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BULLYING AND  
SELF-ESTEEM

by  
Julie Boyle

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the  
Masters of Arts Degree  
of  
The Graduate School  
at  
Rowan University  
May 6, 2003

Approved by \_\_\_\_\_  
Professor

Date Approved 5/6/03

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## ABSTRACT

Julie Boyle  
BULLYING AND SELF-ESTEEM  
2002/2003  
Dr. John Klanderman  
Masters of Arts in School Psychology

The purpose of the study is to investigate the relationship between the amount of bullying a victim endures and levels of self-esteem of those victims. The sample was made up of 124 students, 68 male and 56 female, attending a large middle school in a middle-class neighborhood in Southern New Jersey. All of the students were seventh (n= 52) and eighth (n= 72) graders enrolled in a Life Skills class in which issues regarding bullying were discussed. The Revised Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire was used to assess bullying activity at the school and the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale was used to obtain self-esteem ratings. A Kendall's tau-b and Gamma were used to determine the degree of relationship between level of victimization and self-esteem. A significant relationship was not found between being victimized in general and self-esteem. A significant relationship was found between specific types of bullying and self-esteem.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## Chapter 1: The Problem

### Need

In recent years, tragedies of school violence have brought bullying into public awareness. (Simmons, 2002). Suburban towns like Littleton, Colorado and Santee, California were made common household words, as were the names of the infamous teens that made their towns known. The teenagers became monsters as they violently and systematically took the lives of their fellow classmates. America wanted to know what could drive a child to carry out such a horrid act? Research showed that there were several things that all of the shooters had in common – they had all been picked on and made to feel inferior and evaluations showed that they were suicidal (Egan,T., 1998). Criminologists describe the shootings “as a way to end a tortured life”. There is considerable evidence now that continued or severe bullying can contribute to immediate problems such as depression, sleeping difficulties, low concentration in problem-solving and long-term problems such as permanent anxiety and low self-esteem (Turler, 1990). Further, a close relationship has been found between “low self-esteem and such problems as violence, alcoholism, drug abuse, eating disorders, school dropouts, teenage pregnancy, suicide and low academic achievement” (Reasoner, n.d.). It is apparent that something must be done within the schools to combat the effects of bullying on self-esteem. In 1993, the National Education Goals Panel stated as one of six educational goals, “by the year 2000, every school in America will be free of drugs and violence and will offer a disciplined environment conducive to learning” (Smith et al, 1999). It is apparent that here in America, this goal



has not yet been reached. In the interim, something must be done for the victims of bullying and to do so we must learn more about what exactly is happening and who needs the most help. Bullying may not only have negative long-term consequences for the victim, but also for the bully and the bystander who stands by and observes (National Education Association [NEA], 2002).

The effects of childhood bullying may become even more widespread with the introduction of “cyberbullying” (Blair, 2003). This new form of bullying appears to be on the rise amongst sixth, seventh, and eighth graders from middle- and upper-middle-class homes. The computer provides for children and teens an anonymity that allows them to say things to people that they normally wouldn’t say to their face. Unfortunately, “cyberbullying” is just as harmful as other types of bullying, but is more likely to go unnoticed by adults. Even worse, it seems that beyond prevention, there is little schools can do to target this new breed of bullying that occurs mostly when the children are at home.

Further, there is evidence that the children of victims are more likely to be victimized (Rigby, 1996). If this is true, our society may be creating generations of victims within families. By examining the relationship between bullying and self-esteem now, we may be protecting future generations.

### Purpose

The purpose of the study was to investigate the relationship between the amount of bullying a victim endures and levels of self-esteem of those victims.

## Hypothesis

A significant negative relationship exists between the amount of bullying a victim experiences and his or her level of self-esteem.

## Theory

Bullying among school children certainly isn't a new phenomenon, but several signs suggest that bullying is both more severe and more prevalent than when it first started to be examined in the 1970's (Olweus, 1993). Some prefer to shrug off the effects of frequent and persistent bullying as trivial. Unfortunately though, the effects are anything but that. Only if a child is lucky enough to be extraordinarily resilient to physical and emotional abuse could they remain unaffected (Rigby, 1996).

