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# Responding to Bullying by Gender

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## Abstract

The present literature review examines how the construction of gender influences bullying among children and adolescents, as well as the possible effects of bullying on children, both as bullies and victims. An in-depth, theoretical analysis of gender stereotype and gender construction is presented, through a review of cognitive development theory, social learning theory, and cultivation theory. Gender construction leads children to adopt different behaviors and to interact with peers in various ways (Emilson et al., 2016; Fagot, 1994; Tobin et al., 2010).

Among children and adolescents, the two most prominent forms of bullying that result from gender construction are physical bullying and relational bullying, both of which can be observed in varying degrees based on the bully's and the victim's perceptions of gender stereotypes (Hazler, 1996). One of the most damaging forms of relational bullying among adolescents is sexual harassment. Although often seen as a legal issue, sexual harassment is a form of bullying that results from gender construction and perceptions that often begin at very young ages (Gruber & Fineran, 2016). After examining the responses to bullying given by peers, teachers, and counselors, this review will provide suggestions for addressing, preventing, and intervening in bullying situations within schools. Schools should look to address bullying from a young age by combating prevailing gender stereotypes and offering safe environments for students through support from teachers, families, and student-run groups.

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## **Responding to Bullying by Gender**

Bullying is a systematic abuse of power through repeatedly and deliberately harming others with the express purpose of intimidating or gaining control (Smith & Sharp, 1994). Bullying is also a cultural constant seen in almost every aspect of life, from a young child's experience watching cartoons to an adult's experience in the workplace. Bullying can be seen in some of the most popular children's shows, such as the well-known "Hey Arnold!" television show (Bartlett & Harrington, 1996), which aired on the Nickelodeon channel from 1996 to 2004. The show blatantly depicts bullying behavior as acceptable entertainment for children, as the character Helga is a constant tormenter to the protagonist, Arnold, in the form of name-calling and physical harm. Bullying is not limited to physical harm, as explained by Hazler (1996) and Roffey (2000); it also includes emotional harm. The character of Helga is presented to young children and adults as a perpetrator of multiple forms of bullying, including cross-gender, direct physical, direct verbal, and indirect bullying.

Bullying takes on many forms and is not limited to a specific action, time, or gender. Bullying involves an aggressor (i.e., bully) and a victim. Bullies tend toward dominant behavior and victims tend toward less dominant behavior. Yet this relationship is not always dyadic: As Hazler (1996) explains, bullying may occur between individuals or between groups. Eagly and Karau (2002) and Harper and Schoeman (2003) suggest that groups and individuals are most likely to be positively evaluated by those who perceive them when their characteristics conform to typical social roles. Moreover, the appropriateness of these social roles is often explained in terms of gender. Thus, individuals who do not act per accepted gender roles tend to be evaluated negatively in the form of bullying, exhibiting prejudice, or both.

This description by Eagly and Karau (2002), Harper and Schoeman (2003), and Hazler (1996), illustrates that bullying can be both cross-gender and same-gender—boys bully boys and girls, and girls bully boys and girls. It is important to note that although cross-gender bullying does occur across all four gender pairings, Melton et al. (1998) and Whitney and Smith (1993) note that boys tend to report

being bullied by other boys, and girls report being bullied by both girls and boys. However, reported trends may not equate to reality, as gender stereotyping may make it uncomfortable for boys to admit that they have been bullied by girls (Harper & Schoeman, 2003). Gruber and Fineran (2016) suggest that it is generally safe to assume that bullying victims who are male are bullied by other males, while females are bullied by other females.

As explained by Heald (1994), bullying is long-standing violence, physical or psychological. Direct physical bullying is the easiest form of bullying to identify, and since boys tend to use physical aggression—tripping, punching, pushing, etc.—more frequently than girls, teachers and counselors tend to identify boys as bullies more commonly than they identify girls (Fox, Jones, Stiff, & Sayers, 2014). Psychological forms of bullying include direct verbal and indirect (sometimes referred to as relational) bullying. Direct verbal bullying may include actions such as name-calling, teasing, and taunting. Indirect, or relational bullying, is done in a way that the bully or aggressor is not easily identifiable; these behaviors may include gossip, social exclusion, intimidation, or sexual harassment (Dukes, Stein, & Zane, 2009; Felix & McMahon, 2006; Fox et al., 2014; Gruber & Fineran, 2016; Reid, Monsen, & Rivers, 2004). Understanding the role of gender within bullying, as well as the different types of bullying, allows for more anti-bullying measures to be taken. To fully address the issue of bullying, a third aspect, victim response, must be considered. To understand victim response, it is important to know who the victim is, not only by name but also by gender and background.

