Bullying of Middle School Students With and Without Learning Disabilities: Prevalence and Relationship to Students' Social Skills

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BULLYING OF MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS WITH AND WITHOUT LEARNING DISABILITIES: PREVALENCE AND RELATIONSHIP TO STUDENTS’ SOCIAL SKILLS

By
Silvana M. Spinelli-Casale

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Faculty of the University of Miami in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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BULLYING OF MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS WITH AND WITHOUT
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Silvana M. Spinelli-Casale

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Students who experience bullying have been shown to be at greater risk for forms of maladjustment including depression and loneliness (Hawker & Boulton, 2000), and social withdrawal (Olweus, 1993). Research indicates that bullying is especially severe in middle schools (Boulton & Underwood, 1992; NCES, 2002; Olweus 1993). Students with learning disabilities (LD) are considered to be particularly at risk due to the frequent co-occurrence of poor social skills with learning disabilities (Fox & Boulton, 2005). This study examined the percentage of victims, bullies, bully-victims and non-participants in bullying as reported by a sample of 255 students (144 with LD) attending public middle school in a large, urban Southeastern school district. Classification of students into the four bullying groups was based on students’ responses on the Revised Bullying Victim Questionnaire (RBVQ; Olweus, 1996). Chi-square analysis indicated that students with LD were not more frequently classified as victims of bullying than their peers without LD. Students’ social skills were measured by means of the Social Skills Rating Scale-Teacher Form (SSRS; Gresham & Elliott, 1990). Results of a discriminant function analysis using scores on the three subscales of the SSRS-T as predictors indicated that students’ social skills were not significantly associated with victim/non-victim status.
DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my family; my husband, always there to support me and give me strength, my wonderful three kids, Nicholas, Alexa, and Luchi, and my Mom and Dad for raising me to believe in myself. A special “Thank you” goes to my chairperson, Batya Elbaum: Your guidance has been invaluable.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Introduction to the Problem

Bullying is a dangerous phenomenon that is all too common in our schools today. It is said that not all aggression is bullying, but bullying is always aggression, and includes hurtful and hostile behavior (Gendreau & Archer, 2005). Being the object of bullying is a distressing experience that can be especially damaging when bullying occurs over a prolonged period of time. A more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon of bullying will improve social and emotional school climates and interventions.

Background of the Problem

Bullying is not a new occurrence, but recent acts of violence have been sensationalized by the media and brought particular attention to this topic. In particular, three recent incidents in the United States have raised awareness and concern: Columbine, Colorado, where in 1999, two bullied boys killed 15 peers and themselves; El Cajon, California, where in 2001 one victim of bullying killed 2 and wounded 13, and Red Lake, Minnesota, where in 2005, 10 children were killed by a bully. In Port Arthur, Australia, in 1996, a chronically bullied young person killed 35 strangers. In Japan, 1994-1995, there were 15 deaths associated with bullying, including one victim whose suicide note named his four tormenters. Not all incidents are as fatal or dramatic as these, yet bully-victim relationships underlie the majority of childhood assaults, homicides, and suicides. In 2002, the U.S. Secret Service analyzed school shootings and found that 71%
of the shooters had previously been victims of bullying (Voskuil, Fein, Reddy, Borum, & Modzeleski, 2002). Research on bullying has increased substantially in recent years. Berger (2007) has documented a dramatic increase worldwide from only 62 citations in PsychINFO from 1900-1990, to 289 in the 1990s, to 562 from 2000-2004. She states that much has been accomplished, yet much still remains to be understood in the area of bullying. The systemic research on bullying began in the 1970s primarily in Scandinavia. Paul Heinemann (1972) made some of the first references to childhood bullying as “mobbing” and interpreted this mobbing as group violence directed against a targeted individual. In the 1980s and 1990s victimization and childhood aggression studies among school-aged children were being performed in other countries as well as the United States, and much of the focus was on physical fighting and males (Olweus, 1994). Recently, the discourse on bullying has begun to focus on gender as well as address relational aggression and the less obvious cases of victimized children. The forms of aggression involved in bullying may include physical, verbal, and relational violence. Bullying includes emotional pain; for example, the threat of physical harm creates psychological harm (Batsche & Knoff, 1994; Hoover, Oliver, & Hazler, 1992).

Research has defined bullying with over 200 definitions that can be traced to one of the original researchers in the area, Dan Olweus (1978). Olweus suggested that bullying occurs when there is an imbalance of power. The aggressor, or group of aggressors, is more powerful in some way than the person being targeted. Bullying includes repetition of an unjust use of power coupled with a desire to hurt, a hurtful action, a power imbalance, and evident enjoyment by the aggressor, and a sense of being oppressed on the part of the victim. Scientists worldwide accept that three crucial
elements are present for bullying to occur: repetition, harm, and unequal power (Nansel & Overpeck, 2003; Rigby, 2002).

**Current Situation**

Since bullying most often occurs in schools, many states are now holding school administrators legally responsible for preventing violence and maintaining a safe learning environment. These accountability changes leave the schools responsible for anti-violence or anti-bullying interventions and for proving they are implementing safety provisions. Bullying behaviors, even when not obviously violent, may inhibit learning and instigate interpersonal problems for children. Childhood bullying also causes truancy; recent statistics indicate that 160,000 students skip school in the U.S. each day due to intimidation by their peers (Coy, 2001; Lumsden, 2002). Minor forms of bullying can easily escalate (Garofalo, Siegel, & Laub, 1987), and school personnel who do not positively counteract this effect may create an environment in which bullying is acceptable (Goldstein, Harootunian, & Conoley, 1994). Researchers have investigated bullying and how to stop school violence by helping very aggressive children who bully vulnerable students (Craig, 1998).

Childhood bullying demands close examination due to the established connection to potential future psychological maladjustment (Olweus, 1994; Perry, Perry, & Kennedy, 1992). When children are repeatedly subjected to bullying, they are more likely to experience loneliness, anxiety, lower feelings of self-worth, and susceptibility to childhood depression (Craig, 1998; Slee, 1995). Retrospective research indicates that a disproportionate number of adults with serious psychiatric disturbances such as antisocial personality disorder, schizoid personality disorder or schizophrenia, and social anxiety
remember painful social experiences and describe childhood histories of problematic social behavior and poor peer relations (Bierman, 2004). Adults that have experienced these traumatic childhood social experiences give up coping mechanisms because they feel unable to control outcomes and feelings of depression and anxiety ensue (Abramson, Seligman, & Teasdale, 1978).

In psychosocial research, a disproportionate number of bullied and rejected children grow up to experience mental health problems and antisocial behavior (Parker, Rubin, Price, & DeRosier, 1995). The adverse effects associated with peer group rejection have been well documented by Asher and Coie (1990). In addition being victimized is positively associated with being rejected by peers (Boivin, Hymel, & Hodges 2001).

For children and adolescents with learning disabilities, bullying presents a complicated picture. Many of these students have processing weaknesses, and this difficulty added to possible social skills problems puts them in “double jeopardy” (Faye, 2003). Recent mainstreaming efforts have revealed many positive outcomes for children with learning disabilities; however, in schools that have a hostile school climate, there may be higher risk of students bullying a child with disabilities as indicated in “New Insights on Special Education Practice” (CEC Today, 2002). It is important to examine differences in the prevalence of bullying among students with and without learning disabilities (LD), which may leave them vulnerable to repeated attacks. The combination of poor social skills and repeated bullying puts these children in a situation, which increases the likelihood of experiencing social and emotional problems during adolescence and adulthood (Faye, 2003; Hugh-Jones & Smith, 1999).
The literature has established that children with LD and poor social skills are vulnerable to experiencing various psychosocial complications (Kavale & Forness, 1996; Morrison & Cosden, 1997). Many students with social skills deficits who are repeatedly bullied are also those students who will later exhibit more serious psychological problems (Fox & Boulton, 2005; Larke & Beran, 2006; Schwartz, 1999). The rejected and victimized child is most at risk for serious long-term maladjustment. Middle school students reject victims (Perry, Kusel, & Perry, 1988) and peers and teachers find victims as more demanding, less skilled at interacting with peers, and thus, typically socially isolated (Egan & Perry, 1998; Olweus, 1993; Perry, Willard, & Perry, 1990).

Children with social skills deficits behave “awkwardly,” and inappropriately barge into social situations (Bierman, 2004, p. 78). These children develop habitual patterns of responding to stressful social situations that create disharmonious relationship cycles (Bierman). They are poorly organized, have poor planning skills, and do not interpret social and emotional cues appropriately (Bierman). Thus, an examination of social skills is necessary to better understand the mechanisms that may make these students more vulnerable to bullying.

Children fortunate enough to possess strong pro-social skills can maneuver their way through the unpredictable social scenes that fill their daily school environment and avoid bullying encounters. Researchers identify the pro-social thinking-feeling-acting sequence as indicative of strong social skills and specifically good social-cognitive processing. This integration of social cues includes accurate interpretation of intent and comprehension of unintentional damage so that potential anger is mitigated and no aggressive behavior or bullying results (Crick, 1995).
While bullying is prevalent in schools, society cannot continue to dismiss it as a “part of growing up.” Bullying and the poor outcomes associated with it underscore the need for effective prevention and intervention. Much is now understood about bullying, but studies of prevalence offer contradictory findings. This is why bullying is a topic for scientists of many disciplines. There is an urgency to continue the research into the characteristics of children who exhibit social difficulties and are potentially more vulnerable to being bullied. These children will continue to be blamed for initiating or receiving acts of aggression, which may be the result of possible underlying social skills deficits.

Some experts contend that bullying has become a greater concern as the prevalence of bullying in schools has been recognized and retaliation from victims has become more aggressive (Cullerton-Sen & Crick, 2005; Leary, Kowalski, Smith, & Phillips, 2003; Leff, Power, Costigan, & Manz, 2003; Nansel et al., 2001; NCH Survey, 2005; Olweus, 1993). The consideration and implementation of inclusive models of educating children with emotional and behavior disorders needs to include the reciprocal impact on the total school environment (Furlong, Morrison, & Dear, 1994; Morrison, Furlong, & Morrison, 1994). Children with disabilities will be expected to contend with the same social challenges as other students with perhaps fewer resources with which to cope.

Mainstreaming adversaries and proponents argue if this is due to the tremendous increase of special education students in regular classrooms. Regardless of the precipitating factor, there is a need to examine children’s interaction in schools and to determine how pervasive bullying is at the middle-school level. The apparent yet under-
investigated links between bullying, social skills, and learning disabilities demand further research and elaboration. Specifically, what needs to be addressed is the prevalence of bullying among children with learning disabilities and any social skill deficits these students may demonstrate.

**Current Study**

This study expanded the research base on bullying, students with learning disabilities, and social skills deficits by examining whether middle-school students with LD are more likely to be victimized by bullies than their peers without LD. In addition, this study examined whether middle school students who are the objects of bullying have poorer social skills than students who are not.
CHAPTER II
LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review focuses on bullying, children with learning disabilities, and the social skills deficits that may impede pro-social behavior. Aggression is frequently a random act, whereas bullying has deliberate and often repeat targets. Involvement in bullying can mean being the recipient of the aggressive act, being the instigator of the aggression, or being part of a group that encourages the behavior and does not attempt to stop it. Research indicates that approximately 15 to 20% percent of children kindergarten through high school are bullied or teased in some form (Batsche & Knoff, 1994; NCES, 2004). There is a lack of empirical data on bullying and how children with LD are impacted or how, if at all, they may instigate this behavior. A clear explanation on prevalence and the four subgroups that make up bullying will be explained in this review. There are nine main sections that explain recent research in this area. Social skills and learning disabilities (LD) are discussed within the context of bullying, and hypotheses are presented regarding the relationship between these social and academic areas of functioning.

Types of Bullying

Bullying is defined as an imbalance of power used to hurt other peers intentionally; this can include victimization or rejection of others, and is typically repeated over time (Hazler, 1996; Olweus 1978, 1991). When peers attempt to gain power, dominate or intentionally harm others and use indirect aggression repeatedly, it is also considered bullying (Crick & Grotpeter, 1996, Espelage & Swearer, 2003; Olweus, 1993).
Bullying can be direct or overt aggression exhibited in the physical form typically seen as pushing or physical fighting, and in verbal forms seen as teasing or threatening. (Espelage & Swearer, 2003; Hawker & Boulton, 2000). Indirect or social aggression, such as excluding peers intentionally from peer activities or spreading rumors, has been defined as covert actions intended to damage the victim’s reputation and relationship with others (Galan & Underwood, 1997). (Recent advances in technology have created a new arena for bullying behavior known as cyber-bullying through Internet chat rooms, Websites, or text messaging and e-mail messages. This high technology bullying is not included in this study.)

