

**Bullying victimization within friendships:
An individual and context sensitive analysis**

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On to the next elephant!

Dedication

(You get your own page!)

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Abstract

Bullying victimization within the context of friendships is a complex phenomenon that is commonly experienced among youth, yet is insufficiently understood. Current psychosocial research examining bullying is often devoid of descriptions of the relationship that exists between those who bullied or are bullied (i.e., are they friends, enemies, former friends?), and there continues to be limited consideration of the underlying social dynamics and negotiations that occur within friendships containing bullying. Furthermore, there is a clear need for bullying research to consider how wider macro-level forces (e.g., social processes, power relations, and cultural discourses) can influence the bullying within friendship experience. Guided by a social-ecological framework, this dissertation reports on the findings from two empirical studies that investigated adolescents' experiences of bullying victimization within friendship. These studies involved interviewing previously victimized adolescents and young women; the analytical approaches were guided by thematic analysis and constructivist grounded theory. The results indicate that friendship victimization is a hurtful relational experience that involves painful emotions and carries significant interpersonal risks for adolescents. Furthermore, participants' responses to their friend's bullying behaviours were constrained by a number of barriers, such as depictions of bullying that individualize the problem, discourses of resistance that privilege overt responses, and gender expectations. Finally, the dissertation considers how teacher-student relationships influence peer bullying experiences and reemphasizes how teachers can be influential allies for bullying prevention and intervention.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

School bullying has emerged as a global concern in recent decades. In response to this, the research community has investigated the causes, consequences, and prevalence of these negative experiences with the hopes that this research will contribute to the implementation of effective school-based prevention and intervention efforts. The literature resulting from these research efforts has been immense and has contributed to a persistent bullying discourse that becomes increasingly visible and accessible to the public amidst heartbreaking and highly-publicized tragedies, such as examples of school violence and teen suicides. This dissertation represents an effort to contribute to this scholarship, but it is also intended to demonstrate that bullying is a complex phenomenon that is sometimes difficult to capture and define. As a starting point, bullying has been oft described as a subset of individual aggression, characterised by the *intention to harm* another person through *repetitive* physical, social, or relational acts. A distinguishing feature of bullying is the *power imbalance* between the perpetrator and the victimized, as victims find it difficult to defend themselves (Olweus, 1993). But, as I will take up in this dissertation, bullying has a distinct social and discursive history whereby certain perspectives have been reinforced and legitimized while others have been overlooked or excluded in the defining process, producing “blind spots” (Canty, Stubbe, Steers, & Collings, 2016) that have inevitably impacted how bullying has been understood by the public and reflected in school policies and programming. Very briefly, the dominant focus on bullying as an expression of individual aggression has produced research that overlooks how specific social contexts, such as friendship and teacher-student relationships and wider socio-cultural factors can influence the bullying experience. My dissertation seeks to contribute to a growing body of literature that offers a perspective of bullying victimization (i.e., being on the receiving end of bullying) that is both individually and context-dependent. I focus primarily on young people’s experiences with victimization within friendship and the multiple forces that combine to shape their understandings of and responses to this form of victimization.

In contrast to the dominant paradigm in bullying research, which largely stands on positivist and post-positivist footings, I share an alignment with interpretive philosophical traditions, namely social constructivism, which emphasizes that knowledges are provisional, have complex social histories, and are produced and reproduced through social experiences. I bring this social constructivist perspective to my understanding of bullying and through my

methodological approaches, namely constructivist grounded theory and inductive thematic analysis. As I argue in this thesis, I believe that bullying should be understood as a complex social interaction that is situated, open-ended, and imbued by multiple individual, social, institutional, and discursive factors.

The Scope of the Problem

Longitudinal international research on bullying with the Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children Survey, conducted by the World Health Organization in partnership with 36 national health agencies, reveals that bullying is a significant public health problem that afflicts young people across many Western nations. In Canada, for example, approximately one in four Canadian youth report being victimized at least twice a week (Freeman, King, & Picket, 2016). Large cross-national research has shown that approximately 13% of secondary-school youth reported being a victim of bullying (Craig et al., 2009). Other, smaller, reports have indicated that the percentage of children and youth who will experience bullying at some point during their lives spans between 3% and 40% (Cook, Williams, Guerra, Kim, & Sadek, 2010). It is no wonder then that bullying has attracted national attention within Canada and why stakeholders, particularly those connected to the school community, have committed substantial resources in the pursuit of eradicating bullying.

Forms of Bullying

The ways through which young people exert their power over their peers can vary in form. Initial research on bullying and victimization was typically limited in its scope to the more overt forms of aggression, including the effects of physical and verbal negative aggressive actions (Olweus, 1993). Researchers' understandings of how bullying and victimization manifest in more covert ways is continuing to develop with scholars exploring the nature of indirect forms of victimization (e.g., Crick & Nelson, 2002). These non-physical acts of aggression have also generated considerable public interest and attention, which has been largely propelled by the mainstreaming of the topic in films, television series, and novels, and most often relying on depictions of fraught adolescent girls' friendship groups (Brown, 2003). There continues to be conceptual overlap amongst the terms indirect aggression, social bullying, and relational bullying (Voulgaridou & Kokkinos, 2015).

In this dissertation, I use the term relational victimization (the receipt of relational bullying), which has been described by Crick and Grotpeter (1996) as behaviours that damage, or

threaten to damage, important relationships, such as exclusion, ignoring, spreading rumors, lies, and/or secrets, and engaging in gossip. Relational victimization may involve direct or indirect behaviours and may or may not involve other members of the social group. A large portion of relational victimization research has involved investigating its association to externalizing and internalizing problems, on both the part of the perpetrator and victimized (e.g., Ostrov & Godleski, 2013). Recent sociological and social-psychological work has argued that relational bullying is perhaps a tactical use of power that derives many social benefits for the perpetrator. For example, relational bullying can predict an increase in friendship quality for the perpetrators (Banny, Heilbron, Ames, & Prinstein, 2011) as those who relationally bully others may experience higher levels of intimacy within their friendships (Murray-Close, Ostrov, & Crick, 2007) and an increase in perceived popularity (Cillessen & Mayeux, 2004). Other research has offered a perspective that relational bullying is a socially advantageous strategy for young people to: remain socially relevant within their peer groups (Currie, Kelly, & Pomperantz, 2007); alleviate the anxiety that is associated with a threatened sense of embeddedness within the peer group (Søndergaard, 2014), and; comply with heteronormative standards of “doing girl aggression” (Ringrose & Renold, 2010).

Cyberbullying has emerged as a new form of bullying, coinciding with the advance of technology (Mishna, Saini, & Solomon, 2009). Some researchers have demonstrated that cyberbullying amongst young people occurs at alarming rates, though some have argued that bullying through more traditional forms still takes place with more frequency than cyberbullying (Olweus, 2012). In cyberbullying, similar to traditional bullying, the power differential criterion is central (Ang, 2015), and it is further defined as the use of electronic communication to deliberately threaten, harm, embarrass, or socially exclude another (Patchin & Hinduja, 2006). The media through which cyberbullying occurs include email, social networking websites, text messaging, digital images, chat rooms, and online games. Although there is still some debate about the overlap of traditional bullying and cyberbullying (Beckman, Hagquist, & Hellström, 2012), there is a consensus that the online context produces unique conditions for and consequences of bullying. For example, unlike in face-to-face interactions, youth have limited contextual cues and experience relative anonymity in the online spaces, which may produce a disinhibiting effect and result in adolescents engaging in higher risk behaviours. Furthermore, cyberbullying has the potential to reach a wide audience with relatively little effort and in short

periods of time (Kowalski & Limber, 2007) and its occurrence transcends the boundaries of the school. Some research has also articulated the negative outcomes of cyberbullying, over and above traditional bullying (Perren, Dooley, Shaw, & Cross, 2010) and many have advocated for the need for more cyberbullying research, particularly longitudinal work, to inform comprehensive school bullying prevention initiatives.

Impacts of Bullying

Significant associations have been found between bullying/victimization and the physical, psychological, and social wellbeing of young people. For example, neurobiological (Baddam et al., 2016) and physiological (Gini & Pozzoli, 2009) changes can occur in children who have experienced bullying and these changes can be long lasting. A rapidly growing body of research has linked bullying victimization to a host of short and long-term adjustment difficulties, such as low self-confidence, depression, anxiety, psychosomatic symptoms, and most seriously, suicide ideation (Stassen Berger, 2007; Swearer, Espelage, Vaillancourt, & Hymel, 2010). Chronically victimized children are often rejected from peers, have difficulty developing and maintaining friendships, are more socially isolated at school, and demonstrate increased social anxiety and aggressive responses (Fox & Boulton, 2006; O'Brennan, Bradshaw, & Sawyer, 2009). Victimization can also have negative impacts on students' academic outcomes, particularly in students' attachment to school, concentration on class work, and academic performance (Beran & Lupart, 2009; Kowalski & Limber, 2013). These negative effects often manifest early in children's development, but the small body of research that examines bullying victimization across a lifespan has indicated that the consequences of childhood victimization can extend into adulthood (e.g., Miller & Vaillancourt, 2007).

The effects for those who bully have also been documented. For example, McMaster, Connolly, Pepler, and Craig (2002) found that those children who bully have increased incidences of alcohol and drug abuse and demonstrate delinquent behaviour and future dating aggression. Young people who bully also experience psychological distress and depressive symptoms (Mitchell, Ybarra, & Finkelhor, 2007) and physical symptoms such as headaches (Arseneault et al., 2006), and they are at an increased likelihood for school absenteeism and for developing a negative attitude about school (Reid, 2005).

Bystanders, too, are not immune to the deleterious effects of bullying. For example, research has found that bystanders feel very uncomfortable in bullying situations, often more so

than those perpetrating the abuse (Stevens, Van Oost, & De Bourdeauhuij, 2000). Rivers, Noret, Poteat, and Ashurst (2009), in their large-scale study, found that observing bullying at school predicted risks to mental health and, most particularly, these young people were likely to have elevated levels of substance abuse. Other research has argued that when children and youth witness bullying, this can provoke an anxiety around their own vulnerability (Søndergaard, 2014) or cause emotional or physiological distress (Caravita, Colombo, Stefanelli, & Zigliani, 2016). Barhight, Hubbard, & Hyde (2013) found that experiencing an emotional reaction to witnessing bullying may propel some young people to defend a peer who has been bullied. However, recent Canadian research has found that defending behaviours of bystanders comes at a cost and is associated with significant psychosocial difficulties, particularly for male defenders (Lambe, Hudson, Craig, & Pepler, 2017). Hutchinson's (2012) qualitative work echoed these findings, as the bystanders in his study articulated their feelings of isolation and confusion when witnessing bullying events and deciding whether to intervene.

Bullying and Schools

Research has consistently demonstrated that bullying and experiences of peer victimization occur frequently in school settings and have significant consequences for the health and wellbeing of young people. Recent changes to Ontario's Education Act to include the provision of the Accepting Schools Act (Legislative Assembly of Ontario, 2012) demonstrates a concerted effort for prescribing expectations for the prevention of and intervention in bullying/victimization incidents at schools. Under the Act, school boards across the province are required to establish bullying intervention plans; provide professional development on bullying prevention to teachers; include programs that will support victims, perpetrators, and bystanders of bullying incidents; and offer support to those who wish to promote safe and inclusive learning environments through school-based programming. The Act also carries reporting and documenting obligations for principals and teachers. Other provinces have also undergone recent legislative changes specific to bullying and school safety (e.g., Bill 18 in Manitoba, Bill 30 in Nova Scotia, Bill 45 in New Brunswick, Bill 3 in Alberta), while other provinces and territories have articulated strategies for addressing bullying (e.g., Yukon's and Newfoundland and Labrador's *Safe and Caring Schools Policy*). These legislative and policy changes signify that bullying and peer victimization is a significant public health concern and that the school is a crucial context in shaping students' bullying experiences.

Published research on the effects of school bullying intervention and prevention programming has proliferated in recent years (Merrell, Gueldner, Ross, & Isava, 2008), reaching a level where it is possible to conduct systemic reviews of the collective body of work. Ttofi and Farrington's (2011) review of school-based programs that aim to reduce bullying is perhaps the most widely cited meta-analysis of the effectiveness of bullying initiatives. Their report indicated that of the 44 programs that provided data, on average, there was a moderate decline in bullying and victimization. Smith, Schneider, Smith, and Anniadou's (2004) earlier analysis found that the majority of programs produced non-significant outcomes on measures of self-reported victimization and bullying. Both syntheses articulated the importance of continued monitoring of bullying intervention and prevention initiatives as well as methodological quality standards for evaluation research. Canada has taken a systematic approach to the evaluation of school bullying programming with the establishment of the Canadian Best Practices Portal (in conjunction with the Public Health Agency of Canada, <http://cbpp-pcpe.phac-aspc.gc.ca/>), which provides annotations of programs that use evidence-based approaches to bullying and victimization. These intervention programs vary widely in their scope and implementation, with some programs targeting the whole-school, with others aimed at working with individual youth who bully or who are victimized.

Perspectives of Bullying

There is currently no common definition of bullying that all researchers agree on (Migliaccio & Raskauskas, 2016). As Forsberg (2017) articulates, scholars have taken on different perspectives in their approaches towards bullying (i.e., very briefly: bullying as a result of individual aggression; bullying as a function of group processes and social interaction, and; bullying as embedded within wider socio, historical, and contextual normativities). Formal research on the subject of bullying began in Scandinavia in the early 1970's with publications by Peter-Paul Heinneman, a physician, and Dan Olweus, a clinical psychologist. Heinneman (1972) introduced the term "mobbing," which likened animal behaviours to group-based violence in humans. To Heinneman, mobbing, (now widely known as 'bullying' in English) was a form of collective aggressive behaviour utilized against an individual or other group when a group's cohesion was threatened. He relied on theories of group processes, and intersected issues such as immigration and racism into his conception. Around the same time, Dan Olweus was publishing his doctoral dissertation (1969) on the psychology of aggression, which propelled the notion of

stable personality traits within the individual to the forefront of bullying research. Olweus primarily focused on the role of single-or-dyad perpetrator attacks against a weaker single-victim (Olweus, 1993), and devoted a great deal of attention to describing the role of individuals. Much of the depiction of bullying as a result of group processes or other social issues, such as racism and marginalization, as were indicated in Heinneman's work have, until recently, been pushed to the margins. Indeed, many researchers have contested Olweus' definition and the conditions that comprise bullying, namely: (1) a power imbalance; (2) repetition; and (3) the intent to harm. For example, some researchers have modified the definitional criteria (e.g., Volk, Dane, Marini, 2014; Schott & Søndergaard, 2014), while others have cautioned against expanding the definition (Cascardi, Brown, Iannarone, & Cardona, 2014). Numerous studies have also examined the alignment of conceptions of bullying and its 'established' core ingredients across multiple groups to uncover if researchers, teachers, parents, and youth are "talking about the same thing" (e.g., Vaillancourt et al, 2008, p. 486). Despite these ongoing debates (further illuminated on page 11), Olweus' understanding of bullying as a form of individual aggression still continues to dominate the field (Kousholt & Fisker, 2015). His work has been influential in shaping researchers' "first order perspectives" of bullying, which I describe below.

First Order Perspectives of Bullying

First order perspectives of bullying (Slee & Mohyla, 2007), or what some researchers refer to as *paradigm one* (Schott, 2015), calls attention to bullying as a form of individual aggression. First order perspectives have generated a great deal of scientific progress in researchers' understanding of the various forms of bullying, such as physical, verbal, relational, and cyber, including the ensuing consequences of involvement in each form, as well as the risk factors that create the conditions for such forms of bullying to occur. Much of this work also separates children into measurable group differences (i.e., sex, age, social class, achievement, ability, internalizing/externalizing behaviours, etc.) to further express who is at risk, why, and with what effects. Researchers have amassed an understanding for the plethora of individual and contextual mediating and moderating variables that help to explain risk factors and outcomes, such as teacher-student relationships, school climate, dysfunctional home environments, a young person's emotional regulation/coping skills, peer support, moral disengagement, attitudes about bullying, as only some examples. Research has also started to document the long-term impacts of bullying, particularly related to adult psychopathology (e.g., Miller & Vaillancourt, 2007; Rigby,

2008). Overall, research on school bullying has provided a robust empirical foundation for understanding group-level differences and statistical relationships between pertinent variables.

As a brief note, on an ontological level, bullying researchers who ascribe to a first order perspective are commonly guided by more positivist conceptions of ‘truth’ as being accessible through experimentation and indeed, independent from human consciousness. (Not all “first order” researchers share this ontological stance however, for example, researchers from humanistic psychology traditions). Stemming from these perspectives that seek ‘objectivity’, bullying research typically privileges methods that can explicate nomothetic entities (regularities, consistencies) of the phenomenon. We see this through the use of quantitative data collection tools, such as cross-sectional surveys, longitudinal analyses, or randomized control trials. Although this type of work is helpful in providing a summary description of a group of individuals that may then be tentatively generalizable to larger populations, it has simultaneously led to an “individualization,” – that is, based in individual psychology (Jovanovic, 2010) – of the bullying phenomenon. In effect, this dominant focus has overlooked subjective descriptions or unique qualities of individuals’ meaning-making experiences.

Second Order Perspectives of Bullying

Whereas first order perspectives of bullying, which has hitherto dominated bullying research to date, provide information about the individuals involved in bullying, the risk factors, and the harmful consequences, research from second order perspectives understand bullying as part of social patterns of interaction, shaped by wider societal discourses, power relations, and other socio-cultural forces (Ringrose, 2008; Schott & Søndergaard, 2014). This latter wave of research, or *paradigm two*, is largely influenced by social psychologists and sociologists who are critical of research that reduces the phenomenon of bullying as merely an individualistic phenomenon. The consequences of individualized perspectives of bullying, as many second order researchers articulate, serves to categorize young people within a deficit model that “disregard[s] the institutional setting of the school, the social processes of the involved and how societal and historically constructed structures of inequality are part of producing bullying in schools” (Koushoults & Fisker, 2015, p. 594). Some researchers have argued that first order perspectives pathologize young people, blame them for their behaviours, and resultantly, places sole responsibility on the individual (including the child who bullies, is bullied, stands by, as well as individual teachers and parents) for re-establishing normality (Duncan, 2013). Alternatively,

when researchers recognize the external factors that shape school bullying, we can see that young people involved are not extraordinary (which might indicate pathology), but rather “ordinary children in specific situations and group contexts” (Horton, 2011, p. 269). The question of *how it becomes necessary for children to act in the ways that they do* is central to second order investigations.

Many researchers who draw from second order perspectives of bullying do so from symbolic interactionism as a theoretical perspective (e.g., Forsberg, 2017; Thornberg, 2010; 2017) and/or post-structuralist positions (Schott & Søndergaard, 2014; Søndergaard, 2014; Viala, 2015; Walton, 2005; 2011) and many have incorporated feminist approaches (e.g., Currie et al., 2007; Ringrose, 2008). Furthermore, second order perspectives of bullying have increasingly incorporated the work of Michel Foucault (1926–1984), specifically his understanding of the ubiquity of power and resistance, and the role of discourses in shaping ‘regimes of truth’ (Foucault, 1991). Second order perspectives of bullying, however, comparatively downplay individual factors, such as young people’s personality traits or upbringing, by instead shifting the focus to wider societal issues, which, in effect, may overemphasize cultural determinants and reduce the agency of individuals.

Contrasting First and Second Order Perspectives

It should be noted that the boundaries between first and second order perspectives of bullying are not discrete and are becoming increasingly blurred as researchers approach the problem from multi-disciplinary or integrative-theoretical points of view, such as systems perspectives. For example, work by Salmivalli, Voeten, and Poskiparta (2011) accentuate group processes (e.g., group dynamics, participant roles, etc.) alongside individual factors, which help to bridge first and second order perspectives. Other research that examines the role of schools and teachers in impacting peer bullying also provide important linkages between individualized and socio-cultural perspectives of bullying. Yet, there are key differences in the knowledge that has been developed from first and second order perspectives of bullying, particularly with respect to: (1) the core conditions of bullying (repetition, power imbalance, and intent to harm); (2) the influence of gender in bullying perpetration and victimization; and, (3) the role of the school in bullying prevention and intervention. These differences will be highlighted further below.

The core conditions of bullying

Olweus' classical definition of bullying provides the core conditions of bullying that demarcate it from general forms of aggression. He highlights that bullying is an abuse of power, whereby an individual is exposed, repeatedly, and over time to intentional aggression actions. He sets out three criteria within his definition, specifically: (1) repetition; (2) power imbalance; and (3) the intention to harm.

Repetition. Traditional depictions of bullying highlight that the victim is targeted by the perpetrator(s) repeatedly. This notion has been contested across bullying and peer victimization work from both first and second perspectives, as some researchers have argued that one act of bullying has the potential to satisfy the bullying criteria, particularly when this act invokes a sense of terror in the victim (Byrne, 1994), or in the case of cyberbullying, when one act has the potential to be revisited and reach a wider audience (Parker, 2012). Researchers stemming from second order perspectives, more particularly, have additionally highlighted that the criterion of repetition projects a sense that the positions of bully and victim are relatively static, whereby the “bully” attacks the “victim” repeatedly, with little to no changes occurring in the bullying relationship (Schott & Søndergaard, 2014). Indeed, first order research, often attaches various adjectives to young people involved in bullying (i.e., the bully, the victimized, and bystanders), forming a bullying-triangle that is relatively unchanging (Sullivan, Clearly, & Sullivan, 2004). For example, those who bully are described as aggressive, evil-minded, and impulsive, and those who are victimized are passive, submissive, insecure, or have poor social-emotional skills (Olweus, 1993). Although there is some consideration for the blurring of these classifications (the “bully-victim” designation denotes how a child can exhibit both characteristics of a bully and victim), there is still a tendency to focus on two fixed personalities with a set of stable characteristics.

Conversely, recent social-psychological and sociological research that emphasizes social processes in relationships have noted that the positions of bully and victim are much more fluid than psychological research depicts, and thus the criterion of repetition, in some cases, may resemble more of a cycling between experiences of victimization and bullying others (Jamal, Bonell, Harden, & Lorenc, 2015). Furthermore, preliminary research on victimization within friendship also accentuates that while a child may be bullied repeatedly, there are moments of satisfaction within the friendship, interspersed by periods of abuse (Bouchard, Forsberg, Thornberg, and Smith, 2018). There is substantially less research that has documented these

occurrences “in between” episodes of bullying victimization. This research would help to formulate a more complex understanding of the nature of repetition in bullying experiences.

Power imbalance. The condition of a power imbalance has been argued to be the most crucial factor to the bullying definition (Volk, Veenstra, & Espelage, 2017). Here, many researchers have tended to accept the Olweus (1993) notion that a power asymmetry exists in a bullying relationship when the victimized finds it challenging to defend themselves. Some researchers, primarily from first order perspectives, have articulated the types of power imbalances that can be used to explain bullying. For example, Rigby (2008) notes that power differences can take place in the form of the perpetrator(s) being physically or numerically superior to their victim(s) and having increased social competencies and greater status amongst the peer group (Rigby, 2008). While second order researchers agree that a power imbalance between the victimized and their abusers is central to the bullying phenomenon, they add to this argument by highlighting how the victim’s inability to defend themselves is reflective, or indeed a recapitulation of wider power relations in which bullying occurs (e.g., Duncan, 2013; Horton, 2011). Social-psychological and sociological perspectives of bullying articulate that an individual’s ability to wield power (e.g., through physical size) is largely dependent on the individual’s social positioning as well as the normative orders that make room for such power to be used in a bullying situation. And similarly, individuals may be unable to defend themselves, not just because of their unpopularity within the social group, for example, but because they have been positioned as less valuable than others or “deviant” in some capacity, which is reinforced by structures that create wider societal categorizations and inequalities. Whereas first order perspectives explains power in bullying in terms of examples of power (physically or socially superior), second order research asks how these individuals are positioned and position themselves as to be able to express this power.

Furthermore, second order perspectives question whether bullying itself may be the effects of power within wider society. As Horton (2011) writes:

It is therefore important to consider how bullying relates to social and moral orders within the group, within the institutional setting, and within wider society, because while incidents of bullying may be condemned and deemed unacceptable, the orders which they serve to police and reiterate may be widely accepted. (p. 270)

It becomes crucial then to consider whether young people involved in bullying are behaving in ways that conform to or uphold categorizations and distinctions that are already used for the

purposes of ordering society. Second order perspectives see practices of inclusion and exclusion amongst children's peer groups as recapitulations of power relations within society. This perspective has been instrumental for bringing issues of racism (Ringrose & Renold, 2010), homophobia (Walton, 2005), gendered harassment (Meyer, 2008), and school disciplinary practices (Horton, 2011; Yoneyama & Naito, 2003) into discussions of bullying. Additionally, conceptualizing the effects of power opens up analyses that consider how bullying is used to construct 'differentness' and re-establish what is 'normal,' (Thornberg, 2015a), which is akin to wider discriminatory practices.

Intent to harm. Intending to cause harm to another individual has also been noted as an important condition for bullying, although many studies have noted that young people themselves do not use the criterion of harm intentionality in their definitions of bullying (Vaillancourt et al., 2008). Volk, Dane, and Marini's work (2014) provides an alternative perspective of intention to harm through a description of goal-directedness. They posit that young people use bullying to achieve goals, such as a favourable social positioning, by which they are able to wield more power and gain access to resources. This work brings to light the instrumental function of bullying and questions whether other intentions, beyond the intent to harm, might provide a better explanation for why a young person would bully others. Research from a second order perspective builds on this work by articulating that the intention to harm is seen through the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion, which can be both overtly articulated, unintentional, or as a result of other motivating forces, such as countering the anxiety that is often associated with a threatened peer group inclusion (Schott & Søndergaard, 2014).

Gender in bullying perpetration and victimization

Bullying literature typically considers the differing methods boys and girls use to aggress against others, the motivations they have for aggressing, as well as the differing responses boys and girls have to bullying experiences (Card, Stucky, Sawalani, & Little, 2008; Crick & Grotpeter, 1996). First order research has developed a substantial base of literature for how boys and girls differentially experience bullying (e.g., Nickerson, Singleton, Schnurr, & Collen, 2014), the participant roles of boys and girls within peer groups during bullying incidents (e.g., Salmivalli, Lagerspetz, Bjorkqvist, Osterman, & Kaukiainen, 1996), and the impact of familial characteristics in boys' and girls' experiences with bullying (Totura, Green, Karver, & Gesten, 2009). Additionally, and specifically related to relational aggression (where the debate on gender

differences continues to be the strongest), some first order research has argued that relational bullying may be more typical of females (Crick & Nelson, 2002) whereas others suggest that there are mixed findings in the literature (Olweus, 2012) or that the effect of gender on mean-level differences is small or inconclusive (Card et al., 2008; Chesney-Lind, Morash, & Irwin 2007). Other research has noted that girls view relational bullying as more harmful as compared to boys (Murray-Close, Crick, & Galotti, 2006) and that girls' relational bullying most often occurs within friendship groups (Besag, 2006). Taken together, there is a robust, though still debated, foundation of research that considers gender differences in the experience of bullying perpetration and victimization. However, most bullying research that seeks to investigate the complexity of gender has primarily relied on biological conceptions of gender (Felix & Greif-Greene, 2010). Recent post-modern work on gender and bullying (stemming from second order perspectives) has problematized this approach (e.g., Duncan, 1993; Felix & Greif-Greene, 2010; Meyer, 2008; Ringrose, 2008).

Studies originating from second order perspectives can help to provide crucial insight into how social, political, and cultural landscapes have impacted gender-specific expectations. For example, second order research is critical of the 'naturalness' of young people's behaviours based on fixed categories of gender. Rather, this line of research has suggested that there are a number of social and discursive forces within girls' worlds that constrain their use of aggression (Hey, 1997; Meyer, 2008; Ringrose & Renold, 2010; Warrington & Younger, 2011). For example, literature has a tendency to uncritically position girls as the primary culprits in forms of relational bullying, such as gossip, exclusion, and relational manipulation (to be sure, the research is still mixed on these findings, but the prevalent discourse still remains that girls are more apt to engage in bullying using more relational mechanisms). This work not only homogenizes girls but also overlooks heteronormative ideals of femininity and how these structures force girls to walk a fine line of performing "nice-ness" within their friendship groups (Ringrose & Renold, 2010), while managing their participation in a competitive schooling ethos and heterosexualized competition (Ringrose, 2008). Researchers have also argued that what is deemed as "bullying" is often what transgresses gender expectations (i.e., girls engaging in physical bullying). Furthermore, research has also found that those who do transgress established gender norms are at an increased risk of experiencing bullying (Duncan, 1998). This line of research views gender as a social construct, intimately connected to ideals of masculinity and femininity and to power

structures within society, which adds another layer of complexity to traditional bullying research that examines the role of gender as a relatively fixed category.

The role of schools in bullying prevention and intervention

Findings from several decades of research on school climate have inspired policy, regulatory, and legislative changes that have led schools toward “whole-school approaches” to preventing bullying and victimization. These whole-school approaches are based on the assumption that bullying is a systemic problem that requires intervention and prevention at individual and contextual levels. Within these approaches, there is a considerable emphasis on changing children’s behavioural norms, as well as the important role of teachers and administrators in modeling appropriate anti-bullying behaviour and investing in building positive relationships with their students (Bouchard & Smith, 2017). Although the position has broad support, implementing such approaches into practice has been challenging. There have been some promising results demonstrating the effectiveness of these programs to minimize bullying incidents, yet these results are not consistent across different contexts and are often not sustained over time (Ttofi & Farrington, 2011). Some researchers have argued that whole-school bullying efforts often do not address the multiple ecological levels that can impact bullying behaviours, such as community and cultural norms and wider beliefs, such as religion, socio-economic status, and race (Hong & Espelage, 2012), and they do not acknowledge that schools themselves provide an arena for bullying (Horton, 2011).

Decades of work, largely stemming from first order perspectives, has examined when and where bullying typically occurs, and has provided analyses of variables, such as school size and class size, in bullying perpetration (Espelage & Swearer, 2010). This has produced a robust foundation of school-level factors impacting bullying. Yoneyama and Naito’s work (2003) provides an alternative perspective for understanding the role of schools in the bullying/victimization. They argue that schools represent social institutions that are authoritarian and hierarchical and operate with a clear articulation and division of roles. Students often have very little power to choose whom they associate with and how they spend their time, and they are forced to negotiate the often conflicting demands within schools, such as social conformity and academic competition (Horton, 2011). Students must also juggle the expectations of their peers and teachers, when heeding to the expectations of one group at the expense of the other may subject young people to social sanctions from peers or discipline from their teacher. Teachers,

too, may inadvertently contribute to bullying through their pedagogical practices and may feel so overwhelmed by the demands of the curriculum that they have very little time for addressing social-emotional issues in the classroom (Migliaccio, 2015). Teachers themselves may also bully students, justify the bullying of particular students in the class, or feel compelled to punish individual children to maintain order in the classroom. Duncan (2013) recommends that bullying needs to be reframed as a structural problem, of which schools themselves play a significant part in generating the conditions for the proliferation of bullying. He, and others have argued that bullying prevention and intervention practices that do not consider contextual factors, societal structures, and dominant discourses may be insufficient in addressing the problem (Duncan, 2013; Horton, 2011; Walton, 2005).

