DIFFERENCES IN PERCEIVED SERIOUSNESS AND OUTCOME OF BULLYING
BEHAVIORS BASED ON SEX

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ABSTRACT

DIFFERENCES IN PERCEIVED SERIOUSNESS AND OUTCOME OF BULLYING

BEHAVIORS BASED ON SEX

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Previous research has demonstrated that bullying is a significant problem experienced by

students. Bullying can be categorized as direct or indirect. Direct bullying is overt and

may involve actions such as physical or verbal aggression; indirect bullying is covert and

may involve actions such as spreading rumors about others or socially excluding others

from group activities. This study examined differences in perceptions for different types

of bullying based on sex. Participants read scenarios that depicted different types of

bullying. After each scenario, participants responded to several questions that assessed

their perceptions of seriousness of the bullying in the scenario and the likely emotional

outcome for the victim in the scenario. Two 2 (male or female) x 2 (type of bullying)

mixed model ANOVAs were used to examine differences in perceptions of seriousness

and emotional outcome for the victim based on sex across type of bullying behavior.

Significant sex differences in ratings of perceived seriousness and emotional outcome for

bullying behaviors were found. Males rated perceived seriousness and emotional

outcome lower than females regardless of type of bullying behavior. Results also

indicated a significant difference in perceived seriousness and emotional outcome of

direct versus indirect bullying behaviors. Participants, regardless of sex, perceived direct bullying as more serious and likely to have a more significant emotional outcome than indirect bullying. Exploratory analyses were also conducted to examine additional sex differences. The results of exploratory analyses and implications for future research will be discussed in the paper.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The United States Department of Education (1998) defines bullying as "intentional, repeated hurtful acts, words or other behaviors, such as name-calling, threatening and/or shunning committed by one or more children against another" (p.1). Bullying in school involves the presence of four key factors: harming a person directly or indirectly, an imbalance of power between the bully and the victim, occurrence at or around school, and repetition (Hazler, Miller, Carney, & Green, 2001). For children, harming a person directly or indirectly could involve behaviors such as pushing another child or starting mean rumors about another child. The imbalance of power suggests that the bully and victim do not share equal status physically, socially, or in terms of group support in a bullying situation (e.g., the bully has friends backing him or her up in a situation while the victim does not).

Bullying in schools is a topic that has recently received nationwide attention. After the infamous shooting at Columbine High School and subsequent acts of school violence, school officials have finally begun to look at bullying in schools as a serious problem. Investigation into the Columbine High School shooting revealed that the two students responsible for the shooting were frequent victims of harassment and bullying by other students (Payne & Gottfredson, 2004). The National Research Council and Institute of Medicine (2003) conducted a study to examine whether the perpetrators of subsequent acts of school violence were also victims of bullying. Surprisingly, perpetrators were not always victims of bullying, some were also bullies. Half of the perpetrators in the study were victims and half of the perpetrators were bullies. This

finding shows that there is a connection between school violence and victims as well as between school violence and bullies. This underscores the importance of learning more about the bullying experiences of students in school.

Bullying is one of the most prevalent problems that exist in our schools today, affecting as many as 3.2 million children each year (Cohn & Canter, 2003). Bullying is the most common form of violence in our society. Yet, it is one of the most ignored and underrated forms of violence. The Center for Health and Health Care in Schools (2004) found that many parents and teachers view bullying as part of growing up or as a rite of passage that children go through to build character. In addition, many teacher education programs do not include bullying prevention and intervention into the curricula. This organization asserts that a flippant reaction to bullying by our culture has led many educators to ignore bullying behaviors. They also agree that this acceptance of bullying only leads to an increase in bullying behaviors.

A study conducted jointly by the Bureau of Justice Statistics and National Center for Education Statistics found that 28% of students ages 12 through 18 reported being bullied (as cited in Dinkes, Cataldi, Kena, & Baum, 2006). Of those students, 24% reported that the bullying incident resulted in injury. A similar study of 15, 000 students in grades 6 through 10 found that 29.9% report moderate to frequent involvement in bullying behaviors (Nansel et al., 2001). Of those students, 13% self-report as being bullies, 10.6% as being victims, and 6.3% as being bully-victims. (A bully-victim is a student who bullies others and is also a victim of bullying.) A study of over 200 middle and high school students found that 81.13% of males and 72.16% of females report that they have been bullied at some point during their school years (Hoover, Oliver, & Hazler,

1992). Given the discrepancy in levels of reporting for bullying incidents (from 28% to

81% depending on the study), it is important to understand how bullying is defined by

researchers and students. The next sections in this paper will describe the types of

bullying and discuss the effects that bullying has on psychological well-being.

Types of Bullying

There are two forms of bullying: direct and indirect. Direct bullying consists of

overt verbal and/or physical aggression, such as hitting or name-calling (Hunter & Boyle,

2002). This form of bullying is what is usually thought of when bullying is mentioned.

Images of a child taking another child's lunch money or belongings may come to mind.

This form also includes threatening another student with aggression, (e.g., "I'm going to

beat you up after school"). Direct bullying is also referred to in research literature as

overt bullying or aggression. Indirect bullying includes nonphysical aggression, such as

social exclusion, rumors, or gossiping (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). This type of bullying

involves the manipulation of peer relationships or friendships in order to harm others.

For example, one child may convince other children to exclude a child from their group

of friends by ignoring him or her. This form also includes actions such as starting rumors

about another child. Indirect bullying is also referred to in the literature as social

aggression, relational bullying, or covert bullying.

Within these two forms of bullying, there are four types of aggression that can be

expressed. Direct bullying can be expressed through proactive or reactive aggression

(Connor, Steingard, Anderson, & Melloni, 2003). Proactive aggression is intentional,

goal directed behavior that is not provoked, such as threatening to beat someone up unless they do your homework. Reactive aggression is a defensive reaction to feeling threatened or provoked, such as punching someone who bumped into you in the lunch line. These two types of aggression are also sometimes referred to as physical or verbal aggression. Indirect bullying can be expressed through relational or reputational aggression. Relational aggression involves using a personal relationship to harm someone, such as convincing a group of friends to ignore one of the friends (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). Reputational aggression is an attempt to harm someone's social reputation, such as spreading rumors (Batsche & Porter, 2006).

Although four types of bullying have been identified, research typically focuses on the broad categories of direct and indirect. One reason stems from the difficulty differentiating between the types when creating examples. For example, a child who tells her friends to ignore a victim may also initiate a rumor among her group of friends as a means of convincing them to socially exclude the victim. This would mean that the individual is engaging in both relational and reputational bullying. Differentiation between proactive and reactive is clearer; however the element of intention adds some complication. If research is looking at student perceptions of bullying, the intention or reason for the bullying incident must be included to differentiate between proactive and reactive. When this is done, an added level of complexity is introduced into the study since the student reading the scenario now has access to the cognitions of the bully for reactive but not necessarily for any of the other types. For these reasons, this project will focus primarily on the broader categories of direct and indirect bullying.

Psychological Effects of Bullying

Internalizing Issues

Bullying has a profound effect on the psychological well-being of victims. Bullying can impact anxiety and depression levels, suicidality, self-esteem, and self-concept. A study conducted with junior high school students found that a significant number of victims self-report psychiatric problems, such as depression and other internalizing symptoms (Ivarsson, Broberg, Arvidsson, & Gillberg, 2005). In their study, they also found that 39% of the victims of bullying reported suicidal ideation. In addition, results showed that females report more symptoms than males, especially depressive and other internalizing symptoms. Additional research has shown that being a victim of bullying is associated with anxiety, depression, and psychosomatic symptoms among both males and females (Kaltiala-Heino, Rimpela, Rantanen, & Rimpela, 2000). The study also found that bullying is associated with eating disorders among females.

