Assessing the Role and Extent

Of Relational Bullying Among Grade Seven Boys

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Abstract

The following research study examined relational bullying in a Christian-based elementary school context. Mixed methods were used to study grade seven students and the extent and nature of the relational bullying. Quantitative and qualitative data was collected through a student survey and an adult questionnaire. The results were analyzed using SPSS™ and by coding themes. The results of the analysis supported previously written literature that girls are relational bullies and boys are physical bullies. However, there is a contradiction that relational bullying is "not a boys' issue". Boys are involved in relational bullying in school. Implications from the study indicate that boys will exclude, name call, tease and gossip and spread rumors as a means to bully peers. Boys superseded girls in relational bullying tactics except gossiping and spreading rumors.

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Introduction

> The focus in our educational curriculums on cognitive development
> is important; however, we also need to encourage the development
> of our children in other domains of the self. For instance, as we
> develop academic curriculums that promote intellectual growth, are
> we ignoring our children's social, interpersonal and physical
> development? (Anderson–Butcher, Newsome, & Nay, 2003, p.
> 143).

The question posed by Anderson–Butcher, Newsome, and Nay (2003), has

prompted the focus of my research. Are educators neglecting the social

development of children? Are schools not spending enough time and energy

developing the interpersonal skills of students? I believe there are a few areas

that exist as challenges for schools when trying to develop positive interpersonal

skills of students.

First, I believe the essence of human nature in socialization provides an

opportunity for students to engage in conflict. Based on my experiences, when

students interact on a social level there is always the opportunity to engage in

negative interactions and I often end up dealing with conflicts through out the

course of the school day. Certainly, reminiscing about one's childhood produces

memories of being called names, or being excluded from the group or being

teased; all are examples of relational bullying (Whitted & Dupper, 2005; Naylor,

Cowie, Cossin, Bettencourt & Lemme, 2006).

Second, as an administrator, I am constantly intervening and acting as

mediator in resolving conflict among students in school, conflict that has

manifested as result of the social interactions of peers within the school environment.

Third, as an educator and administrator, daily observations in the classroom and on the playground give the impression that positive relations are not always a realistic outcome of social interactions and conflict has become a routine occurrence of social interactions. Students are taught to voice opinions, express their feelings and to stand-up for that which they believe. These differences among students in thought and point of view creates opportunity for negative interaction.

Also, as a school rooted in belief of religious values and morals, the perception of adults of this school system is one of superiority with respect to a moral education. In my experience Christian schools are expected to be less immersed in bullying behaviors than their public counterparts since the foundation of religious schools is based on respect, dignity and the fundamental teachings of the Bible and Jesus Christ. Our Christian schools take pride in educating students by creating, improving and developing a school climate comprised of empathy, respect, compassion and forgiveness. I believe it is important to examine a school setting based on religious principles and the extent of bullying in the Christian school environment.

Additionally, the degree of conflict within any given school day does not represent an accurate picture of the magnitude of the interpersonal problems that students encounter that transpire in the form of bullying because adults are only aware of a small amount of the bullying behavior that takes place (Cowie, 2000).

Bullying is difficult to detect and adult supervision plays an important role in limiting the frequency of bullying incidences in schools (Olweus, 1993).

Finally, conflicts that develop into bullying situations in schools have detrimental effects on students. The effects that bullying has on a victim's health are serious and the ramifications can be long lasting (Baldry, 2004). Therefore, it is important to determine the degree of bullying in schools to be able to apply the appropriate prevention and intervention strategies to facilitate a positive school atmosphere, which in turn promotes the social, emotional and psychological well-being of students.

Bullying

Bullying is recognized as a common feature of school life, and the increasing number of research studies in the field indicates the seriousness with which the issue is being taken (Cowie, 2000). Bullying is present in the lives of students as they learn to socialize within the school environment. Bullying is a negative interaction (Baldry, 2004) which is of a serious nature and can cause potential harm to children (Gopper & Froschl, 1999). Khosropour and Walsh (2001) argue that there are many negative social, academic, psychological, and physical consequences of bullying in the schools. As a result there is a growing interest in studying the phenomenon of bullying (Gopper & Froschl, 1999).

Bullying is an aspect of the interpersonal and social development of students in school that has been recognized as a concern and has manifested as an issue for educators, parents and students. Bullying has been defined as a

power imbalance (see, e.g., Baldry, 2004) and involves direct and indirect aggression (e.g., Naylor, Cowie, Cossin, Bettencourt, & Lemme, 2006). Bullying involves such actions as teasing (e.g., Dake, Price & Tellojohann, 2003), name calling, exclusion, verbal aggression, gossiping and spreading rumors and physical aggression (e.g., Mishna & Alaggia, 2006).

Bullying has a negative impact on the overall school climate (Casey-Cannon et al., 2001; Yoneyama & Rigby, 2006); therefore, one must recognize there is an issue and deal with its implications. Victimization in the form of bullying occurs regularly in the school environment in locations such as the playing areas during breaks, to and from school (Yoneyama & Rigby, 2006) or on the school bus (Casey-Cannon et al., 2001; Yoneyama & Rigby, 2006).

Direct bullying is easier to detect and therefore deal with its effects and implications. However, indirect bullying tends to be more covert and therefore more difficult to detect and deal with accordingly. Yoneyama and Rigby (2006) indicate that "indirect bullying appears less likely to bring the perpetrator into conflict with school authorities" (p. 40).

The current study was undertaken with a broad focus of the definition for bullying, which has come to include many terms, including relational aggression, relational bullying, social bullying, social aggression, indirect or covert bullying (aggression), peer victimization and peer maltreatment. For the purposes of this study relational bullying is used to encompass these ideas. It is the harm caused intentionally or unintentionally (Naylor et al., 2006) by peers to hurt and damage the relationships of others (Crick, Casas & Ku, 1999). For the purposes of this

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study the term *relational bullying* is defined as teasing, name calling, exclusion (Naylor et al., 2006; Whitted & Dupper, 2005), gossiping (Mishna & Alaggia, 2006; Naylor et al., 2006), and spreading rumors (Naylor et al., 2006; Smokowski & Holland-Kopasz, 2005; Whitted & Dupper, 2005). Relational bullying is operationally defined in this study as the frequency with which a student indicated that they were teased, called a name, left out, gossiped about and had rumors spread about them.

Gender differences in bullying

The leadership role of administration requires numerous interactions with many students of diverse ages on a daily basis that is inclusive to both boys and girls. A number of interactions are centered on supporting students with challenges in their peer relationships. Based on my personal experiences student conflicts and disagreements are rooted in relational bullying tactics. Boys and girls are observed struggling to cope with and resolve relational bullying incidents at school. According to Casey-Cannon et al. (2001), Crick, Casas and Ku (1999) and Khosropour and Walsh (2001) relational bullying is viewed as a phenomenon that is dominated by girls; boys are viewed as the physical bully. This is not the case in my experience as I deal with very little physical bullying and a great deal of relational bullying; and I am intervening more with boys than girls in relational bullying conflicts. This has prompted my desire to research the frequency with which boys are involved in and observed using relational bullying behaviors among their peers.

Implications of bullying

Baldry (2004) indicated bullying is a form of abuse that will impact students negatively for a long time. Studies of peer victimization "have provided a convincing case for the negative role played by peer maltreatment in children's social development and psychological adjustment" (Crick, Casas & Ku, 1999, p. 376). According to Baldry (2004), "poor mental and physical health prevents students from feeling happy at school and achieving good and satisfactory goals"(p. 354). Students who are the victims of bullies are three to four times more likely to experience higher levels of anxiety and greater physical health symptoms that contribute to poorer health (Drake, Price & Telljohann, 2003). Indirect victimization has a huge impact on children and "is the strongest risk factor in the development of a poor physical and mental condition" (Baldry, 2004, p. 352).

Purpose

Relational bullying is difficult to detect because of the covert nature of its actions. Relational bullying deserves more focused research to better support students and the efforts of educators to address the problem of relational bullying in the context of the Christian school environment. Physical bullying issues are becoming less frequent in nature and current conflicts among students are becoming more relational - bullying based (Baldry, 2004). I find it intriguing that much of the literature suggests that girls resort to tactics of relational bullying and that boys are more prone to use physical bullying to cope with conflict

(Khosropour & Walsh, 2001; Crick, Casas & Ku, 1999). In my experiences and through conversations with colleagues, I find that the generalizations surrounding bullying and gender are not easily categorized and the stereotyping of bullying behaviors is disadvantageous to a positive school environment.

There are a few reasons that I believe it is vital that the relational bullying of boys be further analyzed in current society. First, boys are more involved in issues of bullying (Baldry, 2004). Second, boys are involved in indirect bullying where "boys are more likely than girls to bully others" (Baldry, 2004, p. 348). Third, I strongly feel that there is a need for schools to study the relational bullying of students with a focus on boys since they are not typically viewed as the relational bully.

The purpose of this research was to explore the phenomenon of bullying within the context of a Christian elementary school climate. In order to contribute to further research in this area conducted by other researchers, the area of relational bullying was the research theme of my project, (e.g., Baldry, 2004). Based on my experiences, the trend of relational bullying is not gender specific. This contradicts the works of Khosropour and Walsh (2001), Casey-Cannon et al. (2001) and Crick, Casas and Ku, (1999) which indicated that girls resort to relational bullying and boys use physical bullying tactics. This study examined the role of gender (both boys and girls) in regards to relational bullying in the Christian elementary school environment.

Another purpose of the study was to primarily explore the role of boys and the prevalence of relational bullying among boys because there are

contradictions in the literature regarding gender and relational bullying. Also, it is important to understand the concept of bullying behaviors as it applies to boys as this will facilitate the efforts of educators to intervene and implement programming to alleviate relational bullying among school-aged boys.

Rationale

As an administrator, I am responsible for the development of the overall school climate. According to Whitney and Smith (1993) bullying rates at schools are too high and further research on why and ways to reduce it are urgently needed. Considering also that relational bullying can have a profoundly negative affect on the school climate (Whitted & Dupper, 2005), I find it is necessary to focus on the social interactions of school-aged children, particularly boys. Naylor et al. (2006) studied the perceptions of students on the definitions of bullying and determined that boys were half as likely to include social exclusion in their bullying definitions, but in my experience it is important to identify the social needs of our students to support their successes in school. In order to address the issue of bullying and develop interventions and preventative strategies, a school needs to establish what bullying means to children. According to Menesini, Fonzi and Smith (2002), intervention intended to reduce school bullying needs to focus on a shared understanding of what bullying is for teachers and students. Dake, Price and Telljohann (2003) indicated that another reason to conduct further research on the phenomenon of relational bullying is derived from the evolution of the literature on bullying. A considerable portion of

the literature is internationally based and the transferability or applicability of the results of the international studies is challenging due to the social and cultural differences among countries. It is therefore important to conduct studies relevant to our students. The literature also indicates that there is a need for schools to study the relational aggression of students. The purpose of this study was to investigate and explore Grade 7 students' roles towards relational bullying in the hope of providing insight in order for students to resolve conflict peacefully among their peers and for others to intervene. Children are encouraged and expected to "get along", work through their problems and promote positive relations through their interactions on the playground and in the classroom.

The primary focus of the research was on the role of male students in relational bullying within the current school system. The school system is one based on good moral behavior in a Christian school setting; even so, it is important to determine the culture of bullying in this type of setting. In order to facilitate a safe and caring school culture, the magnitude of occurrences of relationally aggressive behaviors will be identified and the types of relational bullying actions that are prevalent among boys in this school system will be determined. According to Khosropour and Walsh (2001) girls are more apt to be involved in relational bullying than boys. Cowie (2000) stated that neither boys nor girls demonstrate effective strategies for challenging bullying on their own. Therefore, it is important that further research is conducted to ascertain the role of male students in relational bullying. Administrators and teachers need to be aware of the role of boys in relational bullying. This is important "as it is usually

teachers who are expected to take the lead in anti-bullying measures in school"
(Menesini et al., 2002, p. 394). However, this could create difficulty in developing
appropriate methods to deal with relational bullying behaviors because according
to Gropper and Froschl (1999) "teachers fail to intervene in ways that students
find helpful" (p. 2). Therefore it is relevant to determine an understanding of the
ways in which students in the district engage in relational bullying tactics.
Knowledge for educators on intervention and programming strategies is
necessary to the well-being of students in the context of social and interpersonal
development and in order to generate teacher, student and administrative
strategies to reduce relational bullying in elementary schools. It is my hope with
this study to be able to contribute to the knowledge base in order to support the
emotional, social and psychological health of students within the culture of the
elementary school. Additionally, I hope that aspects of this study will direct
administrators and teachers in their efforts to more aware of the prevalence and
role of relational bullying among boys. My desire to contribute in the promotion
of change in school climates has shaped my thoughts and initiated my interest to
this particular research phenomenon.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

History

In society today, there are many social problems that concern educators. School bullying has become a focus of attention for many communities. In the past three decades there has been an increase of public interest in bullying and victimization in schools coupled with rigorous media coverage (Whitney & Smith, 1993). The media often provide evidence of the growing magnitude of aggression in children and an increasing number of societal conflicts. The interest in school bullying has gained momentum in the media especially where cases of homicide and suicide have resulted because bullying was a precipitating factor (Dake et al., 2003). The media have created an increased awareness on the serious ramifications bullying can inflict on the lives of students.

