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## SPECIAL TOPIC

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### Bullying and Peer Victimization at School: Perceptual Differences Between Students and School Staff

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*Abstract.* Although bullying and other forms of peer victimization at school are a growing concern, there has been little research examining the potential differences between student and staff perceptions of the frequency of bullying, most common location and forms of bullying, severity of the problem, social norms related to bullying, and responses to witnessing bullying. The data for this study came from a district-wide survey of student ( $n = 15,185$ ) and staff ( $n = 1,547$ ) perceptions of and experiences with bullying conducted in 75 elementary, 20 middle, and 14 high schools. Results indicated that staff at all school levels (elementary, middle, and high) underestimated the number of students involved in frequent bullying. Both middle school students and staff tended to report the greatest exposure to and concern about bullying. Staff with greater efficacy for handling bullying situations were more likely to intervene and less likely to make the bullying situation worse. Staff members' own experiences with bullying were predictive of their attitudes toward bullying and perceived efficacy for handling a bullying situation. Implications for prevention and intervention by school psychologists are provided.

Bullying and related forms of aggression are of increasing concern for students, as nearly 30% of youth are estimated to experience frequent involvement in bullying (Brad-

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shaw, Sawyer, & O'Brennan, 2006; Nansel et al., 2001). Bullying is broadly defined as a class of intentional and repeated acts that occur through physical, verbal, and relational forms in situations where a power difference is present (Olweus, 1993). A growing number of studies have documented the short- and long-term consequences of bullying on social, emotional, and mental health problems for both the victim and perpetrator (Gladstone, Parker, & Malhi, 2006). Because of the pervasiveness of this behavior, school psychologists and other school staff have been encouraged to intervene with students involved in bullying situations. Whole-school bullying prevention approaches (e.g., Olweus Bullying Prevention Program; Olweus, 1993) are often recommended, as they are intended to increase collaboration among school psychologists, teachers, and students to enhance the school's social climate and alter the social norms related to bullying (Rigby & Bagshaw, 2003; Smith, Schneider, Smith, & Ananiadou, 2004). However, fostering an effective partnership between youth and adults to prevent bullying and other forms of school violence can be a complex and difficult task.

### **Student and Staff Perceptions of Bullying**

Much of the difficulty surrounding whole-school bullying prevention efforts appears to stem from the perceptual differences between school staff and students (Houndoumadi & Pateraki, 2001; Newman & Murray, 2005; Stephens, Kyriacou, & Tonnessen, 2005). Past research has shown that many teachers are unaware of the seriousness of peer victimization at their school and its consequential effects on students (Nicolaidis, Yui-chi, & Smith, 2002). Moreover, teachers and other school staff tend to underestimate the number of students being bullied at their school (Houndoumadi & Pateraki, 2001) and expect that children will resolve these conflicts on their own (Newman, 2003; Stockdale, Haggaduambo, Larson, & Sarvela, 2002). Teachers and school psychologists may also react differently to witnessing peer victimization depending on the perceived context of the act

(Newman & Murray, 2005), as well as the student's age (Rigby & Barnes, 2002) and social status (Nesdale & Pickering, 2006).

Teachers' inability to effectively identify bullying behavior, particularly verbal and social forms, may be part of the problem. Leff, Kupersmidt, Patterson, and Power (1999) found that teachers more effectively identified bullying behaviors among elementary school children than adolescents. This disparity may be a result of the typical developmental trend whereby physical forms of aggressive behavior decline but social forms of aggression increase during the transition from childhood to adolescence (Craig & Pepler, 2003). The non-physical forms of bullying are more covert and consequently harder for teachers to detect (Craig, Henderson, & Murphy, 2000). Furthermore, school staff are more likely to categorize physical aggression as a form of bullying and to view nonphysical aggression, such as verbal attacks and social exclusion, as less serious and easier for children to cope with (Bauman & Del Rio, 2006).

There also appears to be a difference between student and teacher perceptions in the likelihood that adults will intervene, such that teachers typically believe they intervene in bullying situations more than they actually do (Newman & Murray, 2005). Pepler, Craig, Ziegler, and Charach (1994) found that 84% of teachers believed they intervened "always" or "often" in bullying incidents, whereas just 35% of students reported that teachers intervened. In fact, many students believe teachers make the situation worse when they intervene (Rigby & Bagshaw, 2003; Rigby & Barnes, 2002) and thus rarely report bullying incidents to school staff. Consequently, students tend to report bullying events to their friends rather than school psychologists, counselors, or other school staff (Genta, Menesini, Fonzi, Costabile, & Smith, 1996; Houndoumadi & Pateraki, 2001; Rigby & Barnes, 2002).

Although the existent research suggests that there are some discrepancies between the way students and school staff perceive the issue of bullying, few studies have examined this issue closely using data from large, diverse samples of students and staff from mul-

tiple schools. Although there are likely developmental differences in students' perceptions of bullying that have important implications for developmentally appropriate intervention, there has been limited research exploring potential discrepancies between students and staff across all school levels (i.e., elementary, middle, high). Despite the need to involve school psychologists and other school staff with behavioral expertise in bullying prevention, the views of nonteaching staff, like school psychologists and guidance counselors, have rarely been considered in prior research. Furthermore, staff members' personal experiences with bullying (e.g., childhood experience of bullying, attitudes toward bullying, adult victimization at school) likely affect their reactions to witnessing a bullying situation; however, these views have been overlooked in the published literature. Having an enhanced understanding of the attitudes of school staff related to bullying, as well as the discrepancy between student and school staff perceptions across all school levels, will inform interventions that aim to increase adult-youth collaboration to prevent bullying.

### Goals of the Present Study

The present study uses data from a large-scale school-based study of bullying to examine the discrepancy between staff and student perceptions of bullying behavior and attitudes toward intervention and retaliation. The study was initiated by a public school district to collect data on the prevalence of bullying and other indicators of school climate that would be used locally to facilitate data-based decision making regarding school safety (for additional information, see Bradshaw, Debnam, Martin, & Gill, 2006a, 2006b). To better understand how bullying behaviors vary across developmental levels, analyses were conducted to contrast students and staff from elementary, middle, and high schools. Furthermore, staff members' personal experiences with bullying were examined as possible predictors of their attitudes toward bullying and intervention. Student and staff attitudes toward bullying were examined in conjunction

with other important predictors of school violence, including attitudes toward aggressive retaliation, perceptions of safety, and feelings of belonging at school. It was hypothesized that there would be discrepancies in the way in which students and staff viewed bullying and victimization within the school environment. Furthermore, based on prior research suggesting a peak in bullying during middle school (Olweus, 1993), it was anticipated that both students and staff in middle schools would express the greatest concerns about bullying.

## Method

### Sample

Data were collected in May 2006 from 15,185 students (Grades 4–12) and from 1,547 school staff members (e.g., teachers, school psychologists, guidance counselors) at 75 elementary, 20 middle, and 14 high schools in a large Maryland public school district that included urban (58%), suburban (28%), and rural (15%) schools. The 109 schools were diverse with regard to size ( $M = 677.83$ ), student-teacher ratio ( $M = 22.86$ ), student ethnicity ( $M = 34.88\%$  minority students), and student socioeconomic status ( $M = 24.55\%$  receiving free or reduced-cost meals). To ensure anonymity among participants, school staff were only asked if they were teaching (86.43%) or nonteaching staff (13.57%), and students were only asked questions regarding their race (65.06% Caucasian, 14.75% African American, 4.12% Hispanic, 16.17% other), sex (55.65% male), and grade level ( $n = 7,083$  elementary, 7,296 middle, and 806 high school). Approximately 74% of the students in the targeted grades throughout the district completed the survey.

### Instrument

Children and school staff completed an anonymous Web-based survey regarding their experiences with bullying, beliefs about aggressive retaliation, and perceptions of bullying. Where possible, parallel items were asked of both students and staff so that multiple perspectives on the issue of bullying could be

examined. These items were based in part on previously developed measures of aggression and school climate (Institute of Behavioral Science, 1990), and on questions commonly used in research on bullying (Nansel et al., 2001; Solberg & Olweus, 2003) and attitudes toward retaliation (Huesmann, Guerra, Miller, & Zelli, 1992). The constructs are described in greater detail in the sections that follow. Because of the elementary school students' reading ability, certain items were only asked of middle and high school students. Prior to the district-wide data collection, the student survey was pilot tested on two classes of elementary students and a class of middle school students to ensure readability and sufficient comprehension of survey items.