Gender stereotypes directly influence the socialization of young children into gender roles (Elsesser & Lever, 2011). Males are socialized to be independent and strong, while females are socialized to be understanding, weak, and vulnerable (Gerber, 1991). According to Baumeister and Sommer (1997), “women prefer close relationships whereas men prefer large-group memberships” (p. 39), as the current American culture teaches women to foster close relationships while teaching men that close male friendships indicate homosexuality. In lieu of this, females are more prone to experience interdependent self-construal (i.e., they define themselves in terms of their relationships with others) as opposed to independent self-construal (defining

themselves based on internal attributes, values, and preferences) (Markus & Kitayama, 2010). According to Morales, Yubero, and Larraaga (2016) and Choi, Fuqua, and Newman (2008, 2009), it is easier for men to define themselves by their internal attributes, because the current American culture sees masculinity as an individual's behavior toward others. Because of this socialization, boys and girls experience bullying differently, both as aggressors and victims. As already mentioned, males most commonly use direct physical forms of bullying (Fox et al., 2016; Harris, Petrie, & Willoughby, 2002; Nansel, Overpeck, Haynie, Ruan, & Scheidt, 2003) but also use direct verbal forms. Females tend to use indirect and relational forms of bullying, such as gossiping, rumor spreading, and excluding (Nansel et al., 2003). These distinct, socialized gender differences play a critical role in the psychology of bullying, both for the bully and the victim.

As a worldwide phenomenon, bullying is a tool used within and between genders to gain and retain dominance (Morales et al., 2016). Given the multitude of known bullying practices, preventative and intervention techniques are necessary to curb the amount of cross-gender violence and same-gender violence that occurs between children. Gender differences should not be overlooked by school teachers and counselors as they respond to bullying because responding to a bullying victim without considering their identified gender may result in an ineffective outcome. By identifying both how gender is constructed and how different genders respond to bullying, school teachers and counselors can change how their prevention and intervention techniques address bullying within schools. This paper will examine the construction of gender and the different learning theories associated with gender. It will then examine the impact of gender on different forms of bullying and finish with a discussion of the importance of considering gender effects when addressing bullying.

### **Construction of Gender**

One of the defining characteristics of an individual is his or her gender. Gender is how infants and children first learn to identify themselves and distinguish between different people (Aydin & Corsaro, 2003). Most societies have only two gender classifications, male and female, which parallel the biological chromosomes of XY and

XX, respectively (Muehlenhard & Peterson, 2011). When a baby is born, society assigns a gender to the child based on the appearance of the genitals, creating an implied gender belief system wherein gender differences are assumed to correlate with biological sex. The differences between males and females are assumed to be innate, with the created gender differences and beliefs taken for granted (Emilson, Folkesson, & Lindberg, 2016). Within gender construction, two theories address the creation of a child's gender: cognitive development theory and social learning theory. This discussion will focus primarily on cognitive development and social learning theory, including whether gender identity and stereotypes originate from society or from within individuals. Cultivation theory, a subset of social learning theory, will also be discussed. These theories are interconnected, but each addresses a different aspect of the issue.

### **Cognitive Development Theory**

Cognitive development theory studies the offer of intrinsic returns for behavior consistent with gender stereotypes. The assumption is, as presented by Kohlberg (1966): "I am a boy, therefore I want to do boy things, therefore the opportunity to do boy things [and to gain approval for doing them] is rewarding" (as cited in Aydt & Corsaro, 2003, p. 1306). However, to further understand cognitive development theory and Kohlberg's reasoning for it, the definitions of gender identity and gender stereotypes need to be identified.

The traditional definition of gender identity involves a fundamental and motivating awareness through which an individual accepts and feels belonging to his or her gender (Tobin et al., 2010). Kohlberg was the first to suggest that a child's gender identity is a biologically based motivating factor in adopting same-sex gender stereotypes and rejecting cross-gender stereotypes (as cited in Tobin et al., 2010). In a similar vein, gender identity is also defined as conformation to gender stereotypes, rather than a feeling of gender acceptance (Kagan, 1964; Martin, 2000; Spence, 1985). Stereotypical gender differences are evident by age 3, as most children separate play based on clothing and gender roles (Tobin et al., 2010). For this discussion, gender identity is the link or relationship a child feels between themselves and a gender (e.g., "I am male") and gender stereotypes are the characteristics children assign to gender groups (e.g., boys play tag and girls play house). Even within the last 50 years,

gender identity and stereotypes have evolved and been assigned a multitude of definitions. Yet together with self-perception of gendered attributes, the concepts of gender identity and gender stereotypes (as Kohlberg defines them), are key to understanding how children cognitively process and develop gender.

