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Evaluating the Effectiveness of Empathy Skills Training in Reducing Schadenfreude of Students with Bullying Tendencies: A Single Case Research Design

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EVALUATING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF EMPATHY SKILLS TRAINING IN REDUCING
SCHADENFREUDE OF STUDENTS WITH BULLYING TENDENCIES: A SINGLE CASE
RESEARCH DESIGN

A Thesis

by

MARÍA CECILIA MONTENEGRO

Submitted to the Graduate College of
The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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May 2018

Major Subject: Counseling and Guidance

EVALUATING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF EMPATHY SKILLS TRAINING IN REDUCING
SCHADENFREUDE OF STUDENTS WITH BULLYING TENDENCIES: A SINGLE CASE
RESEARCH DESIGN

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ABSTRACT

Montenegro, María C., Evaluating the effectiveness of empathy skills training in reducing *schadenfreude* of students with bullying tendencies: A single case design study. Master of Education (M.Ed.), May, 2018, 41 pp., 2 tables, 2 graphical representations, 1 figure, references, 85 titles.

Main researcher implemented a small series (N=3) single-case research design to assess the effectiveness of a five-session empathy skills training for elementary-aged children. An analysis of participants' scores on *schadenfreude* and empathy levels using the percentage of data points exceeding the median (PEM) yielded non-conclusive results concerning the training's effectiveness. The present study makes the argument that these results might be a consequence of self-reporting errors concerning social desirability and limited training sessions, and then it presents other possible forms of measurement for *schadenfreude* and empathy.

Keywords: *schadenfreude*, bullying, empathy, elementary school, single-case research design, points exceeding the median

DEDICATION

To say that the completion of my master's degree would not have been possible without the help of my family is an understatement. My husband, Gabriel González Nunez, my best friend, my biggest support and comfort, deserves as much credit as I do. He never ceased to encourage me, and because of him I was able to believe I could do it. My daughters, Belén and Noemi González, have been my biggest motivation to continue even when the road was filled with obstacles. My hope is that one day they can become inspired and pursue their own masters' and beyond. My mother, Raquel Luzuriaga de Montenegro: Gracias mama. Sin vos no seria, y sin voy no soy. Te quiero. Gracias por ser mi mama. Mi hada madrina que me ayudo a cumplir mis sueños, no con deseos sino con esfuerzo y ahínco. My father, Enrique Carlos Montenegro. Gracias por ser la persona más honrada, y digno de admiración que conozco. A mis hermanos, Andres y Daniel Montenegro, los quiero. Nuestras travesuras de infancia me ayudaron a crecer en amor y seguridad. Finally, my loving "suegros" Walter F. González, y Zulma Anahir Núñez de González. Los quiero mucho. Gracias por ver mi potencial y saber que era capaz de más de lo que aparentaba. Thank you all. This thesis was a combined effort, and because of you all I was able to complete it.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Since 1989, the television show America's Funniest Home Videos broadcasts situations in which individuals experience different embarrassing, and sometimes painful, situations. The first video ever aired, for example, had a woman whose head got caught in a household appliance. These videos are seen as entertainment and comedy ("America's Funniest Home Videos," 2009), and thus present *schadenfreude* in its purest form: pleasure at the expense of another's misfortune (English Oxford Living Dictionaries, 2018).

The present study aims to shed light on the relationship among empathy, bullying, and the concept of *schadenfreude*. In order to do this, it will discuss the involvement that empathy plays in both *schadendreude* and bullying. The question that arises in this context is whether *schadenfreude* can be diminished by elevating empathic skills. The hypothesis is then formulated that children who are taught empathy can diminish their level of *schadendreude*. To test this hypothesis, the researcher carried out instruction at an elementary school on the moral value of empathy through bi-weekly lessons. An assessment was then carried out to measure whether *schadenfreude* levels experienced a change. The prediction in designing the study was that after children were exposed to lessons designed to elevate empathy, there would be a measurable change in children's level of *schadenfreude*.

Schadenfreude

Schadenfreude is a German compound word, in which *Schaden* means harm, and *Freude* means joy (van Dijk & Ouwerkerk, 2014). Translating the word in a literal manner leaves us with the compound word *harmjoy* (McNamee, 2007). According to the Oxford English Dictionary (OED), *schadenfreude* is defined as a malevolent pleasure derived from the misfortunes of others (“Oxford English Dictionary,” 2018). OED points to the citation of the word in the 1852 book “On the Study of Words,” written by Richard Chevenix Trench, Archbishop of Dublin, writer, and poet (“The Dean and Chapter of Westminster,” 2018). In it he expresses:

Thus what a fearful thing is it that any language should have a word expressive of the pleasure which men feel at the calamities of others; for the existence of the word bears testimony to the existence of the thing (p. 29).

Despite its history rooted in a malicious form of *schadenfreude*, in the year 2000 philosopher Portman expressed discomfort with the malevolent portion accompanying the definition of *schadenfreude*. He congratulated Walter Kaufmann, Nietzsche’s editor for “On the Genealogy of Morals” (Nietzsche, 2010), for eliminating the malevolent element of *schadenfreude*. For Kaufmann, *schadenfreude*’s translation should rather convey an element of mischievousness. John Portman, further explains that it should be seen as a morally appropriate emotion felt as a consequence to justice. For Portman (2014) we feel pleasure when a person who acted in a dishonest manner receives the punishment we feel they deserve, thus the pleasure we feel through their demise comes from a sense of justice being served.

Adding to this, Aaron Ben-Ze-ev (2000) argued that the misfortune befalling a person who we believe deserves it allows us to restore our sense of justice, thus enabling us to find enjoyment in an otherwise sadness-inducing situation. This belief of justice being served thus

enables us to be in a high moral ground since our enjoyment of the misfortune comes from a sense of justice being restored. Ben-Ze-ev also noted that “The more deserved the misfortune is, the more justified is the pleasure” (p. 81). Despite these rather positive notes concerning *schadenfreude*, this researcher finds that the pleasure at the expense of another person’s dismay silences what could be a more productive response (e.g., empathy). Empathy is the “[t]he ability to understand and appreciate another person's feelings, experience, etc.” (“Oxford English Dictionary,” 2018). Furthermore, empathy allows for the display of behaviors that are intended to assist others, improve relationship with others, and increase personal emotional health (Zaki & Cikara, 2015).

Schadenfreude can be anteceded by a number of factors, and this study will consider the following: stereotyping, low self-worth, and deservingness. By analyzing these three factors, the present study will indicate that there seems to be a strong relationship between bullying and *schadenfreude*. It is appropriate to next turn our attention to bullying

Bullying

The term “bullying”, which conjures the graphic image of a bull charging at full speed, has been defined by Olweus (1993) as what occurs when one person has a higher degree of power than another person and negatively exerts that power over that other person. When the bully exerts his or her power in this way, the imbalance in the relationship causes the victim to become (or feel) defenseless.

