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Gender differences in bullying and perceptions of bullying

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GENDER DIFFERENCES IN BULLYING AND PERCEPTIONS OF BULLYING

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Dedications

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my parents and also to my boyfriend, David, who have provided me support and encouragement while I accomplished everything I could this past year. It has been a long ride, but you have all been there, and for that I thank you.

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Abstract

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Bullying is a prevalent and ongoing problem in all schools from elementary school on through college. Previous research has shown that rates of bullying have been on the rise in recent years. High rates of bullying should not be ignored as involvement in bullying can lead to long-lasting, negative effects. To decrease or prevent bullying, anti-bullying methods should consider all potential factors. An important factor in bullying research is the influence of gender on one's overall bullying experience. The purpose of the current study was to determine whether or not there is a difference in the bullying rates and styles used between males and females. Additionally, this study hoped to explore whether there are differences in how participants perceive bullying as a result of their gender. A self-report questionnaire was used to collect data from 152 undergraduate males and females about their high school experiences. Results indicated that participants witnessed males exhibiting more direct/overt aggression when bullying and females using more indirect/relational aggression as expected. Analyses also revealed that there were gender differences in the participants' perceptions of bullying in some areas. Overall, understanding gender differences within bullying will assist in the effort to create effective anti-bullying interventions to be used within schools.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Need

Bullying is believed to be an ongoing problem in all schools from the elementary level on up to the college level. Parents, teachers, and other school staff members should continually search for methods to reduce its prevalence. According to Schneider, O'Donnell, Stueve, and Coulter (2012) approximately 26% of students reported instances of school bullying and about 16% of students reported instances of cyberbullying in the past twelve months. This number is minimal compared to other research that stated 75% of children reported being bullied at least once during the academic school year (Sassu, Elinoff, Bray, & Kehle, 2004). The rates of bullying in schools should not be taken lightly because bullying can have long-lasting, negative effects on those involved (Carr-Gregg & Manocha, 2011). When developing and implementing anti-bullying methods, consideration should be given to how gender influences bullying. Studies show that males tend to use more direct/overt forms of aggression while females use more indirect/relational forms of aggression (Bjorkqvist, Lagerspetz, & Kaukiainen, 1992; Wang, Iannotti, & Nansel, 2009). Gaining an increased level of awareness into the different styles of bullying used and the perceptions of bullying by males and females may help lead to improved anti-bullying techniques to be used in the schools.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to discover if males and females bully differently. This study examined the bullying experiences of males and females using a self-report questionnaire. The current study questioned if one gender bullied more frequently than

the other. It also examined if males or females used certain styles of bullying such as direct/overt aggression or indirect/relational aggression more frequently than the other gender. Additionally, this study hoped to explore whether there were any differences in how participants perceived bullying as a result of their gender.

Hypotheses

It was hypothesized that males would report using more direct/overt aggression when bullying and females would report using more indirect/relational aggression. Additionally, how participants perceived bullying was explored to determine if gender played a role.

Operational Definitions

Bullying: "a form of aggression, characterized by repeated psychological or physical oppression, involving the abuse of power in relationships to cause distress or control another" (Carr-Gregg & Manocha, 2011, p. 98).

Cyberbullying: the usage of technology such as e-mail, text messaging, and chat rooms for the purpose of bullying (Griezel, Finger, Bodkin-Andrews, Craven, & Yeung, 2012; Strom & Strom, 2005).

Indirect/ relational aggression: an attempt to harm others through manipulation and damage of their peer relationships (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). This includes bullying by exclusion from groups, gossiping behind one's back, and spreading rumors (Bjorkqvist et al., 1992; Owens, Shute, & Slee, 2000; Smith et al., 2002).

Direct/ overt aggression: the act of harming others through physically fighting, hitting, taunting, threatening, insulting, name calling, teasing, or stealing (Beaty & Alexeyev, 2008; Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Lee, 2009).

Assumptions

In this study, it was assumed that participants were honest and accurate in their responses. Also, it was presumed that those who participated in this study had previously experienced and/or witnessed bullying.

Limitations

This study was limited because it only included undergraduate college students who attend the same public university in Southern New Jersey. Also, this study relied on the participants' memories and recall of their past experiences of bullying which may have skewed the results.

Summary

This study is necessary because the rates of both bullying and cyberbullying are on the rise (Schneider et al., 2012). Exploration into the gender differences of bullying may help lead to a better understanding of the styles of bullying used. An analysis of individuals' perceptions of bullying may also allude to the level of understanding and the reasoning behind the styles of bullying used by each gender. Results from studies of gender differences in bullying may be useful when developing anti-bullying interventions and programs to use within schools.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

The review of literature will first present a definition of bullying and some brief information regarding the prevalence of bullying. This will be followed by the second section which will provide an explanation of the roles one may play in bullying. The third section will define and distinguish the different styles of bullying: direct/overt aggression and indirect/relational aggression as well as cyberbullying. The fourth section will illuminate the negative effects that both traditional bullying and cyberbullying may have on those involved. The fifth section will examine if gender disparities in bullying currently exist. Lastly, the final section will explore the perceptions of bullying on the basis of one's gender.

Bullying Defined

A reoccurring definition of bullying in the literature that has much support is Olweus's 1993 definition of bullying (Boulton & Smith, 1994; Naylor, Cowie, Cossin, de Bettencourt, & Lemme, 2006; Volk, Dane, & Marini, 2014; Wang et al., 2009). Olweus (1993) states, "a student is being bullied or victimized when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more students" (p. 9). He then goes on to further clarify his definition with the following:

> It is a negative action when someone intentionally inflicts, or attempts to inflict, injury or discomfort upon another…negative actions can be carried out by words (verbally), for instance, by threatening, taunting, teasing, and calling names. It is a negative action when somebody hits, pushes, kicks, pinches, or restrains another- by physical contact. It is also possible to carry out negative actions without use of

words or physical contact, such as by making faces or dirty gestures, intentionally excluding someone from a group, or refusing to comply with another person's wishes. (Olweus, 1993, p. 9).

Many researchers agree with Olweus, that in order for an action to be considered bullying it has to be an intentional act of harm onto another person that happens repeatedly and over a period of time (Carr-Gregg & Manocha, 2011; Naylor et al., 2006; Wang et al., 2009). This harm or discomfort put onto another person can occur verbally, physically, or psychologically over a lengthy period of time (Baldry, 2004). Since Olweus created his definition of bullying in 1993, one important feature has been added to the typical definition of bullying. This key aspect is an imbalance of power (Bauman, 2013). The imbalance of power in bullying occurs when, "a power asymmetry exists between the victim and the bully" (Carrera, DePalma, & Lameiras, 2011, p. 481). A bully uses this power inequity to exert his or her dominance over the victim. Researchers explain that this imbalance of power could be due to such things as race, physical strength, gender, sexual orientation, and age (Beaty & Alexeyev, 2008; Carrera et al., 2011).

