Rules of the Culture and Personal Needs: Witnesses' Decision-Making Processes to Deal with Situations of Bullying in Middle School

SILVIA DIAZGRANADOS FERRÁNS
ROBERT L. SELMAN
LUBA FALK FEIGENBERG
Harvard Graduate School of Education

This article explores the decision-making processes by which early adolescents choose a strategy to upstand, bystand, *or* join the perpetrators *when they witness situations of physical and relational bullying in their schools. Authors Silvia Diazgranados Ferráns, Robert L. Selman, and Luba Falk Feigenberg analyze data from twenty-three interviews conducted with eighth graders in four middle schools using a grounded theory approach and propose an emerging theoretical framework to guide future research on bullying. Their framework includes a multilevel model that identifies nested sources of influence on students' responses to bullying and a decision-making tree that hypothesizes different choice paths that student witnesses' decision-making processes might follow in situations of bullying as predicted by the students' positions along a set of "key social-relational indices." Finally, the authors connect their findings with current debates in the field of moral decision making and discuss the implications for researchers, practitioners, and policy makers.*

Peer aggression and social exclusion processes such as bullying are common occurrences in middle and high schools (Smith & Brain, 2000), and their negative consequences have been documented across countries and cultures (Hawker & Boulton, 2000). Despite evidence showing that these behaviors are normative occurrences in schools, they are not considered socially acceptable in the context of democratic societies (United Nations, 1989). In fact, there is ample evidence that bullying, in particular, has detrimental effects

Harvard Educational Review Vol. 82 No. 4 Winter 2012
Copyright © by the President and Fellows of Harvard College

on the psychological, emotional, social, and physical well-being of the victims (Brain, 1997; Due et al., 2005; Hawker & Boulton, 2000; Nansel, Craig, Overpeck, Saluja, & Ruan, 2004; Nishina, Juvonen, & Witkow, 2005; Olweus, 1993; Rothon, Head, Klineberg, & Stansfeld, 2011; Schwartz, Gorman, Nakamoto, & Toblin, 2005) as well on their academic performance in school (Card & Hodges, 2008; Juvonen, Wang, & Espinoza, 2011). In extreme cases, these behaviors may be associated with increased risks of suicide and homicide, as shown by the growing number of students in several countries—such as the United States, England, Japan, Norway, and Ireland—who have fatally harmed themselves or taken the lives of others after experiencing chronic harassment (O'Moore, 2000; Vossekuil, Fein, Reddy, Borum, & Modzeleski, 2002).

In an effort to better understand bullying and to decrease its prevalence and negative effects, researchers have typically studied this form of peer aggression and social exclusion from the perspectives of the victims and the perpetrators (Bolton & Underwood, 1993; Erling & Hwang, 2004; O'Moore & Kirkham, 2001; Seals & Young, 2003). However, given that bullying is most often a group process (Lagerspetz, Björkqvist, Berts, & King, 1982), some researchers study this phenomenon as a relationship among people who play different participant roles beyond the bully and the victim (Salmivalli, Lagerspetz, Bjorkqvist, Osterman, & Kaukiainen, 1996). In particular, the field has seen increased interest in understanding the varied roles that witnesses play in these situations, as their responses can contribute to reducing or reinforcing the problem. For example, "assistants of the bully" join the perpetrators and actively participate in the harassment; "reinforcers of the bully" give positive feedback to the perpetrators by laughing or by providing them with an audience; and "defenders of the victim" take sides with the target of the bullying by comforting the victim, telling the teacher, or expressing disapproval to the perpetrators (Salmivalli et al., 1996).

Studies about the role of witnesses in bullying situations have documented that most early adolescents have negative attitudes toward peer victimization that occurs in schools and express an interest in helping the victims (Boulton, Bucci, & Hawker, 1999). Research has also noted that when early adolescent witnesses take action to protect a victim and express disapproval to the perpetrators, the prevalence of bullying in schools is likely to decrease (Kärnä, Voeten, Poskiparta & Salmivalli, 2010; Salmivalli & Poskiparta, 2012; Salmivalli, Voeten, & Poskiparta, 2011; Salmivalli et al., 1996). For example, one study of nearly seven thousand elementary students' responses to a survey showed that defending a victim is negatively associated with the frequency of bullying in a classroom (Salmivalli, Voeten, & Poskiparta, 2011).

Given these findings, researchers believe that antibullying programs would benefit from targeting witnesses by encouraging them to support the victims and express disapproval to the perpetrators (Polanin, Espelage, & Pigott, 2012). Unfortunately, very little is known about what it takes for witnesses to

stand up for the victims of bullying (Pöyhönen, Juvonen, & Salmivalli, 2010) and about the factors that influence how early adolescents respond to these situations. In fact, despite most students expressing negative attitudes toward peer victimization, most witnesses remain uninvolved when episodes of social exclusion and peer aggression occur in schools. For example, Salmivalli and colleagues (1996) found that among preadolescents and adolescents, less than 20 percent of witnesses act as defenders. Similarly, Hawkins, Pepler & Craig (2001) observed that in grades 1–6, peers were present during 88 percent of bullying episodes that took place on school playgrounds but decided to intervene only in 19 percent of those situations. More recently, Nishina and Bellmore (2010) found that among ninth graders, friends are the most likely to help the victim when they witness bullying; strangers almost never try to intervene or help.

This evidence illustrates a disconnect between the opinions adolescents express about these school-based situations and the actions these students take, a relational phenomenon researchers and practitioners in the field of moral development have documented and struggled with for some time: what people say is the best response to a moral dilemma is not always consistent with what they actually do when a similar situation presents itself (Blasi, 1980). As Selman (2003) has noted, the gap between "talk and walk" has led some researchers to prioritize the study of action (the "walk") over the study of thought (the "talk"), and vice versa, but "it is the connection—or the disconnection—between thought and action that needs to be better understood, both theoretically and practically" (p. 25).

To understand students' thoughts and actions in response to situations of bullying, most studies have used quantitative methodologies to test hypotheses based on responses to large sample surveys (Guerra, Williams, & Sadek, 2011). However, many questions about the nature of bullying and decision-making processes associated with it cannot be adequately addressed with quantitative surveys that require hypotheses based on a priori theories. Exploratory qualitative studies are needed to examine how students make meaning of their experiences and to identify factors that influence their responses in these situations. With these issues in mind, we aim to answer the following question: *What is the process by which early adolescent students in eighth grade at four K–8 schools decide to bystand, upstand, or join the perpetrators in school-based situations where they witness peer aggression and social exclusion?*

Methodology

Participants and Data Collection

Our sample consists of twenty-three eighth-grade students selected from among two urban district public schools and two urban charter public schools in a large metropolitan region in the U.S. Northeast. We contacted principals

from several schools at random or by recommendation. In each of the schools that volunteered to participate, all of the students in the eighth grade were eligible to participate in a larger study of school climate. Among the 167 participants who returned parental consent, we selected twenty-three for in-depth interviews because they exhibited either very high or very low scores on a measure of social awareness and perspective taking (Schultz, Selman, & LaRusso, 2003). Eleven females and twelve males participated in the interview portion of the study. On average, the students were thirteen years old and were representative of the school district in terms of racial and socioeconomic background (40% Black, 35% Latino, 25% White.) We chose to focus on eighth graders because most students at this grade level have been in the same school environment for at least three years, giving them ample time and experience to formulate opinions about the social dynamics and culture of their schools. Furthermore, the emerging cognitive and social skills of early adolescents create a new set of opportunities and challenges for students (Nakkula & Toshalis, 2006), and middle school is a time when school-based episodes of bullying peak (Peskin, Tortolero, & Markham, 2006).

Guided by an interview protocol, we presented students with a range of scenarios reflecting social interactions that regularly occur among peers in unsupervised school settings. We selected three of these scenarios to use in our analysis because they were specifically oriented to issues of bullying. In each of these, we asked students to imagine themselves as witnesses to situations of peer aggression and social exclusion. We then asked them to share similar situations they have experienced in their own schools.

