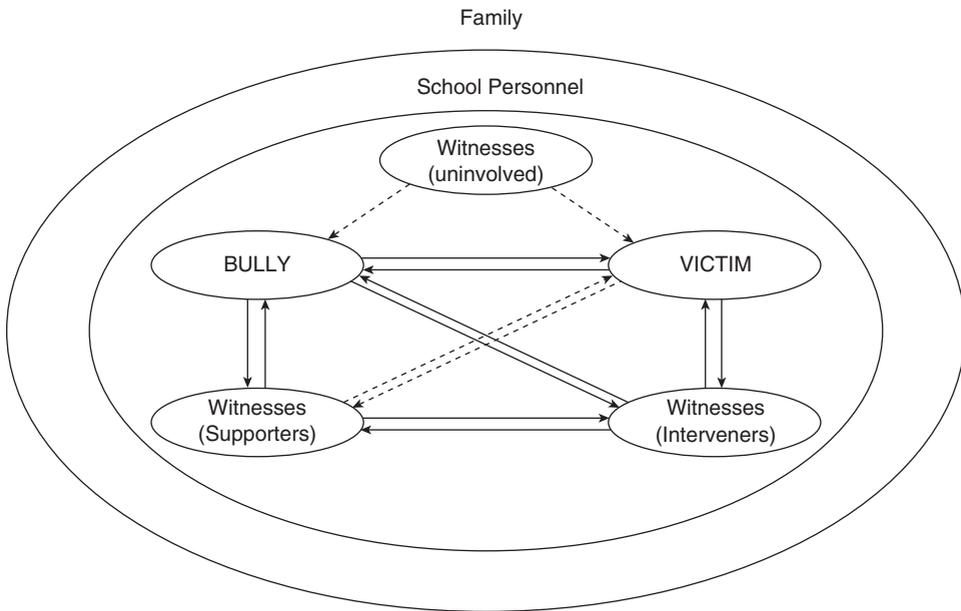
## Types of Witnesses

As depicted in Figure 1.2, the bully-victim relationship involves more than the bully and the victim. These relationships include witnesses to the bully and the victim. Witnesses may take a number of roles within the bully-victim relationship.

### *Adults*

School personnel and family members play a role in the bully-victim-witness relationship. School personnel may have a direct influence on the reduction of bullying behaviors, or, in contrast, may do much to reinforce or even escalate the bullying. School personnel may also influence the existence of interveners within the bullying relationship by encouraging their supportive nature.

Family members also play a significant role in this complex relationship. Modeling bullying or victim behaviors may reinforce children's expression of similar behaviors. Family members can also reinforce or discourage interveners through reward or punishment of the intervention, depending upon their perceptions of such bully-victim relationships. Family and school factors are discussed further in the next chapter.

**Figure 1.2** The Bully-Victim-Witness Relationship

### *Bully Supporters*

First, bully supporters are children who are witnesses to the bully-victim relationship and often incite the bully to participate in bullying behaviors without personally taking action against the victim. Generally, they do not interact with the victim. Instead, bully supporters increase the bullying behavior by creating a supportive environment for the bully; hence, the bully and supporter directly influence each other in the relationship, and this relationship indirectly influences the victim. The supporters' behaviors are often influenced by the bully's appreciation of their support and by the continued suffering of the victim. Males are more likely than females to be drawn into supporting the bullying behavior (Salmivalli, Lagerspetz, Bjorkqvist, Österman, & Kaukianinen, 1996).

### **Michael**

Michael considers himself to be a "leader." At school he has a group of friends who are very popular. Michael and his friends meet in front of the school each morning. They stand near the sidewalk in a group, where they can make comments as certain students arrive at school. There are students whom they always target with insults. Sometimes

they throw things at the target students and even push them. They like to knock one another around and purposefully collide with the student they are picking on.

Michael actively enjoys watching this bullying. He often just stands back and laughs as his friends make life miserable for other students. Sometimes his friends get in trouble with a teacher and are sent to the office. But they never tell the teacher or the principal that Michael is really the one who gets things going and eggs everyone on.