A Potential Meeting Point?

Evidenced by the three examples above (core conditions of bullying, gender, and the role of schools in bullying prevention/intervention), it is apparent that what is needed is a theoretical rapprochement of first and second order perspectives in order to generate a more comprehensive understanding of the bullying problem. Thornberg (2015b) depicts these different perspectives of bullying by drawing from a metaphor of six blind men around an elephant (Thayer-Bacon, 2001). Each man described an elephant as a rope, tree, fan, snake, wall, or spear, depending on which part of the elephant he touched. The message of the metaphor is that it is only through a cooperative dialogical exchange amongst perspectives that a more comprehensive understanding of bullying can be achieved.

I have come to see bullying as a complex individual, social, and cultural phenomenon, where mutually constitutive forces between young people and their socio-ecological contexts combine to shape bullying experiences. As such, I hold a perspective of bullying that is sensitive to many entangled forces, such as individual factors, dyad or group-level processes, patterns of interactions, power relations, and wider socio-cultural influences. A promising perspective of bullying that has the potential to act as a meeting point, incorporating both individual and contextual explanations of bullying, is the social-ecological framework (Horton, 2011; Thornberg, 2015b).

A Social-Ecological Understanding of Bullying

A social-ecological framework of school bullying is influenced by Bronfenbrenner's social-ecological model as well as the vast research on school bullying that have utilized an

ecological lens (Espelage & Swearer, 2010; Hong & Espelage, 2012). Bronfenbrenner (1917–2005), a developmental psychologist, posited that human development takes place through social processes, both proximal and distal, and that these processes are reciprocal, active, and evolving. He conceived the ecological environment as a set of nested social settings affecting human development. Bronfenbrenner’s work, though he focused on development, is an example of a systems theory that describes the complex, reciprocal interactions of multiple actors and objectives in the ambient environment. Bronfenbrenner’s model, as well as other systems perspectives of bullying (Migliaccio, 2015), has prompted a change in thinking about bullying, as it has shifted some attention from understanding bullying in primarily individualistic ways to considering the role of wider contexts. Indeed, bullying is a complex psychosocial phenomenon that is established and perpetuated through the interplay of person and context over time (Hong & Espelage, 2012).

Within Bronfenbrenner’s classic social-ecological model, the individual is located at the center of the model and is most powerfully affected by those persons, objects, symbols in the immediate environment. Bullying research that examines the phenomenon from the level of the individual has typically focused on explicating salient characteristics that predict young people’s experiences with bullying, such as age, sex, and psychosocial problems. The microsystem describes the environment where the individual spends a great deal of time (e.g., the home, school, day-care, etc.) and the interactions amongst prominent participants within the microsystem (friends, peer groups, siblings, teacher-students, etc.). As Hong and Espelage (2012) write, “the most direct influences in bullying behaviour among youth are within the microsystem, which is composed of individuals or groups of individuals within immediate settings (e.g., home, school) with whom youth have interactions” (p. 315). Analyses on the level of the microsystem have dominated recent work on bullying, as researchers have been most interested in the reciprocal interplay between individual factors and young people’s immediate contexts. Peer relationships play a significant role in bullying perpetration and victimization and, as such, this continues to be a widely investigated area of research within microcontextual examinations of bullying. Overall, studies that have examined the microsystem have been prolific in recent bullying research. Yet, some researchers have argued that examining the interplay of the microsystem and individual factors has produced a rather limited conceptualization of bullying, as this perspective has still overemphasized the role of individuals or groups of individuals and

overlooked the interactions amongst those individuals and the other systems that make up a young person's ecology (Horton, 2016; Hong & Espelage, 2012). There has been comparatively little attention in bullying literature given to factors within the mesosystem. The mesosystem forms when people from the microsystems in which children live come into contact (e.g., families and schools, teacher-student relationships and peer relationships), where experiences in one microsystem can impact the experiences in another microsystem (e.g., teacher-student relationships and students' relationships with peers, parental involvement in school life, etc.). The exosystem refers to environments that influence children, but in which they are not directly situated (e.g., the workplace of the child's mother, school board-meetings, etc.). This is where forces, such as school policies, teacher trainings, and other decision-making in which the individual is not present, become relevant to studies on school bullying (Horton, 2011). The macrosystem consists of the overarching societal patterns, belief systems, and social interchanges that exist within any culture, reciprocally impacting all remaining systems. This research has included explorations of discourses of bullying (Canty et al., 2016; Walton, 2005), gender norms and heteronormativity (Ringrose & Renold, 2010), the institutionalization of bullying (Horton, 2011; Yoneyama & Naito, 2003), and other social categories such as ethnicity, appearance, and sexual orientation as important forces that factor into the proliferation of bullying and victimization. Finally, the chronosystem represents the dimension of time as it relates to an individual's life, which includes life events and shifts over time.

Although there has been considerable attention focused on describing and explaining bullying within several pertinent developmental contexts within the microsystem, there still continues to be considerably less research on how bullying relates to other elements in the social-ecological model and the interaction amongst ecological factors. Research that examines the interaction between bullying and multiple levels of the ecology, has the potential to bridge first- and second order perspectives and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the bullying phenomenon (Carerra, DePalma, & Lameiras, 2011).

Friendships and Bullying

Research that examines the link between friendship (a relevant microcontext) and bullying often reveals that friendships are sanctuaries from harm. This research depicts the protective role of friendship in the association between experiences of bullying victimization and both internalizing distress and externalizing behaviours (Gini, 2008). Peer victimization predicts

an increase in both internalized distress and externalizing problem behaviours for only the children who did not have a mutual best friendship (Hodges, Boivin, Bukowski, & Vitaro, 1999). This was echoed in Schmidt and Bagwell's (2007) work, which demonstrated that children's high quality relationships (defined by high levels of support and feelings of security) served as buffers against internalizing distress from both relational and overt forms of victimization. Although friendships are critical for positive development, some researchers have begun to investigate the potential dark-sides of friendship (e.g., Daniels, Quigley, Menard, & Spence, 2010).

A small subset of bullying research recognizes that friendships can be characterized by both positive and negative qualities, offering young people important provisions of friendship, such as disclosure and opportunities for companionship, while simultaneously including forms of bullying (Waasdorp, Bagdi, & Bradshaw, 2009). Quantitative data reveals that about a quarter of victimization occurs within close, reciprocated friendships (e.g., Brendgen et al. 2015). Other work has revealed that two-thirds of friendships that involved victimization were viewed as mutual by members of the friendship (i.e., both the perpetrator and victimized still considered each other as "friends") (Daniels et al., 2010). Crick and Nelson's (2002) seminal work in this area indicated that many children maintain friendships with their victimizer, which may prevent these children from acquiring the social skills and support that friendship typically provides.

Research that examines bullying victimization within friendship has typically done so from a first-order perspective. There is significantly less understanding of the processes that create or sustain the cycle of violence within friendship, as well as the ongoing social dynamics and negotiations that occur within social groupings, such as why certain individuals are excluded or included, as well as how individuals within friendships exercise power. Furthermore, wider cultural forces such as gender and other intersecting categories are rarely examined yet are critical to investigate in order to develop a more comprehensive understanding of bullying.

Theoretical Positions

The social-ecological model used to frame this dissertation is linked to my epistemological and theoretical positions, namely qualified relativism and symbolic interactionism. In my reading of epistemological and ontological literature (as well through personal communication with Dr. Robert Thornberg, who writes about qualified relativism), I found that my understanding of bullying aligned with Thayer-Bacon's (2001, 2003) position of qualified relativism, which has origins in pragmatism, social constructionism, and feminism.

Qualified relativism emphasizes fallibilism, the social construction of knowledge, and pluralism. At its centre, qualified relativism rejects the binary of the knower as separate from knowledge, and instead views knowledge as constructed by individuals in relation.

Thayer-Bacon's qualified relativism is founded on classical pragmatist's C. S. Pierce's fallibilism, namely that human beings cannot attain absolute certainty because they are constrained by their own situatedness and embodiment. As there is no absolute truth, there is no final endpoint to knowledge; the universe is open and unfinished. In line with fallibilism, qualified relativists believe that philosophical assumptions are contextually bound, and as such, individuals are *situated knowers* who are also contextually bound. Knowledge is not neutral, impartial, or objective but, rather, is constructed by individuals embedded within a community of other knowers. As such, knowledge is open to re-examination, criticism, re-conceptualizing, and re-describing (Thayer-Bacon, 2003). In her work, Thayer-Bacon devotes attention to describing the "qualified" in her understanding of relativism. She argues that while qualified relativism emphasizes radical pluralism and a multiplicity of perspectives, it does not "embrace the incoherence and arbitrariness of vulgar relativism" (Thayer-Bacon, 2003, p. 428). That is, it is not a perspective of "anything goes" that is often associated with constructionist paradigms, but rather, is *qualified* by an acknowledgement of the limitedness of knowledge. Thayer-Bacon (2001) stated that "we don't have to embrace all theories as true, but rather we must acknowledge that we don't know the truth' and continue to inquire and support new understandings." For example, as a bullying researcher, I try to describe the phenomenon, seek out more information, and support my understandings with evidence, yet even if "I believe I am right, qualified by a socially constructed view of knowledge...I know I could be wrong" (Thayer-Bacon, 2001, p. 17).

According to Thayer-Bacon (2003), to compensate for our social embeddedness and fallibility of individual human knowledge in constructing a qualified understanding, we must embrace an inclusion of others in our debates and discussions. Here Thayer-Bacon borrows from John Dewey's assertion that a variety of voices need to be considered in the construction of knowledge, as this "inclusion of others in our debates and discussions allows us the means for correcting our standards, and improving the warrants for our assertions" (Thayer-Bacon, 2003, p. 418). She aligns this perspective with the focus of feminist thinkers and researchers, as they are critical of absolutism and call attention to forces of power and privilege that claim epistemological agency. In order to create theories of knowledge, she argues, that the "more

voices are included and considered, the more each of us can trust that we have considered all available information and can hope to make a sound judgement” (Thayer-Bacon, 2003, p. 435).

Thayer-Bacon’s qualified relativism provides an epistemological grounding for my dissertation, as I stress the centrality of social constructions of knowledge, the interconnectedness of knowledge and knowers, as well as the critical need for radical pluralism in constructing knowledge. I see the phenomenon of bullying and our understandings of its complexity as context bound, and therefore open, unfinished, and continually in need of critique and reconstruction. I believe that including others in our research, particularly those whose understandings of bullying have been reduced or overlooked in favour of more dominant, articulated meanings of bullying, such as women and young people, is tantamount to developing qualified constructions of knowledge. Furthermore, as a researcher, I am also open to the assumptions of other inquirers within the bullying research community, as their perspectives will help us to gather more complete, although provisional, contextualized, and fallible, understandings of bullying. Qualified relativism also helped me to conceptualize my own role as a co-constructor of knowledge throughout this dissertation.

The theoretical perspective, symbolic interactionism, was an additional lens from which I approached my understanding of my participants’ perspectives as well as my understanding of bullying as a phenomenon (particularly in study 1). At the core of symbolic interactionism is a focus on perspectives, particularly in how perspectives are constructed and reconstructed through social interaction. Symbolic interactionism was coined by Herbert Blumer (1969) and was influenced by the work of George Herbert Mead (1938), both of whom perceived that meanings of the world emerge from experiences and as social interaction is both open-ended and dynamic, these meanings change as experiences change. The major premise of symbolic interactionism is that meanings are tied to experience (or through actions) and that humans are social, interactional, reflective actors who act towards themselves, others, and objects with respect to meanings. In line with a social constructionist perspective, which perceives reality as distinctly social and constructed, symbolic interactionism highlights that individuals do not respond to reality directly but to their social understandings of reality and that these understandings are created and recreated through interpreting processes during interaction with others.

The subjective meaning that individuals use to make sense of their worlds is a central premise of symbolic interactionism. Individuals interpret and derive meaning from objects

(people, places, and things) as well as language, and respond based on their interpreted meanings. Individuals define and label objects in order to understand situations and this naming has consequences to how individuals act in a situation (Thomas & Thomas, 1928). If individuals construct meaning through social interactions, it becomes important to study how, on what objects, or with what language, the influence of social groups influence individuals' perspectives and actions. Symbolic interactionism also points to how the self is also a social construction, as the self is negotiated by other's reactions and the individual's interaction with and interpretation of themselves. Our identity, or identities, are the acting of these interpretations, presented to others, which in turn, are defined and labeled.

A perspective on social interaction, meaning, and perspectives was helpful in my investigations of bullying. I was particularly interested in how participants' interpreted and defined bullying and friendship, what objects/language were used to craft these understandings, as well as the effects of their perceptions. This is where deconstructing the terminologies of "bully" and "victim" become important, as this can point to how different identities can be constructed in participants' understandings of bullying (Forsberg, 2017). Individuals also interact within a socio-cultural environment, which opens up certain meanings and shapes interaction. Although largely a micro-sociological theoretical framework, as the focus is on individuals' subjective meanings, symbolic interactionism can also point to the constraining forces of structures and how these often taken-for-granted values and practices can set the conditions for individuals' possible actions. This perspective was particularly relevant for manuscript 2 (study 1), which examined how macro-level forces shape individuals' subjective meanings of bullying and serve to produce/reproduce the structures that enable and constrain their actions. Most notably, a symbolic interactionism perspective helps to shift an understanding of bullying as an external, fixed concept to one that is concerned with how individuals make sense of their social worlds and themselves. Accordingly, I perceive that what I write about in this dissertation reflects an interaction of perspectives, namely my participants, other's perspectives, the academic and popular literature, as well as my own emerging conceptualizations. I also recognize that my participants, and myself as a researcher, are individuals who reflect, interpret, and act based on subjective meanings that are socially constructed through interaction.

The Dissertation

This dissertation contributes to the body of work that understands bullying as a complex

phenomenon, imbued by both individual and contextual factors. Specifically, this dissertation explores the experience of bullying victimization, and particularly bullying as it occurs within friendships, from a social-ecological framework. That is, in my analyses, I was sensitive to the overlapping and reciprocal individual, micro, meso, and macro forces that combine to shape young people's experiences with bullying. The three manuscripts that comprise this dissertation highlight different levels of the social-ecological framework. The first manuscript considers specifically the role of a relevant mesosystem, the second manuscript highlights the macrosystem, and the third manuscript focuses on the microsystem while incorporating some analysis from the macrosystem. I provide an overview of each manuscript below.

In the first manuscript I provide more detail to the social-ecological model as it relates to bullying, and consider specifically the role of a relevant **mesosystem**, namely teacher-student relationships and students' bullying experiences with friends and the wider peer group. There is a relatively limited understanding for how the forces within the mesosystem can lead to and potentially protect young people from bullying experiences; this paper serves to draw attention to some of these largely concealed factors.

I report specifically on the experience of victimization as it occurs within friendship in the fourth and sixth chapters of the dissertation. In these projects, I accentuate processes within the **microsystem** and **macrosystem**. My main research question for these two projects was: How do young people experience victimization within friendship? Through investigating these experiences, I was particularly interested in the ways that young people understand and respond to bullying victimization within friendships. Friendship represents an important microcontext that influences the phenomena of bullying perpetration and victimization, yet it has been overlooked in traditional bullying research, or has been examined in limited ways (e.g., the role of friends in bullying perpetration or protection from victimization, and the buffering effects of friends on internalizing and externalizing symptoms following bullying victimization). There is still a gap in the research of the ways that young people experience bullying by friends and how this might compare to or enhance our understanding of bullying between non-friends. Furthermore, there is still relatively little understanding of the social-ecological factors and processes that can create or sustain patterns of bullying within friendships and the complex negotiations that young people undertake when considering their responses to bullying within friendships. By specifically exploring bullying as it manifests within friendship, I identify particular nuances to the bullying

experience, thereby adding another layer of complexity to researchers' understandings of the bullying phenomenon.

Manuscript 1

The first manuscript presented in this dissertation is an article that was published in *The Education Forum* in 2017. As a conceptual piece, this paper offers a perspective of bullying/victimization from a mesosystemic position. In this manuscript, we were interested in the ways that teacher-student relationship quality is intimately connected to youth's bullying experiences with friends and the wider peer group. Throughout this manuscript, we argued for the need for analyses on the level of mesosystem. Particularly, this work highlighted two relationship theories, attachment and social referral, as important processes that are part of the wider moment-to-moment teacher-student interactions that can profoundly affect students' responses to bullying, and by extension, students' relationships with peers. The article also provided an extensive discussion on strengthening the mesosystem as a means to decreasing incidences of bullying.

Manuscript 2

The second manuscript (published in the *Journal of Youth Studies*, 2018) offers a perspective of bullying victimization within women's adolescent friendships from a primarily macrosystemic position, though the article does consider the interaction of other individual and microcontextual factors in the analysis. We were specifically interested in the forces that combine to help to produce young women's understandings of and responses to victimization within friendship. This study was guided by constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014) and Wade's work on resistance to violence (Wade, 1997). The findings draw attention to the social and discursive constraints that determine resistance to school bullying. Specifically, the results suggested that participants resisted victimization in important ways but that their resistance strategies were negotiated within ambient constructions of resistance, bullying, and victimhood. Furthermore, the findings indicated that such discourses that conceal women's resistance and privilege overt responses to bullying run counter to gendered expectations for resistance, leaving women in a double bind. This research contributes to the literature on bullying by highlighting the ways that victimized young people exercise power (i.e., through a 'resistance' lens rather than through individual symptomology lens). Additionally, the manuscript articulates how dominant gendered discourses leave victims of bullying with very limited options for responding to bullying within friendship. Subsequently, women's responses are often covert, seemingly

contradictory (i.e., participants continued to “show friendship” despite feeling victimized), or they often involve retaliatory aggression.

Manuscript 3

The final manuscript (*in review*) reports on findings from a study where we investigated victimized young people’s experiences of bullying victimization as it occurred within a friendship context. Throughout the project, we were sensitive to the microcontextual and macrocontextual factors that influenced participants’ victimization experiences. Guided by a social-ecological model, this study explored 25 Canadian adolescents’ experiences of being previously victimized by a friend. Qualitative data were collected through an anonymous online forum and were analyzed using Braun and Clarke’s (2006, 2013) inductive thematic analysis. After a thematic analysis, the following themes emerged related to how participants experienced victimization within friendship: the cycling of victimization and friendship; responding to bullying and maintaining the friendship and/or peer group membership; responding aggressively to bullying within friendship, and; reconciling bullying within friendship. The themes represent factors that can complicate experiences of victimization within friendship and underline why victimization within friendships can be so distressing for youth. The findings also help to explain why young people respond to bullying victimization within friendships in the ways that they do. Overall, the results point to the potential features of bullying victimization within friendship that add another layer of complexity to the bullying experience; we discuss these aspects and argue that these nuances should be taken up in current practical approaches to addressing bullying, with an emphasis on prevention and intervention efforts in schools.

My Positioning

The phenomenon of bullying victimization within friendships has always intrigued me; this interest is partly founded in my personal experiences. I was a member of a victimizing friendship throughout my adolescence. I remember feeling very hurt and confused by my friend’s behaviour, but I also felt a strong sense of devotion, warmth, and even felt territorial of this friendship. I remember feeling trapped and unable to “stand up” to her, despite numerous suggestions to do so by my parents and other friends. I also remember spreading rumors about this friend, gossiping about her, and calling her callous names “behind her back.” At the same time, I cherished this friendship and, above all, I did not want this friendship to end. I recall feeling perplexed by the shifting power dynamics that constituted our friendship as well as our

overwhelming desire to remain committed to the friendship despite the ongoing victimization. I also remember feeling unsatisfied with the dominant bullying discourses that positioned bullying as primarily a result of deviant children behaving badly. I found these understandings of bullying to be reductionist, if not harmful to those involved. I knew that there must be more going on to explain what I was experiencing.

It was during my master's thesis that I developed a deeper understanding of the forces at work that could help to explain my victimization experiences. In this project, I constructed a theme from the data, which I titled the "dark side of belonging." This theme describes the propensity for some young people to sacrifice their own personal wellbeing in the service of remaining a valued member within a friendship or peer group. Since this time, I have been very intrigued by the power of group processes and interpersonal dynamics in determining behaviours. My doctoral research is influenced by this strong interest in these relational factors. Through my personal experiences and my previous research, I have learned that bullying is a complex phenomenon, one that is impacted by a variety of forces at work, many of which operate outside the individual but nevertheless have an important role to play in individuals' experiences. This position is reflected in my theoretical framework and by my efforts to investigate these forces more deeply.

Chapter 2: Teacher–Student Relationship Quality and Children’s Bullying Experiences with Peers: Reflecting on the Mesosystem

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Abstract

Drawing from social ecological systems theory, the authors argue that current research on childhood bullying would benefit from analyses that consider the mesosystem—specifically, how teacher–student relationships can influence children’s bullying experiences. The authors provide two theoretical conceptions for how children’s peer interactions are implicitly shaped by teacher–student relationship quality: attachment and social referral. Implications for practice, with an emphasis on developing teachers’ social-emotional competencies to strengthen positive teacher–student relationships, are proposed.

Key Words

bullying/victimization, healthy relationships, peer interactions, professional development, social ecology, teacher education/certification, teacher–student relationships.

Bullying is a relationship problem that requires relationship solutions. This is the position taken by the Promoting Relationships and Eliminating Violence Network, a leading bullying prevention and knowledge mobilization network in Canada. This conception of bullying has evolved from the predominant view represented in early bullying research of the 1970s and 1980s, which often framed the issue as an individual problem—that is, that some children may be predisposed to aggressive behaviors or to damaging internalizing and externalizing coping

responses when victimized. Early intervention discourse stemming from this view of bullying indicated that interventions should target individual children involved in bullying through specific skills training (for a review of the evolution of bullying research, see Swearer & Espelage, 2011). Since then, a more complex and nuanced view of bullying has emerged that has integrated considerations of social contexts to understand bullying more completely (Pepler, Craig, Jiang, & Connolly, 2008). Today, bullying is considered a complex psychosocial phenomenon that is established and perpetuated through the interplay of person and context over time (Hong & Espelage, 2012), and prevention initiatives are multilevel and systemic. To address the complex interactional processes of bullying experiences, initiatives to foster healthy relationship development have emerged as potentially effective practices to diminish children's involvement in bullying (Craig & Pepler, 2007).

Bronfenbrenner's social-ecological systems theory (1979) is a useful framework for explaining the multiple factors underlying children's bullying experiences. In this model, development unfolds within nested social systems (of varying proximity to the child) that influence and are influenced by developmental processes in the child. The model has been increasingly applied in bullying research, both in the identification of substantive issues related to bullying and victimization and in shaping prevention practices. There has been considerable attention focused on describing and explaining bullying within several pertinent developmental contexts (i.e., the microsystems)—namely the peer group, family, and school context (e.g., Espelage & Swearer, 2010). There has been considerably less research on how bullying relates to other elements in the social-ecological model of development. For example, Carerra, DePalma, and Lameiras (2011) reviewed the bullying literature within a sociological perspective and concluded that very little research had examined links between bullying and the macrosystem, which includes ambient social, political, and cultural norms. Similarly, research that examines influential mesosystems (i.e., interactions of two or more microsystems in which the developing child lives) is also lacking (Kinderman, 2011). This restricted application of the social-ecological systems theory has impeded the development of bullying prevention strategies that leverage the positive developmental potential of the mesosystems that influence children's development (Richard, Schneider, & Mallet, 2011).

Drawing from Bronfenbrenner's social-ecological model and the need for analyses on the level of the mesosystem, we examine the interaction of two systems known to be separately

impactful on children's bullying experiences—namely, the teacher–student relationship and the peer group. We argue that researchers and educators must recognize more fully teachers' role in children's bullying experiences. Teachers are uniquely situated at a crossroads of several critical social contexts that affect children's development: They have the opportunity to see children in a broad perspective within the school and classroom environments and as impacted by various systems (such as the child's peer group and family), and to influence their development. This position finds support in a body of research that attests to the importance of teacher–student relationships in children's psychosocial and intellectual development (see Sabol & Pianta, 2012, for review). In this article, we examine these relationship processes within two theoretical frameworks, attachment theory and social reference theory, to conceptualize the impact of children's bullying experiences. This conceptualization of the interconnected nature of children's teacher and peer relationships can potentially inform the development of bullying prevention initiatives that consider the various facets of healthy relationships.

Social-Ecological Systems Theory

Urie Bronfenbrenner, a developmental psychologist, devised his social-ecological systems theory in response to the restricted scope of traditional, reductionist psychological research. He posited that human development is driven by social processes, both proximal and distal in relation to the developing child, and that these processes are reciprocal, active, and evolving. He conceived of the social environment as a set of nested structures in which “processes and conditions . . . govern the lifelong course of human development in the actual environments in which human beings live” (Bronfenbrenner, 1994, p. 37). Five nested systems are identified in the model: microsystems, mesosystems, exosystems, the macrosystem, and the chronosystem. The individual is situated in the center and is most powerfully affected by those persons, objects, and symbols in the immediate environment, or the microsystem. People live in numerous microsystems concurrently, and for children the most salient and influential include the child's family, peer network, and school.

Mesosystems form when people from the microsystems in which a child lives come into contact. For example, this happens when a child brings a friend home to eat dinner with her family, bringing the peer network into contact with the family. Mesosystems linking families and schools commonly form through parental involvement in school life, such as when parents attend parent–teacher meetings or serve as volunteers on school field trips to assist the teacher.

Mesosystems that promote positive development have certain characteristics (Garbarino, 1982). They are made up of rich, positive, and diverse connections between the microsystems, and they share and promote common values and goals. In a school setting, this happens when parents have multiple and reciprocal interactions with the school staff (i.e., teacher, principal, and other staff), and all share a commitment to fostering the child's social and academic growth.

Exosystems are social contexts that do not contain the child but can nonetheless affect the child indirectly. For example, the parents' workplaces can affect parents' well-being and subsequently impact their interactions with the child in the home. Similarly, school board councils' decisions about resource allocations can have direct implications for the support services a child receives in school. The macrosystem is the most distant system influencing development and consists of social, political, and cultural norms and values; this is where belief systems, bodies of knowledge, resources, customs, and lifestyles find their relevance in human development. The chronosystem refers to the patterning of events and transitions over the lifespan, thereby bringing a chronological perspective to development.

Notable bullying researchers (e.g., Hong & Espelage, 2012; Pepler et al., 2008; Swearer, Espelage, Vaillancourt, & Hymel, 2010) have considered the role that these nested systems have in triggering, sustaining, and diminishing children's bullying experiences. The model has commonly been used to justify the implementation of "whole-school" bullying intervention/prevention practices, as these initiatives are predicated on the assumption that the processes underlying bullying are not exclusively at the level of the individual. Therefore, there is considerable emphasis on the role of the school, parents, and peers in effectively responding to bullying behavior. The following paragraphs will expand on this introduction to the social-ecological systems theory by describing identified peer, family, school, and community influences on children's bullying experiences.

Peers

A seminal study conducted by Atlas and Pepler (1998) discovered that peers were present in more than 85% of bullying incidents. These findings alerted researchers to acknowledge the role of peers in bullying experiences. Salmivalli, Lagerspetz, Björkqvist, Österman, and Kaukiainen (1996) were also interested in the impact of peers in bullying incidents and identified six roles that peers commonly take in bullying situations. In addition to the bully and victim roles, they also described the behaviors of bully assistants (join in the bullying), bully reinforcers

(encourage and cheer the bullies), outsiders (ignore and withdraw from bullying situations), and defenders (provide support or assistance to victims). These findings highlight the important role of the peer group in perpetuating or dissuading bullying behaviors. Drawing from these results, ongoing bullying research has been focused on describing the peer-level processes that impact students' aggression. Much of this work has focused on the power of the homophily hypothesis—namely, that people form groups by affiliating with those who resemble them in some salient way (Hong & Espelage, 2012). Therefore, an aggressive student is most likely to associate themselves with peers who display aggression. Through a socialization process, these students engage in reciprocal reinforcing of behaviors that are consistent with the norms of the aggressive group (Prinstein & Dodge, 2008). Researchers have been concerned with the processes that contribute to the development of aggressive norms within peer groups, as well as how these norms exert their influence on a wider group of classmates (Hong & Espelage, 2012; Juvonen & Galván, 2008). These processes are inherently linked to bystander behavior. For example, Kärnä, Voeten, Poskiparta, and Salmivalli (2010) found that as more classmates reinforce the bully, bullying rates increase. Similarly, Hawkins, Pepler, and Craig (2001) observed bullying incidents on the school playground and found that, while bystanders intervened in only a small minority of incidents, they were effective in ending the bullying in the majority of instances. These results indicate that peers who witness bullying have a pivotal role in children's bullying experiences and are key players in making prevention initiatives effective.

Family

Olweus (1994) argued that children's bullying behavior in school is linked to troubled child–parent interactions in the home. Several lines of research indicate that children who bully are likely to come from homes in which parents wield power over children in an authoritarian manner (Espelage & Swearer, 2010). These parents are inclined to use harsh physical punishment and violent emotional outbursts to control their children's behavior, while at the same time permitting their children's aggressive behavior toward others. High marital conflict and violence similarly foster aggression-positive attitudes in children who witness them.

Researchers have also been concerned with how parental behaviors impact children's victimization experiences. Olweus (1993) found that victimized children come from families in which parents tend to be overprotective and controlling and are inclined to shelter their children from conflict. Subsequently, this avoidance contributes to low self-confidence and assertiveness

in children who are consequently inadequately prepared to address conflict and aggression in peer relationships. On the other hand, studies on family-level characteristics of children involved in bullying show that parents can play a key role in protecting their children. Parent–child relationships characterized by affection and warmth can decrease aggression in children and buffer them from long-term negative effects of aggression (Espelage & Swearer, 2010).

School

Within the last decade, scholars have been increasingly interested in how school-level differences can influence bullying interactions. Schools are recognized as critical for shaping students' academic, social, emotional, and behavioral development (Cohen, McCabe, Michelli, & Pickeral, 2009). While school climate is a complex, multidimensional concept, Cohen et al. (2009) have summarized it very succinctly as the quality and character of school life, observing that it includes “the norms, values, and expectations that support people feeling socially, emotionally, and physically safe” (p. 182). From this perspective, it has been posited that schools are in a unique position to influence students' engagement in aggressive behaviors. Studies on school climate and bullying have focused on aggressive norm development (Dijkstra, Lindenberg, & Veenstra, 2008), the importance of school bonding in decreasing students' aggressive behaviors (Cunningham, 2007), and characteristics of school environments that influence bullying rates (Nickerson, Singleton, Schnurr, & Collen, 2014). The overwhelming consensus of this research is that supportive school environments that demonstrate clear norms for healthy behaviors, social inclusion, and respect are conducive for children's positive development.