In reviews of literature on gender development and bullying, Aydt and Corsaro (2003) and Tobin et al. (2010) discuss cognitive development theory as presented by Kohlberg. Kohlberg's cognitive developmental theory states that a child's gender progresses through three stages. The first stage is basic gender identity at age 2–3. In this stage, the focus is on the child knowing and understanding that they are either a boy or a girl. Maccoby (1999) explains that after 12 months, infants can tell the difference between men and women and, by age 3, can identify their gender and other peoples' gender. The second stage is gender stability at age 3–4. In this stage, the emphasis is on children understanding that gender does not change and is not a fluid characteristic. The final stage is gender constancy at age 5–7. This stage is different from gender stability, as it involves knowing that gender remains constant even though other external characteristics or qualities, such as height or weight, may change. Gender segregation may appear in children around the gender stability stage but becomes most noticeable around age 5 and through elementary school, as children experience gender stability and gender constancy.

### **Social Learning Theory**

Social learning theory purports that the gender and the sex of an individual are not the same. Sex is a biological designation based on the number and type of chromosomes within cells. Gender is a social construct based on ideas and stereotypes; it is a learned behavior and performance, which can be different from the sex of an individual (Aydt & Corsaro, 2003; Emilson et al., 2016; Mazzarella, 2015). According to Kyratzis (2001), theories that highlight gender differences as biologically based "do not give sufficient emphasis to the role of social practices, activities, and contextual factors" (p. 5). Social learning theory seeks to avoid biological biases and emphasizes the factors listed by Kyratzis when discussing gender differences (Aydt & Corsaro, 2003; Kyratzis, 2001). Social learning theory argues that gender is taught in accordance with societal expectations and assumes: "I want rewards, I am rewarded for doing boy-things, therefore I want

to be a boy” (Aydt & Corsaro, 2003, p. 1306). Just as young children are taught and socialized to behave in school and to play games and to interact with people, they are also taught how to portray and navigate gender.

### **Cultivation Theory**

Socialization comes from different factors in a child’s life, such as play between peers, teacher–child relationships, and media influences (Aydt & Corsaro, 2003; Emilson et al., 2016; Fagot, 1994; Hellman, 2010; Larson, 2001; Mazzarella, 2015; Tobin et al., 2010). As part of social learning theory, cultivation theory specifically examines how media influences and alters ideas about reality (Mazzarella, 2015). Cultivation research indicates a consistent connection between television and stereotypical gender views (Larson, 2001; Mazzarella, 2015). In one study of televised children’s programs, males were found most often to be aggressive, direct, and ingenious, while females were more relationship-orientated and needed more help to succeed (Mazzarella, 2015). Larson (2001) and Van Damme (2010) examined televised presentation of gender stereotypes and found that girls are more likely to show passiveness, emotion, and relational aggressiveness. Boys were shown to be more competitive and physically forceful. By studying gender as a social construction rather than just a biological or cognitive developmental structure, a clearer picture of gender construction and development emerges.

To understand gender construction among children, one must look at where much of a child’s time is spent: schools and daycares. Recent research shows that the teacher–child relationship is instinctively influenced by gender stereotypes (Emilson et al., 2016). The teacher–child relationship is especially potent with preschoolers, who rapidly acquire stereotypes to identify gender and guide behavior (Tobin et al., 2010). Hellman (2010) further demonstrated that societal norms and expectations are created and repeated in preschools. For preschool boys, rowdiness, dominance, and aggressiveness were expected by teachers; when girls exhibited the same traits, however, they were met with indifference or incomprehension because the teachers did not expect girls to act that way (Hellman, 2010). Similarly, Fagot (1994) found that boys and girls are rewarded differently for certain behaviors and that these rewards influence styles of gendered interaction. Gendered stereotypes are presented to children as they



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continually interact with teachers and caretakers, which lead children to adopt certain behaviors in order to receive rewards for their behavior.

According to Fagot (1994), there is no difference in the amount of assertive behaviors or communicative behaviors performed by infant boys and girls aged 12–14 months. However, as shown in Figure 1, there is a perceived difference by caretakers. A year-long longitudinal study conducted by Fagot (1994) on infant children illustrated how caretakers give differential responses based on gender. One year later, the continued influence of differential responses could be seen as boys acted more aggressively and girls were more prone to social interaction and speaking with caretakers.