Typically, victims of bullying are physically less strong than others, timid and non-assertive, introverted, and have low self-esteem and few friends (Rigby, 1996). This profile of a victim often leads to a vicious cycle for a child already suffering from low self-esteem leaving them with even lower levels than before they were victimized. Rigby (1996) has proposed several theories to explain why being victimized lowers self-esteem. First, the failure by the victim to stand up for himself and absolve himself in a conflict situation with peers "strikes deeply" and causes him to have a negative view of himself. An additional explanation comes out of the importance placed on social status. The greater the emphasis on an individual's social standing, the greater was the potential feelings of inferiority when the child is bullied and made to feel subordinate. Third, at a young age children do not yet hold the sense of confidence that comes from having one's own interests and skills. For most children, one's sense of worth and self-esteem is dependent on the quality of their relationships- particularly those with their peers. So,

when a child is bullied, they are affected profoundly because it is their relationships with their peers that tend to define them.

A relationship exists between an already existent low level of self-esteem and further bullying. As mentioned above, victims may be targeted because they do not have friends (Rigby, 1996). These children are easier targets than those who have their own supporters. With continued bullying, isolation grows deeper making the victim more depressed and less likely to make an effort to develop friendships (Rigby, 1996).

### Definitions

**Bullying:** When another student or several other students:

- say mean and hurtful things or make fun of another student or call him or her mean and hurtful names,
- completely ignore or exclude him or her from their group of friends or leave him or her out of things on purpose,
- hit kick, push, shove around, or lock him or her inside a room,
- tell lies or spread false rumors about him or her or send mean notes and try to make other students dislike him or her, and other hurtful things like that.
- For any behavior mentioned to be considered bullying the abuse must happen repeatedly and it must be difficult for the student being abused to defend themselves. (Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire; Olweus, 1996)

**Self-esteem:** A positive or negative orientation toward oneself; an overall evaluation of one's worth or value (RSE; Rosenberg, 1965).

### Assumptions

Several assumptions are made when performing research. In this study it was assumed that all children would listen to the definition of bullying read aloud to them and that they would understand this explanation. It was assumed that all of the children participating in the study had the same reading comprehension skills so that they could understand what the questions in the survey were asking. It was also assumed that the classroom environment was conducive to survey administration on the testing day and that both the researcher and the classroom teacher administered the survey in the exact same way. In answering the survey questions, it was assumed that all children understood the complete anonymity of the survey and were not afraid to answer the questions honestly.

### Limitations

The evaluation of victimization and self-esteem was not without fault. First, the questionnaires that were used to collect the data were in multiple-choice format. It is often difficult to obtain reliable answers using this type of questionnaire due to the fact that questions can be interpreted in different ways. Fortunately though, in using multiple-choice format we are often looking for a realistic approximation of the situation. In addition, children may have misread the questions and answered carelessly.

Children may have over or under-estimated the incidence of bullying and their feelings of worthiness (Rigby, 1996). Children involved in bullying situations might have been too scared to reveal their situation. Victims may have feared that “telling” would only make matters worse and bullies may have feared punishment for their actions regardless of the anonymously nature of the surveys (Rigby, 1996). This may have

resulted in underreporting of bullying. Based on how a victim was feeling on the day that the survey was administered, reports of bullying and self-esteem may have been over or under estimated.

The questionnaires were only distributed in one school. Depending on the bullying/self-esteem education already going on in that school, results may be skewed. The researcher and the students' classroom teacher administered the questionnaires at different times. There is no way to be sure that the researcher and classroom teacher administered the questionnaires in exactly the same way. In addition, the relationship of the administrator to the subjects may have influenced the way an individual answered survey questions.

### Overview

In chapter two, past and current research on the topics of bullying and self-esteem will be reviewed and summarized. Chapter three will explain the design of the study including explanations of the sample size and measures to be used. In chapters four and five, the results will be presented, interpreted, summarized and conclusions will be made. Implications for further research will also be discussed.