Findings from several decades of research on school climate have inspired policy, regulatory, and legislative changes that have led schools toward whole-school approaches to prevent bullying and victimization. This position finds support in a recent large-scale international World Health Organization study of 40 countries (involving hundreds of thousands of youth) that shows that students' increasing involvement in bullying moves in nearly step-wise fashion with their negative perceptions of school climate (Harel-Fisch et al., 2011). These whole-school approaches are based on the assumption that bullying is a systemic problem that requires intervention and prevention at multiple levels of the social ecology. While the position has broad support, putting such approaches into practice has been challenging. There have been some promising results demonstrating the effectiveness of these programs to minimize bullying

incidents, yet these results are not consistent across different contexts and are often not sustained over time. Swearer et al. (2010) argued that the uneven success of these programs is, in part, due to the limited scope of prevention programs and consequent failure to target key social systems, like peers and families.

Community

There has been a dearth of research that examines the relationship between community-level variables and children's bullying involvement. The limited research that has been conducted has argued that levels of community violence can affect incidences of violence within the school. For example, Schwartz and Proctor (2000) found that children who were victims of community-level violence are also most likely to be victims of school bullying. Similarly, Patton, Hong, Williams, and Allen-Meares (2013) revealed that impoverished communities with low resources contributed to parental levels of high stress. They argued that stress undermines child–parent relationships and predisposes children to be involved in violent incidences at school.

Wider cultural, political, and historical processes (i.e., the macrosystem) that influence bullying have still largely escaped empirical scrutiny, although there is some published commentary. For example, Walton (2005) challenged his readers to broaden their perspective on bullying from the narrow, individualistic, student-focused view that underpins bullying research and intervention. He argued for a perspective that considers adult power relations (particularly their inequality and abuse) in the wider social and political context. Similarly, Meyer (2008), looking at gendered dimensions of bullying through a feminist lens, illustrated how bullying in schools often recapitulates the oppressive gendered hierarchies that structure human relations within and outside of the school. The limited work on the links between the macrosystem and bullying points to potential for generating new understandings about bullying and prevention, and clearly more work is needed to realize this potential.

Teacher–Student Relationships within the Social-Ecological Model

The role of teacher–student relationships is often subsumed within studies on school climate—naturally so, given that teachers are the most influential agents in establishing supportive classroom environments (Cohen et al., 2009; Runions & Shaw, 2013). The protective role that teachers can play with children facing multiple risks in their lives has been well documented, as has the importance of the quality of the teacher–student relationship (Davis, 2003; Sabol & Pianta, 2012). These positive relationships provide a context for children to

develop emotional and social skills, which have been linked to future academic and social-emotional development (Birch & Ladd, 1998; Pianta & Stuhlman, 2004). Much of the research on teacher–student relationships has focused on identifying reliable indicators of relationship quality. This research, conceptually rooted in Bowlby’s (1969) attachment theory (see below), examines links between indicators of teacher–student relationship quality and some key psychosocial and academic outcomes. While there is some research on the links between teacher–student relationship quality and aggression, only a few studies specifically address the link to bullying behaviors. Two relationship indicators, namely closeness and conflict, have received the most attention, and we discuss each below in relation to children’s aggression and bullying.

Closeness

According to Davis (2003), both teachers and parents have similar objectives for children—the development of children’s social and intellectual competence. Due to this similarity, “good relationships” between parents and children, and between teachers and children, often share congruent qualities. Theorists have identified closeness as a necessary quality for successful relationships, in both child–parent and teacher–student relationships. Closeness requires that the adult maintain a level of involvement with the child and display warmth, caring, and support in multiple facets of the child’s life. In the classroom, closeness appears to lead to better school adjustment, development of prosocial interpersonal skills, engagement with class material, and less aggressive behavior (Birch & Ladd, 1997; Howes, 2000; Pianta & Stuhlman, 2004). More globally, it seems that closeness fosters children’s sense of relatedness to school (Juvonen, 2006).

Some research has shown that poor-quality relationships with teachers are implicated in children’s involvement in bullying. For example, Raskauskas and colleagues (2010) found that bullies and bully victims reported the weakest connections to school and the poorest relationships with teachers, in comparison to children who were not involved in bullying. Furthermore, Flaspohler, Elfstrom, Vanderzee, Sink, and Birchmeier (2009) found that victimized children were more likely to report poor connections with teachers. These findings indicate that children who are involved in bullying incidents, whether as perpetrator, victim, or both, are more likely to have poorer relationships and little closeness with teachers. The causal direction of these effects is less clear, and it is possible that each is both cause and effect of the other, and that they interact continuously in a reciprocally influencing manner.

Conflict

Conflictual relationships with teachers can shape children's negative perceptions of the school environment, resulting in students' decreased engagement and motivation, and negative implications for their psychosocial development (Buyse, Verschueren, Verachtert, & Van Damme, 2009). According to Howes (2000), teacher–student patterns of interactions are conflictual when they involve high levels of anger and insensitivity. The resulting conflict between teachers and students may serve as a stressor for children and impair successful adjustment to school. Birch and Ladd (1998) found that an antisocial behavioral orientation (which subsumes aggression and bullying) of young children entering elementary schools predicts more conflict and less closeness in teacher–student relationships 1 year later. Moreover, these relationship experiences appear to affect interpersonal relations in the peer network, specifically by increasing aggressiveness displayed by children toward teachers. However, there is compelling evidence that teachers who offer relational support to aggressive children can change these trajectories that would otherwise lead toward negative outcomes. For instance, Hamre and Pianta (2005) found that children entering kindergarten with significant functional risks (including displaying high levels of aggression and other externalizing behaviors) nonetheless developed positive and nonconflictual relationships with teachers who displayed emotional sensitivity and support in interactions with these children. On the other hand, aggressive children assigned to classrooms with teachers who did not provide emotional support developed negative, conflictual relationships with these teachers and performed worse on academic assessments.

Relationships with teachers that are characterized by a low level of conflict and high degree of closeness can provide children with a foundation for healthy functioning. Although there is less research that considers the direct impact of these relationship qualities on children's engagement with bullying, the literature does suggest a link between supportive relationships, children's social and cognitive skill development, and the development of a safer learning environment (Klem & Connell, 2004).

Teacher–Student Relationships and Bullying

Extensive research has focused on explicating the link between peer processes and students' bullying experiences, but the extent to which teachers alter the peer ecology has been underresearched (Farmer, Lines, & Hamm, 2011). The social-ecological model suggests that

teachers are uniquely situated to influence peer relationships. We argue that much of this influence is subtly accomplished through teacher–student relationships. This argument is consistent with Bierman’s (2011) assertion that teachers affect children’s socialization influences both directly through teacher practices, and indirectly through teacher–student relationship quality. Significant work has focused on the direct role of teachers in influencing peer-level processes, such as through arbitrating student conflicts and facilitating student interactions in the classroom through grouping practices, often referred to as *social architecture* (Farmer et al., 2011; Luckner & Pianta, 2011). While this work is valuable in predicting how teacher practices can shape children’s peer interactions, it does not consider the subtle ways that teacher–student relationships can shape peer experiences. In this respect, teachers are relational models. The moment-by-moment teacher–student interactions can profoundly affect children’s relationships with peers, and more specifically, children’s bullying experiences. To elucidate this position, we draw on theories of attachment and social referral. We then end with recommendations for strengthening the mesosystem as a means to decreasing incidences of bullying.

Attachment

Bowlby’s attachment theory (1969) described the dynamics of early attachment relationships, namely through parents and children. He argued that these early relations lead to an internal working model of relationships (including expectations and core beliefs) that affects the child’s subsequent relationships. These early relationships with an adult consequently affect how later teacher–student relationships develop. Some scholars concerned with the teacher–student relationship have adopted an expanded notion of attachment theory. That is, they have sought to examine whether teachers continue to shape, or potentially revise, children’s internal working models of attachment (Davis, 2003). From this work, there is a growing consensus that children’s relationships with teachers may act as models for the formation of high-quality peer relationships (Gest & Rodkin, 2011). Specifically, the types of relationships that students are expected to establish with each other is implicitly modeled through the teacher–student relationship (Farmer et al., 2011).

Teacher–student relationships can effectively scaffold the development of children’s social competencies by helping children establish skills to be used in their peer-to-peer interactions. Pianta (1999) argued that the relational patterns that children develop with teachers are likely to influence the processing of new social information. Furthermore, the authors

contended that children develop self-regulatory skills through their interactions with teachers. This development of social competence, modeled and practiced through positive teacher–student relationships, can shape children’s relational expectations and behaviors with peers. Some researchers have argued that the strength of this relationship is particularly pertinent to those children who suffer from problematic early caregiving experiences and for children who display negative health behaviors, such as bullying/victimization and aggression (e.g., Sabol & Pianta, 2012). Pianta (1999) argued that teacher–student relationships provide “windows of opportunity” to redirect and reorganize children’s relational schemas and buffer children from negative developmental outcomes. Conversely, it has been argued that teacher–student relationships that are distant and conflictual contribute to children’s lower levels of social-emotional adjustment and higher levels of involvement in bullying (Murray-Harvey & Slee, 2010).

Most of what is known about the compensatory role of teachers in children’s attachment models has been developed through research in early childhood settings, rather than in middle-grade classrooms where peer relationships begin to take precedence over adult–child attachments. It is valuable to note that not all teacher–student relationships, although positive, may constitute *attached* relationships, in which there is more emphasis on a deep and enduring affectionate bond. This may be especially pertinent with older children and adolescents, as many junior and senior school structures may not present opportunities to attach (Sabol & Pianta, 2012). There is considerable evidence to suggest the association of attached teacher–student relationships to the development of social competence and regulation on the part of the younger child, however, the strengths of the effects are less clear in older children and adolescent populations. Recent work on the impacts of positive teacher–student relationships in older youth has more broadly emphasized the salience of warm, secure, and responsive relationships for adolescents’ sense of belonging to school and the development of positive relationships with peers (Chhuon & Wallace, 2014). This research suggests that young people draw from their relationships with teachers to develop positive relationships with peers, further highlighting the need to allot additional space in intervention/prevention practices and teacher training that targets the subtle effects of teacher–student relationship quality on young people’s peer relationships.

Social referral

Another mechanism through which teachers may implicitly alter children’s peer relationships is through teachers’ social referrals. Children often make inferences about the

likability of another child through observations of the teacher–student relationships. Hughes and Chen (2011) argued that the relationships teachers develop with individual students can impact how students are viewed by classmates, with students’ preferences for peers mirroring teacher preferences. Specifically, in this study they discovered a bidirectional linkage between teacher–student relationship quality and peer acceptance. Similarly, Ladd, Birch, and Buhs (1999) found that children’s observations of teacher interactions with classmates influenced their perceptions of peers more than their own direct observations of peers. The salient connection between teacher–student relationship quality to peer acceptance becomes particularly troubling when we consider the well-established association between peer acceptance and peer-related aggression (Bierman, 2004; Hughes, Cavell, & Willson, 2001). Taylor (1989), for example, found that teachers’ positive interactions with typically rejected children led to a decrease in victimization experiences, as compared to rejected students who were disliked by their teachers. Echoing this, Chang et al. (2007) suggested that the stigma associated with poor teacher–student relationship quality could increase children’s victimization experiences. This research indicates that children’s aggressive behaviors and rejected status may be improved by higher quality teacher–student relationships. As this research is still in its infancy, more work on teacher–student relationship quality should consider the power of teachers’ social referrals. Despite the topic’s limited attention in scholarly publications, teachers should be informed on the importance of monitoring their own behaviors toward students, particularly rejected students, in fostering safe and accepting classrooms.

Social-Emotional Competencies and Relationship Solutions

Recent bullying scholarship has advocated for the use of bullying prevention and intervention programs that target the multiple contexts of children’s lives. “Whole-school” antibullying approaches have been increasingly utilized in response to this call. Within these approaches, there is a considerable emphasis on changing children’s behavioral norms, and, as such, children’s peer relationships have been targeted as a means of altering the classroom climate (Mishna, 2008). Richard et al. (2011) argued that in order to access the social processes underlying bullying behaviors, researchers need to expand their research scope to consider the influence of teacher–student relationships on peer-level processes. Murray-Harvey and Slee (2010) also argued that whole-school approaches to bullying are weakened when school relationships such as children’s relationships with teachers are not considered. Popular

antibullying programs, such as the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program, prioritize raising awareness at an individual, school, classroom, and community level, primarily through holding meetings with multiple stakeholders (i.e., staff, parents, and students) about the signs and risks of bullying, as well as standard training for how to intervene. These standardized methods may provide a sense of cohesiveness within a school setting, particularly with respect to school rules and specific techniques for intervention; they do, however, overlook the classroom teacher and the relationships that have formed within the classroom as critical to the intervention process. Furthermore, academic literature that examines the teacher's role in antibullying practices often limits its analysis to teacher attitudes toward bullying and teacher competence for bullying intervention procedures (e.g., Mishna, 2004). Such reports often cite the need for ongoing training so that teachers are able to recognize and respond to bullying incidences in the classroom. While these practices are essential for successful intervention and prevention efforts, what is perhaps equally critical is for teachers to be mindful of their relationships with students. To encourage this awareness, we argue that teachers should receive support and training (a) to enhance their attunement to the social organization of peer groups in their classrooms, (b) to learn and practice effective communication skills in the service of maintaining caring relations with students, and (c) to develop emotional awareness of self and others with mindfulness. We say more about each of these skills below.

Each of these suggestions is premised on the assumption that socially and emotionally competent teachers are in the strongest position to build supportive, caring relationships with their students. While there have been considerable advances in emphasizing students' psychosocial characteristics through social-emotional learning curricula, much of this programming calls on *students* to develop their social-emotional competencies (i.e., emotional self-awareness, social awareness, responsible decision-making, self-management, and relationship management; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009), often disregarding the impact of teachers' own social-emotional competencies in developing supportive classrooms. An important report by Jones, Bouffard, and Weissbourd (2013) argued that teachers' social-emotional competencies influence the quality of teacher–student relationships. For example, when teachers are skilled at regulating their emotions, treat students warmly (even when students behave in challenging ways), and display positive affection toward students and colleagues, students are more likely to be engaged in school and report more positive relationships with teachers. More

reports have demonstrated the link between teachers' own social-emotional competencies and the effective implementation of social-emotional learning programming in schools—curricula that is often used to help children develop positive relationships with peers and adults (Brown, Jones, LaRusso, & Aber, 2010).

If children are to learn the skills to enhance their own social-emotional competencies, teachers must develop and model these skills themselves. Teacher education should be a venue for discussing and exploring social skills, emotions, and relationships, but this happens infrequently and unsystematically. The success of social-emotional initiatives in teacher education programs will depend on these prospective teachers' beliefs about their role in developing relationships with students, and research indicates there is more work to do on this front. Davis (2006) found that more than one third of middle school teachers reported that they were unsure whether or not developing relationships with students was their responsibility and felt that they were not obligated to meet students' relational needs. It is important that social-emotional learning initiatives in the classroom, both explicit through social-emotional learning curricula and implicit through teachers' everyday interactions, are founded in the knowledge that positive teacher–student relationships are fundamental to students' intellectual and social development.

Teacher attunement to peer interactions

Many teachers do recognize that their classrooms are complex social communities, but this does not always translate into effective management of social dynamics to the benefit of students. Teacher attunement has been conceptualized as the ability to identify students' peer group affiliations *and* understand the underlying social dynamics operating in them (Rodkin & Gest, 2011). Highly attuned teachers typically use their knowledge of peer groups to organize seating charts and working groups to promote positive social outcomes for students. Teacher attunement, when used to students' advantage, has positive outcomes for students on measures such as likability and popularity within their social networks (Hoffman, Hamm, & Farmer, 2015). Hamm, Farmer, Dadisman, Gravelle, and Murray (2011) argued that grasping peer affiliations and dynamics within the classroom does not occur naturally and usually requires teacher professional development in order to develop the skills of attunement. Low teacher attunement has been recognized as a significant barrier to developing classrooms that are more supportive, engaging, and less disruptive. Specifically related to aggression, Neal, Cappella, Wagner, and

Atkins (2011) found that antiaggression norms were stronger in classrooms where teachers were more able to accurately identify students' peer affiliation patterns.

In order to become attuned to students' social interactions, teachers need to be receptive to relevant cues in the classroom environment that indicate status hierarchies and inequalities. These observations can provide important information about who is socially isolated, undervalued, or rejected by peers, allowing teachers to anticipate incidences of social aggression in the classroom. Hoffman et al. (2015) also suggested that teachers actively seek input from their students to enhance their understandings of peer groups and dynamics. This is important to avoid false perceptions and their potential negative impact on subsequent steps teachers take. In addition to potentially reducing aggression, teacher attunement can also have instructional benefits, such as promoting effective work pairs and seating arrangements that will create a less disruptive and more engaging learning environment. Perhaps most importantly, attuned teachers are better able to provide more sensitive and responsive support to students, thereby enhancing the positive nature of the teacher–student relationship. Audley-Piotrowski, Singer, and Patterson (2015) proposed that to develop attunement, teachers should actively record their observations of students' interactions and discuss the observations with colleagues. These observations should include how students interact with their peers, in addition to with whom they interact. Teachers can discuss potential strategies for how to effectively manage students' interactions and leverage students' peer group dynamics to mitigate status extremes while maximizing students' emotional and social security.

Effective communication skills for caring relations

Nel Noddings (2005) has long argued that caring is foundational to positive learning and development experiences. She described caring as a relational experience, entailing reciprocity and mutual obligations in the caring relationships between the one caring (e.g., the teacher) and the cared-for (e.g., the student). Caring in a relational sense requires that the teacher meet the students where students are and on their terms. Relational caring only exists when the student provides some indication of receiving it, which may be direct (e.g., an expression of gratitude) or indirect (e.g., deepening engagement in the learning activity). More commonly, caring is expressed as a virtue, situated and emanating from the teacher toward students, without a conscious and effortful consideration of the students' needs and desires. Consequently, while

many teachers care for their students in the virtuous sense, Noddings proposed that fewer actually care in the relational manner.

According to Noddings (2005), relational caring requires teachers to engage with their students with *engrossment*. That means that teachers have to interact with their students with the intention of understanding students within their own frame of reference, not the teacher's frame of reference. In practical terms, we propose that communication skills, such as attentive listening, observation, and responding (including questioning, paraphrasing, and summarizing skills) are the best means of attaining this state of engrossment within a caring relation. These skills are taught in a variety of professional helping professions (such as counseling) and are considered invaluable to all care-giving professional interactions, including those involving teachers (e.g., see Kottler & Kottler, 2007).

Many of the skills that contribute to effective interactions between teachers and students can be, and often ought to be, learned and refined. Teacher education programs are a venue for offering this training, and both authors of this article have taught a course, called Counseling Applications for Teachers, that specifically addresses these relationship skills. Preservice teachers in this course observe demonstration videos and live demonstrations with the professor as well as participate in breakout activities with classmates to practice the specific skills. Teachers should also receive inservice learning opportunities to continue to develop their communication skills. In addition to promoting caring classroom environments, these skills can be effectively utilized to intervene in bullying incidents and interpersonal conflicts within the classroom. These intervention strategies, strengthened by positive teacher–student relationships, may contribute to classrooms with prosocial norms where students also feel confident intervening themselves in bullying episodes.

Using mindfulness to develop awareness of self and others

Social-emotional competence entails high levels of awareness of both the self and others (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). These awareness skills permit teachers to recognize their own emotions and emotional tendencies as well as identify emotional states in their students and to respond to them in ways that facilitate open and supportive communication. These skills are particularly critical for interactions with students who are not emotionally well regulated and are often caught up in anger, frustration, and anxiety. Prior research has shown that when teachers use these awareness skills in their interactions with such challenging students, the students

themselves derive lasting benefits to their own social and emotional development (Lynch & Cicchetti, 1992). Converging research from neuroscience, psychology, and education suggests that mindfulness practice is a particularly effective way of cultivating these awareness skills (Mind and Life Education Research Network [MLERN], 2012).

Founded on centuries-old meditative techniques stemming from Buddhism, mindfulness has been imported into North American contexts as a secular practice intended to reduce stress, increase experiential self-awareness, and promote well-being. Mindfulness entails intentionally focusing one's attention on experiences in the present moment without judging, resisting, or limiting those experiences in any way (Meiklejohn et al., 2012). Training in mindfulness typically involves formal practices, such as seated meditation, during which one's attention is directed to an experiential anchor, such as the movement of breath or other bodily sensations. Attention invariably wanders during these practices, and trainees are instructed to simply return their attention to the anchor gently and compassionately when they notice their attention has moved, which it does repeatedly in the course of a meditation exercise. Mindfulness is also cultivated in daily life through informal activities, such as walking, eating, handwashing, and so on. The goal is simply to pay attention to the sensations evoked by these activities and to explore the sensory experiences with openness and curiosity. There are many web-based resources to support teachers who wish to cultivate these mental skills, such as the guided mindful meditations provided free of charge by the UCLA Mindful Awareness Research Center (<http://marc.ucla.edu/body.cfm?id=22>).

Through experiential self- and other awareness, mindfulness cultivates empathy in teachers, which they can then bring to their interactions with students (MLERN, 2012). Empathy refers to the capacity to understand another person's experience, on both cognitive and emotional levels, within that person's own frame of reference and to accurately communicate this understanding to the person. While empathy has a biological basis in personality, it is also clear that people can increase their empathy with mindfulness practice (MLERN, 2012). Several decades worth of research and theory indicate clearly that empathy is a vital component of all positive relationships whose goal is to facilitate growth and personal development. American psychologist Carl Rogers was a strong advocate for empathy as a foundational and necessary condition of effective helping relationships, including teaching relationships (Rogers, 1986).

Conclusion

Considering the mesosystem provides perspective on the interconnected role of teachers and peers in complex social processes such as children's bullying experiences. Theories that help to characterize the association of teacher–student relationships and children's bullying experiences, such as attachment and social referral, speak to the influential, yet subtle, interactions that can influence children's experiences with their peers. More research on teacher–student relationships is vital, especially at a time when school authorities are seeking effective practices that decrease bullying perpetration. Throughout this article, we have used bullying as an example for the potential impact of the teacher–student relationship on students' peer functioning, but the critical role of the teacher–student relationship goes beyond preventing children's bullying behaviors and effectively intervening in bullying incidences. These positive relationships extend into children's multiple domains of functioning, affecting their academic, behavioral, and social development, while continuing to shape the social ecology in which the child is situated. Teachers stand at a crossroad of children's multiple contexts. It is time to consider teachers' own social-emotional competencies as a key factor in bolstering positive teacher–student relationships and, subsequently, healthy peer relationships.

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Chapter 3: Methodology – Manuscript 2

The aim of Study 1 (represented in manuscript 2) was to explore adults' recollections of their responses to bullying victimization that occurred within the context of an adolescent friendship. The guiding research question for this study was: How do young people respond to victimization within a friendship? This involved exploring the variations of participants' responses, the conditions (micro, meso, macro) that shaped their responses, as well as the effects of participants' responses. In line with a symbolic interactionism framework, I also investigated participants' understanding of bullying, victimization, and harm within friendships, including how participants came to these understandings. The study was retrospective in its design and followed the guidelines of Constructivist Grounded Theory (CGT), as articulated by Kathy Charmaz (2006; 2014).

Retrospective Research

The retrospective design of the study helped to highlight the factors of the friendship victimization experience that were especially salient to participants. Retrospective research has been increasingly utilized in bullying research, which coincides with the interpretive turn of social-psychological research over the last few decades. Instead of viewing the time lapse between seminal experiences and the period of data collection as a concern with validity, some researchers have advocated for using memory as a methodological tool to investigate significant events (e.g., Viala, 2015). In line with a symbolic interactionism perspective, memories, or how individuals have come to frame certain events, creates and recreates meaning. When adults consider past experiences of bullying they engage in a process of negotiating meaning and interpretation from their past and present, social, selves (Bruner, 1990). As Viala (2015) notes in her study of women's retrospective accounts of bullying:

Memories of bullying are based on complex and ambiguous interpretations of specific events and sequences of events that are associated with bullying, and that these interpretations have been continuously developed, nuanced and or modified since the events originally occurred (p. 368).

In my analysis, therefore, I was curious about how a young person's perspective of bullying is mediated by the adult's interpretation. As such, the social-cultural contexts (at the time that these adults were bullied as well as in the present day) become meaningful to the investigation, such as prevailing beliefs about bullying, the roles of schooling, stigma, and so on. Through the retelling of these stories, the participants' recollections will point to the contextual factors (including

discourses, power relations, etc.) that have influenced and continue to influence their interpretations of bullying. I do not view my participants' memories as a reiteration of the "truth" (which, would certainly open up questions of validity). Instead, there is analytic potential to investigating the ways adults have derived meaning from their experiences and how these meanings becoming enacted.

Constructivist Grounded Theory

Grounded theory is an analytical method that provides systematic strategies for qualitative researchers to develop themes and theory that emerge from the data. Glaser and Strauss (1967), the founders of grounded theory, emphasized theory construction through the development of emergent codes and categories grounded in the data. Glaser and Strauss' grounded theory emphasized: simultaneous data collection and analysis; analytic codes constructed from the data; constant comparison across data sources; the development of theory at each stage of the research process; memo-writing; and theoretical sampling (Glaser & Strass, 1967). Theoretical sampling refers to the iterative process of refining initial data to guide subsequent interview/discussion topics and themes until reaching theoretical saturation—that is, when the data do not provide any new theoretical understandings nor reveal new properties within core theoretical categories (Charmaz, 2014). Constructivist grounded theory (CGT) upholds many of these components of classical grounded theory, yet there are key ontological and epistemological differences.

A constructivist perspective of grounded theory rejects an objective reality that is independent from human consciousness. Instead, constructivists argue that there are multiple realities and that these realities are influenced by contexts and individuals' meaning making (Mills, Bonner, & Francis, 2006). As Charmaz cites (2017), constructivists view reality as social, fluid, indeterminate, and conditional. Constructivist researchers examine social processes and the dynamic relationship between meaning and action, through the integration of multiple perspectives. Additionally, Charmaz's CGT emphasizes that researchers are not "passive receptacles" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 15), as they shape the narrative through drawing on personal experiences and through interactions with the participants and the data. To be sure, there are strategies that researchers employ to encourage the development of theories grounded in the data (such as theoretical sampling and cross-comparative analysis), yet CGT also acknowledges that researchers inherently guide their research based on personal experiences, empirical interests, or sensitizing concepts (Charmaz, 2014; Thornberg, 2012). These pre-conceived perspectives,

however, do not stand as barriers to the research process. Rather, they provide initial vantage points with which to view the phenomenon, leaving open the possibilities for further inquiry.

Whereas in classical grounded theory, researchers would be advised to resist reviewing the literature that informs the phenomena of study (in collecting and analyzing the data), in CGT, conversely, researchers are encouraged to integrate the literature throughout the research process. This becomes an important piece to the telling of an analytical story. There is also a recognition that the researchers draw from their own experiences, assumptions, beliefs, and interactions with participants in shaping the narrative. However, this is not to say that researchers manipulate their data in order to satisfy researchers' theoretical perspectives. Rather, researchers carry out constant comparisons between data sources, codes, and categories, through iterative data collection and analysis processes, and integrate their knowledge and perspectives in light of these findings. As a result, researchers have argued that CGT is informed by both induction and abduction.

Participants

This study sought the perspectives of Canadian adults. All participants self-identified as having experienced victimization, through bullying, at the hands of a friend during adolescence. I utilized the term "bullied" throughout the study. This decision rested in part on my desire to explore the discursive power of "bullying" as it intersects with other socio-linguistic constructions, such as victimhood and resistance. Throughout the interviews, the participants and I spent significant time deconstructing the term bullying, particularly with respect to its technical and colloquial usage. Some participants' understandings of bullying echoed researcher's definitions, while others pointed to different phenomena that are less commonly examined in investigations of bullying, yet speak to other sites of intersectionality that are bound up in experiences of bullying, such as gendered harassment and racism (Ringrose & Renold, 2010). Instead of viewing these variations in perspectives as an inconvenience, they highlight how constructions of bullying are dynamic and reproduced in social interaction. Throughout the interviews we discussed how the term bullying could both mobilize and thwart meaningful intervention and how the dichotomized labels, bully and victim, can carry a weight for those who have been positioned or position themselves as such.

I aimed to recruit both men and women for the study, as it is important to gain a sense for how both sexes describe and participate in bullying and friendship. Unfortunately, no men

consented to take part in the study, leaving a final sample of 10 women. Recruiting men for social research, particularly on personal or sensitive subjects, such as friendship and bullying, has been identified to be a difficult endeavour (for more of a discussion on this see Butera, 2006). The age of participants ranged from 26 to 36 years old ($M = 28.3$). Seven participants resided in Ontario, 2 in British Columbia and 1 in Quebec. To thank them for their participation, all participants were offered a \$15 gift card to Starbucks, which was sent to their email following the data collection period.

Recruitment

I primarily recruited participants online through social networking sites, such as Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn. I opted to not pay for targeted ads, as I felt that my own social network was extensive enough to gain visibility. Within my personal advertisements or ‘posts’, I asked my friends and followers to ‘share’ or ‘retweet’ the information to the study. All interested individuals were directed to the research website (www.friendshipsthatharm.com), which provided more information about the study, myself as the researcher, as well as information for how to consent to participate (Appendix 3.1). If individuals were interested in participating, they were directed to email a personalized email account that was created for the research. Once I received an email indicating the individual’s interest, I sent them a copy of the consent form to read (Appendix 4.1) To indicate their consent, all participants were asked to send a reply email indicating that they agreed to take part in the individual interviews. With the exception of one individual, all those who originally emailed to indicate their interest in participating, eventually took part in the study. I recruited participants for one month prior to beginning the interviews and throughout the 2-month period that I conducted the interviews. Upon discussions with my supervisor, I decided to stop recruiting participants once I have reached a sample size of 10. This decision was made, in part, by practical concerns, as I felt that I had attained a manageable amount of data. I also felt that through my efforts of theoretical sampling, I was no longer constructing new ideas.

Data collection and analysis procedures

The analysis in Study 1 aligned with the method of theoretical sampling as described in Charmaz’s (2006; 2014) grounded theory. Resultantly, it is appropriate to present the data collection procedures for Study 1 with an integrated description of the analysis. All data were collected in the form of 19 semi-structured individual interviews, taking place in an online

synchronous format and following the guidelines of CGT. Synchronous methods include those exchanges that occur in real-time, mimicking in-person forms of communication (Fox, Morris, & Rumsey, 2007). The methods chosen for this study reflect an emerging base of literature that acknowledges the viability, and indeed the need for, research methods that promote the anonymity of participants. This is particularly relevant for investigations of sensitive topics, such as health or appearance related concerns or issues related to potentially sensitive or stigmatizing experiences, such as abuse. I have argued elsewhere for the importance of anonymity in bullying research for youth-centered investigations (Bouchard, 2016) and many of the same affordances are also applicable for research conducted with adults. Most pointedly, the online nature of the data collection meets participants in a familiar virtual environment, extends the geographical reach of the research, and can promote a disinhibiting effect where participants may feel more comfortable sharing their experiences.

Research using synchronous methods benefit from continuous communication between the researcher and participant, and are typically conducted using Instant Messaging services, either through video, microphones, or text. I felt that the text version of synchronous interviewing was the most appropriate as it allowed participants to reflect on their answers before pressing 'send,' it afforded an increased level of anonymity between the participant and the researcher, and it had the potential to reduce the inhibition of the interviewee while balancing participants' comfort level. More practically, the online interviewing eliminated some of the barriers of in-person interviews, such as geographical distance and the time and cost of travelling and transcriptions (James & Busher, 2006).

