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The Effects of Bullying on Identity

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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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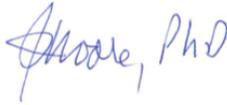
The Effects of Bullying on Identity

This is to certify that the Capstone Project of

Fortino Rodriguez Sanchez

Has been approved by the faculty advisor and the CE 695 – Capstone Project

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Abstract

This paper will explore the impact that bullying has on identity formation. Peers play a crucial

role in identity formation for they encourage or discourage exploration of identity. The area of

interest is identifying the types of bullying, potential targets and its effects on academics, mental

health and prevention. Bullying negatively affects identity, academics, and has severe mental

health and long-term consequences for the victim, bully and witnesses. Bullying can be

prevented if awareness is raised on the issue. Educating the children and parents on bullying is

an important step in prevention. Children need to be taught not only what bullying is but also

what they should do if they see it happening or are the target. By educating parents, they can not

only discuss the topics with the children, but also be aware of potential signs of bullying and get

the child the appropriate help. Another method to prevent bullying is school-based intervention.

KEYWORDS: Identity, mental health, bullying

Contents

Introduction

Erik Erikson believed that personality evolves through eight systematic changes. Each of these stages was viewed as a crisis that a person must overcome to move to the next one. The resolution of each stage effects how the next step will play out. Erik believed that biology, social maturation and cultural environment were the factors that help an individual push through each step. Erick Erikson (1968) described his fifth stage of identity vs role confusion as a crucial point in a teenager's life. Erickson believed teenagers begin to form their identity during this stage. Erickson's fifth stage of identity vs role confusion tends to happen when an individual is in between the ages of twelve and twenty. Teens do not go through this phase exactly when they turn twelve. Some teenagers experience a crisis earlier than others and their personalities might make them questions things at different ages. Cultural norms as well might create a crisis or hinder it. During this period of time adolescences, begin to question their beliefs and try to form their own identity separate of their parents. Some of the most common things teens question is their sexuality, religious beliefs, political views, goals in life and their cultural identity. During this time, also teens are going through physical changes, so they reevaluate their views of themselves (Sigelman & Rider, 2015).

As mentioned earlier biology, society and cultural environment help an individual through Erickson's eight stages of psychological development. During these years, adolescents experience more freedom and are able to test out who they are. Encouragement and support are two crucial things that help teens explore their identity. Identity is described by Sigelman and Rider (2015) as a person's "overall sense of who they are, where they are heading, and where they fit in society" (pg. 209). Marcia (1966) developed four identity statuses that adolescences undergo as they form identity. The ideal status for adolescences is the achievement status

because of the crisis the teen has resolved it and made a commitment to a belief or value for example.

Even though adolescences make a committed to a particular, beliefs or idea they can changed with time. A person identity continues to evolve throughout a person's life because of a different crisis that is experienced or exposure to other ideals, beliefs or goals. Klismtra and Hale (2010) concluded that for the most part teens do have a stable identity and that as adolescences got older they tended to do more in deep exploration about their identities. If a teenager decided to change their identity in later in life, they tend to be progressive for the most part. (van Hoof, 1999). This paper will explore the impact that bullying has on identity formation. Peers play a crucial role in identity formation for they encourage or discourage exploration of identity. The area of interest is identifying the types of bullying, potential target and its effects on academics, mental health and prevention. Bullying negatively impacts identity and has severe mental health and long-term consequences for the victim, bully and witnesses.

Review of Literature

Bullying Forms and Prevalence

The National Centre Against Bullying (2019) described bullying as "an individual or a group of people with more power, repeatedly and intentionally cause hurt or harm to another person or group of people who feel helpless to respond. Bullying can continue over time, is often hidden from adults, and will probably continue if no action is taken" (pg. 1). Bullying is a problem that affects a good portion of our youth. The U.S Department of Health and Human Services (2016) reported that roughly 25%-33% of students report been bullied in school. Bullying has been observed in all grade levels from elementary school to college. Bullying is more common in middle school followed by high school.