- In the first scenario, participants read an essay written by an eighth-grade student who had taken a class using material developed by Facing History and Ourselves (1994), an educational program that combats prejudice and promotes civic education in schools. The essay describes the student's personal experience of a group of popular students who regularly teased her and then unexpectedly invited her to join them in picking on another girl.
- In the second scenario, a hypothetical one, students were invited to imagine that there is a lot of teasing and name calling going on in their school. While they are walking down the hallway with a same-sex friend, someone calls their friend "gay," intending it as an insult.
- In the third scenario, also hypothetical, students were asked to imagine that they are in a school where students hang out in the bathrooms between classes. They see a lot of students "getting jumped" in the bathroom during the school day.

In each case, we asked students to: (1) express how they feel about the situation, (2) consider what would be the best thing to do, and (3) explain the reason why they think that's the best course of action. Then we asked students to relate these situations to their own school experience.

Process of Analysis

In analyzing student responses, we used both preexisting codes and codes that emerged from our interviews. Specifically, we coded for *choice of strategy* using three preexisting (etic) categories of analysis that Feigenberg, King, Barr, & Selman (2008) developed: (1) *upstand* requires intervention in the existing situation, articulates an action that assists the victim, or aligns against (resists) the teasing; (2) *perpetrate* accepts the invitation to tease the victim, aligns with the group that teases the victim; or (3) *bystand* aligns with neither the victim nor the group doing the teasing, avoids involvement with the situation. Additionally, we used a constructivist grounded theory approach in our analysis (Charmaz, 2006). Through a nonlinear process of open, selective, and axial coding, we created a conceptual multilevel framework and a decision-making tree to illustrate how students in our sample justified their choice of strategy. We chose grounded theory because this method provided us with systematic but flexible research tools for analyzing our set of interviews, using an exploratory approach that potentially leads to new insights about witnesses' responses to bullying and to constructing an emerging theory rooted in the data (Charmaz, 2006). To verify our emic codes, we worked with two individuals who first blindly coded the interviews and then engaged in discussions to assess their level of agreement. We obtained an indicator of inter-rater reliability of .87, which reflects the proportion of units upon which raters agreed out of the total number of units they coded. Included in the number of agreed-upon units were those coded segments upon which the raters initially disagreed but after further discussion reached consensus agreement. These were a small proportion of the total responses.

Through our analysis, we identified two primary types of explanations given by our participants for why students their age in general, and in their school more specifically, behave the way they do in situations like the scenarios. First, participants made reference to individuals' motivation for power, connection, and safety, which we coded as *personal needs.* Second, students appeared to follow the shared agreements that exist in the social space in which they live about the ways people are expected to behave in different situations. We created a second construct, *rules of the culture,* to code the prescriptions for action and messages that students receive from the groups to which they belong or with which they identify. These rules of the culture capture what the students consider to be the socially desirable ways to respond to the social situations they regularly encounter at school. Because it became evident that these messages come from different sources, which sometimes prescribe contradictory paths of action, we further specified this category to indicate which primary social-relational groups were prescribing the action or benefiting from it: *rules of friendship, rules of the peer group,* and *rules of the school.*

We then identified a set of factors that we labeled "key social-relational indices," which reflect how students position themselves as they answer, implicitly

or explicitly, questions that appear to be critical in determining how they navigate the maze of rules and personal needs in their decision-making process. We present a decision-making tree to illustrate students' choice of strategy according the positions they adopt along these four social-relational indices: (1) their interpretation of the underlying nature of the situation, (2) their relationship with the victim and the perpetrator, (3) their universe of moral responsibility, and (4) their perceived personal power status in relationship to the perpetrator (see figure 2).

Results

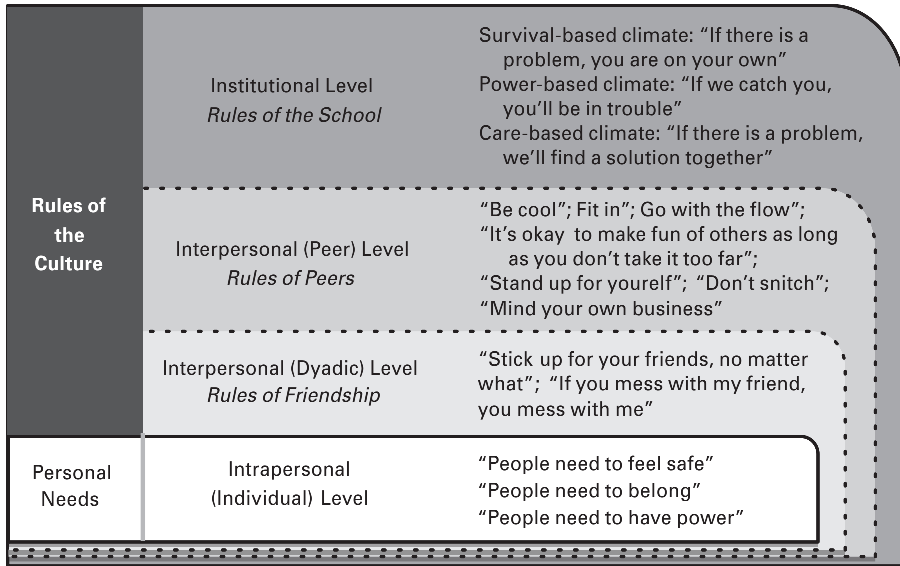
The Talk-Walk Gap

Consistent with the literature (Boulton et al., 1999; Hawker & Boulton, 2000; Hawkins et al., 2001; Nishina & Bellmore, 2010; Salmivalli et al., 1996; Smith & Brain, 2000)), our analysis showed that while many of our participants (65%) expressed disapproval of the three instances of peer aggression and social exclusion portrayed in the scenarios, most students (78%) reported that these incidents are common occurrences in their schools. And even though every single student in the sample recommended becoming an upstander—74 percent by recommending to express public disapproval of the perpetration and 26 percent by recommending to decline the invitation to participate in the teasing and offering support to the victim in private—half of them acknowledged that in practice they often laugh when they see others victimizing a peer in school. Below we present our analysis of how students justify their choices of strategy when they witness situations of bullying.

Justifications Behind Choice of Strategy: A Multilevel Framework

In order to explore the reasons behind students' choice of strategies and recommendations for action, we organized students' justifications in three levels: intrapersonal, interpersonal, and institutional. At the intrapersonal level, study participants referenced their personal needs for connection, power, and safety as individual motivations for their actions. At the interpersonal level, study participants referenced the messages they receive from friends and peers about appropriate responses to particular situations. At the institutional level, study participants referenced the messages they receive from teachers and administrators about how students are expected to behave when they encounter a specific situation. Students made reference to any one or all of these levels in providing their justifications. We present a framework in figure 1 that visually illustrates the multilevel nature of the intrapersonal, interpersonal, and institutional settings that, according to our interpretation of participants' reports, move students in our sample to act in certain ways (bystand, upstand, or perpetrate). We show how students' personal needs (intrapersonal level) interact with the various rules of the culture as prescribed by friends and

FIGURE 1 *Multilevel framework of justifications of choice of strategy: Personal needs and rules of the culture at the friends, peer group, and school levels*



peers (interpersonal level) and school staff (institutional level) to influence their responses to bullying.

At the *intrapersonal level* we observe that students in our study are aware of the personal needs that people strive to fulfill in their everyday interactions, which are salient in social situations of peer aggression and social exclusion. For example, some students justify a decision to bystand based on considerations of their personal need for safety: "what if the person came up to you and stabbed you for saying that" or "otherwise she would have gotten beaten up bad again." Others explain a decision to join perpetrators based on a personal need for connection: "they do it because they really want to fit in." Often, participants explained teasing and bullying as a strategy that students use when they have a personal need for power: "they do it because they want to feel powerful; they want to feel good about themselves."