## Chapter 2: Review of Literature

### Introduction

For decades being bullied was thought of simply as a part of growing up - one that was accepted and considered unalterable (Olweus, 1993). In addition to its long-term negative emotional consequences, bullying can have harmful effects on the general climate of a school as well as infringe on the basic right of students to learn in a non-threatening environment (Banks, 1997; Roberts & Coursel, 1996 as cited in Casey-Cannon, Hayward & Gowen, 2001). Research has been conducted all over the country and much has been done outside of the United States, but the issues involved are applicable to children in any school environment. There is considerable evidence now that continued or severe bullying can contribute to immediate problems such as depression, sleeping difficulties, low concentration in problem-solving and long-term problems such as permanent anxiety and low self-esteem (Turkel, 1990). Recently, schools have begun to take the findings of this research seriously by integrating prevention programs via character education into their curriculum including Steps to Respect, a school-based bullying prevention program that utilizes social-emotional learning, and RCCP Resolving Conflict Creatively Program, a program that helps children learn to manage their emotions and resolve conflicts (Committee for Children [CFC], 2001; Wartik, 2001). In 2002, the state of New Jersey recognized the need to ensure that this basic right be fulfilled with the passage of legislation by the NJ Senate Education Committee requiring that all schools adopt a policy “prohibiting harassment,

intimidation or bullying on school property, at a school-sponsored function or on a school bus” (New Jersey Legislature [NJLEG], 2002).

### Initial studies on bullying

In the 1970’s, Dan Olweus conducted the first systematic research on bullying in Norway (Olweus, 1993; Rigby, 1996). Olweus’ studies revealed that bullying was a widespread problem in Norway, with an average of 9% of primary and junior high school students being victimized “now and then” or more frequently (Olweus, 1993). More specifically, a little more than 3% were bullied “about once a week” or more frequently. This number represents 18,000 students in Norway (Olweus, 1993). In the several decades that have followed we have finally begun to see bullying as an a behavior that cannot be accepted (Rigby, 1996).

### Bullying as a global problem

It is now recognized that bullying is a common problem throughout the world (Smith, Morita, Junger-Tas, Catalano, & Slee, 1999). Studies that followed Olweus’ in countries such as Finland (Lagerspetz et al., 1982), England (Smith, 1991; Whitney & Smith, 1993), USA (Perry et al., 1998), Canada (Ziegler & Rosenstein-Manner, 1991) The Netherlands (Haeselager & van Lieshout, 1992), Sweden (Olweus, 1986), Japan (Hirano, 1992), Ireland (O’Moore & Brendan, 1992), Spain (Ruiz, 1992) and Australia (Rigby & Slee, 1991) revealed findings similar to those of Olweus and showed that the situation of children abusing other children is global in scope (Olweus, 1993; Smith, Morita, Junger-Tas, Catalano, & Slee, 1999). Based on a cross-section of international research, it can be estimated that between 15 and 20% of all pupils have had experiences with bullying at some point during their school years (Batsche & Knoff, 1994). More

specifically, in a study conducted by Rigby and Slee (1995) as cited in Rigby (1996), 19.3 percent of girls and 14.6 percent of boys were victimized “at least once a week”.

### Bullying in the U.S.

In the United States, bullying did not receive widespread attention until the 1990's and studies on the topic are limited (Oliver, Hoover, & Hazler, 1992; Smith, Morita, Junger-Tas, Catalano, & Slee, 1999). The data that we do have reveals some disconcerting numbers and may indicate that victimization by bullies is more prevalent in the US than in European countries (Hoover, Oliver, & Hazler, 1992). A study published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* using the World Health Organization's Health Behavior in School Children Survey reported that 16% of children in grades 6 through 10 said that they had been bullied during the past term (Klinger, 2002). Klinger also reported on a 2001 study conducted nationwide by the Kaiser Foundation and Nickelodeon of children between the ages of 8 and 11 found that 55% believe that teasing and bullying are “big problems” at their schools. In a study conducted by Perry, Kusel, and Perry (1998), 10% of third to sixth graders attending a school serving a middle-class community reported being extreme or chronic victims being bullied “more than once a week” (Smith et al., 1999). In a retrospective study of middle and high school students in the Midwest, 76.8% reported being bullied by peers at some point over the course of their schooling (Hoover et al, 1992). Based on these numbers, it can be assumed that mild victimization would be almost four times as common in the US (76.8%) as it is in England (20%) (Hoover et al., 1992). Further, Glover, Gough, Johnson, and Cartwright (2000) point out that with concern over the



broad nature of definitions of bullying used in earlier studies, numbers may grow even higher.