Previous research reveals that bullying is not a problem unique to one culture, it is a common problem for children all around the world (Cook, Williams, Guerra, Kim & Sadek, 2010). Studies measuring the rates of bullying have shown it can affect anywhere from 9% to 54% of children worldwide (Vanderbilt & Augustyn, 2010). The prevalence rate of bullying can vary depending on the age, gender, and race of the individuals involved (Hanish & Guerra, 2000). Additionally, bullying does not discriminate; it can affect students of all ages and grade levels in school (Beaty& Alexeyev, 2008). The high

prevalence rate of bullying should not be ignored. Bullying has been linked to negative psychological, physical, and behavioral outcomes for all individuals involved (Cook et al., 2010; Gradinger, Strohmeier, & Spiel, 2009). Even with the negative effects of bullying, some children who are bullied choose not to tell anyone at home or at school. These victims may fear they will not be believed or that retaliation from the bully will occur (van der Wal, de Wit, & Hirasing, 2003). As a result, many cases of bullying go unreported and continue to occur.

Roles in Bullying

When examining bullying, it is important to know the different roles of bullying that one may partake in. Individuals involved in bullying, "can move between being a bully, victim, bully-victim (both a bully and a victim), or a bystander" (Vanderbilt & Augustyn, 2010, p. 315). Some individuals may have certain characteristics such as their ethnicity, body type, or personality traits that make them more vulnerable to involvement in bullying (Hanish & Guerra, 2000).

The first role of bullying is the bully who is the individual doing the harm against another individual (Vanderbilt & Augustyn, 2010). A typical bully may be depicted by their impulsivity and need to dominate others (Olweus, 1996; Warren, 2011). Cook et al. (2010) found that a typical bully tends to have academic problems, possesses negative attitudes towards oneself and others, and has trouble resolving conflicts with peers. Bullies may also display noticeable externalizing behaviors and exhibit behaviors that are characteristic of a conduct disorder (Vanderbilt & Augustyn, 2010).

Research also supports the notion that those who bully may come from a family environment that promotes conflict or violence (Cook et al., 2010; Warren, 2011).

Olweus (1993) specified four family factors that may increase one's likely involvement in bullying. First, individuals who are raised by parents with a negative attitude and a lack of warmth may have an increased chance of aggression towards others. Second, parents with high levels of tolerance towards a child's aggressive behaviors may raise a child who shows increased aggression later on. Third, parents who utilize physical punishment may raise children who go on and use physical aggression towards others. Lastly, the overall temperament of a child can determine the aggression outcomes of an individual (Olweus, 1993). These four factors demonstrate the importance of child rearing practices that do no include the use of violence.

Individuals may choose to bully others for a variety of reasons. One reason supported by research could be to obtain or uphold social status among a group of peers (Hanish & Guerra, 2000). Research demonstrates that bullies tend to have a strong desire for power and control over others (Olweus, 1996). A second reason one may bully is because they do not perceive their behaviors as wrong or harmful. They may believe the victim deserved to be bullied and therefore ignore or do not recognize the negative effects of their actions (Hanish & Guerra, 2000). Bullies may not view bullying as a problem because of their tendency to have a positive outlook towards violence (Olweus, 1996). Others who bully may do so as an effective way to obtain high self-esteem and peer approval (Hanish & Guerra, 2000).

The second role an individual may have in bullying is the victim, who is the target of the bullying (Vanderbilt & Augustyn, 2010). Victims are usually physically smaller than the bully which allows the bully to exert dominance over them (Beaty & Alexeyev, 2008). One study explains that children are more likely to fall victim to bullying because

others judge them as appearing physically weak and unable to defend themselves (Hanish & Guerra, 2000). These victims are usually passive, more cautious, and more sensitive than other children (Beaty & Alexeyev, 2008; Craig, Pepler, & Atlas, 2000). Most victims lack the self-confidence to stand up for themselves when they are being bullied (Warren, 2011). Furthermore, victims tend to have higher levels of anxiety and experience many instances of self-blame (Carrera et al., 2011).

According to Cook et al. (2010) the typical victim tends to display many internalizing symptoms. Those who are more likely than others to become a victim are shy, withdrawn, and hesitant to talk to others (Boulton & Smith, 1994; Cook et al., 2010). These are the victims who tend to have little to no friends, are abandoned at school, and thus have no one to defend them when they are bullied (Hanish & Guerra, 2000; Olweus, 1996). The type of victim just described is the most commonly occurring victim and is referred to as the submissive/ passive victim (Olweus, 1996). Another less common type of victim is called the provocative victim in which one demonstrates a mix of both anxious and aggressive traits (Carrera et al., 2011). This type of victim's behavior tends to be hyperactive which can cause peers to become irritated, resulting in the victimization of this provocative peer (Beaty & Alexeyev, 2008; Olweus, 1996).

Some individuals who are involved in bullying may take the role of both a bully and a victim at some point in time, therefore giving them the name of a bully-victim (Vanderbilt & Augustyn, 2010). These individuals seek retaliation or justice for their victimization by taking on the role of bully and victimizing others. Individuals who partake in being both the bully and the victim typically exhibit a combination of internalizing and externalizing behaviors (Cook et al., 2010; Veenstra et al., 2005). These

individuals learn maladaptive behaviors when coping with their victim status by becoming a bully themselves (Craig et al., 2000).

A bystander is the final role that an individual may have in bullying. These are the children who are not directly involved in the bullying itself, but can still have a direct role on the outcome of the bullying. This is because without the presence of bystanders, bullying may no longer exist (Vanderbilt & Augustyn, 2010). Bystanders help to reinforce the bully's behavior by standing by and providing an audience to the bullies' actions (Craig et al., 2000). Some individuals choose to bully for peer acceptance, therefore having bystanders observing one's victimization is seen as encouragement (Hanish & Guerra, 2000). On the other hand, some bystanders involved in bullying take a different role and attempt to support the victim (Salmivalli, 2014). Research demonstrates that a major positive difference can result for a victim when they are supported by bystanders or defended against their bully by a bystander rather than only observed (Salmivalli, 2014).

Styles of Bullying

Wang et al. (2009) explains that bullying can occur through various means including physical, verbal, relational, or social. With that said, there are two main styles of bullying agreed upon in the research which are called direct and indirect bullying (Lee, 2009; van der Wal et al., 2003). Fairly recently a new method of bullying called cyberbullying has emerged with the intrusion of technology and social media into daily life (Bauman, 2013). All three styles of bullying can result in substantial negative effects on the individuals involved, therefore all forms of bullying should be taken seriously (Vanderbilt & Augustyn, 2010).

The first style of bullying is called direct aggression. Direct aggression is also referred to as overt aggression as this style of bullying is typically clear for others to observe because it is out in the open (Olweus, 1993). This style of bullying can include two different means of aggression: physical aggression and verbal aggression (Vanderbilt & Augustyn, 2010). In physical aggression, individuals involved will actually be putting physical harm onto another individual (Prinstein, Boergers, & Vernberg, 2001). This can include actions such as hitting, stealing, threatening harm, pushing, or kicking another individual (Vanderbilt & Augustyn, 2010; Wang et al., 2009). In the other form of direct aggression, verbal aggression, individuals use their words to cause harm to another individual (Lee, 2009). A bully may use name calling, public humiliation, teasing, taunting, or intimidation to bully others (Beaty & Alexeyev, 2008; Vanderbilt & Augustyn, 2010; Wang et al., 2009).

