A Relational Framework for Understanding Bullying

Developmental Antecedents and Outcomes

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This article reviews current research on the relational processes involved in peer bullying, considering developmental antecedents and long-term consequences. The following themes are highlighted: (a) aggression can be both adaptive and maladaptive, and this distinction has implications for bullies' functioning within peer social ecologies; (b) developmental antecedents and long-term consequences of bullying have not been well-distinguished from the extant research on aggressive behavior; (c) bullying is aggression that operates within relationships of power and abuse. Power asymmetry and repetition elements of traditional bullying definitions have been hard to operationalize, but without these specifications and more dyadic measurement approaches there may be little rationale for a distinct literature on bullying—separate from aggression. Applications of a relational approach to bullying are provided using gender as an example. Implications for future research are drawn from the study of relationships and interpersonal theories of developmental psychopathology.

Keywords: bully, aggression, bully prevention

Which youth bully others? What are the factors that lead them to behave negatively and aggressively toward others, picking on the vulnerable for their own advantage? What are the developmental consequences for youth who engage in bullying behavior? In this review, we consider psychological correlates of bullying behavior, the developmental antecedents that predict bullying, and the adjustment outcomes that flow from it. Throughout, we consider perspectives that stress the functionality of aggressive behavior, and the distinction between aggression and bullying. Ultimately, that distinction might best be considered from a relational perspective, because bullying is aggression within the context of a relationship of abuse. We consider some ramifications of this relational view of bullying perpetration and propose a relational approach to understanding the rich social context which supports and influences bullying behaviors.

The Duality of Aggression and Bullying: A Relational Perspective on Adaptation and Maladaptation

The paradox of aggressive behavior is that it is both adaptive and maladaptive. What makes aggression maladaptive is all too obvious: Aggressive children endanger others and are themselves at risk for a host of serious adjustment problems (Dodge, Coie, & Lynam, 2006). What makes aggression adaptive is also well documented (Rodkin & Wilson, 2007). Aggression is often successful in changing other's behavior and can be used to acquire resources and maintain group boundaries.

The bifurcated adaptive/maladaptive nature of aggression makes its way into two basic issues regarding bullying perpetration: *psychological processes*, or what drives some children to bully others, and *concurrent correlates*, namely the social and personality characteristics of youth who bully. Descriptions of why youth bully, or of the kinds of youth who bully, often include either or both of two discordant elements: a functional element, because the bully is in a superior position of dominance with the ability to coerce, and a dysfunctional element, because bullying is morally outrageous and chronic aggression a serious risk factor for maladjustment.

Psychological Processes: Why Bully?

Why would anyone want to bully others? Guerra, Williams, and Sadek (2011) posed this question to 14 focus groups of 115 elementary, middle, and high school students. Across this wide age span, half of the focus groups said that youth who bully were integrated into the school environment, with high self-esteem and a desire to demonstrate social prowess. However, just as many mentioned that youth who bully were marginalized and had emotional problems, such as low self-esteem and prior victimization. We will examine these perspectives in turn, one echoing a theme of social accomplishment and the other a theme of relational difficulties.

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Aggressive behavior has deep phylogenetic roots and, therefore, an aspect of functionality (Ellis et al., 2012). The functionality of aggression is part of the allure of bullying. Youth bully to get what they want and to control the behavior of others. Peer social structures exist in which some members are more popular, more powerful, and more likely to control resources than other members. Children who prioritize public demonstrations of their social power, popularity, and status increase their aggressive behavior over time (Rodkin, Ryan, Jamison, & Wilson, 2013). Children who bully encourage group members to rally around them, to define themselves by scapegoating their targets, and to maintain cohesion and identity for their clique (Faris & Felmlee, 2011; Juvonen & Galván, 2009). Individuals may gain and maintain status by using aggression, alone or in combination with more pro-social behavior (Hawley, Stump, & Ratliff, 2011). Children with moderate positions on the social status system and children who are attempting to increase their status may be motivated to proactively aggress against others to establish their social position and to push others down the social hierarchy.

Yet, aggressive behavior is perhaps the clearest risk factor for poor adjustment and psychopathology over time (Dodge et al., 2006). Aggressive behaviors trigger peers to respond with aggression of their own (Hanish, Sallquist, DiDonato, Fabes, & Martin, 2012). While those who are most effective in using aggression to gain power may tend to rise in the hierarchy, others fail. Aggressive children, particularly those who are also rejected and harassed, have a unique motivational stance to interpersonal relationships, characterized by frustration, hostile attributional biases in the face of ambiguity (Crick & Dodge, 1994), and retaliation goals in the face of social obstacles (Troop-Gordon & Asher, 2005). Impulsive, reactive aggression may stem from poor self-regulation and dysregulation between approach and avoidance motivational systems (Carver, Johnson, & Joormann, 2008). Youth with an overactive approach orientation and an underactive avoidance orientation might disregard social norms or potential consequences of their actions to pursue their own self-interest, increasing the likelihood of aggressive behavior. This suggests, as with Moffitt's (1993) early starter (life-course persistent) pathway to aggression, that temperamental deficits associated with attention problems, hyperactivity, and irritability can be expressed through negative peer interactions. These negative temperamental qualities promote aggressive behavior which in turn may lead to the development of social–cognitive biases that include viewing aggressive behavior as effective, endorsing positive social norms for aggression, and moral disengagement. All of these allow for greater likelihood of aggression (Hymel, Schonert-Reichl, Bonanno, Vaillancourt, & Henderson, 2010). The result is a developmental cascade reflecting the negative cumulative continuity entailed in repeatedly aggressing and being aggressed against (Rudolph, Lansford, & Rodkin, in press).