Once individuals consented to participate in the study, we arranged a time to meet, using a textual chat software that was selected for the research (Backchannel Chat). The software was secure and required participants to input a computer-generated access code that was emailed to them prior to the interview. During the interview I used a flexible interviewing guide, following the recommendations of Charmaz's (2006) intensive interviewing strategies (see Appendix 5.1 for the interview protocol). After introducing myself and the focus of my research, reiterating protocols within the consent form, as well as providing brief technical information for how to navigate the software, I began the interview with initial open ended-questions. For example, I asked, "when you think of what you desire in a friendship, what comes to mind?" The purpose of these questions was to elicit participants' definitions of terms (e.g., friendship, bullying) to garner

an understanding of participants' assumptions and implicit meanings (Charmaz, 2014). Following this, intermediate questions were utilized to gain a deeper understanding of participants' experiences with specific bullying and victimization events. Again, the purpose of asking these questions was to learn more about participants' subjective meanings, how these meanings were constructed, as well as the effects of these meanings. I was less interested in the details of the event, including the chronology and individual behaviours, though participants naturally touched on these aspects in their descriptions. For example, intermediate questions that I often asked were, "why do you think you responded in that way?" or "how did you come to know that you were being bullied?" It tried to keep my questioning open-ended as Charmaz suggests, but I did develop a list of questions that I planned to ask. I was flexible enough to take the interview into unanticipated directions, however. For example, one participant wrote that the bullying she experienced motivated her to obtain a degree in victimology. We then shifted the conversation to her schooling in this subject-area as well as her aspirations for a career that provides support to young women in victimizing relationships. This was helpful for me, as it provided me a further glimpse into her views of bullying as produced and reproduced through her experiences and subsequent formal training in the area of victimization. Finally, I used ending-questions to bring participants back to the present and to conclude the interview on a less distressing note. Here, I asked about participants' recommendations for future policy on bullying and strategies for prevention and intervention programming in schools as well as their thoughts on more contemporary issues in bullying, such as cybervictimization.

Each interview lasted approximately one and a half hours. All the women participated in two interviews, apart from one participant who took part in one longer interview. The follow-up interviews were used as a method of theoretical sampling; during these interviews I clarified any concepts that were still unclear to me, followed up on any theoretical leads that I constructed in the participants' previous interview or in the interviews with other participants, and worked to understand the nuances of my developing categories. For example, in our first interview, Melissa (pseudonym?) made a comparison of her bullying experience to that of interpersonal abuse between romantic partners. Specifically, she made a comment on how disappointed she was in herself for accepting the bullying and that she felt others perceived her as weak because she seemingly did nothing to change her situation. She argued that she "felt trapped," forced to balance her needs for belonging with her self-dignity. The line-by-line codes of "self-blaming",

“others perceiving weakness”, and “balancing belonging and dignity” helped me to construct a focused code (a significant initial code that is more conceptual) of “feeling trapped as a victim,” which I then used to analyze larger portions of my data. Also, during this phase, I began to interrogate the concept of what it means to feel like you are *trapped as a victim*. I asked myself, *when* does Melissa feel trapped as a victim, *why* does she feel trapped, and *to whom* does she feel trapped? I also wondered about what this “trapped as a victim” feeling *depends on* and *why does it depend* on this? Other questions I asked myself were, *when*, *why* and *how* does “feeling trapped as a victim” change and what are the consequences of feeling trapped? Asking myself these analytical questions was important, as I feel it enabled me to identify what I needed to focus on in our follow-up interview and in the interviews with other participants.

To bring this focused code to the level of a category (a focused code that has “overriding significance in explicating events or processes,” Charmaz, 2014), I compared the focused code, and its subsuming codes, with other codes and data. Categories are typically more analytical than focused codes and require definition – I wrote numerous memos that attempted to define the category’s properties, identified the variations within the category and between other categories. Through this process, I came to a tentative hypothesis that Melissa felt constrained by a number of forces in her life (namely, expectations of others to ‘be nice’ and her desire to belong), which inhibited her responses to bullying. Yet, even when she complied with the expectations of these forces, she was still positioned, and positioned herself, as a weak and powerless victim. This notion of “being trapped” (and other related concepts and metaphors that participants’ used like “damned if you do, damned if you don’t”, “double-edged sword”, and “double-bind”) led me to a theoretical conclusion that the women negotiated their strategies for responding to bullying within dominant gendered expectations and that their responses paradoxically served to reproduce the same orders that constrained them. Concurrently with this phase, I also incorporated “lenses” from the literature, specifically Wade’s work on resistance, Ringrose’s stance on the limitations of bullying discourses, and Thornberg’s conceptualizations of a victim-career, as well as symbolic interactionism and underlying logics of social constructionism, which helped me to further understand, elaborate, or refine my categories. I took these theoretical concepts and compared them to my categories to see how well they helped me to understand what was happening in the data. I felt that “resisting bullying within friendship” was an important category in my grounded theory of bullying within friendship, which many of the other concepts

found in my analysis helped to further describe (e.g., “showing friendship”, “fighting back and getting even”). Once the interviews were completed, I transferred the data to a word processing software. At this time, the names used on the software to indicate the writing of participants were anonymized.

Author contributions

There are four authors on the manuscript that I have included in this dissertation; as such, it is important to outline the roles of each author. I conceived the research project, conducted all of the interviews with the participants, and shared my initial memos with the second author, Dr. Camilla Forsberg, a postdoctoral fellow at Linkoping University in Linkoping, Sweden. I discussed these memos and some initial focused codes with Dr. Forsberg; these conversations helped me to make further analytic decisions about the data, which were then used to re-analyze the interview transcripts and to help formulate follow-up questions for subsequent interviews. The final stage of coding (i.e., elevating important categories to theoretical codes) also involved the third and fourth authors (Dr. David Smith, my supervisor and professor at the University of Ottawa, and Dr. Thornberg, a professor at Linkoping University, respectively) and encompassed describing and elaborating on the conceptual categories through a process of abduction (Thornberg, 2012). Each author offered their ‘lenses’ to the data, which helped me to focus my attention to specific processes, recurring patterns, and nuances within my developing categories. Following the data analysis, I wrote a draft of the manuscript. Each author then provided comments, edits, and feedback on my drafts before I submitted the manuscript as a publication to a journal.

Chapter 4: Showing Friendship, Fighting Back, and Getting Even: Resisting Bullying Victimization within Girls' Adolescent Friendships

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Abstract

Extant quantitative data suggest that about a quarter of bullying incidences occur within reciprocated friendships. Yet, little attention is given to the underlying social processes and wider macro-system forces that shape friendship victimization experiences. Guided by constructivist grounded theory, Wade's work on resistance, and a Foucauldian analysis of power within bullying, this research explored the phenomenon of victimization within adolescent girls' friendships. Our findings drew from interviews with Canadian women reflecting on their school-based victimization experiences. The results suggest that participants *resisted victimization* in important ways but that their resistance strategies were negotiated within gender expectations and ambient discursive constructions of resistance and victimization. The results illuminate the ways that discourses that conceal women's resistance and privilege overt responses to bullying run counter to gendered expectations for resistance, leaving women in a double bind. Finally, our analysis of the data also indicates that retaliatory relational aggression was an effective way for girls to deny their victimized status while complying with gendered expectations for resistance,

but that their bullying experiences were normalized and overlooked.

Key words

resistance, bullying, victimization, qualitative, friendship, gender

Bullying victimization, defined as a systematic abuse of power whereby an individual is exposed, repeatedly, and over time to intentional aggressive actions, continues to be a global concern. Longitudinal international research on bullying with the Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children Survey, conducted by the World Health Organization in partnership with 36 national health agencies, reveals that bullying is a significant public health problem. In Canada, for example, approximately one in four Canadian youth report being victimized at least twice a week (Freeman, King, and Pickett 2016). A rapidly growing body of research has linked the receipt of peer bullying, or bullying victimization, to a host of short and long-term adjustment difficulties, such as low self-confidence, depression, anxiety, psychosomatic symptoms, and most seriously, suicide ideation (Stassen and Berger 2007; Swearer et al. 2010). Chronically victimized children are often rejected from peers, have difficulty developing and maintaining friendships, are more socially isolated at school, and demonstrate increased social anxiety and aggressive responses (Fox and Boulton 2006; O'Brennan, Bradshaw, and Sawyer 2009). Victimization can also have negative impacts on students' academic outcomes, particularly in students' attachment to school, concentration on class work, and academic performance (Beran and Lupart 2009; Kowalski and Limber 2013). These negative effects often manifest early in children's development, but the small body of research that examines bullying victimization across a lifespan has indicated that the consequences of childhood victimization can extend into adulthood (e.g., Miller and Vaillancourt 2007; Viala, 2015). Furthermore, bullying researchers have begun to study the phenomenon of victimization occurring amongst friends, noting that this is a particularly deleterious experience that requires further attention (Brendgen et al. 2015). This current study takes heed to this call, providing an exploration of adolescent girls' responses to bullying victimization within friendship. Below we discuss current research on bullying victimization within friendship and how our research is connected. To further articulate a rationale for our work, we provide a brief context of current perspectives on bullying and how our theoretical approach was used to help understand the very complex problem of bullying

within friendships.

Victimization within Friendships

Research that examines links between friendship and victimization often reveals that friendships are *sanctuaries from harm* that provide buffering or protective effects for those who experience peer victimization (Schmidt and Bagwell 2007; You and Bellmore 2012). Although the critical value of friendships for children and youth's positive development cannot be overstated, this assertion should not preclude the recognition that some friendships have a dark side. Victimizing friendships can be characterized by both positive and negative qualities, offering young people important provisions of friendships, such as intimate disclosure and opportunities for companionship, while simultaneously including forms of victimization, such as exclusion, gossip, manipulation, and threats of rejection. These complex relationships that fluctuate in quality and levels of satisfaction may be akin to other victimizing intimate relationships, such as in intimate partner violence or child abuse (Matud 2007).

Contrary to prevalent stereotypes of bullying as occurring within antipathetic or unilateral disliking relationships, quantitative data suggest that about a quarter of victimization occurs within close, reciprocated friendships (e.g., Brendgen et al. 2015; Waasdorp, Bagdi, and Bradshaw 2010). Other work has indicated that the outcomes of friendship victimization may be similar to bullying from non-friends, but that children may perceive that the benefits of the friendship outweigh the consequences of the victimization, and may be likely to continue in these relationships despite their suffering (Daniels et al. 2010; Mishna, Wiener, and Pepler 2008; Owens et al. 2000). The most widely cited qualitative work, Mishna, Wiener, and Pepler (2008), provides some indication of potentially distinguishing factors of victimization within friendship. For example, and similar to Canty et al.'s (2016) work, they found that children had difficulty identifying whether they were experiencing bullying victimization within their friendship or whether their friend was just "screwing around" or involved in "drama." A young person's difficulty in identifying the behaviour of a friend "as bullying," in addition to the feelings of shame associated with wanting to remain in a friendship with a victimizer adds a complexity to young people's responses to victimization (Mishna and Alaggia 2005). Furthermore, Mishna, Wiener, and Pepler (2008) argue that the role of power asymmetry (a core feature of bullying that differentiates the experience from every-day conflict) as it manifests in friendship requires further examination as well as a deeper exploration of the processes that help to sustain the cycle of

violence in friendship.

Perspectives of Bullying

Research on bullying has been primarily dominated by “first order” approaches (Kousholt and Fisker 2015). This perspective typically understands bullying as a form of individual aggression and provides information about the causes, consequences, and implications for those involved in bullying problems. An emerging “second order” perspective of the phenomenon understands the problem of school bullying as reiterations of power relations within wider society, such as the structures that create societal categorizations and inequalities. Many researchers who hold second order perspectives of bullying do so from a post-structuralist orientation, often drawing from the work of Michel Foucault (1926–1984) to understand bullying as part of social patterns of interaction, shaped by wider societal discourses, socio-cultural forces, and power relations. For example, instead of explaining the power imbalance in bullying in terms of physical strength, superior social skills, and/or peer support, Foucault articulates that power does not reside in individuals, cannot be fully explained as a set of commodities, and is not static. Instead, it is experienced in relation, and, in this symbiosis, he argues, where there is power in a relationship, there is also resistance (Foucault 1980). Previous work on resistance draws attention to the ways that power is exercised, even by those who seemingly ‘lack’ power (as perpetuated by public discourses) such as victims of bullying (Horton 2011; Khanna 2013). Unfortunately, there is still little visibility in bullying literature that depicts how those who are victimized exercise power. On the contrary, many depictions of victims of bullying are imbued with classifications such as “weak” “submissive” and “helpless” and their experiences are seen through an individual symptomology lens (e.g., school avoidance, anxiousness, displaying disinterest). These representations serve to conceal the ways that victims of bullying exercise power and navigate the demands of their social worlds.

Resisting Bullying

According to Wade (1997), resistance is ever-present, often subtle, and spontaneous, comprising “micro-level communicative behaviours” (Wade 1997, 32) or “small acts of living” (Goffman 1961). The manner in which victims resist varies depending on the circumstance, the dangers and/or opportunities present, the social context or relationship between the perpetrator of the violence and the victimized, the strategies used by the perpetrator, and the wider social-

historical context of power relations within which the interaction is embedded (Renoux and Wade 2008). Wade further describes resistance as:

any mental or behavioural act through which a person attempts to expose, withstand, repel, stop, prevent, abstain from, strive against, impede, refuse to comply with, or oppose any form of violence or oppression (including any type of disrespect), or the conditions that make such acts possible (p. 25)

Because victims often face the threat of further violence, we can expect that victims will often utilize less visible methods of resistance, such as creative acts of imagination (imagining a better life or imagining confronting the perpetrator), mental or physical escapes (thinking of math homework, playing sports), impression management (saving-face, telling the perpetrator what he/she wants to hear), or emotional responses (crying or holding back tears, depersonalization). Raby (2005) also argues that not all forms of resistance are consciously oppositional and may paradoxically serve to reinforce the status quo. She argues, for example, that conformity can be conceptualized as a form of resistance, whereby a young person, aware of power relations in the classroom, may convince others that she cares about them when, in fact, she does not. Raby (2005), in referring to Scott's position on resistance, reminds us "what looks acquiescence may not always be acquiescence" (159). To add another layer of complexity, acts of resistance may not be successful in stopping the victimization, but they can be seen as expressions of the victims' values and commitments and they represent actions taken to protect self-dignity.

The purpose of this research was two-fold. Firstly, we want to contribute to the small, yet emerging, base of social-psychological bullying literature that specifically examines bullying as it occurs within friendships. It is rarely specified within current bullying research if young people involved in bullying problems were friends, acquaintances, enemies or former friends, and moreover, there has been little consideration of the underlying social dynamics and negotiations that occur within friendships containing bullying. Secondly, and drawing from the work of Wade, Foucault, and others representing second order perspectives of bullying (e.g., Duncan 2013; Schott and Søndergaard 2014; Walton 2005), we set out to understand how young people respond to victimization occurring within their friendship and how these responses are reflective of wider social and cultural forces. We approach our analysis from a resistance lens, rather than through a lens of *effects* (i.e., the psychological and behavioural impacts of bullying on victims) (Wade 2000); this perspective helps to cast a light on the subtle and potentially concealed ways through which young people navigate experiences of bullying at the hands of close friends.

Method

Guided by grounded theory methods, from a constructivist standpoint (Charmaz 2006, 2014), we sought to develop a theoretical framework of girls' adolescent friendship victimization experiences from the perspectives of Canadian women. Constructivist Grounded Theory (CGT) highlights social processes and gives precedence to participants' meanings of their subjective realities. The aim of this present study was to focus on adults' recollections of their responses to bullying victimization that occurred within the context of an adolescent friendship. Through the retelling of their bullying stories, the participants' recollections point to the salient individual and contextual factors (including discourses, power relations, etc.) that have influenced and continue to shape their interpretations of bullying. In line with a symbolic interactionism perspective, which provided a theoretical lens from which we examined the data using grounded theory (Thornberg 2012), when adults consider past experiences of bullying they engage in process of negotiating meaning and interpretation from their past and present selves (Bruner 1990). We agree with Viala (2015) who noted in her retrospective study that examines bullying experiences:

memories of bullying are based on complex and ambiguous interpretations of specific events and sequences of events that are associated with bullying, and that these interpretations have been continuously developed, nuanced and or modified since the events originally occurred (p. 368).

It is important to note that we do not view the participants' memories as a reiterations of the "truth" of bullying, which would certainly open up questions of validity; instead, we believe there is analytic potential to investigating the ways adults have derived meaning from their experiences and how these meanings becoming enacted.

Participants

Upon receiving university ethical clearance, participants were purposively recruited via Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn, so as to access a wide geographical region within Canada. All participants self-identified as having experienced victimization at the hands of a friend during adolescence. Both men and women were sought for this study, as there is currently mixed evidence within friendship victimization literature specifically, and relational victimization more broadly, noting the prevalence and nature of this of form of victimization across sex (Card, Stucky, Sawalani, and Little 2008; Chesney-Lind, Morash, and Irwin 2007). Although it is important to gain an understanding of how both men and women experienced victimization within their friendships, unfortunately no men consented to participating in this study. Recruiting

men for social research, particularly on personal or sensitive subjects, such as friendship and bullying, has been identified to be a difficult endeavour (for more of a discussion on this see Butera 2006). A final sample of 10 women, each taking part in two individual interviews (apart from one individual who participated in one longer interview). In total, the age of participants ranged from 26 to 36 years old ($M = 28.3$).

Data collection

Data were collected through semi-structured individual interviews with each participant. The first author conducted all interviews using online textual chat software, which enabled the anonymity of participants' identities. The methods chosen for this study reflect an emerging base of literature that acknowledges the viability, and indeed the need for, research methods that promote the anonymity of participants (Bouchard 2016; Nicholas et al. 2010; Synnot, Hill, Summers, and Taylor 2014). In line with this work, we felt that the anonymous nature of the interviews in this study had the potential to provide a context for participants to discuss the details of their personal experiences of bullying and to open up about difficult, potentially shaming experiences that may be more challenging to divulge within traditional, in-person interviews.

Each interview lasted approximately one and a half hours. Participants were not provided with a definition of bullying; instead, we opted to have a discussion with each participant about her understanding of bullying. Indeed, some participants' understandings of bullying echoed researcher's definitions, while others pointed to different phenomena that are less commonly examined in investigations of bullying yet speak to other sites of intersectionality that are bound up in experiences of bullying, such as gendered harassment and racism (Ringrose and Renold, 2010). We did not view these variations in participants' perspectives as an inconvenience, however. Rather participants' constructions provided analytical potential, particularly from a symbolic interactionism perspective, which contends that individuals define and label objects (people, places, and things) in order to understand situations and this naming has consequences for how individuals act in a situation (Thomas and Thomas, 1928).

A flexible interview guide was used in each interview, following the recommendations of Charmaz's (2006) intensive interview strategies. Initial open-ended questions were used to start the interview, such as, "when you think of what you desire in a friendship, what comes to mind?" Following this, intermediate questions were utilized to gain a deeper understanding of

participants' experiences with specific victimization events. For example, an intermediate question was, "can you describe what you did in response to your friend hurting you in that way?" Ending questions were used to bring participants back into the present and to end the interview on a less distressing note, for example, "After having gone through these experiences, what do you suggest that teens should do when experiencing victimization by a friend?" The online nature of the interview provided the participants with the ability to reflect and consider their responses before pressing 'send.' The interviewer, too, had more time to think critically about participants' responses before crafting a follow-up question. This fluctuation between data collection and initial analyses fits within the objectives of theoretical sampling within a CGT approach. Additionally, new themes and questions were added to the interview protocol as the data collection period unfolded. The follow-up interviews were used as a method of theoretical sampling; during these interviews we clarified any concepts that were still unclear, followed up on any theoretical leads that we constructed in the participants' previous interview or in the interviews with other participants, and worked to understand the nuances of the developing categories. Whereas the first interview helped to provide an understanding of the bullying events that took place, the second interviews were more analytical, as we discussed discourses of bullying, gendered expectations, and wider institutional, social, historical, or cultural forces that shaped their bullying experiences or the meaning that they derived from their experiences.

Data analysis

Grounded theory methods, based on a constructivist position (Charmaz 2006, 2014) were utilized to analyze the data. In all grounded theory methods actions and processes are analyzed from the participants' perspectives, but the constructivist position more specifically uses symbolic interactionism to theoretically understand the participants' constructions of actions and processes. We viewed our participants as active interpretative actors involved in an ongoing process of constructing and reconstructing their assumptions about their social worlds and themselves through social interaction (Blumer 1969; Charmaz 2014). Similar to Glaser and Strauss' classical grounded theory (1967), this study utilized multi-phase coding processes, constant comparisons of data, memo-writing, and theoretical sampling (i.e., the iterative process of refining initial data to guide subsequent discussion topics and/or themes). The coding process involved initial, focused, and theoretical coding. The initial phases of coding involved making descriptive and, oftentimes, analytic decisions about the data, utilizing line-by-line coding

techniques. Focused coding was conducted through constant-comparative analysis (i.e., comparing codes with codes, codes with data segments, data segments with data segments) in the service of synthesizing large amounts of data into conceptual categories. At this time, reflective memos were written by the first author and shared with the second author. These two authors then made further analytical decisions about the data, which were then used to re-analyze the interview transcripts. The final stage, theoretical coding, involved all four authors and encompassed describing and elaborating on the conceptual categories through a process of abduction—a reciprocal process through which outside ideas were used to help conceptualize the categories and vice-versa (Thornberg and Charmaz 2011). Here we brought into the analysis previous work on victimization within friendship, resistance, and other second order perspectives of bullying that call attention to societal discourses, power relations, and socio-cultural forces.

Results

Working within a post-structuralist perspective, we saw the many ways that our participants resisted their abusers. Specifically, we learned that participants resisted the bullying by their friend in important, though often subtle, ways and that their resistance was both enabled and constrained by dominant power structures, particularly gendered and discursive constructions of resistance and victimization. The findings also point to the ways that participants' resistance paradoxically served to reproduce the status quo, further normalizing, minimizing, or reducing the bullying experience. In our interviews, we noted the following ways that participants resisted their victimization:

- a) avoiding “hot spots” where bullying typically occurs;
- b) staying home from school;
- c) reframing the bullying as a positive learning experience;
- d) keeping busy with extracurricular and academic pursuits;
- e) saving-face with the aggressive friend and peer group;
- f) focusing on the positive aspects of the friendship;
- g) emotionally distancing from the friendship;
- h) imagining the victimizing friend suffering or getting into trouble;
- i) envisioning confronting the victimizing friend;
- j) retaliatory physical and relational aggression

Although their responses were often met with continued victimization (some participants did

experience momentary pauses in the bullying), their responses were spontaneous and demonstrated that they had a *presence of mind* (Khanna 2013) of the resources available to them and the complex social circumstances of their environments.

It is noteworthy, and not surprising, that most of the women (9) opted to resist the victimization using a variety of strategies that lessened the potential for expulsion from their friendship and peer group. These less visible, yet intentional, acts are disguised to the perpetrator and often other peers and parents/teachers. Scott's ethnographic work (1990) denotes that less outwardly visible acts of resistance are safer for those who have been positioned as weaker within the relations of power. In the context of this current study, the women described the significant costs of losing their friendship and status within the peer group, and thus, felt compelled to "not rock the boat" (Melissa, pseudonym). Many of the women reported that they wanted the victimization to stop but they also stressed the importance of remaining in the friendship. To reach this homeostasis, the women were required to engage in a balancing act of asserting their resistance to the bullying while not compromising their social and identity positions (Forsberg 2017). In addition to navigating the social rules of the peer group, the women were also expected to resist in socially-constructed 'female' ways, as to not disrupt the dominant gendered order and risk stigmatization as a gender deviant.

However, as our results indicated, discourses that conceal women's resistance and privilege overt responses to bullying run counter to gendered expectations for resistance, leaving women in a double-bind. In the section that follows, we will discuss the three central forms of resistance that were generated from the grounded theory: showing friendship, fighting back, and getting even. These represent the categories that were developed to help explain the core category of *resisting victimization within friendship*. Overall, we found that the women appeared to be left with limited options for resisting, and most of these options still positioned them as a discursively constructed "victim" or gender deviant. We found that even when the women were able to deny their victimized status and adhere to gendered expectations for resistance, their actions served to further normalize bullying amongst girls' adolescent friendships.

Showing friendship

'Showing friendship' was the most common form of resisting bullying that was illuminated through our discussions with the women. Showing friendship is a strategy that represents an ongoing process of actively participating in the conditions for inclusion within the

friendship, largely seen through outward projections of ‘nice-ness’ (Ringrose 2008).

I would purposely chime in a laugh at jokes she made to fit in, it was a way for me to try to get her attention, hoping that she wouldn’t continue to make me invisible. (Mira)

I also found myself always trying to win their friendship...giving them posters, candy, things I would bring from home...I felt like I kept needing to show them I was a nice person...Maybe for them to think, hey if we continue being mean to her she won’t give us these things...I just wanted them to stop. (Leah)

She always came back to me apologizing for what she did. And I would just say it was okay and take her back...but she would just continue to do mean things...I honestly just kept trying harder to be friends with her. (Sonia)

In showing friendship, the women utilized face-saving protective strategies (Goffman 1967) to construct a more favourable position within the friendship and to feel a sense of group belonging. This is in line with what Warrington and Younger (2011) argue: “Inclusion thus demands certain behaviours...such strategies reduce the risk of ostracization, of being labelled as other and different, and being rejected by the prevailing culture” (153–154). The participants also noted how they were left with limited options beyond showing friendship, citing the social pressures to remain a worthy member of the peer group as a strong motivating force to not address their friend(s) behaviours.

I was afraid of losing the friend, so I would never complain or ask to be treated better, even when deep down I knew that I was being walked on and that we weren’t really friends...I don’t want to rock the boat. (Melissa)

I thought I have to be nice to them because they’re on my swim team and if I tell anyone what they did they might be more mean to me and make my life worse. (Bonnie)

These face-saving strategies represented actions used by the participants to position themselves as worthy members within the friendship, and by extension, the peer group. Importantly, through showing friendship, the participants were attempting to alleviate the anxiety derived from social exclusion (Søndergaard 2014) and deny the pretext for future bullying. Their actions also signify efforts to oppose or distance themselves from their victimized positioning, but, as we will see below, this was difficult to accomplish. To this end, the participants acted as ‘friends do’, which is discursively constituted by notions of idealized femininity that legitimize performing ‘nice-ness’ (Brown 1998; Ringrose 2008; Ringrose and Renold 2010). In the context of this current study, the participants felt compelled to improve their social positioning and simultaneously felt constrained by the “mandate of nice-ness” (Currie, Kelly, and Pomerantz 2007, p. 27), and thus favoured showing friendship in light of feeling victimized. However,

creating this favourable identity position (derived from social embeddedness and attempting to deny a victimized position) was also connected to feelings of shame. For example:

Three days before her party, I told her that I went shopping with my mom and got her the coolest gift and I couldn't wait for her to see it. She responded with, "oh I thought you knew you weren't invited...nobody really likes you." I ended up just leaving the gift for her on her birthday at her back door and walking around the neighbourhood for 4 hours and going home so my mom didn't know I didn't go...There was a lot of self-blame and shame that I felt because I didn't do anything. (Charlotte)

It appeared that in their responses to victimization, the participants engaged in an ongoing and seemingly impossible task of negotiating their desire for belonging and avoiding a sense of shame. Showing friendship seemed to be a viable strategy that allowed for participants to create favourable identity positions vis-a-vis gender, but, as we will now discuss, this was not without cost.

Showing friendship, while aligning with the gendered order of performing nice-ness consequently positioned the women with an undesirable victim identity. Dominant discourses of resistance legitimize overtly pushing back against victimization (e.g., fighting back against the perpetrator or leaving the relationship), which positions those women, who instead 'show friendship' in response to victimization, as helpless, or at worst, willing participants (Mahoney 1992; Paterson 2010). We see the activation of dominant resistance discourses in the women's discussions of the advice that was given to them by parents, teachers, and other peers. We can also see this is the participants' reflections on what they believed they ought to have responded or the ways in which they believed they had failed themselves in response to the victimization.

My father...pointed out to me early on that I had a ton of weight on these kids and should just knock them out, as he was sick of me doing all these nice things for them and coming home crying. It took me years to mentally overcome this feeling that I was weak and useless and getting over my inherent niceness...Wanting to make my father proud, I fought back in grade 4 and broke my best friend's arm. (Charlotte)

I felt that I had done something wrong and desperately wanted to fix it so I felt inadequate and embarrassed for not doing or saying anything to her...I think I was angry because I knew I was being treated poorly and also a little frustrated because even with that knowledge, I still let it get to me and I still wanted to be friends with her. (Elaine)

In a friendship context you want to keep your friends and be part of the group so even though they may not treat you well you would go running back if they give you the chance. There's the hope that earlier indiscretions were singular events that won't happen again. You have a similar lack of confidence and your self-worth becomes really tied in with their opinion of you. You feel awful for doing nothing and it reinforces this idea that you can't do anything. People on the outside get really confused and wonder why you are

putting up with it. Knowing that people are thinking of you in this way makes it even worse...that you are too weak to do anything about it. (Melissa)

These recommendations (both from external sources and internally) for “fighting back” (Charlotte) are keeping in line with dominant heteromascuine discourses that privilege overt resistance to victimization; however, these discourses are sharply contrasted with feminine ideals that project expectations of being “a nice person...generous and caring” (Sonia) and of “showing that you are a good friend” (Melissa). This left the women with few options for responding to the victimization, which potentially led to the vicious cycle in which needing to belong led to subjecting oneself to victimization. The participants’ efforts of showing friendship, or even “doing nothing” (Melissa) were interpreted (through the participants’ own understandings) in light of common representations associated with a victim positionality (i.e., participants felt “inadequate,” “weak” and “useless,” and were concerned that they were appearing like they were “putting up with it” and “doing nice things”). As Coates and Wade (2007) argue, such a construction “exposes victims to that particularly ugly form of social contempt that is reserved for individuals who, when faced with adversity, appear to knuckle under and do nothing on their behalf” (519). As a result, many of the women were positioned, and indeed, many positioned themselves, with victim identity, despite their best efforts to distance themselves from this identity position (Burcar and Akerstrom 2009; Søndergaard 2014).

Although their use of face-saving strategies aligned with the dominant gendered order and demonstrated a determined form of resistance to victimization, many of the participants were still subjected to an abject position (Butler 1999) within the friendship and wider peer group. As a result, the women were primed for future victimization and peer rejection. This was evident in the interviews when the clear majority of participants continued to be victimized by their friend, and in some cases, ostracized from their peer groups.