**Prevalence of bullying.** Based on prior research by Olweus (1993) and Nansel et al. (2001), bullying was defined as occurring "when a person or group of people repeatedly say or do mean or hurtful things to someone on purpose. Bullying includes things like teasing, hitting, threatening, name-calling, ignoring, and leaving someone out on purpose." Students' frequency of involvement in bullying was measured using one question assessing victimization ("Within the last month, how often have you been bullied?") and a second question assessing perpetration ("How often have you bullied someone else during the last month?"). Response options were *not at all, once a month, 2–3 times during the month, once a week, and several times a week*. These items come from the World Health Organization's international study of bullying (Nansel et al., 2001). Based on the work of Solberg and Olweus (2003), a threshold of two or more incidents of bullying in the past month was used to determine "frequent" involvement in bullying. Participants' exposure to bullying and concern about bullying were assessed by single-item indicators, which were based on prior research by Olweus (1993) and Nansel et al. (2001).

**Attitudes and perceptions.** Students' and staff members' perceived social norms regarding bullies were assessed by three items ("The bullies at my school are popular with other

students;" "The bullies at my school are feared by other students;" "The bullies at my school are disliked by other students") to which participants indicated whether they agreed or disagreed. These items were created by the researchers. Adult and student participants responded to two items ("I feel safe at school;" "I feel like I belong at this school") indicating the extent to which they agreed on a 4-point scale, from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree* (the two-item Cronbach alpha was .79 for the staff and .70 for the students; Institute of Behavioral Science, 1990). Participants' attitudes toward aggressive retaliation were assessed through one modified item from the Normative Beliefs About Aggression Scale (Huesmann et al., 1992). Specifically, students responded to the statement "It is OK to hit someone if they hit me first," whereas staff responded to the statement "I think it is OK for students to hit someone who hits them first." Participants indicated the extent to which they agreed with each statement on a 4-point scale, from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*.

**Characteristics of bullying.** The location of bullying was assessed by a single question ("Where have you been bullied within the past month?") to which participants could check multiple responses (e.g., classroom, bathroom, hallway). The form of bullying experienced was assessed by a single question ("Within the last month, has someone repeatedly tried to hurt you or make you feel bad by. . .") and participants were given multiple response options to check (e.g., push/shove; sexual comments or gestures; e-mail/blogging; verbal threats; name-calling; leaving out; Nansel et al., 2001). Students' perceptions of why they had been bullied were assessed through the question "Within the last month, have you been bullied about. . .," whereas a similar staff question was "Much of the bullying at this school is about. . .," to which participants could check multiple responses (e.g., the way they look or talk; their race or religion; their gender; Nansel et al., 2001). Lastly, students' responses to bullying were assessed through a single question ("What did you do when you were bullied?") to which they could check multiple response options

(e.g., tell a friend, tell a parent, nothing). In addition, staff were asked a series of questions regarding their response to bullying, including their likelihood of intervening when witnessing bullying and when a student reported bullying directly to them.

**Prevention efforts.** Participants responded to a series of questions regarding their perceptions of the effectiveness of staff prevention efforts and intervention strategies. Staff efficacy to effectively manage a bullying situation was assessed through items regarding their perceived ability to intervene without making the situation worse (see Table 1).

**Staff members' attitudes and prior experience with bullying.** A series of questions was constructed to assess staff members' own attitudes toward bullying (e.g., "Bullying is a part of life that everyone has to go through") and experiences with bullying, both as a child and as an adult at their current school. A single item assessed who (students, staff, parents) had bullied the staff member at the school (see Table 1).

## Procedure

The anonymous online survey was administered by the students' language arts teacher over a 3-week period (in May and June 2006) and was accessible through a password-protected website. All students completed the survey at school during school hours. The survey was administered to students in group format (classes of 15–25 students). The testing session was led by the teacher and proctored by the guidance counselor or school psychologist to ensure that students were not discussing their answers and to reduce student distractions and interruptions. The administering teachers read aloud the bullying definition provided earlier in this article and indicated that the purpose of the anonymous survey was to understand students' attitudes toward bullying and their school. To ensure comprehension of the survey items by the fourth- and fifth-grade participants, the elementary school teachers were instructed to read the questions and response options aloud as the students com-

pleted the survey. The survey required a mean of 10.0 min for students to complete (median = 9.0). School staff completed a similar anonymous password-protected online survey independently at home or work during the same 3-week time frame. The survey required a mean of 7.8 min for staff to complete (median = 6.0).

The survey was conducted district-wide by the school district using a passive consent process. The nonidentifiable data were obtained from the school district for the purpose of conducting research. Because of the overall design of the project, it was not feasible to include a random sampling of students or schools. These data were approved for analysis by the Committee on Human Subjects Research at the authors' institution.

## Analyses

The majority of outcomes were either single dichotomous (yes–no) or 4-point Likert-style ordinal variables (e.g., *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*). Because the 4-point variables were ordinal (rather than continuous) and not normally distributed (as indicated by inspection of the histograms), the responses were dichotomized into agree (*strongly agree* and *agree*) and disagree (*strongly disagree* and *disagree*) before analyses. Binary (dichotomous) logistic regression analyses were conducted to examine differences among students and among staff across the three school levels (elementary, middle, high) and to explore discrepancies between students and staff. Multivariate logistic regression was selected for these analyses over univariate analyses for binary outcomes (e.g.,  $\chi^2$ ) because it can be used to statistically control for potentially confounding variables (e.g., covariates like school level) and to address concerns associated with the nonindependence of observations (i.e., students clustered within schools), which are common in school-based studies (Murray, 1998). Both confounding variables and the nonindependence of observations can distort the estimates of effects or change the direction of effects, and thus should be addressed. Furthermore, in very large samples,  $\chi^2$  tests tend

**Table 1**  
**Student and Staff Survey Items**

Constructs	Student Items	Staff Items
Prevalence of bullying Frequent involvement	[Constructed variable indicating child had either perpetrated or been bullied two or more times within the last month.] Have you seen someone else being bullied during the last month? (Y/N)	What percentage of students do you think have been bullied two or more times during the last month?
Bystanders	What did you do when you saw the person being bullied? (e.g., joined in, told an adult, ignored it) (C) How much is bullying a problem at your school? (L)	Have you ever seen a student being bullied at this school? (Y/N)
Concern Attitudes and perceptions Perception of bullies	Do you think the bullies at your school are . . . popular (Y/N), disliked (Y/N), feared (Y/N) by other students? I feel safe at school. (L) I feel like I belong at this school. (L) It is OK to hit someone if they hit me first. (L)	How much is bullying a problem at your school? (L) Are the bullies at your school . . . popular (Y/N), disliked (Y/N), feared (Y/N) by other students?
Safety and belonging Retaliatory attitudes	I feel safe at school. (L) I feel like I belong at this school. (L) It is OK to hit someone if they hit me first. (L)	I feel safe at school. (L) I feel like I belong at this school. (L) I think it is OK for students to hit someone who hits them first. (L)
Characteristics of bullying Location of bullying	Where have you been bullied during the past month? (e.g., classroom, cafeteria, hallway) (C)	Where have you seen students being bullied within the past month? (e.g., classroom, cafeteria, hallway) (C)
Form of victimization	Within the past month, has someone repeatedly tried to hurt you or make you feel bad by . . . (e.g., calling you bad names, teasing you, spreading rumors) (C)	In what ways have you seen students being bullied within the past month? (e.g., name-calling, verbal threats, pushing) (C)
Perceived reason	Within the past month, have you been bullied about . . . (e.g., your race or skin color, the way you look, your gender) (C)	Much of the bullying at my school is about . . . (e.g., student's race or skin color, student's gender, student's religion) (C)

Table 1. (Continued)