Research conducted on children between the ages of 12 and 15 examined the prevalence of symptoms of depression, specifically suicidal ideation among victims and non-victims of bullying (Mills, Guerin, Lynch, Daly, & Fitzpatrick, 2004). The study found that victims of bullying are more likely to experience suicidal ideation and to report attempting suicide. Victims also are more likely to have been referred for psychiatric services. Research has indicated that both victims and bullies have a significantly greater number of depressive thoughts than students not involved in bullying (Roland, 2002). In addition, victims have a significantly greater number of depressive

thoughts when compared to bullies. Other research has also shown that bully-victims are at risk for psychological problems (Ivarsson et al., 2005). This study on junior high school students found that adolescents who are bully-victims self-report the greatest number of psychological symptoms, such as depression, aggression, and suicidality.

Involvement in either direct or indirect bullying is a risk factor for internalizing symptoms for victims (Crick, Ostrov, & Werner, 2006). The risk is particularly great when victims experience a combination of direct and indirect bullying. For bullies, research indicates that engaging in direct bullying behaviors does not predict significant poor mental health (Baldry, 2004a). However, engaging in indirect bullying behaviors significantly predicts anxiety, depression, and withdrawal for bullies.

The psychological effects of indirect bullying are more difficult to identity because of the covert nature of this type of bullying (Crick, Bigbee, & Howes, 1996). This study suggested that victims of indirect bullying tend to exhibit higher levels of depression, loneliness, peer rejection, and anxiety. This study also found that being a victim of indirect bullying predicts future problems with social adjustment.

The more frequently a victim is bullied, the greater the psychological effects are for the victim and bully. Research on high school students showed that both victims of frequent bullying and students who frequently bully others are at greater risk for depression, suicidal ideation, and suicide attempts than students who are not involved in bullying (Klomek, Marrocco, Kleinman, Schonfeld, & Gould, 2007). Similarly, research conducted on 13- and 14-year-old females found that repeated victimization is associated with self-reports of symptoms of depression and anxiety (Bond, Carlin, Thomas, Rubin, & Patton, 2001).

Rather than retaliate against their bullies, most victims do not tell others about their suffering. Students who keep their experiences to themselves are more likely to experience internalizing symptoms, such as depression, social anxiety, negative self-concept, and social withdrawal (Hawker & Boulton, 2000).

Self-Concept

Bullying behaviors also impact self-esteem and self-concept. In a study of children age 8 through 18, it was found that victims report lower self-esteem than children who are not bullied (O'Moore & Kirkham, 2001). They also found that the more frequent the bullying, the lower the self-esteem of the victim. In addition, results indicate that females' self-concept tends to be more affected by indirect bullying than males' self-concept.

Research conducted to examine the impact of bullying on the health and self-concept of bullies, victims, and bully-victims found that of these three groups, bully-victims have the lowest self-concept, followed by victims, then bullies (Houbre, Tarquinio, Thuillier, & Hergott, 2006). All three groups have lower self-concept than students who were not involved in bullying at any level. This study also found that bullying is associated with psychosomatic symptoms, such as cognitive difficulties, sleeping disorders, and digestive disorders. This same study also found that victims of bullying exhibit higher levels of post-traumatic stress than the other groups, especially when the victimization is frequent.

Research suggests that bullying has an impact not only on global self-concept but also on specific domains of self-concept. Research has examined the relationship between bullying behaviors and six different aspects of self-concept: academic, physical, behavioral, emotional, social, and family related (Salmivalli, 1998). This study using adolescent participants showed that bullies tend to have high social and physical self-concept, but their perception of themselves was low on the remaining self-concept domains. Adolescents who identify themselves as victims of bullying score low on all aspects of self-concept, obtaining the lowest scores on social and physical self-concept.

Externalizing Problems

Research on experiences of victims clearly demonstrates difficulty with internalizing problems as a result of bullying (e.g., Ivarsson et. al, 2005; Kaltiala-Heino et. al, 2000). However, there are also instances in which victims demonstrate externalizing problems, such as carrying out acts of retaliation. For example, research has found that victims of bullying are more likely than other students to bring weapons to school for protection against bullies (Carney & Merrell, 2001).

Research conducted on over 5,000 elementary school students found that bully-victims report the highest number of incidents of externalizing behavior problems (Kumpulainen et al., 1998). Externalizing behaviors in this study were defined as fighting, disobeying, lying, being irritable, having temper tantrums, and stealing. Results were consistent with a study of junior high school students (Ivarsson et al., 2005). When bully-victims were compared to victim only and bully only groups, bully-victims

exhibited significantly more externalizing behaviors, such as delinquency and aggression. However, research also indicates that victims and bullies, in addition to bully-victims, exhibit a significant amount of aggressive externalizing behaviors (Marini, Dane, Bosacki, & Ylc-Cura, 2006).

Research has studied the relationship between proactive and reactive aggression and future externalizing problems of adolescent males (Vitaro, Gendreau, Tremblay, & Oligny, 1998). Participants were rated on proactive and reactive aggression by their teachers when they were 12 years old, and then assessed for externalizing problems in mid-adolescence. Results showed that proactive, not reactive, aggression predicted delinquency and disruptive behaviors, such as oppositional and conduct disorders.

Popularity

Many people assume that bullies are loners who do not have many friends, but research has shown that is not always the case. A study of adolescents in tenth grade found that a significant number of bullies were perceived by their peers as being popular (Prinstein & Cillessen, 2003). However, peers rated the bullies as having low likeability. Research indicates that many bullying behaviors are exhibited by socially competent, high-status children (Rodkin, Farmer, Pearl, & Van Acker, 2000). These children use bullying to maintain status in their peer group.

In contrast to previously discussed research, a study of ninth grade adolescents showed that bullying behaviors were positively correlated with social rejection for both males and females (Samivalli, Kaukiainen, & Lagerspetz, 2000). Males who were

labeled as aggressive were found to be rejected by both males and females. Females who were labeled as aggressive were found to be rejected by females, but accepted by males. When examining different types of aggression, this study found that direct aggression was associated with social rejection. Interestingly, indirect aggression was associated with social acceptance, especially among male participants.

Victims of bullying are more likely to have few friends and be rated as unpopular by their peers (Pellegrini & Long, 2002). This study found that having a social network of supportive friends and being popular decreases the likelihood that a child will be bullied. Bullies are less likely to victimize students who are popular and have a network of friends for fear of retaliation. The researchers speculate that bullies prefer to victimize students who are socially isolated.

Long-Term Effects of Bullying

Victims of bullying may continue to experience the effects of bullying as adults. Carney and Merrel (2001) found that former victims of bullying have low self-esteem, high stress levels, depression, and other psychological problems as adults (Carney & Merrel, 2001). A similar study that investigated the relationship between adult reports of being a victim of bullying as a child and their reports of being diagnosed with social phobia, obsessive compulsive disorder and panic disorder found that the greatest percentage of participants were diagnosed with social phobia, followed by obsessive compulsive disorder and panic disorder (McCabe, Antony, Summerfeldt, Liss, & Swinson, 2003). They also found that having a history of being a victim of bullying is

significantly related to an earlier age of diagnosis for all three anxiety disorders, as well

as a self-reported greater number of problems as a child. In addition, 60% of former

childhood bullies have at least one criminal conviction, with as many as 40% having

three or more convictions as an adult (Olweus, 1993).