Finally, it is not possible to fully understand the psychological mechanisms that lead a child to bully without considering *who it is* that the bully is targeting, and *why*. Bullying and aggression are dyadic or group phenomena (Card & Hodges, 2010; Espelage, Holt, & Henkel, 2003). Goals and related cognitions guide behavior within specific contexts, such as peers who are liked versus disliked. Hostile attributional biases, for example, are situationally primed toward enemies, and are less likely to occur toward friends (Peets, Hodges, & Salmivalli, 2010). This can translate into a bully's choice of target. To illustrate, Veenstra, Lindenberg, Munniksma, and Dijkstra (2010) find that preadolescent bullies target rejected, unpopular peers whom classmates will support harassing. Cognitive-affective processing structures also help explain individual differences in why some youth target gender-atypical peers to bully (Pauletti, Cooper, & Perry, 2014; Poteat & Espelage, 2005). We will elaborate these points later when discussing the value of an etiological relational approach to bullying.

Concurrent Correlates: Two Types of Bullies?

A person-oriented version of the distinction between more and less adaptive patterns of bullying was captured by Olweus (1978), who distinguished children who perpetrate bullying ("bullies") from children who both perpetrate and are victims of harassment ("bully victims"; see Swearer & Hymel, 2015, this issue). According to Olweus (1978), neither bullies nor bully victims were completely free of mental health problems, but bullies were generally more functional, more likely to use proactive aggression, and more likely to have an extensive social network than bully victims, who were more likely to reactively aggress and show troubling risk patterns across virtually all adjustment indicators.

Besides the co-occurring presence of bullying perpetration and victimization, there are other ways to capture distinctions between aggressors with higher and lower levels of



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social functioning. The extant literature on bullying varies dramatically in how bullies are portrayed: as adaptive Machiavellians (e.g., Ellis et al., 2012; Faris & Felmlee, 2011; Hawley et al., 2011) or as maladjusted and prone to conduct and mental health problems (e.g., Cook, Williams, Guerra, Kim, & Sadek, 2010; Farrington, Ttofi, & Lösel, 2011). From the standpoint of a more relational approach to bullying, a compelling taxonomy is found in Farmer and colleagues' (2010) description of "two social worlds" of bullying: *social integration* on the one hand and *social marginalization* on the other. Socially integrated bullies "may use aggression to control" others, while socially marginalized bullies "may be fighting against a social system that keeps them on the periphery" (p. 386). Whatever the specific distinction used, there is typically one type of youth who bully that seems to have average adjustment outcomes, and another type that seems to suffer from very poor adjustment outcomes. We now discuss the personality and behavioral characteristics of these bullying types and conclude with a brief comment about the psychological validity of this taxonomic structure.

Some youth who bully are well-integrated into their peer culture and do not lack for peer social support (Farmer et al., 2010); they have surprisingly high levels of popularity among their peers (Olweus, 1978). These youth are relatively evenly split between boys and girls. They have a variety of friends that engage in varying degrees of bullying and possess strengths that are easy to recognize, including social skills, athleticism, and/or attractiveness. These youth tend to use proactive and goal-directed aggression (for more, see Rodkin, 2011). Some incorporate prosocial strategies into their behavioral repertoire, for example reconciling with their targets after conflict, or becoming less aggressive once a clear dominance relationship has been established (Pellegrini et al., 2010). They may have lower physiological reactivity to stressful situations than aggressive children who are less well integrated in the social sphere (Kliewer, Dibble, Goodman, & Sullivan, 2012). Socially integrated bullies are both underrecognized as seriously aggressive, and popularized in the media. Vaillancourt, McDougall, Hymel, and Sunderani (2010) go so far as to call these socially connected youth "Machiavellian": "popular, socially skilled and competent . . . [with] high self-esteem . . . low on psychopathology . . . [and] many assets" (p. 218; see also Hawley et al., 2011). Hawley et al.'s (2011) own view seems to suggest that bistrategic controllers (who employ both prosocial and coercive strategies to gain resources) are aggressive, but may not be bullies given that they aggress upon their "inner circle" more than they aggress upon low status peers.