Constructs	Student Items	Staff Items
Response to bullying	What did you do when you were bullied? (e.g., bullied that person back, told an adult) (C)	When you have seen bullying during the past month, how did you respond? (e.g., intervened with bully, referred to school psychologist or guidance counselor, ignored it) (C)
Prevention efforts	What did you do when the student(s) reported bullying? (e.g., talked to administrator, intervened with victim, talked to bully's parents) (C)	
Perception of bullying prevention efforts	Do you think the adults at your school are doing enough to prevent or stop bullying? (Y/N)	Do you think the adults at your school are doing enough to prevent or stop bullying? (Y/N)
	Have you seen adults watching bullying and doing nothing? (Y/N)	Have you seen adults watching bullying and doing nothing? (Y/N)
	Teachers who try to stop bullying only make things worse. (L)	When I have tried to intervene in a bullying situation things have gotten worse. (L)
	Have you ever reported bullying to an adult at school and he/she did nothing? (Y/N)	If you saw bullying, how likely is it that you would intervene? (L)
		I have effective strategies for handling a bullying situation. (L)
Staff experiences with bullying	[Question not asked of students.]	Bullying is a part of life that everyone has to go through. (L)
		Were you ever bullied as a child? (Y/N)
		Have you been bullied at this school? (Y/N)
		Who has bullied you at this school . . . (e.g., students, staff, or parents) (C)

*Note.* The response options are indicated in parentheses using the following abbreviations: L = 4-point Likert scale response option, which was dichotomized; Y/N = yes or no response option; C = respondents checked all response options that applied.

to be particularly sensitive to small differences and can yield significant statistical effects that have limited substantive significance (Kline, 1998). Regression procedures are less sensitive to large sample sizes and thus produce more conservative significance estimates than  $\chi^2$  tests.

Multivariate logistic regression also produces an effect size estimate, called an odds ratio (OR), which helps to gauge the magnitude of significant effects. Specifically, ORs are comparisons of the odds of an outcome (e.g., believing bullies are popular, feeling safe, having witnessed bullying) for those in a particular group (or with a potential risk factor) to the odds for other individuals. ORs greater than 1.00 indicate increased odds, whereas ORs less than 1.00 indicate decreased odds of an outcome (Hosmer & Lemeshow, 2000). For example, an OR of 1.42 would indicate the odds of the outcome (e.g., feeling safe) given the presence of the predictor variable (e.g., being in high school compared to being in middle school) are increased 42%, whereas an OR of 0.42 would indicate the odds are decreased 58% (i.e., 1.00–0.42).

In the present study, ORs were used as effect size estimates that contrast the responses of middle and high school students with elementary school students as a base group. ORs were also used to contrast elementary and high school students with middle school students as the base group. Similar within-group analyses were conducted for staff to explore whether there were differences across school levels. Where possible, staff responses were compared with student responses; however, for many of the variables, student and staff views could not be statistically compared because the questions asked were not identical across both groups (e.g., students were asked “Within the last month, have you been bullied about. . .,” whereas staff were asked “Much of the bullying at my school is about. . .”). All analyses were conducted in STATA 9.2 and standard errors were adjusted for clustering of participants within the 109 schools (Murray, 1998).

## Results

### Prevalence of Bullying

**Frequent involvement.** Over 49% of children reported being bullied by other students at school at least once during the past month, whereas 30.8% reported bullying others during that time. Defining “frequent” involvement in bullying as occurring two or more times within the past month (Solberg & Olweus, 2003), 40.6% of students reported some type of frequent involvement in bullying, with 23.2% as a frequent victim, 8.0% as a frequent bully, and 9.4% as a frequent bully or victim. Staff were asked “What percentage of students do you think have been bullied two or more times during the last month?” and 71.4% estimated that 15% or less of the students at their school were frequently bullied. The perceived prevalence estimate varied by school level, such that over 70% of elementary school (ES) staff, 40% of middle school (MS) staff, and 57% of high school (HS) staff estimated that the percentage of students bullied in the past month was 10% or less. However, the prevalence rates of frequent victimization as indicated by students were 33.7% for ES, 32.7% for MS, and 22.7% for HS students. The discrepancy between staff perceptions of the rates of frequent victimization and the student-reported rates appeared to be the most salient for ES staff, with less than 1% of staff members reporting bullying rates similar to those indicated by students (33.7%). Similarly, MS and HS staff underreported bullying prevalence rates, with only 5.1% of MS and 8.9% of HS staff accurately perceiving student victimization rates.

**Bystanders.** Overall, 70.6% of students reported having witnessed bullying within the last month. Review of the logistic regression results indicated there were some school level differences, such that MS students (75.9%, OR = 1.68,  $p < .001$ ) and HS students (71.5%, OR = 1.3,  $p < .05$ ) were more likely to have witnessed bullying than ES students (65.2%). HS students were less likely than MS students (OR = 0.79,  $p < .05$ ) to have seen someone else bullied. With regard to

staff, 70.4% reported having witnessed bullying within the last month, with MS staff (85.2%) being more likely than both ES staff (67.4%,  $OR = 2.79, p < .001$ ) and HS staff (58.2%,  $OR = 0.26, p < .001$ ) to have witnessed a bullying event. Furthermore, HS staff were less likely than ES staff to have witnessed bullying during this time period ( $OR = 0.25, p < .001$ ).

When MS and HS students were asked what they did when they witnessed bullying, the most frequently reported response was to “ignore it or do nothing” (35.42% MS; 40.32% HS), with HS students being more likely than MS students to ignore the bullying ( $OR = 1.23, p < .05$ ). In contrast, the second most commonly endorsed response to witnessing bullying was to try to stop the bullying (25.11% MS; 25.31% HS). Somewhat surprisingly, 11.90% of MS students and 13.40% of HS students reported joining in when witnessing bullying. Furthermore, HS students (5.58%) were more likely than MS students (3.66%) to report having bullied someone else after witnessing bullying ( $OR = 1.56, p < .05$ ). With regard to reporting the bullying, HS students were less likely than MS students to report the event, either to an adult at school (10.73% MS, 6.45% HS,  $OR = 0.57, p < .05$ ) or a parent (10.51% MS, 6.70% HS,  $OR = 0.61, p < .05$ ). In addition, HS students (10.17%) were less likely than MS students (16.17%) to tell another student about witnessing bullying ( $OR = 0.59, p < .001$ ).

**Concern.** With regard to concern about bullying, more MS students (55.0%) thought bullying was a “moderate” or “serious” problem at their school than did HS students (37.5%,  $OR = 0.49, p < .001$ ). This question was not asked of ES students. Staff members did not differ significantly from students in their perceived level of concern by school level, as 18.2% of ES, 59.9% of MS, and 35.0% of HS staff reported a high level of concern about bullying. Similarly, MS staff were more likely than ES ( $OR = 0.15, p < .001$ ) and HS ( $OR = 0.36, p < .05$ ) staff to be concerned about bullying.

## Attitudes and Perceptions

**Perceptions of bullies.** MS and HS students tend to perceive bullies to be more popular and feared than ES students, whereas MS staff perceived bullies to be more popular and more feared than their counterparts on other school levels (see Table 2). Specifically, over 60% of MS and HS students perceived bullies to be “popular” compared to only 40% of ES students. Compared to students, staff were more likely to perceive the bullies as feared, but less likely to perceive them as disliked.

**Safety and school belonging.** Most students reported feeling as if they belonged at their school; however, they tended to feel less like they belonged in the secondary schools than in the primary schools (Table 2). The vast majority of staff also felt they belonged at their school, and there were no school level differences. The majority of students reported feeling safe at school, and similar to the trend for belonging, the MS and HS students tended to feel less safe than the ES students. Among staff, MS and HS staff tended to feel less safe than the ES staff. Controlling for school level, staff were more likely than students to feel that they both belonged and were safe at their school.

**Retaliatory attitudes.** Most students (55.6%) agreed that it was okay to hit someone who hit them first, whereas few staff (7.1%) agreed that students should physically retaliate against another student. There were some school level differences, such that MS (72.9%,  $OR = 4.89, p < .001$ ) and HS students (75.6%,  $OR = 5.63, p < .001$ ) were more likely than ES students (35.45%) to agree with this statement regarding retaliation, but there were no significant differences between MS and HS students. Similarly, MS (8.0%,  $OR = 1.78, p < .05$ ) and HS staff (19.4%,  $OR = 4.97, p < .001$ ) were more likely than ES staff (4.6%) to support student retaliation, but HS staff ( $OR = 2.79, p < .001$ ) were also significantly more likely than MS staff to do so.