Bullies and victims of bullying experience psychological difficulties as a result of

bullying experiences. Bullies and victims exhibit internalizing and externalizing

problems, as well as lowered self-concept and social difficulties. In addition, bullies and

victims may also experience long-term effects of bullying as adults. The next section

will review the research literature on bullying in terms of sex differences.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Bullying is a serious problem in schools that affects a significant number of students every year. The psychological effects of bullying can be devastating for children. Both victims and bullies experience internalizing problems, such as anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation and externalizing problems, such as fighting or disobedience (Baldry, 2004a; Bond et al., 2001; Carney & Merrell, 2001; Crick et al., 1996; Crick et al., 2006; Hawker & Boulton, 2000; Ivarsson et al., 2005; Kaltiala-Heino et al., 2000; Klomek et al., 2007; Kumpulainen et al., 1998; Marini et al., 2006; Mills et al., 2004; Roland, 2002; Vitaro et al., 1998). In addition, being involved in bullying also has a negative impact on self-esteem and self-concept (Houbre et al., 2006; O'Moore & Kirkham, 2001; Salmivalli, 1998). Bullying impacts students socially. Many bullies are perceived by peers as popular, while victims are more likely to be perceived as unpopular (Pellegrini & Long, 2002; Prinstein & Cillessen, 2003; Rodkin et al., 2000; Salmivalli et al., 2000). Victims of bullying and bullies may also experience long term effects from bullying, such as anxiety disorders or delinquency (Carney & Merrel, 2001; McCabe et al., 2003; Olweus, 1993). This next section will discuss research on bullying in terms of sex differences. A special emphasis will be on student perceptions of bullying based on sex, as this is an area that has been focused on less in previous research.

Sex Differences

Many studies have been conducted that explore sex differences for direct and indirect bullying behaviors. Research has focused on differences in how males and females define bullying, how frequently males and females engage in bullying behavior, how frequently males and females are victims of bullying, and how males and females perceive bullying. Although sex differences in these areas are widely researched, findings have been inconclusive. In this section, the major research findings on sex in these areas will be discussed for both direct and indirect bullying.

Sex Differences in Definitions of Bullying

Boulton, Trueman, & Flemington (2002) examined the behaviors that children consider to be bullying and compared results across sex. Participants were 600 children ages 11 to 15. They completed a self-report questionnaire that featured different types of peer interactions. Participants were asked to indicate which behaviors they considered bullying. There were no significant sex differences, with the exception that more males than females believed that "forcing people to do things they don't want to do" is bullying (p. 357). About 80% of the children agreed that direct bullying behaviors, such as hitting and pushing, threatening people, and forcing people to do things that they do not want to do are considered bullying. For indirect bullying behaviors, only 20% of children considered leaving people out to be bullying, while more than half agreed that telling nasty stories about other people was bullying.

In a study that examined student definitions of bullying in school, researchers found that there are several characteristics that students consider essential to defining bullying (Guerin & Hennessy, 2002). A semi-structured interview was used with the 166 participants, ages 10 through 13, to assess behaviors that children considered bullying. Although no sex differences were found, results indicated that repetition, intention, and lack of provocation are not essential features of children's definitions of bullying. One child reported that "Even if it happens once it is still bullying" (p. 256). Forty-seven percent of participants felt that reacting to provocation was not bullying. One child reported "I would say you were just sticking up for yourself" (p. 256). This study also found that 40.4% of the participants thought that the effect of bullying on the victim was more important to assess than the bully's intention.

Sex Differences in Bullying Behaviors

A study that examined the characteristics of bullies and victims in middle school found significant sex differences (Ma, 2002). Participants included 6,883 students in the sixth grade from 148 schools and 6,868 students in the eighth grade from 92 schools. The researcher used previously collected data from the New Brunswick School Climate Studies project. Results indicated that males are more likely than females to bully others.

Research has also examined sex differences across types of aggression. (Although some research uses the term aggression and not bullying, the definition of aggression in these studies is consistent with the definition of bullying discussed previously.) Research that assessed developmental trends for direct and indirect

aggression across sex and age had significant findings (Bjorkqvist, Lagerspetz, & Kaukiainen, 1992). Peer nominations and self-ratings were used to measure the frequency and type of aggression that participants engaged in. Participants in this study were from three different age cohorts. There were 45 females and 40 males in the 8-year-old cohort and 63 females and 64 males in the 15-year-old cohort. Data for the 11-year-old cohort was obtained from a study previously conducted by the researchers. The article did not indicate how many participants were included in this cohort. Researchers found that males tend to engage in direct aggression more frequently than females, while females in the two older age cohorts engaged in indirect aggression more frequently than males.

Results from research on different types of aggression in children produced similar results (Salmivalli et al., 2000). Participants included 209 students, ages 15 and 16. A questionnaire, the *Direct Indirect Aggression Scale*, was given to participants to identify students who fit descriptions of direct and indirect aggression. Results indicated that males use more direct aggression, while females use more indirect aggression.

Similar results were found in a study that examined frequency of relational aggression and overt aggression (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). Participants included 491 students in grades 3 through 6. Peer nomination forms were used to assess frequency and type of aggression. An example of a relational aggression item was, "tells friends that they will stop liking them unless friends do what they say" (p.4). An example of an overt aggression item was, "hits, pushes others" (p.4). Researchers found that males tend to display more overtly aggressive behaviors, while females display more relationally aggressive behaviors.

Contrary to previously cited studies, another study has indicated that there are not significant sex differences for indirect aggression (Tapper & Boulton, 2004). Sex differences were measured for 74 participants in grades 3 and 6. Frequency of physical, verbal, and indirect aggression was measured using self-ratings, peer ratings, and observations with hidden video cameras. Researchers found that there were no significant sex differences for verbal or indirect aggression. Results from observations indicated that males were more physically aggressive than females, but significant differences for physical aggression were not found in peer and self report data. However, researchers recognized that a limitation of this study was the small sample size.

A previously cited study that examined the impact of indirect and direct bullying on mental health of victims and bullies also examined the prevalence of these types of bullying (Baldry, 2004a). Participants included 661 middle school students, ages 11 through 15. Participants were given a *Victimization and Bullying Scale* to assess frequency and impact of direct and indirect bullying behaviors. Results indicated that males are more likely to engage in direct bullying compared to females. However, results did not indicate any significant sex differences for indirect bullying, except for the finding that males reported spreading rumors more often than females.

Research has also indicated that there are no sex differences across several types of aggression, including indirect and physical aggression (Coyne, Archer, & Esla, 2006). This study was conducted with 216 male and 191 female participants, ages 11 through 15. The frequency of different types of aggression was assessed with the *Indirect/Social/Relational Aggression Scale*. Researchers found that there were no self-reported sex differences in the amount or type of aggression used by the participants.

However, females specifically reported using more gossiping, which is indirect bullying, than males.