However, not all youth who bully are socially integrated; instead, some are socially marginalized. For these children, the source of their power is more difficult to identify. It may come from their unsuccessful attempts to raise their own social status or to attempt to dominate others through coercive strategies (Hawley et al., 2011). It may also come from their efforts in bringing together a small group of equally marginalized youth to support their attacks. A peer rejection framework is a compelling explanatory framework for marginalized youth who bully, who are in conflict with others in the world. These children, mostly boys, tend to be characterized by a clear pattern of deficits in broad domains of developmental functioning. Their aggression is impulsive and overly reactive to real or perceived slights; they are consistently identified as "at-risk" students (Cook et al., 2010). Cook et al.'s meta-analysis concluded that this type of bully "has comorbid externalizing and internalizing problems, holds significantly negative attitudes and beliefs about himself or herself and others, is low in social competence, does not have adequate social problem-solving skills, performs poorly academically, and is not only rejected and isolated by peers but also negatively influenced by the peers with whom he or she interacts" (p. 76). Farmer et al. (2010) reported that marginalized, unpopular youth who bully, whether girls or boys, are often shunted into peer groups with other bullies, and sometimes even with the children they harass. In sum, marginalized bully victims have a host of problems of which bullying behavior is but one manifestation. Their bullying might stem from an inability to control their hostile actions, or from a desire to gain a preferred status that generally eludes them. These youth would benefit from services that go beyond bullying-reduction programs such as more general aggression reduction therapies (e.g., Goldstein et al., 1986) and social skills training (Cook et al., 2010).

The distinction between bullies and bully victims, or between socially integrated and socially marginalized bullies, is an informal heuristic, useful for communicating the considerable variability in social functioning among youth who display aggressive and bullying tendencies. Bullying classifications have not been subjected to the level of statistical scrutiny as have taxonomic classifications such as Moffitt's (1993) distinction between adolescence-lim-



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ited and life-course persistent antisocial behavior, which indeed may show extensive overlap with bully and bully victim (or socially integrated and marginalized) categories. Future research will have to be devoted to the issue of whether bullying behavior is better described in terms of person-oriented configurations versus a relational framework.

Relational Antecedents and Consequences of Bullying Behavior

All bullying is aggressive, but not all aggression is bullying. The overlap between aggression and bullying invites the critical question of distinctiveness: What is new in bullying research that has not already been concluded in the voluminous literature on child and adolescent aggression? What new principles or methods are needed to account for what makes bullying unique and distinct from aggressive behavior? Without conceptual and empirical differentiation, there is little reason other than semantics and faddism to tailor antibullying interventions anew when more general aggression-reduction programs are on the shelf (see also Cook et al., 2010). What Hawley et al. (2011) refer to as the *jingle fallacy* is worth considering: Perhaps bullying and aggression really *are* different, but current methodologies simply fail to measure and take account of those differences. We frame our discussion of developmental antecedents and consequences of bullying behaviors from the value-added approach vis á vis aggression more generally, and where available, we note evidence that would distinguish developmental pathways for socially integrated and marginalized youth who engage in bullying behaviors.

Antecedents of Aggression and Bullying

The challenge of differentiating bullying from aggressive behavior more generally is immediately evident upon examination of developmental antecedents of bullying. There are many antecedents to aggressive behavior and its physical, verbal, and social or relational forms, and these have been extensively reviewed (e.g., Dodge et al., 2006). Aggressive behavior has a trait-like quality, as aggression is among the most temporally stable of all human characteristics (Dodge et al., 2006; Huesmann, Eron, Lefkowitz, & Walder, 1984; Olweus, 1978). At the same time, aggression is quite responsive to situational factors such as being reared in isolation, or settings in which violence is already high or valued, or, of course, acute conditions of perceived threat. Aggressive and bullying behaviors operate according to some of the cardinal principles of developmental psychopathology. One such principle, concerning the intersection of normal and atypical behavior, reminds us that the aggressive behavioral system has deep phylogenetic roots, is highly evolved, and has functional properties (Ellis et al., 2012). Another principle, *equifinality*, suggests that multiple pathways exist to problematic patterns of bullying and aggressive behavior (for more, see Rudolph et al., in press).

There may be as many developmental antecedents to bullying as there are to aggressive and antisocial behavior. Yet, the literature focusing explicitly on antecedents to bullying (net of aggression more generally) is incredibly sparse. We will focus on relational antecedents, including (a) poor home life and (b) less widely considered, the peer social ecology. Hawley et al.'s (2011) *jingle fallacy*, where the constructs of aggression and bullying are used interchangeably, unfortunately suffuses all these cases. Studies are lacking that distinguish developmental pathways of bullying behavior from aggressive behavior, or which identify developmental antecedents of bullying that do not also hold for aggression. Although we do not devote sustained attention to the distinctive subtypes of *physical, verbal, and social* or *relational* bullying, we would expect antecedents to be very similar to those identified in discussions of physical, verbal, and social or relational aggression (Crick & Zahn-Waxler, 2003) and to overlap with aggression more generally.