Bullying is defined as a power imbalance (Baldry, 2004; Dake, Price, & Telljohann, 2003; Mishna & Alaggia, 2005; Naylor et al., 2006; Yoneyama & Rigby, 2006); it involves direct and indirect aggression (Baldry, 2004; Naylor et al., 2006; Mishna & Alaggia, 2006; Whitted & Dupper, 2005), encompasses an array of negative actions such as teasing (Dake, Price & Telljohann, 2003), name calling, exclusion, physical and verbal aggression, gossiping, and spreading rumors (Mishna & Alaggia, 2006; Naylor et al., 2006; Smokowski & Holland-Kopasz, 2005; Whitted & Dupper, 2005). Bullying has become an aspect of school life that has drawn increased attention by staff, parents and students. Bullying and peer victimization have become a common topic for discourse in the

school environment. The actions defined as bullying typically exist in the form of low-level violence; however, over periods of time, bullying situations have escalated into circumstances involving severe violence. According to Whitted and Dupper (2005) "bullying is the most prevalent form of low-level violence in schools today" (p. 167) and it may escalate into extreme forms of antisocial behavior (Smokowski & Holland-Kopasz, 2005). As a result of the victimization peers who are targeted by bullying are affected negatively and have experienced serious problems in their academic, social and psychological development. According to Mishna and Alaggia (2005) "peer victimization, also referred to as bullying, is increasingly recognized as a profound problem for children" (p. 217).

There have been both research studies and media publications on bullying. The scope of my literature review is a precise few of them dealing with the concept of relational bullying. The literature review strongly supported the need for continued research on the phenomenon of relational bullying.

Relational bullying

Relational bullying, a covert and indirect form of aggression is an area of school management that requires considerable attention. Relational bullying has been conceptualized as teasing, name calling and exclusion (Naylor et al., 2006; Whitted & Dupper, 2005). Teasing and name calling are actions of verbal bullying. Verbal bullying, although seen as a direct tactic by the bully, can be viewed as an indirect or covert form of bullying. The way that comments are made by students can be done in a hushed and unnoticeable manner that is not

obvious to other people, especially the teacher or supervisor (Dobie, 2006).

Relational bullying is also viewed as gossiping (Mishna & Alaggia, 2006; Naylor

et al., 2006), and spreading rumors (McKay, 2003; Naylor et al., 2006;

Smokowski & Holland-Kopasz, 2005; Whitted & Dupper, 2005). McKay (2003)

suggests that relational bullying "includes spreading rumors, telling others not to

play with a certain other child as a means of retaliation, and purposely ignoring

someone when angry; in each of these examples, social relationships are used

as a vehicle for harming someone" (p. 1). Children are targeted in order to

damage and minimize the peer support the victim needs to help defeat the bully

and diminish the bully's degree of power. The use of relationships is used to

intentionally or unintentionally hurt others when one engages in the act of

relational bullying (Naylor et al., 2006). As a result of these actions, children who

are victimized through the conduit of relationships experience social control and

isolation. According to Crick, Casas and Ku (2003) children, whether young or

old commonly use "relationships as a vehicle to harm, and when this harm is

frequently directed toward the same children (i.e., victims), it is likely to be an

aversive experience" (p. 377).

Negative comments are often expressed among students as they interact

within the school environment. Teachers have witnessed students' struggles and

have functioned as mediators for other students as they attempt to deal

appropriately with such negative and derogatory remarks that create

interpersonal problems and can often contribute to conflicts in elementary school

settings. These comments are expressed more often strategically in a covert

and manipulative fashion, which are more difficult to detect and deal with accordingly. What is said within earshot doesn't begin to compare to the magnitude of relationally aggressive comments that are directed towards peers in the school climate that are not heard by others (Cowie, 2000).

The remarks outlined in relational aggressive behaviors create chaos and lead to major conflicts in the social dynamics among peer groups in school. This in turn damages the school environment (Whitney & Smith, 1993). Studies have indicated that relational aggression can be every bit as harmful as physical aggression to a child (McKay, 2003).

Holden (1997) suggests that conflict is a normal part of life, and that it is not the conflict that creates the turmoil; it is how one chooses to react to, cope with, and deal with the issue. Relational aggression is evident in many stages of life, beginning from pre-school, to middle school, through to college (McKay, 2003). According to Crick et al. (1999) relational aggression and victimization may be a regular social pattern for children as early as pre-school. These students are the future leaders and are expected to be responsible for communicating with and making and maintaining policies and peace with fellow neighbors, countries and nations.

Legg (2002) suggests that little research has been directed toward what has been named relational aggression. Additionally, Legg (2002) mentions that relational aggression is relatively new and it is still difficult to measure and record acts of relational aggression. Olweus (1993) indicates that intervention should be directed to the less visible form of victimization – indirect bullying.

Relationally aggressive acts are difficult to distinguish from other types of social interactions (Legg, 2002), but this form of bullying is obviously detrimental to the school and classroom environment. It contributes as well negatively to the learning and development of children (Yoneyama & Rigby, 2006). According to Yoneyama and Rigby teachers may never "pick up cues that a student is involved in bullying, either as a bully or as a victim or both from the student's behavior or demeanor in the classroom" (p. 40). Relational bullying, which is done in a covert fashion is equally difficult for adults to spot.

Learning environment

Whitted and Dupper (2005) state that "there is growing evidence that bullying has a profound and pervasive effect on the learning environment" (p. 167). The learning environment in schools in which social interactions are a result of the bully–victim relationship, and the relationships are ignored or not perceived by staff, parents and peers, will lead to a dysfunctional and destructive school climate. The caustic school climate will create issues of the safety and well-being of students. According to Casey-Cannon et al. (2001) "when perceived victimization goes unnoticed students are less likely to feel safe in their schools" (p. 2). According to Smokowski and Kopasz (2005) the school community is negatively affected when bullying is tolerated "and students are unable to learn, grow, and interact in a safe, positive atmosphere" (p.108). Holden (1997) argues that today some children are immersed in the reality of a society that permeates violence. Students' minds are being bombarded with

images of negativity, aggression, and hostility. Students cannot be expected to resolve issues peacefully when this is their reality.

The playground is one environment in which children are particularly vulnerable. Anderson–Butcher, Newsome, & Nay (2003) suggest the "most vulnerable time for many children is during recess on the school playground" (p. 137). The playground is manifested as a place where aggressive behavior like bullying escalates and children are more susceptible to the aggression because they may not have sufficient social skills for dealing with the school bully (Anderson–Butcher, Newsome, & Nay, 2003). Most of the bullying occurs within the context of this portion of the school day. Also, Anderson–Butcher, Newsome, & Nay (2003) indicated that the intervention needs to be clear, explicit and understandable for the targeted student population. In order to establish the target student population, further research is required to determine the role that gender plays in relational aggression.

Gender

According to Smokowski and Kopasz (2005) there is a concerted effort to focus on the bully in school environments. This focus can foster positive change in the school environment surrounding the surmounting problems associated with bullying. However, for the implementation of intervention and prevention strategies by school staff to be successful it would require the development of a knowledge base on which gender to target. There is a significant amount of literature that suggests that relational bullying is predominantly gender specific.

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Boys are viewed as the physical bully and girls are considered to be the relational bully (Crick, Crasas & Ku, 1999; Khosropour & Walsh, 2001). In a study conducted by Gropper and Froschl (1999) a gender difference was found in the role of children's teasing and bullying. Boys initiated acts of bullying three times more than girls; girls responded verbally to bullying whereas boys responded physically.

According to Baldry (2004), the prevalence of different types of bullying and victimization based on gender were as follows: In overall bullying, males (61.2%) were more often the perpetrators than were females (35.6%). Females were less likely than males to be involved in indirect bullying (24.1% v. 30.7%). Males were more apt to be the victim of indirect bullying than females (35.3% v. 31.2%). It appears that boys overall are more likely to be involved in bullying, especially bullying others (Baldry, 2004; Yoneyama & Rigby, 2006). According to Baldry (2004) boys are three times more likely to spread rumors and call names, which are aspects representative of the definition of relational bullying. Pateraki and Houndoumadi (2001) argued boys were viewed as being bullied more than were girls. According to Baldry (2004), indirect bullying was reported at a similar rate for both genders, but boys were found to have spread rumors about four times more than were girls. In contrast, Crick et al. (1999) found that preschool boys are more apt to be victims of physical aggression while girls are victims of relational aggression. Males are also more likely to use physical bullying girls are more likely to use relational bullying (Khosropour & Walsh, 2001).

McKay (2003) identified boys as relationally aggressive like girls, but with a tendency to use physical means. According to Khosropour and Walsh (2001) both male and female students conceptualized verbal aggression such as bullying and teasing as a predominant form of conflict. Boys are more likely to be involved in bullying problems than girls, but boys were also more likely to report incidents of bullying than were girls (Yoneyama & Rigby, 2006). In contrast, Khosropour and Walsh (2001) indicate that boys may underreport bullying at school. Gropper and Froschl (1999) state that boys and girls are bullied and teased mostly by boys. Boys admitted to bullying considerably more than girls and girls were only half as likely to be involved in bullying behaviors (Whitney & Smith, 1993).

Cowie (2000) indicates gender distinction was non-significant in the demonstration of effective strategies used for students in challenging bullying on their own as well as overall coping strategies such as ignore/endure, physically respond, verbally respond, not to cope, manipulate the situation or use no strategy. Regarding gender parity on relational bullying, Cowie (2000) suggests that boys will not use their caring abilities unless they are sure that such attention will not threaten their perceptions of what it is to be masculine. Females are much more active in the peer support process and males were more difficult to recruit and accept a resolution process of peer support (Cowie, 2000).

Summary

Relational bullying is a cause for concern in the school environment. Boys are more likely to be involved in bullying, thus contributing to a poor school and classroom learning environment. Boys are less likely to report incidents of bullying and teachers are unaware of the actual magnitude of bullying in schools. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the school community (administration, teachers, parents and students) to ensure that the school climate is productive and conducive to learning by developing prevention and intervention strategies to support school learning and promote the health and welfare of all students. When bullying is present, a positive learning environment is more difficult to achieve and maintain. In conducting this research on the phenomenon of relational bullying, it is my hope to provide some direction for schools in my district to curtail the destructive nature of relational bullying and promote an awareness among staff, teachers, administrators and Grade 7 students, particularly boys on the issue of relational bullying and the scope of its viciousness as they prepare for the transition into high school.

Based on my experiences and the review of the literature, the following four research questions are advanced within the framework of action research design (Bodgan & Biklen, 2003; Creswell, 2002).

1. Is relational bullying a problem in Christian schools?

2. How often are boys participating in relational bullying?

3. Are boys participating in relationally aggressive behaviors as often as girls?

4. How does gender influence the reactions in relational bully situations?

Chapter 3

Method

There are many benefits to an action research study. As Creswell (2003) indicates, it is through this type of research that educators are able to grow professionally, study their own problems that are relevant and practical, foster a democratic approach to education, empower individuals through collaboration and encourage change in schools. In order to facilitate the data collection process in this research study, research questions in qualitative research procedures were considered as a guide to the study (Bodgan & Biklen, 2003). Some authors perceive it as a means of controlling research scope to avoid both over-saturation of data collection and data redundancy (Creswell, 2002).

The purposes of my study were a) to determine the prevalence of relational aggression in my school system among all Grade 7 students (boys and girls), b) to determine the magnitude of relationally aggressive boys in Grade 7, c) to identify the types of relationally aggressive behaviors boys use to bully others and d) to compare the magnitude of relationally aggressive boys to girls in grade 7 in order to better implement preventative and intervention strategies and e) to provide suggestions for administrators and teachers to help create a school culture that is more conducive to a decrease in relational bullying incidents in school.