The second style of bullying is called indirect aggression because unlike direct aggression this style of bullying is usually not as apparent to the outsider. Indirect aggression is done in a covert manner so that others may not be aware of its occurrence (Crick et al., 2001). Indirect aggression is also known as relational aggression because the bully uses their relationship with another individual as a way of inflicting social harm onto another (Prinstein et al., 2001). This style of bullying can involve such things as spreading rumors, gossiping, saying hurtful things, and ignoring another individual (Vanderbilt & Augustyn, 2010; Wang et al., 2009). Indirect/relational aggression may also include purposefully excluding someone from peer groups or social activities (Prinstein et al., 2001). Indirect bullying can include the bully threatening not to be someone's friend any longer unless the victim agrees to do what the bully wants (Lee,

2009). This style of bullying can therefore result in the damaging of relationships such as friendships or romantic relationships (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). Some support the idea that relational aggression may replace physical aggression in that it is a safer way to express discontent or anger towards another (Prinstein et al., 2001).

Cyberbullying is a separate form of bullying that involves the use of technology such as e-mail, text messages, instant messaging, and chatrooms to threaten or harm another (Barlett & Gentile, 2012; Strom & Strom, 2005; Wang et al., 2009). The technological basis of cyberbullying affects a wider spectrum of individuals and allows for more frequent victimization than traditional bullying (Griezel et al., 2012). Cyberbullying is via technology, therefore the typical power imbalance that is present in traditional bullying tends to be removed (Bauman, 2013). Some children who are physically weak or of lower social status that would not typically engage in traditional bullying may tend to engage in cyberbullying as a result (Barlett & Gentile, 2012; Strom & Strom, 2005).

Cyberbullying varies from traditional bullying because its technological basis allows for the possibility of anonymity on behalf of the bully (Barlett & Gentile, 2012). Cyberbullying diminishes the possibility of coming face-to-face with one's victim and dealing with consequences of one's actions (Strom& Strom, 2005). Therefore, many individuals who cyberbully never understand the level of duress they are having on a victim. They are unlikely to feel regret for their actions or have sympathy towards their victim (Strom & Strom, 2005).

Gradlinger et al. (2009) discovered that barely any students are involved exclusively as cyber victims. Most individuals who are cyber victims are also traditional

victims as well. The biggest predictor of becoming a cyberbully is having experience with being a traditional bully (Bauman, 2013). These findings demonstrate the overlapping nature of traditional bullying and cyberbullying (Gradlinger et al., 2009). In addition, many individuals who experience cyberbullying do so through multiple roles. Typically, adolescents who are victims in a cyber-environment are bullies as well (Erdur-Baker, 2010). Researchers speculate that retaliation may be much easier via technology than in traditional bullying (Bauman, 2013). Additionally, cyberbullying allows bullies to hide behind their technology and bully from a covert non physical distance as seen in indirect bullying (Barlett & Gentile, 2012; Griezel et al., 2012).

Negative Effects of Bullying

Bullying can have negative effects on all individuals involved including the victim, the bully, the bully-victim, and even the bystanders. Vanderbilt and Augustyn (2010) explain that the extent of these effects can vary depending on which role one has in the bullying scenario.

A victim of bullying tends to have an elevated risk for internalizing adjustment problems (Gradinger et al., 2009). Beaty and Alexeyev (2008) state that, "increased fear and anxiety may become an everyday part of the lives of the students who are bullied" (p. 8). Victims may experience a large amount of fear due to the possibility of future victimization (Boulton, Trueman, & Murray, 2008). Individuals may go to extreme measures such as not going to school to avoid having to face their oppressors (Warren, 2011).

Research on the impacts of victimization revealed that the school performance of children who are bullied may be affected; exhibited by a decline in their academics,

withdrawal from social events, and/or high rates of absenteeism (Carrera et al., 2011; Carr-Gregg& Manocha, 2011; Warren, 2011). Children who are bullied may experience inattention and a lack of classroom concentration (Boulton et al., 2008). Additionally, Popp, Peguero, Day, and Kahle (2014) reported that victimization may cause an individual to fear for their safety rather than their educational outcomes. Also, due to bullying, a victim may have lower levels of psychological well-being which in turn can decrease their overall educational achievement (Popp et al., 2014).

Being a victim of bullying may also put an individual at risk for health problems. Children who are bullied tend to report more stomachaches, headaches, gastric disturbances, dizziness and sleep disturbances than individuals who are not bullied (Beaty & Alexeyev, 2008; Karatas & Ozturk, 2011; Warren, 2011). Others have an enhanced risk for poor physical health due to overwhelming amounts of worry, stress, and rumination (Boulton et al., 2008).

In previous research, many discovered that victims of bullying are linked to an increased risk of depression and suicidal ideation (Meltzer, Vostanis, Ford, Bebbington, & Dennis, 2011; Vanderbilt & Augustyn, 2010; van der Wal et al., 2003). In a study conducted by van der Wal et al. (2003) depression and suicidal ideation were present among both boys and girls who were victims of bullying. In regards to being a victim of cyberbullying, the effects are closely related. Bauman (2013) discovered that victims of cyberbullying demonstrated significantly more signs of depression than those who were not cyberbullied. A similar finding was reported by Bauman, Toomey, and Walker (2012) who revealed that cyber victimization was strongly linked to both depression and suicidal ideation.

Prinstein et al. (2001) found that students who were victimized through both direct and indirect aggression have higher levels of depression and loneliness compared to those who are victimized through only one style. This suggests that the more victimization individuals experience, the more likely they are to experience negative outcomes. Additionally, results from a study performed by Rigby and Slee (1999) proposed, "students who are more frequently victimized by peers at school and feel generally unsupported by others … are, in general, more likely to experience suicidal ideation than others" (p. 127). This finding supports other research on bullying in which social support and inclusion from others is suggested to be a crucial factor in helping children who are victimized (Boulton et al., 2008).

While a victim of bullying tends to demonstrate internalizing problems, a bully tends to have a higher risk of externalizing problems (Gradinger et al., 2009). For instance, van der Wal et al. (2003) explained that children who frequently bullied other children experienced more delinquent behaviors than those who did not bully. These delinquent behaviors were portrayed in both those who used direct and indirect styles of bullying (van der Wal et al., 2003). Those who bully are at a higher risk of using drug and/or alcohol (Vanderbilt & Augustyn, 2010). Most children who bully experience negative attitudes towards peers, teachers, and school as a whole which results in an elevated likelihood of dropping out of school (Vanderbilt & Augustyn. 2010). Individuals who bully may also experience social difficulties with their peers. In their study, Crick and Grotpeter (1995) revealed children who bully were significantly more disliked and rejected by their peers. Bullies exhibited diminished peer relationships and social maladjustment (Crick & Grotepeter, 1995).

Children who bully may also experience negative mental health effects such as depression, suicidal ideation, and psychological distress (Bauman et al., 2012; Vanderbilt & Augustyn, 2010). Bullies may tend to receive a diagnosis of antisocial personality disorder, anxiety disorders, and substance abuse later in life (Carr-Gregg & Manocha, 2011; Vanderbilt & Augustyn, 2010). The effects of participating in bullying may also extend into adulthood and include difficulties maintaining a career and a romantic relationship (Vanderbilt & Augustyn, 2010).

The effects that a bully-victim may experience are a combination of the effects of being both a bully and a victim. Bully-victims may have a higher risk for depression and loneliness like a typical victim, but they also have elevated risk for alcohol use and poor peer relationships like a typical bully (Vanderbilt & Augustyn, 2010). Gradinger et al. (2009) reports that individuals who are bully-victims, either using traditional bullying methods, cyberbullying, or both typically exhibit elevated risks for both externalizing and internalizing adjustment problems. This finding supports the idea that individuals who indulge in more than one type of bullying and victimization have the most problems (Gradinger et al., 2009).