Antecedents in family history. The psychologically impoverished home life found for many children who bully is concordant with the more general literature on aggressive behavior, which points to risk factors of insensitive parenting and coercive cycles of parent–child interaction (Dishion & Tipsord, 2011; Patterson, Littman, & Bricker, 1967), along with other family hardships such as low socioeconomic status, family instability, family dysfunction, and child maltreatment (Copeland, Wolke, Angold, & Costello, 2013). Coercive exchanges co-occur with harsh parental discipline and conflictual family dynamics, and all are associated with later bullying (Espelage, Low, Rao, Hong, & Little, 2013). In coercive and hostile relationships with caregivers and exposure to family violence, children who are maltreated may come to expect that aggression is fundamental to interpersonal relationships, affecting children's expectations (or possibly, internal working models) of new social interactions and guiding their behavioral responses (Rudolph et al., in press). To

illustrate, Baldry (2003) found that Italian elementary and middle schoolchildren, particularly girls, who were exposed to violence at home were involved in bullying. Girls who witnessed a father's violence against the mother or a mother's violence against the father were among the most likely to bully others, compared to girls who did not witness interparental violence.

Thus, as is well known, conflict and violence in the home is a training ground for bullying and aggression with peers (Dishion & Tipsord, 2011; Dodge et al., 2006). Although progress has been made in establishing relations between family dysfunction (e.g., maltreatment, exposure to domestic violence, sibling aggression) and bullying, there is still a need for closer, empirical investigation of mechanisms that link the two. Further, research needs to consider bullying as a mediator of other risky behaviors. For example, Espelage and colleagues (2013) found that both bullying and fighting mediated the association between family violence and alcohol and drug use in a longitudinal study, but only for boys, not girls. This research calls attention to the importance of examining bullying behaviors among youth as mediators or even antecedents to other adverse, yet malleable, outcomes, apart from aggression more generally.

Antecedents in the peer social ecology. Rodkin and Roisman (2010) investigated developmental antecedents of popular-aggressive children in the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development Study of Early Child Care and Youth Development. This study examined whether children identified as popular-aggressive over third to sixth grades could be differentiated from unpopular-aggressive and other children on the basis of early maternal sensitivity, high cognitive functioning, or quality and quantity of early child care. The hypothesis, following Bronfenbrenner's (1979, p. 203) Hypothesis 23, was that extensive time within early childhood peer ecologies would promote the social status of aggression, and that once established, linkages between popularity and aggression would endure over the elementary years. Indeed, controlling for many other factors, including child care quality, popular-aggressive third to sixth graders had eight to 11 more hr per week of child care up to age 4.5 years than all other children. Popular-aggressive children were viewed as socially skilled and aggressive by disinterested observers who focused on peer interaction quality, but were viewed as not socially skilled by adults, such as parents and teachers, who may have a frustrating history of trying to guide these children toward pro-social behavior. Regardless of popularity levels, aggressive children had very low levels of maternal sensitivity and relatively poor cognitive functioning.

One implication of Rodkin and Roisman (2010) is that popular-aggressive children have a history of exposure to peer ecologies in which aggression is effective or valued. From this perspective, aggression becomes popular when it is normative, and once normative, can have enduring effects. Some children with an extensive child care background may find that their early expressions of aggression have social value within the peer ecology of child care and beyond. Unfortunately, there was no independent measure of bullying in the Study of Early Child Care and Youth Development to determine the extent of overlap between popular-aggressive and bully, and nonpopular-aggressive and bully victim categories, and neither was there the ability to control for concurrent aggression and bullying.

Summary. The research literature in the area of developmental antecedents is at once voluminous (when considering aggression) and sparse (when considering bullying). Current study designs on developmental antecedents of bullying are subject to the jingle fallacy (Hawley et al., 2011): The discriminant validity of bullying is lacking with respect to aggressive behavior or any of its subtypes, and as a result, findings are ambiguous. Until such research accumulates, conclusions regarding the social functioning of youth who bully must be qualified as suggesting that bullying perpetration may be incidental to underlying issues with aggressive and antisocial behavior.

Long-Term Consequences of Bullying Behaviors

Incidental and causal models of later adjustment outcomes. The distinction between aggression and bullying is also central to the question of long-term consequences for youth who bully. Are long-term effects of bullying to be ascertained relative to aggressive children who do not bully (if there are such individuals) or to nonaggressive, nonbullying children? The latter comparison is not so interesting, because it is well-known that sustained aggressive behavior increases risk and reduces life opportunities (Dodge et al., 2006). Possibly the most useful way to consider long-term adjustment outcomes for bullying perpetration is through the distinction between incidental and causal models that Parker and Asher (1987) put forth in the context of peer rejection. Parker and Asher (1987) asked, does *being rejected* make a child more likely to become depressed, aggressive, or to flounder in school, or is rejection simply a marker for preexisting third variables (e.g., the qualities that make one rejected in the first place)?