Research Site

The research sites were six independent schools in Northern British Columbia. The schools were selected because of availability and the accessibility of the schools to the researcher and the purposes of the study. The schools varied in socio-economics, geographical diversity and size. The schools are located in a variety of areas and sizes that are representative of the geographical area. The communities' populations ranged from approximately 3,000 to 80,000 people. The schools' populations ranged from fewer than 70 to more than 200 students. All six schools were comprised of Grades K – 7; five of the schools contained eight classes and one school was composed of multi-aged groupings containing four classes.

Participant Sample

Teachers, administrators and students participated in the study. Although Naylor et al. (2006) indicate that "investigations on the prevalence of bullying in schools should adopt the perspective of the child rather than that of the adult" (p. 571), "teachers and pupils have partially different views on peer bullying" (Menesini et al., 2002, p. 395). I believe the study had more merit by including data from the differing perspectives of students, teachers and principals on relational bullying. According to Menesini et al. (2002), before there is any implementation of any intervention strategies, an understanding of a shared perception of the issue of bullying must be fostered between the teachers and the students. Therefore, a collection of data from the various perspectives was

warranted for this research study. Cooperation of adult participation in the study was central to the validity of the study and was essential to accomplish desired change (Cowie, 2000).

Student participants were selected from the Grade 7 classes in the five schools that participated in the study. The total number of student participants was 118 (male $n = 62$; female $n = 56$). The age of the students ranged from 11 to 13 years depending upon birthdays at the time of the data collection.

Three administrators agreed to participate in the study (male $n = 3$; female $n = 0$). The experience of all three principals as administrators within the district was three years. Two administrators' involvement in the field of education exceeded 15 years and one had in excess of 20 years experience in education. The teacher participants (male $n = 0$; female $n = 3$) varied in experience from one year to in excess of ten years teaching experience. The three teachers who responded to the questionnaire each taught in a Grade 7 classroom.

Research Design

This study was a mixed methods research design. Action research is a design of mixed methods, qualitative and quantitative that enables teachers to find practical solutions to their problems. According to Creswell (2003), action research

> aims to improve the practice of education by individuals studying
> issues or problems they face. Educators reflect about these
> problems, collect and analyze data, and implement changes based
> on their findings. In some cases, the research is aimed at solving a
> local, practical problem, such as a classroom issue for a teacher.
> In other situations, the researcher seeks to empower, transform,

and to emancipate individuals from situations that constrain their self-development and self-determination. (p. 603)

Practical action research focuses on a school problem or a district problem in the form of a small-scale project (Creswell, 2003). The practical action research design meets the requirements of this study. The first part of the study (involving quantitative methods) determined the degree of relational aggression in my school district, the degree in which boys are participating in this form of bullying and whether and to what degree a gender inequity in relational bullying exists.

I had decided to use both quantitative and qualitative methods for this project because mixed methods have taken on new significance as the favored methodology for educational research (Schwandt, 2005). According to Stange, Crabtree and Miller (2006) mixed methods are often referred to as multimethod. I have selected a mixed methods approach to the study because multimethod research is a means to creatively and effectively portray insights from complementary quantitative and qualitative approaches in order to disseminate and gain new knowledge (Stange et al., 2006). "Multimethod research brings together numbers and narratives, description, hypothesis testing, hypothesis generation, and understanding of meaning and context to provide fuller discernment and greater transportability of the phenomenon under study" (Stange et al., 2006, p. 292).

The practical action research design outlined provided the opportunity for me to become the researcher in an issue that I believe has an impact on the learning environment of selected independent schools within the context of the current school environments at each of the six schools involved in the study.

Procedures

Permission was sought, in writing (See Appendix A), from the District Superintendent of Schools to use the six schools that had been selected to represent the sample site for this particular study. This is the practice for conducting research in the school district in which I am employed. Before contacting participants, I obtained approval to conduct the study from the UNBC Ethics Board.

Once approval was granted, I spoke directly to the administrator of each of the six schools. I provided the administrator with a letter explaining the research (See Appendix B). I made myself available in person to answer any questions that the administrators may have had regarding the research. I provided the consent form for the administrator's participation in the study (See Appendix C). Administrators were provided with a pre-addressed and stamped envelop in order to return their consent forms and questionnaires (See Appendix D).

After obtaining verbal approval from each school administrator, I provided the schools with a student information letter (See Appendix E) and a letter of consent (See Appendix F). Also, the administrator of each of the participating schools ensured that written consent had been obtained from parents or legal guardians for the student to participate. Attached to the student consent form was a letter to parents/guardians of the students (See Appendix G) explaining the research. Once consent had been given I provided hard copies of the survey (adapted from Saufler & Gagne, 2000) (See Appendix H) to each school to be

used to conduct the study via the administrator. The survey was administered to the participating students and returned in the addressed envelopes provided.

I provided the teacher participants with a letter explaining the research (See Appendix B) and made myself available through telephone or email to answer any questions the teacher may have had regarding the research. Teacher participants in the study were also provided with a consent form to complete (See Appendix C). They were also provided with a pre-addressed and stamped envelop to use to return their consent forms and questionnaires.

Data Collection

Student participant data was collected through the use of a survey and an administrator/teacher was collected through the use of a questionnaire. The survey was important to the study because students have a different perspective of bullying than do teachers and because of the differing perceptions, teachers might not recognize when bullying has occurred (Menesini et al., 2002). The school administrator was asked to conduct the survey with the student participants. The administrator was provided with an explanation of the survey and the purpose, as well as a set of pre-determined instructions provided for each administrator to use when conducting the survey. Instructions were prewritten by the researcher to maintain continuity in the administration of the survey to the students. The use of the administrator to conduct the survey ensured that students' responses were kept anonymous. The survey was given to the students at the same time. Invigilators were to stress that there were to be

no names on the survey and that the students were to answer truthfully. The students were instructed to be seated apart and there was to be no conferencing or talking during the administration of the survey. Each question was to be read by the invigilator. This allowed for students who have reading difficulties to successfully participate in the survey. The surveys were placed in an envelope and sealed by the invigilator. The envelope with the surveys from each participating school were mailed to me at my home address where the results were kept in a locked filing cabinet and only taken out for analysis.

Administrators and teachers were asked to complete a questionnaire that consisted of a series of 11 questions. After obtaining consent, questionnaires were given via the administrator to each teacher participating in the study. They recorded their responses and returned the completed questionnaire via Canada Post. Questionnaires were kept in a locked filing cabinet at my home, and will remain until my project has been completed and approved by my examining committee and all avenues for publication of the data have been explored, after which they will be destroyed at the recommended time length of three years.

Once the study has been completed and approved by my examining committee the results will be shared with and disseminated to the Superintendent's office, the Director of Instruction and the principals of the participating schools upon their request.

Data Analysis

Following the data collection process, I analyzed the student surveys with the use of SPSS™ available at the university's computer facilities. The student survey consisted of 78 variable entries. I entered all 118 surveys myself and checked for outliers in the frequency distributions to ensure that the entries were accurate. Once the surveys were entered into SPSS™, I ran frequency analysis obtaining the mean, median, mode, standard deviation, skewness and kurtosis of the data. Following this analysis, I ran cross tabulations looking for relationships among various variables using Chi squared (χ^2) and Spearman's rho (ρ). Chi squared was selected for the analysis as the majority of the survey questions were presented in a Likert scale and the information from the responses was categorical data. Spearman's ρ was selected to look at correlations among the data which the variables were ordinal and interval/ratio in nature.

After the initial frequencies and cross tabulations were conducted, I examined the data to see if there was any recoding required of the data. Questions numbered 6 and 11 on the student survey were recoded because I wanted to analyze the data of those students who had been bullied in school to identify the frequency of the type of relational bullying experienced by the victim and to analyze the effects of telling of those students who actually disclosed to someone they were bullied in school. This I felt would allow for more accurate results of the data.

The principals' and teachers' questionnaires were collected and the responses of the subjects' phrases were analyzed so as to code emerging

themes to the study. From the data, codes were generated and categorized by hand and then stored in a computer file to allow for easy access and retrieval (Mauch & Park, 2003). I used the questionnaires to code reoccurring themes or categories present in the data. I was looking for themes that corresponded with categories on the student questionnaire. The themes were recorded through the use of the computer program Microsoft Word ™. These themes were stored as separate files in a folder to refer to for the completion of the results section of the project. Each file was saved according to the theme or category that was coded.

My role in this study was inclusive to the entire research project. I prepared the questionnaire and located the survey, collected the data, entered the data into computer software for analysis and coded the results of the questionnaires.

The identity of the participants has been kept confidential throughout the course of the study. Names have not been used and participants have been kept anonymous. The six schools were randomly given pseudonyms of school A, school B, school C, school D, school E, and school F; as well the three administrators were given pseudonyms of Mr. Apple, Mr. Brown and Mr. Cook. Following this pattern the three teachers were given the pseudonyms of Ms. Acorn, Ms. Black and Ms. Clay. The pseudonyms were assigned to administrator and teacher participants for purposes of discussion of the research.

Reporting the findings and sharing the results will be my responsibility. Ethical issues considered included the personal bias from my current position within the school system. The existing relationship that I have with the

administrators and two of the teacher participants of the research site could

negatively impact the outcome of the study. Rather than the administrators and

teachers completing interviews the questionnaire format for collecting the data

allowed for more objectivity in the data collection process. Because I would be

working with these people, consent and strict adherence of the university's ethics

policy and procedures was essential and mandatory.

Chapter 4

Results

Findings

Following the collection of data, I examined the responses on the student survey (See Appendix H). During the data entering process of the student surveys (male: n = 62; female: n = 56) I noticed that some of the students checked off two or more boxes for various responses when only one box would have been necessary to complete the question. For example in one survey entry the student checked off both 1-2 times a month and 1-2 times a week when responding to how often they called other children names. Instead of leaving the entry as missing, I selected 1-2 times a month in the belief that the children saw 1-2 times a week as part of a month in which there were three weeks when they did not engage in calling other children names. Doing this would not impact the results of the study as there was one survey on which this strategy was employed. School D, totaling nine surveys (male: n = 7; female: n = 2) indicated that their responses were based on the current years' perceptions when responding to how often the various types of relational bullying had happened to them at school. During the data entry of the two sections of the survey dealing with who had bullied the student at school and whom the student had seen doing the bullying, it was noted that some student surveys indicated multiple responses for the questions. The total number of surveys that contained multiple responses was 35 (School A: 7, School B: 5, School C: 10, School D: 0, School E: 3 and School F: 10). The categories for the response selections were: *both boys and*

girls, a group of boys, a boy, a group of girls, a girl or *nobody.* I examined the responses for each question to see if both genders were identified by the participant. If a participant's multiple responses contained checked boxes that indicated both genders, whether it was individual or group activity or a combination of the two, I entered the response to the question using the category both boys and girls. If only the same gender was identified in the multiple responses (for example, a boy and a group of boys), then the entry was classified as a group of boys and if the response indicated a girl and a group of girls then the entry was considered a group of girls. This method of entering the data was employed to focus upon gender differences regarding the various relational bullying tactics and not individual or group bullying.

There were 36 student surveys that contained responses recorded as not applicable (N/A) on their surveys even though this was not an option. The questions to which students responded in this fashion dealt with issues around the bus, bus stop and walking to and from school. These types of responses were not coded and showed up as missing in the analysis. Also, seven student surveys were missing answers to questions. It was not apparent if the missed items did not apply to the situation of the student or if the missing responses were an oversight in the completion of the student survey. One student had missed responses for an entire page of the survey; the questions missed focused on how often the student employed various relational bullying tactics and how often the student had seen someone use the various relational bullying tactics. Three students on their surveys had written "I don't know" for seven responses

combined. Any survey questions that had been recorded as N/A, missed completing answers or responded with "I don't know" were not assigned a code and showed in the analysis as missing for those particular questions.

Once the initial data was entered into SPSS™, I conducted some recoding of selected variables. The questions that focused on who at school had bullied the student were recoded to remove the number of participants who responded with the choice "nobody" from the analysis. When the participant responded to the question with "nobody" it indicated that there was no bullying of this nature inflicted on the participant and was of little value in analyzing the percentage of relational bullying occurrences and differences in gender. Also, the questions that centered on whom the student had seen bullying were recoded in the same manner. This recoding was completed to provide a better understanding of the gender differences in the bullying tactics employed by and witnessed by students. The question on the survey used to gather information regarding what happened after the student told someone that he/she was bullied was recoded. The two responses, *I never told anyone* and *I have never been bullied*, were redefined as missing. The remaining responses reflected whether the bullying got worse, better or nothing changed. I wanted to focus on the data that demonstrated students' perceptions who felt they were being bullied and had told someone about the problem.

Once the recoding was completed, I analyzed the new recoded variables for frequencies (mean, median, mode, standard deviation, skewness and kurtosis) as well as created new histograms. I also used the recoded variables to

further analyze the data looking for practical significant relationships among variables using Pearson Chi-Square (χ^2) and Spearman's rho (ρ).