A study that examined the relationship between friendship groups and bullying found significant differences for indirect and direct aggression for males (Green, Richardson, & Lago, 1996). The study included 148 undergraduate participants, 52 males and 96 females. Participants were given an aggression measure that assessed how often they engage in indirect and direct aggression and a network density measure to assess how many friends the participants had and closeness of the friendships. Results indicated that males with a large group of close friends reported fewer incidents of direct aggression compared to males with small, loosely knit groups of friends. On the other hand, males with a large, close knit group of friends reported more indirect aggression than males with a small group of friends that are not very close. Direct and indirect aggression by females was not related to the size or closeness of friendship groups.

Studies have also examined sex differences in direct aggression based on the two types (proactive and reactive). Many studies on proactive and reactive aggression have been conducted with males only (e.g. Hubbard, Dodge, Cillessen, Coie, & Schwartz, 2001; Raine et al., 2006; Smithmyer, Hubbard, & Simons, 2000; Vitaro et al., 1998). In addition, the few studies that have examined sex differences have found contradictory results. For example, a study of 1,723 children in grades 5 through 10 found that males displayed more proactive aggression than females, while females displayed more reactive aggression (Little, Jones, Henrich, & Hawley, 2003). On the other hand, a study that examined 323 clinically referred adolescents found no sex differences for proactive and

reactive aggression (Conner et al., 2003). However, these results may not generalize to populations other than adolescents who have serious emotional disturbances.

Overall, research has shown that males engage in bullying behaviors more often than females (Ma, 2002). However, research on sex differences for different types of bullying behaviors has produced some variation in results. The most consistent finding is that males engage in direct bullying behaviors more often than females (Bjorkqvist et al., 1992; Salmivalli et al., 2000; Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Baldry, 2004a). Only one study cited indicated no sex difference between males and females for direct bullying (Coyne et al., 2006). Research on engagement in indirect bullying behaviors has been less consistent. Studies have found that females engage in indirect bullying more than males (Bjorkqvist et al., 1992; Salmivalli et al., 2000; Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). However, other studies report that there are no sex differences for engagement in indirect bullying behaviors (Tapper & Boulton, 2004; Baldry, 2004a; Coyne et al., 2006).

Sex Differences in Victim Experiences

Sex differences in victim experiences as a result of bullying have been less of a focus for researchers. The research that has been conducted has produced varied results. Previously discussed research indicates that males were more likely to be victims of both direct and indirect bullying than females (Ma, 2002). In addition, Baldry (2004a) found that males were more likely to be victims of direct bullying. However, the study also found that there were no sex differences for indirect bullying of victims.

A study on the prevalence of bullying in rural elementary schools produced significant sex differences (Stockdale, Hangaduambo, Duys, Larson, & Sarvela, 2002). Participants included 739 students from grades 4 through 6. Participants completed a survey that assessed the prevalence of physical and verbal bullying. Researchers found that males reported being the victim of physical bullying more frequently than females. However, no sex differences were found for verbal bullying.

Sex Differences in Perceptions of Bullying Experiences

In a cross-national study that examined student attitudes to bullying in school, researchers found significant sex differences (Menesini et al., 1997). The study included 1,379 participants from Italy, ages 11 through 14, and 6,758 participants from England, ages 11 through 16. The participants were administered self-report questionnaires to assess attitudes towards bullying behaviors. Researchers found that the majority of children have empathy for victims, with females showing the most empathy. Females also reported being more upset by bullying than males.

Swearer and Cary (2003) focused on perceptions of bullying and attitudes toward bullying for middle school students. Students were given a survey to evaluate their experience with bullying and their perception of bullying in sixth, seventh, and eighth grade. The survey used open-ended questions to examine why bullies bully other students. Several responses revealed that bullies were bullying others in response to their own internal feelings. For example, one bully reported that "bullying releases my stress" (p. 75). Bullies also responded that they bully to "fit in" or to prove something to others,

such as strength (p. 75). Many bullies also bully as a means of retaliation against others who make fun of them or talk about them behind their backs. No sex differences were found in regards to perceptions of bullying for bullies, victims, bully-victims, or students who were not involved in bullying.

Baldry (2004b) also examined student attitudes towards bullying, but included attitudes towards victimization as well. This study required participants to watch a video of a bullying episode, and then report their judgments of the bully and the victim (Baldry, 2004b). There were 117 middle school participants, ages 11 and 12. The bullying video featured one of the following episodes: a girl bullied by a group of girls, a girl bullied by one girl, a boy bullied by a group of boys, and a boy bullied by one boy. Participants were randomly assigned to episodes. The results showed that the majority of students did not blame the victim for what happened to them and tended to have positive attitudes towards the victim. However, some sex differences for blaming the victim did emerge. Females tended to blame male victims more than female victims, while males tended to blame female victims more than male victims. Males tended to blame the victim more when he or she was bullied by a group than when he or she was bullied alone, while females blamed the victim more when he or she was bullied alone. Results also indicated that male victims were blamed more when bullied by a single bully, while female victims were blamed more when bullied by a group of bullies. This research was limited by the use of same sex bullying episodes; therefore, generalizations for attitudes towards bullying in mixed sex interactions cannot be made.

An additional study investigating attitudes and feelings towards bullying and bullies indicated several significant differences, including sex differences (Houndoumadi,

& Pateraki, 2001). Participants were 1,312 students in grades 3 through 6. Self-report measures were used to assess student attitudes towards bullying behaviors. Researchers found that the majority of children surveyed reported that bullying "bothers them," although this view was expressed more often by victims than by bullies (p. 21). Fifteen percent of bullies felt "nothing special" when they witness bullying (p. 21). Victims tended to rate witnessing bullying as "very unpleasant" (p. 21). When questioned about their feelings after a bullying incident, 31% of bullies reported "they deserved it," while 38.9% reported "I felt pity" (p. 22). Results also indicated that more males than females reported that they considered bullies to be "cool" and understood why some children bully (p. 22). In addition, males reported more frequently than females that victims deserve to be bullied.

A study that examined ratings of overt and relational aggression in children found significant sex differences (Crick & Werner, 1998). Participants were 1,166 children in third through sixth grade at 12 elementary schools. Participants were given peer nomination measures to determine which children were overtly aggressive, relationally aggressive, non-overtly aggressive, and non-relationally aggressive. Participants were then presented with a measure that required participants to evaluate instrumental and relational conflict situations. Instrumental conflict situations were similar to direct bullying behaviors, such as having someone purposefully destroy a school project or cut in front of you in line. Relational conflict situations were similar to indirect bullying behaviors, such as spreading a rumor about someone or excluding someone from a group activity. Responses to relational and instrumental conflict situations for students revealed significant sex differences in attitudes towards bullying. Males rated overt aggression

more positively, while females rated relational aggression more positively. Results also indicated that males evaluated overtly aggressive responses to instrumental and relational conflicts more positively than females. On the other hand, females evaluated relationally aggressive responses to relational, not instrumental, conflict more positively than males.

Murray-Close, Crick, and Galotti (2006) found sex differences for moral judgments concerning different types of aggression. This study examined elementary school student's moral reasoning about different types of aggression. Participants were 639 fourth and fifth graders from diverse ethnic backgrounds. Moral reasoning was assessed with a questionnaire completed by the participants. The questionnaire contained scenarios that featured physically aggressive and relationally aggressive behaviors. Participants rated how wrong they thought the behavior was and how often they thought this type of behavior would hurt the victim on a 5 point Likert scale. Results indicated that students consider physical aggression to be more harmful for the victim than relational aggression. Females considered physical and relational aggression to be more wrong than males. In addition, females considered relational aggression to be more harmful for victims than males. One limitation of this study was that it focused only on elementary school students. Moral judgment for older students may be significantly different.