### Specific types of bullying

The majority of bullying research has focused on physical forms of abuse with fewer studies conducted investigating nonphysical types of bullying (Bosworth, Espelage, & Simon, 1999; Clark & Kiselica, 1997; Crick, Bigbee, & Howe, 1996; Olweus, 1994; as cited in Casey-Cannon, Hayward, & Gowen, 2001). Physical forms of bullying include hitting, kicking, pushing, and shoving. Non-physical bullying is a very real problem for children as well. Glover et al. (2000) asked seventh and eighth grade victims what types of non-physical abuse they experienced “often or very often in a year”. Students in both grade levels reported similar numbers. Approximately 25 percent reported that they “suffered untruths”, 12 percent said that they were “socially excluded”, 8 percent reported that they had their “property damaged”, and 29 percent suffered “teasing and abuse”. This alternative, nonphysical form of bullying is termed “social” or “relational” aggression and is aimed at damaging the victim’s self-esteem (Paquette, & Underwood, 1999). Behaviors such as manipulation, exclusion, spreading rumors, and backstabbing are indirect forms of aggression. This type of bullying is less obvious than physical forms of bullying and make it appear as if the bully does not mean to hurt the victim while in reality they have every intention of doing so (Crick, Bigbee, & Howes, 1996 as cited in Paquette, & Underwood, 1999). A study by Crick and Grotpeter (1996) as cited in Paquette, & Underwood (1999) measured the effects of both physical and non-physical victimization on the social psychological adjustment of third through sixth graders using a self-report Social Experience Questionnaire. The researchers found

that overt, physical forms of victimization were significantly correlated with the psychosocial adjustment of both boys and girls while victimization through the use of non-physical, relational aggression was found to be a significant predictor of loneliness, depression, social anxiety and social avoidance.

#### Effects of bullying on academics

Numerous studies have reported on the negative social, academic and psychological consequences that bullying can have on its victims (Crick & Grotpeter, 1996; Grilo, Wifley, Brownell, & Rodin, 1994; Hazler, et al., 1992; Salmivalli, Kaukiainen, Kaistaniemi, & Lagerspetz, 1999; Shapiro, Baumeister, & Kessler, 1991; Sharp, 1996; as cited in Casey-Cannon, Hayward, & Gowen, 2001). It has been reported that 5% of boys and 8% of girls have stayed home from school to avoid bullies and 12% and 18% of boys and girls respectively said that they had at least thought about staying home (Rigby, 1996). Similar statistics were reported in the US. As many as 7% of American eighth graders stay home from school at least once a month to avoid being victimized there (Banks, 1997). When children were asked if they felt that, in general, schools were a safe place for children who find it difficult to defend themselves, less than 20% said that it was (Rigby, 1996).

In a study conducted by Glover, et al. of children at 25 secondary schools in England, children reported a “great unhappiness” and a “destruction of self-esteem” because of the intimidation used by bullies. Glover and his colleagues contend that at any point in time, 70 students in a school of 1,000 pupils will be suffering at the hands of a bully. For some of them, they explain, this can mean devastating effects on academic achievement and “social potential” (Glover, et al, 2000; Oliver, et al., 1994).

Specifically, when asked if they “mostly or always feel this way”, 9 and 43 percent of students respectively, admitted to feeling “upset in school” and finding it “hard to answer in class”. To the same question, 10 percent reported that they “get discouraged”, and 27 percent said they felt “threatened in some way” at school and 11 percent said they “mostly or always feel this way” to the item that read “wish to change schools”. Further, Miller, Verhoek-Miller, Ceminsky, & Nugent, 2002 as cited in Harris & Petri, 2002 found that the degree of school satisfaction or dissatisfaction expressed by victims was correlated with the extent of bullying they experienced (Harris & Petrie, 2002).

### Physical Consequences

Being bullied can result in a wide range of physical and psychological disorders (West & Salmon, 2000). On a General Health Questionnaire filled out by secondary school students, victims were twice as likely than non-victims to report that they were “not in good health”, that they “felt ill”, or that they experienced “hot/cold spells” (Rigby, 1994 as cited in Rigby, 1996). In a Finnish study of 17,643 adolescents, victims complained of neck and shoulder pain, low back pain, and stomachache (Kaltiala-Heino, Rimpela, Rantanen, & Rimpela, 2000). Eating disorders and substance abuse were also reported among girls and excessive drinking of alcohol was common among boys (Kaltiala-Heino, et al., 2000). In a study reported on in the *Canadian Medical Association Journal* Weir (2001) reports that victims are more likely to have difficulties sleeping. In addition to complaints of stomachaches, the study also found that victims were more likely to suffer from headaches and have more problems with bedwetting than non-victims.