One may think that only the victim and the bully are at risk for negative effects of bullying. But, research explains that even the bystanders of bullying may experience some negative results from just witnessing bullying. The hostile environment in which bullying may produce can distract bystanders from school work and from friendships (Vanderbilt & Augustyn, 2010). Individuals who are not being bullied are still at risk for fear of being bullied in the future which can result in inattention in the classroom (Boulton et al., 2008). This inattention in the classroom could possibly lead to lower

academic performance on behalf of the bystanders. Additionally, Howard, Landau, and Pryor (2014) explain that those who witness bullying in school may experience a diminished sense of safety overall in the school environment.

Bullying Differences Between Genders

There is much speculation as to whether gender differences exist in bullying. A study performed by Griezel et al. (2012) aimed to determine if the rates of bullying differed between genders. The researchers used 803 students, ages ranging from 12 to 17 years old, to complete this analysis. They discovered that, "overall, boys engaged in and were the target of traditional bullying more than girls" (Griezel et al., 2012, p. 451). This finding suggests that boys not only bully more but also fall victim to bullying more so than girls. A study performed by Hoertel, Strat, Lavaud, and Limosin (2011) found similar results. In their study, the probability of being involved in bullying was significantly higher for men than women (Hoertel et al., 2011). Additionally, Chapell et al. (2006) discovered that males bullied significantly more in both elementary and high school than female did. Findings from another study on the gender differences in bullying conducted by Crick and Grotpeter (1995) suggested that, "both girls and boys are aggressive but tend to exhibit distinct forms of the behavior" (p. 721). This proposes that both males and females do bully at comparable rates, but the styles in which they use to bully may be different.

Many studies on this area of bullying have been performed that support Crick and Grotpeter's suggestion. These studies have analyzed the bullying techniques of males and females to see if differences truly emerged. In one study performed by Bjorkqvist et al. (1992) researchers measured the bullying behaviors of two different age groups of

children with approximately an equal amount of boys and girls per group. In both age cohorts, males scored higher on items related to direct aggression and females scored higher on items related to indirect aggression (Bjorkqvist et al., 1992). In a similar study conducted by Rivers and Smith (1994), the bullying differences between males and females in both primary and secondary school were measured. The researchers discovered, "overall, direct-physical behaviors such as hitting, kicking, and stealing were more common among boys than girls" (Rivers & Smith, 1994, p. 362). Rivers and Smith (1994) went on to state, "overall, more girls than boys reported incidents of indirect bullying" (p. 362). Similar more recent studies supported these findings on the styles of bullying used based on one's gender (Chapell et al., 2006; Wang et al., 2009).

Another study performed by Prinstein et al. (2001) found conflicting results to these above studies. In this study, boys did report a significantly higher use of overt aggression compared to girls. But, boys and girls reported equivalent use of relational aggression (Prinstein et al., 2001). A similar study executed by Crick and Nelson (2002) supports the findings by Prinstein et al. (2001). In their study, Crick and Nelson (2002) reported that males used physical and relational aggression with similar frequency while females mainly used relational aggression alone. These two studies support the above studies in that females did use indirect/relational aggression more so than direct aggression when they bullied. But, discovering that males used relational aggression just as much as direct aggression was not previously known (Crick & Nelson, 2002; Prinstein et al., 2001). This study illuminates the idea that females may not utilize indirect/relational aggression more so than males do when bullying.

In regards to cyberbullying, Li (2006) found that males were more likely than females to be both traditional bullies and cyberbullies. In this study, a larger percentage of males were cyber-bullies and a larger percentage of females were cyberbullied (Li, 2006). Findings from a study performed by Wang et al. (2009) supported these results in cyberbullying as boys again outnumbered girls as cyberbullies and females outnumbered boys as cyber victims.

Some researchers intrigued by the reoccurring gender differences in bullying attempted to assess why these gender differences emerge. Lagerspetz et al. (1988) proposed that females are more inclined to use indirect/relational aggression because of their social structure. For females, close and strong relationships between friends tend to emerge whereas in males larger and more diffuse social networks exist (Owens et al., 2000; Rivers & Smith, 1994). Therefore, threatening or manipulating those friendships can do more harm for females than it can for males (Bjorkqvist et al., 1992; Lagerspetz et al., 1988). Additionally, females tend to have more concern for interpersonal problems which can make them more inclined to reacting negatively to relational problems (Crick et al., 2001). Females may also be predisposed to use indirect aggression because they mature faster verbally than males (Lagerspetz et al., 1988). Because females tend to acquire verbal skills at an earlier stage, the use of indirect aggression is simply facilitated (Bjorkqvist et al., 1992). In regard to males, it is a social norm for them to be aggressive and display dominance, therefore males typically may display a more direct aggression style of bullying (Lagerspetz et al., 1988).

Perceptions on Bullying

As the findings of the above research studies show, there are some distinct gender differences in the styles of bullying used. As a result, some researchers have chosen to investigate how children perceive and interpret bullying; some have gone so far to determine whether there is a difference between genders. A study performed by Thornberg, Rosenqvist, and Johansson (2012) included 250 high school students to assess how teenagers explain the causes of bullying. The participants in the study were given an open ended question in which they could respond with up to sixteen reasons why bullying occurs. When their answers were analyzed, a mixture of reasons both attributing to the bully and the victim resulted (Thornberg et al., 2012). The highest occurring cause attributed to bullies was psychosocial problems of the bully. This included such factors as the bully's home life, inner flaws, and previous victim experience. A close second response was that the bully bullies to obtain or enhance social status (Thornberg et al., 2012). On the other hand, when the cause of bullying was attributed to the victim, the highest occurring response was deviance in that the victim did not fit in for some unique reason such as appearance or personality, resulting in their victimization (Thornberg et al., 2012).

Similar responses were found by Frisen, Jonsson, and Persson (2007) who asked 119 high school age students why they believed bullying occurs. The top response for why individuals fall victim to bullying was due to their appearance whereas the top answer for why students bully was because of low self-esteem (Frisen et al., 2007). Other research on bullying discovered that age may play a role in one's perceptions. In a study conducted by Bradshaw, Sawyer, and O'Brennan (2007), most young children perceived

bullies as disliked and rejected, but adolescents tended to link aggressive behavior to popularity.

Some researchers have also discovered that students have views of bullying that relate to the gender differences other studies reported. In one study Giles and Heyman (2005) revealed that students as young as preschool viewed relationally aggressive behaviors to be linked to girls and physically aggressive behaviors to be linked to boys. Similarly, Athanasiades and Deliyanni-Kouimtzis (2010) reported that in their study with fifteen and sixteen year olds, the students agreed that gender played a role in the styles of bullying used. Participants claimed, "…girls are aggressive with 'words' (meaning verbal or indirect bullying) and that boys are aggressive with certain 'acts' (meaning physical bullying)" (Athanasiades & Deliyanni-Kouimtzis, 2010, p. 335). Additionally, Athanasiades and Deliyanni-Kouimtzis (2010) discovered that the male and female participants both claimed that males bully much more frequently than females.

Another area that previous research on perceptions of bullying focused on is how males and females view the bullying situation. Naylor et al. (2006) concluded that females were more likely than males to refer to the effects on the victim when discussing bullying. Results from the study also suggested that boys are inclined to focus on the externalizing bullying behavior while females focus on the internalizing or concealed effects on the victim (Naylor et al., 2006). A different study performed by Baldry (2004) revealed that gender differences emerge when considering if one or multiple people are doing the bullying. Male participants blamed the victim more so when the victim is bullied by a group of people and female participants blamed the victim more when the victim is bullied by one person alone (Baldry, 2004).