Adapting the Parker and Asher (1987) framework to the experience of bullying perpetration, an *incidental* model would frame bullying as epiphenomenal or tangential to early risk and later emotional and behavioral maladjustment. In an incidental model, bullying would be indicative of risk, but there would be no prediction that children who bully for reasons other than some underlying disorder would suffer from later maladjustment. In contrast, *causal* models presume that early peer interactions, such as bullying perpetration, make active contributions to subsequent psychopathology, perhaps as part of a larger developmental cascade. According to a causal model, just as healthy peer relationships serve as positive socialization forces that enhance normative development, unhealthy peer relationships—such as bullying somebody else—serve as negative socialization forces that foster psychopathology (Rudolph et al., in press).

Empirical evidence of long-term consequences. Studies have examined longitudinal associations between bullying during childhood or adolescence

and adult outcomes such as substance use, offending, and job status (Farrington et al., 2011). However, extant studies are limited by only providing evidence for incidental models of bullying perpetration. For example, Sourander et al. (2011) reported that bullying at age eight was a strong predictor of adult criminality among males in their early 20s, echoing Huesmann et al.'s (1984) finding that peer-nominated aggression at age eight predicts, for both boys and girls, criminal convictions at age 30. Unfortunately, Sourander et al. (2011) did not control for peer-nominated, or any other measure, of aggression. Hemphill et al. (2011) found that greater bullying perpetration among Australian youth in Year 7 of school was associated with a twofold increase in binge drinking and marijuana use when these students were in Year 10. Similarly, from the U.S. Raising Healthy Children project, self-reported childhood bullying in Grade 5 was associated with self-reported heavy drinking and marijuana use at age 21 (Kim, Catalano, Haggerty, & Abbott, 2011). Although there were significant associations reported by Kim et al. (2011) between childhood bullying and later adverse outcomes, these relations were attenuated when a host of risky individual (hyperactivity) and contextual (family) variables were included. Thus, bullying might increase the likelihood of these later outcomes, but even so, with no independent measure of aggressive behavior, bullying perpetration would likely be incidental to more global antisocial tendencies, influenced by multiple contextual factors.

It is possible that for some outcomes, bullying perpetration is not even incidental to later, long-term consequences of psychopathology. Sourander et al. (2009) reported that once childhood history of psychopathology was controlled, bullying in childhood did not significantly predict the use of psychotropic medication or psychiatric hospitalization in early adulthood. The nine to 16-year-old participants of the Great Smoky Mountain Study were later assessed for psychiatric disorders between the ages of 19 and 26– depression, suicidality, anxiety, panic disorder, agoraphobia, antisocial personality disorder, and alcohol and marijuana disorders (Copeland et al., 2013). Youth who bullied during childhood were no different than children not involved in bullying on any of the nine long-term outcomes examined save antisocial personality disorder (not surprisingly; however, also no Type I error adjustment across the nine outcomes). Bully victims, however, were susceptible to a wide range of psychiatric disorders in adulthood, even after controlling for childhood variables and hardships such as low socioeconomic status, maltreatment, and family instability and dysfunction. This is consistent with the fact that bully victims tended to be more severely maladjusted across more domains than other children, similar to the profile of rejected-aggressive children. However, extant research designs make it difficult to parse the extent to which findings for bully victims are attributable to bullying others, being bullied, or possible co-occurring risk factors such as rejection.

Summary. There may be little beyond our faith in a just world to demonstrate that bullying perpetration has causal, long-term consequences for criminological indicators, or for personological indicators, such as being a mean boss or corporate billionaire. Some individuals might feel long-lasting regret and remorse for their participation in bullying as youth, without this translating into detectable differences on standard adjustment outcomes. In some ways this may be just as well. Once "being a bully" is reified as a risk factor, attempts follow to predict who "will be a bully," just as attempts were made in the past to identify the individual characteristics that predict being a school shooter (Mulvey & Cauffman, 2001). These steps may be necessary and unavoidable, but they fall short. As we will now highlight, it is also critical to identify changes in life circumstances and *relationships* that motivate some youth to bully—a recent humiliation, a new enemy, losing or gaining friends. As Mulvey and Cauffmann (2001) write, "peers and teachers who talk with problem students can often provide the most useful information about when such students are in trouble" (p. 800). The question of the long-term incidental or causal consequences of bullying is a side issue: For the sake of the broader peer ecology, bullying is just as important to stop whether or not future research reveals negative long-term sequelae for children and youth who bully.

A Relational Approach to Bullying

This review has had two main points thus far. First, aggressive and bullying behavior can potentially have functional and dysfunctional components. Not all, or even most, aggression and bullying is in equal parts functional and dysfunctional, but whatever might be functional in any particular aggressive act is especially difficult to communicate because it risks implying that aggression can be good, or justifiable. This scientific paradox and moral quandary complicates descriptions of psychological mechanisms and concurrent correlates involved in bullying behavior. Second, aggressive and bullying behavior have not been adequately distinguished from one another, and it is not clear that distinct developmental antecedents and long-term consequences are entailed for different kinds of bullies, or for bullying as opposed to aggressive behavior more generally. Future research must clarify the taxonomic structures of bullying and better distinguish bullying from aggression.