**Table 2**  
**Student and Staff Perceptions of Bullies, Belonging, and Safety**

Perception	Students			Staff			Test of Significance Between Students and Staff (ORs)
	ES % [OR] (OR)	MS % [OR] (OR)	HS % [OR] (OR)	ES % [OR] (OR)	MS % [OR] (OR)	HS % [OR] (OR)	
<b>Bullies</b>							
Popular	40.0 <sup>a</sup> — (0.36 <sup>**</sup> )	65.1 <sup>b</sup> [2.80 <sup>**</sup> ] —	61.2 <sup>b</sup> [2.36 <sup>**</sup> ] (0.84)	48.2 <sup>A</sup> — (0.35 <sup>**</sup> )	72.4 <sup>B</sup> [2.83 <sup>**</sup> ] —	43.3 <sup>A</sup> [0.82] (0.29 <sup>**</sup> )	1.10
Feared	30.5 <sup>a</sup> — (0.47 <sup>**</sup> )	48.3 <sup>b</sup> [2.13 <sup>**</sup> ] —	48.0 <sup>b</sup> [2.11 <sup>**</sup> ] (0.99)	39.6 <sup>A</sup> — (0.29 <sup>**</sup> )	69.6 <sup>B</sup> [3.49 <sup>**</sup> ] —	46.1 <sup>A</sup> [1.30] (0.37 <sup>**</sup> )	1.46 <sup>**</sup>
Disliked	64.4 <sup>a</sup> — (0.96)	65.3 <sup>a,b</sup> [1.04] —	66.8 <sup>b</sup> [1.11 <sup>*</sup> ] (1.07)	59.7 <sup>A</sup> — (0.98)	60.2 <sup>A</sup> [1.02] —	69.4 <sup>B</sup> [1.53 <sup>*</sup> ] (1.50 <sup>*</sup> )	.85 <sup>*</sup>
Belonging	83.9 <sup>a</sup> — (1.97 <sup>**</sup> )	72.6 <sup>b</sup> [0.51 <sup>**</sup> ] —	72.8 <sup>b</sup> [0.51 <sup>**</sup> ] (1.01)	92.5 <sup>A</sup> — (1.54)	88.9 <sup>A</sup> [0.65] —	90.6 <sup>A</sup> [0.77] (1.19)	2.94 <sup>**</sup>
Safety	82.5 <sup>a</sup> — (2.63 <sup>**</sup> )	64.2 <sup>b</sup> [0.38 <sup>**</sup> ] —	71.6 <sup>b</sup> [0.53 <sup>*</sup> ] (1.40)	96.4 <sup>A</sup> — (2.92 <sup>*</sup> )	90.1 <sup>B</sup> [0.34 <sup>*</sup> ] —	88.9 <sup>B</sup> [0.30 <sup>**</sup> ] (0.88)	5.71 <sup>**</sup>

*Note.* ES = elementary school; MS = middle school; HS = high school. Superscripts signify within-group differences; lowercase letters indicate school level differences within students, and capital letters indicate school level differences within staff. Percentages sharing superscripts are not significantly different (at  $p < .05$ ). Odds ratios (ORs) for the within-group contrasts are reported to indicate effect sizes. The ORs in brackets contrast MS and HS with ES as the base group. ORs in parentheses contrast HS and ES with MS as the base group. The far right column reports ORs from the logistic regression analyses which were computed to compare all staff to all students, controlling for school level. In all analyses, standard errors were adjusted by clustering on school.

\*  $p < .05$ .

\*\*  $p < .001$ .

### Characteristics of Bullying

**Location.** As reported in Table 3, ES students most frequently reported having been bullied during the past month on the playground, in the classroom, and in the cafeteria. MS and HS students also frequently reported having been bullied in the classroom and cafeteria, as well as in the hallway or at their lockers. MS students were significantly more likely than ES students to report having been bullied in all six locations. With regard to staff, ES, MS, and HS staff most frequently reported having seen students being bullied within the last month in the same locations

that students reported, although at higher percentages. MS staff tended to be more likely than both ES and HS staff to report witnessing bullying in all six locations surveyed.

**Perceived reason.** Students most often reported having been bullied during the past month about the way they “look, talk, or dress” (Table 3), with MS students citing this reason more frequently than ES or HS students. Students in secondary schools were more likely than ES students to report race and family socioeconomic status as a reason for bullying, but there were no school level differences in the likelihood of reporting gender as a reason. When staff

**Table 3**  
**Student and Staff Perceptions About the Location and Perceived Reason of Bullying**

Perception	Students			Staff		
	ES %	MS %	HS %	ES %	MS %	HS %
	[OR] (OR)	[OR] (OR)	[OR] (OR)	[OR] (OR)	[OR] (OR)	[OR] (OR)
<b>Location of bullying</b>						
Classroom or class	21.2 <sup>a</sup> — (0.65**)	29.1 <sup>b</sup> [1.53**] —	23.5 <sup>a</sup> [1.14] (0.75*)	34.4 <sup>A</sup> — (0.49**)	51.7 <sup>B</sup> [2.04**] —	43.9 <sup>A,B</sup> [1.49] (0.73)
Hallway or lockers	15.4 <sup>a</sup> — (0.45**)	29.0 <sup>b</sup> [2.24**] —	21.2 <sup>c</sup> [1.48*] (0.66**)	30.8 <sup>A</sup> — (0.12**)	78.7 <sup>B</sup> [8.28**] —	42.2 <sup>A</sup> [1.64] (0.20**)
Cafeteria or lunch	20.3 <sup>a</sup> — (0.83*)	23.4 <sup>b</sup> [1.20*] —	20.4 <sup>a,b</sup> [1.01] (0.84)	29.3 <sup>A</sup> — (0.65)	38.9 <sup>A</sup> [1.54] —	23.3 <sup>A,B</sup> [0.74] (0.48*)
Gym or PE	10.2 <sup>a</sup> — (0.47**)	19.5 <sup>b</sup> [2.13**] —	14.6 <sup>c</sup> [1.51*] (0.71*)	3.5 <sup>A</sup> — (0.59)	5.7 <sup>A</sup> [1.69] —	4.4 <sup>A</sup> [1.30] (0.77)
Bathroom	5.3 <sup>a</sup> — (0.41**)	12.2 <sup>b</sup> [2.47**] —	13.4 <sup>b</sup> [2.74**] 1.11	8.6 <sup>A</sup> — (0.67*)	12.2 <sup>B</sup> [1.48*] —	5.6 <sup>A</sup> [0.63] (0.42*)
Playground or recess	30.0 <sup>a</sup> — (6.53**)	6.2 <sup>b</sup> [0.15**] —	10.2 <sup>c</sup> [0.26**] (1.73*)	— — (61.30**)	1.7 <sup>B</sup> [0.02**] —	1.7 <sup>B</sup> [0.02**] (0.98)
<b>Perceived reason</b>						
Race	9.3 <sup>a</sup> — (0.49**)	17.4 <sup>b</sup> [2.04**] —	20.4 <sup>b</sup> [2.49**] (1.22)	8.3 <sup>A</sup> — (0.38**)	19.0 <sup>B</sup> [2.61**] —	20.6 <sup>B</sup> [2.87**] (1.10)
Look, talk, or dress	33.6 <sup>a</sup> — (0.70**)	41.8 <sup>b</sup> [1.42**] —	33.5 <sup>a</sup> [1.00] (0.70**)	66.3 <sup>A</sup> — (0.25**)	88.9 <sup>B</sup> [4.08**] —	79.4 <sup>C</sup> [1.96**] (0.48*)
Gender	10.9 <sup>a</sup> — (0.86)	12.3 <sup>a</sup> [1.14] —	11.0 <sup>a</sup> [1.01] (0.89)	8.9 <sup>A</sup> — (0.37**)	21.0 <sup>B</sup> [2.74**] —	19.4 <sup>B</sup> [2.48**] (0.91)
Family SES	9.5 <sup>a</sup> — (0.69**)	13.2 <sup>b</sup> [1.46**] —	14.4 <sup>b</sup> [1.61**] (1.11)	7.4 <sup>A</sup> — (0.37**)	17.9 <sup>B</sup> [2.74**] —	12.8 <sup>C</sup> [1.83*] (0.67*)

*Note.* ES = elementary school; MS = middle school; HS = high school; PE = physical education; SES = socioeconomic status. Students and staff could endorse multiple responses to each question. Superscripts signify within-group differences; lowercase letters indicate school level differences within students, and capital letters indicate school level differences within staff. Percentages sharing superscripts are not significantly different (at  $p < .05$ ). The ORs for the within-group contrasts are reported to indicate effect sizes. The ORs in brackets contrast MS and HS with ES as the base group, whereas ORs in parentheses contrast HS and ES with MS as the base group. In all analyses, standard errors were adjusted by clustering on school.