**Classifications and Characterizations**

There are four classifications that encompass bullying behavior among children; they are bullies, bully/victims, victims, and non-participants. A bully is a child that acts solely with repeated aggressive actions towards their peers (Olweus, 1978, 1991; Hazler, 1996). Victims are children who are the receivers of repeated negative actions; these children are a subgroup who is persistently targeted by their peers for physical and verbal maltreatment (Olweus, 1991; Perry, Kusel, & Perry, 1988; Perry, Perry, & Kennedy, 1992). Bully/victims have recently been identified as aggressive victims or provocative victims, and can take both the role of the bully or the victim (Perry, Perry, & Kennedy 1992; Schwartz, Dodge, Petite, & Bates, 1997). Non-participants are children that do not take part in these actions and are not identified as bullies, victims or bully/victims.

**Bullies**

Characteristics of a bully may differ depending on whether the child is an aggressive bully or a passive bully (Olweus, 1978). Aggressive bullies can be described
as dominant, belligerent, forceful, and impulsive, and they demonstrate lower frustration
tolerance and generally possess a positive view toward violence (Olweus). These physical
bullies have also been found to lack empathy with victims and will overreact aggressively
in ambiguous confrontations (Crick, 2002). Bernstein and Watson (1997) found that these
bullies are also aggressive to their parents and teachers, and establish social dominance
through fear and intimidation.

Bullies possess feelings of control, which reinforces their need to maintain a sense
of power, and they strive to achieve social dominance among their peers (Batsche &
Knoff, 1994; Olweus, 1993). These children believe they will achieve success using
aggression, are unaffected by causing pain, and process information about victims in an
automatic and rigid way (Perry, Perry, & Kennedy, 1992). Bullies also pick on their
victim because they are provoked or believe to be provoked, or because they do not like
the victim (Boulton & Underwood, 1992). These aggressive bullies also feel that their
behavior is justified, and surprisingly, have friends and admirers (Bernstein & Watson,
1997).

A few studies that have examined the characteristics of aggressive bullies have
reported contradictory results. On the one hand there is empirical evidence that
documents these aggressive bullies as being confident and socially savvy (Kaukiainen
et al., 2002). Recent research has found that bullies are socio-metrically rejected but have
average levels of perceived popularity and can be integrated into the social network of the
classroom (Estell, Farmer, & Cairns, 2004). Toblin, Schwartz, Gorman, & Abou-
nezzeddine (2005) found aggressive bullies to possess high social information processing
skills. On the other hand, there is empirical evidence that states that bullies lack good
social reasoning skills (Smith & Brian, 2000). This report contends that aggressive bullies misinterpret ambiguous situations. They perceive physical fighting as bullying opportunities; and they fail to recognize feelings and emotions induced by bullying attacks. They were found to attribute happiness to the aggressor and few of them described the victim as feeling unhappy. This attribution of happiness to the aggressor reveals that many bullies are concerned solely about their social gains, and even if they perceive and interpret social cues accurately, they may differ from controls in goal selection and decision-making because their values and expectations are different from other children (Arsenio & Kramer, 1992; Nunner-Winkler & Sodian, 1988).

Research has found that many aggressive preadolescent bullies do not feel remorse when hurting others, and with an audience they may escalate the attack to inflict pain on the victim (Perry, Williard, & Perry, 1990; Perry et al., 1992). Toblin et al. (2005) found that bully/victim students who were highly aggressive revealed characteristics of depression, loneliness, hyperactivity, and difficulties with emotion regulation. Sutton, Smith, and Swettenham, (1999b) investigated the ability of 7-10 year old aggressive children to understand cognitions and emotions. They found that the level of ringleader or bully was positively correlated with a total social cognition score, reinforcing some of the previously stated results regarding bullies’ strong social skills.

**Bully/Victims**

Recent research indicates that bullies and victims are not mutually exclusive categories (Espelage & Swearer, 2003; Haynie et al., 2001; Pellegrini, Bartini, & Brooks, 1999; Schwartz, 2000). A recently separated category or subgroup is bully/victim, described sometimes as “passive” bullies, or “aggressive” victims (Boulton &
Underwood, 1992; Bowers, Smith, & Binney, 1994; Gasteiger-Klicpera & Klicpera, 1997; Stephenson & Smith, 1989; Sutton & Smith, 1999). The bully/victims display varying behavioral and cognitive characteristics unique to their situation (Wolke & Stanford, 1999). They are children and adolescents who take both roles of the victim and/or the bully; they tend to be less popular than aggressive bullies, have fewer likeable qualities, have low self-esteem, and experience home problems (Olweus, 1978, 1993a; Stephenson & Smith, 1989).

Bully/victims function more poorly than bullies and they experience greater levels of peer rejection, emotional distress, emotion dysregulation, and hyperactivity (Hanish & Guerra, 2004; Nansel et al., 2001; Schwartz, 2000). Frequently, these “aggressive victims” will irritate peers with off-task, inattentive, and impulsive behavior (Olweus, 1978, 1999; Pellegrini et al., 1999; Schwartz et al., 1997). Sometimes bully/victims exhibit externalizing hostile social interaction styles (Perry, Kusel, & Perry 1988) and are hot-tempered and highly emotional (Schwartz et al.). Bully/victims are the children who will counter attack and become involved in extended, emotionally heated arguments, which in turn reward their attackers or bullies (Perry, Perry, & Kennedy, 1992).

Aggressive children assume others are out to get them instead of assuming others will act pro-socially (Crick & Dodge, 1994). Milich and Dodge (1984) found that aggressive reactions to minimal provocation led them to be increasingly rejected by peers. Bully/victims in contrast are identified as using aggression not instrumentally as aggressive bullies do, but after losing control as an inappropriate response to provocation. These children are typically rejected socially by most of their peers (Perry et al., 1988).
and will be anxious and provocative toward others in retaliation (Bernstein & Watson, 1994).

Batsche and Knoff (1994) found that both passive and aggressive victims lack social skills, have low self-esteem, appear weaker, and tend to get poor grades. Research has defined these bully/victims as children that cry easily and typically exhibit internalizing characteristics including anxiety, social withdrawal, lack of self-confidence and self-esteem (Hodges, Malone, & Perry, 1997; Schwartz, Proctor, & Chien, 2001).

Kumpulainen et al. (1998) examined bullying and psychiatric symptoms among elementary children and found that the bully-victim group exhibited externalizing behaviors. This bully-victim group also had the highest probability for psychiatric referral.

**Victims**

Victims without the bullying tendencies are the children that are characterized as being repeatedly ostracized, withdrawn, picked on physically and emotionally, and frequently ignored entirely (Olweus, 1991; Perry, Kusel, & Perry, 1988; Perry, Perry, & Kennedy, 1992). These students are typically weak and thus easy targets for bullies, yet frequently, they “look like everyone else” (Hodges et al., 1997, p. 1033). They usually have low social status, and thus their peer group typically does not value them; in fact, victimization is a social event (Hodges & Perry, 1999). The most frequently cited reason for being bullied is that the victims “did not fit in” (Hoover et al., 1992, p. 101). Rodkin and Hodges (2003) also found victims as possessing internalizing behaviors, but in addition concluded that dishonesty was a typical behavioral characteristic. Toblin, Schwartz, Gorman, & Abou-ezzeddine (2005) found victims to be withdrawn and had
lower grade point averages and depressive symptoms. Being a victim has been linked to lower levels of academic achievement (Ma, Stewin, & Mah, 2001). In addition, Smith et al. (1993) reported that victims tend to misinterpret ambiguous social situations.

Victims have been characterized as provoking or reinforcing attacks against them, thus contributing to the cycle of maltreatment (Hodges & Perry, 1999). Sutton, Smith, and Swettenham (1999b) established a victim score that was negatively correlated with a total social cognition score revealing the role of socio-cognitive deficits in the case of the victims. They discussed these children’s difficulties in understanding others' theory of mind, subsequently leaving victims open to frequent manipulation by peers. Ciucci and Fonzi (1999) examined the relation between bullying and facial recognition of emotions in a sample of 62 bullies, 65 victims, and 140 control children. The results revealed that victims consistently misinterpreted others' emotions more often than bullies and non-participants. Perry, Kusel, and Perry (1988) investigated bullying within 165 boys and girls in 3rd through 6th grades, and found that 10% were extreme victims of direct physical and verbal abuse by peers. Perry (2001) found victimized children to be at increased risk for depression, anxiety, emotional dysregulation, low self-esteem, loneliness, suicidal tendencies, dislike and avoidance of school, and poor academic performance.

A meta-analytic review of cross-sectional studies on peer victimization was completed by Hawker and Boulton (2000). They analyzed studies published between 1978 and 1997. In their review, Hawker and Boulton found that the pattern of results across cross-sectional studies strongly suggested that victims can be characterized as experiencing more negative affect and negative thought about themselves than controls.
Their results also documented that victimization is most strongly related to depression and least strongly related to anxiety. Kochenderfer and Ladd (1996) found that children who were victimized were lonelier, more school avoidant, and liked school less than non-participants.

**Outcomes**

There are many negative behavioral and psychological outcomes associated with a bullying environment (Nansel et al., 2001). Being a bully can be as problematic as being subjected to bullying behavior. Bullies are at increased risk of becoming active in delinquency, alcohol abuse, and crime (Kaltiala-Heino, Rimpela, Rantanen, & Rimpela, 2000; Loeber & Dishion, 1983; Nansel et al., 2001, 1004; Olweus, 1993a, 1993b).

When children are repeatedly subjected to bullying they are more likely to experience loneliness, anxiety, lower feelings of self-worth and are thus more susceptible to childhood depression (Craig, 1998; Slee, 1995). The identification of depressive symptoms in children and adolescents is extremely important because of recent findings documenting that this is predictive of future depressive disorders present in adulthood (Kandel & Davies, 1982; Pine, Cohen, Cohen, & Brook, 1998). Seal and Young’s (2003) findings in regard to depression are in accord with those reported by Slee and others (Duncan, 1999; Tritt & Duncan, 1997), who found that victims were more depressed than bullies and students not involved in bullying. However, Slee reported that bullies also showed a degree of depression, and both bullies and victims were more depressed than students who were neither bullies nor victims.

The bullied child is at risk for serious long-term maladjustment. Bierman (2002) has found that rejected status is a valid predictor of current and future maladjustment.
Peer rejection contributes to anxiety, depression, anger, and acting-out behaviors (Bierman 2004). Physical and relational bullying behaviors are associated with significant social-psychological adjustment problems for children (Crick 1997, Crick & Grotpe, 1995; Prinstein, Boergers, & Vernberg, 2001; Rys & Bear, 1997; Werner & Crick, 1999). In prospective studies, a disproportionate number of victimized children grow up to experience mental health problems and antisocial behavior (Parker et al., 1995). Aggressive bullies have also been found to reveal negative behavioral outcomes, high-school drop out rates are higher, and drug use and criminal activity is more probable (Olweus, 1991).

In a study by Kingery, Coggeshall, and Alford (1998) students’ involvement with bullying as perpetrator and victim was the most important risk factor identified for carrying weapons at school. The infraction of carrying a weapon to school is one of the most potentially dangerous behaviors facing schools today.

**Prevalence of Bullying Behavior**

There has been extensive research that examines bullying prevalence. There are six different variables typically used to evaluate prevalence. These variables—measures and their data source, definitions; time frame used to consider occurrence, age of participants, gender of the participants, and geographical locations—reflect disparities. An explanation of these considerations will provide a starting point to better understand bullying prevalence within the student population.

**Measures and Data Source**

Researchers have used various types of measures and data sources in the analysis of bullying prevalence. Some of the most common methods are student questionnaires,
teacher questionnaires, interviews, peer nomination inventory or socio-metric interviews. The self-report peer assessments are of varying lengths, and are seen as good indicators of what a child perceives happens to them in school.

Socio-metric measures or peer nomination inventories entail giving each student a class roster in which the students are asked to rank peer preferences or reveal each child’s bullying tendencies. These have proved helpful to determine the few children in each class that are consistently rejected or disliked by their peers, and most likely to be bullied. There have been some concerns that these measures may potentially result in increased rejection for those children.

Bullying prevalence rates vary from as low as 4% based on self-report measures that maintain strict definitions of bullying to as high as 89% when bullying and teasing are rated by simple “yes or no” responses (Hoover, Oliver, & Thomson, 1993). There is a small amount of research on bullying prevalence that has been completed within a naturalist, completely unstructured setting (Hawkins, Pepler, & Craig, 2001). This is important to consider because it raises a different view on prevalence as being higher when children are “free” to play, because children who are alone at playtime or do not have many friends are at an increased risk of being bullied (Olweus, 1991, p. 441; Thompson & Arora, 1991).

Pepler (2001) completed a naturalistic observation study of bullying occurring in unstructured play situations. She found that verbal bullying was prevalent 53% of the time, physical bullying was present 30% of the time, direct confrontation was documented 65% of the time, and social exclusion was reported 13% of the time.
Therefore, it is clear that prevalence rates frequently depend on the measure and data source, and the context considered.