I then examined the questionnaires (See Appendix B). The six questionnaires (administrator: n = 3, teacher: n = 3) had been returned with the student surveys. The six participants each completed the same 11 questions. Responses were recorded on the questionnaire in point form with some elaboration on various questions. Ms. Black recorded the responses to the questions using Microsoft Word™ and attached the responses to the original hard copy of the questionnaire. All completed questionnaires were easy to read and analyze. All participant questionnaires were elaborate and contained a rich source of text for coding themes and categories. Some of the themes that emerged from the data were: exclusion of students, teasing, name calling, and physical aggressiveness.

General feelings about safety in school

I next examined how students generally felt at school (see Fig. 1). The findings indicated that the majority of students felt happy and safe at school. No students reported feeling very sad and unhappy and 4.3% of students felt sad and unhappy sometimes, whereas 17.2% felt so-so about their happiness in school. Students felt generally positive about their safety, as well as reporting that they were generally happy in school. However, there was a moderate increase in the total percentage of students who expressed that they felt so-so, somewhat unsafe and very unsafe on the playground compared to the classroom

(see Fig. 2). On the playground 17.8% of students expressed some hesitancy

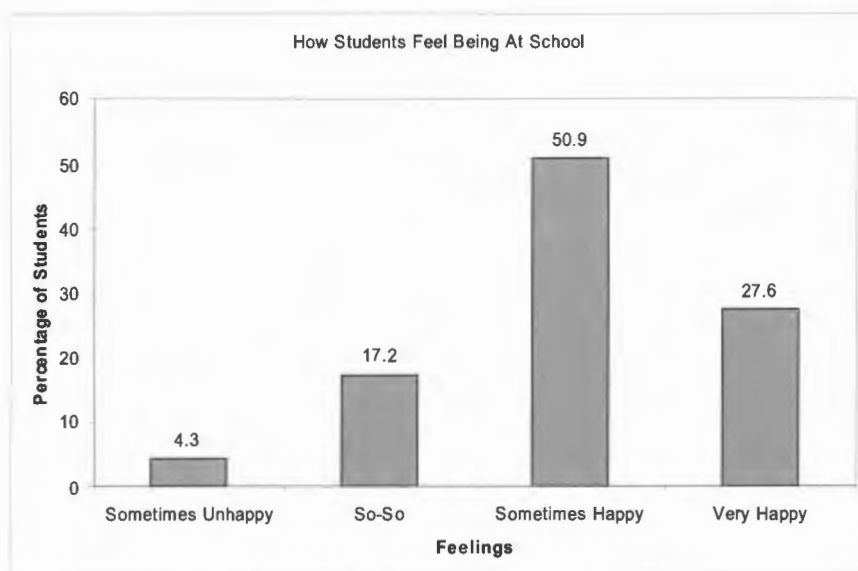regarding their safety versus the 6.8% in the classroom environment (see Fig. 2).

Figure 1. How students feel about being at school.

The data showed that safety concerns for students were areas of the

school that tended to lack teacher presence and supervision. Along with the

playground, other areas of school facilities that could be problematic for students

due to the lack of supervisory presence were the bathroom and the school bus.

The bathroom was an area of the school that students indicated they had some

concerns around their safety, whereas 18.6% did not feel entirely safe about

visiting the bathroom. An additional place that unsafe feelings emerged was on

the school bus where 20.5% of students did not feel confident in their safety. One

teacher participant and one administrator mentioned that the change room was

an area of the school that may be problematic for students. Mr. Cook suggested

that bullying incidents could be an issue in the change rooms too, as this is an

area that is out of sight and Ms. Black said, "I am aware there are problems in the boys' change room as well."

How often students felt threatened at school was low. No student felt threatened everyday and 6.0% felt threatened 1-2 times a week, 4.3% of students felt threatened 1-2 times a month, and 69.0% felt they were never threatened at school. This finding was consistent with the findings that the majority of students felt safe at school.
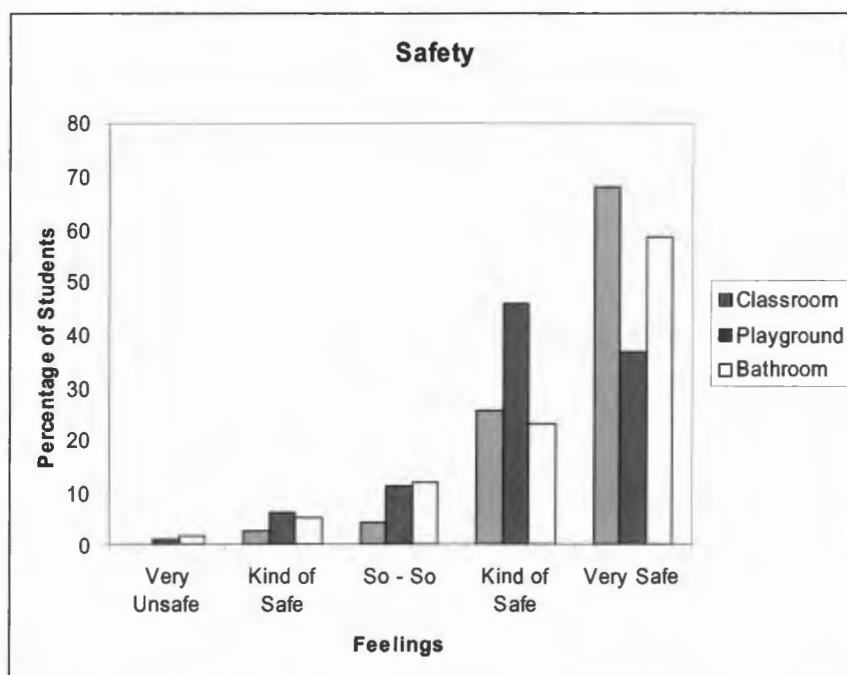

Figure 2. How safe students felt in various areas of the school.

Although student's felt generally safe at school, in the classroom and on the playground, the frequency with which bullying was observed in the classroom (see Fig. 3) was considerably higher; 40.7% of students noticed bullying occurred

in the classroom about 1-2 times a week to daily, whereas on the playground

53% of students witnessed bullying either 1-2 times a week or everyday.

How Often Bullying Is Seen
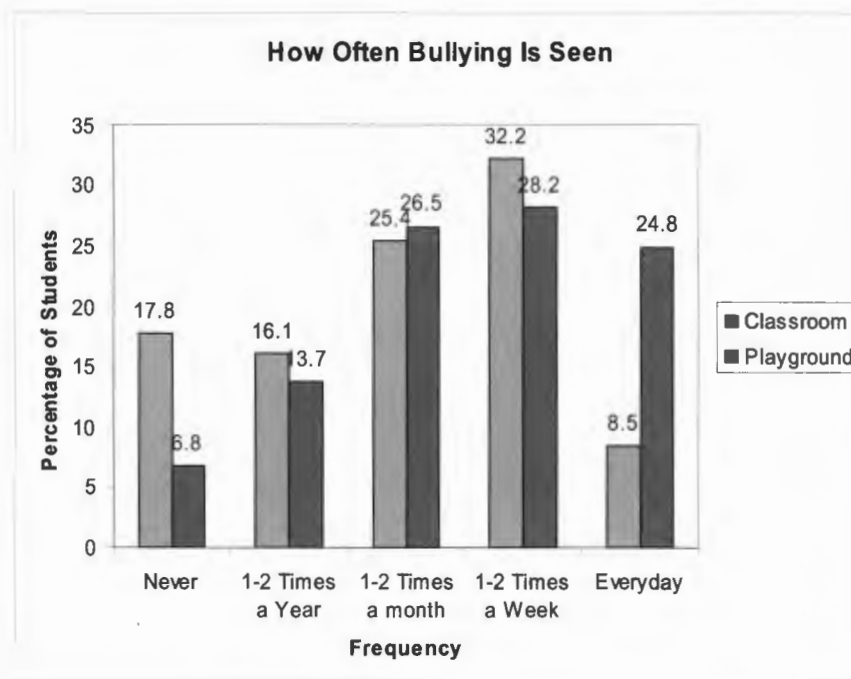
Figure 3. Frequency of bullying viewed in two school locations.

Students were asked what happened after they told someone about their

victimization. The majority of students (54.5%) expressed that the bullying had

gotten worse or did not change at all, whereas of those victimized (45.5%) felt

that things did get better. Students did not confide in teachers and adults in the

school setting to report incidences of bullying. The largest percentage of

students (32.2%) informed another student when they were being bullied while

(31.4%) informed their parents and (20.3%) informed a teacher or an adult in the

school environment. The data on who had tried to help the victimized student

showed that 43.6% of the participants indicated that another student tried to help

them, 21.4% said a teacher or another adult in the school tried to help and 24.8% identified their parents as the helper in the situation.

In general students for the most part felt safe and happy at school and they did not feel threatened. The areas that did pose some concern for students were the bathrooms, playground and bus. These areas did not contain a high rate of direct supervision. Students confided more to peers and their parents than to teachers about the bullying.   Students also expressed that telling someone about the bullying typically made it worse or did not change the circumstances.

Question 1: Is relational bullying a problem in Christian schools?

Relational bullying was examined based on the number of times with which the student bullied, how often various bullying tactics were inflicted upon the student and how often the student witnessed bullying at school. The types of relational bullying examined were exclusion, teasing, name calling, gossiping and rumors; as well the area of overt bullying in the form of hitting, kicking and pushing. The percentage of student perceptions regarding their own involvement in bullying was lower than the percentage of incidents witnessed. Students will often say mean things to one another. In this study, 82.8% of the student participants were *being mean* at some point throughout the school year, and 31% of the student participants observed this quality on a weekly to daily basis. This indicates that about one-third of the student population surveyed self-identified a regular tendency to be mean. Based on the responses to the questionnaires,

Ms. Clay expressed that students negatively communicated using body language by turning or moving away from the other student and using facial expressions. Mr. Apple indicated body language along with sarcasm was used as a means to express an opinion or point of view. Ms. Black reported that students "understand that opinions can hurt the feelings of others". Ms. Acorn said that students "belittle a classmate by making hurtful remarks, making fun of others for their clothes, shoes…" The expression of an opinion or point of view was used as an approach to communicate to others in a mean manner. This is a form of relational bullying.

When I examined how often relational bullying behaviors were self-identified by the student participants the data revealed that participants had teased (73.3%), excluded (53.4 %), called names (62.4%) and told rumors or gossiped (54.7%). These percentages are substantial. After I further explored these areas I noticed that the type and degree of bullying on a daily to weekly basis by the student participants was teasing (18.1%), excluding (3.5%), name calling (19.7%) and telling rumors and spreading gossip (12.0%).

Name calling, teasing and exclusion were common themes that emerged from the questionnaires. All three administrators identified name calling as an issue: one used the term "put downs", Mr. Brown pointed out "two students calling each other unacceptable names during a soccer game"; and Mr. Cook recalled the use of "derogatory remarks". All three teacher participants expressed that name calling was an issue among students as well as teasing. Ms. Acorn said, "One student called another student baby because the student

gets emotional easy. Student A teases student B about once a week". Ms. Black described one incident of a student who was being teased for being slower than the others with classroom routines. "When asked to pack his bag for example, or take out a duo-tang for class, the boy did not respond. Other boys teased him for being 'slow'. This boy who was made fun of has disclosed to me that for years, he has been made fun of, teased, and made to feel less important than some of the others". Ms. Clay identified some of the negative communication among students in the form of insults, name calling and laughing at someone. There were also a total of five student surveys that had a few anecdotal comments written regarding teasing and name calling. The five students wrote responses such as, "it was mostly playful", "mostly it is kidding around", "only gossip", "jokingly", "called names if I was called names", and "friendly" when they had answered questions regarding the type of relational bullying activities.

Exclusion was used a strategy by students within the context of the school climate. Although only 3.5% of students identified that they used exclusion as a tactic with their peers on a weekly basis, administrators and teachers indicated that this form of relational bullying was an issue in school. Mr. Apple said, "There would also be a player or two left out of the game and told they were not good enough". This was also identified as one of the issues that children in the classroom and on the playground disagreed about "who is allowed to play" reiterated by Mr. Brown. It was again identified as an example of negative communication observed among students by all three administrators. As well, all

three teachers expressed exclusion as a means to bully. Ms. Acorn identified not only "who is allowed to play in a game" but also recognized "who is allowed to participate in an activity". Ms. Black said that students may disagree if "someone 'invades' their game without being invited".