Research conducted to determine whether children view relational aggression as angry and harmful found significant sex differences (Crick et al., 1996). Two separate studies were conducted to evaluate children's views of relational aggression. Study 1 included 459 participants in grades 3 through 6. Children responded to open-ended questions to assess whether children believe relationally aggressive behaviors were

normative and associated with anger. Results indicated that females cited relationally

aggressive behaviors as the most common angry behaviors for girls' interactions. On the

other hand, males cited physically aggressive behaviors as the most common angry

behaviors for boys' interactions. Study 2 featured 162 new participants in grades 3

through 5. Students identified by peers as being either physically or relationally

aggressive were interviewed with open-ended questions to assess whether students

perceive relational aggression to involve harmful intent. Results indicated that relational

aggression and verbal insults were the behaviors most frequently considered harmful by

females, while physical aggression and verbal insults were the behaviors most frequently

considered harmful by males.

Previously discussed research on the frequency of different types of aggression

also examined perceived harmfulness of each type of aggression (Coyne et al., 2006).

Results indicated that females perceived indirect aggression and verbal aggression as

being more harmful to the victim than males. There were no sex differences in perceived

harmfulness for physical aggression.

Research has examined student perceptions of the degree of hurtfulness for

different types of aggression (Galen & Underwood, 1997). The study included 234

participants in the fourth, seventh, and tenth grades. The majority of these students were

from White, lower income families. Participants read 12 different social interaction

vignettes that featured either social aggression or physical aggression. Participants were

asked to rate how hurtful they believe the incident would be if it happened to them.

Results indicated that children perceived physical aggression as more hurtful than social

aggression. Females rated both types of aggression as more hurtful than males. In

addition, females rated social aggression as more hurtful, while males rated physical aggression as more hurtful. However, these results may be limited in terms of generalization because of lack of diversity in the sample.

Research that examined victim response to bullying for students in middle school found significant sex differences in victim response to bullying (Salmivalli, Karhunen, & Lagerspetz, 1996). Participants included 537 students, ages 12 and 13, from 11 middle schools. Researchers used peer nomination measures to identify victims and evaluate victim's response to bullying situations. Three distinct types of victim's response to bullying were found: counter-aggressive, helpless, and nonchalant. Females tended to respond to bullying in helpless and nonchalant ways, while male victims reacted to bullying in counter-aggressive or nonchalant ways. Students were also asked to rate which responses make bullying start or continue and which responses make bullying stop. Helpless and counter-aggressive responses by female victims were perceived as making bullying start or continue, while counter-aggressive responses by male victims were perceived as making bullying start or continue. For female victims, the absence of helplessness was perceived to make bullying stop. For male victims, nonchalance and the absence of counter-aggression was perceived to make bullying stop.

A study of over 6,000 students examined the emotional reactions of self-declared victims and bullies (Borg, 1998). Participants were students in primary and secondary schools from Malta, a small Mediterranean island nation. Results showed that victims experience feelings of anger, self-pity, and vengefulness, while bullies experience regret or indifference. Female victims were more likely than male victims to feel self-pity,

while males were more likely than females to feel vengefulness. For bullies, more female than male bullies felt sorry.

Research on sex differences in direct and indirect bullying has produced varying results. Several studies show that males are more likely to engage in and be the victim of direct bullying, while females are more likely to engage in and be the victim of indirect bullying (Bjorkqvist et al., 1992; Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Salmivalli et al., 2000). However, some studies also indicate that there are no sex differences for indirect bullying behaviors (Baldry, 2004a; Coyne, Archer, & Esla, 2006; Tapper & Boulton, 2004).

Research on sex differences in perceptions of bullying has also produced varied results. Studies have shown that males perceive direct bullying as more harmful, while females perceive indirect bullying as more harmful (Crick et al., 1996; Galen & Underwood, 1997). On the other hand, there is also research that suggests that males and females perceive direct bullying to be more harmful than indirect bullying (Coyne et al., 2006; Murray-Close et al., 2006). The following section will summarize research on direct and indirect bullying behaviors and sex, and present hypotheses for the proposed study.

CHAPTER THREE: STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Research on bullying has focused considerable attention on the actual prevalence of bullying in the schools. Many studies have examined sex differences for overall bullying behaviors and the two different types of bullying, direct and indirect (e.g., Baldry, 2004a; Bjorkqvist et al., 1992; Conner et al., 2003; Coyne et al., 2006; Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Galen & Underwood, 1997; Green et al., 1996; Hoover et al., 1992; Little et al., 2003; Ma, 2002; Nansel et al., 2001; Salmivalli et al., 2000; Stockdale et al., 2002; Tapper & Boulton, 2004). There also has been a focus on the psychological problems associated with being a victim, a bully and a bully-victim (e.g., Baldry, 2004a; Bond et al., 2001; Carney & Merrell, 2001; Crick et al., 1996; Crick et al., 2006; Hawker & Boulton, 2000; Houbre et al., 2006; Ivarsson et al., 2005; Kaltiala-Heino et al., 2000; Klomek et al., 2007; Kumpulainen et al., 1998; Marini et al., 2006; McCabe et al., 2003; Mills et al., 2004; Olweus, 1994; O'Moore & Kirkham, 2001; Roland, 2002; Salmivalli, 1998; Vitaro et al., 1998). However, there has not been as much research in the area of student perceptions of direct and indirect bullying.

Previous research on perceptions of bullying behaviors based on sex has produced contradictory results. Some research indicates that males perceive direct bullying to be more harmful, while females perceive indirect bullying as more harmful (Crick et al., 1996; Galen & Underwood, 1997). However, research also suggests that there are no sex differences for perceived harmfulness of direct bullying (Coyne et al., 2006; Murray-Close et al., 2006). The purpose of this study is to add to the knowledge base on bullying by examining how students perceive different types of bullying in terms of how serious

they think the bullying is and what they perceive the emotional outcome of the bullying to be. Emotional outcome will be measured by how hurtful the incident is perceived to be for the victim. Comparisons will be made across sex (male and female) and type of bullying (direct and indirect).

The following hypotheses were tested in my study:

Hypothesis 1: Previous research has suggested that males and females differ in how they perceive the seriousness of bullying (Crick, Bigbee, & Howes, 1996; Crick & Werner, 1998; Coyne, 2006; Galen & Underwood, 1997; Murray-Close & Crick, 2006). The first hypothesis is that males and females will differ in their ratings of how serious bullying behavior is based on the type of bullying (indirect or direct). It is hypothesized that females will rate indirect bullying as more serious than males. It is expected that there will be no differences in the ratings of seriousness of direct bullying between males and females. Thus, in ANOVAs and in follow-up tests, there should be an interaction between sex of participant and type of bullying.

Hypothesis 2: Previous research has suggested that males and females differ in how they rate the emotional outcome of bullying for victims (Baldry, 2004a; Borg, 1998; Houndoumadi & Pateraki, 2001; Menesini et al., 1997; Salmivalli, Karhunen, & Lagerspetz, 1996). The second hypothesis is that males and females will differ in their ratings of how hurtful the bullying is likely to be for the victim based on the type of bullying (indirect or direct). Males will rate the emotional outcome for the victim of direct bullying as more hurtful than females. Females will rate the emotional outcome for the victim of indirect bullying as more hurtful than males. Thus, in ANOVAs and in

follow-up tests, there should be an interaction between sex of participant and type of bullying.