Definitions

The use of consistent definitions and terminology could help to substantiate the prevalence research. Yet, even the term “bully” has been defined differently in the research, and the term can reflect various subjective reactions. Recent work in bullying research has separated the terms bully, victim, and bully-victim for better subgroup classification and identification of student roles. These more stringent criteria obviously have an impact on empirical results. For example, studies which have not separated the four groups with this or similar definitions will have higher prevalence rates as the bullying group may encompass a combination of these subgroups (Olweus 1996).

Bullying research that has used these separate classifications and definitions reveal more specific and accurate prevalence rates; for example, Olweus (1991) has examined the prevalence of the bully/victim group, finding that 6% of those children, who themselves were seriously bullied, bullied others in turn. Toblin et al.’s (2005) findings indicated that of the 240 students they examined, 10% were aggressive, 9% were passive victims, 9% bullies, and 70% normals or non-participants. The recent separation of these terms has alleviated some of the overlapping in the bullying research literature, and helped to pinpoint students that need the intervention.

Time Frame

Olweus (1991) has explained that the time frame considered is particularly important when examining bullying prevalence. In some studies, prevalence estimates only refer to the current situation, and in some instances no information is provided about
the time period for reference. Response and rating categories may vary in both number and specificity. Categories may consist of simple yes-no dichotomies, and categories such as, *sometimes* or *seldom to very often* are vague. There are more exact categories such as *not at all in the past couple of months* to *once a week*. Some studies base their prevalence estimates on a single item or variable, while others use a scale index or sum of items. Typically, more exact categories can help to better pinpoint accurate estimations for bullying prevalence. In addition, documented prevalence statistics also depend largely on the time period considered, the duration and frequency of the aggression, and the perceived seriousness of the incidents. Hoover, Oliver, and Hazler (1992) gathered self-reports of middle and high school students and stated that 77% of students in their research reported being victimized by bullies “at some point” during their school years. This reveals a high percentage, and also reveals the vague terminology “at some point” used in some studies (p. 99).

For example, The World Health Organization on Health Behavior in the United States conducted a study using a sample size of 15,686 students and indicated that approximately 30% of students in Grades 6-10 reported moderate (“sometimes”) or frequent (“at least once per week”) involvement in bullying (Nansel et al., 2001, p. 2094). If a closer look is taken into these reports, results reveal that 13% of these students identified themselves as a bully, 10.6% as a victim, and 6.3% as both bully and victim.

A recent publication by Olweus (2003) addressed the issue related to statistical variation within the bullying prevalence literature. He provided empirical support for “cut off” criteria to help identify bullying based on frequency that is at or above a few times a week. In 1991, Olweus published a nationwide study on bullying with 83,000 students
surveyed, indicating that approximately 7% of students bullied others “now and then,” or more frequently (p. 315). Understanding prevalence and the grouping characteristics is crucial for purposes of identification, causal interpretations, as well as for eventual interventions and implementations.

Age

Bullying is prevalent throughout all grade levels, yet studies show that bullying behavior becomes increasingly problematic in terms of frequency and severity during early adolescence within the middle school years (NCES, 2002). Bullying increases during the late elementary grades, peaks during middle school, and declines through high school (Oliver et al., 1994). Middle school is the age range identified in the literature as the peak for bullying and victimization behavior. (Boulton & Underwood, 1992; Olweus, 1993). Victimization increases from 4th to 8th grade and then decreases after eighth grade for girls and after 9th grade for boys (Hoover, Oliver, & Hazler, 1992). The steady decline in high school was also documented by Espelage and Swearer (2003). It is also crucial to point out one of the common misconceptions, the prevalence of bullying declines as students mature and grow older; it actually changes from aggressive forms to more passive verbal forms (Borg, 1998).

Bullying is also prevalent among very young children. Four types of peer victimization in 5 and 6-year-old children were assessed to determine which forms of bullying were most common (Kochenderfer & Ladd, 1996). Results indicated that about half of the kindergarten children had experienced some bullying, typically in the form of direct verbal aggression and general bullying. Repeated bullying was related to reports of
loneliness at school and school avoidance. This reveals that even early bullying is peer violence that points to physical, verbal, and relational acts of aggression among children.

**Gender**

Bullying has been frequently studied with males and females grouped together, yet there are data reflecting specific gender differences. Males are more involved in physical bullying, while females use more covert forms (Olweus, 1991). Extensive empirical research has demonstrated that when bullying is examined boys are more physically aggressive than girls (Coie & Dodge, 1994). The Olweus study on bullying with 83,000 students surveyed, also reflected a clear trend with boys behaving more frequently as bullies than girls. The more common physical aggression typically expressed by males can be viewed readily and is usually responded to immediately. Yet as recent research reflects, female bullying takes a covert; secretive dimension that is rarely viewed by teachers yet can be exceedingly more psychologically damaging (Crick, Ostrov, Appleyard, Jansen, & Casas, 2004; Simmons, 2002).

Feshbach (1969), in one of the earliest studies on the topic of gender differences in aggression, observed first graders’ responses to unfamiliar peers and referred to the girls' responses as "indirect aggression" (pp. 249-258). Recent studies have further indicated that girls bully, but that they use qualitatively different methods to those used by boys (Bjorqvist, 1994). Lagerspetz, Bjorqvist, and Peltonen (1988) found that girls appear to adopt more indirect methods as they get older. How girls themselves perceive these aggressive behaviors is of importance. If they consider them to be bullying behaviors, then they are indicating that they represent not only an intent to harm, but they fulfill the requirements of that subset of aggression: bullying, which involves a power
imbalance and is repeated over time. Lagerspetz et al. further suggested that girls' tighter social structure made it easier for them to exploit relationships and manipulate and harm others in these indirect ways. Bjorqvist, Osterman, and Kaukiainen (1992) referred to a type of "social manipulation" where the bully makes use of the social structure available to harm the target girl. Aggressive female bullies can use planning and premeditation, manipulation, and powerful clicks that can control the classroom climate (Simmons 2002).

These psychological methods of abuse used by females can include gossip, notes, non-verbal gestures or elaborate facial grimaces, and typically this relational aggression can be everywhere but not obvious to teachers, school administrators, or parents (Simmons, 2002). Conway, Irannejard, and Giannopoulos (2005) have found that gender differences in bullying behavior disappear when assessments are widened to include these relational methods of bullying.

Lagerspetz et al. (1988) have studied females that use these indirect methods of bullying and found similar behavior patterns including spreading rumors, exclusion, and ostracizing others. Crick, Bigbee, and Howes (1996) reported that relational aggression among girls reveals more peer conflicts with increased frequency as they move from middle childhood to adolescence. Such socially manipulative strategies are powerful tools often used by girls to protect and maintain their peer relationships and friendship dyads, which in turn reflect exclusivity, intensity, and disclosure (Crick & Bigbee, 1998). These behaviors appear to serve a dual function: to protect existing friendships from the intrusion of others and to deliberately harm target girls through rejection and isolation (Simmons, 2002).
Maccoby and Jacklin (1974) suggested that girls frequently have a higher level of verbal ability than boys and are generally socialized to avoid overt, physically aggressive behaviors. This may facilitate language being used as the central, manipulative tool that serves to maintain, destroy, or generally control relationships in indirect ways. Bjorqvist, Maltz, and Borker (1983) also examined girls’ language and determined it could be used in the social process to either bind friendships or to reject others; interestingly, that at times when girls talk, they appear to have a double agenda: to be "nice" and appear to sustain social relationships, while at the same time are working to achieve their own individual ends (Maccoby, 1990, p. 513). This double agenda then raises questions of manipulation and intent: two of the key factors in girls' bullying behaviors. Girls, then, use language more subtly, manipulatively, and indirectly than boys, who have been found to use language more directive to command, threat, or boast. Bjorkqvist, Osterman, and Kaukiainen (1992b) suggested that when verbal skills develop, a rich amount of possibilities for the expression of aggression and bullying is facilitated.

Solberg and Olweus (2003) recently completed a study revealing a gender difference within each bullying subcategory; they found that .9% of girl victims ages 11 to 15 were bully/victims and 2.3 % of the boy victims were bully/victims, or also called provocative victims.

Geographical Location

Bullying research within different countries and continents reflects some variation in prevalence rates. Examination of incidents of school bullying has revealed rates that vary between 15% to 25% in Australia (Rigby & Slee, 1991), Austria (Klicpera & Gasteiger Klicpera, 1996), England (Whitney & Smith, 1993; Wolke, Woods, Stanford,
& Schulz, 2001), Finland (Kumpulainen et al., 1998; Kumpulainen & Rasanen, 2000), Germany (Wolke et al., 2001), Norway (Olweus, 1978, 1993b), and the United States (Nansel et al., 2001; Olweus, 1978; 1993b; Wolke et al., 2001).

National research in the U.S. has recently included verbal bullying as well, and results indicated that approximately 15 to 20% of children as early as kindergarten through high school are bullied or teased in some form (Batsche & Knoff, 1994; NCES, 2004). In addition, a few studies in the United States have found a higher estimated rate (20%-40%) of bullying than in other geographical locations (Duncan, 1999; Hoover, Oliver, & Hazler, 1992). Rural American adolescents report themselves as victims more often than do Norwegian or British adolescents (Hoover et al., 1993).

Dake, Price, and Telljohann (2004) conducted a review of the literature and found that international data on primary school age students who reported being victims of bullying has shown a range from 11.3% in Finland to 49.8% in Ireland. They also found that international data on middle school students has shown a range of 4.7% in Finland to 27% in the United Kingdom. Similar to the U.S., the Scandinavian countries have also recently completed substantial empirical research on bullying behavior and found some prevalence increases. This may in part be due to the inclusion of relational and verbal bullying in assessments. Research conducted with 150,000 Norwegian students over many years found that approximately 155 of these children ages 7 to 16 were consistently involved in bullying problems (Olweus, 2001). Statistics from the Swedish National Institute of Occupational Health suggest that bullying in various forms results in 200-400 suicides a year in that country. In Northern European countries, it is widely accepted that at least 5% of children in primary and secondary schools are victims of bullying (Hoover
et al., 1993). In Norway, the department of education accepted results as portraying an unacceptable level of bullying in their schools and launched a national campaign to counteract it.

Bullying was examined in Dublin schools by O’Moore and Hillery (1989). There were 783 participants ages 7-13 from four different schools. Students were asked if they “experience fear coming to school as a result of bullying, been bullied, or rejection by peers” (pp. 426-441). Results revealed that 54.9% received occasional bullying and 8% received serious bullying. Many of those who were bullied admitted to bullying others as well.

Bullying behavior of primary school children was investigated in England and Germany by Wolke in 2001. This large study included 2377 six to eight year olds in England, and 1538 six to eight year olds in Germany all questioned individually. They documented prevalence differences based on country of origin, with perpetrators identified as 2.9% of the English students and 4.8% of the German students, 24% of the English children and 8% of the German children reported victimization. The researchers concluded that cultural differences might explain some of the variation, yet regardless they determined that each country should make efforts to decrease these very large numbers.

No published research on the prevalence of the four subgroups of bullying has been done in South Florida. However, data from a school climate survey published by the public schools suggest that bullying may be a very frequent occurrence for some children. Responses to an annual school climate survey administered in every middle school indicate that when parents were asked if their child’s school is safe and secure, 14% were
unsure, 9% disagreed, and 3% strongly disagreed. When they were asked if school officials and law enforcement work together to keep their child’s school free from violence, 14% of parents were undecided, 10% disagreed, and 6% strongly disagreed. In response to the statement, “The overall climate of my child’s school is a positive atmosphere for learning,” 15% of parents were undecided, 8% of parents disagreed, and 4% of parents strongly disagreed.

When the middle school students were surveyed regarding whether they felt safe in their school, 18% were undecided, 6% disagreed, and 12% strongly disagreed. In response to the statement, “Violence is a problem in my school,” 22% of middle school students were undecided, 21% agreed and 19% strongly agreed. In response to the statement, “I like coming to school,” 29% of middle school students were undecided, 13% disagreed, and 19% strongly disagreed. Finally, middle school students were asked to respond to the statement, “The overall climate or feeling at my school is positive and helps me learn.” Twenty-eight percent were undecided, 13% disagreed, and 19% strongly disagreed. When the teaching staff was asked if their ability to do their best possible job was limited by school violence, 8% were unsure, 9% agreed, and 3% strongly agreed.

These noted prevalence variations examined from different geographical locations could be attributed to two things: true cultural differences and/or some or all of these defining seven variables.

**Bullying and Social Skills Deficits**

A great frustration encountered by parents and teachers of students with LD is not always the student who acts out, but the one who fails to perform the appropriate behavior or skill for a given circumstance, frequently labeled a social skill deficit
(Gresham & Elliott, 1989). Social skill deficits can be either skill-based or performance-based; children with LD may have the skill but it may not be at an acceptable level. Human interaction is full of necessary social skills. This interaction involves constant interpretation and encoding and reacting to the social world with great perceptual, auditory and verbal and nonverbal processing. This section discusses how social skill deficits impact children who may be involved in bullying.