At the *interpersonal* and *institutional levels* we observe that students reported receiving conflicting messages from friends, peers, and teachers about the ways they are expected to behave as members of each group under different conditions. For example, some students report that they helped a friend because "you have to stick up for your friends, no matter what" (rules of friendship), while others reported they remained bystanders when a nonfriend was being victimized because "you should mind your own business" (rules of the peer group).

We also tried to understand the dynamic processes that regulate how the personal needs and the rules of the culture function in different social situations, as reported by students in our sample. We paid special attention to those instances in which the rules prescribed by one or more of the three nested social groups conflict with a personal need or where the rules prescribed by these different groups conflict with each other. In doing so, we identified two patterns:

- When facing a social conflict, students tacitly reach into the *rules of the culture* to choose those strategies that help them fulfill the personal need they perceive as least satisfied. For instance, students who are not popular seem to yield more readily to group pressures because they are struggling to belong, while students who are popular appear less prone to follow group expectations they disagree with because doing so will not threaten their feeling of belonging.
- When messages from different groups prescribe *rules of the culture* that lead to contradictory paths of action, students prioritize loyalty to the rules of the group with whom they have stronger ties—friends, peers, or school. In our study, participants consistently exhibited more loyalty to rules of friendship than to the rules of the peer group and similarly prioritized loyalty to the rules of the peer group over those prescribed by adults in the school.

Key Social-Relational Indices: Turning Points Along the Path

Keeping in mind the patterns of interaction described above, and using the rules of the culture and personal needs (figure 1) as transversal categories of analysis, we examined the process by which our sample of eighth-grade participants chose strategies to bystand, upstand, or join perpetrators when they witness bullying in their schools. Through our analysis, we identified four key social-relational indices that seem to have a large influence on students' choice of strategy in different situations. In what follows, we describe each of these indices and discuss the ways in which they intersect with the rules of the culture to influence students' choice of social strategy.

— *Key Indicator 1.* Interpretation of the Underlying Nature of the Situation: "Are They Taking It Too Far?"

Participants in our sample are acutely sensitive to the ways in which they are perceived by their peers and how they perceive their own status in social hierarchies according to how likable or unlikable they are in the eyes of other group members. As one student stated,

> There's always going to be popular kids, there's always going to be the one who's always going to be nerds, there's always going to be jocks, there's always going to be cliques, there's always going to be groups. So, in any school it doesn't really matter if you know the person, if you know any popular people. If you hang out

> with the nerds you're not popular. If you hang out with popular people and you talk to the nerds then you're still pretty much popular. (Andy)

They also accept as a normal part of life that some students are popular and others are not, and our data suggest that they feel strongly that it is preferable to be popular. For this reason, our participants follow the rules of the peer group, according to which they should "be cool" or, at a minimum, "fit in." By prescribing a rule to "be cool," the group provides individuals with a socially approved way of fulfilling their personal need for power; by prescribing a rule to "fit in," the group provides individuals with standard mechanisms to fulfill their personal need to belong and be treated as legitimate members of the peer group. Those who do not succeed in these tasks are considered outcasts and become targets of teasing by students who are trying to fulfill their personal need for power.

> I think that it mostly happens because some of the older kids, they feel more powerful and that they could do anything that they want just to prove it in front of their friends. So that they can stay in the group that they are, so then they can't be made fun of. (Antonio)

According to students' responses, teasing appears to be an important mechanism by which the peer group creates social pressure for individuals to conform to its prescriptions, which often reflect the values of dominant members of the peer group. Note how in the following excerpt a student suggests, without questioning the mechanisms of dominance and power, that the more effective way to avoid being teased is to act in ways that are consistent with what the popular members of the group value:

> I say for the kids that getting picked on . . . not get mad, but try to do things that the popular kids or the kids that are making fun of them do, so they won't get picked on. Or like doing things that other kids are doing, that they are not doing. That would help a lot 'cause the kids that are popular would begin to notice and say, "Hey, you doing things like us." And they start talking to them. (Amari)

Teasing also appears to be an instrument by which students in our sample position themselves in relation to others in the social hierarchy. Therefore, teasing helps some students satisfy their personal need for power, but, as a consequence, it often prevents other students from satisfying their personal need for safety: "Ummm, this girl she's getting picked on and . . . probably to make herself more popular, she's trying to become, she's trying to make fun of someone who's at a lower level than her. So she can become popular again" (Talia).

Many of our participants consider teasing to be a universal behavior that most people have experienced and that cannot be prevented. For example, in the following excerpt, a student naturalized this behavior by pointing out

that humans have exhibited it throughout history, even in isolated areas of the world:

> I feel like it's just like the natural order of things and it has to happen. It's so stereotypical that you hear about these stories . . . it's almost like the same situation happening over and over again. I feel like it's almost like it has to happen. You like you hear about it in villages and in, you know, nineteenth-century towns and stuff. I don't think it's something that we have created in middle school. (Lisa)

Interestingly, while eighth graders in our sample appear to take teasing for granted and don't question its use as a method of status differentiation, they did discuss with us the limits beyond which teasing becomes aggression. In fact, students appear to follow a rule of the peer culture according to which "it's ok to make fun of others, as long as you don't take it too far" (see rules of the peer group, figure 1). By prescribing this rule, the peer group enables its members to use teasing as a mechanism by which a status hierarchy is established, maintained, or revised while acknowledging members' personal needs for safety. For this reason, when students witness others teasing a peer, their choice of strategy may depend on their initial assessment of the underlying nature or severity of the situation. In other words, they accept the act of teasing as long as it does not cross the boundary into what they would consider harassment. Here a student commented on the essay scenario, where the author, despite being a victim herself, decides to join perpetrators and make fun of another girl:

> That's messed up. Because she knows what it's like to be in that situation. But then again she just wants to fit in. But either way, it's messed up. If she's laughin', then that's alright, because if you laugh at somebody, then you laugh at somebody. But if she's going to humiliate her, then that's just too far. It's getting pushed too far, that's just taking it over the edge. (Jariah)

However, the limits between teasing playfully and teasing as harassment are sometimes blurry. What it means to "take it too far" seems to vary in different contexts and for different students. When asked how they determine if somebody is taking it too far, students in our sample answer according to different underlying conceptions. Some focus on the nature of the relationship between the teaser and the teased. These students argue that friends always tease playfully because they care about each other's feelings and well-being. In contrast, they suggest that most people would feel threatened if a stranger made them the target of a joke. Other students focus on the intention of the teaser: if the goal is to be funny, the teasing is acceptable; but if it is to be hurtful, that is "taking it too far." A third group of students considers that what matters most is the potential impact of the action on the person who is being targeted. While students in this group do not always agree on whether relational and verbal aggression is hurtful, most think behaviors that put the physical integrity of the victims at risk represent what it means to "take it too far."

Finally, one student pointed out that victims of harassment may laugh at the jokes that others play on them to hide that they are hurt and to avoid looking weak in the eyes of the peer group. For this reason, he suggested that the best way to identify if somebody is "taking it too far" is to use the golden rule: do unto others as you would have them do unto you.

Using any of these four strategies to distinguish teasing from bullying, witnesses arrive at this juncture: if they feel that somebody is "just kidding," they are likely to bystand or to join in and laugh; but if they feel that somebody is teasing another student as a way of harassment, other factors play a significant role as they consider a strategy of action. This takes us to the next step in their decision-making process.

— *Key Indicator 2.* Personal Relationship with the Victim and Perpetrator: Who Is My Friend?