### *Interveners*

Another form of witness is bully intervener—a child who intervenes on behalf of the victim during bullying situations. These witnesses are likely to stick up for the victim during bullying situations, or to console the victim following a bullying episode. Interveners are often motivated to defend or console victims not out of friendship with the victim but out of a sense of injustice and a desire to oppose the bullies and their supporters. The bullying behavior itself seems to reinforce the intervener's desire to intercede more than the victim's behavior does. According to Craig and Pepler (1997), peers intervened in 11 percent of playground bullying episodes; adults were significantly less likely to intervene, taking action only 4 percent of the time.

### **Meredith**

Meredith is playing on the playground with her two friends. Suddenly she hears a low wailing coming from the enclosed playhouse. She sees a group of girls surrounding the new student. Meredith can just barely hear what they are saying to her, and it isn't nice. She is tired of the group ganging up on the "new kid" and decides that today is the day she is going to intervene. Meredith walks up to the group, and says in a loud voice, "This is stupid. I am sick of seeing you doing this to someone new all the time. Get a life!" The group is shocked.

### *Passive Supporters*

Finally, bully-victim-witness relationships often include witnesses who are uninvolved with the bullying interaction. Victims and bullies often perceive these children as supporters of the act because they are

passively involved and do not actively intervene in the situation. They indirectly influence the bully-victim relationships.

**Marcia**

Marcia has a few close friends at school but is more popular with girls from her neighborhood. Every day, Marcia watches Michael bullying other students as they enter the school. Marcia thinks that Michael is really cruel, as he often picks on special education students. Marcia would like to intervene, but she has never done it before, and she is afraid of the repercussions.

**Types of Bullies**

According to researchers, bullying behavior takes many forms, and children who participate in bullying behaviors often take different roles within the bully-victim relationship. For example, some witnesses may serve in supportive roles in the bullying relationship.

In general, two types of bullies exist. Bullies are categorized by (1) the level of conflict they engage in, and (2) the effectiveness of their aggression against victims. Figure 1.3 highlights these two categories, the bully (effectual) and bully-victim (ineffectual) types.

*Effectual Bullies*

Bullying encompasses a range of behaviors exhibited with varying degrees of success. Some bullies engage in few conflicts, yet are highly aggressive during conflict situations and tend to resolve the conflict on their terms. While in conflict, these bullies, called “effectual bullies,” swiftly deal with their conflict partners. Usually these bullies deal unemotionally with their victims and very quickly move on following the conflict. Effectual bullies are more likely to initiate and actively play a role in

**Figure 1.3** Levels of Conflict and Effectiveness in the Bully-Victim Relationship

<i>Role</i>	<i>Level of Conflict</i>	<i>Bullying Effectiveness</i>
BULLY	LOW	HIGH
BULLY-VICTIM	HIGH	LOW
VICTIM	LOW	LOW

the bullying episode. They usually encounter little resistance from their victims. Bullies tend to be somewhat unpopular but, unlike victims, may be popular with a particular group of children (Olweus, 1997).

This type of bully is the most common form and is the one most people think of when asked to describe bullying behavior.

### **Marcus**

Marcus is tall for his age and is very strong. He likes to play on the baseball field at recess and rarely allows anyone outside of his peer group to play on the field at the same time. Daniel, a younger student, has been playing near the third baseline for the fourth day in a row. Marcus had spoken to him before playing on his field, but it appears that Daniel isn't heeding his warning. Looks like Daniel is going to be Marcus's newest victim.

### *Ineffectual Bullies*

However, some bullies are often unsuccessful in their bullying behaviors. Ineffectual bullies frequently participate in conflict, yet are often not effective in asserting their aggression. Unlike effectual bullies, ineffectual bullies do not carry out the bullying behaviors using swift, unemotional methods. Instead, they continue to "jab" at the victim, who may or may not resist. Ineffectual bullies are often not successful in bullying their victims and often are at risk of becoming victims themselves.

### **Steven**

Steven is very unpopular in school. He often gets into fights with other students and spends a great deal of time in detention. Steven is known by some students as a bully. He frequently starts his day by name calling, shoving, and threatening to "get" several students—all by 9:00 a.m.! One day, Steven went too far with a fellow student and was physically assaulted after calling the student a "loser."

Although it is unclear to researchers why these children engage in this behavior, some suggest that ineffectual bullies were bullied themselves and then model these methods with other children. Others suggest that these bullies actually began as bullies, were ineffective in their methods, and became victimized as a result. Often these ineffectual bullies play the

role of the bully supporter in order to be provided with opportunities to succeed in bullying vicariously through the effectual bully. Ineffectual bullies are just as likely, however, to serve as the principal bully with additional ineffectual bullies serving as supporters.