Gossiping and telling rumors was a means to negatively interact by grade seven students in the school setting. Twelve percent of student participants reported using this type of activity. Two of the three administrators identified spreading rumors as an issue. No teacher identified rumors and gossiping as an area of great concern.

Next, I studied how often students had experienced relational bullying as the victim within the school climate. Again, I examined areas of teasing, name calling and exclusion. Over the course of the school year, it was evident that the percentage of students being victimized was higher with teasing and name calling being reported as the most common attack followed closely by exclusion (see Fig. 4).

Finally, I examined how often students witnessed the frequency of relational bullying tactics in school using the same themes as I did for the student's involvement in and experience of bullying. The degree of relational bullying that had been viewed by students was higher than their participation in teasing, name calling, excluding and gossiping and spreading rumors and how often they felt victimized. Students who witnessed bullying in school reported teasing at some time during the school year (96.5%), weekly (31.6%) and daily

(28.2%). Exclusion was observed within the school year (90.6%), weekly (31.6%) and daily (15.4%). Students viewed gossiping and the spreading of
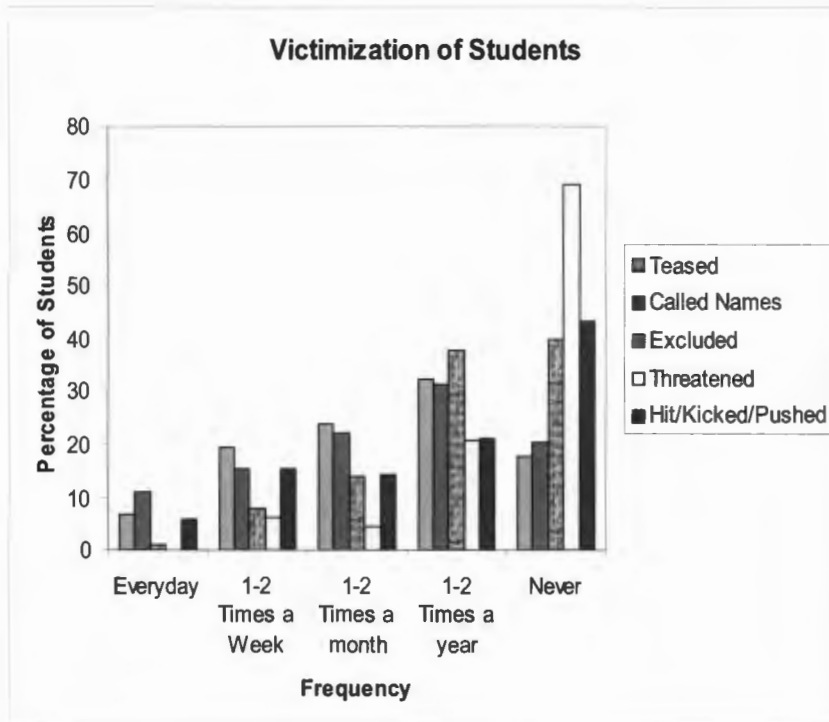

Figure 4. How often students experienced bullying at school.

rumors within the school year (83.8%), weekly (23.1%) and daily (21.4%). Lastly, students hit, kicked and pushed within the school year (56.8%), weekly (15.3%) and daily (5.9%).

Students witnessed bullying by others more often than they identified their own engagement in bullying. One third of the student participants indicated that peers were mean to them weekly. Name calling and teasing were the two tactics identified by student participants as the manner in which they and their peers bullied. Exclusion was not viewed by the students as a tactic commonly used when they engaged in bullying; however, teachers and administrators identified

exclusion as a regular tactic used by students. Even though students felt safe and not threatened at school, physical bullying in the form of hitting, kicking and pushing was witnessed students regularly during the school week.

Question 2: How often are boys participating in relationally aggressive acts?

First, I evaluated who students were bullied by at school and who had bullied them. I recoded the data to assign those students who were never bullied as missing and only analyzed the student responses that indicated they were bullied by someone. The results indicated that 38.6% of students were bullied by both boys and girls and 55.2% were bullied by boys (see Fig. 5).
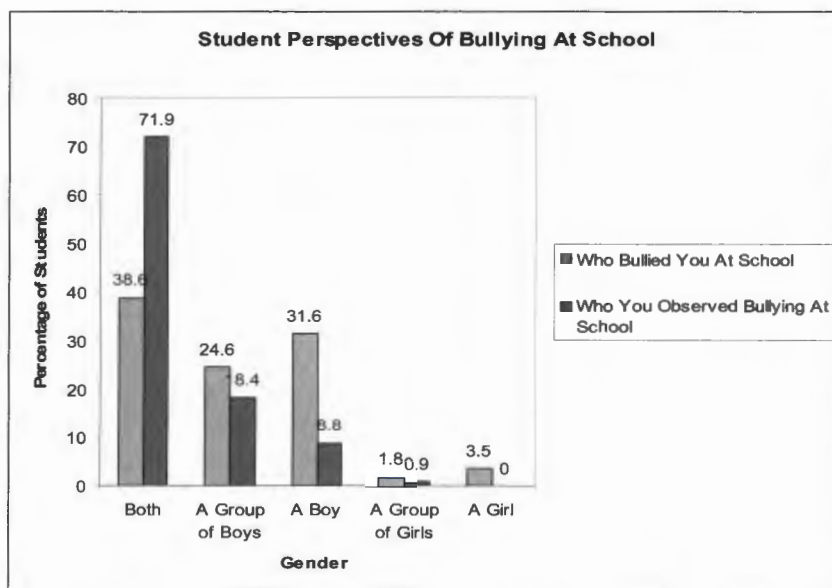
Figure 5. Students as victims and witnesses of bullying at school.

The relationship between gender and who had bullied the students was analyzed. The results indicated there was practical significance between the two variables $[\chi^2 (4, N = 57) = 10.560, p = .032]$.

Boys were identified as the bully in school. The students in their survey responses did not indicate that boys were involved more in relational bullying; simply that they were the perpetrator (56.2%), whereas girls were less likely perceived as the bully (5.3%). Student participants who viewed themselves as the target identified *both boys and girls* (38.6%) as the bully in school. On the student survey it was reported who was observed as the school bully. Boys and groups of boys (27.2%) were more likely than girls and groups of girls (0.9%) to be observed as the bully towards other targets, excluding the participant. (see Fig. 5).

I then examined the section of the survey that focused on students as victim in specific categories to determine who had used relationally aggressive strategies. There were three categories for this section of the study a) *Both Boys and Girls*, b) *boys* and c) *girls*. The subcategories of relational bullying included: a) teasing, b) name calling, c) being mean, d) telling rumors and gossiping and e) excluding. Students who saw themselves as victims identified both genders as those who had teased them (37.2%) and boys who teased them (50.0%). The students' perceptions were supported by the comments of teachers and administrators. Mr. Apple commented that student comments were used in negative interaction "though not containing foul language but would be cutting". Also, Mr. Brown alluded to students "making a smart comment about the other

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student followed by name calling back". Mr. Cook observed that taunting and teasing were viewed as examples of negative communication among students. Ms. Acorn made reference to negative interactions among students as "teasing wars". Name calling was used by both male and female (46.2%) and involved boys (41.8%). All three teacher participants expressed concern with boys involved in name calling. Ms. Clay described boys as using insults and "put downs" in relation to athletic ability. Ms. Black observed boys involved in much name calling. Ms. Acorn explained a situation that involved two students in a conflict where student A often attempted to bully student B by acting tough and in particular "belittling student B even more through hurtful words".

When it came to *being mean*, boys participated in this activity: where 42.3% of student participants saw boys as the *mean student*. About 42% of students viewed both male and female as the students who were mean in school.

Exclusion was described by all six teacher/administrator participants as an area of concern when observing student interactions in the classroom and on the playground. Students felt excluded 27.4% of the time by boys. Boys excluded others when the context of the exclusion centered on games, particularly regarding sports. Mr. Apple observed that "there would also be a player or two left out of the game". Ms. Clay described that boys disagreed about who was better at sports. Both males and females were identified by 47.9% of the students as the excluders at school.

According to 14.6% of the students, gossiping and spreading rumors involved boys as perpetrators and 34.1% of the student participants believed that

both genders used this tactic to victimize other students. Rumors and gossiping were not mentioned by the teacher/administrator participants as an issue regarding boys at school whether it was in the classroom or outside on the playground. This was consistent with the findings from the student survey that indicated boys were less likely to be involved but were not entirely innocent of participating in this type of relationally aggressive behavior. Boys were less likely to gossip or spread rumors (14.6%) compared to girls (51.3%).

Question 3: Are boys participating in relationally aggressive behaviors as often as girls?

I further examined the data to determine differences between gender and the frequency of participation in relational bullying. I determined the frequencies in which boys and groups of boys and girls and groups of girls were involved in teasing, name calling, exclusion and telling rumors and spreading gossip. I examined the percentage of boys and groups of boys as well as girls and groups of girls involved in teasing, name-calling, excluding and gossiping and spreading rumors. I examined the participant as the target or victim as identified in the surveys.

The participants identified boys (50%) and girls (12%) as students who used teasing to bully. According to the student participants, 41.8% identified boys as the name callers but only 12.1% of students identified girls in this way. One theme that emerged from the questionnaires was that both boys and girls are involved in a power struggle for dominance in the group. Mr. Cook described

disagreements on the playground and in the classroom as issues of power, and indicated that students argued about "who should be in charge or the leader". However, the context in which the power was obtained was different for boys and girls. Boys usually sought the power in group sport activities involving peers where girls sought the power in social situations. Mr. Apple described how a certain "power" group picked the teams and decided the rules of the game. All three administrators recognized verbal bullying as an approach by students when they were interacting in a negative manner. Mr. Apple and Mr. Cook felt girls were more verbally abusive than boys but Mr. Cook observed that the use of verbal language was similar for the two genders. However, Mr. Brown categorized name calling as being similar for both boys and girls.

Student participants identified boys (27.4%) and girls (24.6%) as the excluder. The perception differed between adult and student participant pertaining to who had used the tactic of exclusion to bully. Student respondents indicated that both boys and girls excluded other students from games and activities. The responses to the questionnaires by administrators and teachers indicated that exclusion was perceived as a tactic employed by girls. Ms. Acorn described a situation where one girl didn't want another girl to be included so she gathered her friends and talked about the other girl. Ms. Black described a situation where girls did not want to "hang out" with another girl and Ms. Clay indicated that exclusion was a popular tactic used by girls.

Telling rumors and spreading gossip was identified as a tactic that was predominantly used by girls. Student participants (51%) recognized girls as

individuals who employed this type of bullying, whereas only 14.6% of students recognized that boys participated in this activity. Both boys and girls (34.1%) were identified by student participants as the perpetrator of this particular tactic. This meant that boys were involved in telling rumors and gossiping, but not to the extent of girls. There were only 0.9% of the student participants who perceived girls alone as the bully in contrast to 27.2% of students who identified boys as the bully. The majority of students did not distinguish between boys or girls and selected both genders as the school bully. However, there was a significant relationship identified between who had bullied and gender $[\chi^2(4, N = 57) = 10.560, p = .032]$, where boys were viewed as the bully in school.

Question 4: How does gender influence the reactions in relational bullying situations?

This study indicates there are definitive findings about how boys and girls react to relational bullying that are different for boys and girls. Boys look for power differently than girls. Both genders are involved in relational bullying tactics, but the manner and extent of their involvement varies.

Girls tended to be involved more in using gossiping and rumors to retaliate against their peers. Boys were more apt to name call and tease one another and both boys and girls have excluded in a similar degree, but in different ways. Boys excluded in a group activity or game where girls targeted others in social situations. Mr. Apple indicated that girls were less obvious about the tactics they used and boys were more direct and open in their approach. Both Mr. Apple and

Mr. Brown identified that girls take more time to talk about their conflicts and seek out friends to help resolve the issues. Ms. Acorn said, "Girls talk with a third party and talk through their issue whereas boys tend to solve their problems on their own". Boys in contrast do not tend to seek out others to resolve issues and do not take a great deal of time to find a resolution to the problem. Mr. Cook found that most students resolved issues in similar manners and it depended on the mood and the circumstances of the students involved whether the resolution was quick or took a long time to achieve. Ms. Clay felt that girls "harbored grudges" where boys resolved their issues by "just getting over it".

The analysis of the data indicated that boys were viewed as the bully in school. Boys excluded, told rumors and spread gossip, teased and name called. As well, boys were seen as the student who was more apt to hurt someone else in school. About 25% of student participants identified boys as the gender who tried to hurt them in school, whereas only 3.4% of girls were viewed in this manner. Mr. Apple and Mr. Brown recognized in bullying situations boys' behaviors could escalate to physical aggression. Ms. Clay felt that boys interacted more aggressively than did the girls.