Fagot's research demonstrates how children's gender identities and roles are influenced and constructed by adults beginning at an early age. As girls learn to respond through social interaction and verbal negotiation, boys learn to respond through aggressive behavior and dominating interactions. These differences lead children to create their own play groups based on gender and to increasingly delineate gender boundaries. Aydt and Corsaro's (2003) research provides an example of gender boundaries within children, where two preschool girls were observed chasing two male peers. As the boys were chased, the girls pulled up their shirts and asked the boys if they wanted to see their bras. Though preschool girls lack breasts and have no need for bras, in this situation they were already using gender stereotypes and knowledge of gender differences to tease the boys and emphasize the difference between them.

Knowledge of stereotypical gender differences can also be seen in the labels children give each other when engaging in cross-sex play. A girl who plays with boys is labeled a tomboy, while a boy who plays with girls is a sissy. These labels carry powerful social stigmas, and, as demonstrated by Aydt and Corsaro (2003) and Tobin et al. (2010), preschoolers rapidly identify gender stereotypes and become aware of the problem of being labeled. Through examination of cross-sex play at an early age, social learning theory posits that gender is a learned, performed, and socially constructed behavior.

Learned gender differences continue to develop throughout early childhood and into adolescence as children's knowledge of gender stereotypes expands with age. An increase in brain development

around ages 5-7 allows children to notice additional gender differences (beyond surface changes like clothing or hair length) in personality, perceived scholastic ability, social motives, and behavior as they experience gender constancy (Tobin et al., 2010). Those sex differences solidify into gender beliefs about masculinity and femininity and become embedded in interpersonal relationships, societal institutions, and society at large (Emilson et al., 2016; Tobin et al., 2010). Embedded gender beliefs are manifest in both words and actions toward other people, as individuals place themselves in positions of dominance and submissiveness according to environmental circumstances.

Cognitive developmental theory and social learning theory both present the idea that children learn gender from those who are similar. For many children, that similar individual is someone of the same sex and most often another child (Mazzarella, 2015). However, the difference between these theories lies in an individual knowing whether or not he or she is a specific gender and feeling intrinsic reward (or receiving reward) for being that gender.

### **Bullying by Gender**

Gender stereotypes play a large role in the formation of gender construction and identity in children. As children grow, there is a general transition in adolescence during which a child's direct and overt aggression becomes more indirect and covert due to the social norm that aggression is not an appropriate behavior (Lee, Liu, & Watson, 2016). Included in this general adolescent transition is a change wherein teenagers begin to rely more on peers' acknowledgment for social acceptance and popularity while simultaneously seeking independence from parents or guardians (Lee et al., 2016). This increased pressure to obtain a place in social hierarchy, acceptance, and superiority over other peers may lead to an increase in bullying, as risk-taking behaviors and delinquency significantly increase with the presence and influence of adolescent peers (Lee et al., 2016). As children seek social prominence and parental independence, the socialization of gender prompts children to look for acceptance and superiority through involvement in athletic, academic, and sexual domains and may lead to increased bullying during adolescence.

## **Bullying Among Children and Adolescents**

In 2004, the American Psychological Association (APA) concluded that bullying and victimization among children and youth occur due to a multitude of factors, including individual, familial, peer, school, and community influences (American Psychological Association, 2004). Research suggests that as these factors converge, bullying appears most frequently during childhood, peaks in early adolescence, and begins to decline during late adolescence (Nansel et al., 2001; Tsaousis, 2016). Despite the cognitive, relational, and behavioral changes that young adolescents experience due to puberty and changing schools, the behaviors of bullying and victimization stabilize after students enter secondary school environments (Sentse, Kretschmer, & Salmivalli, 2015). However, it is not just change that comes from new schools and puberty that fosters bullying. Early adolescence presents many social challenges to youth as they transition from childhood, including concerns over self-esteem and social image as the importance of peer acceptance and physical appearance among their social groups (Lee et al., 2016; Tsaousis, 2016). In other words, secondary schools provide an environment for bullying to happen due to the changes occurring in adolescents' lives.

As adolescents prioritize popularity and self-image, self-esteem begins to be based on how an individual believes society will interpret their actions. To achieve the desired higher self-esteem, adolescents may disregard what is socially accepted and what is not (such as not bullying; Swearer & Cary, 2003). A disregard for accepted behaviors allows bullying to become more prevalent within secondary schools and also allows for the possibility of greater social rewards among peers (Sentse et al., 2015). Accordingly, bullying can be seen to have a positive association with popularity for the bullies, while victims of bullying have a negative association with popularity and self-esteem (Sentse et al., 2015). Desire for a high self-esteem can thus be seen as a contributor to bullying.