Our interviews suggest that when students feel that somebody is bullying another student—that is, when they witness teasing that has "gone too far"—they consider their own relationship with those involved in the conflict before deciding on whether they will bystand, upstand, or join the perpetrators. If a friend is involved, their choice of strategy often follows a rule of friendship that prescribes that they should "stick up for their friends, no matter what" (see rules of friendship, figure 1). Given that participants believe that friends help each other fulfill their personal need to belong, students often stick up for friends who are bullied, even if this means disregarding the rules of the peer group and the rules of the school. In this way, when the victim is a friend, witnesses are most likely to become upstanders.

> When the kids were making fun of one of my really good friends and I was with them, you are kind of like, "Yo, you really should stop because you're really hurting this person, so I really think you should stop." [I: What in that moment makes you feel this is important enough to do something about it?] Definitely when you find out, you definitely think that, umm, that is my really good friend, I should hang on to 'em. If you know that if it's a popular person and a really good friend, then you really want to go with the friend though, even if you want to be popular. (Andy)

Unfortunately, according to our data, "sticking up for your friends, no matter what," also means that students may automatically support their friends even when those friends are in the role of perpetrators themselves. This may explain why students in our sample report that the best thing to do in a hypothetical scenario is to stand up to the perpetrators yet frequently acknowledge that, in practice, they laugh and act as assistants to the bully when their friends are teasing somebody.

> My friend Andre was making fun of this really small girl, like she speaks real low. He was making fun of her, saying she talks like Mighty Mouse. [I: In that situa-

> tion, are you laughing along?] Yeah. I feel bad for her. I laugh, but then I still feel bad. (Tyler)

Our data suggest that when witnesses of a bullying incident are friends with both the victim and the perpetrator, they may try to take the role of mediator or simply avoid taking sides. In these situations, witnesses may be protecting their personal need to belong by taking a position that allows them to maintain their connections with both parties. In the following excerpt, note how under the same circumstances a student would confront the perpetrator if the victim was a friend but would avoid taking sides and try to mediate if the perpetrator was also a friend:

> If someone calls my friend gay? Am I friends with the person who called him gay? . . . Well, if I was friends with the guy that called him gay, I would just be like, "Why are you guys fighting? You guys ain't even friends. You guys need to squash this; there's no point to fighting." But if it wasn't my friend, I'd be like, "Shut up! Leave him alone. What's your problem?" (Chris)

In summary, when the personal needs of friends are involved, students appear to prioritize the rules of friendship over the prescriptions of the peer and school groups. We see that when the victim is a friend, witnesses are likely to become upstanders; when the perpetrators are friends, witnesses are likely to join them in their teasing; and when both victim and perpetrator are friends, witnesses may feel moved to act as mediators. Interestingly, when witnesses don't have ties with the victim or the perpetrator, their choice of strategy appears to incorporate and give weight to additional factors. One of the most important factors is whether they feel a moral obligation to help people beyond their own circle of friends.

— *Key Indicator 3.* Scope of the Universe of Moral Responsibility: Should I Help Nonfriends?

Our interviews suggest that the rules of the peer group prescribe contradictory paths of action when the victim of bullying is not a friend. On the one hand, the peer group disapproves of acts of bullying by prescribing that "it's not ok to take teasing too far." On the other hand, it discourages witnesses from upstanding by prescribing rules according to which they should "mind their own business" and "don't snitch" (see rules of the peer group, figure 1). By prescribing minding one's own business, the peer group protects witnesses' personal needs for safety. Additionally, by prescribing that witnesses shouldn't report the situation to adults, or "snitch," the peer group acknowledges that adults have a completely different set of rules to address bullying and avoids bringing them in to protect members from the risk of getting in trouble.

> If you tell a teacher, they have to tell somebody. So, if you really feel like you can control it, you definitely don't want to tell anybody because then it doesn't get solved the way you want. And sometimes you just feel that adults don't know

> how you feel. Even when they think they know what's best for you, you have to control what you do and what's going to happen. But they should get to the bottom of it and set some boundaries. If they say, "It started when this kid gave me marijuana," you need to say that, but you don't want to get the kid in trouble. So, that's why it's hard to talk to adults. (Chris)

When victims of bullying are not their friends, students in our sample suggest that most witnesses will either become bystanders or join in, even when they disapprove of the actions of the perpetrators. This is not surprising given that the rules of the peer group discourage intervention and encourage being sensitive to social hierarchies. Therefore, in order to protect their personal need for safety and their personal need to belong, most witnesses will "go with the flow" (see rules of the peer group, figure 1).

> When the popular people call me over to their table, I know they just call people over to laugh at them. I knew something was going to happen, but you still want to go because it may increase your popularity and maybe do stuff to your ego. It may bring you up. So, you kind of go with the flow, you just kind of follow the people that are higher than you. It's just something a lot of people do. I think people normally know that they need to go with whatever's going to happen, because if they don't then that's just going to make them lower. And then, sometimes the wannabes or whatever will laugh at them to try and become popular. (Sam)

In this sense, the peer group enables teasing to serve as a mechanism to establish social hierarchies by forcing students to position themselves in the social order. To avoid victimization, targets of teasing have to "stand up for themselves" and learn how to "act tough so they don't get punked" (see rules of the peer group, figure 1).

Importantly, we did find a few cases in which a witness took a stand against bullying to support a peer who was not a friend at the moment of the event. Looking across these cases, we noted that students who intervened in favor of a nonfriend share a common commitment to address issues of unfairness. This commitment does not depend on the quality of their relationships with the people directly involved in the conflict but, rather, on their feelings of empathy and care for the personal needs of others. Therefore, if somebody is "taking it too far," these students will "stick up" for the victim, even if they don't have a personal relationship with that person. We used the category *universe of moral responsibility* to discriminate between witnesses of bullying who take a stand against peer aggression regardless of the target and those who only get involved to support their friends. The following excerpt illustrates how a student, whose universe of moral responsibility only includes friends, disengages from any responsibility to help a nonfriend who is being victimized:

> People always make fun of this girl and I never do anything. Most of the time I just, like, stand around and watch. They make fun of her 'cause everybody thinks she's fat and ugly and rude. [I: Are you friends with those kids?] I'm friends with

> the kids that make fun of her all the time. [I: You see them teasing her and you don't say anything?] Yeah, 'cause I'm not really friends with her so I don't know what I should do and I don't know how she really feels about it . . . I don't even think it bothers her 'cause she never says anything. She just doesn't realize that they're making fun of her. So I can't do anything if she doesn't acknowledge that they make fun of her. [I: Would it be different if you were good friends with her?] Yeah. Then I would tell them to stop 'cause that's my friend. (Leslie)

In contrast, another student justified his decision to become an upstander and support a stranger because he cared about that person's well-being in the same way he would care about the well-being of a friend:

> [I: You would have defended her? Why would that matter to you?] 'Cause I would consider that person a friend. I would probably later on ask them if they wanted to be my friend and talk to them, try to make their self-esteem higher. [I: And why would that be a good thing to do?] 'Cause I would feel good about myself, and they would probably feel a lot more better, that they finally have another friend at school. And now that they have more power, they could step up to the other popular kids. (Pedro)

In addition, we note that this student appears aware that friends are sources of power and that targeted students who feel empowered are more likely to stand up for themselves during conflicts.

In summary, our interviews suggest that when students' universe of moral responsibility only includes their friends, they are likely either to bystand or to join perpetrators as reinforcers in situations where they witness others bullying a student who is not a friend. If, however, they empathize with others and feel moved to protect the personal need for safety of people beyond their friends—that is, if their universe of moral responsibility includes nonfriends—they are more likely to respond as upstanders. However, our data also suggest that the witness's own position in the social hierarchy matters. We explore this dimension below.

— *Key Indicator 4.* Personal Power Status: Can I Challenge the Perpetrator? Students appear aware of their own power status in relationship to other peers, and they keep their position in mind when choosing a strategy of action in situations where they witness others bullying a peer. An eighth grader's concern about entering high school shows that he is not oblivious to the ways in which his power status varies across different contexts and relationships: "Here I'm at the top of the food chain, there I'm at the bottom." Yet, the same individual who yields to the pressure of a group of popular peers and joins them in perpetration may choose to upstand when his seniority confers on him some perceived power over younger students who are victimizing a peer.