A skill-based deficit is when a student has not learned how to perform a specific action or behavior. For example, a student who has not learned to decode could be said to have a reading skill deficit. If a child does not implement the skill of greeting others appropriately, he or she may have a social skill deficit, and it may be that while some children learn this without explanation, there are those who need specific social skills instruction (Smith 1991).

There is a large body of research indicating that social skills difficulties may predict serious psycho-social adjustment problems in life (Briney & Satcher, 1996; Dumas, 1998; Elksnin & Elksnin, 2000; Fuchs, Fuchs, Mathes, & Martinez, 2002; Givon, 2003; Goldstein & McGinnis 2000; Gresham & Elliott, 1987; Hayes, 1994; Jarvis & Justice, 1992; Koller & Goldberg, 2002; Lavoie, 1994; Morrison & Cosden, 1997; Rudolph & Luckner, 1991; Vacca, 2001; Vaughn, McIntosh, & Spencer-Rowe, 1991). There has not been any empirical research that examines specific social skill deficit areas and how these may impact or inadvertently invite bullying among children with LD. However, empirical data has revealed that children with LD have more social adjustment problems as a consequence of social skills deficits and their peers’ responses to them (Spafford & Grosser, 1993; Stiliadis & Wiener, 1993; Stone & LaGreca, 1990).
There is a maturational lag reflecting slowness in certain aspects of neurological development for children with LD (Bender, 1957; Koppitz, 1973), within the realm of social functioning these differences are reflected in delays in social perception (Holder & Kirkpatrick, 1991; Nabuzoka & Smith, 1995), and social information processing (Nabuzoka & Smith). These delays or deficits may occur at any one or more junctions of Dodge’s six automated, interrelated steps for social actions.

Dodge’s five-step social information processing model helps us to understand what occurs normally in a social setting when children possess productive social skills (Crick & Dodge, 1994; Dodge et al., 1986). Crick and Dodge describe children who follow these steps without having to think about them as pro-social children. The social behavior of pro-social children is the result of six interrelated, cognitively automated steps: (a) encoding situational and internal cues, (b) interpretation of cues, (c) selecting or clarifying a goal, (d) generating or accessing possible responses, (e) choosing a response, and (f) behavioral enactment (Crick & Dodge; Dodge et al.). Children who have difficulty accessing or evaluating responses to social situations (Steps d and e) tend to have fewer responses from which to choose in social situations and may fail to evaluate the consequences of particular behaviors (e.g., Mize & Cox, 1990; Spivack & Shure, 1974).

To illustrate, deficits at the encoding or the interpretation stage of processing reflects a misinterpretation of the intent of others as hostile in neutral or ambiguous social situations. Hostile misattributions have been linked to aggressive responses, now known as hostile attribution bias (Crick & Dodge, 1994). Aggressive children are more likely to make hostile attributions than their non-aggressive peers or pro-social peers (Slaby &
Guerra, 1988). Deficits at the goal selection or clarification stage can result in the selection of antisocial rather than pro-social goals (Asher & Renshaw, 1981; Crick & Dodge, 1989). Social problems, difficult behaviors, and peer aggressions have been associated with these findings (Spafford & Grosser, 1993; Kravetz et al., 1999). Children with LD reveal more social adjustment problems as a consequence of social skills confusion or deficits and their peers’ responses to them (Spafford & Grosser, 1993). The literature documents that children with LD show a reduced ability to deal with these non-verbal aspects of communication (Rourke, 1989, 1995). The inability to decode these social cues puts children at a great disadvantage and leaves them more vulnerable to hostility from their peers and bullying (Nabuzoka & Smith, 1993).

The three areas of social skills examined in this study include cooperation, assertion, and self-control. Deficits in any or all three of these functions would impede the normal social processing steps indicated by Crick and Dodge (1994). A study by Haynie et al. (2001) evaluated bullies, victims, and bully/victims: distinct groups of at-risk youth, they included self-control as one of the main variables in their analysis. Haynie et al. concluded that self-control was highly associated with bullying group membership, which is consistent with previous work that has indicated bullies are impulsive (Olweus, 1995). Low social competence was the other variable in this study that was highly associated with problem behaviors and represented high at-risk group characteristics. One way they assessed social competence was to evaluate communication, and problem solving in social situations (Haynie et al.).
Bullying and Learning Disabilities

There is minimal research that specifically examines bullying among children with LD, yet there is extensive research regarding the characteristics of children with LD, and their vulnerable profiles. The American Psychological Association's Commission on Violence and Youth (American Psychological Association, 1993) reported that existing data suggest that students with disabilities are particularly at risk for physical and sexual abuse. The terminology with disabilities is vague and all-inclusive. The extent to which sexual abuse occurs on a school campus is likely to be low, but children and adolescents are subjected to the more common forms of school aggression such as pushing, shoving, and name-calling on a very frequent basis (Furlong et al., 1994). The first section discusses the minimal research on bullying and children with learning disabilities and the second section looks at studies that have examined the vulnerable characteristics of children with learning disabilities.

Empirical research on bullying of students with learning disabilities is minimal. A recent meta-analysis examining research conducted between 1989 and 2003 found only 11 studies that examined bullying and students with disabilities. The authors separate visible disabilities and non-visible, which includes attention deficit disorder, LD, and behavioral disorder. Five studies fall under the bullying and LD area, and only two of these were conducted in the United States: Sabornie (1994) and Morrison and Furlong (1994).

Sabornie (1994) evaluated social affective differences among 38 LD students and 38 NLD matched controls. Conclusions focused on findings that the LD students revealed lower self-esteem and overall social problems in general. The Morrison and Furlong
(1994) study provided results based on a school safety and climate survey focusing on at-risk students including 11 students in an “opportunity” class and 19 students with severe LD (p. 236). Morrison (1994) surveyed 554 high school students to examine their experiences in school violence and feelings of safety. There were 11 participants from an opportunity class which was defined as a self-contained, half-day program for at-risk students who had behavioral and academic difficulties and 19 students with severe learning disabilities in special day classes. The School Safety and Climate Survey (SSCS) revealed differences between groups on perceptions of safety. Students in the opportunity and leadership class experienced and observed higher rates of school violence while the special day class students experienced more bullying than the other groups. However, the findings of this study should be interpreted with caution due to low sample sizes.

The study completed by Norwich and Kelly (2004) took place in the United Kingdom where 84% of a sample of students with moderate LD reported the experience of bullying and 49% indicating this was related to their learning difficulties. In a previous study, O’Moore and Hillary (1989) found that children with special education needs (SEN) placed in remedial classes in mainstream schools report themselves to be victims of bullying nearly twice as often as students in mainstream without LD: 12%; 7% (O’Moore & Hillary, 1989). A qualitative look at SEN children in Sheffield, England, was completed by Hodson (1989). She found that children with special needs were teased significantly more than mainstream children and formed fewer friendships. Hodson also found that mainstream children showed a preference for social interaction with other mainstream peers rather than with the SEN children.
Martlew and Hodson (1991) evaluated students with mild LD and examined social integration. They found that students with LD had fewer friends and were teased more than NLD students. Nabuzoka (2003) examined bullying in schools in the United Kingdom with teacher ratings and peer nominations. This study included 20 moderate LD students, and concluded that they were shyer than NLD students and were more often victimized. Nabuzoka and Smith (1993) had previously looked at peer status and social behavior in middle school students from the United Kingdom. They had a total sample size of 179 children with 36 LD students. Their results revealed that the participants with LD were shyer than their NLD counterparts, and were more often victimized as well.

**Characteristics of Children with LD**

There is a large body of empirical research establishing some of the characteristics common to children with LD. Children with LD have been found to have more behavioral problems, such as hyperactivity and aggression, than their non-LD peers (McGee, Williams, Share, Anderson, & Silva, 1986). A meta-analysis of 81 studies revealed that children with LD were more likely to be rated as aggressive, immature, to suffer from personality problems, and to have difficulties in attending to groups when compared with non-LD counterparts (Swanson & Malone, 1992). Vallance et al. (1998) explain that both syntactic and semantic coordination of language skills impact successful communication and children with LD exhibit several deficits in the expression and interpretation of verbal as well as nonverbal communication. In general, children with LD were found to have difficulties with social interactions (Spafford & Grosser, 1993). On social problem-solving tasks, children with LD have been found to perform worse than their peers (Nabuzoka & Smith, 1999; Smith, 1986). Learning disabled students were
also found to be less cooperative than their non-disabled classmates (Haager & Vaughan, 1995).

Children with LD are more at risk for depressive symptomology because of lower self-concept, more loneliness, lower social status among peers, increased anxiety, and higher external locus of control (Bender, 1987; Bladow, 1982; Geisthardt & Munsch, 1996; Margalit & Levin-Alyagon, 1994; Margalit & Shulman, 1986). In addition, children with LD have problems with attention, organization, and hyperactivity. There is a high incidence, 82.2% of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder among LD students (Mayes, Calhoun, & Crowell, 2000).

The recent empirical study conducted by Toblin et al. (2005) documents the unique social-cognitive and behavioral attributes of the bully/victim subgroup as discussed in the previous section. In addition, this research points out the academic differences common to this subgroup, that is, significantly lower standardized achievement test scores and lower grade point averages than all other subgroups of children. (Toblin et al. do not indicate which, if any, students in this low achieving bully/victim subgroup may possess a learning disability.)

Children with LD are more rejected when compared with their mainstream counterparts (Nabuzoka & Smith, 1993) and have a higher rate of being victimized (Martlew & Hodson, 1991; Nabuzoka & Smith, 1993; O’Moore & Hillery, 1989; Thompson, Whitney, & Smith, 1994). Yet, there are also data indicating that children with LD are more aggressive than their non-LD peers. One study found that they bullied others significantly more than mainstream children (Thompson et al.).
Researchers find that social status is an important piece to the feelings of well-being and general psychosocial functioning of persons with LD. They contend that persons who experience significant difficulties in learning are most vulnerable and predisposed to disorders in other areas of social and emotional human functioning (Rourke & Fuerst, 1991). Rourke and Fuerst have investigated LD and psychosocial functioning and concluded that specific patterns of central processing abilities and deficits cause specific manifestations (subtypes) of LD and specific forms of socio-emotional problems, the “common cause” explanation. Similar to this “common cause” hypothesis is the “social cognitive deficit hypothesis,” which argues that the impairment in social perception and understanding of children with LD accounts for their peer problems and vulnerability to aggressions (Nabuzoka, 1999, NEED PAGE).

McConaughy and Ritter (1996) contended that deficiencies in execution reflect a different cognitive structure, and, therefore, children with LD are unable to build up requisite age-appropriate knowledge and strategies to perform social tasks successfully. On average, children with LD experienced many situations in which they fared worse than their normal peers. However, it is also important to note that not all children with LD exhibit significant social-emotional problems (Rourke et al., 1991).

Many researchers contended that children with LD compared with typically developing children become more vulnerable to these aggressions because they exhibit lower social competence (Greenham, 1999; Kavale & Forness, 1996; Lewandowski & Barlow, 2000; Morrison & Cosden, 1997). Eisenberg (2001) has evaluated affective social competence, and concluded that emotion-related regulation is the critical link between deficits in emotion and peer difficulties. Extended support for this theory has
been found in preschool children (Calkins, Smith, Gill, & Johnson, 1999). These researchers concluded that there is a positive relationship between the child’s ability to effectively regulate negative emotional reactions to frustration and socially competent behavior during peer involvement.

Research on the social competence of students with LD found that they had poorer social cognition than non-disabled students (Bryan, 1991). A deficit in social cognition may be obvious in a student who does not react to social cues or who lacks understanding of the demands given the social context (Bryan, 1994). Kumpulanian (1989) found that children with LD self-reported ineffective problem-solving skills. This correlates with what many researchers, practitioners, and theorists observe in psychopathology patients, weak flexibility and constrictions in the affective, cognitive, and behavioral areas of adaptational interactions (Overton & Horowitz, 1991). The social context demands constant flexibility and adaptation of emotion and behavior; therefore, difficulties with these social tasks place children with LD at increased risk of being ostracized and bullied (Bryan, 1994).

The majority of research on learning disability and social competency does not distinguish between the various forms of learning disability. Recent studies are increasingly delineating the groups of symptoms into two major LD categories: verbal learning disabilities (VLD) and nonverbal learning disabilities (NLD) (Foss, 1991b; Gerber & Sisterhen, 1989; Harnadek & Rourke, 1994; Morris et al., 1998; Roman, 1998; Rourke, 1989, 1995,; 1996, 2000; San Miguel, Forness, & Kavale, 1996; Telzrow & Bonar, 2002; Vacca, 2001). Students with nonverbal LD have difficulty learning and internalizing necessary skills for common interactions, typically revealing social
difficulties (Rourke, 1995b; Rourke & Fuerst, 1996; Thompson, 1997). Verbal LD is evidenced by a deficit in the ability to read, write, think, or spell when combined with average cognitive ability; the deficit is typically restricted to a specific area of performance. These researchers have found that individuals with nonverbal LD demonstrate lower social skills and have peer problems and suffer from frequent victimization. Rourke (1995a) found that students with a nonverbal learning disability lack the ability to comprehend social cues and all nonverbal communication, which reveals a break down in social judgment and social situations. These students also reveal deficits in social perception, judgment, interaction skills, and cannot consistently appreciate or understand humor. Researchers contend that children with nonverbal LD are more at risk for victimization and negative peer interactions than their non-LD peers (Fuerst & Rourke, 1993; Harnadek & Rourke, 1994; Rourke, 1995a).