Bullying perpetration (i.e., the act of bullying) and bullying victimization can both be accounted for by the presence of weak social ties. Weak social ties (e.g., little to no school or extracurricular involvement, little to no participation in social activities, or no friends) offer greater possibility of either being a bully in an attempt to increase social standing or of being a victim on the bottom of the social

hierarchy (Tsaousis, 2016). Lee et al. (2016) reported that children who are engaged in bullying behaviors for substantial amounts of time are likely to develop maladaptive relationship patterns, while Olweus (1992) and Tsaousis (2016) suggested that individuals with low self-esteem appeal to bullies, because their behavior indicates a lack of retaliation. One study by Sentse et al. (2015) indicated that boys who are bullied and rejected socially tend to display bullying behavior in return, because they are more likely to be socially maladjusted and already stereotypically gendered to be aggressive. This relationship between maladaptive behavior and the appeal of victims creates a loop wherein victims with low self-esteem are bullied but may bully others in return to raise social standing and avoid their own future victimization (Sentse et al., 2015). Bullying is a behavior intended to increase social ties, but victimization is a behavioral response that cannot increase social position.

Direct physical bullying often decreases with age in accordance with visible social norms, but indirect and relational bullying increase within secondary schools. This increase occurs between the ages of 11 and 15, during which children experience the previously discussed cognitive, relational, and behavioral changes (Tsaousis, 2016). In addition, secondary schools are larger than primary schools, with a greater diversity of students and fewer teachers per student, which leads to a greater incidence of indirect and relational bullying (Popp, Peguero, Day, & Kahle, 2014; Sentse et al., 2015). Students experience a wide variety of bullying, from direct verbal to relational peer victimization. Knowing how children develop and construct their gender will help counselors and teachers as they address bullying in all its forms in schools.

### **Relational vs. Physical Bullying**

The APA (2004) has stated that children are bullied differently based on their gender: Boys are more likely to be bullied physically, and girls are more likely to be bullied relationally. The difference in bullying perpetration is largely due to the socialization and construction of gender that occurs at a young age, with boys generally becoming more physically aggressive and girls becoming more relationally aggressive (Dukes et al., 2009; Popp et al., 2014; Tsaousis, 2016). Gender stereotypes dictate that the norm for girls is to not be physically aggressive. Therefore, as Dukes et al. (2009) and Sentse

Intuition: The BYU Undergraduate Journal of Psychology, Vol. 12 [2017], Iss. 2, Art. 2 et al. (2015) stated, a girl's sociality gives rise to relational bullying. A sense of interdependent self-construal, seen more among females, is such that girls will define themselves through the values and attributes assigned them by a peer group (Markus & Kitayama, 2010). In conjunction with gender stereotypes, multiple forms of bullying contribute to the rise of a variety of bullying methods across genders.

Bullying perpetrators are thus generally split along gendered lines, although these lines are fluid. Boys can and do use forms of relational bullying, most notably in the form of sexual harassment, and girls can use forms of physical bullying (Fox et al., 2014; Gruber & Fineran, 2016). Physical bullying involves hitting, pushing, and kicking a victim to raise one's social status while simultaneously lowering the victim's (Dukes et al., 2009; Sentse et al., 2015; Tsaousis, 2016). Results obtained by Dukes et al. (2009) showed that physical and relational bullying have nearly the same consequences for adolescents. Victims of both forms of bullying experience a sense of hopelessness, lowered academic performance and self-efficacy, lowered self-esteem, and withdrawal from social ties and activities (Dukes et al., 2009; Popp et al., 2014). Foels and Tomcho (2005) suggested that women are higher in relational interdependence and that interdependence is a greater factor in female self-esteem. So, although bullying negatively impacts both men and women, relational bullying may cause more psychological distress to women due to the importance they place on social groups. Fox et al. (2014) and Reid et al. (2004) suggested that this greater psychological distress may be because, within relational bullying, the threat or harm itself appears to come from all peers and not from a singular individual or the environment (e.g., school, sports team) and is not a singular instance. Combating direct physical bullying is of great importance because of the immediate threat it presents; however, combating relational bullying is just as important because of its linkage to sexual harassment and other violent behavior.

**Sexual harassment.** Sexual-harassment victimization is similar to bullying victimization, as it produces a negative effect on an individual's self-esteem and identity (Dukes et al., 2009; Gruber & Fineran, 2016; Popp et al., 2014). Researchers disagree as to what the differences are between bullying and sexual harassment, since not all cases of sexual harassment occur repeatedly and deliberately with the purpose of intimidating or gaining control (Gruber & Fineran, 2016).

Currently, sexual harassment is viewed as a legal issue, while bullying remains a social problem (Gruber & Fineran, 2016). Thus, while sexual harassment is not classified as a form of bullying, it presents many of the same victimization effects and should be addressed within schools.