> [I: You are telling me that in some situations you are going to say something and in other situations you are not. In this situation what makes you feel like you need to say something?] In the track team I try to be, like, a leader because

> I'm one of the oldest. I was the only eighth grader that day so I thought I should step up. The teacher wasn't around at that point in time, so I was going to be the leader and say something. [I: And in other situations if you are not the oldest, or if you're with friends, then it makes it harder?] Yeah. (Andy)

We find that when students witness an incident in which they feel that a perpetrator has crossed the line and that it is their responsibility to help the victim, they also report assessing how their power measures up to that of the perpetrator before choosing a specific strategy of intervention. In fact, the rules of the peer group prescribe that students should "know who is who in the food chain" (see rules of the peer group, figure 1) so that in order to protect their personal needs for safety and connection, they avoid public confrontations with students who are higher up in the social hierarchy.

> I don't think she should say, "What you're doing is really inhuman, guys," because that would just make it so that they don't want to talk to her; it displaces her. But at the same time, I don't think she should egg it on as something good. She should suggest something that doesn't completely separate her from the group, like, "Maybe you should be a little bit nicer." Kind of subtle. Something that isn't like, "What you guys are doing is mean!" Something so that you get their attention but you are not insulting them. You're an advice [*sic*]. You're not telling them what to do; you're asking them to do it. [I: Why do you think that would be the best way?] Because if you feel like you're more powerful than someone, you don't want someone who you feel looks up to you telling you what to do. They don't want someone who they have more power than to question them. (Chris)

This student suggests that a disempowered witness who needs to fulfill her personal need to belong may benefit from using subtle, nonconfrontational ways to address her concern for the victim in ways that do not sound like a challenge to a group of powerful perpetrators.

Interestingly, the few students who report having been active upstanders in situations where they witnessed a nonfriend being victimized also describe themselves as very powerful members of the peer group. Being popular themselves, it is possible that they may have fulfilled their personal need to belong and can count on numerous friends to protect their personal need for safety. For this reason, they claim feeling comfortable and empowered to openly express their disapproval of the bullying. In other instances, popular students already have a relationship with the perpetrators and feel safe confronting them for their behavior.

> [I: If you were in a school where students were jumping others in the bathroom, what would you do?] I don't know. It wouldn't be a point where I would walk into the bathroom and be scared, just because at school there's no one that intimidates me. So I would have control of it. If I walked in, I could tell everyone to stop. All the kids, for the most part, I can probably tell them to stop. It would have an effect on them. So, I'd just tell them to stop. [I: Why do you have an effect on them?] Because I'm friends with a lot of them, that's why. (Chris)

Students who feel morally responsible to support the victim may then choose the strategy of action that better suits them, according to their access to various sources of power, such as popularity, seniority, or physical strength. If witnesses feel they are in the weaker position, for instance, they appear more likely to upstand passively by offering support to the victim in private or by walking away from an invitation to engage in the perpetration.

> I would probably stick up for the person, especially if it was my really good friend. It normally depends on who's saying it though. I mean, in any situation, I honestly would stick up for the person anyways. But, if it's, like, a really big person, like, a person that's tough and everything, then people don't really want to get involved. So, you're just kind of quiet about it and you just kind of whisper to your friend, "Yo, just forget about it." (Sam)

Yet, if witnesses feel they are in an equally or more powerful position than the perpetrator, they appear more likely to upstand actively and express in public their disapproval of the bullying. It is worth noting that some students in our sample are aware that if they succeed at challenging a perpetrator, they can shift the power balance and gain social recognition among their peers.

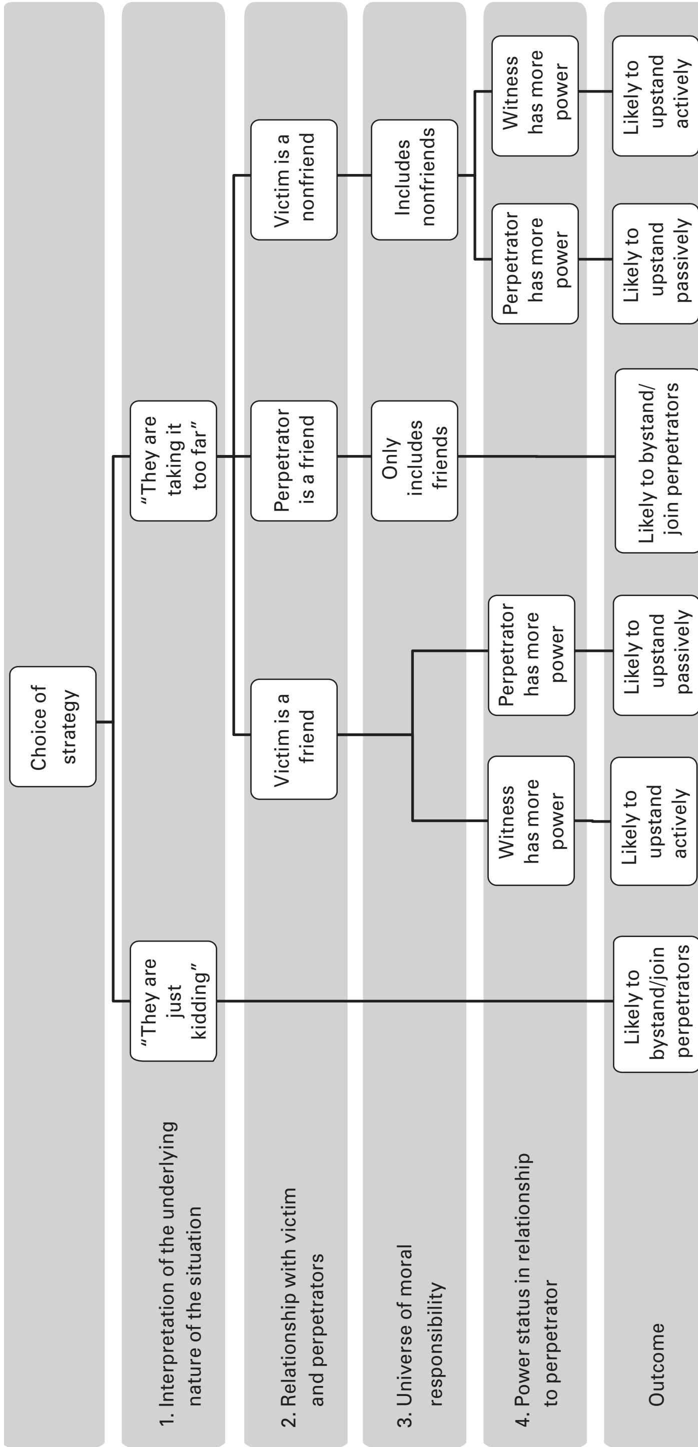
> If you have the courage to stand up for somebody and put that person in their place, they know what you have done and they know what that could do. They just do it because they want to see how the other popular kids will react to that and to have them like bidding and stuff. So they're just trying to impress the popular kids, what they do to other people. (Pedro)

In conclusion, in the process of choosing a specific strategy of action, students who want to help a victim of bullying first assess if their own status allows them to openly and publicly express their disapproval to the perpetrators or if it would be safer to offer support to the victim in private or report the situation anonymously. When witnesses feel they have less power than the perpetrator, they appear more likely to upstand passively by offering help to the victim in private or refusing to join them. When they feel they have more power than the perpetrator, they appear more likely to upstand actively and openly express their disapproval of the harassment.

The Path Students Walk: A Decision-Making Tree

We present a decision-making tree (figure 2) that illustrates the different paths that students may walk when choosing a strategy of action according to their position along the four key social-relational indices that emerged from our data. From our analysis, we hypothesize that these four relational indices—their interpretation of the underlying nature of the situation, their relationship to the victim and perpetrator, their universe of moral responsibility, and their power status in relationship to the perpetrator—are critical for students' decision to bystand, upstand, or join perpetrators when they witness situations of peer aggression and social exclusion in their schools.