\*  $p < .05$ .

\*\*  $p < .001$ .

were asked what much of the bullying at their school was about, the staff's most commonly reported reason was consistent with the students' (look, talk, or dress). Like the students, MS staff were more likely than ES and HS staff to perceive appearance as a reason. Interestingly, MS and HS staff were more likely than ES staff to cite all four reasons for bullying.

**Form of victimization.** Across all school levels, the direct verbal forms of bullying tended to be the most commonly reported, followed by relational forms and then direct physical forms. More specifically, the four most frequently reported forms of bullying were name-calling, teasing, spreading rumors or lies, and intentionally leaving out (Table 4). MS students did not differ significantly from ES students with regard to these forms of bullying, but HS students were significantly less likely than ES and MS students to be bullied in these ways. MS students tended to be more likely than ES and HS students to report experiencing most of these forms of bullying, particularly the direct physical forms of bullying. Interestingly, the form of bullying least reported by students across all school levels was e-mailing or blogging, although MS and HS students were more likely than ES students to report cyberbullying. HS students were, however, significantly less likely than ES and MS to experience the other two forms of relational aggression (spreading rumors or lies and leaving out).

Staff most frequently reported witnessing direct verbal bullying, including name-calling and teasing, as well as the spreading of rumors or lies and leaving other students out. In addition, pushing and shoving was commonly reported among the staff, particularly on the MS level. Also similar to the trends for students, MS staff tended to be more likely than ES and HS staff to report seeing all of the forms of bullying surveyed (except cyberbullying and leaving out). In fact, staff rarely reported witnessing cyberbullying, but similar to the students, MS and HS staff were more likely than ES staff to report witnessing it. Taken together, the student and staff victimization data suggest a peak in bullying during MS.

**Student responses to bullying.** Whereas 21.3% of students reported telling school staff after having been bullied, 45.6% of staff indicated that a student had reported being bullied to them during the past month. Both MS (OR = 0.43,  $p < .001$ ) and HS students (OR = 0.29,  $p < .001$ ) were less likely than ES students to report being bullied to an adult at school; however, MS staff were just as likely as ES staff to have had a student report being bullied to them. HS staff were less likely than ES (OR = 0.21,  $p < .001$ ) and MS (OR = 0.17,  $p < .001$ ) staff to have had this happen. Upon reporting bullying to an adult at school, many MS (33.6%) and HS students (25.6%) perceived that the school staff member did nothing to follow up.

**Staff responses to bullying.** Staff were also asked how they would respond if they *witnessed* bullying and if a student *reported* bullying to them (see Table 5). Overall, very few staff members reported that they would "ignore it or do nothing" if they witnessed bullying. In fact, a large percentage of staff on all school levels reported that they would intervene with the bully and with the victim. Furthermore, for nearly all response options, MS staff were more likely than ES staff to report intervening by the identified method, except for talking with the bully's parents and talking with the victim's parents. In contrast, HS staff were less likely than ES staff to intervene by all methods identified, except for talking with an administrator. MS staff were more likely than HS staff to report they would intervene in all ways surveyed except to ignore it.

The pattern of findings was less clear when a student reported having been bullied to the staff member (Table 5). Compared to ES staff, MS staff were more likely to talk with an administrator and refer the situation to a guidance counselor or school psychologist, but were less likely to talk with the bully's parents. HS staff were less likely than ES and MS staff to intervene by nearly all response options surveyed, including talking with the bully, talking with the victim, talking with other staff, talking to the bully's parents, and referring the situation

**Table 4**  
**Student and Staff Perceptions About the Forms of Victimization**  
**Experienced by Students**

Perception	Students			Staff		
	ES % [OR] (OR)	MS % [OR] (OR)	HS % [OR] (OR)	ES % [OR] (OR)	MS % [OR] (OR)	HS % [OR] (OR)
<b>Direct verbal</b>						
Name-calling	40.8 <sup>a</sup> — (0.87)	44.2 <sup>a</sup> [1.15]	32.9 <sup>b</sup> [0.71**] (0.62**)	72.3 <sup>A</sup> — (0.41**)	86.4 <sup>B</sup> [2.42**]	63.3 <sup>C</sup> [0.66*] (0.27**)
Threats	21.1 <sup>a</sup> — (0.71**)	27.4 <sup>b</sup> [1.42**]	23.8 <sup>a,b</sup> [1.71] (0.83)	32.9 <sup>A</sup> — (0.34**)	59.4 <sup>B</sup> [2.98**]	24.4 <sup>A</sup> [0.66] (0.21**)
Teasing	42.9 <sup>a</sup> — (0.98)	43.3 <sup>a</sup> [1.02]	35.7 <sup>b</sup> [0.74*] (0.08*)	70.9 <sup>A</sup> — (0.36**)	87.2 <sup>B</sup> [2.80**]	67.2 <sup>A</sup> [0.84] (0.30**)
Sexual comments or gestures	— <sup>†</sup>	23.7 <sup>a</sup> —	23.5 <sup>a</sup> (0.99)	9.3 <sup>A</sup> — (0.15**)	39.8 <sup>B</sup> [6.47**]	26.7 <sup>C</sup> [3.56**] (0.55*)
<b>Direct physical</b>						
Push or shove	28.0 <sup>a</sup> — (0.81*)	32.4 <sup>b</sup> [1.24*]	23.6 <sup>a</sup> [0.79] (0.64*)	46.3 <sup>A</sup> — (0.42**)	67.1 <sup>B</sup> [2.36**]	33.3 <sup>C</sup> [0.58*] (0.25**)
Hit, slap, or kick	20.8 <sup>a</sup> — (0.64**)	29.2 <sup>b</sup> [1.57**]	21.7 <sup>a</sup> [1.06] (0.67*)	23.8 <sup>A</sup> — (0.32**)	49.2 <sup>B</sup> [3.09**]	19.4 <sup>A</sup> [0.77] (0.25**)
Steal your belongings	20.0 <sup>a</sup> — (0.67**)	27.3 <sup>b</sup> [1.50**]	21.7 <sup>a</sup> [1.11] (0.74*)	22.3 <sup>A</sup> — (0.34**)	46.0 <sup>B</sup> [2.98**]	29.4 <sup>A</sup> [1.46] (0.49*)
<b>Indirect or relational</b>						
E-mail or blogging	2.9 <sup>a</sup> — (0.27**)	9.9 <sup>b</sup> [3.67**]	10.9 <sup>b</sup> [4.07**] (1.11)	0.9 <sup>A</sup> — (0.13**)	6.3 <sup>B</sup> [7.45**]	8.9 <sup>B</sup> [10.91**] (1.46)
Spreading rumors or lies	36.6 <sup>a</sup> — (1.01)	36.3 <sup>a</sup> [0.99]	24.1 <sup>b</sup> [0.55**] (0.56**)	30.3 <sup>A</sup> — (0.29**)	60.2 <sup>B</sup> [3.49**]	34.4 <sup>A</sup> [1.21] (0.35**)
Leaving out	29.9 <sup>a</sup> — (1.07)	28.5 <sup>a</sup> [0.93]	24.3 <sup>b</sup> [0.75*] (0.81*)	50.7 <sup>A</sup> — (0.83)	55.4 <sup>A</sup> [1.21]	31.7 <sup>B</sup> [0.45**] (0.37**)

*Note.* ES = elementary school; MS = middle school; HS = high school. Students and staff could endorse multiple responses to each question. Superscripts signify within-group differences; lowercase letters indicate school level differences within students, and capital letters indicate school level differences within staff. Percentages sharing superscripts are not significantly different (at  $p < .05$ ). The ORs for the within-group contrasts are reported to indicate effect sizes. ORs in brackets contrast MS and HS with ES as the base group. ORs in parentheses contrast HS and ES with MS as the base group. In all analyses, standard errors were adjusted by clustering on school.