Athanasiades and Deliyanni-Kouimtzis (2010) examined how males and females feel about bullying. The results revealed that males typically denied any underlying motive behind bullying and tried to justify their bullying actions as a joke. Males tended to not recognize the negative effects that bullying may have on the victim; some males even placed the blame of bullying onto the victim (Athanasiades & Deliyanni-Kouimtzis, 2010). Females participants on the other hand expressed disapproval of bullying and focused on the negative effects it can have on a victim. These results puzzled the researchers because rates of bullying by females is still quite substantial even though they claim to disprove of it (Athanasiades & Deliyanni-Kouimtzis, 2010). Owens et al. (2000) obtained similar results and suggested females express sympathy and disapproval of bullying to attempt to justify their own bullying actions.

From reviewing a surplus of literature in the field of bullying, it is clear that there are distinct but questionable gender differences in the styles of bullying used. In addition, some interesting findings into how individuals perceive bullying as a result of their gender have been found. This study aspired to add to the previous literature by collecting and analyzing the self-reported bullying experiences and perceptions of bullying from individuals.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Participants

The current study included undergraduate students from a four-year public university in Southern New Jersey. A total of 152 undergraduate students chose to participate in this study. The sample in this study included 47 (30.9%) males and 105 (69.1%) females. In order for a student to participate in this study, they had to be a part of the department of psychology subject pool. This subject pool was comprised of undergraduate students enrolled in Essentials of Psychology. Subjects had to be at least 18 years of age and willing to disclose their gender to be eligible to participate. All participation in this study was done so voluntarily.

Materials

Collection of data took place during the spring semester of 2016. The only demographic information that was collected in the questionnaire was the participant's gender (male or female) at the start of the survey. A questionnaire created by the researcher was used to assess the participants' high school bullying experiences and their perceptions of bullying. The formatting of the first half of the questionnaire was modeled after an earlier, widely used bullying questionnaire called the Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire. The current questionnaire first presented definitions of bullying, cyberbullying, victim, bully, direct aggression, and indirect aggression which is similar to Olweus's questionnaire (Olweus, 1996). The questions included in the questionnaire for this study were modified from the original to better serve the purpose of the current study. The second half of questions related to perceptions of bullying were developed

through an adaptation of a previous study's questions performed by Frisen et al. (2007).

Procedure

The participants in the current study were undergraduate students who were a part of the department of psychology subject pool at Rowan University. All participants were at least 18 years of age. One hundred and fifty-two undergraduate students voluntarily chose to participate and completed an electronic survey for research participation credit in the Essentials of Psychology course they were enrolled in. This survey along with an informed consent and debriefing form was uploaded electronically to the Rowan University subject pool website, SONA. Participants who were interested in participating in this study had to first read and agree to the informed consent presented at the start of the survey. After agreeing, the survey questions began. During the questionnaire, only one question appeared at a time. The participants were given as much time as needed to complete the self-report questionnaire. Participation was kept anonymous in the survey and participants were allowed to decline participation at any point during in the survey. Additionally, it was expected that participants would respond honestly to all questions in the self-report questionnaire. Once participants finished and submitted their responses to the questionnaire, they were provided with information regarding the purpose of the study. Contact information for both the researcher and the counseling center were provided in case the need for either arose.

Once enrollment and subject participation in the study was completed, data analysis began. All data from the survey was extracted from SONA and transferred into the statistical software program IBM SPSS Statistics Version 21.0 for analyses.

Chapter 4

Results

It was hypothesized that males would report using more direct/overt aggression when bullying and females would report using more indirect/relational aggression. Due to an insignificant amount of participants reporting actual firsthand involvement in bullying, either as a bully or a victim, the researcher's hypothesis was unable to be supported or refuted. However, the researcher was able to assess the reported styles of bullying that participants witnessed being used by males and females.

The questionnaire that was used in this study found that when participants were asked to report what styles of bullying they witnessed a male using, by selecting all that apply, the highest chosen response overall was direct/overt aggression (72%). This was followed by indirect/relational aggression (50%), and cyberbullying (35%). Similar results were found when responses were categorized by gender, as seen in Figure 1. Out of a total of 105 female participants, 76 (72%) reported witnessing a male use direct/overt aggression, 53 (50%) indirect/relational aggression, and 35 (33%) cyberbullying. In regards to the 47 male participants, 34 (72%) reported witnessing a male use direct/overt aggression, 23 (49%) indirect/relational aggression, and 18 (38%) cyberbullying.

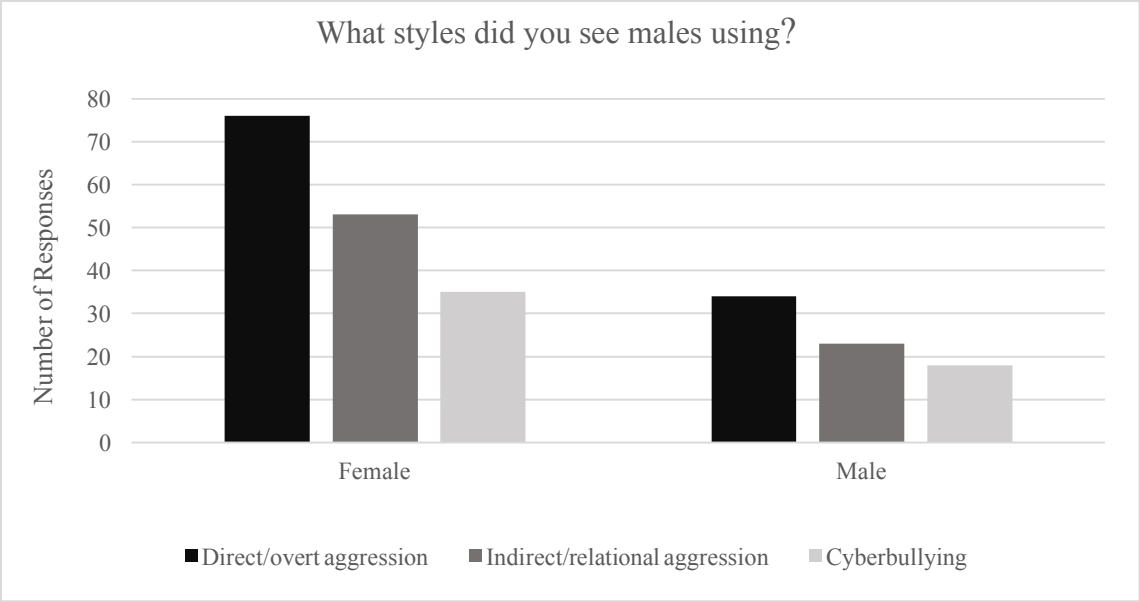

Figure 1. Styles of Bullying Seen Used by Males.

When participants were asked what styles of bullying they witnessed a female using, by selecting all that apply, the highest response overall was cyberbullying (77%). This was followed by indirect/relational aggression (71%) and direct/overt aggression (37%). Similar results were found when responses were categorized by gender, as seen in Figure 2. Out of a total of 105 female participants, 43 (41%) reported witnessing a female use direct/overt aggression, 79 (75%) indirect/relational aggression, and 86 (82%) cyberbullying. In regards to the 47 male participants, 13 (28%) reported witnessing a female use direct/overt aggression, 30 (64%) indirect/relational aggression and 32 (68%) cyberbullying.