Effectual bullies and ineffectual bullies differ according to their levels of peer popularity, which also support the demonstration of their bullying behavior. Effectual bullies are more popular among their peers as compared to ineffectual bullies, who demonstrate negative personality characteristics and are more disliked by peers (Pelligrini, 1998).

### Types of Victims

In comparison to bullies, little research has been conducted into the backgrounds and behavior of children who serve as the victims in bully-victim relationships. Some researchers do suggest, however, that victims are often more similar to bullies in methods of problem solving than not, particularly with regard to conflict behavior. Both victims and bullies use competitive forms of conflict resolution, with victimized children often resolving conflict through avoidance and bullies through aggressive means. As a group, victims cry easily, are disliked by peers, and are anxious and lonely (Olweus, 1978; Schwartz, Dodge, & Coie, 1993). Similar to bullies, victims can be categorized according to the level of conflict in which they are involved.

#### *High-Conflict Victims*

Some victimized children engage in high levels of conflict. Victims who engage in high levels of conflict are often aggressive, yet unsuccessful in “winning” conflicts with others. Also referred to as “provocative” or “aggressive” victims, 10–20 percent of victims are bullies as well (Olweus, 2001). These children often exhibit behaviors that are highly irritating, such as disruptiveness, hyperactivity, and aggression. For instance, high-conflict victims will frequently provoke other children and will respond aggressively when provoked. These children will lose many of their battles while displaying great frustration and bitterness. They are at great risk for serving as victims in bullying-victim relationships. Often high-conflict victims are also ineffectual bullies.

#### **Milton**

Teachers are always having to remind Milton to sit in his chair to finish a lesson. He frequently picks on other students in class. One day, Milton made animal sounds when the teacher called on a particular student. Milton’s frequent target was absent from school another day, and Milton attempted to bully the student’s “backup,” when suddenly, Milton was victimized by another student!

### *Low-Conflict Victims*

On the other hand, low-conflict victims do not demonstrate aggressive behaviors, but rather are passive and submissive when confronted in bullying episodes. These children yield submissively and quickly to the demands of an aggressor, ending the conflict. Therefore, conflicts do not occur over extended periods of time.

Pierce (1990), as cited in Perry, Perry, and Kennedy (1992), found that high-conflict victims were more disliked by their peers than were low-conflict victims. High-conflict victims were more likely to be described as always needing to have their own way, ready to blame others, argumentative, disruptive, and persistent in attempts to enter peer groups. In contrast, low-conflict victims are more likely to be described by peers as withdrawn and reluctant to interact with peers.

Interestingly, parental involvement is correlated to victimization. Children who are more likely to become victimized tend to have involved parents. Again, it is unclear if parents become more involved in response to bullying behaviors against their child, or if their involvement indicates their difficulty in allowing their children to function independently.

#### **Angela**

Angela has two very good friends at school, but generally she keeps to herself. She is quite self-conscious about her appearance and does not like having to change clothes for physical education. The school bully has targeted her during the last month and is becoming increasingly threatening. Today, the bully has demanded that Angela hand over a favorite necklace that she was storing in her gym locker.

## **RESEARCH FINDINGS ON BULLIES AND VICTIMS**

Researchers have attempted to identify trends with regard to bullying behaviors in order to understand the nature of bullies and their victims. Trends have emerged identifying differences in gender, age, and ethnicity. Although many of these studies were conducted in countries outside of the United States, they still provide useful information for American educators and parents.

### **Gender Differences**

Researchers suggested that gender differences are apparent with regard to bullying behavior. Specifically, gender is related to the demonstration of bullying behavior and methods of bullying. Olweus (1978)

noted that males are more likely to demonstrate bullying behaviors through physical violence and aggression or threat of physical violence or aggression. Females, on the other hand, more frequently use indirect or relational modes of bullying, such as gossiping, spreading rumors, and ostracizing (Bjorkqvist, Lagerspetz, & Kaukianinen, 1992; Rivers & Smith, 1994).

Gender differences also are evident in victim selection. Males are equally likely to bully males and females, while females almost exclusively bully other females. Males are more likely to bully than females in a 3:1 ratio and will bully children from other grades in the school. Females are less likely to bully than males, and females tend to choose their victims from their own grade.