After the first incident I was an easy target. Other people started avoiding me because of the fear the association with me would make them a target. (Melissa)

I had so many former friends who betrayed me and joined in with the bullies to save themselves. Once it started it didn’t really stop. (Leah)

This speaks to the double bind that many of the participants were forced to negotiate in their responses to victimization. On the one hand, others (and the girls themselves) understood resistance, constituted by constructions of power, strength, and dignity, performed through pushing back against the bullying, while they associated less direct actions, such as showing

friendship, with a victim position. To heed these expectations for overt resistance, however, would violate prevailing gender norms of showing friendship. And conversely, to align with idealized feminine expectations by exemplifying nice-ness stands in contrast to heteronormative constructions of resistance. As we will see in the discussion that follows, other responses to victimization, although they are more in line with dominant discourses of resistance, still stigmatized the women and threatened to render their experience as invisible within traditional understandings of bullying.

Fighting back and getting even

Not all the women responded to victimization through ‘showing friendship.’ Most notably, Charlotte, recalled her use of force against her friends who victimized her, detailing how she “broke her friend’s arm,” “slapped the most popular girl in school across the face after teasing me” and “blacked out and started beating people off with a hockey stick after getting beat on for an hour.” Here Charlotte, upon the encouragement from her father, subverted the gendered order of performing ‘nice-ness’ in an attempt to push back against her victimized status. Although she seemingly aligned with discursive constructions of resistance that legitimize “standing up” or “fighting back”, Charlotte was still positioned as a deviant at school, as she was unable to yield the social power necessary to influence how she was perceived as a person (Viala 2015). Interestingly, she commented on how her identity at school was defined with respect to appearance expectations concerning girls’ bodies.

I remember getting bullied for my weight and hair...I was a chunky child with nappy hair. I would overhear kids not to invite me along as I eat too much or that I may break the trampoline.

Her efforts to resist victimization through more overt strategies align with hetero(normative) discourses of resistance, however, Charlotte as a girl was not entitled to act in such a way, on account of her gender and marginalized social position (fuelled by appearance expectations).

Furthermore, as Charlotte challenged gender expectations with respect to her appearance and through her overt responses to feeling victimized, her experiences risked being overlooked within dominant constructions of bullying, and thus, she threatened any meaningful intervention from adults or peers. Discourses of peer bullying centralize the importance of the power imbalance between perpetrators of the abuse and those victimized. This power imbalance is often interpreted through individual and micro-contextual advantages/disadvantages, such as physical size or number of perpetrators. While Charlotte was at a significant power advantage through her

physical size, she was disadvantaged by her social marginalization (fuelled, in part, by her gender non-compliance). Her physical size and (hetero)masculine responses to victimization rendered her resistance visible. But, as articulated by Horton (2011), “visible resistance reduces the perceived applicability of the bullying definition as it is commonly defined” (p. 271). We can see this in Charlotte’s narratives about how her teachers and school administrator opted to approach her victimization experiences.

Even the teachers would tease me about it. I was the girl who broke bones. The last time I was suspended in Grade 5 for fighting back against those who were bullying me, the principal called it an ‘unfair fight’ as I was so much bigger than the other kids. I told the principal earlier that week that I was being teased a lot and that I was scared. He called me a tattle-tale...It would have been nice if teachers knew how to properly intervene and treat these situations as bullying. I felt they generally ignored it when it happened to me. (Charlotte)

Similar to other participants, Charlotte was subjected to ongoing bullying throughout her early adolescence, despite her “standing up,” as such aggressive resistance violated the normative order of femininity and positioned her as even more ‘deviant’ in front of the peers.

Some of the participants indicated that they resisted the bullying using retaliatory aggression. For example, one participant, Mira, indicated that she used relational strategies in response to the victimization she endured by her friend.

Mira - So MSN chat was very popular at the time, eventually, some time in Grade 10, these group chats started happening, where we [she and her girlfriends] chatted about her specifically

Interviewer - What would you speak about in these chats?

Mira - People mostly made fun of her, like I remember one joke was she needed to wear deodorant...they were plotting about a "protest," that we all pick a day to ignore her and to give her the cold shoulder back that type of thing.

Her response to her victimization is in line with decades of research on female aggression that demonstrates that being positioned as a girl ‘bully’ in relation to discursive masculinity constitutes those who breach normative femininity as gender deviants (Brown 2003; Hey 1997; Ringrose and Renold 2010). Girls, therefore, may be more apt to engage in aggression through relational mechanisms (as Mira spoke to above). As Ringrose and Renold (2010) articulate, “meanness is therefore part of the normative cruelties of ‘doing’ girl” (585). As Mira negotiated her responses to victimization, relational aggression was an effective tactic, as it aligned with gendered expectations (i.e., not physically aggressing or confronting like in Charlotte’s case) and yet still allowed her to reject a victimized position (i.e., to not appear weak or submissive).

Mira's resistance to her friend's bullying did not significantly change the status of her friendship (i.e., they remained friends, even years after), nor did it prevent further victimization (Mira described how the victimization continued throughout high school). However, by navigating the constraints within her peer group and persistent gender norms, she was successful in retaining her social power. Yet, simultaneously, she also participated in the normalization of appropriate girl aggression, which also threatened the visibility of her experience within current bullying discourses. This is seen in her comments discussing whether her experience could be considered victimization. "I didn't see this as victimization, I didn't see it as bullying, even though I knew that it was hurtful. I just saw it as girls being girls." So while in Charlotte's case the power imbalance was blurred due to her aggressive resistance, Mira's experiences were seen as normal, everyday conflict amongst girls. Both forms of aggression, physical and relational, minimized the chances that their experiences would be seen from a bullying perspective by others, and in addition, contributed to the participants' perceptions that they were just "too sensitive" (Bonnie), "overreacted" (Melissa), or "brought it on themselves" (Charlotte).

Discussion

Current bullying literature often overlooks the ways that victims respond to aggressive behaviour, particularly when those responses are covert, perhaps contradictory, and appear to not directly address the circumstances of the bullying (Khanna 2013). Instead, victim responses are seen through the effects of the bullying, reinforced by an individual symptomatology lens (i.e., school avoidance, anxiousness, displaying disinterest, etc.). This perspective serves to disempower those who are victimized and contributes to prevalent discourses of victim passivity, submissiveness, and pathology (Renoux and Wade 2008). The risk of concealing these responses is high, as research has demonstrated that young people internalize their experiences of bullying, leading to what Thornberg et al. (2013) refer to as *internal victimization*—a process through which victimized young people internalized a 'victim' image, leading to shame, guilt, self-doubting, and self-blaming. Many of the women interviewed in this study described how they were still working through their victimization experiences. Some women had difficulty maintaining their current friendships, while others felt ashamed talking about their previously flawed friendships. Not surprisingly, a large majority of the women declared that they had spoken very little about their memories of victimization, for fear of their experience being minimized or even scrutinized by peers. Although working through adverse childhood relationships should not be reduced to a

catch-all strategy, we contend that adults engaging with victimized youth must ensure that they deconstruct (*with* the young person) the ways that he or she resisted the bullying, no matter how covert or seemingly contradictory (Combs and Freeman 2012; Wade 1997). An emphasis on these responses can “give victims a sense of accomplishment, thus foregrounding their skills, knowledge, and personal agency” (Khanna 2013, p. 71).

Concepts within Wade’s work (2000) on response-based therapy may be helpful to begin these conversations. Response-based therapy is an approach that provides different possible ways of thinking about violence, which could facilitate in the retelling and reunderstanding of experiences. For example, a young person may perceive that her inaction towards a close friend who chronically bullies her is an example of her own cowardice; she may even begin to question whether there is something wrong with her. The temptation would be to focus on the effects of the bullying—namely her loss of confidence—and offer strategies to help the young person overcome her passivity. Instead, we could focus on the ways that her apparent inaction may represent her understanding of the struggle to remain a relevant, worthy, socially embedded subject within her peer group, and that her sense of dignity is, in part, derived from this peer membership. This shifts the discussion away from pathology (i.e., her lack of confidence and passivity) to one that focuses on her beliefs, values, and commitments. We might also help her to deconstruct this apparent ‘inaction’ to find the subtle and disguised ways that she resisted the bullying by her friend. For example, she may ask her mother to pick her up from school rather than taking the bus with her friend, or she might play along with her friend’s bullying behaviour. Although these strategies may not stop the bullying, they represent her understanding that she was treated disrespectfully and signify her best intentions of protecting herself. And, according to Wade (1997), “acts which may appear to be inconsequential can provide the foundation for more effective action.” It is our contention that school bullying prevention and intervention initiatives would do well to provide space for discussions on how young people respond to victimization, and that resistant actions are not always overt, but can be subtle, concealed, or paradoxical. These efforts would help young people involved in bullying to acknowledge their existing strength and resourcefulness (Wade 2000).

The interviews with the participants suggested that the women’s resistance was constrained and determined by a series of discursive limits, namely discourses that associate victimization with personal deficits, as well as discursive practices that dictate gender

expectations of how girls can appropriately respond to bullying without being labeled as a gender deviant. To complicate the situation, we also found that these gender expectations for how girls ought to respond were in contrast to dominant constructions of resistance that privilege overt resistance or “standing up” leaving the women in a double-bind when negotiating their resistance. As we saw in Mira’s case, navigating prevailing gender norms and expectations for resistance marked relational aggression as an effective and socially risk-averse option for responding to victimization. In other words, it appeared that retaliatory relational aggression was an effective way for girls to deny their victimized status while complying with gendered expectations for resistance. This finding provides a differential perspective to the “naturalness” (Ringrose and Renold, 2010) of relational bullying and victimization that has been cited in previous psychological work (e.g., Crick and Grotpeter 1996).

Our findings serve to re-emphasize the social and discursive limits within women’s worlds that constrain and open up possibilities for their responses. There is a small, yet emerging base of literature on relational victimization that critically examines gender, not in a binary but in terms of gendered expectations or normative ideals (e.g., Hey 1997; Currie, Kelly, and Pomerantz 2007; Meyer 2008; Ringrose and Renold 2010; Warrington and Younger 2011). This dearth in second order perspectives of girls’ responses to bullying within the literature has surely contributed to a public discourse that is uncritical of ‘naturalized’ female relational bullying. Not surprisingly, and as we saw in our interviews, girls may find it challenging to differentiate girl bullying from every-day girl conflicts within friendships as their experiences are minimized, if not overlooked, in current discursive frames of bullying. Future work should continue to examine the macro forces, such as gender expectations and discourses of bullying and resistance, in addition to the more widely studied internal forces, that constrain women’s responses to bullying

There is also work that can be done in our schools. Teachers, for example, could increase their awareness of such discourses and power relations at play within bullying incidences and encourage students to interrogate dominant social and moral orders, most particularly widely held beliefs about how boys and girls should respond to bullying. Teachers could also begin to problematize the ways that school institutions, themselves, are complicit in the upholding and reinforcing of bullying behaviours, heteronormativities, and social hierarchies (Duncan 2013; Horton 2011; Yoneyama and Naito 2003). More specifically, many of our participants noted that the adults in their lives minimized their bullying experiences, but at the same time they also

mentioned that they were fearful that their teachers or parents would overreact to the bullying and potentially threaten their peer group status. Other studies have also noted these reactions from adults; this speaks to why many youth are reluctant to disclose incidences of bullying (Bjereld 2016; deLara 2012). It is vital that in any attempt for bullying intervention, adults remain sensitive to the micro and macro realities of young people's social worlds; perhaps this is most crucial when there is a friendship between the perpetrator and the victimized.

The results of this study should be examined in light of the research's limitations. The self-selection sampling procedures as well as the small data sample may limit the generalizability of the findings in a statistical sense. The results from this work, however, are still open to transferability, wherein the reader judges the generalizability of the data (Charmaz 2014). We also acknowledge that CGT approaches to examining bullying, while useful for locating relationships between concepts and themes, across interviews (Charmaz 2006), could be supported by other research methodologies that aim to keep "participant stories intact" (Lal, Suto, and Unger 2012, p. 11), such as narrative inquiry. Additionally, the methods chosen for this work, namely online synchronous interviews provide a number of benefits for research on sensitive topics, such as bullying. However, there are some limitations that should be noted. Firstly, similar to the observation by Jowett, Peel, and Shaw (2011), our online interviews produced less data than we suspect would have been collected in more traditional face-to-face interviews. This may have limited both the breadth and depth of the conversations that we were able to have with our participants over the two interviews. Second, although it was a central goal of the study to not compromise participants' anonymity, we collected little contextual demographics about our participants, which may limit our readers' interpretation of the results. Although we acknowledge the intersections of class, culture, race/ethnicity, (dis)ability, religion etcetera that are bound up in experiences of bullying, victimization, and resistance (e.g., Thornberg 2017), this study was based on a primarily gendered perspective. Future work should continue to untangle these complexities. More generally, we recommend that bullying should be understood as a complex phenomenon of overlapping individual and contextual forces enacted within relations, and that these relations are constituted by power structures that position children with respect to dominant social and moral orders.

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Chapter 5: Methodology – Manuscript 3

The overall aim of manuscript 3 was to explore adolescents' experiences of bullying victimization within friendship. In this study, I investigated the intersection of microcontextual and macrocontextual variables with a special attention to how forces within these contexts become important in young people's experiences of bullying by friends. A basic qualitative research method was used to investigate the participants' experiences with victimization within friendships. This study was informed by the philosophies of social constructivism and used a unique method for collecting data, namely a large focus group via an online asynchronous discussion board.

Participants

Canadian adolescents aged 16–19 were included in Study 2 (manuscript 3 in this dissertation). Although we used the term “bullied” within our recruitment, we did not provide a specific definition of the phenomenon. There is still a preponderance of research that relies on adult-centric perspectives of bullying, where researchers prime young participants with the core conditions of bullying before examining the phenomenon rather than investigating how children themselves identify and experience bullying (Guerin, 2006). Although a priori definitions can help to establish consistency between empirical studies, research that avoids this kind of priming can provide rich data that can potentially elicit new insights into complex phenomenon, such as bullying (Duncan, 1998). This type of work is important for child and youth-based investigations of bullying, as children's perspectives are positioned at the forefront rather than treated as less valid in comparison to researcher's definitions.

Both males and females were sought for this study, as there is still considerable debate regarding sex differences across factors related to bullying and victimization as well as an emerging research focus that calls for analyses that are sensitive to gendered discourses. Additionally, there is currently mixed evidence within friendship victimization literature, specifically, and relational bullying, more broadly, noting the prevalence and nature of this form of victimization across the sexes and developmental stages (Card, Stucky, Sawalani, & Little, 2008; Chesney-Lind, Morash, & Irwin, 2007). I felt it was important to gain an understanding of how both boys and girls experience abusive friendships as they age into adolescence.

Numerous lines of research have identified that bullying and experiences of victimization typically peak in the middle-school years (i.e., Grades 6, 7, and 8, within Canada) and that these prevalence rates decline the longer that young people are in high school (Cook et al., 2010). The age range for this study, namely 16–19-year olds, was selected, in part, to allow participants to reflect on their recent bullying experiences during this formative period. The retrospective nature of the study helped to give insight into how adolescents interpreted their more recent bullying experiences and enacted this meaning within their social interactions. Participants’ narratives can also draw attention to the individual and social-contextual forces that were influential in the recent past (or continue to be influential). From a symbolic interactionism standpoint, retrospective accounts allow researchers to examine how specific meanings emerge from participants’ experiences and how these meanings change as participants evolve. Furthermore, we can gain insight into how participants reaffirm past meanings through present interactions.

Additional justification for including 16–19-year olds within the study concerned ethical considerations. The Canadian Research Ethics Board indicates that “young people between 16–18 years of age with sufficient understanding are able to give their full consent to participate in research independently of their legally authorized representative.” It was critical that participants were able to indicate their own consent because previous research has demonstrated that young people are reluctant to disclose peer abuse, particularly experiences that implicate the aggression of a friend, to adults (Mishna, 2004). Although I encouraged our participants to share their involvement in the research with their parents/guardians, I did not want to force this conversation for those adolescents who were not yet comfortable disclosing these experiences.

Recruitment

Upon receiving university ethical clearance, we recruited Canadian adolescents through social media platforms (e.g., Facebook and Twitter). On Facebook, in particular, I paid for advertisements that specifically targeted a 16–19-year-old demographic (see Appendix 2 for recruitment advertisements). Although I could have paid to advertise on Twitter, I instead opted to rely on re-tweets, a form of ‘online snowball sampling’ (Sadler, Seung-Hwan, & Fullerton, 2010), as particular organizations acted as intermediaries to promote the study and source potential participants (for a more detailed discussion on strategies for online recruitment, see Boydell, Fergie, McDaid, & Hilton, 2014). Advertising on Facebook was the most effective method likely because we were able to tailor and promote the ad to a specific demographic. I

recruited participants for one month prior to launching the forum; I continued to recruit participants throughout the first month of the data collection period. All participants were offered a \$15 voucher to the movie theatre to compensate them for their participation.

In total, a final sample of 25 adolescents (6 males) with an average age of 17.8 years drawn from eight Canadian provinces shared their experience. The online nature of the recruitment allowed us to extend the geographical reach of the study. This was important, not to increase the generalizability of the results in a statistical sense, but to provide a forum for youth across the country to contribute their voices to the research.

Becoming a Participant

The recruitment ads included a link to a website that was created for the research. The website introduced the research project (via text and a video), the researchers, information about consent and the data collection procedures, clickable link to informational and support resources, as well as a page for interested participants to sign up for the study. Specifically, the “Info and Consent” tab on the research website outlined the objectives of the study, the timelines for collecting data, procedures for becoming a participant, information about remuneration, as well as a clickable link to download a consent form. I strongly encouraged interested individuals to read the consent form, but, just as in offline research using hard-copy consent forms, I could not guarantee that individuals read through the form in its entirety before indicating their consent (see Appendix 4 for consent forms). Ultimately, if individuals were interested in participating, they were asked to click on the “forum access” button, which led them to an external discussion board. On the opening page of the forum, individuals were asked to indicate their consent and their reasoning for wanting to participate (for example, one participant noted, “I want to join because I think this is a great idea for those who want to have a voice out there about their friendships that have hurt them in the past and just knowing that there are others out there that can relate to you can make people feel like they aren't alone”). Although it was not required that participants provide a justification for signing up for the forum, it did afford another layer of authentication. At this time, participants also filled out a brief questionnaire regarding their sex, birthdate, and geographic location. I then approved participants based on this information, ensuring that their questionnaire responses aligned with our inclusion criteria. All approvals were sent to the participants’ email addresses. This email also provided a link to the forum webpage. Although 44 adolescents consented to the study, a total of 25 contributed to the online forum. I only

considered those who were active on the forum to be participants, although I recognized that some individuals may have engaged on the forum without actually contributing to the discussion.

Data Collection Procedures

The online discussion board was open for two months and participants joined the study over this duration. The focus group was open-ended, in that participants joined the discussion as they consented to participate in the study. As a result, some participants joined the forum after the discussion had already started. As the study was asynchronous, participants contributed to the forum at times that were most convenient for them (i.e., there was no live chat). The forum was utilized to mimic a focus group, whereby participants could meet in a shared space to discuss experiences of a similar phenomenon. Focus groups have been identified as a data collection strategy to garner an understanding of bullying via group settings and have the potential to be more natural, familiar, comfortable, and less threatening to participants (Kitzinger, 1994). Furthermore, focus groups allow researchers to investigate individuals' ideas from the dialogue and interaction between participants. Bullying research, in particular, has utilized focus groups as a means to position participants as experts of their social worlds and to counteract power imbalances between researchers and young people that may become exacerbated in individual interviews (Williams et al., 2012). Online focus groups were utilized in this study, in order to reach youth in familiar environments, and to have open, candid discussions in an anonymous environment.

In order to start the discussions on the forum, I generated six catalyzing questions, found within six separate tabs (clickable links to open up threads). The six questions included: Why do you think your friend bullied you? What does bullying look or feel like? What does friendship look or feel like? What did you do when your friend bullied you? Why do you think friends bully each other? What made your experience of being bullied by a friend worse or better? (Appendix 5) Participants responded to the initial question but were also encouraged to comment on each other's posts and pose their own questions to move the discussion forward. My role in the research was intended to be in a moderator capacity, but I did find that I needed to be more directive in my approach in order to move the discussions forward (i.e., I asked follow-up questions and encouraged participants to respond).

When the conversations on the forum concluded two months later, there were 96 responses from the 25 youth. I set out a two-month limit for data collection on the forum. I

decided on the two-month period based on recommendations from existing literature and felt compelled to note a specific end-date so that I could provide this information in my ethics application. As is the case in all qualitative focus groups, conducted either online or offline, there was uneven participation from the adolescents. For example, some participants contributed lengthy discussions of their experiences (e.g., one typed page in text) while others wrote comparatively less (one to two lines). The average number of contributions per participant was approximately 6. Additionally, as stated earlier, some participants joined the discussion after other participants had already begun sharing their experiences on the forum. This may have produced some confusion for participants and may have limited participants' abilities to answer certain questions that were posed earlier in the discussion. Once the data collection period ended, the participants were thanked for their time and emailed an online gift certificate. I copied and pasted the textual data into a word document to continue analyzing the data.

A note on some ethical considerations

There are important limitations that ought to be critically assessed prior to undertaking any online qualitative study, particularly with young people, and the suitability of online methods with these populations should ultimately rest on careful considerations of ethics (Farquar, 1999). Although the anonymous nature of the study had the potential to produce a disinhibiting effect, where participants may have felt more comfortable sharing experiences that may be stigmatizing or less socially desirable (Suler, 2004), researchers should still be cautious of anonymity's double-edge sword (Bouchard, 2016). For example, I recognized that the perceived anonymity of the forum could influence the participants' relative ease of sharing personal information or details that they may have otherwise wished to remain concealed. To address this, participants had the ability to delete any posts and were reminded that they had the right to request that any or all of their contributions be omitted from the final analysis. The asynchronous nature of the data collection process also helped in this regard, as participants had the time to be thoughtful about their responses, drafting and redrafting what they wanted to share (Mann & Stewart, 2000).

The disinhibiting effect of online research also presented some ethical challenges. For example, it was entirely possible that participants could use inappropriate language on the forum, including disparaging or hurtful remarks to other participants, or post any content that promotes violence, racism, or demonstrates dangerous behaviours or promotes self-harm. It is imperative that researchers discuss their protocols for addressing such possibilities and provide participants

with guidelines for appropriate participation as well as the specific procedures for managing unsafe posts (Synnot et al., 2014). To account for this, I provided a “Guidelines for Participation” list on the research website as well as the online forum. Although these types of comments are a real possibility for any research conducted on the Internet, I did not encounter any commentary that threatened the safety of our participants.

It should also be noted that it is impossible to assure all participants that their identities will remain anonymous. Researchers can only provide an anonymous and secure research environment to the best extent possible. Firstly, researchers cannot guarantee that the information posted within the forum will be completely erased upon completion of the study. As Gaiser (2011) indicated, any online communications may be traceable and accessible both during and after the research project. For example, I used an American server to conduct the online research, and, as such, certain information may have been subject to the Patriot Act of the United States of America (i.e., IP addresses, login information, etc.). To account for this, I made sure to include this information within the consent form and the “Reminders for Participation” post within the online forum. Furthermore, there are anonymity risks if participants use a similar username within the study as they do on other social media platforms, for example. This may make it possible for participants’ identities to be discovered. As such, I encouraged all participants to create a unique username for the research.

Data Analysis

My approach for data analysis for manuscript 3 included using thematic analysis (TA), as articulated by Braun & Clarke (2006, 2013). TA is a useful method for summarizing core features of phenomena found within the data set and can help researchers to generate unanticipated insights. It is a particularly accessible method for data analysis that can be used effectively by both emerging and established researchers and is appropriate for empirical investigations of new or developing substantive research foci. TA does not seek to theoretically describe complex processes, such as in grounded theory, but rather aims to elucidate descriptive patterns found in the data, which is helpful to provide a depth and detail to constructs more typically measured in quantitative studies. In general, TA involves identify, analyzing, and reporting patterns within the data.

Braun and Clarke (2006) describe two forms of TA: theoretical TA and inductive TA. Whereas in theoretical TA, the analysis is driven by the researcher’s theoretical positionings and

understandings, thereby taking on a more deductive approach, inductive TA involves strongly linking the findings to the data. However, while I acknowledge that attempts were made to ground the findings in the data, the themes that I identified were not separate from my theoretical knowledge of the topic and my epistemological commitment to social constructivism.

In this study, a thematic analysis was conducted in the following steps: (1) exporting the textual data from the discussion forum into a word document; (2) familiarizing myself with the data; (3) generating preliminary codes through line-by-line coding; (4) grouping codes that seemed to represent familiar phenomena (represented as themes); (5) defining/refining themes through subsequent review of data and preliminary codes; and, (6) producing the final report. Although Braun and Clarke's phases of analysis are presented in a linear fashion, I agree with Nowell, Morris, White, and Moules (2017) that our analysis was a reflexive process where I often moved iteratively, oscillating between many phases. For example, when participants responded on the forum, I often produced preliminary codes and even grouped similar codes together as part of the process of generating new questions to be asked on the forum. This process of iterative data collection and analysis is similar to what is described as theoretical sampling in grounded theory but is often used in other methods for coding as well (Srivastava & Hopwood, 2009).

I used several strategies to keep my preliminary codes grounded in the data. For example, whenever possible, I used action codes denoted by the use of gerunds, such as *going*, *making*, *seeing*, *having*. This is a strategy that has also been suggested by Charmaz (2006) as it encourages the researcher to not make theoretical leaps about the data too soon in the analysis. I also engaged in a process of cross-comparative analysis, which involved comparing codes with codes, codes with data segments, and data segments with data segments. This helped me to synthesize larger amounts of data into themes that made the most analytic sense.

Author Contributions

There are three authors that contributed to manuscript 3. I conceptualized the project, created the online forum, posted the catalyzing questions, monitored the forum, and asked follow-up questions throughout the data collection period. The second author, my supervisor and professor at the University of Ottawa was involved in the latter stages of the data analysis; I had multiple discussions with the second author, which helped me to draw further analytical conclusions of the data. These conversations often led to new questions that I asked participants

on the forum. I found that my discussions with the second author, a clinical psychologist, helped to bring my analysis of salient individual factors (e.g., coping, internalizing symptoms, resilience, etc.) ‘to the analytical table,’ which helped to support my own lenses. The third author, a PhD Candidate in Education at the University of Ottawa, was involved in the final stages of drafting the manuscript; she provided comments, edits, and feedbacks on my drafts.

Chapter 6: Bullying Victimization within Adolescent Friendships

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Abstract

Although researchers have developed an understanding for the causes, consequences, and implications for the variety of individuals involved in bullying problems, there has been less consideration of the ways that specific relational contexts, such as friendships, may influence the bullying experience. Guided by a social-ecological perspective of bullying, this study investigated the phenomenon of bullying within friendship from the perspectives of 25 previously victimized adolescents. A basic qualitative research design was used as participating youth asynchronously contributed to an anonymous online discussion forum for two months. After a thematic analysis, the following themes emerged related to how participants experienced victimization within friendship: the cycling of victimization and friendship; responding to bullying and maintaining the friendship and/or peer group membership; responding aggressively to bullying within friendship, and; reconciling bullying within friendship. We situate the findings within current bullying and friendship literature and provide several implications for practice that could be implemented to help youth navigate these painful and interpersonally risky experiences.

Key Words

Bullying, victimization, qualitative, online research, friendship, youth, adolescents

Victimization resulting from peer bullying is a prevalent and persistent issue facing children and youth. For decades, researchers have associated experiences of bullying victimization with many negative psychological, social, and academic consequences (e.g., Stassen Berger, 2007; Swearer, Espelage, Vaillancourt, & Hymel, 2010), leading to educational policy, regulatory, and legislative changes across Western nations. Although researchers have

developed an understanding for the causes, consequences, and implications for the variety of individuals involved in bullying problems, there has been less consideration of the ways that specific relational contexts, such as friendships, may impact the experience of bullying victimization. Indeed, it is rarely specified in bullying research if young people involved in bullying were friends, acquaintances, enemies, or former friends (Rodkin, Espelage, & Hanish, 2015) and moreover, there has been little consideration of underlying factors and social processes that shape victimization within friendships. To provide a more relationship-sensitive perspective of bullying victimization, this study investigated victimized young people's descriptions of their experiences of bullying victimization as it occurs within a friendship context. Throughout this research, we take a social-ecological approach, which depicts bullying as a complex social experience that unfolds within nested systems comprising individuals and their social and cultural contexts.

Bullying Victimization within Friendships

Research that examines the link between friendship and bullying often reveals that friendships are sanctuaries from harm (Schmidt & Bagwell, 2007). This line of research has indicated that bullied youth tend to experience less internalizing distress and display fewer negative externalizing behaviours when they have friends versus when they do not have friends (Hodges et al., 1999). Although the critical value of friendships for positive development cannot be overstated, a subset of bullying research has revealed that friendships can be characterized by both positive and negative qualities, offering young people important provisions of friendship, such as disclosure and opportunities for companionship, while simultaneously including forms of bullying (Waasdorp, Bagdi, & Bradshaw, 2010). Previous work has indicated that bullying occurs frequently within friendships (e.g., Brendgen et al., 2015), and that the nature of friendship often complicates young people's understanding of and their responses to the victimization. For example, Mishna, Wiener, and Pepler's exploratory (2008) work indicated that children are often confused or unaware that they had experienced bullying or whether their friend was just "joking around" and "doesn't really mean it." Daniels, Quigley, Menard, and Spence's (2010) and Crick and Nelson's (2002) quantitative work also found that many children continue in their friendships despite experiencing victimization. Other researchers have posited that young people's responses to bullying will be more severe (e.g., internalizing distress) when a close friend perpetrates the bullying and that these reactions (e.g., anxiety, fearfulness, etc.) may

reinforce a friend's aggressive behaviour (Reijntjes et al., 2010). Findings from other research suggests that victimized youth may appear to do little to change the circumstances of their victimizing friendship and may paradoxically work to "show friendship" in response to being victimized (Authors). Despite these advances, there is still relatively sparse social-psychological research on how victimized adolescents experience bullying within friendship. Understanding the complexities of young people's relationships with their friends and how these relate to their experiences of bullying is vital for developing comprehensive approaches to bullying prevention and intervention.

There is also an ongoing need for investigations of adolescent bullying that privilege the perspectives and lived experiences of young people. Researchers have developed a robust understanding of bullying, but this has been largely gained from traditional methods for investigating the problem, such as quantitative approaches, which often rely on a priori definitions of bullying or seek to compare researchers' perspectives with those of young people (Canty, Stubbe, Steer, & Collings, 2016). Interpretive qualitative research, which emphasizes understanding meaning and the social construction of experience, has the potential to provide additional insight into the problem of victimization within friendship (Patton, Hong, Patel, & Kral, 2017). Additionally, qualitative research can open up opportunities for young people to become engaged with the research process, which can help to expand researchers' insight of and approaches to addressing the bullying issue (Guerin, 2006). This current research, designed to capitalize on these advantages of qualitative research, contributes to a youth-based perspective of bullying experiences by using a non-traditional approach for collecting data, namely online asynchronous focus groups.