FIGURE 2 *Decision-making tree of students' choice paths when they witness peer aggression*



Given that the social-relational indicators that build up the layers of the decision-making tree are intimately connected with the personal needs and rules of the culture of our multilevel framework, the processes portrayed in figure 2 do not represent definitive or universal processes. The paths portrayed in the decision-making tree are in no way exhaustive, but simply reflective, of the most salient justifications for choices given by the participants in our small sample, as they dealt with hypothetical and real-life scenarios in the context of their own school settings. Furthermore, the layers in the tree are not meant to reflect an invariant, hierarchical, or linear process of selection. In actuality, in our analysis we found that there was variation both within and across students in how they report accessing these four social-relational indices.

Finally, the decision-making paths portrayed in figure 2 do not intend to represent conscious reflections, although they do not preclude them. After all, our data consist of reflections, but they are reflections well after the fact (Haidt, 2001). In fact, our interviews suggest that in many instances, the process by which witnesses make a decision to upstand, bystand, or join the perpetrators in situations of peer aggression and social exclusion exhibits high levels of automaticity, as some students spontaneously stated that "it all happens like a reflex" and "without thinking." In this sense, we are suggesting that students may choose an outcome automatically or arrive at a strategy of action through a more deliberative and conscious decision-making process.

Discussion

In this study we introduced students to hypothetical scenarios that often occur in schools, prompted them to make a recommendation for action, and asked them to share their personal stories about the strategies they have used to respond to similar situations in their own lives. Our purpose was to identify the process by which early adolescents who witness peer aggression and social exclusion choose strategies to address these situations. In fact, understanding how early adolescents make moral decisions in situations of social conflict can be particularly useful for researchers, practitioners, and policy makers interested in designing programs to prevent bullying in schools (Coie, Miller-Johnson, & Bagwell, 2000; Kellam & Langevin, 2003).

An Emergent Theoretical Framework with Relevant Implications for Practice

Our grounded theory approach to the analysis of students' narrative responses led us to accomplish four tasks that provide insights into the links between moral thought and moral action in the case of witnesses to bullying. First, we identify that early adolescents who witness bullying choose strategies that help them fulfill their personal needs for connection, power, and safety, while attending to the rules of the culture that have been prescribed by the different groups to which they belong: friends, peers, and school. Second, we present a multilevel framework to make meaning of how the personal needs

at the intrapersonal level and the rules of the culture at the interpersonal and institutional levels influence witnesses' responses to these situations. Third, we identify four social-relational indices that appear to mark critical positions for witnesses' decisions to upstand, bystand, or join perpetrators. Finally, we use these indices to build a decision-making tree that illustrates the path students walk in these situations. Given our small sample and exploratory methodology, we see our model as an emerging theoretical framework with early empirical support. For this reason, our insights need to be further explored with more qualitative data from students in other settings, as well as tested through quantitative analyses based on these outcomes. In what follows, we discuss our preliminary insights into how our findings can inform theory, policy, and practice.

Theoretical Implications

The multilevel framework that emerged from our analysis is consistent with ecological approaches to human behavior, which have been considered particularly useful to address bullying in schools (Swearer, Espelage, Vaillancuourt, & Hymel, 2010). In fact, developmental and social psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner sees human development as taking place "within a set of nested contexts that range from proximal environments, such as home and classrooms, to more distal environments such as larger contexts of society, through processes of progressively more complex reciprocal interactions between an active, evolving bio-psychosocial human organism and persons, objects and symbols in its immediate external environment" (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998; p. 996). Our model identifies how students' choices of strategy when they witness situations of bullying in schools are influenced by their individual personal needs as well as by the rules of the culture that regulate their membership to groups within the context of nested school settings.

Based on our emergent multilevel model, we argue that, on the one hand, at the intrapersonal level, the personal needs for safety, connection, and power that students rely on to explain their behavior may be linked to natural predispositions that bio-evolutionary scientists think all humans share, as they are connected with instincts that we developed as means of survival (de Waal, 1996; Pinker, 2002; Singer, 1981). On the other hand, at the interpersonal and institutional levels, the framework incorporates an analysis of the particular configurations that the rules of the culture have taken, at different levels of the system, in four middle schools. The analysis of the cultural prescriptions that regulate how students are expected to respond to particular situations in their schools connects with the work of socioconstructionist researchers (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Gergen, 1994; Haste & Abrahams, 2008), who describe how people co-construct social realities through language and interaction and the way in which the discourses that are available in the culture shape subjectivities, create intelligibilities, and open up or close down possibilities for moral thought and moral action. We argue that the specific rules of

the culture that we identified, while affiliated with universal aspects of human nature such as personal needs for safety, connection, and power, are nevertheless local social constructions that would vary in different places and times of history, according to the ways in which people co-construct the shared understandings and expectations that regulate what they sanction as acceptable or unacceptable behaviors of their group members.

In relation to our decision-making tree, we argue that the positions students adopt along the social-relational indicators are context dependent (Krebs, Denton, & Wark, 1997) and sensitive to development (Kohlberg, 1969; Piaget, 1965). Positions are context dependent because the rules of the culture that are available in different settings provide students with contrasting expectations about desirable behaviors and contrasting opportunities to protect and fulfill their personal needs for safety, connection, and power. For example, the degree to which a school environment is safe or aggressive may inform how a student who witnesses a nonfriend being victimized decides to respond to the situation. The context-dependent nature of their decision-making process may explain why the same student acts in some situations as a bystander, in others as an upstander, and in yet others as a perpetrator. Similarly, positions are sensitive to development because the implicit or explicit answers students give to the questions that emerge along the path are intimately related to cognitive, socio-emotional, and moral competencies. For example, the degree to which students are able to feel empathy, see the world from the perspective of others, and question the rules of the culture that promote harassment may inform how they respond to situations where they witness any form of peer aggression and social exclusion in their school.

Based on these emerging frameworks, we argue that in order to more fully understand the gap that we often observe between espoused moral thoughts and self-reported moral choices of action in the case of adolescent witnesses to bullying, it is important to explore the relationship among individuals' positions along the decision-making path; their personal needs for safety, connection, and power; and the rules of the culture that they try to follow in their effort to maintain membership in groups at different levels of the system. In fact, in a particular context, people's moral responses to a given conflict seem to be the result of their attempts to use the developmental set of skills they have to position themselves in ways that help them protect and fulfill their personal needs while trying to behave as legitimate members of the groups to which they belong in a multilevel system where different groups prescribe rules that may reinforce or contradict one another.

Implications for Policy and Practice

We provide here some thoughts on how our emergent multilevel framework might inform future research to enhance policy and practice aimed at addressing bullying in schools. Our analysis suggests that individuals who feel safe,

connected, and empowered may be more likely to "walk the talk" and enact in practice the upstanding strategies they recommend in hypothetical scenarios. Conversely, witnesses of peer aggression or social exclusion who feel unsafe, disconnected, or disempowered may be less likely to take a stand against harassment and translate their recommendations to hypothetical scenarios into real action in their own lives. Our findings suggest that a productive direction for future research may be to help both practitioners and policy makers develop processes by which schools can become environments that provide opportunities for all students—including those in the roles of victims, witnesses, and perpetrators—to fulfill their personal needs for safety, connection, and power in ways that are positive and socially constructive. Our multilevel model also suggests that in order to breach the "talk-walk" gap, future research should focus on developing strategies for educators to locate and intervene wherever the rules of the culture enable or encourage students to seek fulfillment of their personal needs by engaging in practices that promote or condone bullying in their school. Given that the peer group often prescribes rules that lead to bullying, research should focus on developing school interventions that manage to involve all students in the critical transformation of the rules of the culture that sustain these practices. In other words, our findings indicate that creating antibullying rules at the school level only, with disregard for the ways in which students seek to fulfill their personal needs by following the rules of friendship and the rules of the peer group, may not be effective. Further, our findings suggest that unilateral, top-down strategies may lead to a decrease in aggression in supervised contexts but will not likely change student behavior when teachers are not around. More research is needed to develop school interventions that may succeed at involving the peer group in the process of creating a counterculture against bullying.