Although females are reported to bully less frequently than males, documented cases may not clearly represent the true incidence, since girls use more covert methods of bullying behavior than males and are underrepresented in the literature. Also, bullying behavior among males may be overrepresented if self-reporting measures are used because male bullying

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behaviors are more socially acceptable than female forms of bullying. Therefore, males might be more willing to admit their bullying behavior than females. One possible reason for bullying differences between males and females is their different motives. While males tend to bully to demonstrate power and hierarchy, girls demonstrate bullying behaviors for reassurance or affiliation (Wachtel,

1973). On self-report surveys, males and females are equally likely to report being victimized (Charach, Pepler, & Ziegler, 1995).

### Age Differences

Age differences have been found in bullying studies in Scandinavian countries, with some preliminary evidence in America supporting these findings. Olweus (1996) found significant differences with regard to age in identifying bully behavior in Europe. The incidence of bullying behavior is twice as high among elementary as in secondary school students; however, students transitioning from schools are at greatest risk for bullying behavior. Bullying behavior was at its highest rate among children in their final years of attendance at any particular school (for example, among sixth graders in a K–6 school and among twelfth graders in a traditional high school). Developmentally, girls' bullying behavior declines over the years, while males' bullying behavior tends to increase. Physical bullying decreases with age in both genders.

In the United States, bullying tends to increase during the late elementary years, peaking during the middle school grades. Espelage and Holt (2001) found that after the transition to middle school, the sixth graders reported more use of teasing and bullying behaviors than elementary grades. Bullying decreases after the ninth grade, when children reach approximately 14 years of age (Hazler, Carney, Green, Powell, & Jolly, 1997). Therefore, youth in Grades 6–8 are at greatest risk for experiencing bullying behaviors. Some researchers also suggest that bullying may be a way to establish dominance in social structures, and therefore, the transition to middle school will likely be accompanied by an increase in bullying and then followed by an age-related decline in high school as dominance hierarchies are solidified (Pelligrini & Long, 2002).

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Indeed, this overlaps well with reported elevated levels of conflict—both peer conflict and familial conflict—that occur among this age group. In the United States, this age group is often reported to demonstrate the highest levels of risk-taking behaviors (for example, smoking, drug use, sexual activity). Olweus (1993) reported that children in lower grades are more likely to be victims of older bullies, whereas children in upper grades are more likely to be victims of same-age bullies. Smith and Shu (2000) found that older children were more likely than younger children to report using effective strategies against bullies.

### **Ethnic Differences**

Although the literature is scant, ethnicity and race do seem to influence the risk of participating in bully-victim relationships. White, non-Hispanic students are more likely than Black, non-Hispanic students to report being bullied. White and Black students report greater incidence of indirect or relational bullying as compared to Hispanic students. White students were more likely than Black students to report being bullied (Hanish & Guerra, 2000).

Rigby (1998) described bullies as possessing strong racist attitudes. Often, children of the minority group in a classroom are victims, and they tend to view their peers' aggression as bullying rather than racism. These findings are certainly consistent, as children are more likely to initiate isolation and separation based upon differences at this age than during other developmental periods.

In preliminary findings, Barton (2000) found bullying behaviors were reported more frequently in diverse school communities as compared to more homogeneous school populations.

### **Socioeconomic Status**

Olweus (1980) found no relationship between socioeconomic status of the family and being the victim of bullying and indicates that there are similar proportions of bullies and victims across all levels. Olweus attributes this finding, however, to the relative homogeneity in the Scandinavian countries in which his studies were conducted. DeVoe and Kaffenberger (2005) found similar results in the United States; however, additional research must be conducted.

### **Bullying and Special Student Populations**

Very little research has been conducted on bullying and special populations of students. The limited research on bullying in special education has indicated that special education students are more likely to be victimized (Llewellyn, 2000). The scant research of bullying among children with learning disabilities suggests that they are vulnerable to being victimized, as these students are at risk for being rejected and unpopular with peers.

### **Effects of the Bully-Victim-Witness Relationships**

Researchers have identified both long-term and short-term effects of the bully-victim-witness relationship. However, these effects cannot be generalized as the type of bully and type of victim affect these findings. Carefully designed empirical studies using a longitudinal design (studying the same individuals over an extended period of time) are necessary to identify clear psychosocial correlates of this relationship.