### Emotional Consequences

There is much evidence that bullying among children can result in serious mental health issues for those who are victimized (Besag, 1989 in Callaghan & Joseph, 1995; Neary & Joseph, 1994). An unpublished study cited in West and Salmon (2000) found that bullying was associated with 70% of cases of depression in adolescents seeking outpatient services compared with 25% in a psychiatric control group. Being victimized can result in chronic anxiety and can lead to a lack of support from peers, both of which have been documented as being associated with depression (Kaltiala-Heino, et al., 2000). So, it is possible that victimization may be a precursor of mental disorders. On the same General Health Questionnaire on which victims were twice as likely to report physical complaints, were also much more likely to report anxiety including loss of sleep over worry and constant strain, and were almost four times as likely to experience panic without reason (Rigby, 1994 as cited in Rigby, 1996). Also, respondents were two to three times more likely to report social dysfunction including the inability to keep occupied and enjoy activities. Most importantly, victims were twice as likely to report symptoms of depression, feeling worthless, and feeling that life is not worth living, as well as suicidal ideations, wishing they were dead or recurring ideas of taking their life. In the same study, 15.6% and 9.1% of girls and boys respectively presented with two or more mental health problems. This further supports peer victimization as an indicator of mental health problems (Kaltiala-Heino, et al., 2000).

Olweus (1994) and Hazler (1994) as cited in Carney (2000) have found that victimization may be an important causal factor of suicide in adolescents. Among students who admitted to being affected by their bullies, the most commonly reported

emotional reactions were anger (in boys) and sadness (in girls) (Rigby, 1996). It is no wonder then that more than two-thirds of school shooters reportedly “felt persecuted or bullied by someone” and the motive for their attacks was often revenge (Slobogin, 2001). In fact, most of the shooters were reportedly suicidal and were looking at the killings as “a way to end a tortured life” (Egan, T., 1998).

### Bullying and Self-Esteem

Banks (1997) explains that because non-bullied students are afraid to put themselves at risk of being bullied, they avoid association with victimized children. This tends to increase isolation experienced by bullied children. Gilmarten (1987) contends that these individuals who are “systematically denied peer support” may suffer from low self-esteem (Hoover, et al., 1992). Several researchers point to a “vicious-cycle” of peer abuse and low self-esteem. They argue that low self-esteem, as well as depression, may be both antecedents and consequences to victimization by peers (Matsui, Takashi, Tzuzuki, & Onglatco, 1996). Investigators contend that victimization leads to unassertiveness that attracts more victimization and so on (Matsui, et al, 1996). Rigby (1996) refutes this hypothesis. When he asked students how they felt about being bullied after it had happened, more than half said that they felt worse about themselves. This shows that the majority of students are made to feel even worse about themselves after being victimized than they had before. Further, S.K.Egan and Perry (1998) conducted a longitudinal study of young children and reported that regardless of the fact that victims were more likely to have a lower sense of worth, being bullied caused further loss of self-esteem. While this vicious cycle may or may not exist, scores of researchers (e.g., Neary & Joseph, 1994; Matsui, et al, 1996; O’Moore & Kirkham, 2000; Rigby & Slee, 1993;

Salmon & James, 1998) have established that victims of bullying are afflicted with significantly lower levels of low self-esteem than those children who are never bullied. In a study of 60 schoolgirls in Ireland, only 12 identified themselves as victims, but classmates identified 30 victims by name (Nearly & Joseph, 1994). These 30 were later identifiable by their own self-ratings of lower global self-esteem as well as other measures including social acceptance, scholastic competence, behavioral conduct, and victimization.