Additionally, we argue that schools may be able to effectively impact witnesses' responses to peer aggression and social exclusion by creating strategies that target students' positions along each of the four layers of the decision-making path. In fact, the first social-relational indicator of our decision-making tree suggests that students' choice of strategy often depends on whether they interpret a situation to be "just teasing" or bullying. Students' interpretation of the situation can depend on contextual features, such as the degree to which students personally know the people involved in the conflict and the clarity and consistency of the rules of the culture at different levels of the system, as well as on developmental factors, such as their ability to take perspectives. Our findings suggest that research should focus on providing schools with effective educational strategies to target the first layer of the decision-making tree by supporting students in the process of developing the cognitive, emotional, and social skills they need to accurately tell apart acceptable teasing from aggression. Schools may see positive effects by establishing clear and explicit rules about bullying and other unacceptable behaviors, by ensur-

ing that teachers and administrators actively enforce these rules, and by making sure school personnel serve as consistent models of how to take a stand against all manifestations of harassment. As these changes in school culture are not easily achieved, we hope our analysis will motivate future research that seeks to empower schools to develop contextual and developmental supports to help students interpret the underlying nature of different situations while also protecting their personal need for safety.

The second social-relational indicator in our decision-making tree pertained to how witnesses' choice of strategy depends on their relationship to the victim and perpetrator. In fact, given their personal needs for connection and the high influence of the rules prescribed by the culture at the friendship level, witnesses of bullying are very likely to side with their friends. Not surprisingly, having friends is a strong protective factor against victimization, and the lack of friends puts children at high risk of being bullied. For this reason, at the second layer of the decision-making tree, schools may help prevent bullying by structuring activities in ways that promote positive interactions among peers, help all students get to know each other as individuals, and facilitate the process of building personal connections. Furthermore, schools can devise focused strategies to help students who are at risk of victimization participate in events where they can connect with others and be part of social networks that can collectively change the rules of the culture that portray them in a negative lens. In this way, schools would provide students with contextual and developmental supports to make new friends, while at the same time protecting and helping them fulfill their personal need to belong and their personal need for power.

The third social-relational indicator shows that when the victims are nonfriends, the witnesses' choice of strategy depends on the scope of their universe of moral responsibility. In our study, most participants only felt personally responsible to defend their friends, and only in rare cases did they feel moved to protect the personal needs of students who were nonfriends at the moment of the event. For this reason, at the third layer of the decision-making tree, schools can prevent bullying by creating a school climate that includes students in the process of finding the solutions to the problems that occur at school. Students can be actively involved in the critical transformation of the rules of the culture that discourage students from helping nonfriends. By including students in the process of creating and actively questioning the rules of the culture, schools provide students with the contextual supports they need to develop a sense of care and responsibility for others despite the status of their relationship and a sense of awareness and critical thinking in regards to the impact of their own actions on others. Additionally, schools can also integrate socio-emotional learning and civic education in the curricula and engage children in activities that support the development of empathy, perspective taking, engagement, and informed social reflection (Selman &

Kwok, 2010). This intervention not only has the potential to help students expand the scope of their universe of moral responsibility, but would also help them fulfill their personal needs to belong and their personal needs for power by providing them with a sense of being part of a community in which they are contributing and valuable members.

Finally, the fourth social-relational indicator suggests that witnesses' choice of strategy depends on how their own power compares to that of the perpetrators. Power is a comparative category that varies in each bullying situation according to how the witness's sources of strength—such as popularity, seniority, or physical prowess—measure up to those of the perpetrator and the aspects that are valued or relevant in each context. For this reason, our analysis suggests that to target the fourth layer of the decision-making tree, schools may be able to reduce bullying by providing safe, anonymous channels for students to report bullying to school authorities without compromising their own personal need for safety. Schools can also make "powerful" students key allies in the process of creating a counterculture against bullying through training that empowers them to express their disapproval of bullying in public and to build peer pressure against harassment. Educational opportunities could also be employed to help all students become aware of the transformative power of collective action and the ways in which they can come together to change the rules of the culture that enable or condone bullying. Our findings suggest that these types of interventions may help students by providing them with tools to shift the balance of power away from a few individuals who engage in bullying and toward the larger group of witnesses who disapprove of it but too often do not feel empowered to intervene.

The Missing Links

Our research raises the questions: Are there differences in climates among these schools that lead one to believe different outcomes would occur should an outbreak of teasing, bullying, or harassment emerge? And if so, what are the rules of the culture that regulate action in different types of school climates and in what ways do they affect students' choice of strategy? Are there differences in students' choice of strategy according to the level of social awareness with which they respond to situations of peer aggression and social exclusion in school? And if so, what interventions may be effective in helping students develop the set of skills they need to respond constructively to the social conflicts they experience in their daily lives? These questions are deeply engaging not only to researchers and practitioners but also to students themselves. Asking students to discuss and debate their opinions about these controversial issues may help researchers and practitioners gain insights into how to prevent bullying. At the same time, it may provide students with opportunities to become involved in the critical transformation of the rules of the culture that regulate their responses to peer aggression and social exclusion in their schools.

References

Berger, P. L., & Luckmann, T. (1966). *The social construction of reality: A treatise in the sociology of knowledge* (1st Anchor books ed.). Garden City, NY: Anchor Books.

Blasi, A. (1980). Bridging moral cognition and moral action: A critical review of the literature. *Psychological Bulletin, 88*(1), 1–45.

Boulton, M. J., Bucci, E., & Hawker, D. D. S. (1999). Swedish and English secondary school pupils' attitudes towards, and conceptions of, bullying: Concurrent links with bully/victim involvement. *Scandinavian Journal of Psychology, 40*(4), 277–284.

Boulton, M. J., & Underwood, K. (1993). Bully/victim problems among middle school children. *European Education, 25*, 18–37.

Brain, P. F. (1997). Emotional and biological consequences of threat and attack on victims. In J. S. Grisolia, J. L. Sanmartin, J. L. Lujan, & S. Grisolia. (Eds.), *Violence: From biology to society* (pp. 115–124). Amsterdam: Elsevier Science.

Bronfenbrenner, U., & Morris, P. (1998). The ecology of developmental processes. In R. M. Lerner (Ed.), *Theoretical models of human development* (5th ed., Vol. 1, pp. 993–1028). New York: Wiley.

Card, N., & Hodges, E. (2008). Peer victimization among school children: Correlations, causes, consequences and considerations in assessment and intervention. *School Psychology Quarterly, 23*(4), 451–461.

Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing grounded theory*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Coie, J. D., Miller-Johnson, S., & Bagwell, C. (2000). *Prevention science*. In A. J. Sameroff, M. Lewis, & S. Miller (Eds.), *Handbook of developmental psychopathology* (pp. 93–112). New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum.

de Waal, F. B. M. (1996). *Good natured: The origins of right and wrong in humans and other animals*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Due, P., Holstein, B. E., Lynch, J., Diderichsen, F., Gabhain, S. N., Scheidt, P., & Currie, C. (2005). Bullying and symptoms among school-aged children: International comparative cross sectional study in 28 countries. *European Journal of Public Health, 15*(2), 128–132.

Erling, A., & Hwang, C. P. (2004). Swedish 10-year-old children's perceptions and experiences of bullying. *Journal of School Violence, 3*(1), 33–43.

Facing History and Ourselves. (1994). *Holocaust and human behavior*. Brookline, MA: Facing History and Ourselves National Foundation.