Bullying behavior can be direct or indirect. Direct bullying is the use of insults or physical attacks on another, and indirect bullying is the damage produced against a victim’s sense of belonging (e.g., ignoring or social exclusion) (Olweus, 1993). In this study, only traditional bullying behavior will be considered because much is still unresolved in the ever-

evolving world of cyberbullying (Froeschle Hicks, Le Clair, & Berry, 2016). In the case of traditional bullying, moral deficiency has been shown to predict its development (Sticca, & Parren, 2015). Fortunately, victimization of others can be reduced through preventative work if started early on in children (Monks, 2012).

As with *schadenfreude*, bullying will be reviewed in terms of the presence of three antecedent factors: stereotyping, low self-worth, and deservingness. In the next section, a literature review will identify aspects that suggest bullying and *schadenfreude* have a connecting link. This connection places them together in the spectrum of non-social responding when others are either in need or lacking social fitting attributes.

Schadenfreude and Bullying, Close Allies

Schadenfreude and Stereotypes

As indicated above, *schadenfreude* can be preceded by stereotyping. The present study will utilize the *Oxford English* dictionary definition of stereotype as the “[p]reconceived and oversimplified idea of the characteristics which typify a person, situation, etc,” and “[a]n attitude based on such a preconception.” (“OED,” 2018). Stereotyping others requires us to view those we perceive as different as belonging to an out-group. This leads to blurring of in-group differences and a stressing of differences between groups (Wright & Lopez, 2011). This phenomenon has the potential for negative outcomes. In a study involving a larceny case, it was shown that racial bias caused for a reduction of empathic feelings and a harsher punishment for the defendants (Johnson et al., 2002). Furthermore, individuals who are outside a person’s social group can be dehumanized by members of the in-group who can also then feel a sense of disgust toward these individuals that do not belong to the group (Harris & Fiske, 2006).

Concerning *schadenfreude*, depending on the target, individuals can not only feel pleasure when experiencing an outgroup member's misfortune but also a willingness to harm them (Cikara, Botvinick, & Fiske, 2011). This is a problem because when individuals feel the sense of belonging to a specific group more strongly and see other individuals as not being part of the in-group, researchers found these individuals become more prone to harming those who are envied and/or considered to belong to outside groups (Cikara & Fiske, 2013). It has been observed that *schadenfreude* resonates with our less compassionate side (Smith, 2013). Experiencing *schadenfreude* because of stereotypes seem to be characterized by a lack of empathy since it breaks the link between observing people's pain and feeling motivated to assist them (Cikara & Fiske, 2013). In *schadenfreude*, there is a joy in somebody else's pain (Smith, 2013). At the end of that spectrum, empathic processes help us not only understand the inner state of others but also prompt us to reach out to help. Such processes are important in order to experience positive human interaction (Tomasello, 2009). Furthermore, empathic inclinations have been shown to reduce biases being held against outgroup members of different races (Johnson et al., 2002).

Bullying and Stereotypes

In the case of bullying based on negative racial stereotypes, Phelan and Rudman (2010) studied the impact of stereotypes and racial backlash. They were able to observe that those individuals in minority groups who are stereotyped into fulfilling a certain role are then penalized when breaking the mold. In the case of Whites (majority group), it is accepted they fulfilled non-stereotypical roles only if it maintains the "racial status quo" (p. 278). Phelan and Rudman conclude that violation of a racial stereotypes and negative reactions go hand in hand. In the school setting, students with a higher family socio-economic status who come from an

expected racial and ethnical disadvantaged background, experience the most bullying victimization, and face disrupted academic success (Peguero, & Williams, 2013).

Bullying because of negative stereotyping does not only entail race or ethnic background, but it can also be the product of other biases. According to Rukavine and Li (2008), individuals can also face bias because of weight. Individuals who are overweight or obese can be attributed characteristics such as laziness, lack of motivation, unappealing, and incompetence. In addition, the Obesity Action Coalition indicates that “[m]ultiple forms of weight stigmatization also occur in educational settings. Students affected by obesity face numerous obstacles, ranging from harassment and rejection from peers at school, to biased attitudes from teachers, lower college acceptances and wrongful dismissals from college.” Furthermore, “[n]egative attitudes have been reported among pre-school children (ages three to five) who associated peers affected by obesity with characteristics of being mean, stupid, ugly and having few friends.” (“Understanding Obesity Stigma,” 2017, p. 6). Unfortunately, Puhl, Luedicke, and Heuer (2011) were able to find that students who were overweight experienced the mean-spirited teasing, name calling, and social avoidance, and they were victims of detrimental rumors as reported by peers.

Going back to Portman (2000, 2014), *schadenfreude* can enable us restore our sense of balance in a world that is often unjust. As can be seen in the aforementioned review, stereotyping actually distorts that sense of restoration in the sense that it opens the door to the belief that others suffer because they deserve it due to their ethnical or cultural background. In more extreme cases, it can lead us to desire or even cause that suffering ourselves. This issue is not simply academic. It is important to note that during a dark age in our history, Nazis felt pleasure in the suffering of Jewish people. Smith (2013) pointed out: “...this extreme example of *schadenfreude* is partly explained by unconscious envy transmuted into resentment. When this

happens, the envious person can rationalize and justify extreme forms of *schadenfreude*, as well as aggression” (p. 193). It seems that when not in check, *schadenfreude* can mutate from a sense of justice to a form of direct bullying: physical aggression.

Schadenfreude and Deservingness

Deservingness is the notion of justice in an outcome or the idea that the individual who receives the outcome receives it meritoriously or appropriately (e.g., the person experiencing the misfortune deserved what happened to him/her). Deservingness, as stated above, can also antecede *schadenfreude* so that not all *schadenfreude* comes from stereotyping. Sometimes we feel pleasure when a person who acted in a dishonest manner receives the punishment we feel they deserve; thus, the pleasure we feel through their demise comes from a sense of justice being served (Portman, 2014). *Schadenfreude*, in this sense, can be seen as a byproduct of our desire for a just world (Smith, 2013; Pietraszkiewicz, 2013). In some cases, people can feel an in-group member’s positive outcome to be more deserved than an out-group member’s positive outcome; along the same lines, an out-group member’s negative outcome is also considered as being more deserved than an in-group member’s negative outcome (Feather, & McKee, 2013). One concern with deservingness being a cause for *schadenfreude* is that it raises the possibility of developing resentment. Individuals who were considered to deserve failure triggered in others less sympathy and also more resentment over their success (Feather, Wenzel, & McKee, 2013).

Another concern about perceiving a person’s misfortune as deservedly just is that, as human beings, our assessment of the reasons behind another person’s actions can often be faulty. It is this researcher’s claim that the extent to which a person can fairly measure deservingness on another person’s misfortune can be flawed at best and dangerously cruel at worst. Before experiencing pleasure at the expense of another person’s dismay, and before passing judgment

on that person's deservingness, a clearer picture of the situation should be assessed to prevent *schadenfreude* from evolving into cruelty. Deservingness as an assessment for a person's responsibility for his/her misfortune seems a risky endeavor, and one that is prone to malicious judgment when a lack of information comes into play. This is especially troubling when considering that *schadenfreude* can be felt over a sense of undeserved achievement in an envied target (Feather, 2014).

