

Abstract

Gender differences in bullying and ostracism were studied in 112 boys and 179 girls, ages 11-14. Results indicated that boys showed more physical bullying, while girls showed more online bullying. Boys reported victimization to authority figures, while girls reported to peers. No gender differences were found in ostracism rates or needs-threats. Session participants will learn the importance of approaching bullying with gender-appropriate intervention strategies.

Background and Objectives

- Bullying and ostracism are widespread and harmful social phenomena (Arseneault et al., 2006, Williams, 2007).
- Research and theory have suggested gender differences in rates and types of bullying (Maccoby, 2002; Olweus, 1993; Owens et al., 2000) and ostracism (Williams & Sommer, 1997); however, there is still a need for more research, especially in American youth.
- The purpose of this study is:
 - to examine gender differences among middle school children in rates of physical bullying, verbal/social bullying, online bullying, and ostracism,
 - to explore gender differences in whom students are willing to talk to about instances of bullying, and
 - to identify possible gender differences in needs threatened by ostracism.

Methodology

Participant Recruitment: 291 children and adolescents, ages 11-14, who were not receiving special education services were recruited from:

- One countywide magnet middle school (84%)
- One private pediatrics primary care practice (6%)
- Three subspecialty pediatric clinics: Developmental-Behavioral Pediatrics (5%), Cystic Fibrosis (1%), and Adolescent Medicine (3%)

Sample Characteristics:

- Gender:** 39% male and 62% female
- Race:** 79% Caucasian, 14% African American, 7% Other
- Annual Household Income:** 64% of parents reporting \$75,000+
- Parent Marital Status:** 84% married
- Parent Education:** 64% of mothers and 62% of fathers holding at least a four-year college degree

Measures:

Bullying and Ostracism Screening Scale (BOSS) (Saylor et al. 2009), a student report measure including:

- 12 questions regarding how often different kinds of bullying (i.e., Verbal/Social, Physical, and Online) occurred during the current year
- A section on whom participants would feel comfortable talking to if they or someone close to them was being bullied at school
- 15 questions, which target respondents' personal experiences with ostracism and threats to their fundamental needs (i.e., Belonging, Self-Esteem, Control, and Meaningful Existence)

Results: Gender Differences in Rates of Bullying and Ostracism

Summary of Independent Samples t-Tests Comparing the Means of Bullying and Ostracism in Males and Females

	Participant Gender				t	df	p <
	Males		Females				
	M	SD	M	SD			
Physical Bullying Items							
Girls were physically bullied.	1.51	.62	1.67	.77	-1.93	286	.055
Boys were physically bullied.	2.90	1.16	2.60	1.21	2.08	285	.038
I was physically bullied.	1.55	.88	1.21	.67	3.42	286	.001
I bullied someone physically.	1.22	.61	1.13	.46	1.26	284	.209
Verbal Bullying Items							
Girls were verbally/socially bullied.	2.64	1.16	3.18	1.15	-3.83	286	.001
Boys were verbally/socially bullied.	3.16	1.09	2.66	1.02	3.95	286	.001
I was verbally/socially bullied.	2.04	1.16	1.99	1.09	.35	286	.727
I bullied someone verbally/socially.	1.65	.83	1.55	.80	1.01	284	.311
Online Bullying Items							
Girls were bullied online.	2.12	1.12	2.36	1.06	-1.80	285	.072
Boys were bullied online.	1.85	1.08	1.64	.77	1.78	285	.077
I was bullied online.	1.15	.45	1.32	.73	-2.54	283	.011
I bullied someone online.	1.15	.53	1.11	.38	.72	284	.472
Ostracism Items							
Other people ignore me.	2.17	.91	2.08	1.06	.49	135	.624
Other people leave me out of things.	2.00	.94	2.08	1.09	-.46	135	.647
I do things by myself but wish I had a friend to join me.	2.60	1.35	2.33	1.29	1.21	134	.230
Combined Experiences of Ostracism	6.77	2.62	6.51	2.71	.57	134	.571

Interpretation: Based on self-reports of bullying victimization, males had significantly higher rates of physical bullying than females, while females had significantly higher rates of online bullying than males. Additionally, boys and girls perceived physical and verbal/social bullying among their own gender as more prevalent. No significant differences were found between male and female rates of ostracism.

Results: Gender Differences in Victim Support Network

Summary of Independent Samples t-Tests Comparing the Means of Needs Threatened by Ostracism in Males and Females

	Participant Gender				t	df	p <
	Males		Females				
	M	SD	M	SD			
Needs Threatened by Ostracism							
Belonging	5.66	2.49	5.63	2.54	.08	134	.939
Control	8.57	3.14	9.29	2.30	-1.44	135	.153
Meaningful Existence	4.58	1.98	4.62	2.36	-.09	135	.930
Self-Esteem	6.25	2.24	5.94	2.35	.75	134	.453

Interpretation: No significant differences were found between boys' and girls' needs threatened by ostracism.

Results: Gender Differences in Needs Threatened by Ostracism

Summary of Chi-square Tests of Independent Variables (Males and Females) Based on Whom Participants Would Tell About Instances of Personal Victimization

	Participant Gender		c ²	p <
	Males	Females		
	n = 111	n = 177		
Victim Support Network				
	% Within Gender			
Teacher	56.80	49.70	1.36	.244
Principal or Assistant Principal	38.70	27.10	4.26	.039
Guidance Counselor	61.30	61.60	.01	.957
Friends at School	56.80	78.50	15.44	.001
Friends Outside of School	42.30	69.50	20.79	.001
Parents	82.00	70.60	4.70	.030
Siblings	33.30	47.50	5.59	.018
Another Relative	35.10	44.60	2.54	.111
Another Adult	48.60	44.60	.44	.506

Interpretation: Boys were more likely than girls to tell the principal/assistant principal or their parents, while girls were more likely than boys to tell friends at school, friends outside of school, or siblings.

Conclusions

- An increased awareness of differences in the types of bullying employed by boys and girls is an important precursor to detection and intervention.
- Because males are commonly assumed to be the primary perpetrators of bullying in general (Maccoby, 2002), our finding that girls have higher rates of online bullying is a particularly valuable supplement to the literature.
- The existence of gender differences in victim support networks has important implications for bullying identification and intervention. If girls are more likely to report to their peers, then girl bullying may be falling below the radar of parents and teachers.
- In order to provide outreach that appeals to both boys and girls, schools might consider putting in place a task force comprised of students and teachers.

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