**Summary**

Browning, Cohen, and Warman (2003) recently evaluated peer social competence and the stability of victimization. They found that friendship status was related to victimization, such that children who managed to decrease being a victim found themselves with improved friendships. Browning et al. (2003) concluded that this reinforces previous findings indicating that friendships may have a buffering effect on negative peer interactions. These researchers conclude with a call for future study into relations among variables associated with peer rejection and victimization so as to help children avoid involvement in bullying situations.
CHAPTER III

METHOD

Participants

An application to conduct this research was submitted to the University of Miami Institutional Review Board and the local school system review board for approvals. Both approvals were granted and the recruitment process began in January 2008. The number of students that the research board approved for recruitment was 300 (100 with LD). The participating school district is in the Southeastern area and is one of the largest in the United States, with a student enrollment of approximately 372,000+ in 2007-2008. The district is also one of the largest minority public school systems in the country: 60% of its students are of Hispanic origin, and 28% are of Caribbean or African American descent.

The criteria that were established to meet the demands of this study included: (a) enrollment between 800 and 1200 students, (b) a minimum of 60 students identified as students with LD, (c) between 40% and 70% of the students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, and (d) at least 15% or more of the students indicated on the most recent school climate survey that they did not feel safe at school and/or at least 20% of the students indicated on the survey that violence is a problem at their school. The demographics of the middle schools for the participating school district were reviewed to determine the potential schools that met the criteria. This review revealed a total of ten middle schools from the participating Southeastern school district that met the criteria. Individual phone calls to the ten school administrators were placed to explain the dissertation research. Four of the middle schools replied with immediate phone calls, one declined participation, two requested participation for the following year, and one middle
school requested a next day conference and expressed interest in participation. The researcher visited the school that expressed a desire to be included in the study that week and presented the process to the school principal and trust counselor. The principal and counselor agreed to full participation and requested that the researcher present the study to the social studies teachers the following week.

The specifics for this participating school were as follows: (a) regular education enrollment of seventh and eighth graders was approximately 900; (b) students in exceptional education represented 21.7% of the student body; (c) 47% of the students were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch; (d) when asked if they felt safe at their school, 13% of the students disagreed and 5% strongly disagreed; when asked if violence was a problem at their school, 15% strongly agreed and 26% agreed. The distribution of the seventh and eighth graders by race was, 11% White, 6% Black, 77% Hispanic, and 7% Asian/ Indian or multiracial.

At the meeting with the social studies teachers, 8 out of the 10 teachers present were willing to participate in the research and immediately signed consent forms. The researcher gave these 8 teachers all of the necessary consent forms for parents and students. That week the teachers gave students the parent consent forms to have signed and returned to school within a week. The researcher returned to the school and collected all signed parent consents and youth assents, from participating students.

The student assents and parental consents were given out to approximately 100 seventh graders and 300 eighth graders. There were 29 consents returned with denial to participate and 89 consents not returned. Final collection numbers that replied yes to participation totaled 52 seventh graders and 230 eighth graders; there was no difference
in return rate for students with and without LD. Ultimately, 156 students with LD and 126 students without LD, received parental permission and agreed to participate. Of these, 27 had questionnaires that could not be used owing to items left blank.

As seen from in Table 1, a slightly smaller percentage of participants are students with LD (43.5%), a greater percentage have a learning disability (56.5%). There were slightly more females (54.5%) than males (44.3%). A majority of the respondents were eighth graders (83.5%).

Table 1

*Distribution of the Sample by LD Status, Gender, and Grade Level*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LD Status</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students without LD</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>43.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students with LD</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>56.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>44.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>54.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade level</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seventh</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>16.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eighth</td>
<td>213</td>
<td>83.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Procedures**

The administration of the RBVQ was conducted during social studies class by the consenting teachers and with assistance from the researcher. Instructions to the student groups were as follows:

I am trying to find out how often students are bullied in your school. The questionnaires that you are about to complete have many items, so please read
carefully and pick the best answer for you. To understand what bullying means, we say a student is being bullied when another student, or several other students, say mean and hurtful things or make fun of him or her or call him or her mean and hurtful names, and/or completely ignore or exclude him or her from their group of friends or leave him or her out of things on purpose, and/or hit, kick, push, shove around, or lock him or her inside a room, and/or tell lies or spread false rumors about him or her or send mean notes and try to make other students dislike him or her. When we say bullying, we mean these things happen repeatedly, and it is difficult for a student being bullied to defend him or herself. We also call it bullying, when a student is teased repeatedly in a mean and hurtful way. There is no right or wrong answer and everything will be confidential. In other words no one in your school will know your specific answers, and your name does not go on the paper. Thank you for your help with this study.

To ensure student privacy the responses were placed in an envelope and were coded with a number corresponding to the SSRS for the homeroom teacher. The social studies teachers were asked to complete the SSRS within a 2-week time frame. The researcher returned to the school after 2 weeks to retrieve all of the questionnaires.

Measures

Bullying/Victimization (RBVQ)

Students were asked to complete the Olweus’ (1996) Revised Bully/Victim Questionnaire (RBVQ; Solberg & Olweus, 2003). The questionnaire consists of 40 questions that provide information on student variables and self-reports related to bully/victim problems. The first question asks if the student likes school in general, the second question asks for the student’s gender, and the third question asks how many good friends the student has. Subsequent questions address the frequency of experiencing physical, verbal, indirect, racial and sexual forms of being bullied and bullying other students. Students are also asked about their pro-bully or pro-victim attitudes and the extent to which the social environment, teachers, peers, and parents are informed about
the bullying incidents. The students are also asked who they have reported the incidents to and what has been the response to these reports.

Students were classified as bullies, victims, bully-victims, or non-participants in bullying based on two items considered global bullying questions (Q4 and Q24). Item Q4 reads, “How often have you been bullied at school in the past couple of months?” and has five response alternatives. These choices are the following: “It hasn’t happened in the past couple of months, it has only happened once or twice, 2 or 3 times a month, about once a week, several times a week.” The lower bound cut-off point to determine victim status is 2 or 3 times a month or more frequently. Item 24 reads, “How often have you taken part in bullying another student(s) at school in the past couple of months?” The same five response alternatives follow this question and a response of 2 or 3 times a month or more frequently determines bully status. Students who responded “2 or 3 times a month” or more to both questions fall into the bully/victim subgroup.

**Reliability**

No data are available on the reliability of the two global questions to assess the frequency with which students have experienced bullying or the frequency with which they have bullied other students. Solberg and Olweus (2003) found a correlation of .88 between school-level prevalence estimates for 37 schools based on responses to the global questions, on the one hand, and responses to the specific questions, on the other.

**Validity**

Construct validity for the classification based on two global variables was investigated by Solberg and Olweus (2003) by examining differences between students classified as victims vs. nonvictims and those classified as bullies vs. nonbullies on scales
measuring theoretically related variables such as internalizing problems, perceived social disintegration, depressive tendencies, and global negative self-evaluations/poor self-esteem. There were large, highly significant differences between victims and nonvictims on measures of social disintegration, global negative self-evaluation, and depressive tendencies. There were also highly significant differences between bullies and nonbullies on measures of aggression and antisocial behavior (Solberg & Olweus, 2003).

Several other features enhance the validity of the classification based on students’ responses to the global items. First, the anonymous format helps improve the validity of the students’ responses compared to other measures that require victims and bullies to record their experiences openly (Ortega, Sánchez, & Menesini, 2001). Also, validity is increased by the presenter’s scripted definition of bullying behavior with an exclusionary clause to explain what is not bullying (see Appendix A).

Self-reports of bullying can be questionable, owing to social responding. An intervention study by Olweus (1991) found that class-aggregated student rating estimates of the number of students in the class who were bullied or bullied others during the reference period were correlated with class-aggregated estimates derived from the students' own reports of being bullied or bullying others. Correlations were in the .60-.70 range (Olweus).

**Social Skills (SSRS)**

Social skills were measured by the *Social Skills Rating System: Teacher Report Form, SSRS-TRF* (Gresham & Elliott, 1990). The SSRS is a norm-referenced 30-item scale designed to measure teachers' perceptions of students' social skills. The authors define social skills as socially acceptable learned behaviors that allow a person to interact
effectively with people and to avoid socially unacceptable exchanges (Gresham & Elliott). The SSRS Teacher Questionnaire consists of three subscales: cooperation (10 items), assertion (10 items), and self-control (10 items). There are three possible raw scores for each item. The sum of the responses yields a Total Social Skills scale score, ranging from 0-60. Higher scores reflect more positive social skills. The scale is appropriate for assessing the social skills of children ages 3 to 18 years of age, and requires 10 to 20 minutes to complete.

The measure was standardized on a national sample of more than 4,000 students. Separate norms are provided for boys and girls, and for students with and without disabilities. Internal consistency reliability for teachers’ ratings of social skills is reported to be .90 (Gresham & Elliott, 1990). Test-retest reliability of the SSRS was measured by having samples of teachers from the standardization sample rate the same students four weeks after their original ratings. The findings for the social skills ratings revealed correlations of .85 (Gresham & Elliott).

The SSRS manual states that three validity studies were conducted using the teacher form, and each study used data from selected sections of the national standardization sample. The first study investigated the relationships between the teacher form and the Social Behavior Assessment (SBA; Stephens, 1978). The SBA is a teacher rating scale of 136 social skill behaviors with four subdomains. These include interpersonal behaviors, self-related behaviors, and task-related behaviors. Total score correlations between the SSRS and the SBA were -.68 for social skills, .55 for problem behaviors, and -.67 for academic competence.
In the second study, correlations between the SSRS and the Child Behavior Checklist for the teacher report of the Achenback measure were .75 for externalizing behaviors and .59 for internalizing behaviors (Achenback & Edelbrock, 1983). The third study investigated the relationship between the SSRS and the Harter Teacher Rating Scale (TRS; Harter, 1985). The total SSRS social skills scale correlated .70 with the Harter total score; correlations of the subscales for the SSRS and the Harter ranged from .56 to .62.
CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The main objective of the current study was to determine whether there is a difference in the percent of middle-school students with and without LD who are victims of bullying. A secondary objective of the study was to determine whether students’ social skills (as reported by a teacher) significantly discriminate between victims and non-victims. Further, this study sought to document the relative frequency of different types of bullying among middle school students.

Percentage of Students With and Without LD Who Are Victims of Bullying

Students were first classified as either victims or non-victims based on their response to Question 4 of the RBVQ. Following the protocol recommended by the instrument’s authors, students who indicated that they had been a victim of bullying two or more times in the past month were classified as victims; the rest were classified as non-victims. Students were then classified as bullies or non-bullies based on their response to Question 24 of the RBVQ. Students who indicated that they had bullied another student two or more times in the past month were classified as bullies; the rest were classified as non-bullies. Students classified as victims but not classified as bullies were categorized as victims only, students classified as both victims and bullies were categorized as bully-victims, students classified as bullies but not classified as victims were categorized as bullies only, and students classified as neither victims nor bullies were categorized as non-participants. The cross-tabulation of students with and without LD in each category is presented in Table 2.
As seen in Table 2, some of the groups had extremely small $n$’s, for example, there was 1 bully-victim among students without LD and there were 5 bully-victims among students with LD. Therefore, a further cross-tabulation was run using only the superordinate categories of victims and non-victims. Table 3 displays this cross-tabulation. The results of a chi-square test conducted on this second cross-tabulation indicated that there was no significant relationship between LD status and victim status, $\chi^2 (1) = .373, p = .541$.

Table 3

*Frequencies and Percentages of Students With and Without LD Classified as Victims and Non-Victims*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classification</th>
<th>Students without LD</th>
<th>Students with LD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$N$</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victims</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-victims</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>93.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Classification of Students as Victims or Non-Victims Based on Social Skills

Data from the SSRS were available for 95 of the students who participated in the study. Table 4 displays the distribution of this subsample of students by gender and grade level. This distribution closely matches the distribution of the larger sample on these variables.