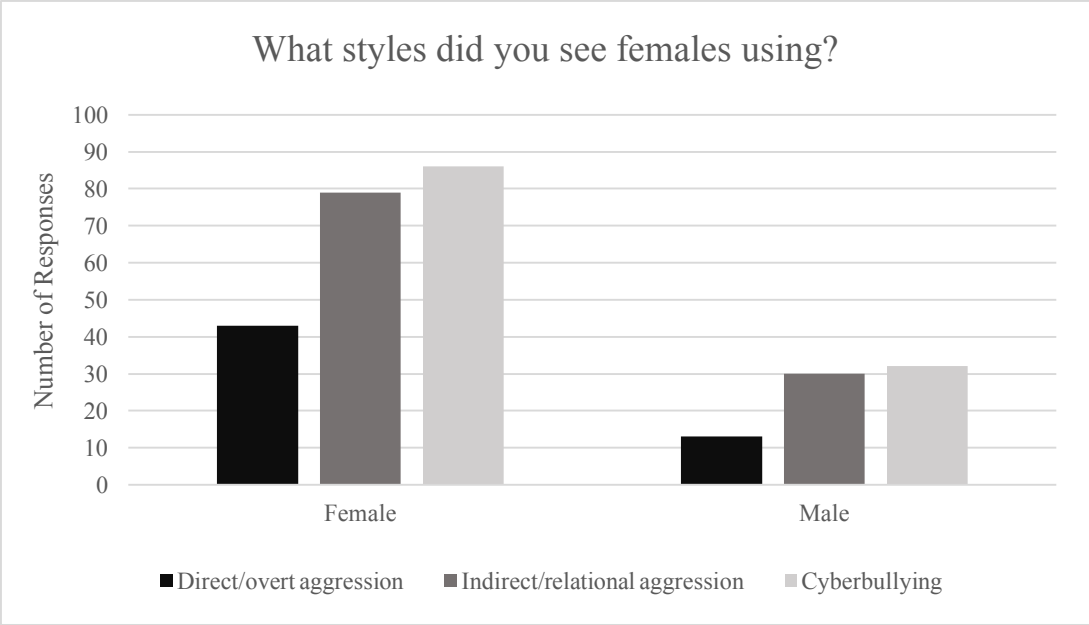

Figure 2. Styles of Bullying Seen Used by Females.

This study sought to examine how participants perceived bullying to determine if gender played a role. The participants' perceptions and interpretations of bullying were assessed through six different questions. The first question asked participants to report who they think causes bullying to occur more: the bully, the victim, or both equally cause. Results are shown in Figure 3 on the following page. For female participants, 12 (11%) reported that both equally cause bullying to occur, 91 (87%) stated that the bully causes bullying most often, and 2 (2%) replied the victim causes bullying to occur more. For the male participants, 13 (27.7%) reported that both equally cause bullying to occur, 32 (68%) stated that the bully causes bullying to occur more, and 2 (4.3%) chose that the victim causes bullying most often.

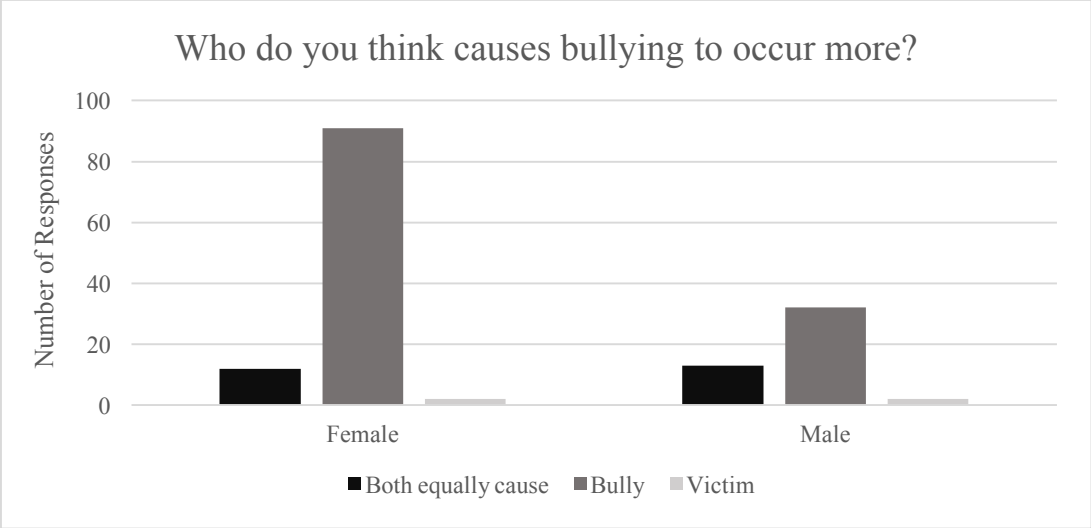

Figure 3. Who causes bullying to occur more?

The second question participants were asked was why do individuals bully. Participants were able to select all answer choices that applied and there were seven total options. These options for why individuals bully included: peer pressure, desire for social status, to control others, previous victim experience, low self-esteem, home life precipitates, and victim precipitates. Analyses for this question were performed three ways: using all total participants, using only females, and using only males. When all total participants were analyzed, the top three highest responses were low self-esteem (89%), followed by desire for social status (85%), and home life precipitates and to control others were tied (78%). When responses were analyzed in regards to gender, the top three responses for females were low self-esteem (91%), followed by desire for social status (87%), and home life precipitates (79%). For males, the most frequent three

responses were low self-esteem (85%), followed by desire for social status (81%), and to control others (79%). The complete results for this question are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Why do Individuals Bully?

	Females (n=105)		Males (n=47)		Total (n=152)	
Reason	**n**	**%**	**n**	**%**	**n**	**%**
Peer Pressure	**77**	**73**	**29**	**61**	**106**	**70**
Desire for Social Status	**91**	**87**	**38**	**81**	**129**	**85**
To Control Others	**81**	**77**	**37**	**79**	**118**	**78**
Previous Victim Experience	**61**	**58**	**30**	**64**	**91**	**60**
Low Self-esteem	**96**	**91**	**40**	**85**	**136**	**89**
Home Life Precipitates	**83**	**79**	**36**	**77**	**119**	**78**
Victim Precipitates	**37**	**35**	**12**	**25**	**49**	**32**

Note. All percentages were rounded to nearest percent.

The third question participants were requested to respond to was why do individuals become a victim. Participants were able to select all answer choices that applied and there were five total options. These options for why individuals become a victim included: perceived physical strength of the victim, appearance of the victim, personality characteristics of the victim, social status of the victim, and victim triggers the bully. Analyses for this question were performed three ways: using all total participants, using only females, and using only males. When all total participants were analyzed, the top three highest responses were personality characteristics of the victim (85%), followed by social status of the victim (82%), and appearance of the victim (80%). When responses were analyzed in regards to gender, the top three responses for females were social status of the victim (86%), followed by personality characteristics of

the victim (84%), and appearance of the victim (77%). For males, the most frequent three responses were appearance of the victim and personality characteristics of the victim tied for first (87%), followed by social status of the victim (74%). The complete results for this question are presented in Table 2 on the following page.

Table 2

Why do Individuals Become a Victim?