Social-Ecological Approach

Research on school bullying continues to inform an understanding of the individual factors (personality characteristics, personal histories, genetics, intra-psychological dynamics) that contribute to conditions for school bullying (Hong & Espelage, 2012). Many scholars have argued that perspectives of bullying need to be broadened so that microsystemic patterns of interaction (e.g., within peer groups, friendships) and macrocontextual forces (e.g., societal discourses that shape social norms and widely held beliefs) are also integrated into researchers' investigations (Migliaccio & Raskauskas, 2016). Swedish bullying scholar, Robert Thornberg, has argued cogently that bullying cannot be adequately understood from either an individualistic

perspective or from an exclusive focus on social structures. What is needed is a theoretical rapprochement of these two understandings of bullying, incorporating both individual and contextual factors. A promising perspective of bullying that has the potential to act as a meeting point is the social-ecological framework (Horton, 2011; Thornberg, 2015; Forsberg & Horton, 2015). Drawing from Bronfenbrenner's social ecological framework (1979), primarily a perspective on human development, bullying researchers have begun to consider the complex interactions of multiple factors that combine to shape the bullying experience, and the factors that are reciprocally impacted by bullying. The model has shifted some attention from understanding bullying in primarily individualistic ways to considering the role of ambient social contexts and the interactions amongst ecological factors that combine to influence individuals' development.

Drawing from a social-ecological approach, we investigated victimized young people's experiences with bullying victimization as it occurred within the context of a friendship. Although a social-ecological framework involves a broad number of forces at the individual, microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem levels (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), this study focused primarily on microcontextual and macrocontextual factors that influenced experiences of bullying victimization. We anticipate that the findings of this study will complement other research that addresses the many risk and protective factors and potential outcomes of experiencing bullying within friendships, and they may provide more insight into why this form of victimization is so distressing for youth. We also hope to provide more insight into the phenomenon by exploring the views of those who have personal experience with being victimized by a friend. Additionally, we opted to use anonymous online focus groups in order to meet youth in familiar online spaces and to foster a safe forum for discussing victimization experiences (Author).

Method

This study is informed by the philosophy of social constructivism. Subjectivist and relativist, social constructivism is concerned with individuals' ways of creating meaning, and there is an adherence to the multiple contexts and realities that shape individuals' knowledge and experience (Raskin, 2002). In line with social constructivism, we prioritized our participants' voices in the data collection and analysis but also recognized that we, as the researchers, made a number of decisions throughout the research project that helped to carve out the results. Furthermore, bullying research has been primarily informed through deductive analyses, but

qualitative work is often inductive, which allows for the development of new knowledge and understanding individuals' lived experiences. Qualitative research has the potential to uncover deep insight into young people's perspectives, by exploring the subtle processes and nuances that might be overlooked in more traditional bullying research using quantitative designs (Thornberg, 2011). Furthermore, the findings generated from this work will help contribute to an emerging area of research, namely bullying victimization within friendships, which can be taken up in future qualitative and quantitative investigations of the bullying phenomenon.

Participants

Twenty-five Canadian adolescents aged 16–19 ($M = 17.8$ years old; $n = 6$ males) and from eight provinces, participated in the study. All participants self-identified as having experienced bullying by a close friend. Numerous lines of research have identified that bullying and experiences of victimization typically peak in the middle-school years (i.e., Grades 6, 7, and 8, within Canada) and that these prevalence rates decline the longer that young people are in high school (Cook et al., 2010). The age range for this study, namely 16–19-year olds, was selected, in part, to allow participants to reflect on their experiences during this important development stage. Additional justification for including 16–19-year olds within the study concerned ethical considerations. The Canadian Research Ethics Board indicates that “young people between 16–18 years of age with sufficient understanding are able to give their full consent to participate in research independently of their legally authorized representative.” We felt that it was critical that participants were able to indicate their own consent because previous research has demonstrated that young people are reluctant to disclose peer abuse to adults, particularly experiences that implicate the aggression of a friend (Mishna, 2004).

We opted to use the word “bullying” in our recruitment; however, we did not assign a priori criteria for what is considered as “bullying,” as we wanted to leave the research open enough as to capture a broad range of behaviours that young people may classify as bullying. This has been identified to be an important approach in child and youth-centered research on bullying (Guerin, 2006). Both boys and girls were included in this study, as there is still considerable debate regarding sex differences across factors related to bullying and victimization (Card, Stucky, Sawalani, & Little, 2008; Chesney-Lind, Morash, & Irwin, 2007). We recruited participants online through paid advertisements on Facebook and Twitter for two months in 2016.

All participants were offered a \$15 voucher to the movie theatre to compensate them for their participation.

Data collection procedures

All data were collected online through an online asynchronous discussion board that was created for this research. The online discussion board was moderated by the first author (KB). It was open for two months and generated a total of 96 responses from the 25 participants. Participants' responses varied in length from one to two lines to one page of written text. Six open-ended questions were posed to begin the conversation: (1) why do you think your friend bullied you?; (2) what does bullying look or feel like?; (3) what does friendship look or feel like?; (4) what did you do when your friend bullied you?; (5) why do you think friends bully each other?; and, (6) what made your experience of being bullied by a friend worse or better? Participants responded to the initial questions but also commented on others' posts, and some posed their own questions to move the discussion forward. As the study was asynchronous, participants contributed to the forum at times that were most convenient for them.

The online context for collecting data in this study reflects a small, yet emerging, conversation on the viability of using online methods to conduct qualitative research on sensitive topics (Authors; Hill, 2006; Wilkerson, Iantaffi, Grey, Bockting, & Rosser, 2014), such as participants' experiences with victimization. The forum was utilized to mimic a focus group, whereby participants could meet in a shared space to discuss experiences of a similar phenomenon. We used these online focus groups to reach hard-to-access youth (individuals from rural populations or those who have mobility or oral communication exceptionalities) and to meet young people in familiar virtual environments. The anonymous nature of the focus groups in this study also provided a context for participants to discuss the details about their personal experiences and to open up about difficult, potentially shaming, experiences that may be more challenging to divulge within traditional in-person focus groups.

Data analysis

Thematic analysis (TA), as articulated by Braun & Clarke (2006; 2012), was used to analyze all data, as this method is useful for summarizing core features of phenomena found within a data set and generating unanticipated insights. TA does not seek to theoretically describe complex processes, such as in grounded theory, but rather aims to elucidate descriptive patterns found in the data, which is helpful to provide a depth and detail to constructs more typically

measured in quantitative studies. TA emphasizes identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns within the data. We conducted TA using a primarily inductive approach, where the themes identified were strongly linked to the data, albeit not completely separate from our theoretical knowledge of the topic and our epistemological commitment to social constructivism.

In this study, a thematic analysis was conducted in the following steps: (1) exporting the textual data from the discussion forum into a word document; (2) familiarizing one's self with the data; (3) generating preliminary codes through line-by-line coding; (4) grouping codes that seemed to represent familiar phenomena (represented as themes); (5) defining/refining themes through subsequent review of data and preliminary codes; and, (6) producing the final report. The first author was responsible for the data collection and generated preliminary codes and themes. The second and third authors served as auditors in the analysis process. They reviewed the final themes and supporting data and provided feedback, which was incorporated into the final results presented below.

Results

The central aim of this study was to develop an understanding of adolescents' experiences with victimization as it occurs within friendship, with careful consideration of microcontextual and macrocontextual factors. The results indicated that experiencing victimization was a confusing and often painful experience, one that left youth with limited options for responding. Throughout the project, participants highlighted a number of features that complicated their understandings of and responses to victimization, which denotes the complex negotiations that young people grapple with in their friendships and why friendship victimization may be a particularly challenging experience for youth. The following themes emerged related to how participants experienced victimization within friendship: the cycling of victimization and friendship; responding to bullying and maintaining the friendship and/or peer group membership; responding aggressively to bullying within friendship, and; reconciling bullying within friendship.

Cycling of victimization and friendship

The cycling of victimization refers to a process that was described by many of the participants on the forum, whereby their experiences of victimization were interspersed by periods of satisfaction within the friendship: "Sometimes she was amazing and I loved her, and other times it was horrible." One participant described these moments as "in between the

bullying” and that these periods produced an immense confusion about her relationship: “She would call me horrible names and then the next day would apologize. It was so hard to keep track. Was she going to be my friend today? Or was she going to bully me again?” Another participant echoed this as she stated: “She didn’t talk to me at all and avoided me in the halls, but they would come to my house on weekends and hang out and eat...things were normal sometimes and it made me question what I was feeling.” One participant argued that it “wasn’t bad all the time” and that she was “happy with her when she wasn’t ignoring me or calling me names or making me wonder if I did something wrong.”

Other participants spoke about the provisions that were provided by their friendships but that these moments were interspersed by experiences of victimization. For example, one participant stated:

We were close and I would have trusted her with my life. But then she would call me selfish. She would slap me, trip me all the time and pull my hair. She would gossip about me behind my back and would ignore me in front of other girls. I didn’t understand it at all.

Additionally, it appeared that although the participants were bullied, their relationships with their friends were reinforcing in other ways: “she may have been my worst enemy at times but we were there for each other when it counted.” Another commented on the history that she had with her friend: “we were best friends since elementary school and I think she was still my best friend in those times when she was awful.” This sometimes rendered it difficult for participants to identify that bullying was occurring and made it challenging to address their friend’s behaviours, which will be more closely addressed in the following theme.

We had been friends for many, many years before I started realizing how unhealthy our relationship was. It took me a long time to realize that she was actually bullying me... But because I still wanted to keep being friends with her, I had to keep to myself about it.

Responding to bullying and maintaining the friendship and/or peer group membership

Our data indicated that participants carefully considered the social risks of their responses to the victimization. Although many participants were aware that their friend’s bullying behaviours were “wrong,” “unacceptable” or “not friend-like”, they also felt a sense of anxiety that they might be excluded from their friendship or from the wider peer group if they disrupted the normative social order of the friendship by directly addressing the friend’s bullying behaviours: “Them bullying me made me realize that they weren’t my true friends, but they were the only ones I had. I needed to just survive so I pretended like it wasn’t happening.” Another

participant stated, “I didn’t have any friends besides her, so I needed someone to be friends with, even if she hurt me.” One participant described her reasoning for “not standing up for herself.”

She stated:

I wasn’t exactly ready to do anything about it because I was still new at this school and didn’t really have any other friends. She opened up her friends to me, and I wasn’t going to screw that up by telling on her or asking her to treat me better.

Others participated in aggressive social norms established within the friendship, such as victimizing others, because they felt they had limited alternatives. “I didn’t have anyone else at school and I wasn’t about to spend the next 3 years alone, so I just did what they were doing, gossiping about other kids and saying nasty things.” This participant also believed that engaging in these behaviours would “take the heat off of me for once.” Some participants described how they felt isolated in their experiences because the person who they would normally confide in was the same friend inflicting the pain: “I cried a lot, and the worst part is since it’s your friends who hurt you, you don’t have anyone to go confide in when you are hurt.”

Others wrote about how they felt they were unable to tell an adult about their experiences because they feared the adults in their lives would attempt to intervene and cause more problems:

I couldn’t tell my parents because they would do something crazy and call up her parents and it would have been awful to deal with that... I just dealt with it on my own...not well though...I basically just cried.

One participant suggested that having to work through this experience on her own contributed to emotional difficulties:

The events had a really big toll on my mental health and happiness, and I feel I have been damaged...I think if I had someone to talk to it would have been better, but I feel like I didn’t have that option.

Overall, participants’ comments on the forum indicated that remaining in the friendship, despite feeling victimized, was often an important priority as responding directly to the friend or disclosing the victimization to adults would likely contribute to more social difficulties. It appeared that it was socially advantageous, albeit emotionally difficult, to ignore or downplay the bullying problem, in the service of maintaining the social status quo.

Responding aggressively to bullying within friendship

There was also some evidence in the discussions on the forum that some participants responded aggressively towards their friend in an attempt to equalize the suffering: “I was a bully to her too. I was aggressive. If she was going to hurt me, I would hurt her just as much.” It was

also apparent that retaliating aggressively served an instrumental goal of recuperating the lost sense of power that resulted from the initial bullying. For example, one participant stated, “I was hurting so much, I needed to hurt her too. And I knew what I said to her hurt her. It didn't fix things but it made it a little better, to know I wasn't totally helpless.” Another participant similarly wrote that he “didn't want to feel on the outside anymore” and he further explained that “ I did what I thought would help make things normal again...even if it meant that I was mean back to him.” In this final example, this participant also stated that this strategy to become a more socially embedded member within the friendship was not without significant cost: “My friends still ignored me and treated me so badly. The opportunity came up to switch to a junior high school instead of continuing with him. I took it.”

Reconciling bullying within friendship

It was evident in the responses on the forum that many participants were grappling with various, and often competing, understandings of bullying and friendship. For example, it was common for the youth to rationalize their experience as normative: “I saw that bullying was happening all the time even with people who are friends...so I didn't think that my situation was any different.” However, it was also apparent that participants had to navigate competing discourses, namely that experiencing bullying amongst friends is normal but that friends are not supposed to bully each other. “You don't say that to a best friend. I did not understand how someone who knew me from the inside out could tear me apart and knock me down over and over again.” This participant continued:

I know what friendship is supposed to be like and I wasn't feeling that anymore. But you see girls treating each other so badly everywhere in the media and in movies and you see it every day at school so you start to change your mind.

This excerpt exemplifies the mixed messages that the participants attempted to navigate—discourses that normalize victimization within friendship and those that highlight “proper conduct” within friendships. This confusion seemed to foster a sense of resignation amongst participants and also fed uncertainty about what was considered “normal” in friendships. “I still considered her a friend but I started to not really know what a friend was anymore. I think that might be why I let it happen, because I didn't know any better at the time.” Ultimately, however, many of the participants decided that despite their understandings of what friendship was “supposed to” entail, they were reluctant to intervene in a way that would jeopardize their

friendship and social standing: “Even though I knew what she was doing to me was wrong, I still didn’t do anything about it because I needed friends.”

Discussion

The purpose of this research was to explore young people’s experiences with being victimized within the context of a friendship. The results shed new light on our evolving understanding of the complex phenomenon of bullying victimization. We uncovered a number of features of the bullying victimization experience as it occurred within friendship as expressed by the youth (1) the cycling of victimization and friendship, (2) responding to bullying and maintaining the friendship and/or peer group membership, (3) responding aggressively to bullying within friendship, and, (4) reconciling bullying within friendship. Taken together, these themes reveal that friendship victimization is a hurtful relational experience that entails very painful emotions and significant interpersonal risks.

Although there is a substantial base of literature that documents the experience of relational bullying, often a common strategy used in victimizing peer relationships (e.g., Ostrov & Godleski, 2013), there continues to be less focus on the phenomenon of bullying within specific relationship contexts, such as friendships. Indeed, bullying research often assumes that the young people involved in the bully-victim dynamic do not also share moments of relationship satisfaction (Rodkin, Espelage, & Hanish, 2015; Wei-Jonson & Reid, 2011). Similar to other studies that have examined victimization within friendship, the participants in our study described that they experienced both victimization and periods of satisfaction within the same friendship (Crick & Nelson, 2002). Most of our participants acknowledged that the bullying that they endured was repetitive in nature (i.e., it was not a ‘one time’ occurrence), yet they also believed that their friendship was reaffirming in other ways or that the bullying they experienced was interspersed with positive moments with their friend. This is akin to what Daniels et al. (2010), found in their study, where their child-participants rated their victimizing friendship as both high and low in quality. The cycling nature of victimization that was reported in our data provides more evidence that victimizing friendships contain positive and reaffirming moments alongside other negative relationship processes, such as dominance and abuse. Developing further insight into this interplay will help researchers to understand why identifying and responding to bullying within friendship is so confusing and challenging for young people,

perhaps analogous to addressing abusive behaviour in other examples of partner violence (Matud, 2007).

Our results indicated that young people victimized by their friend(s) found it challenging to respond in ways that did not disrupt the social order of the friendship(s). Directly addressing the bullying problem within the friendship could involve substantial social risk—many of our participants seemed to be more willing to respond in other ways that limited the likelihood of losing out on the friendship or being excluded from the peer group. This motivation has also been noted across other studies on victims' responses to bullying by a friend (Mishna et al., 2008). In our study, many of our participants responded in ways that allowed them to retain some sense of membership, however precarious, within the friendship. This, however, took an emotional toll, as participants described how prioritizing their friendship over their own happiness was damaging, even in the longer term, which has been similarly noted in other qualitative examinations of bullying (e.g., Viala, 2015).

Furthermore, the results from this current study demonstrated that the participants often felt isolated to process and address their victimization experience, as the companion that they normally confided in was also the friend who was causing the harm. Research has consistently shown that friendships can buffer young people from the internalizing and externalizing difficulties that can result from victimization (e.g., Schmidt & Bagwell, 2007). Our study reminds researchers that we may be remiss if we do not consider that while some friendships may be protective, others may be reinforcing of a victim's internalizing and externalizing problems because the aggressor was a friend.

Additionally, and perhaps unsurprisingly, our participants noted that they would not likely inform an adult of their experiences because they feared that an ineffectual adult intervention could lead to losing control of their social relationships. deLara (2012) noted that this was a primary concern of youth in their decision-making to disclose victimization to adults. Studies have shown repeatedly that children and youth are very reluctant to seek help from responsible adults, and particularly teachers, for bullying that they either witness or endure themselves (Spitali, 2003; Hunter, Boyle, & Warden, 2002). Hoff and Mitchell (2009) found that students were reluctant about telling school staff because they feared staff would not take their report seriously, would do nothing about it, or would disclose information that would make the bullying worse. Their report also found that students who are bullied reach out to family members most

frequently for help (28%). Although recent research has indicated that children are more likely to disclose bullying to parents today than in previous years (Patchin & Hinduja, 2016), there is still a clear need for parents and educators to provide non-judgemental and supportive spaces for young people to open up and discuss their friendship experiences.

In some cases, to improve their social positioning and to provide a distraction so that they might no longer be bullied, some participants felt compelled to uphold the normative orders of the friendship by bullying others outside the friendship. This has been identified to be a common behaviour for those who feel a threatened sense of group membership (Duffy & Nesdale, 2008; Søndergaard, 2012). Some of our participants also indicated that they responded aggressively towards their friend, but that this was often met with unwanted consequences, such as continued bullying or peer group exclusion. This link between bullying victimization and bullying perpetration has been continuously documented within bullying literature (e.g., Swearer & Hymel, 2015), which denotes the fluidity of bullying roles, particularly as experienced within friendships (Jamal, Bonell, Harden, & Lorenc, 2015).

Finally, in our study, a common response to experiencing bullying by a friend was to ignore or downplay the abuse. Macro-level forces, such as discourses about friendship and bullying, seemed to contribute in this regard, as some of our participants used these common representations as evidence that their experience was not abnormal and therefore not requiring remediation. There is an abundant base of sociological research that has documented the effect of societal discourses on young people's bullying experiences (e.g., Mitchell & Borg, 2013; Walton, 2005). For example, as Ringrose and Renold (2010) argue, that which is labelled bullying is often what transgresses gender normativities (i.e., when a girl uses physical aggression) and more "typical" gendered behaviours (i.e., when a girl uses relational aggression amongst friends) are "passed over in the classroom and schoolyard, as natural practice" (p. 577). As a result, aided by common representations of bullying (particularly as it intersects with gender), some young people may not come to see their experience as bullying, and rather, normalize these types of behaviours of their peers. Yet, in our study, this understanding that bullying is perhaps commonplace amongst friends existed alongside other ambient constructions of friendship, which often purport that friendships should be affirming, positive, and comprised of mutual caring. Although we did not investigate the reasoning behind our participants' understandings of aggression within friendship, we speculate that these discourses, as produced and reproduced via

wider social structures (e.g., media, family, schools), were influential in their constructions, as have been documented elsewhere (Walton, 2011). It is possible that these competing discourses contributed to a cognitive dissonance about whether or not their experiences were “normal.”

Implications for Practice

Guided by the findings from this study, we argue that the oscillating nature of abuse and feelings of satisfaction within bullying friendships, the social constraints and risks for responding behaviours, and young people’s complex, and often conflicting, understandings of bullying and friendship are features of the friendship bullying experience that require careful consideration in any efforts for prevention and intervention. For example, it was clear in our findings that young people were hesitant to tell others about their victimization experiences and were reluctant to respond in ways that addressed their friend’s victimizing behaviours. This disinclination was due to their fear that intervention efforts would lead to further problems within the friendship, such as being expelled from the wider peer group, and/or continued bullying. Furthermore, many of our participants described how they experienced positive moments within their friendship in which they derived some relationship satisfaction.

Losing a friendship is a psychologically painful experience, so it is unsurprising that many of our participants attempted to avoid this experience. Indeed, there is a strong line of research that has documented that friendship loss is a significant risk factor for psychosocial difficulties in adolescence, such as loneliness, sadness, and anger (Bowker et al., 2007). Because research has demonstrated that both ending friendships and remaining in a victimizing friendship are associated with a broad range of negative consequences, we argue that there is a critical need for adults to develop supportive alliances with youth who are experiencing victimization within friendships. Similar to the suggestions put forth by Mishna and colleagues (2008), we offer a number of recommendations based on our findings. We suggest that adults validate the painful experience of being hurt by a friend, listen with empathy and understanding to the emotional pain and potential predicament victimization within friendship places children and youth in, and avoid dismissing the value of a friendship to a young person when bullying occurs. Secondly, it is important that adults provide support patiently so youth can have the time and space needed to explore their complex reactions to victimization in their friendships. Finally, we suggest that adults could help young people to understand, establish, and communicate appropriate boundaries in friendships that can protect them from more victimization. In turn, these

approaches will help to foster environments where youth may feel more comfortable disclosing experiences of victimization amongst friends, which is crucial as forms of victimization amongst friends can be subtle and potentially concealed from others (Bjerald, 2016).

We speculate that the oscillating nature of victimization and friendship may make it challenging for others to provide helpful intervention. Adults may, for example, overlook that bullying is occurring because it is overshadowed by other positive markers within the friendship, or may be frustrated that the child/youth does not appear to make any effort to change their circumstances when they are bullied. Providing advice that minimizes young people's feelings and overlooks the factors that constrain their responses might do more to contribute to the problem. Instead, we argue that adults should be sensitive to the ways that young people do respond to feeling victimized by a friend, even if their responses seem paradoxical (e.g., not desiring to end the friendship or participating in bullying others), and/or worsen the problem (e.g., retaliating aggressively). While there is certainly work that can be done to help young people to understand the impacts of their responses, it is also important to recognize that their responses, no matter how seemingly contradictory or confusing for others to understand, can signify young people's best intentions of considering their social circumstances and protecting themselves (Authors; Wade, 1995). We contend that it would be more productive to help youth consider their options for responding and provide support in their decision-making, rather than blaming individual children for their circumstances, demonstrating skepticism of their choices, and/or attempting to intervene on their behalf. We suggest that teacher education programs and community engagements (e.g., connecting research to schools and parents) could act as venues for discussing the complex and fluctuating social demands that young people negotiate within their friendships and peer groups and how motivations for belonging to a friendship or peer group can incite responses to bullying that appear to do little to change their social realities.

Our results also suggest that many of our participants were confused by dominant, and often competing, social representations of bullying and friendship. Formalized bullying prevention efforts in schools, social-emotional learning initiatives, and every-day discussions that take place in the classroom should include conversations of ways that bullying within friendship is depicted in popular culture and media (for example, in *Mean Girls*, *Gossip Girl*, *13 Reasons Why* or through popularized literature, such as *Odd Girl Out* and *Queen Bees and Wannabees*). In these discussions, teachers can encourage students to consider the ways that these representations

(and in the case of the examples just reported, often gendered representations) shape how they recognize bullying within friendships, how they respond, and the potentially lingering consequences. For these conversations to be productive, it is important that adults deepen their insights of bullying as it occurs specifically within friendships and to provide support that demonstrates an attunement to peer group affiliations and the underlying social dynamics operating within them (Rodkin & Gest, 2011).

More particularly, teachers and other adults should open up space for young people to talk about their friendships and the potential conflicts that occur within them. It is important that youth understand the difference between friendship conflict (disagreement or argument) and bullying (repetitive abuse of power) within friendship. Although conflict is considered normative within friendships and can actually provide formative learning opportunities for youth (Hartup, 1992), feeling victimized at the hands of friend can lead to serious maladjustment problems, such as psychological distress, anxiety, and externalizing problems (Crick & Nelson, 2002). With that said, we did not prime the participants in our study with the common definition of bullying, so it is possible that they reported on a wide variety of experiences within their friendship, including conflict. Notwithstanding, it is important to listen to youth who say they were bullied by a friend, regardless of whether it meets the definitional criteria; these conversations can open up opportunities for young people to learn about their relationships and develop their social-emotional competencies.

Limitations

As with all research, the findings from this study should be interpreted with caution. First, the online methods afforded certain benefits to the research, such as the geographical reach of recruitment and the anonymous and flexible nature of data collection, to name a few. There was, however, an uneven output from participants—with some participants responding on the forums repeatedly and in great detail, while others chose to contribute sparingly and less often. This may have led to an overrepresentation of some participants' experiences, which is a characteristic to any qualitative investigation, whether conducted online or offline. Additionally, we do suspect that the online asynchronous nature of the data collection may have produced less data than we would have collected in more traditional focus groups. This drawback has been similarly suggested within Jowett, Peel, and Shaw's (2011) manuscript that discusses the benefits and challenges of conducting online interviews. Additionally, we collected little contextual

demographics about our participants, which may limit our readers' interpretation of the results. It was a central goal of the project to not compromise our participants' anonymity, but future work should consider the ways that intersections of other individual and contextual characteristics (e.g., class, culture, race/ethnicity, (dis)ability, religion) shape young people's experiences of bullying victimization within friendship.

Conclusion

Despite these limitations, this study provides a portrayal of experiences of bullying victimization within friendships from the perspectives of victimized young people. The themes represent important factors that may complicate experiences of bullying victimization and should be taken into account for prevention and intervention efforts. Although there is recent work that has called for investigations of bullying that consider the inherent complexities involved, particularly as it relates to the multiple levels of a child's ecology (e.g., microcontextual and macrocontextual factors the impact experiences of bullying victimization) (Hong & Espelage, 2012), this needs to be matched by research that considers the particular relationship contexts in which bullying does often occur. Future scholarly work should continue to investigate the victimization within friendship dynamics. This should include both qualitative and quantitative research designs and analyses that are sensitive to the interacting individual and contextual factors that shape experience.

Lastly, we found that this study represented an important attempt for a youth-centered investigation of bullying, as the research met youth in familiar virtual environments, prioritized participants' insights of bullying and challenged certain features of the dominant researcher-participant power relations that can characterize offline research approaches. We recommend that future examinations of bullying consider how conducting research online may open up space for new or deeper insights and may provide a context for collecting data that is potentially sensitive in nature. To answer certain questions about bullying we believe that it is critical that bullying researchers provide safe and anonymous places for discussions.

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Chapter 7: Discussion and Conclusion

This dissertation reports on three interconnected projects that explored the phenomenon of bullying victimization across multiple levels of the social ecology. Overall, this research confirms that bullying is a complex issue that is influenced by a variety of individual, social, and cultural forces. In this discussion chapter, I will present a summary of the key findings from the three manuscripts and key linkages between the manuscripts. I also pose recommendations for future scholarly work and practice, based on the findings from the three manuscripts and supported by the knowledge of bullying as a subject of inquiry that I have gained over the last 5 years.

Summary of Key Findings

Manuscript 1

The first manuscript included a discussion of the ways that teacher-student relationships can shape how young people respond to bullying in the classroom and, more generally, influence students' bullying experiences with peers. Throughout this conceptual piece, we draw attention to the importance of examinations at the level of the mesosystem in order to better understand bullying processes, and additionally, to help pinpoint potential avenues for effective bullying prevention and intervention. Although there is limited scholarship in this area, recent work has demonstrated that two teacher-student relationship indicators, namely closeness and conflict, have been found to be associated with student bullying perpetration and victimization. This work points to the need for teachers and schools to account for the subtle ways through which teachers can influence young people's bullying experiences. To further describe this position, we draw on theories of attachment and social referral. Finally, the paper outlines some potential avenues for future bullying prevention and intervention initiatives. We consider specifically, the moment-to-moment teacher-student interactions and relationship qualities that can shape students' experiences with and responses to bullying victimization. To strengthen these every-day interactions, we recommended that teachers become attuned to students' social interactions, develop effective communication skills that will help to bolster caring relationships with students, and to practice mindfulness to develop awareness of self and others (Rogers, 1983). Overall, this conceptual review highlights that: (1) everyday interactions amongst teachers and students shape students' bullying experiences, and (2) strengthening the mesosystem is vital to efforts to reduce bullying in schools.

Manuscript 2

The second manuscript provided an examination of some of the wider macro and micro forces that combine to shape young people's experiences with bullying within friendship. In this article, we note the ways that women resisted their friend's bullying behaviours and highlighted that their resistance was enabled and constrained by dominant power structures, particularly gendered constructions of resistance and victimization. The findings point to how participants were tasked with balancing asserting themselves against their victimization while not compromising their social and identity positions, of which meeting gendered expectations was a significant concern. As a result, many of the women resisted in constructed "female ways", such as 'showing friendship,' as to not disrupt the gendered order and potentially threaten their peer group membership. However, this was not without cost, as the participants were still positioned as 'victims' because 'showing friendship' did not align with other ambient discourses, particularly expectations for how to appropriately resist violence. Importantly, the results indicated that one method of adhering to gendered expectations while also demonstrating visible resistance was through retaliatory relational aggression. But, again, this was not without cost, as these resistance strategies contributed to the normalization of girl aggression (i.e., this is how girls 'do aggression'), which also served to reduce the visibility of these experiences within a 'bullying' lens (i.e., it's not bullying, it's just girls being girls). Overall, the key findings from this paper illustrate that: (1) Victimized young people resist bullying in a multitude of ways, but that these resistance strategies are often covert, seemingly contradictory, and are constrained by a variety of contextual-level forces, such as social processes, power relations, and discourses, and; (2) Relational aggression proved to be an effective way for girls to deny their victimized status while complying to gendered expectations for resistance. Finally, we argue that concealing the ways that young people resist victimization can promote feelings of shame and self-blame, whereas highlighting the ways that young people responded, no matter how covert or paradoxical, acknowledges victimized adolescents' strength and resourcefulness. Furthermore, we attest that teachers could help their students consider the ways that their responses to bullying are, in part, constrained by societal discourses that set up expectations for how boys and girls should appropriately respond to aggression.