Summary

The study suggested that children in the Christian-based schools were faced with relational bullying situations and that the frequency of incidents was high. However, students indicated that they were generally happy going to school and did not feel threatened at school. Safety was not a huge concern for

student participants; however there was some hesitancy around feeling safe in playground and school bus environments. Relational bullying in the classrooms was an area of some concern for students.

Students did not tell teachers about bullying situations as often as they told their parents or friends (other peers). Students told peers about their concerns of bullying more often than they told their parents. More students felt that when they told someone about the bullying that it got worse or nothing changed compared to those students who felt the situation had gotten better.

The themes that emerged in the findings included: name-calling, teasing, exclusion and spreading rumors or gossiping. Administrator and teacher respondents did not indicate that gossiping and spreading rumors was an issue observed in the schools; however student respondents did determine that gossiping and spreading rumors was an area of concern.

Boys superseded girls in using relational bullying as a means to negatively communicate with their peers, except in the category of spreading rumors and gossiping. Boys excluded more than girls and in a different way. Boys excluded in games and activities where power and domination prevailed where girls excluded within the context of forming the social group. Girls were found to hold grudges and involve more people in the helping process whereas boys would take less time to resolve the issues and would not seek as much input from others. Boys also would begin a conflict rooted in relational bullying, but would escalate to a physical altercation. Overall students do not communicate in a positive and constructive manner when involved in conflicts.

Chapter 5

Conclusions, Recommendations and Limitations

Conclusions

This mixed methods study on relational bullying was established to explore the perceptions of Grade 7 students, administrators and teachers regarding the frequency of bullying in the Christian schools used for the study, the degree in which boys are involved in relational bullying and the percentage of gender differences involved in relational bullying. As well, the study examined how gender influenced students' reactions to relational bullying situations.

Safe environment

Bullying is a form of abuse that has the capacity to be detrimental to the student, and create negative affects that can exist for many years (Baldry, 2004). It is the responsibility of schools to ensure a safe and nurturing environment for all children. This does not simply mean an environment void of any physical harm. As this study indicated students felt safe at school and did not feel physically threatened by others. In addition to feeling physically safe at school, students should also feel emotionally and socially safe at school. Our job as educators requires us to obtain the ability, skills and knowledge to be proactive in keeping children emotionally, socially and academically well adjusted in their development as the implications that the effects of bullying have on children's health are serious and long-lasting (Baldry, 2004).

As Olweus (1993) stated "No school can be regarded as 'bully proof'" p. 66). However, as educators we must provide a safe haven for our students. Educators need to create a refuge for students (Holden, 1997). When students feel self confident, self worth, have a sense of responsibility, and take ownership, they contribute more positively to aspects of school community and life; thus contributing to a positive school climate (Cowie, 2000).

Relational bullying

Relational bullying is a phenomenon that has received a great deal of attention in the media (Olweus, 1993) and is an area requiring a concerted focus in schools. This study supports Olweus' (1993) findings that relational bullying is used as a means of negative communication and interaction among students in Grade 7. This suggests it is an area that requires attention in the school district in which I work. According to Olweus (1993), one out of seven students is involved in some aspect of bullying. In this study the percentage of students who utilized and observed relational bullying tactics in the school environment was substantial and is consistent with the literature. Students are frequently involved in name calling (62.4%), teasing (73.3%), excluding (53.3%), gossiping and spreading rumors (54.7%) and just being mean (82.8%) as a means to deal with a conflict. Although these relational bullying tactics were used by the participants in the study, the degree of relational bullying was substantially higher in students' observations of bullying compared to their use of or involvement in this negative behavior. Students who witnessed bullying reported teasing (96.5%), name

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calling (94.0%), excluding (90.6%) and telling rumors or spreading gossip (83.8%). Surprisingly, exclusion was identified by students in the study as a tactic that they rarely employed daily (0.9%), but the degree to which the bullying strategy *excluding* was witnessed daily (15.4%) was more than 15 times higher, a considerable difference in student's observations of the tactic versus the students' use of the tactic. Spreading rumors and gossiping daily (0.9%) was more than 20 times more prevalent in daily student observations (21.4%) compared to their involvement in utilizing this tactic.

Name calling

Consistent with the literature name calling was prevalent among the subcategories explored in the study. Whitney and Smith (1993) indicated that bullying can transpire in various forms and name calling was the most common tactic utilized by children. According to student participants in the study, name calling ranged in use within various contexts such as in a kidding or jokingly manner, as retaliation when one was called names, as a playful use of time and as a friendly interaction among peers. Also, observations based on the qualitative data identified name calling as being used in the form of insults and a method of obtaining and retaining power in a group situation. From the study, teasing was employed in the form of laughing at someone else for their weaknesses, through the use of body language and gestures and verbal comments that would be cutting and hurtful. Also, exclusion was a tactic that was used to obtain power among peer relationships.

Supervision

Areas of the school that are less supervised are a concern for students victimized by bullies. Olweus (1993) stated that the greater number of supervisors during breaks the less likely bullying problems will occur in a school. This study reiterated the concern regarding areas of low direct supervision. Areas such as the playground and the bus are more difficult to provide direct supervision; and were more apt to be considered unsafe by students who felt victimized. Also, the change room was a problem area for students who were targeted by the bully as this was another area of the school that received low to no direct supervision.

Gender and relational bullying

According to Whitney and Smith (1993) the frequency of bullying others does not decrease with age and boys are twice as likely to be involved in bullying. Also, Olweus (1993) argues that boys are more exposed to bullying than girls. This is consistent with the findings in the present study. Boys were viewed as the bully in school and were much more likely to be involved in bullying tactics (Baldry, 2004; Yoneyama & Rigby, 2006). Students identified the male considerably more than the female as the perpetrators. The boys called names mostly in the context of athletic games and activities where there was a desire to maintain or obtain the power in the circumstances. The findings showed that generally boys would begin a conflict that was relationally aggressive in nature, and would occasionally escalate to physical

aggressiveness in the form of pushing and shoving. Here boys were using both relational and physical bullying to deal with conflict.

Consistent with the literature and the findings of this study, boys are the physical bully (Crick, Crasas & Ku, 1999; Khosropour & Walsh, 2001), but in contrast to the literature, boys are not only the physical bully, they are equally involved in relational bullying tactics just as much as girls. Boys supersede girls in all areas of relational bullying studied, with one exception, gossiping and spreading rumors. The study demonstrated that girls are more involved in this type of behavior, but it is not exclusive to the female gender. Also, boys excluded others more so than did girls as a means to victimize their peers.

Peer support

Cowie (2000) suggests that attributes required for positive communication and conflict resolution such as self – responsibility, ownership and self – worth, can be instilled in students through the use of peer support systems and thus create caring and safe schools. Peer support systems are a means of fostering change and taking preventative measures to support students in responding to relational bullying constructively and to cope appropriately. The study showed that students confided in other students for help when they felt victimized, along with their parents more so than did adults or teachers in the school environment. Also, the study indicated that students felt they were helped the most by other students. This is important for schools when action plans are developed to take preventative measures and intervene when required in order to foster a positive

school climate. Whitney and Smith (1993) indicate that bullying rates are too high and ways to reduce bullying are urgently needed.

Recommendations from the Study

The results of this study suggest that students in Christian schools are involved in and are witnesses and victims of relational bullying. Schools, teachers, administrators and parents cannot rely on the belief that the Christian-based system is inherently free of bullying. Therefore, it is imperative that educators consider relational bullying a focus of extreme importance and to assume responsibility to counterattack the problem, facilitate change and promote positive interpersonal relationships among students.

Gender. Boys are involved more in bullying than girls and are more apt to be mean and hurtful towards their peers (Baldry, 2004; Gropper & Froschl, 1999; Yoneyama & Rigby, 2006). This is consistent with the literature. In the study, boys engaged more often in name calling, teasing and excluding, but did not gossip or spread rumors as much as girls. Therefore, I believe it is important for schools to place greater effort and focus on boys to prevent relational bullying in our schools. Also, it is necessary for teachers and school administration to evaluate more closely the physical altercations among boys. It is important to determine the root of the problem in physical altercations, so the conflict is resolved. The solution should not simply address the physical aspect of the issue as the underlying issues can easily stem from relational bullying tactics.

This study aided in examining further characteristics of relational bullying by exploring gender and gender differences. Additionally, gender role seems to be significant in the success of intervention (Cowie, 2000). From the findings in the study, boys and girls deal with conflict in different ways. Girls tend to be more emotional and prefer to discuss the issue, as well as hold grudges. Boys do not feel the need to involve others into the resolution stage of conflict. They tend to get over it more quickly and do not hold grudges. Both genders exclude, tell rumors, name – call and tease. Intervention strategies need to focus on the root of the problem, as boys tend to begin their conflict based on relational aggression and end up in a physical altercation. The underpinning relational bullying issue needs to be identified and dealt with efficiently to curtail the degree of bullying taking place in school environments by boys.

Supervision. Administration and teachers need to be aware of the interactions of students especially in areas of the school that lend to higher degrees of bullying and areas that contribute to students' feelings of being unsafe in school. Olweus (1993) indicates that scheduled play areas with minimal supervision must be given attention or eliminated from the play time. Administration and teachers need to review school supervision practices and policies to ensure that student safety is the underpinning factor in developing supervision procedures. Additionally, Olweus (1993) suggests that a greater number of teachers supervising during a break time will decrease the level of bullying that takes place in school. Administrators need to consider methods to

create a safe environment during play times. This would include the participation

and cooperation of all staff members, as they are the adults who supervise

during this time.

> Most important, all parties must recognize the importance of recess
> intervention and its potential effects on not only students' social
> skills development but also on the school climate. Teachers and
> school administrators must understand that the potential role of
> supervision and instruction on recess may have many implications
> for promoting not only positive student development, but also more
> appropriate behaviors in the classroom. (Anderson–Butcher,
> Newsome, & Nay, 2003, p. 143).

It is essential that children who have been entrusted to the care of schools must

see that schools are welcoming and secure environments that promote the

emotional wellness of the children, not only their physical well-being.

Programming and prevention. According to the findings of this study,

teachers and administrators felt that it is necessary to prevent relational bullying

through the use of school programming. This is consistent with the literature.

Holden (1997) stated, "We clearly need a curriculum to help these kids" (p. 74).

Reducing negative behavior by using programs is possible, and school support

and action around improving social and emotional safety benefits students a

great deal (Casey-Cannon et al., 2001). Prevention is a key component to

developing constructive conflict resolution abilities in students. One encounters

daily conflict consistently; it is unavoidable. I convey this message to my

students regularly, but I also communicate that the issue is not the conflict that

creates the problem, but the way in which a person chooses to deal with it. I,

along with other staff members, always seem to be intervening, as students are not equipped with the strategies and handle conflict using inappropriate responses and ineffective skills. Additional programs can be implemented in the school or classroom setting, which is evident in the Ophelia Project (McKay, 2003). The aim of the program – Creating a Safe Social Climate in our Schools' (CASS) – is used to address peer aggression.

Also, to develop preventative measures it is necessary to consider the individual student and the entire school community. Various programs focus on either the victim or the bully; others take a systematic approach, addressing bullying behaviors at many levels (Smokowski & Kopasz, 2005). Another means to combat the issue of bullying is to use peer support systems. Cowie (2000) suggested peer support systems, whether formal or informal, "tend to incorporate the use of basic counseling skills, include active listening, empathy for a person with social or emotional difficulties, a problem-solving approach to intrapersonal difficulties, and a willingness to take a supportive role" (p. 87). These peer support systems should include tackling the problem using various schemes such as, befriending, conflict resolution and counseling (Cowie, 2000). *Expect Respect* was used to improve peer relations and communication skills (Khosropour & Walsh, 2001). *Expect Respect* also is comprised of components that can be implemented with the entire school community or to a segment of the community such as an individual class as the focus group. Equipping peers with the strategies to effectively deal with a bullying situation is essential to curtailing bullying in school. Therefore, peer support is the key aspect of programming

available used to counterattack bullying. Even though peer support is a key aspect of programming, it may not be viewed as the most effective component of programming. Cowie indicated there is always some doubt about the helping process, there may be jealousy directed towards the peer support by other peers, adverse comments can be used in the helping process that are detrimental to resolution, and possibly not all school staff may accept the system and back it. In order to make productive choices, it is important that educators provide opportunities to students that empower them. Casey- Cannon et al. (2001) felt that it is necessary to empower students through involving school counselors as a means to increase their sense of control over the experience and improve their sense of belonging to the community. According to Cowie (2000) the benefits of peer support are a way of challenging bullying and changing the ethos of a school to one of care. Older students and adults - such as parents, teachers and staff members - also play an active role in the reduction of relational bullying. Adults need to be there to help intervene when students feel powerless over their experiences. As well, there must be financial support from administration, and teachers need to integrate programming into curricular areas (Whitted & Dupper, 2005).