Reason	Females (n=105)		Males (n=47)		Total (n=152)	
	n	**%**	**n**	**%**	**n**	**%**
Perceived Physical Strength	**65**	**62**	**33**	**70**	**98**	**64**
Appearance of Victim	**77**	**77**	**41**	**87**	**122**	**80**
Personality Characteristics	**88**	**84**	**41**	**87**	**129**	**85**
Social Status of the Victim	**90**	**86**	**35**	**74**	**125**	**82**
Victim Triggers the Bully	**25**	**24**	**17**	**36**	**42**	**28**

Note. All percentages were rounded to the nearest percent.

The fourth question proposed to participants was which gender do you think bullies more. Response options were females, males, or the genders are equal. For female participants, 49 (47%) answered females, 13 (12%) replied males, and 43 (41%) responded the genders are equal. For the male participants, 16 (34%) responded females, 12 (26%) answered males, and 19 (40%) replied the genders are equal. A graphical representation of this data is presented below in Figure 4.

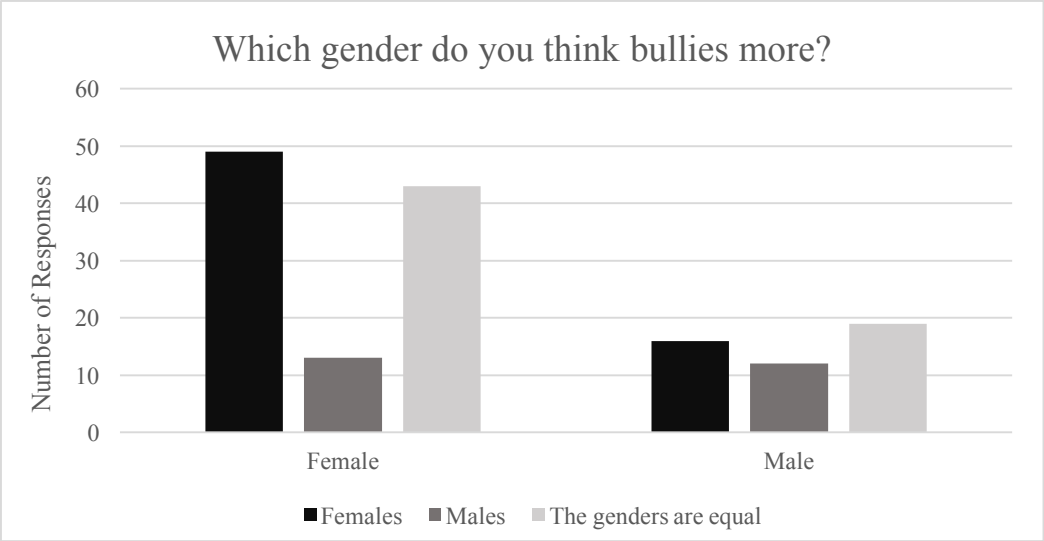

Figure 4. Which gender bullies more.

The fifth question presented to participants was, which style do you think males use more when bullying. Two (2%) of females responded cyberbullying, 99 (94%) answered direct/overt aggression, and 4 (4%) replied indirect/relational aggression. For the males, 2 (4%) answered cyberbullying, 41 (87%) replied direct/overt aggression, and 4 (9%) responded indirect/relational aggression. A graphical representation of these results are presented in Figure 5 below.

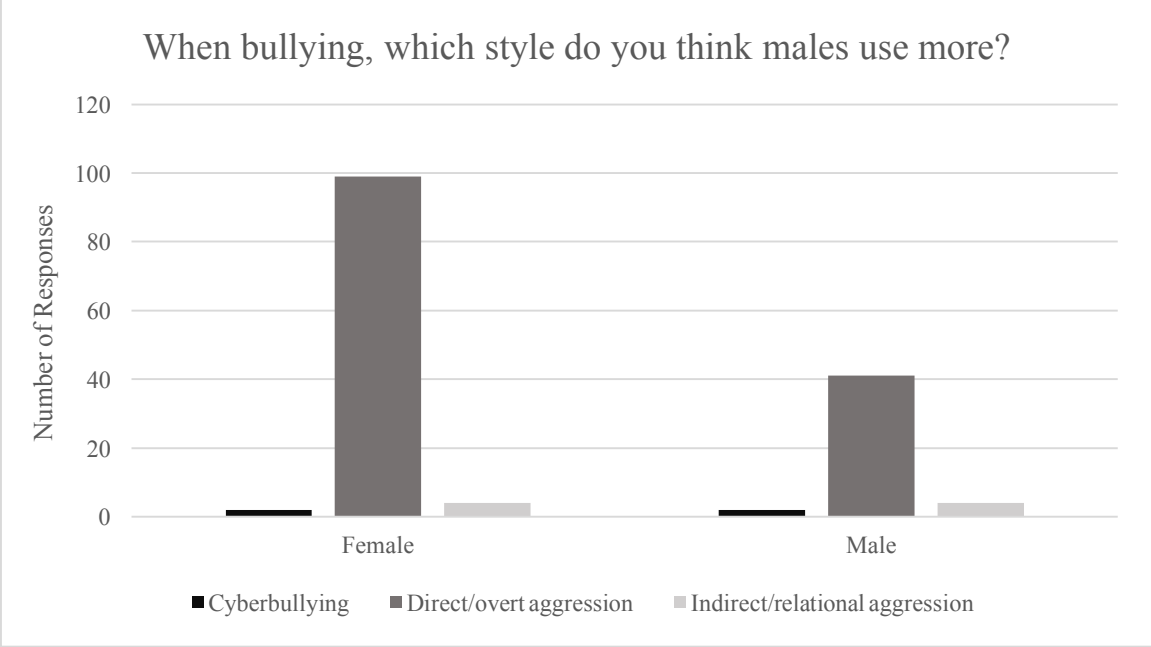

Figure 5. What style of bullying do males use more?

The sixth question participants were asked was, which style do you think females use more when bullying. Forty-four (42%) of females responded cyberbullying, 3 (3%) answered direct/overt aggression, and 58 (55%) replied indirect/relational aggression. For the males, 19 (40%) answered cyberbullying, 3 (6%) replied direct/overt aggression, and 25 (54%) responded indirect/relational aggression. A graphical representation of these results are presented in Figure 6 below.