CHAPTER FOUR: METHOD

Participants

Participants were 192 undergraduate and graduate psychology students from Western Carolina University. The sample included 79 (41.1%) males and 113 (58.9%) females. Sixty-two (32.3%) of the participants were freshmen, 38 (19.8%) were sophomores, 45 (23.4%) were juniors, 31 (16.1%) were seniors, and 16 (8.3%) were graduate students. The sample was 87% Caucasian (n=167), 8.9% African American (n=17), 0.5% Hispanic (n=1), 0.5% Asian (n=1) and 3.1% individuals of other ethnicities (n=6). The mean age for participants was 22.6 (SD=6.97). There was a statistically significant difference [t(190)=2.53, p=.01] in the mean age of participants based on sex. The mean age for males (M=24.22, SD=8.50) was significantly higher than the mean age for females (M=21.48, SD=5.43). This difference will be explored in greater detail in the discussion section of this paper.

Materials

A questionnaire developed by the researcher was used (See Appendix A). Participants read and responded to questions about eight scenarios. Four scenarios were examples of direct bullying and four scenarios were examples of indirect bullying. Participants were instructed to think back to when they were in elementary, middle, or high school as they completed the questionnaire. Participants were asked to read each scenario and then respond to the following questions: (1) How serious is _____ (name

of bully)'s behavior, (2) How likely do you think it is that _____ (name of bully)'s behavior will hurt _____ (name of victim)'s feelings, (3) How do you think _____ (name of victim) will respond to _____ (name of bully)'s behavior. Responses for questions 1 and 2 were coded on a 6-point scale, where 1 = not serious/unlikely and 6=very serious/very likely. Responses for question 3 were open-ended and then coded as passive response (e.g., victim does nothing), verbal response (victim asserts themselves verbally), physical response (victim asserts themselves physically), seeks help of adult (victim tells parent or teacher) or other response.

Procedure

This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board at Western Carolina University. Participants were administered the instrument in an online setting. Each participant completed the questionnaire (see Appendix A) and gave consent online (see Appendix B). The scenarios in the questionnaire were counterbalanced to minimize the likelihood of order effects. A Demographics Form was completed after the questionnaire (See Appendix C).

A focus group was conducted with graduate psychology students to assess the face validity of the scenarios in the questionnaire, the readability, and the use of gender neutral names. The participants rated each scenario to see if they identified the scenario as a good example of bullying, if the situation was one that is likely to occur in a typical school setting, if the scenario was easy to understand, and if the names of the targets and bullies in the study were gender neutral. Eight questionnaires were collected from the

focus group and mean scores were calculated for each scenario. The scenarios with the

highest mean scores were chosen and used in the questionnaires given to participants in

the main study.

Research Design

Two 2 (male or female) X 2 (type of bullying) mixed model ANOVAs were used

to examine differences in perceptions of seriousness and emotional outcomes for the

victim based on sex across type of bullying behavior. The independent variable for the

study was sex of participant. Type of bullying (indirect or direct) was a repeated

measures variable. The dependent variables were perceptions of seriousness and

perception of emotional outcomes.

Exploratory analysis using a Chi Square Test of Independence was completed to

examine the perceived course of action (Question 3) based on sex. Questions were coded

into the five response options discussed above (e.g., passive, verbal, physical, seeking

help of adult, and other response) and then statistical significance in ratings for direct and

indirect based on sex was examined.

CHAPTER FIVE: RESULTS

A 2 (male or female) X 2 (type of bullying) mixed model ANOVA was used to examine differences in perceptions of seriousness of direct and indirect bullying based on sex. The independent variable for the study was sex of participant. Type of bullying (indirect or direct) was a repeated measures variable. The dependent variable was perception of seriousness.

Results indicated a significant main effect for within-subjects for perceived seriousness of bullying, $F(1, 188)=360.70$, p<.001, $\eta^2 = .66$. The mean score for direct bullying ($M=21.21$) was significantly higher the mean score for indirect bullying ($M=17.37$). There was a significant main effect for between-subjects for perceived seriousness, $F(1,188)=5.49$, p<.05, $\eta^2 = .03$. The mean score for males ($M=18.79$) was significantly lower than the mean score for females ($M=19.80$). There was not a significant interaction between sex and type of bullying. The means and standard deviations of males and females across the types of bullying are presented in Table 1.

Table 1
Means and Standard Deviations for Perceived Seriousness by Sex and Type of Bullying

	Type of Bullying	
	Direct	Indirect
Sex	M(SD)	M(SD)
Male	20.58(2.84)	16.97(3.90)
Female	21.83(2.12)	17.77(3.91)

A 2 (male or female) X 2 (type of bullying) mixed model ANOVA was used to examine differences in perceived emotional outcome of direct and indirect bullying based on sex. The independent variable for the study was sex of participant. Type of bullying (indirect or direct) was a repeated measures variable. The dependent variable was perceived emotional outcome.

Results indicated a significant main effect for within-subjects on perceived emotional outcome, $F(1,187)=91.85$, p<.001, $\eta^2 = .33$. The mean score for direct bullying ($M=21.44$) was significantly higher than the mean score for indirect bullying ($M=19.40$). There was a significant main effect for between-subjects for perceived emotional outcome, $F(1, 187)=10.02$, p<.01, $\eta^2 = .05$. The mean score for males ($M=19.80$) was significantly lower than the mean score for females ($M=21.03$). There was not a significant interaction between sex and type of bullying on perceived emotional outcome. The means and standard deviations across the types of bullying are presented in Table 2.

Table 2
Means and Standard Deviations for Perceived Emotional Outcome of Bullying by Sex and Type of Bullying

	Type of Bullying	
	Direct	Indirect
Sex	M(SD)	M(SD)
Male	20.92(3.05)	18.68(3.83)
Female	21.95(2.00)	20.11 (3.13)

Exploratory Analyses

Perceived Course of Action for Victim

Exploratory analyses using a Chi Square Test of Independence procedure were completed to examine the perceived course of action for the victim in each question based on sex. For the questions related to direct types of bullying, only the question that stated "Casey calls Jessie 'fatso' every time Jessie walks into the classroom. Casey also makes rude comments about Jessie's weight at lunchtime so that everyone can hear" showed a statistically significant ($x^2 = 13.77$, $df = 4$, $p = .008$) relationship between sex and perceived course of action. The cross-tabulations for this significant relationship are presented below in Table 3.

Table 3
Cross-tabulations for Likely Course of Action across Males and Females for Direct Bullying

	Response					
	Passive	Verbal	Physical	Adult Help	Other	Total
Sex						
Male	35	18	3	2	21	79
Female	61	9	12	0	31	113
Total	96	27	15	2	52	192

For other questions related to direct bullying (see Appendix A), the relationship between sex and perceived course of action was not statistically significant at the .05 level. For question 1 ($\chi^2 = 7.59$, $df = 4$), question 2 ($\chi^2 = 3.91$, $df = 4$), and question 4 ($\chi^2 = 1.21$, $df = 4$), sex and perceived course of action were independent of each other.

For the questions related to indirect bullying, the question that stated, "Jordan writes a note about Logan and then passes it around the classroom. The note says that Logan kissed the least popular kid in school" was the only question that showed a statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 8.56$, $df = 3$, $p = .04$) relationship between sex and perceived course of action. The cross-tabulations for this significant relationship are presented below in Table 4.