Bullying and Deservingness

In the case of bullying, Hara (2002) observes that most children in his sample of 100 students thought that in certain instances bullying behavior was appropriate. Furthermore, all of the students with bullying tendencies being studied blamed the attacks on the victims' personal characteristics, ranging from behavior to personality. This finding is disturbing, considering that victims of bullying include those that have physical or mental disabilities, those who are introverted or shy, and those students who have a stigmatized appearance (Wong, Cheng, & Chen, 2013). In other words, students are being singled out by bullies for being the way they are due to some inherent characteristic. They are being emotionally and physically hurt because of such traits. Unfortunately, bystanders, bullies, and even teachers have a tendency to blame the victim for "provoking others through ill-advised words, lack of awareness of their speech and behavior, or bullying acts against others" (Wong, Cheng, & Chen, 2013, p. 285). Bullies, bystanders, and teachers also believe that victims provoked the bullies and should take responsibility for it (Wong, Cheng, & Chen, 2013). In another study, teenagers were interviewed to assess their opinion on bullies and the reasons behind their aggression. The study showed that out of the hundred and seventy-six students interviewed, the most common response given to explain bullying was that of a deviant victim. In other words, bullying was explained in terms of

the *victim* being deviant, different, or odd, and thus responsibility lay with the victim. Thirty-six percent of the sample used the explanation of a deviant victim as the reason for bullying. This was the most represented subcategory among 26 possible explanations for the occurrence of bullying. Other students explained bullying as a result of the victims having done something bad previously so that bullying occurred as revenge or payback (Thornberg & Knutsen, 2011)

Once again, *schadenfreude* and bullying seem to be preceded by common factor. This time it is the notion of deservingness, the underlying belief that the person experiencing the misfortune “deserved it,” which implies that it is ok to feel pleasure in their pain (Portman, 2014) or that they are at fault for the bullying they experience (Wong, Cheng, & Chen, 2013; Thornberg & Knutsen, 2011).

Schadenfreude and Self-Worth

The last precedent factor found in elevated levels of *schadenfreude* is self-worth (or rather the lack of it). Researchers (Van Dijk, Ouwerkerk, Van Koningsbruggen, & Wesseling, 2012) found that individuals who experienced a low self-evaluation by receiving a negative review on a specific assignment experienced higher *schadenfreude* as a way of restoring their self-worth when receiving the negative feedback. The lower the self-evaluation, the higher the *schadenfreude*. *Schadenfreude*, if flows from the aforementioned study, provides a way to restore self-worth. In other words, the pain of somebody’s suffering, restores or elevates our positive self-thoughts.

This is problematic in many levels. First, it shows a lack of self-worth, which should have been gained through inner growth either by a bettering of cognitive processes or the product of personal efficacy. As McNamee points out, this enables a form of envy to accompany *schadenfreude*. In this case, then, “negativity overtakes what benefits could be had from

emulation...then although the lack of self-esteem that give birth to *schadenfreude* may not be as vicious as resentment or spite or malicious glee, it is nevertheless something we should be on our toes to avoid and/or acknowledge on our path to making ourselves better persons in general...” (2007, p. 295-296)

Bullying and Self-Worth

In situations of bullying behavior, students being interviewed for a study responded that one of the main reasons for bullies doing what they do is because of their own inner flaws. These individuals suggested that bullies feel insecure, have low self-confidence, low self-esteem, or a weak mind, and these characteristics cause them to bully others. The study then suggests that those who are bullies are trying to preserve or improve their power, status, popularity, or might even be trying to protect themselves from social segregation, aggravation, or even from bullying itself. Teenagers in the study also believed that bullies bully others as a way to feel better about themselves or as a way to enhance their confidence and self-esteem (Thornberg, & Knutsen, 2011).

Once again, “harmjoy” seems to align with bullying behavior. In both of the aforementioned studies concerning low self-evaluation and worth, it was concluded that inner flaws or lack of self-worth created a byproduct either in the form of *schadenfreude* or in the form of negative actions (e.g., bullying) towards others.

Countering Schadenfreude and Bullying

Schadenfreude, as seen in this study’s literature review, has negative connotations that could impact society in harmful ways. In a recent study, it was observed that the pleasure coming from *schadenfreude* is associated with more willingness to harm those people we envy and feel are from a different group than our own. According to said research, however, these

effects are malleable. When perceptions of status and competition were changed, *schadenfreude* was reduced and eliminated. Individuals seeing others in different ways, and further, gaining a different insight into people's lives showed a reduction in the pleasure of envied individuals' misfortunes and a lower willingness to harm them (Cikara & Fiske, 2013). As a result of the aforementioned findings, we might conclude that manipulating perceptions or teaching individuals see people in different ways could be one method of reducing *schadenfreude*.

In the case of bullying, researchers have shown that bullies attack their victims due to disliking them, for entertainment purposes, as a way to achieve elevated social status or benefits, or because of their intolerance to diversity in the culture of their peers (Wong, Cheng, & Chen, 2013). It seems bullying and *schadenfreude* share many particularities. As indicated above, stereotyping, deservingness, and low self-worth are among them. Because bullying can be seen as having many similarities with *schadenfreude*, the current study seeks to assess the malleability of *schadenfreude* when empathy is incorporated into the classroom through the "Second Step" school curriculum for violence reduction ("Character Education and the Second Step Program," 2015).

It is important to decrease bullying behavior and *schadenfreude* responses in children, since it allows not only for the improvement and safety of the school setting as a whole, but at the personal level may produce better, rounded individuals. McNamee argues that *schadenfreude* is not the appropriate emotional response when others experience pain or misfortunes. For example, if justice is truly being sought after, there are legal routes one can take. With such routes, satisfaction can be felt, which is a more passive, neutral response. *Schadenfreude*, or "hand-rubbing glee," according to him is "empathy-lacking justice" and not the appropriate emotional response (McNamee, 2007, p. 296). McNamee's paper is filled with

reflections concerning healthcare professionals, and to them he urges the need to cultivate empathic and fair “emotional disposition towards another” (p. 296). He concludes by arguing that *schadenfreude* can easily end up becoming a malicious response, and a more adequate response would be one filled with sympathy and compassion. Despite sympathy and compassion being different from empathy, they share similarities that show the moral sense of an individual (Rosan, 2014).