### Long-term Consequences

The association between bullying in childhood and low self-esteem in adulthood is a consistent finding. Bullying affects the “immediate experience” of the child as well as the individual’s long-term adjustment causing victims to have problems later in life including difficulties with role confusion in adult relationships (Casey-Cannon, Hayward & Gowen, 2001; Gilmarten, 1987 in Hoover, et al, 1992; Lines, 1999; Olweus, 1993; Boivin, Hymel, & Hodges, 2001 & Limber, Flerx, Nation, & Melton, 1998 as cited in Harris & Petrie, 2002). In a study of adults victimized during childhood, Tritt and Duncan (1997) reported that as adults, victims were lonelier than normal controls. A frequently referenced retrospective study (Gilmarten, 1987) of “love-shy” men found to have histories of victimization in childhood suggests that difficulties in psychosexual functioning in adulthood may also be a consequence of social withdrawal and possibly low self esteem-resulting from bullying (Tritt & Duncan, 1997). Olweus (1979, 1984) and Farrington (1989, 1991) as cited in Rigby (1996) both conducted separate studies in Norway and England respectively. Olweus conducted psychological tests on victims of bullying into their twenties and Farrington followed victims into their thirties. Olweus

found that children that were bullied during their years in secondary school had higher levels of depression and poorer self-esteem in their early twenties even though they were no longer being victimized. Together, these studies show that the self-esteem of individuals victimized during their school years tends to remain relatively low into adulthood.

#### Level of Victimization and Level of Self-Esteem

There is limited research related to the topic of a correlation between the amount of victimization experienced by an individual and their level of self-esteem. Matsui, et al. (1996) states that the rated severity of victimization in junior high was negatively correlated with current self-esteem of male college freshman only for those who were low in self-esteem during elementary school. This research though does not say if the subjects had never been bullied prior to the time period being studied during elementary school. Perhaps these subjects were victimized earlier and had lower levels of self-esteem because of prior victimization. Results of a large study of 8,249 school children between the ages of 8 and 18 showed that the more children were victimized, the lower their level of self-esteem (O'Moore & Kirkham, 2001). Specifically, non-victims between the ages of 12 and 18 had a mean self-esteem score of 57.4. Mean scores declined steadily as victimization increased. Those children who were victimized "once or twice" had a mean self-esteem score of 52.2 and those who were bullied "several times a week" had a mean self-esteem score of 39.7. Similar numbers were seen for the 8-11 year olds (O'Moore & Kirkham, 2001). These results strongly indicate that children and adolescents who have been bullied frequently have a lower self-esteem than those involved in occasional or moderate victimization (O'Moore & Kirkham, 2001).

## Summary

A substantial amount of research has been done on the topic of bullying, but most has concentrated on its consequences as well as the characteristics of bullies and victims. Only a few studies have focused on the amount of bullying and its affects on a victim's self-esteem. The several studies that have focused on this subject have shown a negative relationship between amount of bullying a victim suffers and their level of self-esteem. This research will serve to help confirm these findings.



### Chapter 3: Design of the Study

#### Sample

The sample was made up of 68 male and 56 female students (n=124) attending a large middle school in a middle-class neighborhood in Southern New Jersey. All of the students were seventh (n= 52) and eighth (n= 72) graders enrolled in a Life Skills class in which issues regarding bullying were discussed. A letter of consent was sent home to the parents of all the children. One parent did not permit her child's participation in the study.

#### Measures

First, students were asked to complete the Revised Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire. The Olweus questionnaire is an anonymous survey that is completed individually, but administered in a group. The 40 questions used to measure bully/victim problems are all followed by a Likert-type scale. Questions cover issues including the exposure to various forms of forms of bullying as well as various forms of bullying others, places where the bullying occurs, and attitudes and reactions to bullying (Violence Institute of New Jersey [VINJ], 2002). The survey was normed on 130,000 children and yields an internal consistency coefficient of .8-.9 (VINJ, 2002).

Immediately following the Olweus questionnaire, students continued on to complete the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale. The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale is a 10-item survey using a Likert scale and Guttman scaling. Many studies have shown that the RSE has a high level of internal consistency as well as test-retest reliability. A great deal

of research has also been conducted and indicated high scores of predictive and construct validity (Family and Community Violence Prevention Program [FCVP], 2001).

Before beginning the surveys, students were reminded of the confidentiality of their answers and were urged to be truthful when they selected their answers. Both scales were administered consecutively by the researcher as well as by the teacher of the class studied to different children on 3 different days over a three-month period. The administrator read through the introductory material with the subjects in order to ensure that all of the students understood exactly what to do. In addition, an explanation of bullying was read aloud to the students so that all of the subjects understood exactly what is considered bullying and what is not. This explanation was part of the Olweus questionnaire. Help was available to the students if they needed it. Subjects remained in their own seats and did not speak to one another for the duration of the survey. Students that finished the survey early were asked to sit quietly and read.