As children reach adolescence and move into secondary schools, sexual harassment becomes more prevalent. It is not that other forms of bullying disappear, but adolescents seek more powerful ways to establish social dominance, and sexual harassment is very powerful. Driven by gendered stereotypes, sexual harassment can be used to demean both girls and boys (Felix & McMahon, 2006; Gruber & Fineran, 2016; Swearer, Turner, Givens, & Pollack, 2008). At a time when adolescents' bodies are changing and sexually maturing, sexual harassment carries more of a stigmatizing effect in victims. Consequently, both females and males report being victims of sexual harassment (Felix & McMahon, 2006; Gruber & Fineran, 2016). Seen this way, sexual harassment can be viewed as a type of relational bullying, the kind most often perpetrated by males (Gruber & Fineran, 2016; Swearer et al., 2008). Felix and McMahon (2006) argue that the most frequent perpetrators of sexual harassment in secondary schools are boys with a high social status, who make lewd gestures and comments about women while using homophobic slurs against other boys. As young adolescents solidify and reinforce gender identity and stereotypical beliefs, sexual harassment and gendered relational bullying function to construct new and unstable gender stereotypes and relationships, which impact self-identity and future patterns of interactions within society (Gruber & Fineran, 2016). Sexual harassment is a form of bullying in that bullying can be classified as deliberate and intentional as well as physical or psychological (Heald, 1994; Smith & Sharp, 1994). Although girls are most commonly perpetrators of relational bullying, boys are the most common perpetrators of sexual harassment. Within schools, students experience multiple forms of victimization, from direct physical bullying to relational bullying or sexual harassment. Comprehensive programs that account for these multiple forms of bullying, as well as for sexualized and gender-related victimization, should be used by counselors and teachers to protect and enable students.

## **Addressing Bullying**

Schools are beginning to recognize the negative effects of bullying and victimization on students' overall health and are working to solve the problem by implementing programs to prevent bullying or to intervene when bullying occurs (Felix & McMahon, 2006; Radliff, Wang, & Swearer, 2016). In 2004, the APA reported the development of many bullying prevention programs and strategies and indicated that bullying perpetration may be significantly reduced within schools through school-wide programs that aim to change behavioral norms. However, there are obstacles that remain in the paths of teachers, counselors, and administrators, including gender perspectives and the difficulty of identifying bullying forms.

### **Gender Perspectives**

As has been previously theorized, gender is a social construct. It is a learned behavior that is taught within the first year of an infant's life (Fagot, 1994). Teachers and caretakers instinctively respond with gendered stereotypes that imprint on boys and girls with or without intent, resulting in the inevitability of gender as a social construct (Emilson et al., 2016). To combat the resulting development of gender traits and stereotypes (e.g., aggression in boys), Morales et al. (2016) suggested that schools support non-traditional gender views. By doing so, educators can work to remove the social masculine traits which are commonly found in young bullying perpetrators. Accordingly, starting in elementary school and preschool, teachers should strive to develop a climate in classrooms that does not force gender (Swearer et al., 2008). Rather than students responding to teachers' assumptions, students should be free to develop their own genders, which counselors and teachers then respond to and work into school programs. Swearer et al. (2008) stated that a student's participation in bullying begins with the attitude and view they hold toward it. If a child learns that aggressive behavior successfully contributes to their wants or desires, or similarly, if a child learns at a young age to expect victimization, these experiences will reinforce participation or non-participation in bullying.

By educating preschool and elementary school teachers about their role in the process of gender construction, teachers can communicate the seriousness of bullying and the consequences of bullying

to students (Emilson et al., 2016; Swearer et al., 2008). Bullying prevention programs can help adolescents by educating teachers to not judge students based solely on sex characteristics or gender stereotypes. The APA (2004) and Morales et al. (2016) recommended viewing bullying and victimization through the lens of a gender perspective. To fully address bullying, social and gender stereotypes should be considered at all levels, including research, school intervention programs, and parental and teachers' influence.