There is a third point embedded in this review that we will now highlight, namely that bullying is *relationally oriented* (e.g., Pepler et al., 2006; Pepler & Craig, 2011; Veenstra et al., 2007). In this section we consider distinctions between aggression and bullying more carefully, highlight why bullying should be considered a *relational* phenomenon in addition to individual or behavioral characteristics, and illustrate how a relational approach can be applied by considering questions about the role of gender in bullying.

Distinguishing bullying from aggression. Olweus (2010) had a response to the question of the distinctiveness of bullying from aggression, writing that bullying is "aggressive behavior with certain special characteristics such as repetitiveness and an asymmetric power relationship" (p. 11). The *repetition* element draws atten-

tion to the fact that bullying is not a one-time interaction, or a passing conflict, but a *relationship* with temporal expanse. To the extent that there are multiple interactions between a child who bullies and another child who is harassed by the bullying, a relationship has emerged, even if it is one that is unwanted by the victim. The term "relationship" should not imply that the tie between bully and victim is, or ever was, positive, but that "bullying" is intrinsically dynamic, in a relationship that unfolds over time and that potentially entangles others, such as bystanders.

What kind of relationship exists between bullies and victims? The ugly heart of bullying and its distinctive element is an *asymmetric power relationship*. It is power asymmetry and the accompanying specter of abuse that elicits outrage. *Unequal, coercive power*, in which a more powerful aggressor attacks a less powerful victim, is what distinguishes bullying from other forms of aggression. The broader construct of aggression encompasses antagonistic behaviors that are emitted within a wider array of relationships. Aggressive behaviors that are directed toward one or more individuals of relatively equal power might be conceptualized as a game of the dozens, a fight, or even as mean-spirited and harmful, but they are less likely to provoke moral offense. Situations that involve a weaker individual attacking a more powerful individual can evoke images of the underdog and may therefore be heralded as morally justified (i.e., David and Goliath). In both of these cases, the nature and impact of the aggressive behavior may be less serious, as serious, or even more serious than the nature and impact of aggressive behaviors that occur during bullying. Yet, the meaning typically promulgated is often less morally repugnant.

With this in mind, what kind of power does a bully really have? A bully can have physical power over his or her victim. "His poor neighbor is bully'd by his big appearance," wrote Samuel Palmer in 1710, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, which cites the first known written use of the term "bully." A bully may also have *psychological power* relative to the target of harassment—more friends, greater status and prestige, greater access to resources, or in the case of bullying, a child may strive to derive or gain power by constructing weakness in the children being targeted. Power asymmetries may exist along a broad array of peer-valued characteristics: physical, material, psychological, and social (Vaillancourt & Hymel, 2006).

The difficulty of operationalizing an asymmetric power relationship, and of accurately assessing repetition, have led to questions of whether there is any meaningful difference between bullying and aggression, and to attempts to do away with or revise definitions of bullying. Indeed, researchers are not the only ones who jingle together aggression and bullying (Hawley et al., 2011). Children pay little heed to the components of bullying outlined by Olweus (1993) when asked to complete the sentence, "A bully is . . .," emphasizing instead global negative behaviors, such as teasing or mean behaviors (Vaillancourt et al., 2008). According to Vaillancourt et al. (2008), less than 2% of 8- to 18-year-old participants spontaneously mentioned that bullying is intentional, 6% spontaneously mentioned that bullying is repetitive, and only 26% (but up to a third of adolescent respondents) noted that bullying entails a power imbalance.

For these reasons, some bullying prevention efforts, particularly those from a positive behavioral support perspective, address the problem of bullying from a behavioral level by avoiding the use of the term bully, redefining the bullying construct so as to focus on concrete behaviors underlying bullying (e.g., hitting, threatening, name-calling), without bothering with amorphous and subjective requirements of assessing power differentials, and without considering the interpersonal dynamic existing between children who bully and the peers they harass (e.g., Ross & Horner, 2009). It is indeed possible that the most successful interventions will be those designed to reduce aggression and antisocial behavior more generally (e.g., Goldstein, Glick, & Gibbs, 1986), with decreases in bullying necessarily following.

Our perspective is that there exists unique relational features of bullying that can be usefully synthesized within individual, clinical and behavioral perspectives. This would give the aggression field greater balance, provide more comprehensive information about children who bully and their peer relationships, and allow a conceptual bridge to research in relationship science (Reiss, Collins, & Berscheid, 2000) and interpersonal theories of developmental psychopathology (Rudolph et al., in press). For example, the bully victim classification itself is useful inasmuch as it points to a real profile of children with extensive needs, but it leaves open basic relational questions such as, "Who is the bully victim bullying?" "Who is the bully victim being harassed by?" and the temporal processes behind these complex interactions.