Positive communication. The findings from the study indicated there was a need to develop positive communication among students. Administrators and teachers identified the importance of using various strategies to decrease the prevalence of negative communication. A few themes that emerged from the

qualitative data focused on the resolution of conflict in schools but did not specify approaches based on gender differences. According to administration and teachers, resolving conflict involved the themes a) modeling positive communication, b) teaching strategies to interact in a constructive manner and c) being respectful towards others and their feelings. These themes were not identified as gender specific, but rather student specific. Ms. Clay identified that both parents and teachers need to model good communication skills, where Mr. Brown indicated that positive behavior needed to be modeled as a teacher. Ms. Black explained "I treat each student in this school with kindness, respect, and genuine empathy. By doing this, I have found that they [students], in turn, treat others in the same manner". Mr. Brown felt students needed to be taught conflict resolution strategies in and out of school; and Mr. Acorn determined that some specific programming was necessary in promoting positive communication among students in school. Along with programming, guest speakers, presentations, special recognition days and talking circles were suggested as a means to prevent and intervene in conflicting situations among peers in school. All six participants identified respect as a means to develop positive coping strategies to bullying. Ms. Acorn said, "Always be respectful. If you have a problem with someone/something, there is a way to talk about it without hurting others feelings". Mr. Apple stressed the importance for schools to ensure that everybody's dignity remain intact.

Peer support and intervention. The findings of this study indicated peers relied on other peers for support in dealing with their bullying issues at school. Teachers and administrators indicated that modeling was an effective strategy to use to develop positive communication skills among students. Mentoring, role playing, modeling and small group discussions are also means to accomplish this task (McKay, 2003). As school personnel we need to provide the opportunity for students to be able to model positive communication strategies daily. Also, it would be beneficial for schools to provide younger students with the skills through the help and support of the older students in the school.

School personnel need to create empathy among students (Cowie, 2000). This is particularly true in bullying situations. This study indicated that their needs to be a culture of empathy and respect and that positive communication can prevail in such an environment. As a Christian-based school system, a culture of empathy, care and respect is integrated into all aspects of the school community.

Many authors iterated the need for intervention. McKay (2003) stated that unless others intervene and teach different coping mechanisms, the aggressor is rarely motivated to change because the social power gained seems to reward this type of behavior. Casey-Cannon et al. (2001) suggest that support and consistency in responding to victims is a key component to intervention. This is reiterated in the findings of this study. There needs to be clear expectations and consistency for everyone. We must be accessible to our students, so they are able to discuss their concerns; and we must listen to them.

From the study, students are not confiding enough in teachers and adults in the school environment in order to resolve bullying situations. According to Menesini et al. (2002) students are not seeking help from teachers as much as the teacher thinks. The student will confide in a parent first. This is consistent with the findings of this study as fewer students tell a teacher than their parents. As educators we must find the means to encourage children to speak up when these injustices are occurring. The Ophelia project (MacKay, 2003) was used to address the issue of early intervention among intermediate students in elementary schools. In order to be effective in the intervention of peer conflict and facilitate change, adults such as parents, teachers, counselors, and older students must cooperate. The greatest ally is the adult in charge (McKay, 2003); this is in contrast to the findings expressed by the student participants in the study. In school the teacher, administration and staff are in charge of the daily operation of the school. However, from the data in the student survey, children reported they told an adult in school less than both parents and peers that they were the victim of bullying. According to Cowie (2000), adults need to retain a supportive and supervisory role without imposing solutions. As educators, we must provide the tools and opportunities for students as we learn by doing for ourselves. We must look at the conflict from the perspective of all the participants: victims, perpetrators, and bystanders; it is in doing so that we are better equipped to intervene when conflicts arise among students. According to Dake et al. (2003) there needs to be pre-professional teacher training on bullying so teachers can implement effective strategies in their classrooms.

Prevention and intervention strategies are integrated aspects of programming used to facilitate the helping process. "Reaching a more common ground of discourse in this area may well be one of the main challenges facing schools and teachers if they want to succeed in their anti-bullying projects" (Menesini et al., 2002, p. 403).

After analyzing the differing opinions cited in the literature and analyzing the data from the study, it is evident that there was a need to research the phenomenon of relational bullying. Students need to be equipped with the skills, strategies and encouragement to cope with such social injustices. It is vital that school communities work on preventative measures in order to empower students to be proactive in their efforts to resolve their issues. The creation of safe school climates to help give students the courage to speak out against injustices, that have a negative impact on the child's social, emotional, and physical well-being, to themselves and to others should be the prerogative of administrators and teachers. Conflict and indifference are all too familiar; we must help our students learn the necessary skills to be able to deal with relationally aggressive behaviors in school.

In reviewing the literature it was apparent there needs to be an environment that is founded on safe and caring principles. First, educators need to recognize the prevalence of relational bullying in their schools. Second, they need to work with students and personnel to eliminate the negative role that relational bullying impacts on a school environment. There must be collaboration of the staff and adults involved in building a positive community within the school

climate in order to promote constructive conflict resolution practices within the school setting. "It is imperative that further information is collected on the characteristics of the pupils who are involved in bullying and victimization, the short-term and long-term consequences of such experiences, as well as effective strategies of intervention" (Pateraki & Houndoumadi, 2001, p. 174). According to Pepler, Craig, O'Connell, Atlas and Charach (2004) the challenge for prevention and intervention measures is to ensure that school communities, particularly the teachers do not become complacent about having addressed bullying once and for all.

Finally, the implementation of prevention and intervention strategies is essential components to empower students to resolve their issues respectfully and peacefully. It is important that students are equipped to deal with conflict as we can not avoid or ignore the negative impact and implications it can generate in establishing and maintaining interpersonal relationships. This can be accomplished through the effort and the contribution of continued research to the professional community. "We need to rely on the knowledge gained through research to help us deal with the pervasive problem of bullying and its detrimental effects on children and youth" (Junvonen, 2005, p. 40).

Recommendations for further research

This study focused on a specific grade level for the data collection and analysis, as well as administrators and the classroom teacher. Naylor et al. (2006) suggest that there needs to be more data on teachers' conceptions of

bullying. I also firmly believe that there needs to be more research conducted on the parents and guardians' perceptions of bullying, especially relational bullying. The parents and guardians of the students is one important focus group that was not included in the data collection process of this study. Our Christian-based schools are continually creating, improving and developing a school climate immersed in empathy, respect, compassion and forgiveness; however the student participants have identified a significant amount of relational bullying is occurring in our schools. I feel that by completing research using parent participants, we may be able to understand more how the effects of the home environment impact the level of bullying in schools. Also, this can provide insight into how schools should further develop prevention and intervention strategies to counterattack the issue of bullying.

The perception of teachers and administrators is a further area to explore along with their own understanding and definitions of relational bullying. "Few studies exist on adults' and teachers' perspectives on bullying among children" (Menesini et al., 2002, p. 394). This study attempted to include the perspective of teachers. I believe that more direct qualitative research focusing on the perceptions of teachers would be beneficial in understanding relational bullying and how our own experiences can influence our objectivity in dealing with relationally aggressive students. By conducting additional research on teachers and school personnel, I believe that stereotyping based on gender can be explored and how this stereotyping impacts the resolution of relationally aggressive acts among boys. Also, I feel that by understanding our own biases

we can be more objective in dealing with conflict in a productive manner and in turn be role models for our students.

According to Lickona (1993) our society is entering deep moral turmoil. Lickona states "as we become more aware of this societal crisis, the feeling grows that schools cannot be ethical bystanders" (p. 6). Character education is gaining momentum as a comeback in many schools. I feel that another area that needs to be researched is schools that use programming based on moral education to counterattack relational bullying. Our Christian-based schools are already educating founded on the principles of moral values; however, it is evident from this study that there still exists a high percentage of students who continue to use and witness relational bullies. Therefore, schools that are not founded in religious principles and immersed in moral education could provide further insight into the effect of moral education and the frequency of bullying in schools.

In today's society we are living in an age of technology, this knowledge is rapidly growing and young children are continually developing the skills and ability to use many devices to communicate with others, especially their peers. One area that was not addressed in the data collection process for analysis was the use of the internet and the degree and extent to which it is being used among elementary students to bully. Cyber bullying is an area that needs further attention. According to Keith and Martin (2005), this form of bullying has become very common. Also, they indicate that girls are more likely to be involved in on-line bullying. I think it would be important not only to look at the frequency of

cyber bullying in the elementary school setting, but also to look at gender differences in this realm. As we progress through an age of technology additional studies on cyber bullying are becoming more imperative as "kids are always connected and wired and communicate in ways often unknown by adults" (Keith & Martin, 2005, p. 224). Because of the advances in technology, it is more difficult for children to find refuge, including one's home, and feel safe from the bully because the advancements in technology have been integrated into many aspects of the students' lives outside of the school setting.

Finally, another area that requires further focus is the programming that exists for boys around relational bullying. As educators we need to ensure that programming on relational bullying is not gender specific and does not perpetuate stereotyping of students. I believe programming needs to be objective and concentrate on developing effective communication skills built on good moral behavior and respect.

Relational bullying is an intricate and multifaceted phenomenon. It is difficult to measure and is composed of many perceptions of many stakeholders. This is why it is imperative to conduct as much research as possible utilizing different methods and participants. As educators, we need to find out as much as possible about relational bullying and its short and long term effects on victims in order to be able to better serve and educate our students and to be able to work towards developing socially, emotionally and psychologically safe schools.

Limitations of the Study

The benefits of an action research orientation (Creswell, 2002) will assist me as an administrator to implement positive changes to re-direct the existing practice of dealing with relational bullying in my school district. Therefore, a possible limitation of the study pertains to my choice of the sample population because it is specific to one type of school environment and a particular age grouping of students.

Also, the research site and participant population is Christian-based and limits the scope of generalization of the research. The results of this study can not be used to make generalizations about all Grade 7 students due to the selection of the population. Another limitation is the participants' willingness to respond to the survey and to take part in the questionnaire. There is a higher ratio of female to male teachers in Grade 7 and the stereotyping of students by teachers according to gender may limit the objectivity of the research data. I may have certain biases of which I am unaware that influence daily routines, decisions and interactions with others. I may have formed opinions and perceptions of events based on preconceived knowledge or even stereotypes that have significantly affected how I interpreted the situation and its outcome. Menesini et al. (2002) argued that "teachers and pupils have partially different views on peer bullying" and that "some elements of discrepancy between these two informants [teachers and students] may be related to gender and personal characteristics of children" (p. 395). As well, the semi-structured questionnaire

and the format of the survey limit the study as it may place confines on the scope of responses from the participants.

Another limitation to the study is the structure of the questions in the survey. The manner in which the questions were written need to be more carefully phrased to reduce participant confusion in the answers or a pilot survey may have been used to develop the final survey distributed to the participants.

Finally, I believe that the perceptions of administrator and teacher participants on relational bullying may be significantly influenced by adults' preconceived ideas of bullying and who bullies based on the stereotyping of gender. I feel that these perceptions may have limited the scope of responses on the questionnaire. Also, not using interviews limited probing the adult participants for further explanation to answers.

Concluding Statement

This study utilized the benefits of action research design and facilitated the data collection and analysis through the use of a student survey and adult questionnaire. The action research design has enabled me to use the results of the study to further better practices surrounding the social development of students in my school district. Conducting the study on relational bullying has helped me to develop insight into creating a positive and happy learning environment based on the social, emotional and psychological well-being for all children in my school district.

In conducting this study, I have realized the importance to develop a safe school culture based on the social and emotional well-being of students through the collaboration of staff, students, and parents. To facilitate and promote change in dealing with conflict in an appropriate, peaceful manner within a school climate, there must be a sense of safety. Smokowski and Kopasz (2005) suggest it is vital to create a school culture based on respect and the ethos that bullying is not necessary and will not be tolerated. Administrators and teachers need to create responsible, caring, citizens through the implementation of prevention and intervention strategies, and consider the gender differences, as well as break the barriers of stereotyping to achieve this goal. The necessity to be proactive demands devising, locating, and implementing programs that will support student's growth and development as effective and influential individuals who resolve conflicts in a positive manner.