### **Identification of Bullying**

Identifying the type of bullying that is occurring is crucial in helping victims of peer victimization. Without a knowledge of who a perpetrator is or even if bullying is occurring, victimized students cannot be helped, so it is important to recognize when and if bullying is taking place and in which way (Swearer et al., 2008). Fox et al. (2014) and Lee et al. (2016) reported that the specific context of a bullying incident will change a teacher's attitude toward it. Bullying is different from general aggression, as bullying assumes a specific relationship between dominant and weak individuals, is proactive, and aims to hurt others in a variety of ways (Gini & Pozzoli, 2006). Lee et al. (2016) explained that, as defined by the Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL), aggression includes more general violent tendencies, while bullying includes intentional or relational components between specific bully-victim pairings. The APA's resolution on bullying in 2004 detailed this difference, resolving that bullying is a form of peer victimization and is different from other forms of aggression among children. Not all highly aggressive people are bullies, and not all bullies have highly aggressive tendencies. In other words, if an individual teacher does not know or does not consider perpetrators to be bullying, they may not help victims. There is a difference between aggressive behavior and bullying, and teachers need to understand the difference to intervene and prevent bullying.

Physical bullying (i.e., kicking, pushing, and tripping) is the easiest to identify and prevent, but Radliff et al. (2016) and Swearer et al. (2008) explained that relational victimization has greater negative consequences for victims, including internalized feelings of hopelessness and a change to an external locus of control. However, there is a shortage of anti-bullying programs that address relational bullying, and anti-bullying policies that attempt to prevent direct



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physical bullying often force bullies to turn to more discreet relational bullying (Dukes et al., 2009). While physical bullying and victims of physical bullying are easily identifiable, teachers can learn to also recognize the effects of relational bullying. Victims of relational bullying can be identified as students who withdraw from friendships and social activity and possess lowered self-esteem, increased negative attitude about school, lower academic performance and self-efficacy, and disruptive behavior (Dukes et al., 2009; Popp et al., 2014). It is important for teachers and counselors to be able to recognize relational bullying as it is occurring so that victimization is not continued.

It is also important that teachers are aware of what relational bullying entails. Relational bullying is characterized by teasing, gossiping, social exclusion, intimidation, or sexual harassment (Dukes et al., 2009; Felix & McMahon, 2006; Fox et al., 2014; Gruber & Fineran, 2016; Reid et al., 2004). According to Felix and McMahon (2006), many secondary schools have acknowledged the negative impact that bullying has on students, but most of the anti-bullying programs that have been put in place do not address sexual harassment as a form of bullying. Opinions are difficult to change on this issue, as many educators tend to view sexual harassment among adolescents as simply flirting or failed romantic signaling between teenagers (Gruber & Fineran, 2016). Sexual harassment is illegal according to Title IX, and addressing sexual harassment in adolescence is not an attempt to criminalize flirting or romantic signaling. Educators should be sure to make the distinction between illegality and romantic attempts, as they should do with bullying and general aggressive behavior. The available literature on bullying makes it apparent that when teachers are knowledgeable and educated on the symptoms and effects of bullying, boys and girls will not suffer psychological effects or a change in externalized behavior (Dukes et al., 2009; Felix & McMahon, 2006; Gruber & Fineran, 2016). Given successful intervention and prevention, schools should become safe havens where students can feel comfortable and safe.

### **Conclusion**

Bullying is prevalent in American society in books, television, schools, and society at large. It can be seen on college campuses in fraternities and sororities and the tradition of hazing, in sports locker

rooms, and in work settings (e.g., sexual harassment, exclusion, gossiping). Bullying occurs when there is a power imbalance between dominant and submissive individuals or groups. It is the abuse of an individual by another person with the intent of using the power gained through the abuse to advance among peers and along a social hierarchy (Swearer & Cary, 2003). Victims of bullying develop problems with interpersonal relationships and psychological functions, especially when bullied at a young age (Morales et al., 2016). Although anti-bullying programs are promoted by the APA and schools are implementing prevention and intervention techniques, an understanding of the origins of bullying and its methods must be gained before such programs and techniques become successful (APA, 2004; Felix & McMahon, 2006).

Almost from birth, children are socialized into two genders and gender conformity, with boys generally labeled as physical and aggressive, while girls are labeled as social and gentle (Fagot, 1994; Hellman, 2010). These respective gender differences are taught and enforced through play interaction and through student–teacher dyads and lead to differing ways of interacting with peers (Emilson et al., 2016; Tobin et al., 2010). As children age, peer interaction becomes centered on social hierarchies and social dominance, which gives rise to behaviors that limit some individuals and promote others. A focus on social hierarchies promotes perceived popularity among adolescents as a valued aspect of a reputation, and being known as popular is a highly valued characteristic (Sentse et al., 2015). This perceived popularity is central in adolescents’ self-view of their peer rejection or peer acceptance. Peer acceptance generally leads to a sense of popularity, and children who are popular are known to use aggressive behavior to advance personal interests at the expense of those who are rejected by peers (Sentse et al., 2015). In other words, popular children are more prone to bullying to remain popular and further personal interests. However, not all bullying is acceptable in the eyes of students. Gender stereotypes that were imprinted on children at a young age may lead students to reject most forms of cross-gender bullying, due to the need for gender conformity (Fox et al., 2014). When cross-gender bullying does not occur, different methods of bullying become apparent between genders. To stay within gender stereotypes, boys typically rely on physical bullying, while

girls use more relational bullying (Dukes et al., 2009; Sentse et al., 2015). Different methods of bullying require different responses from teachers and counselors, as physical and relational bullying cause different effects.