#### *Effect on Bullies*

Much has been written about both the short-term and long-term impact of bullying behaviors. According to a study in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* (Nansel, Overpeck et al., 2001), bullies are more likely than other children to be involved with risk-taking and problem behaviors such as drinking alcohol and smoking. Bullies are more likely to demonstrate antisocial and rule-breaking behaviors such as with vandalism, truancy, and frequent drug use. According to Berthold and Hover (2000), middle school bullies were more likely to be pressured by peers into high-risk behaviors such as smoking and drinking. Bullies also demonstrated poorer school adjustment, including lower academic achievement and a more negative perception of the school climate. Interestingly, the social and psychological maladjustment associated with relational bullying is as significant and stable as those of physical bullying (Galen & Underwood, 1997).

Researchers disagree, however, regarding the impact of bullying on social behavior. Bjorkqvist, Ekman, and Lagerspetz (1982) found bullies to be unpopular among peers, but not as unpopular as their victims. Bullies, according to self-reports, perceive themselves as impulsive and lacking in self-control (Bjorkqvist et al., 1992) and tend to be attracted to social situations with aggressive content. Olweus (1992) found bullies were four times more likely to be involved with criminal behaviors at the age of 24, with 60 percent demonstrating at least one conviction and 35–40 percent showing three or more convictions.

Eron, Huesmann, Dubow, Romanoff, and Yarmel (1987) found that those who were labeled as bullies by their classmates remained bullies throughout their lives; they accumulated more court convictions, experienced more alcoholism and antisocial personality disorders, and used more mental health services than their peers.

However, bullies are less likely to experience negative consequences as compared to individuals who participate as both bullies and victims. According to the *Journal of the American Medical Association* (Nansel, Overpeck, et al., 2001) study, children who serve as both bully and victim demonstrate poorer adjustment across socioemotional dimensions.

### *Effect on Victims*

Victims who participate in low levels of conflict tend to demonstrate poorer social and emotional adjustment than nonvictims. As children, victims tend to have greater difficulty making friends with same-age peers; they demonstrate poorer quality interactions with classmates, and report greater loneliness than nonvictims. Victims also demonstrate poorer problem-solving skills than nonvictimized youth; however, it is unknown if this is a result of the bullying behavior or an underlying cause of the behavior. Victims report low self-esteem, likely because of repeated exposure to victimization (Besag, 1989). Depression and loss of interest in activities are common (Craig & Pepler, 1997), as are anxiety, tension, and fear (Slee, 1995). As a result of bullying, suicidal ideation is high among victimized children (Carney, 2000; National Center for Education Statistics, 1995).

Long-term effects of victimization are evident. Individuals formerly bullied were found to have higher levels of depression and poorer self-esteem at age 23, and they were more harassed and socially isolated than comparison adults (Olweus, 1994). This may result from an internalization of perceptions that they are worthless or inadequate.

Farrington (1991) cited that victims are less likely to be involved with delinquent behaviors than are bullies.

Bullies were four times more likely to be involved with criminal behavior at the age of 24, with 60 percent demonstrating one conviction and 35–40 percent showing three or more convictions.

## SUMMARY

As educators and parents, we must appreciate the complexities of the bully-victim-witness relationship if we hope to change it. Bullying is intentional, repeated aggression within an interpersonal relationship characterized by a real or perceived imbalance of power. What does bullying look like? Most of us picture physical aggression when we think of bullying, but bullying may take the more subtle forms of teasing or gossip. The power bullies wield may be based on their physical size or on less tangible factors such as their popularity with peers. Finally, bullying often is a three-way relationship in which bystanders have the power to intervene or support the behavior.

Bullying has significant short-term and long-term results. Parents and educators should be aware that bullies tend to engage in more risk-taking behaviors than their peers, while victims have a harder time adjusting socially and forming same-age friendships. In later life, bullies tend to adjust poorly, with a far greater incidence of emotional problems and criminal behavior. Their victims also experience long-term effects, most notably higher rates of depression and suicidal ideation.

The stakes are high, therefore, for both bullies and victims. Understanding and influencing bullying behavior provides educators and parents with a significant opportunity to have a profound impact on the quality of children's lives and futures.