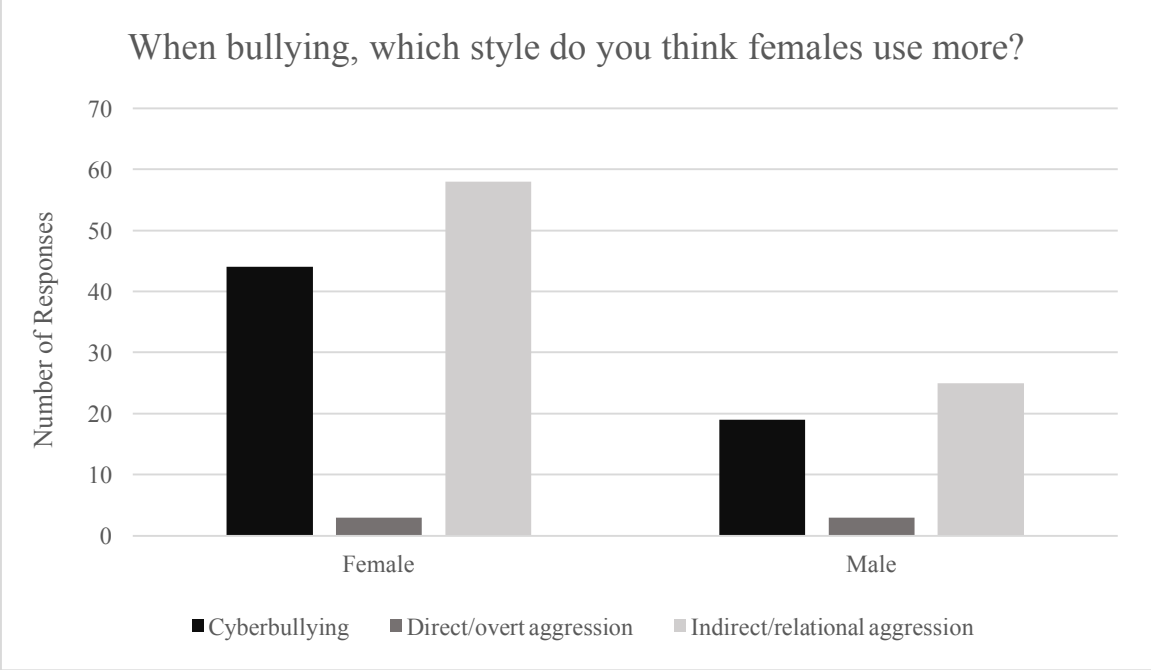

Figure 6. What style of bullying do females use more?

Chapter 5

Discussion

Summary

The purpose of this study was to discover if males and females bully differently. This was done by assessing the high school bullying experiences in which male and female participants reported. Additionally, this research study sought to investigate if differences emerged in how individuals perceive bullying as a result of their gender. It was hypothesized that males would report using more direct/overt aggression when bullying and females would report using more indirect/relational aggression. Unfortunately, due to a low number of participants reporting firsthand involvement in bullying, the hypothesis could not be supported or refuted. Although the proposed hypothesis could not be assessed as hoped, the styles of bullying in which participants reported witnessing males and females using in high school was able to be assessed instead. Participants' perceptions of bullying were also evaluated in this research study through a variety of questions.

Explanation of Findings

It was hypothesized as stated earlier, that the researcher was attempting to assess a difference between gender and styles of bullying used. Although this could not be addressed as intended, the styles of bullying participants witnessed males and females using during their time in high school was evaluated. An analysis revealed that regardless of gender, the most frequent style of bullying participants witnessed males using was direct/overt aggression. Indirect/relational aggression came in as the second highest style males used, with cyberbullying coming in as the lowest reported style. On the other hand,

regardless of gender, the most frequent style of bullying participants witnessed females using was cyberbullying followed by indirect/relational aggression, and then direct/overt aggression. These results support prior research in that males were witnessed using more direct aggression and females more indirect aggression (Bjorkqvist et al., 1992; Rivers & Smith, 1994). It was surprising to discover that females were witnessed using cyberbullying more so than males as this goes against what previous research performed by Li (2006) suggests. This finding may represent a changing preference in the style of bullying chosen by females. The anonymity of cyberbullying could possibly be drawing individuals in to use that style. These results may also indicate a rise in the prevalence of cyberbullying as a whole. A little more than a third of all participants witnessed males using cyberbullying and over three quarters of participants witnessed females using cyberbullying at some time.

The current research study also sought to analyze how participants perceive bullying to determine if gender plays a role. The first question asked participants who they believed caused bullying to occur more: the bully, the victim, or both equally cause. Regardless of gender, the highest response overall was the bully. This finding support prior research performed by Thornberg et al. (2012) in which 80% of their participants attributed the cause of bullying to the bully.

An analysis of participants' responses to why individuals bully revealed the top responses were low self-esteem, desire for social status, to control others, and home life precipitates. Very similar results were found when participants' responses were broken down according to their gender. Results of this question strongly support findings from a previous study performed by Frisen et al. (2007) whose participants claimed low-self

esteem was the most frequent reason why someone became a bully. These results also support prior research by Thornberg et al. (2012) who discovered that psychosocial problems and social positioning were the highest reported reasons for someone becoming a bully. These results represent a closely synonymous understanding between males and females for why individuals decide to become a bully.

Examining the results of another question involving why individuals become a victim of bullying also supported the research performed by Thornberg et al. (2012). In the current study, participants chose personality characteristics, social status of the victim, and appearance of the victim to be the highest reason in which someone would be a victim which supports the previous study (Thornberg et al., 2012). The findings from this question are quite interesting when gender is also addressed. For females, social status of the victim was the highest response whereas for males, personality and appearance were tied for first. The highest response for females may be explained by their inclination to bully based on gaining and maintaining close friendships, therefore social status may be of more importance to them (Bjorkqvist et al., 1992). The highest responses for males may indicate their care for an individual's appearance and personality more so than females, however more research is required to better explain these results.

Results from the question which gender do participants think bullies more delivered some surprising results. For female participants, the highest response was females followed by the genders being equal, and lastly males. For males, the highest response was the genders are equal, followed by females, and then males. These results are not as expected, in prior research individuals stated they believed males bully much

more frequently than females (Athanasiades & Deliyanni-Kouimtzis, 2010). This result could represent a change in the bullying patterns of gender since the prior study was performed, or possibly a difference in bullying experiences of participants included in the current study.

The final question in relation to participants' perceptions of bullying assessed what style of bullying they think males and females use most. Regardless of gender, males were thought to use more direct/overt aggression and females were thought to use more indirect/relational aggression. This finding supports the discoveries that were made in previous studies (Athanasiades & Deliyanni-Kouimtzis, 2010; Giles and Heyman, 2005). It is interesting to note that for males, direct/overt aggression surpassed the other choices by many responses. But, for females indirect/relational aggression came in first but cyberbullying was still a very close second. This finding is surprising as prior research suggests that males are involved in cyberbullying as a cyberbully much more frequently than females (Li, 2006). This result signifies a possible change in the dynamics of cyberbullying that may need to be further assessed.

Implications

The findings from the current style imply that potentially there are differences in the styles of bullying used by males and females. Additionally, the results relating to perceptions of bullying suggest that one's gender may influence their views and understanding of a bullying situation in some cases. This information may help the general population to better understand bullying and its relation to one's gender. By acknowledging the potential differences between genders and how it relates to bullying, improvements may be made in decreasing the overall bullying frequencies in schools.

Limitations

This study was limited as it could not assess if males and females actually report using one style of bullying over another. With that said, other questions in the survey were used that reported what styles participants witnessed a male or female using. Although these results support the hypothesis, they do not prove that males and females actually use those styles more. The current study was also limited because its sample consisted of participants who were all enrolled in Essentials of Psychology at the same university. Additionally, there was an unequal ratio of males to females in the sample which could have limited analyses. Finally, although all responses were anonymous, this study relied on participants' honesty and accurate self-reporting. Some individuals may have been embarrassed to admit they were bullied or involved in bullying. Participants may have feared their responses would be linked back to them somehow which could have had an impact on the small amount of bullying involvement reported.

Future Research

Future research into the gender differences in bullying and perceptions of bullying should include more participants from a diverse population. Future studies should also seek to acquire an equal ratio of male to female participants. Additionally, results of this study could be used to design a new study that focuses more on the gender differences in cyberbullying. This study revealed gender differences in cyberbullying may not be as understood as anticipated. New studies could start to untangle these gender variations.

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