Feigenberg, L. F., King, M. S., Barr, D., & Selman, R. (2008). Belonging to and exclusion from the peer group in schools: Influences on adolescents' moral choices. *Journal of Moral Education, 37*(2), 165–184.

Gergen, K. (1994). *Realities and relationships: Soundings in social construction*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Guerra, N. G., Williams, K. R., & Sadek, S. (2011). Understanding bullying and victimization during childhood and adolescence: A mixed methods study. *Child Development, 82*(1), 295–310.

Haidt, J. (2001). The emotional dog and its rational tail: A social intuitionist approach to moral judgment. *Psychological Review, 108*(4), 814–834.

Haste, H., & Abrahams, S. (2008). Morality, culture, and the dialogic self: Taking cultural pluralism seriously. *Journal of Moral Education, 37*(3), 377–394.

Hawker, D. S. J., & Boulton, M. J. (2000). Twenty years' research on peer victimization and psychosocial maladjustment: A meta-analytic review of cross-sectional studies. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry and Allied Disciplines, 41*(4), 441–455.

Hawkins, D. L., Pepler, D. J., & Craig, W. M. (2001). Naturalistic observations of peer interventions in bullying. *Social Development, 10*(4), 512–527.

Juvonen, J., Wang, Y., & Espinoza, G. (2011). Bullying experiences and compromised academic performance across middle school grades. *Journal of Early Adolescence, 31*(1), 152–173.

Kärnä, A., Voeten, M., Poskiparta, E., & Salmivalli, C. (2010). Vulnerable children in varying classroom contexts: Bystanders' behaviors moderate the effects of risk factors on victimization. *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly, 56*(3), 261–282.

Kellam, S. G., & Langevin, D. J. (2003). A framework for understanding "evidence" in prevention research programs. *Prevention Science, 4*(3), 137–153.

Kohlberg , L. (1969). Stage and sequence: The cognitive developmental approach to socialization. In D. A. Goslin (Ed.), *Handbook of socialization theory and research* (pp. 347–480). Chicago: Rand McNally.

Krebs, D., Denton, K. L., & Wark, G. R. (1997). The forms and functions of real-life moral decision-making. *Journal of Moral Education, 26*(2), 131–145.

Lagerspetz, K. M. J., Björkqvist, K., Berts, M., & King, E. (1982). Group aggression among school children in three schools. *Scandinavian Journal of Psychology, 23,* 45–52.

Nakkula, N. J., & Toshalis, E. (2006). *Understanding youth: Adolescent development for educators.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.

Nansel, T. R., Craig, W., Overpeck, M. D., Saluja, G., Ruan, W. J., & Health Behavior in School-Aged Children Bullying Analyses Working Group. (2004). Cross-national consistency in the relationship between bullying behaviors and psychosocial adjustment. *Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine, 158* (8), 730–736.

Nishina, A., & Bellmore, A. (2010). When might peer aggression, victimization, and conflict have its largest impact? Microcontextual considerations. *Journal of Early Adolescence, 30*(1), 5–26.

Nishina, A., Juvonen, J., & Witkow, M. (2005). Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will make me feel sick: The psychosocial, somatic and scholastic consequences of peer harassment. *Journal of Clinical and Adolescent Psychology, 34*(1), 37–48.

Olweus, D. (1993). *Bullying in school: What we know and what we can do.* Oxford: Blackwell.

O'Moore, M. (2000). Critical issues for teacher training to counter bullying and victimisation in Ireland. *Aggressive Behavior, 26*(1), 99–111.

O'Moore, M., & Kirkham, C. (2001). Self-esteem and its relationship to bullying behaviour. *Aggressive Behavior, 27*(4), 269–283.

Peskin, M., Tortolero, S., & Markham, C. (2006). Bullying and victimization among black and Hispanic adolescents. *Adolescence, 41*(163), 467–484.

Piaget, J. (1965). *The moral judgment of the child.* New York: Free Press.

Pinker, S. (2002). *The blank slate: The modern denial of human nature.* New York: Viking.

Polanin, J. R., Espelage, D. L., & Pigott, T. D. (2012). A meta-analysis of school-based bullying prevention programs' effects on bystander intervention behavior. *School Psychology Review, 41*(1), 47–65.

Pöyhönen, V., Juvonen, J., & Salmivalli, C. (2010). What does it take to defend the victimized peer? The interplay between personal and social factors. *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly, 56 (2),* 143–163.

Rothon, C., Head, J., Klineberg, E., & Stansfeld, S. (2011). Can social support protect bullied adolescents from adverse outcomes? A prospective study on the effects of bullying on the educational achievement and mental health of adolescents at secondary schools in East London. *Journal of Adolescence, 34*(3), 579–588.

Salmivalli, C., Lagerspetz, K., Bjorkqvist, K., Osterman, K., & Kaukiainen, A. (1996). Bullying as a group process: Participant roles and their relations to social status within the group. *Aggressive Behavior, 22*(1), 1–15.

Salmivalli, C., & Poskiparta, E. (2012). Making bullying prevention a priority in Finnish schools: The KiVa antibullying program. *New Directions for Youth Development, 2012*(133), 41–53. doi:10.1002/yd.20006

Salmivalli, C., Voeten, M., & Poskiparta, E. (2011). Bystanders matter: Associations between reinforcing, defending, and the frequency of bullying behavior in classrooms. *Journal of Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychology, 40*(5), 668–676.

Schultz, L. H., Selman, R. L., & LaRusso, M. D. (2003). The assessment of psychosocial maturity in children and adolescents: Implications for the evaluation of school-based character education programs. *Journal of Research in Character Education, 1*(2), 67–87.

Schwartz, D., Gorman, A. H., Nakamoto, J., & Toblin, R. (2005). Victimization in the peer group and children's academic functioning. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 97*(3), 425–435.

Seals, D. & Young, J. (2003). Bullying and victimization: Prevalence and relationship to gender, grade level, ethnicity, self-esteem, and depression. *Adolescence, 38*(152), 735–747.

Selman, R. L. (2003). *The promotion of social awareness: Powerful lessons from the partnership of developmental theory and classroom practice.* New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Selman, R, & Kwok, J. (2010). Informed social reflection: Its development and importance for adolescents' civic engagement. In L. R. Sherrod, J. Torney-Purta, and C. A. Flanagan (Eds.), *Handbook of Research on Civic Engagement in Youth.* Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Singer, P. (1981). *The expanding circle: Ethics, evolution, and moral progress.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Smith, P. K., & Brain, P. (2000). Bullying in schools: Lessons from two decades of research. *Aggressive Behavior, 26*(1), 1–9.

Swearer, S., Espelage, D., Vaillancuourt, T., & Hymel, S. (2010). What can be done about school bullying? Linking research to educational practice. *Educational Researcher, 39*(1), 38–47.

United Nations. (1989). Convention on the rights of the child. United Nations. Retrieved November 15, 2012 from http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/crc.htm

Vossekuil, B., Fein, R. A., Reddy, M., Borum, R., & Modzeleski, W. (2002). *The final report and findings of the Safe School Initiative: Implications for the prevention of school attacks in the United States.* Washington, DC: U.S. Secret Service and U.S. Department of Education.

We wish to thank Real Colegio Complutense for inviting us to present an earlier draft of this work to the Advanced Research Group, Developing Socio-emotional Education in the 21st Century.

This article has been reprinted with permission of the *Harvard Educational Review* (ISSN 0017-8055) for personal use only. Posting on a public website or on a listserv is not allowed. Any other use, print or electronic, will require written permission from the *Review*. You may subscribe to *HER* at www.harvardeducationalreview.org. *HER* is published quarterly by the Harvard Education Publishing Group, 8 Story Street, Cambridge, MA 02138, tel. 617-495-3432. Copyright © by the President and Fellows of Harvard College. All rights reserved.