Table 4

*Distribution of SSRS Subsamples by Gender and Grade*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Percent of students without LD</th>
<th>Percent of students with LD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>( n = 51 )</td>
<td>( n = 44 )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>43.2</td>
<td>45.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>56.8</td>
<td>52.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seventh</td>
<td>16.2</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eighth</td>
<td>83.8</td>
<td>83.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The means and standard deviations of teachers’ ratings of students’ social skills are presented in Table 5. Inspection of the distribution of scores on the three subscales indicated that scores on all three subscales were normally distributed. Comparison of the mean scores with those reported in the SSRS manual indicated that group means for students with and without LD were quite comparable to those of the SSRS norming samples. Mean ratings on the norming samples for seventh and eighth graders ranged from 13.5 to 18 for Cooperation scores, 9.75 to 12 for Assertion scores, and 11 to 14 for Self-Control scores.
Table 5

Measures and Standard Deviations of Students’ Scores on the SSRS Subscales

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SSRS subscale</th>
<th>Students without LD</th>
<th>Students with LD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperation</td>
<td>15.73</td>
<td>4.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assertion</td>
<td>10.20</td>
<td>4.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-control</td>
<td>12.96</td>
<td>4.78</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discriminant Function Analysis

A discriminant function analysis (DFA) was carried out to assess the extent to which students’ scores on the social skills variables predicted their classification as victims or non-victims. DFA is a statistical procedure that classifies cases into groups, based on a set of predictors.

Table 6 presents the results of the DFA. The findings in Table 6 indicate that the discriminant function did not significantly distinguish non-victims from victims. First, the eigenvalue of 0.046 was very small, indicating that the variance within each group was much higher than the variance between groups. Second, the canonical correlation, \( r = 0.211 \), indicated a minimal association between the resulting discriminant scores and the non-victim and victim groups. Third, the fact that the value of lambda was almost 1 (0.956) indicates that there was minimal variability between groups. As shown in Table 6, the chi-square value of Wilks’ lambda was not statistically significant, \( \chi^2 = 4.155, p = 0.245 \). Accordingly, these results indicate that the three social skills subscales did not significantly discriminate non-victims from victims.
Table 6

**Discriminant Function Analysis Results**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Eigenvalue</th>
<th>Canonical $r$</th>
<th>Wilks’ Lambda</th>
<th>$\chi^2$</th>
<th>$df$</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>.046</td>
<td>.211</td>
<td>.956</td>
<td>4.155</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.245</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The resulting classification table generated by the discriminant function is presented in Table 7. Of the 86 cases in the non-victim category, 54 were predicted correctly to be members of that category (62.8%) while 32 were incorrectly assigned to the victim category (37.2%). Similarly, of the 9 cases in the victim category, 6 were predicted correctly to be members of that category (66.7%) while 3 were incorrectly assigned to the non-victim category (33.3%). The overall percentage of cases classified correctly was only 63.2%.

Table 7

**Discriminant Function Classification Results**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predicted group membership</th>
<th>Actual group membership</th>
<th>Non-victim</th>
<th>Victim</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Non-victim</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>86</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victim</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>95</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Types of Bullying**

Table 8 presents the percentages of students with and without LD who experienced each of six types of bullying, two or more times a month. As shown in
Table 8, approximately 11% of students with LD and 15% of students without LD were called mean names. The percentages of students who reported being a victim of lies and of sexual gestures were similar for students with and without LD. Being physically victimized and hearing comments about race were reported more frequently by students without LD than by students with LD. The percentage of students who reported being a victim of theft was slightly higher for students with than without LD.

Table 8

*Percentage of Students With and Without LD Who Experienced Specific Types of Bullying*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Bullying</th>
<th>Students without LD</th>
<th>Students with LD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Called mean names</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>14.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hit, kicked, or shoved around</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victim of lies</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>7.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victim of theft</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hearing comments about race</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victim of sexual gestures</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicated that there was no significant difference in the percentage of middle-school students with LD and those without LD classified as victims and non-victims. In addition, the three social skills areas for the SSRS-TR did not significantly predict group membership for victims or non-victims. In this chapter, these major findings are explained, including practical implications and limitations of the study.

It was expected that a significant difference would be found between the percentage of students with and without LD classified as victims. This expectation was based on the research that has identified students with LD as more vulnerable to psychosocial maladjustment (Kavale & Forness, 1996; Morrison & Cosden, 1997), the social processing weakness found in students with LD (Rourke & Fuerst, 1993), and the higher rejection rate among peers documented in children with LD (Nabuzoka & Smith, 1993).

One possible explanation for the unexpected finding of no differences regarding victimization between students with and without LD has to do with using LD status as the grouping variable in this research. Not all students with LD have the kinds of social problems that are associated with being victimized. For example, Rourke (1995) and Fuerst (1993) have argued that students with a non-verbal learning disability (NVLD) constitute a subtype of LD and that students with this subtype of LD—rather than all students with LD—experience social processing problems. Research involving students with LD could provide more informative results if the specific nature of a student’s
learning disability were better differentiated. Specifically, if subtype of LD had been used instead of general LD status in the present study, the results might have shown differences in the percent of victims among students with a NVLD, students with a verbal LD, and students without LD.

Regarding distinguishing bullying groups, this study revealed that across all students, 7.5% were classified as victims only and 2.4% as bully-victims, yielding a total of 9.9% of students who were victims of bullying. These percentages are close to those documented in previous research. Olweus (2003) identified 7.9% victims only, and 1.5% bully-victims in a sample of 2,378 middle school students. Champion, Vernberg, and Shipman (2003) found 10% victims only in a sample of 274 middle school students. Results from Nansel et al. (2001) indicated that 10.6 % of middle school students (N = 269) were victims only and 6.3% were bully-victims. These similarities reflect the relatively consistent prevalence of bullying across different geographical locations.

The finding of no association between social skills and victim status can be explained in various ways. First, while some students with LD may have problems with social skills, not all students with LD have problems with cooperation, self-control, and assertion that would invite victimization. Second, it is possible that this study did not tap the aspects of social skills reflected in the research that found that children with LD have more social adjustment problems as a consequence of social skill deficits (Spafford & Grosser, 1993; Stiliasdis & Wiener, 1993; Stone & LaGreca, 1990). Some researchers have recently identified these aspects as having to do with social information processing and specifically how students “read” social intent and attributions (Crick & Dodge, 1994). The main idea in the social information processing explanation is that children
have different ways of understanding and interpreting social situations. These different understandings combine with past experiences and biological capabilities to influence actions (Lemerise & Arsenio, 2000).

Third, the fact that social skills scores were based on teachers’ ratings may have affected the results, in that teachers may not be close enough observers of the interactions that occur between students to assess students’ social competencies with their peers. The more challenging social context for students with LD would be the less structured settings, such as the hallway, recess, cafeteria, and bus time. These peer driven social interactions demand more social processing and incorporate a complex analysis of social intentions. The teachers in this study may be accurately indicating what they observe in their structured classroom setting where expectations are clear. They have fewer opportunities to observe their students in those more challenging and constantly changing social situations.

There were no marked differences in the types of bullying incidents experienced by middle school students with and without LD. As noted in the results, being called mean names was the type of incident most frequently reported. The occurrence of verbally aggressive remarks was greater than that of the physical types of bullying. The other forms of bullying that were included in the questionnaire were being a victim of lies, theft, sexual gestures and hearing comments about race, all of which occurred in this sample of students.

**Research Implications**

There are three main suggestions for future research based on the results of this study. First, future research aimed at investigating the prevalence of bullying among
students with LD should classify participants based on the nature of their social 
information processing skills. Students with social processing problems, for example, 
NVLD, should be grouped separately from students with other types of LD.

Second, future research could identify more clearly which areas of social skills capture specific vulnerabilities to bullying. This could be accomplished with reference to Crick Dodge’s (1994) reformulation of the six-step social information processing model. This model describes the processes involved in responding to social cues, ideally to identify the mental actions likely to predict aggressive behavior. Specifically this refers to the encoding patterns that are attentive to hostile cues, representational biases toward hostile attributions, self-defensive goal-setting, aggressive response repertoires, and favorable evaluations of the outcomes of aggressive behavior. Due to the comprehensive nature of the social information processing model, the model has been applied to a range of different social behaviors including pro-social and aggressive behavior (Crick & Nelson, 2002). Crick and Nelson’s research regarding problems with peer interactions takes social processing into account and has begun to use assessments that examine a hostile misattribution bias regarding social encounters. These types of measures could be used within the bullying research to examine the aspects of social problems that may lead to peer victimization.

The third recommendation is that the RBVQ continue to be used for future research in the area of bullying and victimization. The internal consistency of the RBVQ was evidenced when items assessing specific victimization incidents reflected percentages that were similar to those reported for the general questions about having experienced bullying and having been a bully. It is also suggested that the RBVQ
includes an additional item that addresses high technology or cyber-bullying. This type of bullying is also harmful. Although it deviates from traditional patterns of bullying in that the bully may not be seen by the victim, the harassing emails or instant messages can be just as damaging to victims.

**Practical Implications**

It is recommended that schools administer the RBVQ or portions of this questionnaire for purposes of identifying students who have been repeatedly victimized. The RBVQ is fairly easy to administer and to interpret. Schools or school counselors could use the victimization portion to identify the students that are repeated victims in order to implement any necessary interventions. Frequently, these are the students whose problems are hidden from staff and who may need more emotional support. Timely intervention may attenuate these students’ risk for future psychosocial maladjustment.

**Limitations of the Study**

This study was limited to only one middle school from a southeastern school district in Florida. However, the school was selected based on criteria that matched the larger region, and is, therefore, reflective of similar multi-cultural and middle socio-economic populations. Nonetheless, studies conducted in other geographical areas, or in schools with different socio-economic make-up, might produce different results.

**Conclusion**

Research suggests that students with LD who have social processing difficulties, such as an inability to decode social cues, are at a disadvantage to maneuver complex social interactions. This leaves them more vulnerable to hostility from their peers (Nabuzoka & Smith, 1993). This study found that there was no significant difference in
the percentage of middle school students with LD and those without LD classified as victims and non-victims. Therefore, the assumption that all school-identified students with LD, as a group, are more vulnerable to bullying appears to be incorrect. The use of specific sub-types of LD may help to identify those students who have social processing weaknesses that will leave them more vulnerable to their peers.

The three social skills areas for the SSRS-TR—cooperation, assertion, and self-control—did not significantly predict group membership for victims or non-victims. It is possible that using the social information processing model and examining hostile attributions will lead to identification of the specific social skills in question. These skills can then be analyzed to determine how they may impede appropriate behavior and thus create vulnerability to bullying.

The school survey for the participating school does not specifically use the word “bullying,” however, when students completing the survey were asked if they felt safe at their school, 13% of the students disagreed and 5% strongly disagreed, indicating that 18% of the students do not feel safe at the participating school. When asked if violence is a problem at their school, 15% strongly agreed and 26% agreed. These results reflect a fear of being hurt that is sufficient to create a sense of alarm in 41% of the students. Through use of the RBVQ, this study identified 20 middle school students who are bullies and 6 students who are bully-victims. The actions of these students may be partially responsible for creating an environment in which a significant portion of the study body feels at risk.

Training teachers and students in stopping bullying incidents and in conflict resolution has proven successful in creating a more positive environment for social
interaction (Orpinas et al., 2003). Initial educational techniques could benefit the entire school. Use of the RBVQ could assist in identifying those students who would benefit from additional counseling and interventions
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APPENDIX A

HUMAN SUBJECTS APPROVAL FOR SURVEY

Full Board – Approved as Submitted

January 22, 2008
Batya Elbaum, Ph.D.
University of Miami
Department of Teaching and Learning
Coral Gables Campus, Locator Code:

HSRO STUDY NUMBER: 20071107

STUDY TITLE: BULLYING OF MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS WITH AND WITHOUT LEARNING DISABILITIES: PREVALENCE AND RELATIONSHIP TO STUDENTS’ SOCIAL SKILLS

IRB MEETING DATE: 1/10/2008

STUDY APPROVAL EXPIRES: 1/9/2009

On January 10, 2008, the Social Behavioral IRB approved the following items. This study has been approved for the inclusion of minors pursuant to 45 CFR 46.404.

APPROVAL INCLUDES:
New Research Protocol
Research Materials (English Versions Only)
  • Parental Informed Consent Form
  • Youth Assent Form
  • Teacher Informed Consent Form
  • Revised Bullying Victim Questionnaire
  • SSRS-Teacher Report Form

Note to PI: Please provide IRB approval from Miami-Dade County Public Schools prior to initiation of study activities via a notification form.

NOTE: Translations of IRB approved study documents, including informed consent documents, into languages other than English must be submitted to HSRO for approval prior to use.

A request to continue this study must be submitted to the HSRO at least 45 days before IRB approval expires. If this study does not receive continuing IRB approval prior to expiration, all research activities must cease, and may officially be suspended or terminated.
All principal investigators must abide by and comply with all policies and procedures for the conduct of human subject research as posted on the HSRO website (http://www.hsro.miami.edu).

Sincerely,

Amanda Coltes-Rojas, MPH, CIP
Associate Director
Regulatory Affairs & Educational Initiatives

/cc: IRB File
APPENDIX B

REVISED BULLYING VICTIMIZATION QUESTIONNAIRE

RBVQ Instructions

Do not give names of anyone on this questionnaire.
You will find questions in this booklet about your life in school. There are several answers next to each question. Answer the question by marking an X in the box next to the answer that best describes how you feel about school. If you really dislike school, mark an X in the box next to "I dislike school very much". If you really like school, put an X in the box next to "I like school very much", and so on. Only mark one of the boxes. Try to keep the mark inside of the box.