Empathy seems to create more altruistic, ethical individuals. In a recent study, students were allowed to play videogames that promoted prosocial behaviors. These games not only elevated empathy towards others but also diminished *schadenfreude*, or the pleasure felt at the expense of a misfortune befalling another individual (Greitemeyer, Osswald, & Brauer, 2010). It is important to note that *schadenfreude* responses show an empathic failure, and it plays a part in the “...tolerance and even perpetration, of harm against out-group members.” (Cikara, Bruneau, Bavel, & Saxe, 2014, p. 111). Furthermore, individuals are more prone to show empathy for individuals within their ingroup, whatever it might be, and more empathic failures (e.g., envy, *schadenfreude*) with outgroup members. Yet, the good news is that this “empathy bias” can be modified through changed perceptions concerning our relationship with others and our sense of belonging to a particular group (changing entitativity) (Cikara, Bruneau, Bavel, & Saxe, 2014, p. 120). Additionally, empathy has been associated with “prosocial moral reasoning” (Paciello, Fida, Cerniglia, Tramontano, & Cole, 2013, p. 4), the cognitive process that occurs when deciding to help others, and actual helpful behaviors towards others. Researchers in a study dealing with empathy and prosocial behavior concluded that “...our results confirmed the predictive power of empathy in sustaining both thoughts and behavior oriented towards others. The more participants experienced compassion and concern for people in need, the more they

felt responsible for others and had a desire to improve other's condition." (Paciello et al., 2013, p. 6)

Statement of the Problem

Because *schadenreude* is the pleasure felt at the expense of another person's dismay and since this feeling can sometimes produce negative outcomes (e.g., higher *schadenfreude* predicted elevated vindictive behavior in individuals) (Steinbeis & Singer, 2012), a possible way of increasing comprehension for another person's actions and diminishing malicious judgment from *schadenfreude* could be through elevated levels of empathy toward individuals experiencing misfortune. Because it seems that the cruel type of *schadenfreude* is rooted in a lack of empathy ("...an other-oriented emotional response elicited by and congruent with the perceived welfare of a person in need") (Batson, Ahmad, & Lishner, 2011, p. 418), the present study will aim to assess if empathy skills training diminishes *schadenfreude* in children.

Violence-reduction materials will be used to assess the influence that empathy has on *schadenfreude*. There are two reasons for this choice of materials. First, empathy-education programs have been shown to reduce bullying behaviors in students (Sahin, 2012). Second, the curriculum used in this study has been shown to produce positive changes in children with behavioral issues while increasing social actions that assist others (Low, Cook, Smolkowski, & Buntain-Ricklefs, 2015). Additionally, the present study will focus on school-aged children. This choice is justified on the grounds that children at this age acquire emotional understanding very quickly. Such emotional understanding becomes the foundation to comprehending more complex moral codes (Schulz, Rudolph, Tsharaktschiew, & Rudolph, 2013). Participants will be elementary-aged children, preferably 6-7 years old because children at this age are able to understand and answer the questioning involved in the study.

CHAPTER II

METHODOLOGY

Research question

Does instructing empathic skills using the “Second Step” curriculum with elementary students produce a change in their *schadenfreude* and empathy?

Participants

Having obtained all necessary IRB and School District permissions, the researcher asked the school Counselor and the school Principal to help select children for the study. They were instructed to select children they believed exhibited bullying tendencies and would therefore benefit from receiving empathy skills instruction. Specifically, they were asked to select children who displayed negative attitudes that could cause emotional pain to another person through name calling, repeated teasing, intimidation, and mocking (Olweus, 1993). During this process, the school Principal requested that the school counselor be present in all sessions. In conclusion, through consideration of beforementioned determinants, school counselor, school principal, and teachers of sample participants agreed on a final sample of 3 students. These students were chosen because they exhibited some form of bullying tendency, were disruptive in classroom, or exhibited some problematic behavioral characteristic. Ages of participants ranged from 9 to 10 years old (*Mage*=9.6). Children were enthusiastic to participate, but also wanted to attend P.E. so empathy skills training had to incorporate entertaining activities (e.g., board games, Legos, etc.) to increase incentive to participate in the study.

The school chosen serves 665 students, with an ethnic composition that is 89% Hispanic, 6% American Indian, and the remainder being White, Asian, or African American. The school resides in the city of Brownsville, Texas, and is geographically located near two Border Patrol facilities, and a county jail. Due to a lower socioeconomic status, more than half of the students are eligible for reduced or free lunch. The school location, and its population, reflect a struggling community in the U.S-Mexican border. The children chosen for the sample were Hispanics, and male due to prevalence rates for bullying being higher among boys (“Prenet,” n.d.).

Participant 1

Raul (all names have been changed to protect confidentiality), age 8, is a third-grade student. He seemed to show some apathic characteristics. By apathic, it is implied that he does not think things are funny (that other kids his age would think so) and has a hard time understanding the feelings of others. The school counselor informed the principal researcher that Raul would continuously hurt other kids (emotionally) but lacked awareness of what was hurtful about his behavior. He does not have many friends and prefers to interact with certain adults. He does not make friends easily and has self-control issues.

Participant 2

Gabriel, age 9, is a third-grade student. He seemed to have experienced physical abuse by his father in the past as was reported by him. He had a hard time being able to understand personal boundaries and would constantly hug tightly Ismael to the point of making him uncomfortable. This made other children uncomfortable at times. In his case, class teacher suggested for him to participate in the group experience due to low grades and poor behavior in classroom.

Participant 3

Ismael, age 9, is a third-grade student. He had a hard time following rules or listening to instruction. He would wander off and would struggle following the lesson. He could be easily rerouted for improved behavior but would quickly go back to not listening and doing what he wanted instead of what was being asked. School counselor, despite not having official diagnosis, suggested he might have ADHD due to his inability to concentrate on topics.

Measurements

Schadenfrude. The present study utilized videos from America's Funniest Home Videos showing children falling. To increase likelihood of relatability, the videos depict children of around the same age as participants. *Schadenfreude* was then measured through the answer to the question: Do you think it is funny that...? (Schulz, Rudolph, Tscharaktschiew, & Rudolph, 2013). Due to limited time with participants, only one question dealing with *schadenfreude* was asked. Participants answered the question through the use of a pictorial rating scale (fig 1).

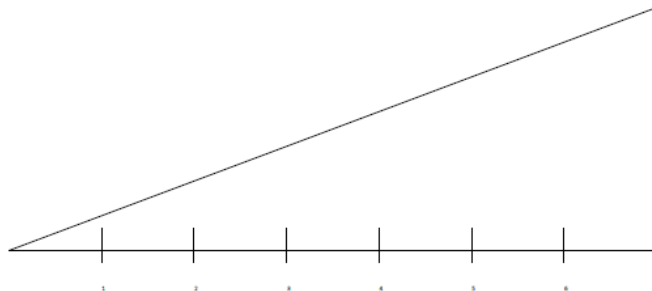


Fig 1

The scale was presented as a triangle that differs in gradients. Starting at 0 and ending at 7, the triangle provided a 7-point scale, with 0 being not funny at all, and 7 being very funny. By moving the hand to different levels of proximity to the side, the child could express different

levels of emotion. For research purposes, these answers were transformed into a 7-point rating scale. To test children understanding of the scale, children were asked unrelated questions before baseline measurements. These questions were: “How much do you like ice cream?” and “How much do you like doing homework?” Points closer to the thinner part of the triangle represented diminished values, and the higher levels of the triangle represented higher amounts of dislike/like towards the event. The use of such point rating scales is amply documented in such a manner (Feather & McKee, 2014, van Dijk, Ouwerkerk, van Koningsbruggen, & Wesseling, 2012, Schulz, Rudolph, Tscharaktschiew, & Rudolph, 2013, Feather & McKee, 2014, Schindler, Körner, Bauer, Hadji, Rudolph, 2015)

Empathy

Since the present study attempts to assess a diminishing of *schadenfreude* by elevating empathy awareness in its participants, a 7-point scale similar to the one used to measure *schadenfreude* was used. Students were asked to answer: 1) How sorry do you feel sorry for (e.g., children in the video falling). The triangle had numbers 0 to 7 representing gradients of emotion, with 0 being no sorry at all, and 7 being very sorry.