Applying the relational approach to bullying: A gendered example. A relational perspective on bullying is particularly important when dealing with issues of gender (Pepler et al.,2006). Gender issues in bullying include, but go beyond, such contrastive questions of whether boys or girls are more likely to be bullies, or whether female bullying is best captured through attention to social or relationally aggressive forms (Crick & Zahn-Waxler, 2003). Bullying is a gendered phenomenon in many ways, whether it be in children's targeting of, and attempts to gain status among, same- and other-sex peers (Faris & Felmlee, 2011; Hanish et al., 2012; Rodkin & Berger, 2008), cross-gender bullying as an immature attempt to enter into the "push-and-poke courtship" of early adolescence (Pellegrini et al., 2010), developmental linkages to intimate relationships of coercion and control (Espelage, Low, Anderson, & De La Rue, 2013; Rodkin & Fischer, 2003; Pepler et al., 2006), the targeting of youth based on real or perceived sexual orientation (Espelage, Aragon, Birkett & Koenig, 2008; Pauletti et al., 2014; Robinson & Espelage, 2011), or using sexually harassing behaviors and homophobic epithets as a means of bullying (Espelage, Basile, & Hamburger, 2012). Gender often un-

derlies decisions about whom to harass, why to harass, and how to harass.

One finding that becomes evident once bullies and victims are considered in a dynamic relationship is that bullying is not limited to same-sex peers. Indeed, once children's interactional preference for same-sex partners is controlled, rates of same- and other-sex aggression are relatively similar, although there may be a preference for boys (but not girls) to direct physical aggression (but not relational aggression) to other boys (Hanish et al., 2012; Ostrov & Keating, 2004). Sexual selection theory provides a conceptual framework for understanding same-sex aggression, as same-sex peers vie for dominance and resource control. However, dominance motives can underlie other-sex aggression as well (Hanish et al., 2012). Even before adolescence, empirical reports suggest that there are a disturbing number of cases, possibly half, where aggressive boys are harassing girls (Rodkin & Berger, 2008; Veenstra et al., 2007). Olweus (1993) first reported this finding, writing that "*boys carried out a large part of the bullying to which girls were subjected*" (p. 18, italics original). That is, 60% of fifth through seventh grade girls who were reportedly harassed said that they were bullied by boys. Socially marginalized boys, who are unpopular and rejected, are most likely to harass girls (Rodkin & Berger, 2008). In contrast, socially integrated bullies tend to demonstrate within-sex bullying and dominance against unpopular targets (Pellegrini et al., 2010; Veenstra et al., 2010).

Such cross-sex bullying is uniquely problematic in that it likely diminishes children's understanding of, appreciation for, and efficacy in interacting with cross-sex peers. As a result, we may see less adaptive and more maladaptive interactions with cross-sex peers, the consequences of which can play out seriously in such behaviors as sexual harassment and relationship violence becoming an accepted part of peer culture and the culture at large (Espelage et al., 2012; Rodkin & Fischer, 2003; Pepler et al., 2006). Peer sexual harassment is often seen as a purely adolescent phenomenon, related to adolescents' attempts to position themselves as desirable mates (Guerra et al., 2011). However, according to the American Association of University Women Educational Foundation (2001), sexual harassment begins as early as elementary school, with 38% of girls who experience sexual harassment reporting first occurrence even before entering middle school. Moreover, the longitudinal associations among bullying, homophobic name-calling, and sexual harassment in youth are evident as young as age 10 (Espelage et al., 2012). Thus, the origins of peer sexual harassment may be linked to how boys and girls get along with another in early and middle childhood (Hanish et al., 2012).

Children's interactions with male and female peers have the potential to exacerbate or mitigate aggressive tendencies, depending on children's own sex and tendencies to display gendered characteristics (Hanish, Hill, Gosney, Fabes, & Martin, 2011). For example, peers can socialize aggressive behaviors in one another, as evident in interactions with both same- and other-sex peers (Hanish, Martin, Fabes, Leonard, & Herzog, 2005). However, when risk factors for aggression are aggregated, such as when arousable, dysregulated, and aggressive boys spend time with other similar boys, the likelihood for the inculcation of aggressive and bullying behaviors is enhanced (Martin & Fabes, 2001). These examples highlight the importance of the larger social network in which bully/victim relationships are embedded. Importantly, the social embedding of bullying begins early, as children first come together in groups of same-age peers in preschools and daycares (Andrews, Hanish, Fabes, & Martin, 2014; Rodkin & Roisman, 2010), and continues through childhood and adolescence and into adulthood (Hanish et al., 2011).