<sup>†</sup> Item not administered to ES students; therefore, the OR compared HS to MS students.

\*  $p < .05$ .

\*\*  $p < .001$ .

**Table 5**  
**Staff Responses to Witnessing Bullying and Upon Receiving a Student Report of Bullying**

Response	Witnessing Bullying			Student Report of Bullying		
	ES %	MS %	HS %	ES %	MS %	HS %
	[OR] (OR)	[OR] (OR)	[OR] (OR)	[OR] (OR)	[OR] (OR)	[OR] (OR)
Intervened with bully	73.8 <sup>a</sup> — (0.46**)	85.8 <sup>b</sup> [2.15**] —	60.6 <sup>c</sup> [0.55**] (0.25**)	67.0 <sup>A</sup> — (1.47**)	58.0 <sup>B</sup> [0.68**] —	28.3 <sup>C</sup> [0.19**] (0.29**)
Intervened with victim	68.3 <sup>a</sup> — (0.56**)	79.3 <sup>b</sup> [1.78**] —	52.2 <sup>c</sup> [0.51*] (0.29**)	65.0 <sup>A</sup> — (0.94)	66.5 <sup>A</sup> [1.07] —	36.7 <sup>B</sup> [0.31**] (0.29**)
Talked to other staff	50.8 <sup>a</sup> — (0.68*)	60.2 <sup>b</sup> [1.46*] —	28.9 <sup>c</sup> [0.39**] (0.27**)	45.6 <sup>A</sup> — (0.74)	53.1 <sup>A</sup> [1.36] —	21.1 <sup>B</sup> [0.32**] (0.24**)
Talked to administrator	37.2 <sup>a</sup> — (0.36**)	62.5 <sup>b</sup> [2.81**] —	27.2 <sup>a</sup> [0.63] 0.22**	38.2 <sup>A</sup> — (0.40**)	60.8 <sup>B</sup> [2.51**] —	30.0 <sup>A</sup> [0.69] (0.28**)
Referred to guidance counselor or school psychologist	42.0 <sup>a</sup> — (0.65*)	52.8 <sup>b</sup> [1.55*] —	18.3 <sup>c</sup> [0.31**] (0.20**)	38.2 <sup>A</sup> — (0.55**)	52.8 <sup>B</sup> [1.81**] —	23.3 <sup>C</sup> [0.49*] (0.27**)
Talked to bully's parents	24.2 <sup>a</sup> — (1.50*)	17.6 <sup>b</sup> [0.67*] —	9.4 <sup>c</sup> [0.33**] (0.49*)	24.2 <sup>A</sup> — (1.57*)	17.1 <sup>B</sup> [0.64*] —	10.6 <sup>C</sup> [0.36**] (0.57*)
Talked to victim's parents	18.5 <sup>a</sup> — (1.15)	16.5 <sup>a</sup> [0.87] —	8.3 <sup>b</sup> [0.40**] (0.46*)	20.8 <sup>A</sup> — (1.28)	17.1 <sup>A</sup> [0.78] —	13.9 <sup>A</sup> [0.61] (0.78)
Ignored it or did nothing	1.3 <sup>a</sup> — (0.31**)	4.0 <sup>b</sup> [3.19*] —	3.9 <sup>b</sup> [3.12*] (0.97)	0.2 <sup>A</sup> — (0.35)	0.6 <sup>A</sup> [2.89] —	0.0 — <sup>†</sup> — <sup>†</sup>

*Note.* ES = elementary school; MS = middle school; HS = high school. Staff members could endorse multiple responses to each question. Superscripts signify within-group differences; lowercase letters indicate school level differences within students, and capital letters indicate school level differences within staff. Percentages sharing superscripts are not significantly different (at  $p < .05$ ). The ORs for the within-group contrasts are reported to indicate effect sizes. ORs in brackets contrast MS and HS with ES as the base group. ORs in parentheses contrast HS and ES with MS as the base group. In all analyses, standard errors were adjusted by clustering on school.

<sup>†</sup> OR was not computed because no HS staff endorsed this item.

\*  $p < .05$ .

\*\*  $p < .001$ .

to a guidance counselor or school psychologist. Similar to the findings for witnessing bullying, very few staff members reported that they would do nothing if a student reported it to them.

### Prevention Efforts

**Student perception of prevention effectiveness.** The vast majority of students felt their school was *not* doing enough to prevent

bullying (67.3% MS; 60.0% HS), whereas most staff members believed their prevention efforts were adequate (81.7% ES; 52.8% MS; 65.0% HS). Compared to staff, students were less likely to think adults at their school were doing enough to prevent bullying (OR = 0.41,  $p < .001$ ) and were more likely to report having “seen adults in the school watching bullying and doing nothing” (51.7% MS and HS students; 18.1% all staff, OR = 2.51,  $p < .001$ ). In fact, most students reported believing school staff made the situation worse when they intervened (61.5% MS; 57.0% HS).

**Staff efficacy.** Fewer than 7% of all staff surveyed (4.8% ES; 9.7% MS; 10.0% HS) believed that things got worse when they tried to intervene in a bullying situation. In fact, over 86% of all staff surveyed (89.2% ES; 84.4% MS; 77.8% HS) endorsed the statement “I have effective strategies for handling a bullying situation,” thereby indicating their perceived efficacy for handling such situations. Compared to ES staff, both MS (OR = 2.11,  $p < .05$ ) and HS (OR = 2.19,  $p < .05$ ) staff were more likely to believe their attempts to intervene worsened the situation. Whereas over 97% of both ES and MS staff reported being “likely” or “very likely” to intervene in a bullying situation, approximately 91% of HS staff indicated they would do so, which was significantly lower than ES staff (OR = 0.24,  $p < .001$ ), but not MS staff. Staff members’ perceptions of their ability to handle a bullying situation were also examined in relation to their perceptions of bullying. Staff who believed they had effective strategies for handling a bullying situation were less likely to report that bullying was a moderate or serious problem at their school (OR = 0.44,  $p < .001$ ). Likewise, these staff were more likely to think the adults at their school were doing enough to prevent bullying (OR = 2.89,  $p < .001$ ), as well as to feel safe at the school (OR = 2.81,  $p < .001$ ) and that they belonged at the school (OR = 1.98,  $p < .001$ ). Furthermore, staff with greater efficacy for handling bullying were more likely to intervene if they saw bullying (OR = 6.89,  $p < .001$ ) and were less likely to report that they had made

a bullying situation worse when they had intervened in the past (OR = 0.28,  $p < .001$ ).

### Staff Members’ Attitudes and Prior Experience With Bullying

Approximately 13% of staff agreed that “bullying is a part of life that everyone has to go through.” Staff who agreed with this statement were more likely to report it was acceptable for students to respond aggressively to threat (OR = 3.70,  $p < .001$ ) and to believe they made bullying situations worse when they intervened (OR = 1.70,  $p < .05$ ). Furthermore, over 22% of staff reported having been bullied (as an adult) at the school by either another staff member (8.8%), a student’s parents (7.7%), or a student (6.3%). MS staff (34%) were more likely than both ES (17.3%, OR = 0.39,  $p < .001$ ) and HS staff (20.7%, OR = 0.47,  $p < .05$ ) to have been bullied at the school. Among staff who were bullied at school, MS staff were more likely than ES staff (OR = 4.19,  $p < .001$ ) to have been bullied by a student. Perceived ability to handle a bullying situation was negatively associated with having been bullied at the school (OR = 0.62,  $p < .05$ ).