Table 4
Cross-tabulations for Likely Course of Action across Males and Females for Indirect Bullying

	Response					
	Passive	Verbal	Physical	Adult Help	Other	Total
Sex						
Male	19	28	0	0	32	79
Female	24	58	3	0	28	113
Total	43	86	3	0	60	192

For the remaining questions related to indirect bullying (see Appendix A), the relationship between sex and perceived course of action was not statistically significant at the .05 level. For question 1 ($\chi^2 = 3.48$, $df = 3$), question 2 ($\chi^2 = 4.75$, $df = 4$), and

question 4 (χ^2 = 8.31, df = 4), sex and perceived course of action were independent of each other.

Occurrence of and Engagement in Bullying Behaviors

Additional exploratory analyses were conducted to examine participant engagement in bullying, knowledge of occurrence of bullying behaviors, and presence of bully prevention programs when they were in elementary, middle, and high school. Independent-samples t-tests were conducted to compare the occurrence of and involvement in bullying for males and females. The mean score for females (*M*=4.09, *SD*=1.43) was significantly higher than males (*M*=3.54, *SD*=1.40) in terms of reports of how often bullying occurred while the participant was in school [t(190)= -2.62, p=.01]. The mean score for females (*M*=2.71, *SD*=1.56) was significantly higher than males (*M*=1.96, *SD*=1.18) in terms of reports of how often the participant was bullied in school [t(189)= -3.77, p=<.01]. There was no significance between males (*M*=1.75, *SD*=1.03) and females (*M*=1.71, *SD*=1.07) in terms of reports of how often the participant bullied others in school [t(189)=.95, p=.79]. There was no significance between males (*M*=3.22, *SD*=1.45) and females (*M*=3.17, *SD*=1.43) in terms of reports of teachers or other adults getting involved when they saw bullying [t(190)=.22, p=.82]. Means and standard deviations for occurrence of and involvement in bullying are presented in Table 5.

Table 5
Means and Standard Deviations for Occurrence of and Involvement in Bullying

	Male	Female
How often bullying occurred	3.54(1.40)*	4.09(1.43)*
How often participant was bullied	1.96(1.18)*	2.71(1.56)*
How often participant bullied others	1.75(1.03)	1.71(1.07)
How often adults got involved	3.22(1.45)	3.17(1.43)

Note: *Indicates mean scores that were significantly different at the .05 level or higher.

Presence of Bullying Prevention

Participants were also asked if there were any type of bullying prevention programs or specific rules against bullying when they were in school. Of the 192 participants, 81.3% (*n=156*) reported that no bullying prevention program or specific rules were in place, while 18.8% (*n=36*) reported that there was a prevention program or specific rules against bullying at their school.

CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to add to the knowledge base on sex differences in bullying behaviors by examining student perceptions of different types of bullying in terms of how serious they believe the bullying is and their perception of the emotional outcome of the bullying for the victim. Previous research has found that males perceive direct bullying to be more harmful, while females perceive indirect bullying as more harmful (Crick et al., 1996; Galen & Underwood, 1997). On the other hand, there is also research that suggests that there are no sex differences for perceived harmfulness of direct bullying (Coyne et al., 2006; Murray-Close et al., 2006).

Hypothesis One

Previous research has suggested that males and females differ in how they perceive the seriousness of bullying (Crick & Werner, 1998; Crick, Bigbee, & Howes, 1996; Coyne, 2006; Galen & Underwood, 1997; Murray-Close & Crick, 2006). It was expected that males and females would differ in their ratings of how serious bullying behavior is based on the type of bullying (indirect or direct). It was expected that females would rate indirect bullying as more serious than males. There was not a significant interaction difference in males' and females' ratings of seriousness of bullying collapsed across bullying type. Males rated bullying behaviors as less serious than females regardless of whether the bullying type was direct or indirect. This may be due to the finding that males engage in bullying behaviors more often than females and have a

greater belief that bullying is a normal behavior than females (Ma, 2002). There was also a significant difference in perceived seriousness of direct versus indirect bullying behaviors regardless of sex. Direct bullying was rated as more serious than indirect bullying. This finding may indicate that overt bullying behaviors continue to be more easily identified than covert bullying behaviors. Research has shown that more children consider direct bullying behaviors to be bullying compared to indirect bullying behaviors (Boulton et al., 2002).

<div align="center">Hypothesis Two</div>

Previous research has suggested that males and females differ in how they rate the emotional outcome of bullying for victims (Baldry, 2004a; Borg, 1998; Houndoumadi & Pateraki, 2001; Menesini et al., 1997; Salmivalli, Karhunen, & Lagerspetz, 1996). It was expected that males and females would differ in their ratings of how hurtful the bullying is likely to be for the victim based on type of bullying (indirect or direct). It was expected that males would rate the emotional outcome for the victim of direct bullying as more hurtful than females, while females would rate the emotional outcome of indirect bullying as more hurtful than males. While there was not an interaction between sex of participant and type of bullying, this study found significant sex differences in ratings of perceived emotional outcome for bullying behaviors. Males rated the emotional outcome as less hurtful for the victim than females regardless of the type of bullying. There was also a significant difference in ratings of emotional outcome for the victim for direct versus indirect bullying. Direct bullying was rated as more hurtful for the victim than

indirect bullying. This is consistent with research that found that students consider direct bullying behaviors more harmful/hurtful than indirect bullying behaviors (Coyne et al., 2006; Murray-Close et al., 2006). Contrary to hypothesis, there were no sex differences in ratings of emotional outcome for indirect and direct bullying. Previous research findings of significant sex differences for direct and indirect bullying behaviors were not supported (Murray-Close, 2006; Crick et al., 1996; Coyne et al., 2006; Galen & Underwood, 1997).

Lack of significant sex differences for ratings of seriousness and emotional outcome based on type of bullying may be due to both sexes being equally likely to view bullying as a significant problem. An examination of mean scores for perceived seriousness and emotional outcome of direct bullying reveals relatively high scores, meaning that both males and females perceive direct bullying behaviors to be serious and hurtful for the victim. Although mean scores were slightly lower for perceived seriousness of indirect bullying, these scores were still high enough to indicate that both males and females perceive indirect bullying behaviors to be serious and hurtful for the victim as well.

When examining perceived course of action for the victim, significant sex differences were also found. However, only one scenario produced significant results for each type of bullying. For the direct bullying scenario, more males felt that the victim would have a verbal response to the bullying incident than females. Yet, both males and females chose a passive response as the most likely course of action. For the indirect bullying scenario, verbal response was chosen as the most likely course of action for both sexes. However, significantly more females felt that the victim would choose a verbal

response than males. Perhaps because some studies have found that males tend to engage in direct bullying behaviors more than females (Baldry, 2004a; Bjorkqvist et al., 1992; Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Salmivalli et al., 2000; Tapper & Boulton, 2004), they felt more strongly about the victim's reaction and thus indicated a stronger response option. Likewise, since females are found to engage in indirect bullying behaviors more often than males in some studies (Bjorkqvist et al., 1992; Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Salmivalli et al., 2000), they felt more strongly about the victim's reaction in the indirect bullying scenario. In addition, studies have found that males tend to find direct bullying behaviors more hurtful than females, while females tend to find indirect bullying behaviors more hurtful than males (Crick et al., 1996; Galen & Underwood, 1997; Menesini et al., 1997). This can also be an indication of why each sex feels differently in the different types of bullying situations.