While we have focused on applying a relational approach to issues of gender, similar questions regarding *who bullies whom* can be applied to race and ethnicity (Garandeau, Wilson, & Rodkin, 2010; Graham & Juvonen, 2002; Tolsma, van Duerzen, Stark, & Veenstra, 2013). From a relational perspective, any notable difference between people that can be associated with power differentials, such as religion, disability, or ethnicity, has the potential to be seized upon as an object of harassment in a way that cannot be captured by strictly individual-level taxonomies or approaches that focus exclusively on bullying-like behaviors. From a measurement standpoint, one goal for future research will be to empirically assess repetition and power asymmetries *within* the bully/victim relationship and social networks, as opposed to simply providing (or not) children and youth with definitions of bullying that may or may not be relevant to their construction and experiences of bullying (Rodkin, Hanish, Wang, & Logis, 2014; Vaillancourt et al., 2008).

Conclusions

After decades in which interest in bullying was minimal, contemporary scholarship has grown in quantity and extent, capturing the ear of educators, policymakers, parents, and researchers around the globe. This growing body of research has helped draw attention to some important findings about the nature of bullying, and aggression more generally. Bullying can be fostered by both the presence of a social network and its absence. At least some youth who bully are well-integrated into peer social ecologies, and may derive at least short-term benefit from bullying other youth. Other children who bully are socially marginalized and enmeshed in reoccurring cycles of abuse. Among some children who engage in high levels of bullying, bullying is an indicator, the tip of an iceberg, for a larger profile of antisocial problems. These distinct profiles and developmental pathways could be better established, and related to other person-oriented classifications of aggression in future research.

An existential problem with the literature on bullying is that it may not be distinguishable from the larger body of work on childhood aggression. What is there about anti-bullying interventions that could not also be addressed by a more general violence-reduction program? When reading a journal article, or a popular book for that matter, what would be lost in the understanding by substituting "aggres-

sor" or "aggression" for "bully" or "bullying"? What is the heuristic value of having a literature on bullying when one on aggression already exists? This challenge was especially clear in our discussion of developmental antecedents and long-term consequences of bullying. We would venture to predict that meaningful, robust distinctions between bullies and other aggressive children are unlikely to be found in antecedent personality or dispositional features. Similarly, we would predict that genetic correlates to aggression, such as those found in twin studies (e.g., Brendgen et al., 2011), would also be found were measures of bullying substituted for measures of aggression—but not necessarily when more general aggressive tendencies were controlled for. In short, readers interested in the question of antecedents or consequences of bullying might be well-served by consulting what is known about aggression more generally.

In order to better distinguish bullying from aggression, we have stressed that, along with being a feature of individual personality and behavior, bullying is perpetrated within a *relationship*, albeit a coercive, unequal, asymmetric relationship, characterized by aggression. Because bullying is aggression directed from at least one person to another, research on bullying might benefit from a more explicitly relational or interpersonal perspective that includes information about the bully victim dynamic, bystanders, and related social networks. It has been overdue for the field of social development to accept what Olweus (1978) pointed out 35 years ago: Aggression can bring social capital, some bullies may hide in the plain sight of social acceptance, while other, more socially marginalized youth are mired in what may seem like a chronic cycle of bullying and being bullied.

While understanding differences between socially integrated bullies and socially marginalized bully victims is important, and distinguishing bullying from aggression is essential, research would be well-served by moving beyond categorical schemes to relational, situational analyses of the extent to which bullying behaviors are dysfunctional and maladaptive versus functional and adaptive with respect to social dynamics that are operating at any given point in time. This includes knowing not just who is a bully and who is a victim, but *who bullies whom* and how bullies and the children they harass are situated within peer social ecologies. Which bullies are harassing which victims? Does bullying occur between youth of different ethnicities, genders, or ages? Not much is known about the relationship between a bully and the child whom he or she targets—for instance, were they friends, former friends, enemies, or strangers (for an exception, see Rodkin et al., 2014)? Additionally, we need to know more about the nuanced dimensions upon which power differences are expressed.

We considered the complexity that gender brings to a relational analysis of bullying, beyond issues of what may be gender-normative subtypes of overt or social aggression or prevalence rates of male and female bullying. Gender and sexuality is a hidden underbelly of much bullying and harassment. Bullying may be as likely to occur between boys and girls as within gendered peer groups, and to start well before the transition to adolescence. In addition, youth use homophobic language or engage in other forms of gender-based harassment as a way to enforce traditional masculinity norms (Birkett & Espelage, 2014; Darwich, Hymel, & Waterhouse, 2012).

There are translational implications of a relational approach to bullying and peer harassment. Initiatives like the Promoting Relationships and Eliminating Violence Network (PREVNet), advocate that "*promoting relationships* is essential to . . . *eliminating violence*" and that "the use of power and aggression underlies most forms of interpersonal violence throughout the life span . . .. Healthy relationships [are] trusting, supportive, and devoid of the use of power and aggression" (Pepler & Craig, 2011, p. 389). Long-term outcomes that are most causally associated with bullying may be those that are domain-specific, focused on aggression within relationships, such as intimate partner violence or intergroup hostility. In the years ahead, researchers interested in bullying should consider the unique insights bullying provides on aggression as it operates, however destructively, within diverse relationships and through the social networks of childhood and adolescence.

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