Manuscript 3

The final manuscript reports on findings from a study where we drew from a social-ecological perspective of bullying, with a particular focus on the level of the microsystem and macrosystem, to help inform an understanding of young people's friendship victimization experiences. The purpose of the work was to provide a more relationship-sensitive perspective of bullying, while noting the factors that serve to complicate participants' understandings of and responses to victimization by a friend. The findings point to four key themes that were related to how participants experienced victimization within friendship: the cycling of victimization and friendship; responding to bullying and maintaining the friendship and/or peer group membership; responding aggressively to bullying within friendship, and; reconciling bullying within friendship. Overall, we found that experiencing victimization within a friendship was confusing and often painful for our participants, further complicated by the oscillating nature of the abuse and feelings of satisfaction that participants derived from their friendship and the sense of isolation that many participants experienced. Furthermore, participants described the social constraints they felt when considering their responses, as their motivations for wanting to remain in the friendship and to not be excluded from the wider peer group often outweighed their suffering, producing a number of emotional difficulties. Finally, there was evidence that participants grappled with competing understandings of bullying and friendship (i.e., bullying in friendship is "normal", but that friends are not supposed to bully each other). It was apparent that some of this confusion was precipitated by friendships portrayed in the media and the culture of bullying that existed at the school. This confusion rendered it difficult to identify that bullying was occurring and contributed to an uncertainty for how to best respond. We argued that these features of bullying victimization within friendship should be considered in future investigations and require careful consideration in efforts for bullying prevention and intervention. We provide the following recommendations in the manuscript for adults to implement in efforts to reduce bullying or to help minimize the negative impact following victimization within friendships: (1) validate young people's feelings following experiences of victimization; (2) resist dismissing the friendship or victimization that is occurring; (3) be sensitive to the varying pressures that young people face in their social lives and how these pressures may influence their responses; (4) discuss how friendships are depicted in popular culture and media and how other societal representations of bullying and friendship may be reproduced in their everyday interactions, and; (5) provide space for young people to talk openly about their friendships.

Linking the Findings

This dissertation described the varying spheres of influence on experiences of victimization within adolescent friendships. Throughout the project, I was sensitive to the interacting individual and contextual factors that shape experience, thereby attempting to bridge first order and second order perspectives of bullying. Below I revisit Bronfenbrenner's model from the first chapter and include the influences that were found within the three manuscripts (Figure 1). The individual factors that seemed to have relevance to shaping young people's experiences with bullying, particularly within friendship, include participants' emotional and behavioural responses to bullying (retaliatory aggression, "showing friendship," and emotional difficulties, such as feelings of self-blame, a sense of confusion, and loneliness). There is a base of literature that supports these individual constructs related to experiences of bullying within friendship, yet there is comparatively less literature that examines the phenomenon of bullying within friendship beyond individual levels and considers wider social and cultural contexts. Extending the scope of this research can provide explanatory power that may be difficult to ascertain in individual-focused research. For example, while it is evident that young people may do little to change their social circumstances when victimized by a friend, it is not until researchers examine factors within wider systems that it becomes more apparent as to why youth may understand and respond to friendship victimization in these ways.

Figure 1 highlights the relevant social processes within bullying friendships (represented at the microsystem level) (e.g., the oscillating nature of friendship satisfaction and bullying victimization, the fear of not fitting in, and the anxiety associated with losing friends or being expelled from the peer group). The most prominent social process that was found within this dissertation was that many participants desired to remain in a victimizing friendship, even despite their own suffering. This echoes the findings from other work documenting the experience of victimization within friendship (Daniels et al., 2010). While there were certainly some exceptions (e.g., Charlotte), it seemed that many participants believed that a victimizing friendship was preferable to no friendships at all. This was largely motivated by participants' motivations to remain as a valuable member of the wider peer group; maintaining a friendship with the victimizing friend seemed to be critical in order to secure this sense of group membership, which in turn, contributed to responses that lessened the likelihood of losing the friendship (e.g., showing friendship).

Although not directly analyzed in terms of the role of teacher-student relationships in students' experiences of bullying victimization amongst friends, I also identified a number of processes within teacher-student relationships that can influence young people's bullying experiences with peers (represented in the mesosystem level). These teacher-student relationships

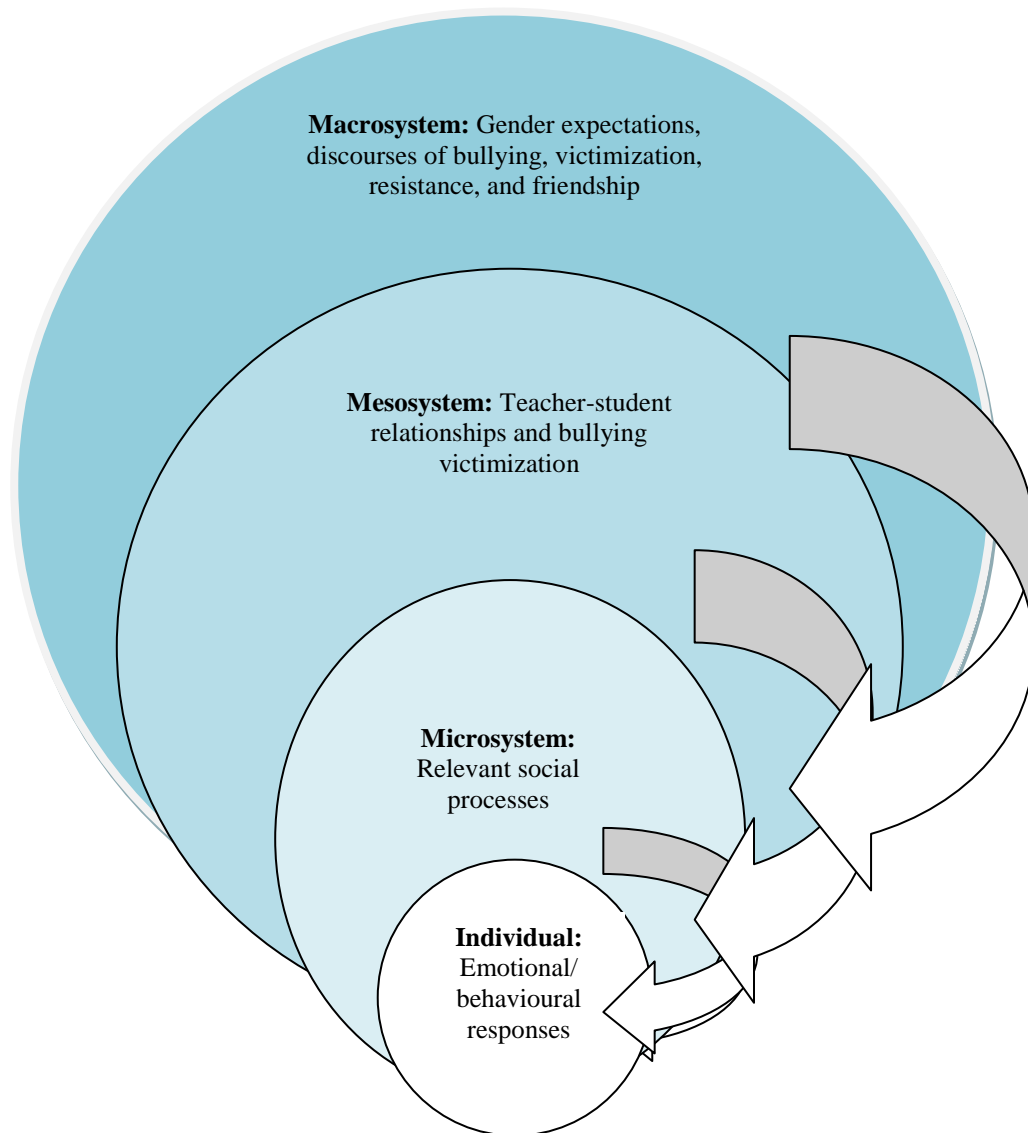


Figure 1. Social-Ecological Model depicting relevant processes that shape adolescents' understandings and responses to bullying victimization within friendships

can also serve to exacerbate negative outcomes or can help to minimize harm following bullying and victimization (i.e., attachment, social referral, levels of closeness and conflict, attunement to peer interactions, and teachers' own social-emotional competencies). These mesosystem factors

can help to provide more information about how youth come to understand and respond to their bullying victimization experiences.

Finally, factors within the macrosystem, such as gender expectations, discourses of victimization and resistance, and dominant constructions of bullying and friendship, were relevant to how young people experienced victimization within friendship. These forces seemed to contribute to the cognitive dissonance that victimized youth experienced and produced a number of limits that constrained young people's responses to bullying. Overall, a social-ecological perspective of bullying allows for a multi-faceted view of the phenomenon; this can help researchers to not only further understand the social-ecological factors that provide the context for and produce potential outcomes of bullying victimization, but can also provide explanatory information as to why young people feel and act in the ways that they do in response to being bullied. In this pursuit, it is vital that research continue to examine bullying experiences from the multiple spheres of influence, including both proximal and distal systems.

Future Directions for Bullying Research

Relationship contexts

There is a widely established and continuously growing base of bullying literature that has documented the causes, consequences, and implications of bullying on the variety of individuals involved. Indeed, bullying has been of significant empirical interest to researchers for the past 50 years, which has contributed to education policy, regulatory, and legislative changes across Canada and other Western nations. The Promoting Relationships and Eliminating Violence Network (PREVNet) – a leading network of Canadian bullying scholars – has long attested that *bullying is a relationship problem that requires relationship solutions*. Rodkin, Espelage, and Hanish (2015) build on this perspective by arguing that bullying is a relational phenomenon, and that future research should continue to untangle the relationship between those who bully and who are victimized.

There is some work that indicates that young people who bully are not likely to be friends with those who they victimize (Murray-Close, Crick, & Galotti, 2006); other studies have found evidence that one quarter to nearly one third of bullying victimization occurs in friendships (Wei & Jonson-Reid, 2011). These findings indicate that there is more work that can be done to understand the prevalence, risk factors, and outcomes of bullying amongst friends, as well as work that explores the underlying mechanisms that create the conditions for and help to sustain

the patterns of interaction that support the proliferation of bullying victimization within friendship. Specifically, there is a need for empirical work to examine the nature of bullying as it occurs in friendships. Importantly, researchers should carefully consider how the definitional criteria of bullying, which have routinely framed researchers' understandings of the phenomenon, manifest when bullying occurs amongst friends (and specifically the criteria of repetition and power imbalance as noted below).

The results from this dissertation suggest that while bullying amongst friends can be repetitive and long-lasting, the relationship may not be exclusively dominated by bullying interactions. Rather, those victimized by a friend may also experience moments of relationship satisfaction, and friendships that involve mutual caring, trust, and companionship. Future research should continue to examine how these "off" moments from the bullying contribute to the victimization and friendship experience. This work could consider the situational complexities of youth's friendships and the social processes that might produce bullying while others promote positive experiences of friendship.

The nature of the power imbalance amongst members of a victimizing friendship also requires further examination. Jamal, Bonell, Harden, and Lorenc's (2015) work questions the consistency of the power imbalance that exists between perpetrators and victims, as their findings indicate that bully and victim roles shifted and were "situated within a story of social interaction" (p. 741). The results from this dissertation support their findings, as some of our participants described how they resisted their victimization by retaliating against their friend because they were desperate to maintain their position within the peer group. Rather than envisioning the power imbalance amongst "bullies" and "victims" in dyadic and static terms, Adler and Adler (1995) and Besag (2006) argue that peer groups contain "circles of power" that are characterized by processes of inclusion and exclusion involving multiple members, where individuals move in and out of power positions based on the changing social dynamics of the peer group. Research that is sensitive to the relationship contexts in which bullying can manifest (i.e., within friendships or "cliques") will help shed light on the interplay of group dynamics and the fluidity of power disparities. This work should also include examinations of "power" as it is used by individuals and reinforced through structures that create societal categorizations and inequalities. Social-ecological approaches would allow for this examination of broader forces that are implicated in the expression of power asymmetry in bullying dynamics (Carrera et al., 2011).

Perspectives on victims

Additionally, the results from this dissertation also suggest that there is potential in exploring the subtle ways through which victims of bullying exercise power. Although traditional work has a tendency to view the experience of victimization from the language of “effects” (i.e., highlighting individual symptomology—loss of confidence, passivity, anxiety, etc.), the results from this dissertation offers a perspective of the subtle ways that young people protect themselves from the abuse by a friend. I agree that future bullying research should include more approaches that highlights victims’ strengths and resourcefulness. Foregrounding young people’s responses to bullying (perhaps alongside the ways that they have been physically or emotionally affected) will be an important step in future research on bullying victimization because this information can illuminate the varied ways that resistance to abuse is exercised amongst all members within bullying interactions.

Missing pieces of the social-ecological model

With respect to the social-ecological model, there is more work that could be done to understand the interplay of typically less-studied social-ecological spheres of influence on bullying experiences, particularly the exosystem and the chronosystem. The exosystem is understood to be the interaction of two or more microsystems, where the developing individual is present in only one of the microsystems yet affected by the other (e.g., school policies, teacher professional development and training). This system indirectly affects the individual, but as was noted in the first manuscript of this dissertation, teacher training, for example, can have profound impacts on the students within their relevant microsystems (e.g., teacher-student relationships) (Horton, 2016). Future research could consider how teacher-training about the social dynamics of friendships and the bullying that can sometimes co-exist within friendship, may shape young people’s experiences with victimization. Other policies and training, such as the ways teachers learn to socially structure their classrooms and guide students’ social behaviours, may also have relevance to examinations of bullying within friendships.

The chronosystem represents the dimension of time as it relates to an individual’s life, which includes life events and shifts over time. Future research should consider how bullying within friendship changes across the lifespan, and/or how particular transitions (e.g., vertical transitions from elementary school to high school, horizontal transitions to a new school) can impact these experiences. I anticipate that the social instability that often accompanies these

transitions (Goodenow, 1993a) would have important implications on the experience of bullying within friendships. For example, Espelage, Hong, Rao, and Thornberg (2015) found that students' relations to school (i.e., belongingness) and their relationships with teachers (teacher affiliation and teacher dissatisfaction) across these transition periods were predictive of changes in peer bullying. Finally, there is some work that has documented the ways that earlier bullying by friends can continue to shape individuals' perceptions of themselves and their current relationships (Thornberg et al., 2011; Viala, 2015). There is a growing base of literature that examines the long-term consequences of bullying victimization (Miller & Vaillancourt, 2007; deLara, 2018). Future work should similarly examine the lingering implications of bullying victimization within friendship contexts, as this form of abuse is particularly confusing and painful for young people to experience.

Bridging first and second order perspectives and qualitative and quantitative approaches

This dissertation attempts to bring together first and second order perspectives of bullying through the use of the social-ecological model as a useful heuristic tool to help frame the complexity of the problem. With my stance rooted in Thayer-Bacon's qualified relativism (Thayer-Bacon, 1992), I believe that there is more work that can be done to help bridge perspectives of bullying, particularly from across individual-psychological, social-psychological, and sociological traditions. For example, it is important that researchers investigate the personality traits or behaviours of children who bully or are bullied, while also questioning the stability of these traits and how other forces may be at work in determining behaviours. The social-ecological model has the potential to capture these complexities and open up a dialogue amongst scholars (Horton, 2015; Thornberg, 2015). Future bullying work would benefit from continued investigations that consider the complex interplay of individual factors and contexts, over time. Furthermore, much of what is known about the bullying experience has been gained from traditional quantitative methods. There is a growing recognition that qualitative research can help researchers to understand situational processes, individual's subjective beliefs and practices, and cultural and historical contexts as they manifest within bullying and victimization (Patton et al., 2014). The interplay of descriptive depth of qualitative research and the more objective precision that is offered by quantitative research can help to deepen or provide alternative perspectives to the bullying phenomenon.

Youth's voices

There is a strong line of research that has commented on the importance of including young people's voices in bullying research to help move the field forward (e.g., Canty et al., 2016). For example, Guerin's (2006) call for child-centered approaches to bullying research reminds researchers that bullying often occurs away from adults and that young people are often reluctant to disclose incidences of bullying to adults. This may render it difficult for parents and teachers to reflect on the extent and nature of bullying amongst children in their care. Furthermore, traditional research approaches for understanding bullying often rely on child self-report. Although this an important step in gathering young people's views, surveys often consist of close-ended questions where children are not provided the opportunity to contribute additional insights. Lastly, there is ample evidence to suggest that children and youth's understandings of bullying are much broader than that of researchers' conceptions, which points to the need for researchers to be aware of the boundaries of their knowledge of bullying (e.g., Canty et al., 2016). Taken together, there is more work that can be done to include young people's perspectives, including how they define bullying, the aspects of the experience that are most relevant to them, and the questions that young people think are important to ask related to the bullying experience.

Online qualitative research

There is a plethora of work that have utilized online, anonymous methods for qualitative data collection in youth mental health and physical health research (e.g., Synnot et al., 2014), yet there is comparatively limited empirical research using these same methods for discussions within relationship science. Online qualitative research methods may be particularly useful when investigating sensitive topics, such as bullying within friendships. From the outset, I decided to use online qualitative research methods (focus groups and individual interviews) because it had the potential to bring participants together, regardless of geographical location, oral communication or mobility constraints, to have open, candid discussions of their relationships in anonymous and familiar virtual environments. Future bullying research could benefit from the affordances of online qualitative research (e.g., anonymity, potentially reduced power-relations between the researcher and participants, iterative data-collection and analysis, etc.; Bouchard & Smith, in review). However, I agree with Ignacio (2012) that online methods should not be selected in order to expedite traditional approaches, but rather, should be used because of its appropriateness in contributing to understandings of a particular phenomenon. Moreover, online

methods should not be seen as a recapitulation of traditional methods using virtual environments, but instead, requires a new set of methodological tools. Accordingly, researchers using these methods need to be critical and transparent on the methodological and ethical implications of such approaches. This is especially pertinent given the novelty of online qualitative approaches, as well as the pace at which these methods evolve alongside technological advances.

Although there are several advantages to using online software to collect qualitative data, it is also critical that researchers consider the potential methodological challenges of conducting qualitative research online. I discuss these potential challenges in more detail in a previously published manuscript (Bouchard, 2016); below I highlight three areas of concern: (1) participant safety; (2) building rapport, and; (2) participant retention and engagement.

There were times within the data collection period when I felt that the research may have provoked emotional discomfort for some of the adolescent participants. My protocol for this was to “check-in” with the participants as the study progressed through the individualized messaging service provided on the forum. A large number of participants did not respond to these check-ins, so it was impossible to confirm that they had not been impacted (a considerable portion of those who did respond to the check-ins felt that sharing their experiences in the research had been a cathartic process). Furthermore, I found it difficult, without the aid of nonverbal or parverbal communication to express empathy when participants disclosed difficult experiences. Building a rapport with participants before discussing potentially sensitive topics could be a potential avenue for researchers to consider. Additionally, including researcher-participant interviews in conjunction with focus groups might help to establish an additional line of connection should participants feel distressed and may provide more opportunities for establishing rapport.

On a similar note, retaining and engaging participants throughout the project was difficult. Many of my participants only wrote a small number of responses on the forum and many were engaged sporadically throughout the data collection period. This produced much less data than would likely be collected in offline research. Furthermore, from the outset, I had intended for the data collection to be driven mostly by the youth’s themselves, so I tried to keep my presence within the research in a moderator capacity. Contrary to my plans for a limited researcher role, I found myself needing to prompt the participants to respond (i.e., directing questions to particular participants) and beginning new lines of discussion regularly over the 2 months. I also observed that the participants were more likely to answer questions that I asked, rather than questions or

topics discussed by other participants. This begs the question of whether an online focus group discussion can really be considered a focus group at all, as there was minimal interaction amongst participants throughout the focus group. This has been debated elsewhere (e.g. Bloor, Frakland, Thomas, & Robson, 2001), and others have suggested that collecting data within synchronous focus groups in addition to asynchronous focus groups may provide more opportunities for participants to interact (Fox et al., 2007).

Evaluating the Quality of the Research

Lincoln and Guba's work (1985) often serves as a guideline to qualitative researchers seeking to demonstrate the quality of their studies. They argue that in order for researchers to claim that their study is worthy of attention, it must exhibit credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and make use of reflexive audit trails. Tracy's (2010) more recent work builds on these guidelines and provides a framework of eight universal, yet flexible, criteria for qualitative research of quality. Tracy herself acknowledges that these criteria could be conceived as reductionist and divorced from theoretical, epistemological, and ontological differences amongst qualitative researchers (e.g. Creswell, 2007, alternatively, distinguishes evaluative criteria across qualitative paradigms, such as narrative, phenomenology, grounded theory, etc.). Yet, Tracy (2010) also stresses that her framework is intended to be flexible and was designed in order to promote a dialogue about excellence in qualitative research. I agree that her work is helpful for the qualitative researcher who might benefit from a common language of qualitative best practices. I will now consider each of her eight criteria and how I attempted to address each marker of quality within the two empirical studies. The purpose here is not to "cover up research blemishes" (p. 849), but rather to engage in a process of critical reflection, recognizing that I have likely fell short of these criteria at points throughout the research process.

The first criterion calls for qualitative researchers to examine worthy topics. Tracy defines "worthy" as those topics that are relevant, timely, significant, interesting, or evocative (2010). I think I have already made the case in Chapter 1 about the wide interest in the phenomenon of bullying in schools over the last 40 years, which helps to justify its 'worth' as a topic of research. Moreover, however, I believe that the research that I have presented in this dissertation contributes to a current vein in bullying research that is gaining momentum; this research considers the social-cultural contexts that shape bullying and experiences of victimization alongside individual factors. My research draws attention to the complexities of victimization as

occurring with the context of a friendship and describes the important social-cultural forces that constrain victimized youth's responses. Additionally, this dissertation examines bullying from social-ecological and, increasingly, critical perspectives, which situate the phenomenon of bullying as complex, interactional, and evolving.

Another criterion of high quality qualitative research is rigor. Tracy (2010) poses a series of questions about rigor, including: are there enough data to support significant claims?; did the researcher spend enough time to gather interesting and significant data?; is the context or sample appropriate given the goals of the study?; and, did the researcher use appropriate data collection and analysis procedures? The steps that I took to defend my data collection and analytical strategies to my supervisor, the university ethics board, my dissertation committee, as well as anonymous reviewers from various journals throughout the past 4 years have certainly helped. Specifically, I considered the use of online methods extensively, both through ongoing discussions with my supervisor and also through the writing of two manuscripts (two published, one in review) and through a number of guest lectures at the Faculty of Education. In each of these cases, I carefully considered the appropriateness of my methods, the alignment of my theoretical assumptions and approaches to collecting data, the claims that I made resulting from my analysis, as well as the limits of my research. One area that I feel could have increased the quality of my work, with respect to rigor, was the amount of time that I spent collecting data for manuscript 3. I believe that the practical constraints (e.g., namely the cost to operate the forum software) compelled me to finish collecting data earlier than I might have if I considered more methodological-oriented arguments (e.g., theoretical saturation).

Tracy (2010) also specifies the importance for sincerity in qualitative research. Here, she calls for researchers to demonstrate self-reflexivity, vulnerability, honesty, transparency, and data auditing. The constructivist method of grounded theory also emphasizes these aspects. The memo writing that I engaged in throughout both studies helped to promote this practice. I also feel that my extensive coverage of the methodological and ethical considerations for conducting sensitive research online (for both youth and adult populations) is an example of the transparency I brought to my research. I made a practice of disclosing the challenges that I was encountering throughout the project (both in my researcher memos and in my discussions with my supervisor). I was also very cautious of the needs of my participants – I tried to learn as much as I could about child and youth-centered approaches to collecting data and I regularly checked in with my participants so

they felt valued throughout the research process.

Similar to Lincoln and Guba (1985), Tracy (2010) argues that quality work should be credible, or in other words, dependable and trustworthy. This is often accomplished through thick descriptions and triangulation. I have already argued that one of the real benefits of online work, particularly data that is collected asynchronously, is that it produces rich excerpts of data that can then be directly shared with the reader. In these quotes, I provided enough details so that readers could also come to their own conclusions about the data. However, I do acknowledge that I was missing out on participants' paralingual cues, which may have drawn me to different conclusions of the data. This limited my ability to ascertain my participants' tacit knowledge, which could influence the dependability of the data. In order to triangulate my research, I collected data from two sources, using two different forms of online data collection. I also feel that my collaboration with many researchers in the data analysis and representation processes assisted in this triangulation. The most significant method of triangulation, I believe, was in my analytical approach, namely adopting both a first-order and second-order perspective of bullying. Throughout the two studies, I tried to think about my participants' experiences from both an individual and social-cultural perspective. This was a daunting task, as I often found myself wavering from one perspective to another, rather than trying to integrate both potential realities. However, the aim for triangulation was not to converge on a singular truth, but rather to deepen an understanding of bullying.

Resonance is another criterion of quality cited by Tracy (2010). She describes resonance as the "research's ability to meaningfully reverberate and affect an audience" (p. 844). Researchers can accomplish this through aesthetic merit and transferability/naturalistic generalizations. Aesthetically, I tried to present the dissertation in a way that could be comprehensible to many audiences, most particularly, researchers from multiple disciplines, school personal, as well as lay people who are interested in bullying experiences. I felt that many of the narratives of my participants were raw, emotional, and speak to the enduring, and sometimes damaging, nature of bullying. I hope these stories will cause readers to think about their own experiences of bullying, potentially reinterpret these experiences in light of the analyses I have made, and perhaps problematize perspectives that treat bullying as a taken-for-granted phenomenon. Although I did not seek to enhance the generalizability of the research in a statistical sense, I feel that many of the findings are open to transferability, wherein the reader

judges the generalizability of the data (Charmaz, 2014).

Qualitative research must also significantly contribute to “our understanding of social life.” (Richardson, 2000, p. 254 as cited in Tracy, 2010, p. 836). Research can do this theoretically, heuristically (e.g., by moving people to further explore and act on the research) and practically. I believe my research will help to deepen my reader’s perceptions of the bullying phenomenon. For example, instead of viewing young people who bully, and those who are victimized, within a rather limited and often deficit-laden perspective, they might come to see the multitude of forces that are implicated in experiences of bullying. I provide a number of suggestions for researcher, practitioners, other adults, and youth in the concluding chapter of this dissertation, which I hope will help to reinforce the significance of the work.

Qualitative research must also be ethical. Conducting the research in an online format catalyzed many discussions about ethics, particularly concerning procedures of consent, online safety, and the limits of anonymity. For example, I felt uneasy that it would be difficult to gage the emotional impact of the research, so I set up procedures to help offset this barrier. I also found myself questioning how I elicited narratives from my participants and how I chose to present the data. I asked myself, “Am I seeking out stories from my participants that will help me to promote the seriousness of bullying, at the expense of their own emotions/comfortability?” “Am I a culprit of re-positioning my participants as victims?” or similarly “How does my treatment of bullying as social-cultural phenomenon threaten my participants’ personal agency?” Although I feel that I often did not have a neat-and-tidy answer, the process of reflecting on these ethical questions was helpful.

The final element of qualitative research quality is meaningful coherence, which concerns the purposeful and careful interconnection of relevant theoretical perspectives, methodological foundations, methods, and literature. I tried to situate my understanding of the nature of knowledge as constructed, fallible, social, and ongoing at the forefront to my work and throughout I acknowledge that the purpose of my research was not to come a conclusion about the ‘truth’ of bullying. I revisited these notions multiple times throughout the research process, which helped me to scrutinize the more detailed decisions that I was making with respect to my theoretical positioning, methodological orientation, methods, as well as the array of literature that I examined.

Implications for Practice

Examining bullying from a social-ecological lens can help to highlight the factors within an individual's social ecology that can be leveraged to minimize harm and promote wellbeing, following experiences of victimization. Throughout the dissertation I provide a number of suggestions that can be taken up by teachers and other adults in order to develop supportive relationships that are affirming to young people's perceptions and experiences of friendship and victimization. Each of these suggestions is predicated on: (1) validating youth's experiences and providing space for non-judgemental conversations about friendship and bullying; (2) recognizing the social pressures that young people face alongside emphasizing youth's inner strengths and resourcefulness, and; (3) considering how social contexts (e.g., satisfaction derived from friendship, pressures to belong, etc.) and wider cultural influences (e.g., discourses, expectations, beliefs, etc.) become activated in bullying victimization experiences, thereby looking beyond individual explanations for emotional responses and behaviours.

The results from this dissertation demonstrate that support from adults is particularly vital in friendship victimization as experiencing bullying at the hands of a friend can be difficult for young people to understand and process. Yet, victimization within friendships can pose a challenge for outsiders to provide meaningful intervention. First, this form of bullying is often covert, pervasive, and difficult to differentiate from normal, everyday conflict amongst friends. In other words, it may be very difficult for adults to know that victimization is occurring within a child or youth's friendships. Furthermore, young people may be reluctant to speak to adults about their experiences of bullying because they fear that adults may make the situation worse (Bjerald, 2017; deLara, 2012), so it may be important that adults take the initiative to open up conversations with youth about their friendships. To be productive, adults should approach these conversations from a perspective of curiosity and support, rather than fear and scepticism (Shariff, 2014). For example, I agree with Hinduja and Patchin (2018) that immediately banning a child's access to a friend is likely to do little to address the underlying conflict and may not help to stop future instances of victimization (particularly if the children are classmates at school).

Canada's Promoting Relationships and Eliminating Violence Network provides a number of suggestions for parents and educators for how to appropriately support children and youth as they confront bullying and victimization problems (www.prevnet.ca/bullying). For example,

adults can explain to young people that they deserve good friendships and that the bullying they are experiencing is unacceptable. Adults and youth can also discuss the differences between conflict, teasing, and bullying so that youth can better identify if their interactions with their friends have transitioned from being constructive or playful to harmful. However, even if what a young person is experiencing is not technically bullying (by adults' or researchers' standards), it is still important that adults listen to what they are describing as being hurtful. If it is not "bullying", it is still a relationship problem that requires adult support. In summary, opening up these conversations can help young people in their decision-making and also demonstrates an interest and willingness to support youth in their social-emotional development.

Second, the results from this dissertation also demonstrate that bullying within friendship may differentiate from typical bullying (or bullying between non-friends), as friendships that involve bullying may be affirming in some ways or oscillate between periods of friendship and abuse. As a result, victimized young people may do little to change the circumstances of the bullying, may actually work to reinforce their relationship with their victimizer, or may contribute to the patterns of aggression from which they also suffer (i.e., responding aggressively). These reactions can be confusing to others as it may appear that the young person is unaffected by the victimization, is inciting it, or is making the situation worse by retaliating aggressively. The results from this dissertation support that when a child or youth discloses to adults that a friend has victimized him or her, it is important that adults understand that the prospect of losing a friendship or being pushed out of a peer group can be terrifying and that this pressure can shape a child or youth's responses to bullying. Carefully considering the social pressures that young people face may help adults to better scaffold children in their decision-making for how to best respond. Alongside, I argue that it is vital that adults recognize (and help young people to acknowledge) that the potentially subtle, or perhaps even contradictory, ways that youth respond to being bullied by a friend may represent their best intentions of protecting themselves. Approaching conversations with youth from a perspective that empowers rather than pathologizes youth (i.e., focusing on youth's deficient coping skills or what they are "not doing") can provide ground for youth in responding in other, potentially more effective, ways (Wade, 1995).

Third, adults can work with youth to consider how dominant stereotypes, reproduced through societal structures, can influence understandings of bullying and can help to produce

certain responses. For example, from the results, I speculate that including conversations of gender expectations in discussions of responses to bullying (both within and outside friendship contexts) may help victimized youth to better understand their motivations and behaviours, which may potentially reduce the associated feelings of self-blame that can accompany experiences of victimization (Thornberg, 2015). Also, considering the ways that gender expectations may stand in contrast to heteronormative discourses that legitimize “standing up” against abusers, and how these discourses can position women and non-gender conforming individuals in a double-bind may be helpful when discussing bullying within friendships with young people. Furthermore, these discussions could include questioning the “naturalness” of “typically female and male” forms of aggression and how discourses may be at work in producing and constraining individuals’ responses to bullying. In summary, I suggest, alongside others (Kousholt & Fisker, 2014; Ringrose, 2008), that teachers and adults could increase their awareness of relevant discourses and power relations at play in bullying and encourage young people to reflect on and interrogate these dominant representations.