Interestingly, more than 53% of staff members reported that they had been bullied as a child. MS staff were more likely than ES staff (OR = 1.33,  $p < .05$ ) to report having been bullied, whereas the likelihood for HS staff did not differ significantly from either ES or MS staff. Staff who reported being bullied as a child were more likely to think bullying was a “moderate” or “serious” problem at their school (OR = 1.43,  $p < .001$ ) and to report having been bullied at the school as an adult (OR = 1.77,  $p < .001$ ). However, experience with bullying as a child was not related to the staff members’ perceived ability to effectively handle a bullying situation, their belief that the schools’ prevention efforts were adequate, or their perception of having made a bullying situation worse. Furthermore, childhood experience with bullying was unrelated to feelings of safety or belonging at the school and to attitudes toward student retaliation. Childhood bullying experiences were associated with en-

dorsement of the statement “Bullying is a part of life that everyone has to go through” (OR = 2.66,  $p < .001$ ).

### Discussion

Although the assessment of bullying by both student and staff reports is often recommended (e.g., Leff, Power, & Goldstein, 2004; Olweus, 1993), it can be challenging to understand the discrepancies in their perceptions. The current study used data from a district-wide survey of students and staff to better understand the discrepancies and similarities in their attitudes toward bullying and perceptions of the school environment. As anticipated, there were several differences between students and staff perceptions of the issue of bullying. School staff, particularly at the ES level, grossly underestimated the prevalence of students frequently involved in bullying. Despite the staff members’ tendency to underestimate the prevalence of frequent victimization, roughly the same percentage of students and staff reported being concerned about bullying at their school.

### Attitudes and Perceptions

This study is one of the first to examine perceptions of bullies held by either students or school staff. Results showed that school staff were more likely than students to perceive bullies as both popular and feared, whereas students were more likely to perceive bullies as disliked. However, over 60% of MS and HS students also perceived bullies as popular. These findings contradict the widely held belief that bullies are outsiders. When it comes to students’ perceptions of bullies, some studies have indicated that younger children who bully are often rejected (Boulton & Smith, 1994) and perceived as unpopular by their peers. In contrast, adolescent aggressive behavior—in particular, relational aggression—has been linked with popularity among older adolescents, but not for younger adolescents (Rose, Swenson, & Waller, 2004). In addition to the child’s developmental stage, prior experience with bullying also appears to influence the perception of bullies. Compared to

uninvolved peers, students who had been bullied tend to view bullies as being more popular (Bradshaw et al., 2006; Houndoumadi & Pateraki, 2001). These findings highlight the importance of addressing social norms related to the perceived power and popularity of children who bully, particularly among MS and HS students. However, it is important not to ostracize or reject children who bully, as they are also at risk for developing educational and behavioral problems (Veenstra et al., 2005).

The vast majority of the participants reported feeling safe and that they belonged at their school, but the staff were more likely than the students to report feeling safe and that they belonged. Although the discrepancies in perceptions of safety and belonging are not surprising (likely because of power differential, experiences, and maturity), these findings provide further evidence that students and staff are perceiving the school differently. Rather than relying on just one group’s perspective, the perceptions of both students and staff should be assessed when evaluating the need for or impact of a prevention program.

With regard to attitudes toward retaliation, the vast majority of students indicated that they believed it was appropriate to resolve conflictual situations with force, particularly on the MS and HS levels. Although relatively few staff believed that aggression was an appropriate response to interpersonal threat, staff approval for aggressive retaliation was greater on the MS level, and even higher on the HS level. This is one of the first large-scale studies to examine attitudes toward retaliation among both students and staff. Given that prior research indicates that such attitudes are predictive of physically aggressive behavior (Bradshaw & Garbarino, 2004; Huesmann et al., 1992), social norms related to aggressive retaliation should be addressed through school-wide programs to prevent subsequent violent incidents. These findings suggest that school psychologists working in secondary schools should implement programs for students and provide professional development on prosocial strategies for resolving interpersonal conflict.

## Characteristics of Bullying

Students were most frequently bullied in the classroom, cafeteria, hallway (MS and HS students), and on the playground (ES students only). Although the high rates of bullying reported in the classroom may seem counterintuitive given the presumed high level of supervision in a classroom setting, students spend the majority of their time in a classroom and therefore have more opportunity to experience bullying there than in other locations. These findings suggest that more professional development should occur to increase teachers' and other classroom staff's awareness of the different forms of bullying that may be occurring in the classroom.

The data on forms of victimization indicated the direct verbal forms were the most commonly reported by students, followed by relational forms and then direct physical forms. Although prior research suggests that verbal and relational forms may be less apparent to teachers than physical forms (Boulton & Underwood, 1992; Leff et al., 1999), a large proportion of the staff in this sample reported having witnessed these forms of bullying. Furthermore, the most commonly reported forms of bullying experienced by students were also witnessed by a relatively large proportion of the staff. These findings on the rates of indirect and verbal forms of bullying witnessed by staff suggest that the adults in the school may have greater exposure to these forms of bullying than previously speculated (Olweus, 1993).

The form of bullying also tended to vary by school level, such that both MS students and staff were more likely to report experiencing the direct physical types of bullying than their counterparts on the ES and HS levels. These data echo previous research indicating that bullying is at its worst during the MS years (Nansel et al., 2001; Olweus, 1993). Some research has suggested that relational forms of bullying may supplant overt forms of aggression during the high school years (Underwood, 2003); however, these data suggest that both ES and MS students were more likely to experience both spreading rumors or lies and leaving out than did the HS students.

A different pattern emerged for cyberbullying, such that the older students tended to be at greater risk for experiencing cyberbullying, although the risk for experiencing other forms of bullying tended to decrease by HS. It is likely that older students have greater access to the Internet and other electronic media, and thus more opportunity for involvement in cyberbullying. Despite the increased concern about cyberbullying (Patchin & Hinduja, 2006), relatively few students (2.9% of ES to 10.9% of HS students) reported having been victimized through this method during the last month. However, very few staff reported having witnessed cyberbullying, which suggests that the majority of cyberbullying likely occurs off school grounds.

With regard to the perceived reasons for bullying, the pattern of findings was relatively consistent across students and staff. Most student and staff respondents indicated that the majority of the bullying was perceived to be associated with the students' presentation (i.e., look, talk, dress). Because the student and staff items were not exactly the same (the student question was "Within the last month, have you been bullied about," whereas staff were asked "Much of the bullying at my school is about"), the student and staff responses cannot be directly contrasted. However, this finding indicates that staff are well aware that this is the most common reason for bullying. There were also some interesting developmental trends, whereby race and socioeconomic status were more commonly cited as reasons for bullying among MS and HS students and staff than ES students and staff, respectively. MS and HS staff cited gender as a more common reason than ES staff; however, there were no developmental differences for this item among students. These findings suggest a need for additional research examining students' experiences with bullying as compared to harassment based on sex, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, and ethnicity.

## Staff Responses to Bullying

The results of the current study indicate that most students believed school staff made the situation worse when they intervened, which is

consistent with prior research (Rigby & Bagshaw, 2003; Rigby & Barnes, 2002). By contrast, relatively few staff believed they had negatively impacted the situation by intervening. In fact, the vast majority of staff believed they had effective strategies for handling bullying situations. Interestingly, more staff indicated that they would intervene with either the bully or the victim when they witnessed the bullying than when a student directly reported bullying to them. Because of the structure of the survey items, staff members' responses to two questions ("When you have seen bullying during the past month, how did you respond?" and "What did you do when the student[s] reported bullying?") could not be directly compared. Regardless, the pattern of responses to these items suggests that staff members are responding a bit differently in situations when they directly witness bullying than when bullying incidents are reported to them.