There are four types of bullying; physical, verbal, hidden and cyber bullying. Physical bullying involves physical actions like hitting or pushing. Verbal bullying involves the usage of words hurt the individual like insulting them directly name-calling. Hidden bullying tends to happen behind the individuals back. In hidden bullying, the bully normally spreads rumors or encourages isolating their target. Cyberbullying is fairly new and has become more common as the result of technological advances. Technology like cell phones, computers and social media are used to cyberbully an individual. Unlike the other types, cyberbullying can be overt or covert. Overt cyberbullying is directly sending hurtful messages, pictures through some form of technology. In covert cyberbullying, an individual is excluded or gossiped about for example on social media or group messages (The National Centre Against Bullying, 2019). Boys were found to be more likely than girls to be the initiators of bullying as well as the victims in the United States. It was found that males are more likely to use physical bullying while females use hidden bullying. (Young-Jones, Fursa, Byrket , Sly, 2015).

Bullying can affect anyone but "recent immigrants, gays and lesbian youth and youth with disabilities get more than their fair share of bullying" (Sigelman & Rider, 2015, pg. 525). Bully's tend to choose individuals who also have a hard time defending themselves as well because they are viewed as easy targets. Bullies might also chosen to victimize others because they find it enjoyable and want things like peer acceptance, power, money and sense of control (Sigelman & Rider, 2015). The U.S Department of Health and Human Services (2016) mentioned that another reason kids might decide to engage in bullying is because they want to copy some of the behaviors of their peers.

Bullying and Academics

Bullying affects students academically. When children enter middle school, they begin to think about their futures in high school and careers they want to pursue. Adams and Lawrence (2011) mentioned that bullying tends to happen more often in middle school. Juvonen and Wang (2011) conducted a 3-year long experiment to measure the effect of bullying on academic performance. They concluded that high levels of bullying were associated with poor grades and disengagement from school. It is believed that bullying makes kids nervous and thus are unable to concentrate on the task they have to complete. A short social exclusion experiment was conducted by Baumeister, Twenge and Nuss (2002) on college students to see how bullying would affect their performance on a test score and those who were bullied performed worse than those who were not socially excluded. In the experiment by Adam and Lawrence (2011) the students who were bullied had a 1.5 lower grade letter than those who did not report bullying. A similar finding was found by the University of California, Los Angeles. Wolpert (2010) stated that there is a correlation between bullying and school performance. They stated that kinds who are bullied do not feel safe in the school and are more likely to not participate in class out of fear

of being bullied. These kids are also more likely to not want to attend school and dislike it.

Bullying has serious effects on a child's academic success and even their desire to stay in school.

Fullchange and Furlong (2016) mentioned that there is a correlation between children that are

bullied and high school dropout rates. Children who are bullied unfortunately do not get to form

a positive identity about their education goals and instead see as an unpleasant experience.

Bullying has been known to affect teen's identity. Aside from being victimized those who

are bullied are also excluded and viewed as outcast by others. Their poor performance in school

as well as isolation or teasing by their peers discourages teens to explore their personalities and

education goals. Children do not focus on their academics and instead are at higher risk of

developing mental health disorders as a result of constantly being anxious or depressed in an

environment that should foster learning.

Bullying and Mental Health

Bullying has been associated with a variety of mental health disorders and can be a very

traumatic even for the victim, bully and the bystanders. Part of a person identity is developing

positive habits, beliefs and growth. Wolpert (2010) reported that "middle school children who

are bullied are likely to feel depressed and lonely" (pg.2). The U.S Department of Health and