Limitations

Although I have listed a number of limitations within manuscript 2 and 3, I will comment on an additional limitation and reiterate two important limitations that readers should consider. Firstly, I focused my study on the perspectives of those who felt they were victimized by a friend, rather than opening up the work to the multiple individuals involved in incidences of bullying. To be sure, there is certainly more that can be learned about bullying within friendships from the perspectives of those who bullied others or acted as bystanders to bullying occurring within a friendship or peer group. My decision to only include those who identified as being victimized rests on my assumption that those who were interested in participating in the study would feel more comfortable writing about their experiences on a forum with individuals who share similar experiences. I also wanted to foreground the responses of those who had been victimized, which is traditionally overlooked in current bullying research. Notably, what I set out to be an exploration of bullying victimization actually transformed into an investigation of aggression and bullying victimization, as many of my participants wrote about their own aggressive behaviours. This speaks to the blurring of lines between what (or who) is considered “bully” or “bullied” that has been documented in recent research (Adler & Adler, 1995; Jamal, Bonnell, Harden, & Lorenc, 2015). Second, constructivist grounded theory and thematic analysis, as analytical

methods, can be criticized for divorcing participants from their individual narratives, in the favour of producing cross-participant depictions of phenomena. I think this is a natural consequence of cross-comparative analysis. Future work should seek to keep participants' stories intact, so as to provide a more nuanced perspective of bullying within friendship that highlights more closely the individual characteristics and situational complexities of participants' experiences. In other words, while I learned a great deal about processes and factors involved in bullying victimization, I feel that I learned comparatively less about my participants, as individuals. Relatedly, I did not collect contextual data about my participants, beyond their gender, age, and general geographic location. This was chosen so that I would not compromise participants' anonymity throughout the research project. This may limit my reader's interpretations of the results. Other factors, such as culture, race/ethnicity, disability, religion, etc., could be untangled in future investigations of bullying within friendship, whether from a first or second order perspective.

Conclusion

This dissertation provides a depiction of the phenomenon of bullying as it occurs within the context of a friendship. Opening up examinations of bullying that carefully considers the relationship that exists between the perpetrator and the victimized helps to accentuate areas of complexity of the bullying problem and reemphasizes that bullying research must incorporate both individual and contextual perspectives. The social-ecological model has been used to frame research that seeks to grasp the complexity of bullying, but there is more than can be done to ensure that a balance is maintained between understanding bullying as an individualistic, social, institutional, and discursive problem. The findings from this dissertation describe the ways that young people experience bullying occurring within friendship, and in so doing, points to various spheres of influence that impact adolescents' understandings of and responses to bullying victimization. Research should continue to provide space for victimized individuals to describe their experiences, as their depictions of bullying can provide important insight that can assist in the development of effective and sustainable bullying prevention and intervention efforts.

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Appendix 1: Ethics Approval

File Number: 09-15-21

Date (mm/dd/yyyy): 11/17/2015



Université d'Ottawa **University of Ottawa**
Bureau d'éthique et d'intégrité de la recherche Office of Research Ethics and Integrity

Ethics Approval Notice

Social Sciences and Humanities REB

Principal Investigator / Supervisor / Co-investigator(s) / Student(s)

<u>First Name</u>	<u>Last Name</u>	<u>Affiliation</u>	<u>Role</u>
David	Smith	Education / Education	Supervisor
Karen	Bouchard	Education / Education	Student Researcher

File Number: 09-15-21

Type of Project: PhD Thesis

Title: With Friends Like These, Who Needs Enemies? Experience of Victimization within Adolescent Friendships

Approval Date (mm/dd/yyyy)	Expiry Date (mm/dd/yyyy)	Approval Type
11/17/2015	11/16/2016	Ia

(Ia: Approval, Ib: Approval for initial stage only)

Special Conditions / Comments:

N/A



Université d'Ottawa **University of Ottawa**
Bureau d'éthique et d'intégrité de la recherche Office of Research Ethics and Integrity

This is to confirm that the University of Ottawa Research Ethics Board identified above, which operates in accordance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement (2010) and other applicable laws and regulations in Ontario, has examined and approved the ethics application for the above named research project. Ethics approval is valid for the period indicated above and subject to the conditions listed in the section entitled "Special Conditions / Comments".

During the course of the project, the protocol may not be modified without prior written approval from the REB except when necessary to remove participants from immediate endangerment or when the modification(s) pertain to only administrative or logistical components of the project (e.g., change of telephone number). Investigators must also promptly alert the REB of any changes which increase the risk to participant(s), any changes which considerably affect the conduct of the project, all unanticipated and harmful events that occur, and new information that may negatively affect the conduct of the project and safety of the participant(s). Modifications to the project, including consent and recruitment documentation, should be submitted to the Ethics Office for approval using the "Modification to research project" form available at: <http://research.uottawa.ca/ethics/submissions-and-reviews>.

Please submit an annual report to the Ethics Office four weeks before the above-referenced expiry date to request a renewal of this ethics approval. To close the file, a final report must be submitted. These documents can be found at: <http://research.uottawa.ca/ethics/submissions-and-reviews>.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact the Ethics Office at extension 5387 or by e-mail at: ethics@uOttawa.ca.

Appendix 2: Recruitment Advertisements

CALLING
ALL TEENS

ages
16-19!

HAVE YOU
EVER BEEN
HURT BY A
FRIEND?

We want to hear
from you!
Participate in a
national online study.

WWW.FRIENDSHIPSTHATHARM.COM

EVER BEEN HURT BY A FRIEND?
Participate in a national online study!
All participants will receive \$25

 **CANADIAN TEENS
16-19**



FRIENDSHIPSTHATHARM.COM

CALLING ALL CANADIAN ADULTS
(20 YEARS +)

**AS A TEENAGER, WERE YOU
BULLIED BY A CLOSE FRIEND?**

Participate in a national online
study! Earn \$15

To sign up, contact
friendshipsthatharm@gmail.com

FRIENDSHIPSTHATHARM.COM



BULLIED
BY
FRIENDS
AS A
TEEN?

FRIENDSHIPSTHATHARM.COM

Appendix 2.1: Recruitment Scripts – Adolescents

Twitter recruitment texts:

Ever felt that you were bullied by a close friend? Are you a 16–19 yr old Canadian? An OttawaU researcher wants to hear from you. Visit friendshipsthatharm.com for more info!

Recruitment text on researcher’s Facebook & LinkedIn

Attention 16–19 year olds who reside in Canada: Have you ever felt that your friend(s) bullied you, whether socially, emotionally, and/or physically? We know that feeling victimized can be hurtful and damaging to young people’s development, but we don’t know as much about how this happens within friendships. For my PhD project, I am looking to explore past experiences of adolescent friendship victimization. I’m looking for adolescents aged 16–19 to participate. If this is an experience that you can speak to, please check out my research website (insert website domain here), and join our anonymous online community. (Please note that the study will be conducted in English). Please pass this message on to your networks!

Shared recruitment texts on Facebook and LinkedIn profiles (*messages posted on my “friends” profiles*)

My (friend/colleague/family member) Karen is a researcher from the University of Ottawa and she is looking to explore adolescents’ past experiences with feeling bullied by a close friend(s), whether socially, emotionally, and/or physically. She is looking for 16–19 year olds who reside in Canada to participate in her research study. Please pass this message on to your networks!

If you are between the ages of 16–19 and this is an experience that you can speak to, please check out her research website (insert website domain here) and join the anonymous online community. (Please note that the study will be conducted in English).

Emails to organizations to inquire about forwarding recruitment text

Dear (insert organization’s name and/or name of direct contact)

I am a PhD student at the University of Ottawa in the Faculty of Education. I am also an executive graduate student member of PREVNet (Promoting Relationships and Eliminating Violence Network), an organization that you are affiliated with. I am currently completing my doctoral dissertation about youth’s past experiences with bullying/victimization within their friendships. I have contacted you (and/or your organization) to inquire whether you (and/or your organization) would be interested in forwarding the details of this study on your social media pages (i.e. Twitter, Facebook). I am recruiting adolescents who reside in Canada aged 16–19 to participate. This study will be conducted in English.

My supervisor, Dr. David Smith, and I are hoping to reach youth from across the country, and your involvement in our recruitment will help to improve our knowledge of victimization experiences within adolescent friendships. This will really assist us in developing school based anti-bullying programs that will support these students.

We appreciate your continued involvement in initiatives that support the positive development of children and youth. If you are interested in forwarding the details of this study on your social media pages, you may do so directly, using your own descriptions, or by using the descriptions provided below. You may also respond to this email if you have any questions about this research project.

Thank you very much,

Karen Bouchard
PhD Candidate
University of Ottawa
Faculty of Education

Recruitment video script on research website

Hi everyone, and thank you for checking out my research website. I am a PhD student at the University of Ottawa in Ontario Canada. I am really interested in learning more about how people have experienced feeling bullied, or what researchers call feeling victimized, by their close friends. I really want to hear from 16, 17, 18, and 19 year olds, who reside in Canada, about what they are experiencing at school, at home, on sports teams, online, with their friends who are hurting them intentionally. I want to learn more about what you are feeling, how this is impacting you, and what is currently being done, or what could be done to help you.

If you are checking out this website, it might be because this is something that you feel you've experienced in the past – feeling hurt, whether socially, emotionally, or physically at the hands of your close friend or friends. I think its really important that we learn more about this and learn from each other's experiences, so that school-based anti-bullying programs or relationship development initiatives recognize that not all intentionally hurtful behaviours take place between people who don't like each other, or where one person or group doesn't like another person or group, and that it can occur between people who actually like each other, and for the most part, enjoy being around one another. Sometimes experiencing feeling bullied by our friends can be a very confusing and painful experience. The way that teachers and other adults can support young people who have experienced this hurt by their friends may be different from how we support those who have been hurt by people who are not their friends. Your stories can really impact what we know about a term we call friendship victimization, and hopefully this will help other young people, like you, who have experienced or are still experiencing being harmed by their friends. These young people need our support.

I've designed the study to include online forum discussions with other adolescents. Everything will be done anonymously, so no one will know who you are, and the forum will be completely secure, with only other participants in the study allowed access to our conversations. Within the online discussions, you will be able to respond to "threads" that I have developed – these are questions that you can respond to. You can also develop your own "threads" on issues that you think are important but I haven't addressed. I will also personally message you within the website to see if you'd like to have a more one-on-one conversations about your experiences. Sometimes we don't want to share certain things on the forum and would feel more comfortable doing this

one-on-one, so this is a space for us to talk separately from the forum. You can respond whenever you would like to these questions – you don't need to be online at any specific time. The forum will be open for three months starting in (insert start date of project), so we'll have lots of time for discussion.

It's really important that you learn about this study, what it involves, and how you can participate safely. If this study is something that you would like to participate in, please click on the letter of information and consent page to read about what your participation involves. If you reside in Canada, are between the ages of 16–19, you are eligible to participate in this study. If you are from Quebec, you can also participate, but you'll need to be at least 18 years old. If you are from the other provinces or territories, you can participate as long as you are at least 16 years old. Even though you are under the age of majority, you do not need to have your parent or guardian's approval, though we encourage you inform a trusted adult about your participation. If you would like more information about victimization or where you can go for additional support, please check out the resources page on the website.

After you indicate your consent, you'll be redirected to the forum webpage that will ask you to create a username and fill out a very short survey about your sex, gender, age, and general location. Then, this information will be sent to me to double-check to make sure you meet the criteria for participating. After this, you'll receive a password from me through your email in order for you to access the forum. After this, you can begin your discussions on the forum. This study and all of our discussions will be conducted solely in English.

We all need to help each other build positive relationships – this forum is a great way for your voice to be heard so that we can help others who are experiencing victimization within their friendships. I hope you'll consider sharing your stories.

Recruitment script posted on homepage of study's website

Welcome! Thank you for your interest in this research project. We would like to hear from you if you are an adolescent who resides in Canada, between the ages of 16–19, and who has experienced feeling bullied by a close friend. You will have the opportunity to share your past experiences with other youth via an online forum. Please be advised that this study will be conducted solely in English. Please view the introductory video if you'd like more information about the study and how you can participate. More information detailing the study can also be found here (link to letter of information and consent form). Participation is first-come, first-served. Thank you and looking forward to connecting with you! *The ethical components of this study have been reviewed and granted clearance according to the recommended principles of the University of Ottawa Research Ethics Board.*

Appendix 2.2: Recruitment Scripts – Adults

Twitter recruitment texts:

Online study for Adults 20 yrs + Were you #bullied by a friend in your teens? Email friendshipsthatharm@gmail.com for info. Earn \$15 to Starbucks

Recruitment text on researcher's Facebook & LinkedIn

Attention Canadian adults (20 years and older)! Were you ever victimized by your friends in your teens? We know that being victimized can be hurtful and damaging to young people's development, but we don't know as much about how this happens within friendships and what the long-term outcomes may be. For my PhD project, I am looking to explore past experiences of adolescent friendship victimization. If this is an experience that you can speak to, please email friendshipsthatharm@gmail.com

We are offering a \$15 Starbucks gift card if you participate in a 1-hour online interview. Please pass this message on to your networks!

Appendix 3: Letters of Information – Adolescents

Dear Participant,

Karen Bouchard, a doctoral student from the Faculty of Education at the University of Ottawa invites you to participate in a study that seeks to explore your experiences of victimization within friendships. The study is titled *With Friends Like These, Who Needs Enemies? Experiences of Victimization within Friendships during Adolescence*. The purpose of this study is to examine how victimization occurred within your friendship, how you coped with this victimization, the factors that influenced this victimization, as well as the short-term and long-term effects of this victimization within your adolescent friendship(s). *This study has been granted clearance according to the recommended principles of the Ottawa Research Ethics Board.*

In this study, you will be asked to participate in an online forum, responding to “threads” posted by the researcher and other participants. These “threads” will include questions about your experiences with friendship victimization that occurred during your adolescence. The conversations that occur on the online forum between participants will be secure and all participants will be required to create an anonymous username. In addition to the online forum discussions, the researcher will personally message you to take part in a one-on-one discussion. This will be done through the same website that you use for the online forum. The questions for this one-on-one discussion will vary with each participant, but overall, the researcher is looking to develop a rapport with you, learn more about your experiences, and provide a space for you to ask any questions. The text generated from the online chats will be directly used for data analysis. Once the researcher has compiled all the results, they will be shared with all participants on the online forum, with any identifying information removed.

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. There are minimal risks for participating in this study, though some of the discussions that we have may bring up some uncomfortable memories. Some of the questions may also be personal in nature. You are encouraged to seek out the recommended resources provided by the researcher if you feel uncomfortable as a result of the discussions. You do not have to answer any questions that you do not want to. You can withdraw from the study at any time without reason or consequence. You can request removal of all or part of your data. You also have the right to be informed on how your identity will be protected in the publication of the data.

Every effort will be made to ensure your confidentiality. All the discussions in online forum and the one-on-one discussions with the researcher will be kept confidential to the best extent possible. You have the right to be informed of the limits of confidentiality. Only the researcher, Karen Bouchard, and her supervisor, Dr. David Smith will have access to the data. If the results of this study are published, there will be no identifying information of the participants or school. Should you be interested, you are entitled to a copy of the findings. In accordance with the University of Ottawa’s policy, data will be retained for a minimum of five years and data will be destroyed after five years.

If you decide to participate in this study, please read the consent form carefully, and then indicate your consent by clicking on the consent button on the homepage of the study’s website. Please print out a copy of the consent form for your own records. In addition to

providing consent, please create an anonymous username and fill out the general demographic survey also found on the homepage.

Sincerely,

Karen Bouchard

Appendix 3.1: Letter of Information – Adults

Dear Participant,

Karen Bouchard, a doctoral student from the Faculty of Education at the University of Ottawa invites you to participate in a study that seeks to explore your experiences of victimization within friendships. The study is titled *With Friends Like These, Who Needs Enemies? Experiences of Victimization within Friendships during Adolescence*. The purpose of this study is to examine how victimization occurred within your friendship(s) during adolescence, how you coped with this victimization, the factors that influenced this victimization, as well as the short-term and long-term effects of this victimization. *This study has been granted clearance according to the recommended principles of the Ottawa Research Ethics Board.*

In this study, you will be asked to participate in an online individual interview. The interview will include questions about your experiences with victimization that occurred within a friendship during adolescents. The conversations that occur between you and the interviewer will be secure. Following the first interview, you may be asked to participate in a follow-up interview. The text generated from the online chats will be directly used for data analysis. The data will be downloaded from the website onto a password-protected data analysis software. Once the researcher has compiled all the results, they will be shared with all participants on the online forum, with any identifying information removed. These results will be used for the purposes of the researcher's doctoral dissertation.

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. There are minimal risks for participating in this study, though some of the discussions that we have may bring up some uncomfortable memories. Some of the questions may also be personal in nature. You are encouraged to seek out the recommended resources provided by the researcher if you feel uncomfortable as a result of the discussions. You do not have to answer any questions that you do not want to. You can withdraw from the study at any time without reason or consequence. You can request removal of all or part of your data. You also have the right to be informed on how your identity will be protected in the publication of the data.

Every effort will be made to ensure your confidentiality. All the discussions within the interview will be kept confidential to the best extent possible. You have the right to be informed of the limits of confidentiality. Only the researcher, Karen Bouchard, and her supervisor, Dr. David Smith will have access to the data. If the results of this study are published, there will be no identifying information of the participants. Should you be interested, you are entitled to a copy of the findings. In accordance with the University of Ottawa's policy, data will be retained for a minimum of five years and data will be destroyed after five years.

If you decide to participate in this study, please read the consent form carefully, and then indicate your consent by emailing the researcher at friendshipsthatharm@gmail.com. Please print out a copy of the consent form for your own records.

Sincerely,

Karen Bouchard

Appendix 4: Consent Form – Adolescents

Title of Research: With Friends Like These, Who Needs Enemies? Experiences of Victimization within Adolescent Friendships.

Researcher:

Karen Bouchard
Faculty of Education, University of Ottawa

Project Supervisor:

David Smith
Faculty of Education, University of Ottawa

Invitation to Participate: I am invited to participate in the abovementioned research study conducted by Karen Bouchard, supervised by Dr. David Smith. I am eligible to participate in this study if I am between the ages of 16 and 19 years old, live in Canada (*individuals from Quebec must be at least 18 years old to participate*), and have experienced harm (victimization) within my friendship(s) during adolescence. This study is being conducted as part of Karen Bouchard's PhD thesis.

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this study is to learn more about how victimization occurred within my friendship(s), how I dealt with this victimization, the factors that influenced this victimization, as well as the short-term and long-term effects of this victimization. This study is being done because we still know very little about how victimization occurs between friends. This will add to our understanding of victimization, more generally, and hopefully contribute to the ways that teachers and our schools can help youth who experience victimization within their friendships.

Participation: My participation will consist of answering a short survey based on my general experiences of feeling harmed by my friend(s) and/or sharing my experiences in a secure, anonymous, online forum (conducted through a website, created solely for the purposes of this research project). I will choose how much or how little I participate in the online discussions and what survey questions I answer. My decision to not participate in the survey will have no bearing on my ability to participate in the online forum discussions, or vice versa. I only have to respond to the discussion topics of my choice. I can respond to questions posed on the survey, online forum and the individual discussions with the researcher at a time that is convenient for me. My participation in this study will not exceed three months.

Risks: There are limited risks for participation in this study, but some of the questions may bring up uncomfortable memories of my past victimization, which can make the risk of this study more substantial for some participants. I know that I do not need to answer any questions that I do not want to, that I can withdraw from the study at any time, and that I can request to have all or part of my data removed from the study. I have received assurance from the researcher that every effort will be made to minimize the risks of the study. As the online discussions will take place

via an American server, my discussions may be subject to the Patriot Act of the United States of America.

Benefits: My participation in this study will help me to reflect on my previous experiences with victimization within my friendships during adolescence. Discussing my experiences with others who have similar experiences may be helpful, and may contribute to new ideas that will help me deal with my previous experiences of victimization and my understandings of friendships. My participation may also help with the implementation of effective victimization intervention and prevention programming that includes aspects of victimization within friendships.

Confidentiality: I have received assurance from the researcher that the information I will share will remain strictly confidential. I understand that my responses on the online forum will be used only for the development of a doctoral dissertation and for research papers for publication. I also understand that my confidentiality will be protected through an online anonymous username used throughout the study, as well as the use of pseudonyms (secret names) in the researcher's work. All of the text from online forum will be downloaded to a password-protected data analysis software, and will be stored on a secure USB drive in the researcher's office. All the survey results will be exported to password-protected data analysis software and will also be stored on a secure USB drive in the researcher's office.

Anonymity: When consenting to the study, I will create a unique and anonymous username to use in the online forum and individual discussions with the researcher. I will also answer a short 8-question survey (a link to the online survey will be emailed to me when I register on the forum). I am not required to answer the survey, and my discussions on the forum will not depend on answering this survey. Only the researcher will know my responses to this survey. All participants in the study will use an anonymous username, and will be reminded about the importance of privacy and confidentiality of the data and other participants' identities. All conversations that I will have with the researcher and other participants will be conducted on the online forum.

Conservation of data: The data collected from the survey, the forum and the individual discussions with the researcher will be transferred to a password-protected data analysis software and a secure USB storage device. Only the researcher and her supervisor will have access to the data. The data will be conserved for a period of 5 years following completion of the study, after which the data will be destroyed.

Compensation: I will be given a \$10 Cineplex Odeon gift card as compensation for responding to the survey. If I wish to continue in the study and contribute to the online forum discussions, I will receive an additional \$15 Cineplex Odeon gift card. My email that I provided when I joined the forum will be collected for the purposes of sending me the electronic gift cards, following the completion of the survey/online discussions. My email will be kept confidential and then destroyed once the gift cards have been sent. If I choose to withdraw from the study, I will still be compensated.

Voluntary Participation: I do not have to participate in this research project and if I choose to participate, I can withdraw from the study at any time and/or refuse to answer any questions,

without suffering any negative consequences. If I choose to withdraw, all data gathered until the time of withdrawal will be eliminated, unless I agree to let this data be used.

Acceptance: I acknowledge that by clicking on the consent button on the study's website, I am indicating my consent to participate in the above research study conducted Karen Bouchard of the Faculty of Education at the University of Ottawa, under the supervision of Dr. David Smith of the same faculty and institution. I am also indicating that I meet the inclusion criteria for this study, namely, that I am a Canadian adolescent who has experienced victimization within my friendship(s), and that I am of appropriate age to consent to participate. *If I am a resident of Quebec, I must be at least 18 years of age to participate. The age of consent in all other provinces/territories is 16.*

If I have any questions about the study, I may contact the researcher or her supervisor.

If I decide to participate in this study, I will read the consent form carefully, and then indicate my consent by clicking on the *consent button* on the study's website.

Appendix 4.1: Consent Form – Adults

Title of Research: With Friends Like These, Who Needs Enemies? Experiences of Victimization within Adolescent Friendships.

Researcher:

Karen Bouchard
Faculty of Education, University of Ottawa

Project Supervisor:

David Smith
Faculty of Education, University of Ottawa

Invitation to Participate: I am invited to participate in the abovementioned research study conducted by Karen Bouchard, supervised by Dr. David Smith. I am eligible to participate in this study if I am 20 years or older, live in Canada, and have experienced harm (victimization) within my friendship(s) during adolescence. This study is being conducted as part of Karen Bouchard's PhD thesis.

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this study is to learn more about how victimization occurred within my friendship(s), how I dealt with this victimization, the factors that influenced this victimization, as well as the short-term and long-term effects of this victimization. This study is being done because we still know very little about how victimization occurs between friends. This will add to our understanding of victimization, more generally, and hopefully contribute to the ways that teachers and our schools can help youth who experience victimization within their friendships.

Participation: My participation will consist of participating in a 1-hour individual interview with the researcher, via an online, secure, chat software. I will only respond to the questions that I feel comfortable. The time of the interview will be decided between the researcher and myself, at a time that is agreed upon.

Risks: There are limited risks for participation in this study, but some of the questions may bring up uncomfortable memories of my past victimization, which can make the risk of this study more substantial for some participants. I know that I do not need to answer any questions that I do not want to, that I can withdraw from the study at any time, and that I can request to have all or part of my data removed from the study. I have received assurance from the researcher that every effort will be made to minimize the risks of the study. As the online discussions will take place via an American server, my discussions may be subject to the Patriot Act of the United States of America.

Benefits: My participation in this study will help me to reflect on my previous experiences with victimization within my friendships during adolescence. Discussing my experiences may be helpful, and may contribute to new ideas that will help me deal with my previous experiences of victimization and my understandings of friendships. My participation may also help with the

implementation of effective victimization intervention and prevention programming that includes aspects of victimization within friendships.

Confidentiality: I have received assurance from the researcher that the information I will share will remain strictly confidential. I understand that our discussions will be used only for the development of a doctoral dissertation and for research papers for publication. I also understand that my confidentiality will be protected through an online username used throughout the study, as well as the use of pseudonyms in the researcher's work. All of the text from the online discussions will be downloaded to a password-protected data analysis software, and will be stored on a secure USB drive in the researcher's office.

Anonymity: After initially contacting the researcher through the study's email (friendshipsthatharm@gmail.com), the researcher will get in contact with me to provide information about the study and the consent process (the consent form will be attached). To indicate my consent, I will reply to this email, stating my interest to participate. Only the researcher will participate in the interview with me. All of the conversations that I will have with the researcher will be conducted through the online interview and via email (discussion through email will only be used to indicate consent and to decide on a convenient time for the interview).

Conservation of data: The data collected from the interviews will be transferred to a password-protected data analysis software and a secure USB storage device. Only the researcher and her supervisor will have access to the data. The data will be conserved for a period of 5 years following completion of the study, after which the data will be destroyed.

Compensation: I will be given a \$15 Starbucks gift card as compensation for participating in the individual interviews. My email will be collected for the purposes of sending me the electronic gift cards. My email will be kept confidential and then destroyed once the gift cards have been sent. If I choose to withdraw from the study, I will still be compensated.

Voluntary Participation: I do not have to participate in this research project and if I choose to participate, I can withdraw from the study at any time and/or refuse to answer any questions, without suffering any negative consequences. If I choose to withdraw, all data gathered until the time of withdrawal will be eliminated, unless I agree to let this data be used.

Acceptance: I acknowledge that by responding to the researcher's email that outlines the project and consent process, I am indicating my consent to participate in the above research study conducted Karen Bouchard of the Faculty of Education at the University of Ottawa, under the supervision of Dr. David Smith of the same faculty and institution. I am also indicating that I meet the inclusion criteria for this study, namely, that I am Canadian who has experienced victimization within my friendship(s), and that I am of appropriate age to consent to participate.

If I have any questions about the study, I may contact the researcher or her supervisor.

Appendix 5: Interview Protocol - Adolescents

*initial questions posed by the researcher on the discussion forum

Why do you think your friend bullied you?

What does bullying look or feel like?

What does friendship look or feel like?

What did you do when your friend bullied you?

Why do you think friends bully each other?

What made your experience of being bullied by a friend worse or better?

Appendix 5.1: Interview Protocol - Adults

*potential discussion questions for semi-structured interview

Perceptions of Friendships

How/when do you know someone is your friend?

How might this be different when someone is your close or closest friend?

What are the most important qualities of a close friend?

How does having a close friendship impact you?

What do you think you provide to your closest friend(s)?

How have your friendships changed as you got older?

How do you see your close friendships changing as you get older?

How do you maintain your friendships with your close friend(s)?

How do you experience conflict with your close friend(s)?

How do you experience companionship/closeness with your close friend(s)?

If you could teach your younger self on how to make a close friend, what would you tell yourself?

If you could teach your younger self on how to be a close friend, what would you tell yourself?

If you could teach your younger self on how to be in a good friendship, what would you tell yourself?

Perceptions of Victimization within Friendships

Why do you think some people might bully their friends in adolescence?

Do you think that some people who bully others might also bully their friends? Why?

Do you think that people who bully their friends are also bullied by their friends? Why?

Do you think that people who are bullied by their friends are also bullied by others? Why?

Do you think it's hurtful to be bullied by a friend in adolescence? Why?

How do you think this is different or similar to being bullied by a non-friend?

How do you think being bullying by a friend may change from adolescence to adulthood?

Who else is involved when someone bullies a friend?

How do you think being bullied by a friend may change the way we think of bullying?

How might this change the way that we deal with bullying in school?

How does bullying within friendships happen/what does it look like?

Where does bullying within friendships happen?

Did bullying within friendships happen often at the school(s) you attended during your adolescence?

What do you think helps to stop bullying within friendships? Do you think it does stop?

How do you think being bullied in a friendship may change the way you think about friendships?

How do you think being bullied in a friendship may change the way you think about bullying?

Experiences of Victimization within Friendships

How did you first recognize that you were experiencing bullying within your friendship?

Describe some of the emotions that you experienced because of being bullied by your close friend.

Describe the ways that your friend bullied you.

Describe your friendship with your friend who bullied you. What were/are the qualities of your friendship?

Why do you think that your friend bullied you?
How did this bullying change your friendship?
Who else was involved in your victimizing experiences?
Was anyone else aware that you were experiencing this? How did they (or might they) help?
How long and in what frequency did you experience this bullying from your friend? Did the bullying change overtime?
How did this experience impact your other relationships?
How did this experience impact your time at school?
In what other ways did this experience impact you?

Subsequent Perceptions of Friendships Resulting from Victimization

How have your experiences changed the way you look at friendships?
Describe your current relationship with the friend who victimized you.
Has this bullying with your friendships happened within more than one of your friendships?
How has this experience changed how you interact with your friends?

Responses to Victimization within Friendship

How did you respond to the bullying? Why do you think you responded in this way?
Did you notify anyone of your experiences? How did others come to know of your experiences?
If you could go back to that time, what would you do differently? The same?
Describe the ways that you coped with your experience.
Describe who else was involved in managing your emotions resulting from the bullying?
Describe how your friendship changed with your friend who bullied you.
What are some ways that you tried to manage your victimization?

Factors that Impacted Victimization

Describe what made your experiences with being bullied by a friend harder to deal with.
Describe what made your experiences with being bullied by a friend easier to deal with.
If you could go back to that time, how would you recommend that the adults in your life (teachers, your parents/guardians) help you?
If you could go back to that time, how would be recommend that your other friends help you?
Why do you think your victimization lasted as long or as short as it did?
What support systems did you have that helped you through your experience?

Enduring Consequences

What do you still think about when it comes to your experience being bullied by your friend?
How does this experience still impact you today?
How do you (or might you) talk about this experience to others?
What are the most significant lessons that you learned from this experience?
How has this experience changed the way you see or experience your friendships now?
Have you experienced victimization within your friendships again? How is this similar or different to your earlier experiences?