### Design

This study was designed to show whether the amount of bullying a victim endures tends to correlate with that individual's level of self-esteem. Variables identified by this study include amount of bullying endured by a victim of bullying evaluated using the Revised Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire and level of self-esteem determined by the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale.

### Testable Hypothesis

H<sub>0</sub>: A significant relationship does not exist between the amount of bullying a bullying victim experiences and his or her level of self-esteem.

H<sub>1</sub>: A significant negative relationship exists between the amount of bullying a victim of bullying experiences and his or her level of self-esteem.

### Analysis

The methods of analyses chosen for this study are correlational in nature. Using SPSS, a Kendall's tau-b and Gamma will be calculated to describe the degree of relationship between the two variables. Also, mean self-esteem scores for each of the questions regarding specific types of bullying endured will be constructed.

### Summary

Data on bullying and self-esteem will be collected from a total of 124 seventh and eighth graders from a nearby middle school. The data will be analyzed to determine if a relationship exists between being a victim of bullying and self-esteem. These relationships are described more specifically in the hypothesis section of this chapter. The Kendall's tau-b and Gamma will be used to describe the relationship between the variables.

## Chapter 4: Results

### Introduction

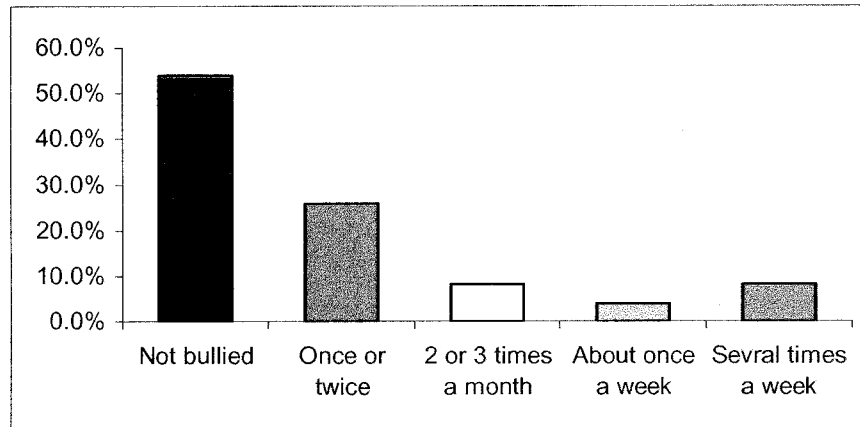
Victims of childhood bullying can experience serious long-term problems with self-esteem. The purpose of the study was to investigate the relationship between the amount of bullying a victim endures and levels of self-esteem of those victims. The independent variable, or predictor, in this study was the amount of bullying a victim experienced and the dependent variable or criterion was the victim's level of self-esteem.

The hypothesis used in this study was a significant negative relationship exists between the amount of bullying a victim experiences and his or her level of self-esteem. The null hypothesis of the study was that a negative relationship would not be found to exist between the amount of bullying a victim endures and his or her level of self-esteem.

### Analysis

An analysis of frequency of bullying was performed to illustrate how often students had "been bullied at school in the past couple of months". The frequency of bullying is represented in Figure 4.1. Fifty-four percent of students selected "I haven't been bullied at school in the past couple of months". Just under 26 percent reported that "it has only happened once or twice", 8 percent reported that they had been bullied "2 or 3 times a month", 4 percent responded that they had been bullied "about once a week", and 8 percent said that they were bullied "several times a week". Approximately 50 percent of children are experiencing some amount of bullying when they are at school.

Figure 4.1 – Percentage and frequency of children bullied



A Kendall's tau<sub>b</sub> correlation was performed on self-esteem with the general bullying question as well as with all specific bullying questions. Table 4.1 shows those bullying statements that showed a significant correlation with self-esteem. Frequency of bullying in general was not correlated with the subjects' self-esteem score, but some specific types of bullying were weakly correlated with self-esteem. These questions that did show some correlation are included in Table 4.1. Question number 13 asked the students to write in any way that they had been bullied that was not mentioned in the previous questions. For this question, answers provided by the students included references to body weight, name calling, rumor spreading, being teased about the way the child dresses and wears his or her hair, teasing about religion and comments that were sexual in nature, and prank phone calls. Students also wrote in about being physically bullied including being pushed into lockers. One student wrote in, "Someone spit in my hat and then threw my bike into a pole". Most of the types of bullying written in by the students were included in the bullying questions that they had already answered.