Human Services (2016) stated that kids who are bullied are more likely to feel "Depression and

anxiety, increased feelings of sadness and loneliness, changes in sleep and eating patterns, and

loss of interest in activities they used to enjoy"(pg. 5). If a child loses interest in activities, they

enjoy they will not take the time to further explore those activities and decided if it is something

they want to pursue. Depression can be developed because children who are bullied are usually

excluded and thus feel alone. They tend to have a harder time making friends and feel like they

are helpless because they cannot change their situation. Victims may experience anxiety about

going to school and disengage from school because they are scared of being victimized. Aside

from being at higher risk of developing mental health disorders children might become more

aggressive. Kaltila-Heino, Frojd and Marttunen (2011) stated that kids who were bullied were

more likely to engage in violent-related behaviors. Boys who are victims were more likely to

engage in criminal behavior while girls were more likely to self-harm. They concluded that being

bullied at fifteen predicted depression for both males and females when they were seventeen. A

second question that children ask themselves during their teen years is where they fit in the

world. If a teen feels alone and has a hard time making friends, they will not resolve their

identity crisis because they will think that they do not belong. Teens that are bullied have lower

self-stem and think that they are outcast who do not deserved to live.

   Kids who were bullied are more likely to have lower self-efficacy for assertion but

instead have high self-efficacy for aggression. Bullied kids are also more likely to have higher

rates of emotion dysregulation and less self-control than their peers. Also, teens who are bullied

are more likely to have lower levels of optimism and higher levels of distress. When children

desire to explore their identity is denied they might respond by not becoming assertive sense they

are being excluded or become aggressive to gain acceptance or even some form of attention from

those who ignore them.

   There are long term consequences for individuals who are bullied and their identity.

Bullying was described as a cycle that continues passed middle school though. Adams and

Larwrence (2011) concluded that students who were bullied in middle school or high school

were also victimized in college. They continued to be excluded and abused by their peers in

college. Kaltila-Heino, Frojd and Marttunen (2011) mentioned that individuals who are bullied

"experience difficulties with social-emotional functioning and adjustment". These individuals

tend to struggle to make friends and have poor relationships with their peers as a result. The sixth step of Erickson's stages of development is intimacy vs role confusion. When a teenager cannot have healthy relationships, they miss out on opportunities to commit and thus are not likely to resolve the next phases of Erickson's development. Kaltila-Heino, Frojd and Marttunen (2011) go on to say that children who experience bullying between the ages of 7-11 were more likely to have worse physical and mental health issues than those who were not bullied. Those were bullied had higher rates of suicidality, depression, anxiety disorders, alcohol dependence, psychological distress, poorer general health, decreased cognitive functioning, lower socioeconomic circumstances, fewer social relationships and diminished well-being (Takizawa, Maughan, Arseneault, 2014).

Sigelman and Rider (2012) point out the importance of peer acceptance and how children who are victimized and excluded do not develop like their peers and lose out on opportunities. These kids can develop a sense of who their friends are and start to distrust people. Some teenagers begin to resent their peers and in the most severe cases bullying might lead the victims to retaliate as a result of their bullying like in the case of Virginia Tech Shooter, Seung Hui Cho. The U.S Department of Health and Human Services stated that "12 of 15 school shootings in the 1900s, the shooters had a history of being bullied. When a child is bullied their identity can lead to abnormal behavior and ideals like Seng Hui Cho.

Bullies also suffer as a result of their actions and their identity does not fully develop as well. One of the risk bullies run is that they are more likely to develop alcohol and substance abuse problems as teens and adults. Children who are bullied are also likely to develop depression and turn to drugs as a way to escape their reality. Secondly bullies are at higher risk of being abusive in their future relationships with their children, partners. When bullied are

abusive they cannot have positive relationships and feel alone. They are also more likely to drop out of school and engaged in early sexual activity. When a bully drops out they lose out on opportunities of academic advancement and not develop a concreate idea on their education beliefs. Bullies have higher chances of engaging in criminal activity when they are older and have more traffic violations than their peers (The U.S Department of Health and Human Services, 2016).

Bystanders who witness bullying are at risk of experiencing symptoms even if they are not the one being bullied. As mentioned previously seeing someone getting bullied might encourage the individual to be part of it and become a bully themselves. Secondly those who witness bullying are more likely to develop mental health problems like anxiety or depression. When bullying happens kids might not feel safe or simply be uncomfortable in the environment that it happens. If children don't feel they can do something about the issue they might also feel helpless in their environment and become anxious that they might also be victimized. As a result, kids are more likely to miss school and avoid that environment all together. Some kids might internalize what they see differently and find other ways of coping with it. Children who witness bullying are more likely to drink, use drugs and smoke tobacco (The U.S Department of Health and Human Services, 2016). Witnessing bullying is sufficient to lead kids to develop negative views of school, themselves and distract them from exploring their identity.