Now put an X next to the answer that best describes how you feel about school. If you mark the wrong box, you can change your answer like this: Make the wrong box completely black: Then put an X in the box where you want your answer to be. Don’t put your name on this booklet. No one will know how you have answered these questions. But it is important that you answer carefully and how you really feel. Sometimes it is hard to decide what to answer. Then just answer how you think it is. If you have questions, raise your hand. Most of the questions are about your life in school in the past couple of months, that is, the period from start of school after summer/winter holiday vacation until now.
So when you answer, you should think of how it has been during the past 2 or 3 months and not only how it is just now.
Questionnaire on bullying for students

Name of school: _____________________________
Grade and classroom: _________________________ date: __________

You will find questions in this booklet about your life in school. There are several answers next to each question. Answer the question by marking an X in the box next to the answer that best describes how you feel about school. If you really dislike school, mark an X in the box next to "I dislike school very much". If you really like school, put an X in the box next to "I like school very much", and so on. Only mark one of the boxes. Try to keep the mark inside of the box.

Now put an X in the box next to the answer that best describes how you feel about school.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>How do you like school?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I dislike school very much</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I dislike school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I neither like nor dislike school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I like school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I like school very much</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If you mark the wrong box, you can change your answer like this: Make the wrong box completely black: ☐. Then put an X in the box where you want your answer to be ☐.

Don’t put your name on this booklet. No one will know how you have answered these questions. But it is important that you answer carefully and how you really feel. Sometimes it is hard to decide what to answer. Then just answer how you think it is. If you have questions, raise your hand.

Most of the questions are about your life in school in the past couple of months, that is, the period from start of school after summer/winter holiday vacation until now. So when you answer, you should think of how it has been during the past 2 or 3 months and not only how it is just now.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2</th>
<th>Are you a boy or a girl?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>girl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>boy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3</th>
<th>How many good friends do you have in your class(es)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I have 1 good friend in my class(es)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I have 2 or 3 good friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I have 4 or 5 good friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I have 6 or more good friends in my class(es)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
About being bullied by other students

Here are some questions about being bullied by other students. First we define or explain the word bullying. We say a student is being bullied when another student, or several other students

- say mean and hurtful things or make fun of him or her or call him or her mean and hurtful names
- completely ignore or exclude him or her from their group of friends or leave him or her out of things on purpose
- hit, kick, push, shove around, or lock him or her inside a room
- tell lies or spread false rumors about him or her or send mean notes and try to make other students dislike him or her
- and other hurtful things like that.

When we talk about bullying, these things happen repeatedly, and it is difficult for the student being bullied to defend himself or herself. We also call it bullying when a student is teased repeatedly in a mean and hurtful way.

But we don't call it bullying when the teasing is done in a friendly and playful way. Also, it is not bullying when two students of about equal strength or power argue or fight.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>4</th>
<th>How often have you been bullied at school in the past couple of months?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I haven't been bullied at school in the past couple of months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>it has only happened once or twice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 or 3 times a month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>about once a week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>several times a week</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Have you been bullied at school in the past couple of months in one or more of the following ways? Please answer all questions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Frequency Options</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>I was called mean names, was made fun of, or teased in a hurtful way</td>
<td>it hasn't happened to me in the past couple of months, only once or twice, 2 or 3 times a month, about once a week, several times a week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Other students left me out of things on purpose, excluded me from their group of friends, or completely ignored me</td>
<td>it hasn't happened to me in the past couple of months, only once or twice, 2 or 3 times a month, about once a week, several times a week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>I was hit, kicked, pushed, shoved around, or locked indoors</td>
<td>it hasn't happened to me in the past couple of months, only once or twice, 2 or 3 times a month, about once a week, several times a week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Other students told lies or spread false rumors about me and tried to make others dislike me</td>
<td>it hasn't happened to me in the past couple of months, only once or twice, 2 or 3 times a month, about once a week, several times a week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>I had money or other things taken away from me or damaged</td>
<td>it hasn't happened to me in the past couple of months, only once or twice, 2 or 3 times a month, about once a week, several times a week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>I was threatened or forced to do things I didn't want to do</td>
<td>it hasn't happened to me in the past couple of months, only once or twice, 2 or 3 times a month, about once a week, several times a week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Frequency Options</td>
<td>Additional Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
<td>It hasn't happened to me in the past couple of months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>only once or twice</td>
<td>2 or 3 times a month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>about once a week</td>
<td>several times a week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
<td>It hasn't happened to me in the past couple of months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>only once or twice</td>
<td>2 or 3 times a month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>about once a week</td>
<td>several times a week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12a</td>
<td></td>
<td>It hasn't happened to me in the past couple of months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>only once or twice</td>
<td>2 or 3 times a month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>about once a week</td>
<td>several times a week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12b</td>
<td>In case you were bullied on your mobile phone or over the Internet, how was it done?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>only on the mobile phone</td>
<td>only over the Internet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>only over the Internet</td>
<td>in both ways</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please describe in what way: ___________________________

| 13       |                   | It hasn't happened to me in the past couple of months |
|          | only once or twice | 2 or 3 times a month  |
|          | about once a week  | several times a week   |

Please describe in what way: ___________________________
14. **In which class(es) is the student or students who bully you?**
   - ☐ I haven’t been bullied at school in the past couple of months
   - ☑ in my class
   - ☑ in a different class but same grade (year)
   - ☐ in a higher grade
   - ☐ in a lower grade
   - ☐ in different grades

15. **Have you been bullied by boys or girls?**
   - ☐ I haven’t been bullied at school in the past couple of months
   - ☐ mainly by 1 girl
   - ☐ by several girls
   - ☐ mainly by 1 boy
   - ☐ by several boys
   - ☐ by both boys and girls

16. **By how many students have you usually been bullied?**
   - ☐ I haven’t been bullied at school in the past couple of months
   - ☐ mainly by 1 student
   - ☑ by a group of 2-3 students
   - ☐ by a group of 4-9 students
   - ☐ by a group of more than 9 students
   - ☐ by several different students or groups of students

17. **How long has the bullying lasted?**
   - ☐ I haven’t been bullied at school in the past couple of months
   - ☐ it lasted one or two weeks
   - ☐ it lasted about a month
   - ☐ it lasted about 6 months
   - ☐ it lasted about a year
   - ☐ it has gone on for several years
18 Where have you been bullied? □ I haven’t been bullied at school in the past couple of months
□ I have been bullied in one or more of the following places in the past couple of months (continue below)

Please put an X if you have been bullied:

18a on the playground/athletic field (during recess or break times)
□

18b in the hallways/stairwells
□

18c in class (when the teacher was in the room)
□

18d in class (when the teacher was not in the room)
□

18e in the bathroom
□

18f in gym class or the gym locker room/shower
□

18g in the lunch room
□

18h on the way to and from school
□

18i at the school bus stop
□

18j on the school bus
□

18l somewhere else in school □ in this case, please write where:
19. Have you told anyone that you have been bullied in the past couple of months?

☐ I haven't been bullied at school in the past couple of months

☐ I have been bullied, but I have not told anyone

☐ I have been bullied and I have told somebody about it

Please put an X if you have told:

19a. your class (home room) teacher ☐

19b. another adult at school (a different teacher, the principal/headmaster, the school nurse, the custodian/school caretaker, the school psychologist/mental health professional, etc.) ☐

19c. your parent(s)/guardian(s) ☐

19d. your brother(s) or sister(s) ☐

19e. your friend(s) ☐

19f. somebody else ☐

☐ in this case please write who:

____________________
____________________
20 How often do the teachers or other adults at school try to put a stop to it when a student is being bullied at school?
- almost never
- once in a while
- sometimes
- often
- almost always

21 How often do other students try to put a stop to it when a student is being bullied at school?
- almost never
- once in a while
- sometimes
- often
- almost always

22 Has any adult at home contacted the school to try to stop your being bullied at school in the past couple of months?
- I haven't been bullied at school in the past couple of months
- no, they haven't contacted the school
- yes, they have contacted the school once
- yes, they have contacted the school several times

23 When you see a student your age being bullied at school, what do you feel or think?
- that is probably what he or she deserves
- I don't feel much
- I feel a bit sorry for him or her
- I feel sorry for him or her and want to help him or her

About bullying other students

24 How often have you taken part in bullying another student(s) at school in the past couple of months?
- I haven't bullied another student(s) at school in the past couple of months
- it has only happened once or twice
- 2 or 3 times a month
- about once a week
- several times a week
Have you bullied another student(s) at school in the past couple of months in one or more of the following ways? Please answer all questions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Frequency Options</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 25 I called another student(s) mean names, made fun of or teased him or her in a hurtful way | - it hasn't happened in the past couple of months  
- it has only happened once or twice  
- 2 or 3 times a month  
- about once a week  
- several times a week |
| 26 I kept him or her out of things on purpose, excluded him or her from my group of friends or completely ignored him or her | - it hasn't happened in the past couple of months  
- it has only happened once or twice  
- 2 or 3 times a month  
- about once a week  
- several times a week |
| 27 I hit, kicked, pushed and shoved him or her around or locked him or her indoors | - it hasn't happened in the past couple of months  
- it has only happened once or twice  
- 2 or 3 times a month  
- about once a week  
- several times a week |
| 28 I spread false rumors about him or her and tried to make others dislike him or her | - it hasn't happened in the past couple of months  
- it has only happened once or twice  
- 2 or 3 times a month  
- about once a week  
- several times a week |
| 29 I took money or other things from him or her or damaged his or her belongings | - it hasn't happened in the past couple of months  
- it has only happened once or twice  
- 2 or 3 times a month  
- about once a week  
- several times a week |
| 30 I threatened or forced him or her to do things he or she didn't want to do | - it hasn't happened in the past couple of months  
- it has only happened once or twice  
- 2 or 3 times a month  
- about once a week  
- several times a week |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Frequency Options</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 31 I bullied him or her with mean names or comments about his or her race or color | - it hasn't happened in the past couple of months  
- it has only happened once or twice  
- 2 or 3 times a month  
- about once a week  
- several times a week |
| 32 I bullied him or her with mean names, comments, or gestures with a sexual meaning | - it hasn't happened in the past couple of months  
- it has only happened once or twice  
- 2 or 3 times a month  
- about once a week  
- several times a week |
| 32a I bullied him or her with mean or hurtful messages, calls or pictures, or in other ways on my mobile phone or over the Internet (computer) | - it hasn't happened in the past couple of months  
- it has only happened once or twice  
- 2 or 3 times a month  
- about once a week  
- several times a week |
| 32b In case you bullied another student(s) on your mobile phone or over the Internet (computer), how was it done? | - only on the mobile phone  
- only over the Internet  
- in both ways |

Please describe in what way

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Frequency Options</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 33 I bullied him or her in another way                                   | - it hasn't happened in the past couple of months  
- it has only happened once or twice  
- 2 or 3 times a month  
- about once a week  
- several times a week |

Please describe in what way
34. **Has your class (home room) teacher or any other teacher talked with you about your bullying other students at school in the past couple of months?**

- [ ] I haven't bullied another student(s) at school in the past couple of months
- [ ] no, they haven't talked with me about it
- [ ] yes, they have talked with me about it once
- [ ] yes, they have talked with me about it several times

35. **Has any adult at home talked with you about your bullying other students at school in the past couple of months?**

- [ ] I haven't bullied another student(s) at school in the past couple of months
- [ ] no, they haven't talked with me about it
- [ ] yes, they have talked with me about it once
- [ ] yes, they have talked with me about it several times

36. **Do you think you could join in bullying a student whom you didn't like?**

- [ ] yes
- [ ] yes, maybe
- [ ] I don't know
- [ ] no, I don't think so
- [ ] no
- [ ] definitely no

37. **How do you usually react if you see or understand that a student your age is being bullied by other students?**

- [ ] I have never noticed that students my age have been bullied
- [ ] I take part in the bullying
- [ ] I don't do anything, but I think the bullying is OK
- [ ] I just watch what goes on
- [ ] I don't do anything, but I think I ought to help the bullied student
- [ ] I try to help the bullied student in one way or another
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Options</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>38. How often are you afraid of being bullied by other students in your school?</td>
<td>never, seldom, sometimes, fairly often, often, very often</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39. Overall, how much do you think your class (home room) teacher has done to counteract bullying in the past couple of months?</td>
<td>little or nothing, fairly little, somewhat, a good deal, much</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thank you!

Copyright Dan Olweus 1996 - 2006
APPENDIX C

SOCIAL SKILLS RATING SCALE - TEACHER FORM

Directions

This questionnaire is designed to measure how often a student exhibits certain social skills and how important those skills are for success in your classroom. Ratings of problem behaviors and academic competencies are also requested. First, complete the information about the student and yourself.