Demographic data also produced interesting results. Females reported that bullying occurred more often when they were in school than males. Examination of mean scores showed more bullying occurrences for females than for males. Females also reported a higher rate of being the victim of bullying than males. This result is surprising given that one study found that males report being bullied more often than females (Hoover, et al., 1992). However, mean scores for both sexes in the present study were relatively low, indicating overall low rates of victimization. It is possible that differences in recall reflect some sex difference in retrieving information that is emotionally salient. This is an area that warrants further investigation.

There was no significant sex difference in reports of being a bully and mean scores indicated overall low rates of being a bully. This is also contrary to previous

research, which found that males bully others more than females (Ma, 2002). There were

also no significant sex difference in reports of teachers and adults getting involved when

they saw bullying occurring. An examination of mean scores shows average rates of

teachers and adults getting involved when they see bullying occurring. Results also

showed that participants reported a significant lack of bullying prevention programs and

specific rules against bullying while they were in school.

Limitations of the Study

One limitation of this study is the restricted ability to generalize results to

populations outside of the college setting. Participants were all college students at a

small public university in a rural setting. There is concern that since bullying behaviors

are more prevalent in the elementary and secondary school settings, results may not be

the best representation of the perception of bullying behavior in a younger population.

Although this study prompted participants to think back to elementary, middle, or high

school, it is likely that participants did not relate as well to the situations presented.

Thus, despite the retrospective nature of the study, perceptions of bullying were likely not

as accurate as they would be with participants still in school. In addition, demographic

data also showed that the majority of the participants were Caucasian, thus data may not

generalize to minority populations.

Another limitation is social desirability bias, which is the tendency for

participants to respond in a manner that will be viewed favorably by others. This may

account for the finding that both males and females rate direct bullying as more serious

and hurtful than indirect bullying. Behaviors considered direct bullying, such as physical harm, are generally considered less socially desirable than an indirect bullying behavior, such as social exclusion. Social desirability may also account for low ratings by participants in terms of how often they were bullies or victims of bullying. Participants may have not wanted to admit that they were the victim of bullying and especially not the perpetrator of bullying.

A significant age difference for males and females is also a limitation of this study and possibly impacted sex differences. Since males in this study were significantly older than females, they may have been less likely to relate to the bullying scenarios presented. Or they may have reached a level of emotional maturity that is higher than those of males that are slightly younger. In addition, the ability to recall information from elementary, middle, or high school is likely to be more difficult as a person ages.

Directions for Future Research

Future research should focus on the developmental level of the participant as it relates to bullying. An examination of the perception of bullying behaviors at the preadolescent, adolescent, and extended adolescent stages would provide more insight into how bullying behaviors progress and evolve as a child ages. In addition, preadolescent and adolescent populations are more likely to be experiencing bullying behaviors and will probably provide more accurate ratings of bullying behaviors. If research is focused on the extended adolescent stage, as it was in this study, it would be

important to focus on behaviors that are more developmentally appropriate and not retrospective in nature.

Another area of exploration for future research would be assessing emotional outcomes for victims using qualitative data. Instead of looking at how hurtful the bullying incident will be for the victim, it would be informative to investigate specific emotional outcomes that are likely given the different types of bullying. For example, does indirect bullying invoke feelings of anger or feelings of sadness?

An additional possibility for future research would be research that looks at the relationship between exposure to bullying program and ratings on seriousness and emotional outcome. It would be interesting to determine whether children exposed to bullying programs would perceive bullying behaviors as being more serious and hurtful than children not exposed to these programs. It would also be informational to gather more information on whether these prevention programs address both types of bullying (direct and indirect) and whether this has any impact on perceptions of seriousness and emotional outcome for the different types.

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APPENDIX A: SAMPLE QUESTIONNAIRE

Indirect Examples

1. A group of students suddenly decide that another student in their group (Bailey) will no longer be their friend. The group does not explain anything to Bailey, but they make it obvious that they do not want Bailey in their group. The group members start to ignore Bailey and say mean comments about Bailey to other people outside of the group.

2. Cameron starts a rumor about Taylor. Cameron tells other people that Taylor does not shower after gym class and that Taylor is dating someone two grades below them in school.

3. Jordan writes a note about Logan and then passes it around the classroom. The note says that Logan kissed the least popular kid in school.

4. A group of students are sitting at a table during break time. When Pat approaches their table to sit down, Riley puts books in the empty seat. The other students at the table start laughing and whispering to each other.

Direct Examples

1. During lunch at school, Jamie grabs Kris forcefully by the arm and says "Give me your money or I'll beat you up after school."

2. In the hallway between classes, Skylar pushes Dakota against the lockers, knocks Dakota's books to the ground, and walks away laughing. This happens almost every day between classes.

3. Casey calls Jesse "fatso" every time Jesse walks into the classroom. Casey also makes rude comments about Jesse's weight at lunchtime so that everyone can hear.

4. Avery comes from a poor family that cannot afford name brand clothes. Other students tease Avery by saying things such as, "Where did you get that shirt from, The Dollar Store?" or "My grandma has some shoes just like yours."

Note: Scenarios will be randomly ordered when questionnaires are administered. Ordering in this sample is designed to help demonstrate the difference in scenarios that will be used for each type. The questions described in the paper above will be inserted after each question with a 6-point scale.

APPENDIX B: PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

I consent to participate in the research entitled "Differences in Perceived Seriousness and Outcome of Bullying Behaviors Based on Sex," which is being conducted by Autumn Taylor, a graduate student in school psychology at Western Carolina University. Questions regarding this research may be directed to Mrs. Taylor, Dr. Candace Boan-Lenzo, School Psychology Program, at (828) 227-3451 or Dr. Meagan Karvonen, Institutional Review Board Chair, at (828) 227-3323.

I understand the following points:

- The reason for this research is to examine student perception of the seriousness and emotional outcome of bullying behaviors.

- My participation in this research is entirely voluntary. I may withdraw consent at any time without penalty. If I choose to withdraw consent, the results of the participation, to the extent that I may be identified, will be removed from the research records or destroyed.

- I will participate in the research by completing one questionnaire. The completion of this questionnaire will take approximately 15-20 minutes.

- There are no foreseen discomforts, stresses, or risks associated with participation in this research.

- The results of my participation in this research will be confidential. These results will not be released in any individually identifiable format without consent unless otherwise required by law.

- Any further questions about this research should be directed to the investigator at the phone number listed above.

- I understand that, should I wish to receive the final results of this study, I may contact Mrs. Taylor by email at atautry@catamount.wcu.edu

By clicking on the button below you indicate that you understand this information and give consent to participate in this research.

APPENDIX C: DEMOGRAPHICS FORM

Age: _____

Classification: Freshman   Sophomore   Junior   Senior

Race: Black   White   Hispanic   American Indian   Asian   Other

Sex: Male   Female

For the remaining questions, please think back to when you were in elementary, middle, or high school.

How often did bullying occur while you were in school?

1	2	3	4	5	6
Never					Very Often

Describe an instance in which someone you know was bullied at school.

How often were you bullied at school?

1	2	3	4	5	6
Never					Very Often

Describe an instance in which you were bullied at school.

How often did you bully others at school?

1	2	3	4	5	6
Never					Very Often

How often did teachers or other adults at school get involved when they saw bullying?

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |

Never   Very Often

Was there any type of bullying prevention program or specific rules against bullying at your school? Yes   No

If you answered yes, please describe the program or rules.