The literature on bullying consistently agrees that schools are the best medium through which to intervene and prevent adolescent bullying behavior (Felix & McMahon, 2006; Radliff et al., 2016). Schools that focus on familial involvement, student discipline, and academic achievement should have the most success in combating bullying, as the promotion of a strong support system among all aspects of students' lives (e.g., family, peers, teams) would create a sense of group resistance (Dukes et al., 2009; Popp et al., 2014). Bullying tends to increase in schools when adolescents reject their peers and focus on a winner-take-all attitude where there are winners and losers (Sentse et al., 2015). However, research suggests that schools which focus on empathy and self-efficacy are most helpful in preventing bullying (Dukes et al., 2009). Schools that implement ideas such as these should note that policies without a program to enforce them do not see success (Dukes et al., 2009; Popp et al., 2014). Student involvement appears to be most helpful in targeting bullying; students are more likely to witness bullying and have primary knowledge of the situation, as large student bodies create more diverse peer groups for students and limit teachers' interactions with individual students (Sentse et al., 2015). Approaches that use student involvement allow physical bullying to be halted immediately and offer a support system for victims suffering from relational bullying. Victims of relational bullying can be identified through symptoms such as withdrawal from friendships, increased negative attitudes, and lower academic performance, to which student-group resistance can offer support at school as well as at home (Dukes et al., 2009; Popp et al., 2014). Anti-bullying programs should offer involvement and have time to gather students, rather than teachers, as groups to educate and intervene.

Anti-bullying programs should aim to target both bullies and victims in intervention techniques. Generally, most bullies have a cause for their aggressive behavior, but it should be remembered that not all bullies are highly aggressive. When anti-bullying programs target the psychological process of bullying, victims can be helped to navigate their negative experiences (e.g., feelings of

hopelessness, lowered self-esteem), and bullies can be helped to resolve their aggressive behaviors (Radliff et al., 2016). Moreover, if bullying is stopped early enough, then there is a recovery effect and less permanence of negative externalized behaviors (Lee et al., 2016). Victimization and bullying should not be thought of as things that occur at school but as things which are part of a school. In other words, victimization and bullying should not be looked at as just events that happen within a school building but as part of the students' environment.

An environment where victimization is tolerated indirectly creates the idea within victims that teachers and educators endorse bullying (Gruber & Fineran, 2016). Having a school environment that offers support from teachers and students in any instance of bullying is essential to preventing and ending bullying behavior. To deal with and counteract bullies, teachers should look to create positive experiences for every student, encourage growth and maturation through positive involvement in social settings, and highlight and praise examples of positive, socially accepted behavior.

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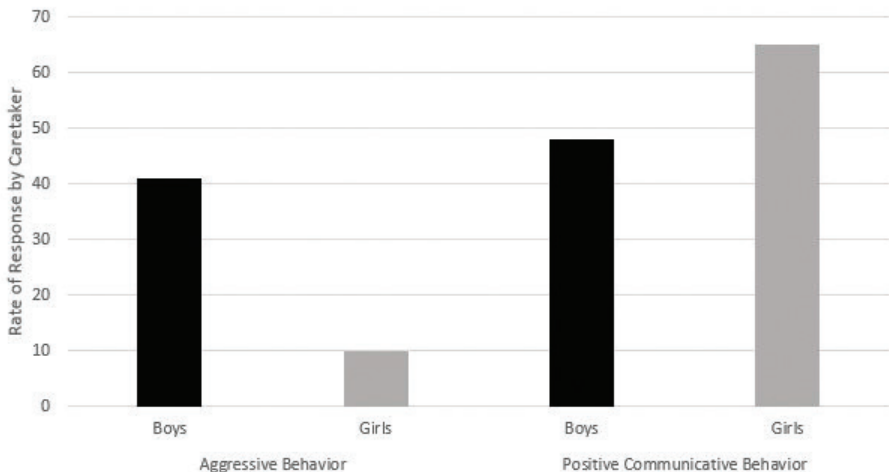


Figure 1. Response of Caretakers to Infant Behavior (Fagot, 1994). This figure illustrates the type of responses by caretakers to infants aged 12–14 months.