---

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student's name:</th>
<th>Age:</th>
<th>Grade:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

School: _____________________________ City: _____________ State: _____________

Grades: _____________________________ Ethnic: _____________________________ Gender: Male/Female

Is this student handicapped? □ Yes □ No

If handicapped, this student is classified as:

□ Learning disabled □ Mentally handicapped

□ Behavior-disordered □ Other handicap (specify):

---

Teacher Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher's name:</th>
<th>Age:</th>
<th>Sex: Male/Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

What is your assignment? □ Regular □ Resource □ Self-contained □ Other (specify): _____________________________
Next read each item on pages 2 and 3 (items 1-42) and think about how students' behavior during the past month. Decide how often the student does the behavior described.

If the student never does this behavior, circle the 0.
If the student sometimes does this behavior, circle the 1.
If the student very often does this behavior, circle the 2.

For items 1-20, you should also rate how important each of these behaviors is (for success in your classroom). If the behavior is not important for success in your classroom, circle the 0.
If the behavior is important for success in your classroom, circle the 1.
If the behavior is critical for success in your classroom, circle the 2.

Here are two examples:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>How Often?</th>
<th>How Important?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This student very often shows anger for classmates. Also, this student sometimes asks questions when working on a task. This teacher thinks that showing anger is important for success in his or her classroom and that asking questions is critical for success.

Please do not skip any items. In some cases you may not have observed the student perform a particular behavior. Make an estimate of the degree to which you think the student would probably perform that behavior.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Social Skills</th>
<th>How Often?</th>
<th>How Important?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This student very often shows anger for classmates. Also, this student sometimes asks questions when working on a task. This teacher thinks that showing anger is important for success in his or her classroom and that asking questions is critical for success.
APPENDIX D

PARENT CONSENT FORM

Name of Study: Bullying of Middle School Students With and Without Learning Disabilities: Prevalence and Relationship to Students’ Social Skills

University of Miami
Parent Informed Consent Form

Purpose:
Your child is invited to participate in a research study that will help educators learn more about bullying in middle schools. The purpose of the study is to understand how many middle school students are affected by bullying, which students are more likely to be affected by bullying, and what types of bullying they may have experienced. Individual information that we collect from your child will not be shared with anyone at your child’s school or outside the school. We hope that the results of this study will help teachers and school leaders to reduce bullying that may occur at their schools.

Procedures:
Your child will be asked to complete a 40-item questionnaire regarding bullying experiences that he or she may have had at school. The questionnaire will be given in your child’s classroom and will take about 30 minutes to complete. It will not be given during a critical learning period. You will not be told your child’s answers.

Your child’s teacher will be asked to complete a 30-item questionnaire regarding your child’s social skills.

Using your child’s Miami-Dade County Public Schools (MDCPS) ID number, the researchers will check the information that the school district has on file to see whether your child has or has not been receiving any special education services.

Risks:
Participation in this study involves minimal or no risk for your child. Some children - for example, those who may have experienced bullying at their school - may feel nervous while responding to the questionnaire. Should your child become upset, he/ she is encouraged to seek help from the school’s guidance counselor.

Benefits:
We do not foresee that you or your child will benefit directly as a result of your child’s participating in this study. However, we hope that there will be a benefit to all children as a result of your child’s school developing a better understanding of how bullying affects students.

Alternatives:
Students that do not have consent to participate will do class work or homework as instructed by their homeroom teacher.
Confidentiality:
All information collected for this study will be kept confidential, in other words students specific results will not be disclosed to anyone. Records will be kept in a locked cabinet in the office of the co-investigator on this study, Ms. Silvana Spinelli.

The investigators and their assistants will consider your records confidential to the extent provided by law. However, it is possible that the investigators’ records may be reviewed for audit purposes by authorized employees of the University of Miami, The Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), or other agents who will be bound by the same provisions of confidentiality. When we are finished with this study we will write a report about what was learned. This report will not include your name or that you were in the study.

Right to Withdraw:
You do not have to allow your child to participate in the study. Your child’s participation is voluntary. If you give your consent for your child to participate, your child can quit the study at any time. Nothing will happen to your child if he or she drops out of the study. Your child will also be asked to sign an assent form indicating their agreement to take part in the study.

Other Pertinent Information:
The co-investigator on this study, Silvana Spinelli, will answer any questions you may have regarding the study. She can be reached at 305-781-7160. If you have any questions about the rights of research participants, you may contact the Human Subjects Research Office at the University of Miami at 305-243-3195.

Co-Principal Investigator: Silvana Spinelli M.A. C.A.G.S. (Doctoral Candidate, University of Miami)

Dissertation Chair: Batya Elbaum, Ph.D.

_________________________  _______________________  ________
Name of Child (print)

_________________________  _______________________  ________
Name of Parent (print) Signature of Parent Date

___Yes, I want my child to participate in this study.

___No, I do not want my child to participate in this study.
APPENDIX E

TEACHER CONSENT FORM

Name of Study: Bullying of Middle School Students With and Without Learning Disabilities: Prevalence and Relationship to Students’ Social Skills

University of Miami
Teacher Informed Consent Form

Purpose:
You are invited to participate in a research study that will help educators learn more about bullying in middle schools. The purpose of the study is to understand how many middle school students are affected by bullying, which students are more likely to be affected by bullying, and what types of bullying they may have experienced. Individual information that we collect from you will not be shared with anyone at your school or outside the school. We hope that the results of this study will help teachers and school leaders to reduce bullying that may occur at their schools.

Procedures:
You will be asked to complete a 30-item questionnaire regarding the social skills of each student in your class who participates in the study. It will take you approximately 5-8 minutes to complete each questionnaire.

Participating students will be asked to complete a 40-item questionnaire regarding bullying experiences that they may have had at school. The questionnaire will be given in your classrooms and will take about 30 minutes to complete.

Using participating students’ Miami-Dade County Public Schools (MDCPS) ID number, the researchers will check the information that the school district has on file to see whether participating students have or have not been receiving any special education services.

Risks:
Participation in this study involves no risk for you.

Benefits:
We do not foresee that you or your students will benefit directly from participating in this study. However, we hope that as a result of this study, educators will develop a better understanding of how bullying affects students.

Compensation:
Teachers who agree to participate in this study will receive $25 in acknowledgement of their contribution to this research.
Confidentiality:
All data collected are confidential. Your answers to the questionnaire(s) concerning students will be kept private. When we are finished with this study we will write a report about what we learned. This report will not include the students’ names or any other personally identifying information.

Right to Withdraw:
Your participation is voluntary. You can withdraw from the study at any time and nothing will happen to you.

Other Pertinent Information:
The co-investigator on this study, Silvana Spinelli, will answer any questions you may have regarding the study. She can be reached at 305-781-7160. If you have any questions about the rights of research participants, you may contact the Human Subjects Research Office at the University of Miami at 305-243-3195.

Co-Principal Investigator: Silvana Spinelli M.A. C.A.G.S. (Doctoral Candidate, University of Miami)

Dissertation Chair: Batya Elbaum, Ph.D.

_________________________  _______________________   ________
Name (print)                  Signature                  Date

_________________________  _______________________   ________
Person obtaining consent (print) Signature                  Date

___Yes, I want to participate in this study.

___No, I do not want to participate in this study.
APPENDIX F

STUDENT ASSENT FORM

Name of Study: Bullying of Middle School Students With and Without Learning Disabilities: Prevalence and Relationship to Students’ Social Skills

University of Miami

Youth Assent Form

Purpose:
You are invited to participate in a research study that will help educators learn more about bullying in middle schools. The purpose of the study is to understand how many middle school students are affected by bullying, which students are more likely to be affected by bullying, and what types of bullying they may have experienced. Your answers will not be shared with anyone at your school, outside the school or your parents. We hope that the results of this study will help teachers and school leaders to reduce bullying that may occur at their schools.

Procedures:
You will be asked to complete a questionnaire about bullying experiences that you may have had at school. The questionnaire will be given in your classroom and will take about 30 minutes to complete. This is not a test, and there are no right or wrong answers. We are interested in your honest answers to the questions. Your teacher will also be asked to complete a questionnaire about you.

Using your student Miami-Dade County Public Schools (MDCPS) ID number, the researchers will check the information that the school district has on file to see whether you are receiving any special education services.

Risks:
Participation in this study involves minimal or no risk for you. Some students - for example, those who may have experienced bullying at their school - may feel nervous while responding to the questionnaire. If you feel uncomfortable with the topics and feel you need to talk to someone, you should seek help from your school’s guidance counselor.

Benefits:
A benefit means that something good happens to you. We do not foresee that you will benefit directly from participating in this study. However, we hope that there will be a benefit to all students as a result of your school developing a better understanding of how bullying affects students.
Alternatives:
Students whose parents do not consent for their participation will be doing class work or homework as instructed by the homeroom teacher.

Confidentiality:
*Please do NOT write anyone’s name anywhere on the questionnaire.*

All data collected are confidential. This means that your answers to the questionnaire are kept private. No one at your school our outside your school, including your teachers and parents, will be given your answers. When we are finished with this study we will write a report about what we learned. This report will not include your name or any other information that would identify you.

Right to Withdraw:
This survey is voluntary. You do not have to participate. If you decide to stop after we begin, that’s okay too; nothing bad will happen if you do stop the study.

Other Pertinent Information:
The co-investigator on this study, Silvana Spinelli, will answer any questions you may have regarding the study. She can be reached at 305-781-7160. If you have any questions about the rights of research participants, you may contact the Human Subjects Research Office at the University of Miami at 305-243-3195.

Co-Principal Investigator: Silvana Spinelli M.A. C.A.G.S. (Doctoral Candidate, University of Miami)

Dissertation Chair: Batya Elbaum, Ph.D.

____________________  __________________ ________
Name (print)          Signature        Date

__Yes, I want to participate in this study.

__No, I Do Not want to participate in this study.
APPENDIX G

PARENT CONSENT FORM SPANISH TRANSLATION
Universidad de Miami
Formulario de Consentimiento Informado para Padres

Objeto:
Se invita a su hijo/hija a participar en un estudio de investigación que ayudará a los educadores a conocer más sobre la intimidación en la escuela media. El título de este proyecto es: “Intimidación de Estudiantes de la Escuela Media con o sin Discapacidad de Aprendizaje: Frecuencia y Relación con las Destrezas Sociales de los Estudiantes”. El objeto del estudio es comprender cuántos estudiantes de la escuela media son afectados por la intimidación, cuáles son los estudiantes que tienen mayor probabilidad de sufrir debido a la intimidación, y qué tipos de intimidación pueden haber experimentado. La información individual que obtengamos de su hijo no será compartida con personas de su escuela o fuera de ésta. Esperamos que los resultados del estudio ayuden a los docentes y líderes de escuelas a reducir cualquier intimidación que pueda ocurrir en sus escuelas.

Procedimientos:
Se le pedirá a su hijo que responda un cuestionario de 40 preguntas sobre sus experiencias con cualquier tipo de intimidación en la escuela. Se repartirá el cuestionario en el aula de su hijo y tomará 30 minutos para completarlo. No se repartirá durante un período crítico de aprendizaje.

Se pedirá a la maestra/maestro de su hijo que complete un cuestionario de 30 preguntas en relación con las destrezas sociales de su hijo.

Utilizando el número de identificación de las Escuelas Públicas del Condado Miami-Dade (MDCPS) de su hijo, el investigador revisará la información en los archivos del distrito escolar para verificar si su hijo ha recibido servicios de educación especial.

Toda la información recopilada para este estudio se mantendrá confidencial. Los registros se guardarán en un mueble cerrado con llave en la oficina de la co-investigadora del estudio, Sra. Silvana Spinelli.

Riesgos:
La participación en el estudio acarrea un riesgo mínimo o ninguno para su hijo. Algunos niños, por ejemplo, aquellos que han sufrido intimidación en su escuela, podrían sentirse preocupados mientras responden las preguntas.

Beneficios:
Un beneficio significa que algo bueno le sucederá a usted o su hijo. No prevemos que usted o su hijo se beneficie directamente de la participación en el estudio. Sin embargo, esperamos que todos los niños se beneficien cuando la escuela desarrolle un mejor entendimiento de cómo la intimidación afecta a los estudiantes.
Alternativas:
Usted no tiene que permitir que su hijo participe en el estudio. Si usted otorga su consentimiento para que su hijo participe, su hijo puede retirarse del estudio en cualquier momento. No habrá consecuencias para su hijo si el o ella se retira del estudio.

Confidencialidad:
Toda la información recopilada es confidencial. Esto significa que las respuestas de su hijo se mantendrán privadas. Al finalizar este estudio, redactaremos un informe sobre lo que aprendimos. Este informe no incluirá el nombre de su hijo y no mencionará que participó en el estudio. Todos los registros de este estudio se destruirán después de un año.

Derecho a retirarse:
La participación de su hijo es voluntaria. El o ella se puede retirar del estudio en cualquier momento y no habrá consecuencias.