This trend may have emerged because it was much more common for staff to witness bullying (70.4%) than to have a student report it to them (45.6%). Alternatively, staff may be less likely to follow-up with those involved in a reported (or alleged) bullying situation, as opposed to when they directly witness an incident among students (the bully is "caught in the act"). Teachers' failure to act may also be attributable to school level factors (e.g., perceived lack of administrative support, lack of a school-wide policy regarding bullying, the culture of the school), which can lead to passive intervention strategies when dealing with bullying situations (Yoon, 2004). Moreover, this hesitation to intervene "after the fact" may contribute to students' perception that staff are not doing enough to prevent bullying and not responding appropriately when an incident is reported to them. On the other hand, very few staff members reported that they did nothing when a child reported bullying to them, whereas the students perceived this to be a fairly common occurrence. Although social desirability may have played a role in the staff members' response to the item, it is also likely that the staff responded to the bullying incident but did not communicate those activities to the student (Pepler et al., 1994). Staff mem-

bers should increase communication with students, particularly student victims, regarding their efforts to manage bullying situations. Additional research is needed to determine the most effective strategies for staff to communicate their efforts to students, without exacerbating the situation.

Not surprisingly, staff members' perceived efficacy for resolving a bullying situation was a strong predictor of their likelihood of intervening and doing so effectively (Nicolaides et al., 2002). These findings suggest that staff on all school levels should receive additional skill-focused training on how to intervene appropriately. School staff need to work collaboratively to develop policies and establish norms regarding bullying behavior so that staff feel supported when they intervene on behalf of a student or refer the incident to an administrator or school psychologist. These policy changes and other professional development activities will likely help staff develop greater efficacy for handling bullying situations effectively (Olweus, 1993).

This study is also one of the first to assess staff members' personal experiences with bullying, as both a child and adult victim of bullying, in relation to their attitudes and bullying prevention efforts. Over 22% of staff reported having been bullied as an adult at the school, with MS staff being the most likely to have been bullied. Other staff members were the most common perpetrators of the staff bullying, which is concerning given the results of a recent study linking workplace bullying with depressive symptoms in adults (Niedhammer, David, & Degioanni, 2006). These findings suggest that professional development should be provided to address staff members' own attitudes and experiences with bullying (as both a child and adult victim). Staff should also receive training on the policies and procedures for handling a situation in which they are threatened or bullied by students, parents, and other staff.

### **Developmental Trends**

As hypothesized, the results revealed several differences by school level, most of

which suggest that MS is a particularly challenging time for students and the staff who work with them. Although the percentage of MS students reporting frequent victimization did not differ significantly from that of ES students, MS students tended to be more likely than ES or HS students to experience most of the forms of bullying surveyed, particularly the direct physical forms. Furthermore, MS students felt less safe and less like they belonged than did ES students. Additional research is needed to better understand these developmental differences. MS staff also tended to experience more negative effects of bullying than other staff. Moreover, MS staff were the most concerned about the level of bullying within their schools and were the least likely to report feeling safe at school. These results suggest that MS staff need specialized training on how to best work with MS students and meet their unique needs.

### Limitations

It is important to note some potential limitations of the current study. The data were collected by the district through self-report measures, and thus social desirability may have influenced the responses, particularly those of the staff. Staff completed the survey independently, at either home or school, whereas students completed it in a group setting at school; this variation in administration procedures may have influenced their responses. The ES teachers were instructed to read the questions and response options aloud to the students to facilitate comprehension; although this likely increased the ES students' comprehension of the survey items, it did result in slightly different administration conditions for ES students than for other students. There may have been MS or HS students with limited reading abilities, which could have compromised their comprehension of the survey.

There continues to be considerable debate in the literature regarding the most appropriate way to define bullying and how to assess it (e.g., to include a definition of bullying or assess separate aggressive behaviors; Greif,

Furlong, & Morrison, 2003). The survey included a definition of bullying similar to the one used by Nansel et al. (2001) in their international study; however, it is unclear whether the students and staff consistently applied this definition when answering the individual questions. The definition of bullying used in the current study specified two of the three typical features of bullying (i.e., repeated, intentional, but not the power imbalance; Olweus, 1993). Although the power imbalance is an important feature of bullying, the notion of power is challenging to articulate to youth, particularly to younger children. In fact, Nansel and Overpeck (2003) have noted that "most measures of bullying probably fall short in fully delineating one or more of these elements" (p. 1135). There is limited research regarding the reliability and validity of anonymous self-report measures of bullying, particularly when collected via a Web-based survey. A recent study by Wang et al. (2005), however, found that adolescents reported higher and perhaps more valid rates of sensitive information on a Web-based survey than a written survey. Thus, the Web-based administration of the survey may have resulted in more accurate data regarding the participants' attitudes and experiences with bullying.

Given that the survey was developed to be used district-wide to provide prevalence estimates of bullying and information on a wide variety of school violence indicators to school administrators and district staff, it was critical that the assessment be relatively brief. Because it was not feasible to include multiple-item scales on the measure, single-item indicators (e.g., bullying, bystander, safety, belonging, and retaliation) from previously published measures were used. Although this precludes examination of the reliability of the variables, single-item indicators are commonly used in large-scale public health and epidemiologic research where there is a predilection for breadth over depth. Single items measuring latent constructs (e.g., safety and belonging) are often used when the item is assumed to best measure the construct and generate the least measurement error (Atkinson & Lennox, 2006).

Although the sample was diverse with regard to ethnicity and included data on over 16,000 participants from more than 100 schools, the sample was limited to one district and was not a random sampling of students in the district or nationally representative. The large sample size afforded sufficient power to detect differences between the ES, MS, and HS levels. However, it is unclear to what extent these findings will generalize to other students and staff. The study should be replicated in other school districts. Furthermore, fewer HS students and staff participated in the study than did MS or ES students and staff. The timing of the administration of the survey coincided with the state's HS standardized testing and thus these students were underrepresented in the data. Additional work is needed with a larger sample of HS youth to determine if these findings generalize. To ensure anonymity, detailed information regarding the staff members' role was not collected. It is likely, however, that staff with advanced training in school psychology and behavior management would view and handle bullying situations differently than staff with less training in these areas.

The slight wording differences between student and staff questions precluded direct comparisons for some variables (e.g., students were asked where they had personally been bullied, whereas staff were asked where they had witnessed bullying). As noted above, these data are cross-sectional, and thus the direction of the observed associations cannot be determined. Although the standard errors were statistically adjusted to account for the clustering of participants within schools, future analyses will use a multilevel approach to determine if certain school level factors (e.g., school size) account for some of the perceptual differences observed.

### **Conclusions and Implications for School Psychologists**

Taken together, the findings evinced both similarities and discrepancies between student and staff perceptions of bullying and peer victimization. Staff clearly underesti-

mated the prevalence of frequent bullying across all school levels, but were more cognizant about the most common locations and forms of bullying experienced by students. Collecting data on bullying from both students and staff at their school and sharing this information broadly may reduce these and other misperceptions regarding bullying and school violence (Bradshaw et al., 2006a, 2006b). Furthermore, staff members need increased opportunities for enhancing efficacy for handling bullying properly. These findings also highlight the need to address staff members' personal experiences with and attitudes toward bullying, as these experiences appear to play an important role in predicting their likelihood of intervening in bullying situations.

The data on the form of bullying suggest that it is important for staff to learn strategies for detecting the physical, verbal, and relational forms of bullying, particularly among MS students. Staff need to recognize that all forms of bullying have negative effects on the child's social-emotional functioning and the school environment. Given that a relatively large proportion of the staff reported having witnessed different forms of bullying, detection does not appear to be the sole cause for lack of effective responses. Rather, staff appear to need more training on effective intervention approaches that are developmentally appropriate and strategies for communicating their efforts with children across the different developmental levels. Enhancing staff members' perceived efficacy should increase their likelihood of intervening effectively.

School psychologists can also assist in educating and collaborating with teachers, parents, and students to create and implement an effective bullying prevention program. Before implementing antibullying programs, school psychologists should determine the level of engagement and interest from teachers and school staff to ensure program effectiveness. School psychologists can also aid in the dissemination of information regarding effective bullying intervention and prevention strategies and educate school personnel about the potentially

deleterious effects of peer victimization. By increasing awareness of the problem and providing training on skills for effectively handling a bullying situation, staff may be more likely to effectively intervene. School psychologists can be instrumental in educating parents about effective strategies for talking to their children about bullying and communicating their concerns to administrators, teachers, and other parents. In conclusion, this research helps bridge the gap between student and staff perceptions of bullying by informing strategies that can be implemented to prevent bullying and help children feel safe at school.

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