Conclusion

Bullying can be prevented if awareness is raised on the issue. Polanin and Vera (2013) mentioned that cultural awareness is one of the issues that children need to be taught. American schools are becoming more diverse as a result of ethnic minorities growing. As mentioned previously in the text some of the children who are targeted are usually immigrant

children. These children are vulnerable from a variety of reasons from language barriers, looking different than their peers and not being as financially stable. Children form many of their stereotypes by age four and it is those stereotypes that lead them to discriminate and isolate some of their peers. Schools and parents can talk to their children about other cultures in the world and create positive awareness so that children do not form negative stereotypes or at least change the ones they have. This is a crucial awareness piece because one of the largest components of identity understands one's ethnic identity. When children show biases or discrimination simply because of someone ethnic background it can lead to the person developing negative attitudes about themselves and inhibit cultural exploration.

Educating the children on bullying is an important step in preventing. Children need to be taught not only what bullying is but what they should do if they see it happening or are the target. Having kids and teenagers roleplay is a great way in teaching them how to stop bullying if they encounter it. Other activities they can do include discussion on how they would speak out against it and make them aware of the resources that they have. Schools can assess bullying by performing anonymous surveys questioning the prevalence of bullying and determine locations where it tends to happen. The staff can then have a better understanding of how common bullying is in their school and take measured to prevent bullying in those common spots. Schools should be able to measure their efforts and conduct various surveys to see if their efforts are decreasing rates of bullying incidents. Schools can also survey all the staff from teachers to the bus driver to see what they are noticing and their thoughts on prevention. Training staff on what bullying prevention and school policies are effective ways in help them better handle it if they witness it and help prevent it (The U.S Department of Health and Human Services).

Also, schools can get parents involved. If parents participate they become more educated on the topic and help prevent bullying in school. They can educate their kids and set clear guidelines on what is expected of them. Having parents participate can put parents at ease because they know they are helping decrease bullying in the school. Also, by having parents involve there is more people who can monitor school grounds. As a result of having parents participate teacher can focus on their work while student will feel safer in their school and focus on learning (The U.S Department of Health and Human Services)**.**

Another method to prevent bullying is school based intervention. Schools can have children participate in groups and have them perform bonding activities together. The goal of such task is to get the children to work together and developed cooperative learning and positive attitudes about their classmates. Another activity schools can have the children partake in is empathy training. Children can learn to distinct what people are feeling by having them analyze faces of people from different ethnic backgrounds. Exposing them to different facial expressions of ethnic backgrounds is also meant to teach them to see that people of that group also feel those same feelings. This technique is ideal for children because attitudes on other ethnicities can be easily change. Children in the process become better at reading people's emotions, which can increase their awareness of how their peers might feel (Polanin & Vera, 2013). These prevention methods can create a safe environment in school and encourage identity exploration. When kids receive encouragement and feel safe in school they feel comfortable exploring their identity and focus on resolving the crisis that they experience.

Author's Note

      I primarily have worked with adults for most of my career in mental health. Growing up, bullying existed but back then, it was predominantly name-calling and physical. As technology grew drastically, the term cyber bullying began to pop up during my high school years. As I continued to get older, I would hear about these horrendous stories in the news and it began to concern me. It was roughly around this time that my younger sister began elementary school and I dreaded that this was a potential hazard for her.

      My sister is the reason I began to develop interest in the topic of bullying and its effects on a child's identity. I wanted to educate myself so that I could be better prepare to discuss this topic with my younger sister. As I became more educated on the subject, I did have the conversion with her and not only is she better informed on the subject but have reminded her I am part of her support system. Not only did I want to become educated on the topic, but as a clinician be able to educate others on the dangers that bullying can have on a child.

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