Treatment

Second Step Curriculum teaches children social emotional skills aimed at reducing violence among students. These skills are taught through age appropriate weekly lessons that include stories, videos, and role playing (“Committee for Children,” 2002). The curriculum is divided by grade level and thus provides lessons that are in accordance with the developmental stage of the child. Students in this study were in 3rd grade, so Second Step Grade 3 was used for instruction of empathy skills. This training included 3 units with 5 lessons each. The first unit dealt with empathy skills. For the current study, lessons were provided bi-weekly.

In the following paragraphs, a summary of each lesson is provided:

Lesson 1: Lesson was aimed at identifying other people's emotions and feelings, through verbal and physiological cues. A video included in the Second Step curriculum kit was presented in which an elementary aged girl experienced an embarrassing moment while two male students laugh at her. Participants in the study were able to identify possible ways individuals in the video felt, and how they would have felt if experiencing the same event. Participants were also instructed about feelings changing overtime, and thus the importance of always assessing others' feelings before acting ("Committee for Children," 2002).

Lesson 2: Conflicting feelings were presented. Participants learned about having more than one feeling at a time when faced with particular life events. For example, sometimes one can be scared yet excited when facing a novel situation ("Committee for Children," 2002).

Lesson 3: Importance of listening to others was encouraged. Participants learned about skills needed to convey active listening skills to others. They also learned how to identify non-listening cues. Importance of active listening was shown as a way to show respect for others ("Committee for Children," 2002).

Lesson 4: Being able to relate to concerns and worries of others was emphasized. Validating other people's worries or preoccupations was introduced ("Committee for Children," 2002).

Lesson 5: Understanding personal differences and appreciating them was encouraged. Students were taught that learning more about other individuals' different backgrounds and personal life stories can bridge the gap that personal differences can otherwise accentuate. Accepting and respecting said differences was encouraged ("Committee for Children," 2002).

After each lesson, students were allowed to play and encouraged to apply the skills learned during the lesson. The researcher for the present study has had extensive training to effectively leading group sessions with children, including how to appropriately use therapeutic interventions through the child's favorite language: play (Landreth, 2012). Said researcher is in her last semester pursuing a Master's degree in counseling, and she has specialized in working with children through different volunteer opportunities. She has volunteer in the Children Bereavement Center of South Texas and has led weekly counseling sessions interacting with parents and children. Her volunteer efforts have also included a center for abused and neglected children, where her satisfactory fulfillment of duties while volunteering led to an employment offer. The researcher has also been in play therapy seminars and has previously co-led weekly group sessions aimed at reducing bullying behaviors and increasing victims' empowerment.

Procedures and Data Analysis

The present study is a single-case research design (SCRD) (Lenz, 2013). Single-case, formerly known as single subject, research designs (Kratochwil & Levin, 2014) are characterized by having either one participant or a small number of sample participants and focus on differences in the independent variable (e.g., *schadenfreude*) throughout the course of the study to draw conclusions concerning the effectiveness of implemented treatment (Gage & Lewis, 2012). SCR D studies have different phases. These phases use an alphabetical letter to identify their order. Phase A is characterized by no treatment and establishment of a baseline measure. Phase B is when treatment commences, and measurements are taken to establish changes in the independent variable. More phases could be included implementing added interventions (Ray, 2015). According to Scruggs and Mastropieri (2001), the pursuit of an SCR D can add accuracy to a study because it allows researchers to draw conclusions that are not possible through

literature review alone. Furthermore, he argued that despite some individuals not being fond of single case research designs, these types of studies are “objective and systematic” and “show a solid baseline for future investigations” (p. 241).

The present research has two phases, A and B. In phase A, participants received no treatment, yet *schadenfreude* and empathy were measured in three different occasions to establish a baseline. Phase B intervention started with clients receiving empathy skills training. No further interventions were implemented due to lack of time and high amount of responsibilities school counselor faced. It is important to note that school settings endure a fast-paced environment in which there is an increased focus on instruction time over recreational time (IOM, 2013). In addition, the case has also been presented concerning efficacy of results in future phases in which treatment is removed to incorporate again at a later time. When presenting an intervention as counselors, it is difficult to determine if clients are improving because of the new intervention or due to their own personal growth during removal time of intervention. It is because of this, among other reasons, that A-B-A-B designs are not always appropriate in school settings or with clients in counseling sessions. As Plavnick and Ferreri (2013) pointed out, sample participants have a tendency to remember information or instruction concerning behavioral change, so it is difficult to assess success of following phases.

SCRDs are an appropriate medium for school counselors due to the possibility of gathering profound information concerning therapeutic approaches. They are also appropriate in terms of the ability to use qualitative and quantitative information. Furthermore, SCRDs provide a feasible medium for day-to-day interactions of clients and counselors (Ray, Barrio Minton, Schottelkorb, & Garofano Brown, 2010). They also provide an effective alternative to experimental research when large sample sizes are not easily accessible, thus allowing

participants to become their own comparison group (Lenz, 2015). SCRDS are not only time-efficient and practical in a monetary sense but also enable researchers to study changes within the individual over time (Rizvi & Nock, 2008). This makes them a good fit with the present research due to time constraints faced in the public school. It is also an acceptable design because it enables the assessment of the individual changes of *schadenfreude* and empathy throughout the course of the treatment intervention.

For this study, an SCRDS was preferred over randomized clinical trials because it enables the measurement of change within the individual. Clinical trials, on the other hand, draw differences among groups, thus making individuals in these groups homogenous to reduce variables. These studies then lack external validity and are not useful to draw generalized conclusions because complexities at the individual level are not sampled (Rizvi & Nock, 2008). Since this study attempts to measure *schadenfreude* and empathy levels before and after treatment (empathy skills training), an SCRDS becomes a practical and acceptable medium to make that comparison in the sense that it takes into account the individual differences at different points of treatment. Furthermore, an SCRDS can have strong internal validity by showing the intervention cause behavioral change in participants (Ledford, Lane, & Tate, 2018).

The present study is an A-B SCRDS (Sharpley, 2007) to help assess if empathy building skills taught in the classroom are an effective way to reduce *schadenfreude* and increase empathy in elementary school children. Measurements for *schadenfreude* had three baseline points before empathy skills training commenced. According to Chambles and Hollon (1998), three baselines are the appropriate number needed before an intervention starts to control possible change in the behavior being studied. These baseline measurements allow for an establishment of a linear tendency. After the fifth week of lessons, data collection was completed and a last measurement

was taken. Percentage of data points exceeding the median (PEM) procedure was carried through for the analysis of the quantitative data (Ma, 2006). Effect size of PEM is observed through the results that are presented in a decimal point from 0 to 1. The higher PEM scores (close to 1), reflect higher changes in *schadenfreude* (or empathy) levels (Ikonomopoulos, Cavazos Vela, Smith, & Dell' Aquila, 2016). The criteria for evaluation suggests that effect sizes of .90 or higher reflect a highly effective treatment, scores that range from .70 to .89 show a reasonable effectiveness, those from .50 to .69 are questionably effective, and scores lower than .50 are not effective (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1998). The calculation of the PEM statistic is acquired through treatment data. For empathy, since the effect desired was for it to go higher, treatment points above median were counted and then divided by total number of treatment points. For *schadenfreude*, effect desired was its decrease, thus treatment points below the median were considered and then divided by total number of treatment points (Ikonomopoulos, Cavazos Vela, & Smith, 2016). PEM has been shown to yield higher Spearman correlation than percentage of non-overlapping data (PND) (Ma, 2006). Furthermore, PEM methods for SCRD are beneficial to compute their effect size (Ma, 2009).