It is my hope that through this research study that I can positively improve practice by influencing the parents, students and educators in my school system to be more aware of the effects and the prevalence of relational bullying in elementary school. It is also hoped that these stakeholders in turn will be good role models for the rest of the student population in their school communities and can be the agents of change in resolving conflict. To be the most effective in lessening the concerns of relational bullying, schools need to be prepared to approach the problem, and understand the degree of relational bullying that happens in their own schools and the role of gender and its impact on the

fundamentals of prevention and intervention. The problem must be acknowledged to avoid inadvertently supporting it (McKay, 2003).

As educators we need to find ways to get all participants, male or female, staff or student, parent or guardian to take ownership of the problem, recognize their biases and prejudices to stereotyping behaviors regarding gender and utilize prevention and intervention strategies to minimize relational bullying in schools.

Also, I hope to bring an increased awareness to our school community and influence the larger global community through the actions of the students as they will carry forth these learned skills and attitudes into their adult lives. One must confront the destructive nature of relational aggression as it negatively affects the psychological, physical and academic well-being of students (Dake et al., 2003). Implementation strategies, support for students to cope and methods and programming to prevent and intervene are necessary in order for students to co-exist in a safe, nurturing, productive environment. This is crucial to reducing the occurrence of relational bullying and limiting its negative effects on society's youth.

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Letter of Request to School District

Superintendent

Friday, March 23, 2007

Dear Sir,

I am seeking approval from your school district to use your schools for the research study I will be conducting on grade seven students and relational bullying. This study will fulfill the research requirements for a Master of Education degree in Multidisciplinary Leadership.

I am interested in using the schools in this district because I am an employee of the district and I am interested in using my research project to further the development of students and practices within our schools. It is hoped that the study will provide the district with information to improve practices in the social development of the students.

The aim of my study is to determine the degree of relational bullying in our system, the degree in which boys participate in this type of bullying behavior, the comparison of boys and girls at the grade seven level on relational bullying and to provide recommendations to support schools in developing more positive learning environments.

Upon completion of the study, a copy will be forwarded to your office for review.

If you have any further questions regarding the research, please call me at work 123-4567 or at home 765-4321.

Thank you in advance for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

Kevin Harnish

Letter of Introduction: Administrator/Teacher Participant

Dear Participant,

Hello. My name is Kevin Harnish. I am an administrator and teacher for the school district and a graduate student at the University of Northern British Columbia. I am the father of two children, one of school age.

I am conducting a study on grade seven students and relational bullying. This study will fulfill the research requirements for a Master of Education degree in Multidisciplinary Leadership. Approval has been granted by the school district office and permission has been approved from the University of Northern British Columbia.

I am contacting you because you are the administrator/classroom teacher of the students that I will be using to collect datum for my research. I wish to explore your perceptions of your student's experiences and opinions of relational bullying through a questionnaire. The task of completing this questionnaire is entirely voluntary. Through this study I hope to determine the level of need for intervention strategies to implement through programming in the schools in the district. I hope to be able to provide valuable information to the school district and school personnel to better support your students' education. Your opinions are important to this process and would be highly valued. There is no risk associated with this study.

The questionnaire will take approximately thirty minutes to complete. The questionnaire will require no names and no attempt will be made to link you with a specific questionnaire. All responses would be kept strictly confidential. Only I and my supervisor would have access to the questionnaires. Three years after the completion of the study, the questionnaires will be destroyed by being shredded. If you choose to withdraw at any time from the study all associated data from the study will be withdrawn.

I hope you will participate in this endeavor. If you have any questions that you would like answered after the questionnaire is completed, please feel free to contact me by phoning 250 123 4567 or by emailing harnish@unbc.ca. Also, you can contact my supervisor, Mr. Colin Chasteauneuf at 250-960-5401 or the Office of Research at 250-960-5650 or by emailing reb@unbc.ca.

Thank you for your assistance. Your involvement is appreciated.

Yours Truly,
Kevin Harnish

Appendix C

CONSENT FORM

I _____ agree to participate

in this study of gender in relational bullying. I understand that my participation is

completely voluntary. Also, I understand that provisions have been made to

ensure that my identity is not linked to any information provided in the survey. I

understand that I may withdraw from this study anytime without penalty.

Name of Participant: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Study Results Summary Request

I wish to receive a summary of the results of this study of the gender differences

in relational bullying. Please clearly print your name and mailing address in the

space below.

Name: _____

Address: _____

_____

_____

Appendix D

Principal/Teacher Questionnaire

1. Have you witnessed interactions of a negative nature among your students? Please describe one of the incidences that come to mind. If I were with you what would I see and hear and what would students be saying and doing? and how often?

2. What other opinions, points of view, issues and concerns did they express to each other?

3. What types of issues do children in the classroom and on the playground disagree about?

4. Describe an incident in which girls behaviors were demonstrated? Boy's behaviors were demonstrated?

5. When students (boys and girls) negatively interact with one another how would you describe their approach? How are their behaviors the same? How are their behaviors different?

6. Describe a situation in which students were able to resolve their difficulties without intervention. If I were there with you, what would we have seen and heard? When students disagree with each other how do they go about resolving these differences?

7. Can you describe how girls resolve their differences? How do boys resolve their differences? How are the resolutions the same? How are they different?

8. What are some examples of negative communication among students you have observed?

9. As an educator, what would you see as being the most important influence in having students resolve problems between themselves?

10. How would you promote positive communication among students in your class?

11. How would you promote positive communication among students in your school?

Appendix E

<u>Letter of Introduction: Student Letter</u>

Dear Student,

Hello. My name is Kevin Harnish. I am an administrator and teacher for the school district and a graduate student at the University of Northern British Columbia. I am the father of two children, one of school age.

I am conducting a study on grade seven students and relational bullying. This study will fulfill the research requirements for a Master of Education degree in Multidisciplinary Leadership. Approval has been granted by the school district office and permission has been approved from the University of Northern British Columbia to conduct the research.

I would like your opinions and views on your experiences with bullying. It is important that students are equipped with the strategies to deal with bullying and schools are taking steps to reduce bullying. I will examine the degree of relational bullying, some differences and similarities between boys and girls, and how much and to what degree do boys participate in relational bullying. Also, I will examine ways to help students and schools with relational bullying.

The survey will take approximately twenty minutes and will be administered by the administrator. The survey will require no names and no attempt will be made to link you with your survey. All responses would be kept strictly confidential. Only I and my supervisor would have access to the survey. Three years after the completion of the study, the surveys will be destroyed by being shredded. If you choose to withdraw at any time from the study all associated data from the study will be withdrawn. If you choose to participate you will need your parent/guardian to sign the consent form and return it to the school before completing the survey.

I hope you will participate in this study. If you have any questions or concerns, please have your parents contact me by phoning 250-123- 4567 or by emailing harnish@unbc.ca. Also, your parents can contact my supervisor, Mr. Colin Chasteauneuf at 250-960-5401 or the Office of Research at 250-960-5650 or by emailing reb@unbc.ca. Thank you for your assistance. Your involvement is appreciated.

Yours Truly,

Kevin Harnish

Appendix F

CONSENT FORM

I _____give my child/children

_____permission to participate in this study of

gender in relational bullying. I understand that my child's participation is

completely voluntary. Also, I understand that provisions have been made to

ensure that my child's identity is not linked to any information provided in the

survey. I understand that my child may withdraw from this study anytime without

penalty.

Name of Participant: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix G

<u>Letter of Introduction: Parent/Guardian Letter</u>

Dear Parents/Guardians,

Hello. My name is Kevin Harnish. I am an administrator and teacher for the school district and a graduate student at the University of Northern British Columbia. I am the father of two children, one of school age.

I am conducting a study on grade seven students and relational bullying. This study will fulfill the research requirements for a Master of Education degree in Multidisciplinary Leadership. Approval has been granted by the school district office and permission has been approved from the University of Northern British Columbia to conduct the research.

I am contacting you because you currently have a child/children in the school district in your community. I wish to explore your child's/ children's experiences and opinions of relational bullying through a survey. The task of completing this survey is entirely voluntary. Through this study I hope to determine the level of need for intervention strategies to implement through programming in the schools in the district. I hope to be able to provide valuable information to the school district and school personnel to better support your child's/ children's education. Your child's/ children's opinions are important to this process and would be highly valued. There are no risks to this research.

The survey will take approximately twenty minutes and will be administered by the administrator. The survey will require no names and no attempt will be made to link your child with a specific survey. All responses would be kept strictly confidential. Only I and my supervisor would have access to the survey. Three years after the completion of the study, the surveys will be destroyed by being shredded. If you choose to withdraw at any time from the study all associated data from the study will be withdrawn.

I hope you will participate in this endeavor. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me by phoning 250-123-4567 or by emailing harnish@unbc.ca. Also, you can contact my supervisor, Mr. Colin Chasteauneuf at 250-960-5401 or the Office of Research at 250-960-5650 or by emailing reb@unbc.ca. Thank you for your assistance. Your involvement is appreciated.

Yours Truly,

Kevin Harnish

Appendix H

Student Survey

Directions: Answer all the questions. Think about each question carefully. Put
an **X** in the box that best describes you. Do not put your name on
this survey.

School: _____   Date: _____

1. **What is your ethnic group?**

   ☐ Asian   ☐ Black   ☐ Aboriginal   ☐ White   ☐ Other

2. **Are you a boy or a girl?**   ☐ Boy   ☐ Girl

3. **This is how I feel being at my school?**

   ☐ very happy and good
   ☐ sometimes happy and good
   ☐ so – so
   ☐ sometimes sad and unhappy
   ☐ very sad and unhappy

4. **This is how safe I feel in each of these places:**

	Very Unsafe	Kind of Unsafe	So – So	Kind of Safe	Very Safe
In my classroom	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
On the playground	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
While eating lunch	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Walking to and from school	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
In the bathroom	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
In the hallway	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
On the bus	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
At the bus stop	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

5. How often have these things happened to you at school?

	Everyday	1 or 2 times a week	1 or 2 times a month	1 or 2 times a year	Never
Teased in a mean way	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Called hurtful names	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Left out of things on purpose	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Threatened	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Hit or kicked or pushed	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Check the boxes of all that apply in questions 6 – 10. (You can check more than one box for each question)

6. At school who has:

	Both Boys & Girls	A Group of Boys	A Boy	A Group of Girls	A Girl	Nobody
Excluded you	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Said mean things to you	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Teased you	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Called you names	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Told rumors or gossiped about you	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Tried to hurt you at school	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Bullied you	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

7. In what grade is the student or students who bully you?

☐ In my classroom
☐ In the same grade but a different classroom
☐ In a lower grade
☐ In a higher grade
☐ I haven't been bullied

8. When I am bullied, I

☐ Do nothing
☐ Tell the bully to stop
☐ Get away from the bully
☐ Hurt other kids
☐ Stay home from School
☐ Tell an adult
☐ Tell a friend
☐ Say or do something mean to the bully
☐ Don't get bullied

9. If you have been bullied, who have you told?

☐ My mother or my father
☐ My sister or brother
☐ A teacher or another adult at school
☐ Another student at school
☐ Nobody
☐ I have never been bullied

10. If you have been bullied, who has tried to help you?

☐ My mother or my father
☐ My sister or brother
☐ A teacher or another adult at school
☐ Another student at school
☐ Nobody
☐ I have never been bullied

11. If you have been bullied, what happened after you told someone?

☐ It got better
☐ It got worse
☐ Nothing changed
☐ I never told anyone
☐ I have never been bullied

12. How often do you hit, kick or push someone?

☐ Everyday
☐ 1 or 2 times a week
☐ 1 or 2 times a month
☐ 1 or 2 times a year
☐ Never

13. How often do you:

	Everyday	1 or 2 times a week	1 or 2 times a month	1 or 2 times a year	Never
Say mean things	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Tease others	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Purposely leave people out	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Call other children names	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Tell rumors or gossip	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

14. How often have you seen someone:

	Everyday	1 or 2 times a week	1 or 2 times a month	1 or 2 times a year	Never
Being teased in a mean way	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Being Threatened	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Purposely being left out of things	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Being call hurtful Names	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Being hit, kicked or pushed	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Telling rumors or gossiping	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

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15. How often have you noticed bullying going on in these places?

	Everyday	1 or 2 times a week	1 or 2 times a month	1 or 2 times a year	Never
In my classroom	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
On the playground	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
While eating lunch	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Walking to and from school	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
In the bathroom	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
In the hallway	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
On the bus	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
At the bus stop	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Mark all that apply in 16 – 17.

16. Who have you seen doing the bullying?

☐ Both Boys and Girls
☐ A Group of Boys
☐ A Boy
☐ A Group of Girls
☐ A Girl
☐ Nobody

17. What grades are the bullies in?

☐ In my classroom
☐ In the same grade but a different classroom
☐ In a lower grade
☐ In a higher grade
☐ I haven't seen any bullying

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