Table 4.1 – Nonparametric correlations for items showing significance

		<u>Self-Esteem</u>
Q5	I was called mean names, made fun of, or teased in a hurtful way	-0.167*
Q8	Other students told lies or spread false rumors about me and tried to make of others dislike me	-0.124*
Q10	I was threatened or forced to do things I didn't want to do	-0.173*
Q13	Other	-0.135*

- Indicates significance at .05 level (1-tailed).

## Chapter 5: Summary and Conclusions

### Summary of Literature

Bullying is on the rise and the incidence of school violence has brought the problem into public awareness (Simmons, 2002). There is evidence that these children were bullied and made to feel inferior by their classmates (Egan, T., 1998). The introduction of technology has made the situation even worse with children using the anonymity of the Internet to abuse their peers known as “cyberbullying” (Blair, 2003). There is considerable evidence now that continued or severe bullying can contribute to a long list of immediate problems as well as long-term difficulties including low self-esteem well into adulthood (Turkel, 1990). Several theories have been proposed to explain this relationship pointing to the victim’s inability to stand for himself, an emphasis on social status and the associated feelings of the victim as he is made to feel like a subordinate, a lack of confidence, as well as a vicious cycle that is proposed to grow out of being bullied repeatedly (Rigby, 1996).

### Summary of Present Study

The purpose of the study was to investigate the relationship between the amount of bullying a victim endures and levels of self-esteem of those victims. The sample was made up of 68 male and 56 female students attending a large middle school in a middle-class neighborhood in Southern New Jersey. 52 students were in the seventh grade and 72 were in the eighth grade. All were enrolled in a Life Skills class in which issues regarding bullying were discussed.

Results from the present study did not show a significant relationship between the amount of bullying a victim endures and their level of self-esteem, though a weak, but significant relationship was found between self-esteem and some specific types of bullying. Many students responded that they had not been bullied within the past several months, but then went on to report how many times they had endured specific types of bullying. This indicates that unless an explicit definition was given when the question was asked, the subjects were unsure of what bullying was. The survey administrator read aloud a complete definition of bullying before the beginning the survey.

### Discussion

Approximately half of the students answered that they had not been bullied at school within the past several months. One-quarter of the students reported that they had been bullied only “once or twice” at school in the past several months. Under ten percent of the students reported that they had each been bullied “2 or 3 times a month”, “about once a week”, and “several times a week”. So, half of the students reported that they had been victims of bullying at some point within the past couple of months.

Results from the present study do not indicate a significant relationship between the amount of bullying a victim endures and their level of self-esteem and fail to reject the null hypothesis. Results did not show a significant negative relationship between frequency of victimization and level of self-esteem. Results did however show a significant negative relationship between an individual’s level of self-esteem and the amount of specific types of bullying experienced. A significant relationship was found between self-esteem level and the items, “I was called mean names, was made fun of, or teased in a hurtful way”, “Other students told lies or spread false rumors about me and



tried to make others dislike me”, “I was threatened or forced to do things I didn’t want to do”, and “I was bullied in another way”. These findings indicate that student answers to the question of overall bullying were unreliable. Considering that this question was presented first, before the questions indicating the specific types of bullying mentioned in the previous paragraph, this indicates that students did not understand what bullying was in the first question.

### Conclusions

No significant relationship was found between the amount of bullying endured in general and self-esteem. A significant relationship was found between the amount of specific types of bullying experienced and self-esteem. The inconsistency of these findings indicates a need for further education and interventions. Approximately half of those students surveyed were victimized at least “once or twice” within “the couple of months” preceding the test administration. Being victimized at the hands of a bully may put a child at risk for serious mental health issues (Besag, 1989 in Callaghan & Joseph, 1995; Neary & Joseph, 1994). These findings support the need for further education and interventions in schools to help decrease those victimized.

### Implications for further research

In administering this survey to this age child in the future, it may be beneficial to read the survey together while continuously reminding the children of the definition of bullying. Future researchers may want to consider expanding the study to include a greater number of children. Using a larger sample in the may yield more significant results.

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