Results

Results from Empathy Skills training intervention are indicated below through PEM scores concerning *schadenfreude* and empathy levels.

Table 1

Target Measure

<i>Schadenfreude</i>	Gabriel							PEM=0
	B	B	B	T	T	T	T	
	0	0	0	0.5	0	0	0	

<i>Schadenfreude</i>	Raul							PEM=0
	B	B	B	T	T	T	T	
	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	

<i>Schadenfreude</i>	Ismael							PEM=1
	B	B	B	T	T	T	T	
	7	7	7	6	5	5	5	

Table 2

Target Measure

Empathy	Gabriel							PEM=0
	B	B	B	T	T	T	T	
	7	7	7	5	7	4	7	

Empathy	Raul							PEM=0
	B	B	B	T	T	T	T	
	4	0	0	0	1	0	1	

Empathy	Ismael							PEM=0.25
	B	B	B	T	T	T	T	
	7	5	5	6	5	5	5	

Figure 2.

Graphical Representation of Schadenfreude by Participants

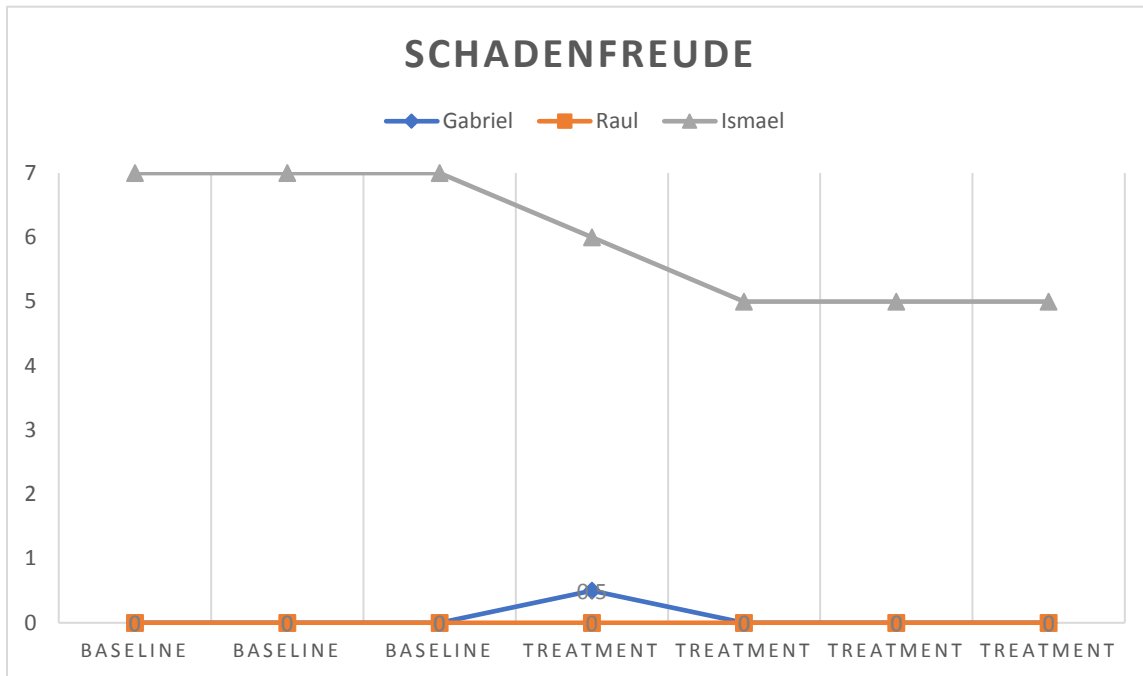
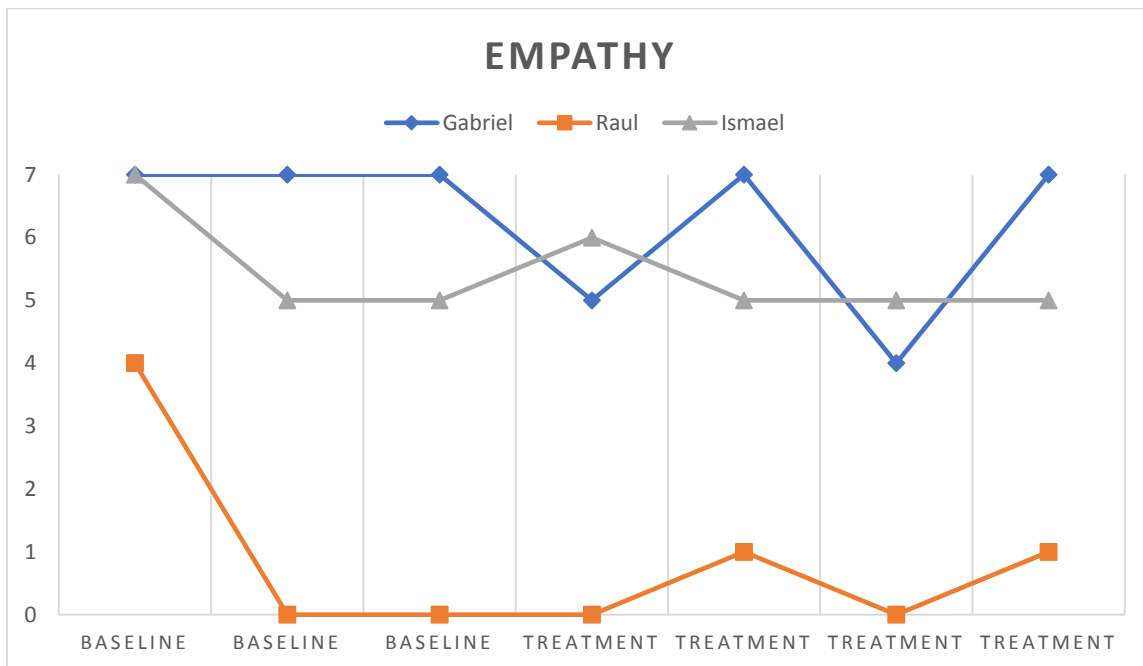


Figure 3.

Graphical Representation of Empathy by Participants



Participant 1

Findings from this study indicate that Gabriel did not decrease *schadenfreude* responses nor improve empathic feelings. Evaluation of the PEM statistic for *schadenfreude* score measure (0) indicated that all scores remain at the same level of the baseline. PEM statistic for empathy score measure (0) also indicated that all scores remain at the same level of the baseline.

Participant 2

Findings from this study indicate that Raul did not decrease *schadenfreude* responses nor improve empathic feelings. Evaluation of the PEM statistic for *schadenfreude* score measure (0) indicated that all scores remain at the same level of the baseline. PEM statistic for empathy score measure (0) also indicated that all scores remain at the same level of the baseline.

Participant 3

Findings from this study indicate that Ismael decreased *schadenfreude* responses but showed no statistical improvement of empathic feelings. Evaluation of the PEM statistic for *schadenfreude* score measure (1) indicated that treatment scores were on the effective side above the baseline. PEM statistic for empathy score measure (0.25) also indicated that all scores remain at the same level of the baseline.

CHAPTER III

DISCUSSION

The results in this study found that one of the three students showed an effective reduction of *schadenfreude* (PEM=1). The other two students, Raul and Gabriel, showed no differences in their *schadenfreude*. For Raul, he did not experience *schadenfreude* to begin with. It can then be concluded that *schadenreude* was neither reduced nor increased. The same can be said about participant 2, Gabriel. It is important to note that in the case of Raul, he seemed to show apathic responses in day-to-day interactions. In his demeanor, he rarely smiles, and he has difficulty interacting with other children. He usually hurts other children emotionally and gets into fights but seems to lack awareness of the effect his behavior causes on other children's emotions. He seemed entertained at times when watching the videos of children falling, but most of the time he did not understand why they were funny. In other words, it seems Raul is not easily entertained or emotionally moved by daily events. In the case of Gabriel, despite laughing out loud while videos were playing, he never reported thinking they were funny. This non-reporting can be explained by pointing out that social desirability motivates individuals to underreport or not report *schadenfreude* (Cikara & Fiske, 2011). In a recent study, this social desirability was put to the test by using an electromyography (EMG) to identify facial movement in participants. As suspected, despite participants not self-reporting evident *schadenfreude*, their facial responses did show pleasure at the expense of envied individuals misfortunes (Cikara &

Fiske, 2013). Self-reporting of negative events is underreported due to a desire to report more socially acceptable behaviors as expected to be viewed by others. In this case, low empathy and pleasure at another's misfortune are not considered to be socially acceptable (Cikara & Fiske, 2011).

For empathy, PEM scores only showed a slight change in Ismael (PEM=0.25). In the case of participant 1, Gabriel, empathy levels in baseline measurements were at their highest level, thus showing his ability to show empathy (as self-reported) was already high. In the case of participant 2, Ricardo, despite a higher level of empathy in the first baseline measurement, empathy skills remain low or non-existent for the remaining of therapy.

It is important to note that research based Second Step curriculum is designed to give children emotional skills that will assist them in their social cues and regulation of emotional and social issues. Second Step, for 3rd graders, has three phases, and empathy training gives the groundwork for the following stages of the program. For the program to be fully successful, the classroom teacher should implement it, model the behavior throughout the day, and include the curriculum in other parts of classroom instruction. Furthermore, it is important that all school staff be involved and trained in the curriculum for its implementation in all areas of the school experience of children. This allows for consistency, and incorporation of skills being taught into daily routines (Committee for Children, 2002).

Lastly, despite quantitative data not revealing much change in participants Gabriel and Raul, their behavior during empathy skill training showed a different scenario. Only two participants in this study were friends previous to its commencement, Gabriel and Ismael. Raul was selected by the school counselor because he had behavioral issues that prevented him from befriending other children. Towards the end of the treatment phase, all three children became

friends and enjoyed each other's company. While participating in activities, when asked, Raul would respect other people's turn to play, respect others' feelings and emotions, and was able to interact in a healthy and productive manner. Concerning Raul, it is important to point out that despite school counselor not reporting a specific diagnosis to protect privacy of child, it is assumed by main researcher Raul showed signs of Autism spectrum disorder (ASD). It is possible that due to this he had not only more difficulty conveying cognitive empathic responses, but to also have found the self-reporting instruments as too subjective thus resulting in misconception or lower self-reporting (Trimmer, McDonald, & Rushby, 2017).

Implications for Future Research

Empathy skills training was helpful in reducing *schadenfreude* in one participant. In another participant, possible desires to respond in a more socially acceptable manner could have interfered with self-report. Such is the case with participant 1, Gabriel. Despite showing facial expressions of pleasure (e.g., laughing, putting hand on his mouth in disbelief) at the expense of children in the video, he did not report that he thought the videos were funny. To reduce self-reporting errors such as underreporting to convey socially acceptable norms, previous research has used "Echo-planar images" to obtain "neuroimaging data" (Cikara & Fiske, 2011, p. 3795) of *schadenfreude* responses. In another study, facial expressional changes were observed using electromyography (EMG) to identify *schadenfreude* (Cikara & Fiske, 2013). These two options are not easily accessible to researchers due to cost and because they require specific training for proper implementation. Consequently, an alternative tool for future studies could be the use of a "software development kit (SDK)" ("SDK", 2018, paragraph 1). This technology seems to be more easily accessible and more user friendly. It offers the additional advantage that it can be incorporated into different technologies such as apps, games, and webcams. SDK can detect

facial expressions through sensors. For students conducting research, this software can be used free of charge for 6 months (SDK, 2018). Finally, it is suggested that in order to circumvent low self-report issues, more time should be spent getting to know the children before the start of baseline measures. This rapport-building phase can increase comfort and the willingness to be honest, thus reducing participants' fears about providing less socially acceptable answers.

It would also be important for researchers to consider the benefit in establishing more phases in their SCRD. Despite present study not being able to integrate more phases due to time constraints, more phases are considered better for intervention effect to be demonstrated. Such is the case of an ABAB design, which consists of an added baseline measurement phase, and an additional treatment phase, which is considered a more reliable type of design study (Kratochwill et al., 2013).

Implications for Practice

Teaching empathy and reducing *schadenfreude* does not need to be limited to a classroom setting. As stated before, the joy of observing somebody in pain and not doing anything to assist, demonstrates a lack of social responding. Furthermore, individuals with high levels of *schadenfreude* responses can also develop a willingness to harm others (Cikara, Botvinick & Fiske, 201) and are more likely to spread negative information of the person experiencing a downfall (Ouwkerk, van Dijk, Vonkerman, & Spears, 2018). Therefore, identification of elevated *schadenfreude* response can assist therapists in identifying behaviors and emotions that can be changed to convey more empathic responses. As was mentioned earlier, *schadenfreude* does not necessary need to have a malicious component to occur; sometimes the belief of injustice can cause a *schadenfreude* response (Pietraszkiewicz, 2013). Yet, this is another strong point to bring up in therapy. The world is not just, and somebody

else's pain does not make our problems go away. Concentrating on somebody else's pain as a source of our enjoyment does not restore balance to the world.

Empathy is central to our condition as human beings because it facilitates social interactions that have at their core a desire to help others (Cikara, Bruneau, Bavel, & Saxe, 2014). Despite our mortal bodies being chained by biology and self-serving tendencies, our moral attributes are what allows to raise above them (Iacoboni, 2009). It is thus our responsibility, as counselors, educators, and parents, to enable children to become more than a neurological makeup of self-centered tendencies, indeed, to raise up and become socially responsible individuals. As McNamee points out: "For to act well is merely to do so for the right reasons, to the right extent, at the right time and so on, but also to feel these reasons and responses while so constructing and responding" (2007, p. 296). Empathic response to the suffering of others enable us to engage in cognitive processes that can induce personal growth. Promoting reduction of *schadenfreude* in clients can assist them in elevating self-worth based on individual merits, in understanding that judgement in the deservingness of other people's misfortunes can be unjust and faulty, and in increasing the ability to diminish enjoyment because of stereotyped ideals.

Limitations

There are a few limitations to be taken into consideration. The present study did not use a secondary withdrawal and treatment phases, which would have made it possible to assess a higher gradient of effect change in the responses being measured (Kratochwill et al., 2013). Also, despite three baseline measures being enough for an SCRD to maintain internal validity (Ledford & Gast, 2018), five baseline measurements would have shown a better effect (Kratochwill et al., 2013). In addition, the present study would have benefited by incorporating

more questions to assess both *schadenfreude* and empathy. For *schadenfreude*, other statements could have been used such as: “What happened gives me satisfaction,” “I liked what happened to [...],” “I couldn’t resist to smile a little,” “Actually I had to laugh a little” (van Dijk, Ouwerkerk, Goslinga, Nieweg, Gallucci, 2006, p. 158). In the case of empathy, another form of measurement could have yielded more conclusive results. Such is the case of the *Interpersonal Reactivity Index* (Davis, 1980), an instrument with seven subscales that identifies the multidimensional quality of empathy. This instrument was not used in the present study due to its length. It has 28 statements within 7 subscales. The index has been used effectively in children, aged 9 to 16 years old, through a modified version of four items dealing with compassionate feelings and expression of concern when others are experiencing a negative event (Carrasco Ortiz, Delgado Egido, Barbero Garcia, Holgado Tello, & Barro Gandara, 2011).

Another possible limitation to consider is its sample size. Originally, the present study had a sample of 13 children. Out of this sample, three children were in third grade, three children were in fourth grade, and seven children were in fifth grade. It was then agreed by the school Counselor and main researcher to do three separate group sessions during physical education (P.E.) scheduled time. As time progressed, fifth and fourth grade students were not allowed to participate in the group skill training program because they were assigned tutoring during P.E. time. Thus, the sample diminished from 13 possible participants to three third-grade students. Inability to have access to children for research could be attributed to the growing importance given to instruction time in preparation of students for standardized testing. Schools across the country have placed a priority for testing preparation to the extent of abandoning all things that are unrelated to the test (Barrier-Ferreira, 2010). This includes having students participate in less counseling related events. Furthermore, school counselors increasingly face

higher student/counselor ratios, which results in less one-on-one with students facing emotional needs (Carrell & Carrell, 2006). A 2004 study showed that school counselors were performing a wide variety of administrative duties and providing less counseling services to students (Perusse, Goodnough, Donegan, & Jones, 2004). In 2016 another study pointed out the weakening of the school counselor's role (Robertson, Lloyd-Hazlett, Zambrano, & McClendon, 2016). In the school where the present study was carried out, the counselor/student ratio was 1 to 665. Due to all these factors, the principal researcher was only allowed to provide empathy skills training to participants during P.E. time. The total allowed time to interact with sample participants was 30 minutes on Tuesdays and on Thursdays. This time was sometimes shortened by children taking longer to arrive or by counselor's time conflicting with other responsibilities. It is important to note that due to sample size and comparisons being made concerning changes within the individual, SCRD does not generalize to a larger population (Ledfor & Gast, 2014).

Conclusion

The present research was effective in bringing to light, through literature review, similar aspects that *schadenfreude* and bullying tendencies share. Among these are the effects of stereotyping others, of perceiving deservingness, and of experiencing low self-worth. In the experimental phase, despite results not conveying a more pertinent impact in a quantitative manner, it was determined through a qualitative observation that children experienced a better group dynamic. By promoting empathy skills learned using Second Step curriculum, participants in the present study experienced an increased ability to cooperate and to convey and respect each other's needs.

Despite empathy-skills training not showing a strong impact in *schadenfreude*, its instruction with more sessions in classroom settings should be encouraged. According to Cuddy,

Rock, and Norton (2007), after Hurricane Katrina, individuals who observed its consequences were less prone to assist if those in need were from an outgroup. Furthermore, these individuals perceived these victims to be less human and went as far as to think that outgroup victims felt less secondary emotions such as grief and mourning. The aforementioned researchers placed a call for identification of instances in which we are able to see others as equal humans, calling out for more prosocial behavior towards those we see as not belonging to our group. Zaki and Cikara (2015) aggregate on this by suggesting that the encouragement of empathy might not suffice. Instead they suggest identifying empathic failures and working to change those.

Future research can build on this research. Empathy skills training impacted one individual, and this is shown in the quantitative results. The rest of the group show a healthier dynamic, as it was described in its qualitative aspects. If empathy skills training is considered a weak link to diminish *schadenfreude*, the next step can be implementing other aspects not covered in the scope of this study that promote pro-social behavior when seeing others suffer.

Portman (2000) considers *schadenfreude* a “morally acceptable kind of pleasure” (p. 2557) and a response that is corollary to justice. Yet, he points out that our compassion is diminished towards those we believe have brought unto themselves their suffering. As it has been shown in present research, *schadenfreude* responses not only cut short our fair assessment of the whole picture but also activates a thought process that cuts short prosocial empathic responses. To conclude, it is important to remember that:

Some people help us, some people hurt us, some people are helped by us; some people are harmed by us. That's life. There is no changing this. We can, however, increase the store of happiness in our little worlds by treating others well (Portman, 2000, p. 2553).

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Maria Cecilia Montenegro earned a Master of Education in Counseling and Guidance at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley in May of 2018. Previously, Mrs. Montenegro graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Psychology, Dec 2008, from Brigham Young University at Rexburg, Idaho.

Maria Cecilia Montenegro lived in Leuven, Belgium, from 2011 until 2014, where she studied Dutch and immersed herself in the rich Flemish culture of her surroundings. Upon her return to the United States, she immediately enrolled in college to further advance her education. Since the beginning of her academic pursuits, Mrs. Montenegro has been involved in different organizations, starting with the Counseling and Guidance Student Association fulfilling duties as a historian, earning the “Outstanding Graduate Student Award” from the Texas Counseling Association, and competing in the ACA Graduate Student Ethics Competition. Furthermore, Mrs. Montenegro received the UTRGV Excellence Scholarship in 2016-2017 due to her academic achievements.

Mrs. Montenegro is currently employed in Sunny Glen Children’s Home, helping improve the lives of children experiencing difficult life situations. Previously, she was employed as a graduate assistant from 2015 until December, 2017. Furthermore, Mrs. Montenegro helped University Faculty research and write published or under review articles. Her life’s ambition is to pursue a doctoral degree, of preference in KU Leuven. Maria Cecilia Montenegro receives correspondence through email at maria.montenegro01@utrgv.edu