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The Dual Role of Students with Behavioural Problems:  
An Analysis of Their Experiences as Bullies and Victims

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## Abstract

The present study examined the bullying experiences of a group of students, age 10- 14 years, identified as having behaviour problems. A total of ten students participated in a series of mixed methodology activities, including self-report questionnaires, story telling exercises, and interview style journaling. The main research questions were related to the prevalence of bully/victims and the type of bullying experiences in this population. Questionnaires gathered information about their involvement in bullying, as well as about psychological risk factors including normative beliefs about antisocial acts, impulsivity, problem solving, and coping strategies. Journal questions expanded on these themes and allowed students to explain their personal experiences as bullies and victims as well as provide suggestions for intervention. The overall results indicated that all of the ten students in this sample have participated in bullying as both a bully and a victim. This high prevalence of bully/victim involvement in students from behavioural classrooms is in sharp contrast with the general population where the prevalence is about 33%. In addition, a common thread was found that indicated that these students who participated in this study demonstrate characteristics of emotionally dysregulated reactive bullies. Theoretical implication and educational practices are discussed.



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## CHAPTER ONE: THE PROBLEM

The focus of this study was on a particular group of elementary students who are identified by the Identification, Placement and Review Committee (IPRC) as exceptional in the area of behaviour. These children participated in a series of activities that allowed them to describe their school experiences through questionnaires, drawing, story telling, and journaling. Through these activities, this study aimed to discover the rate of reported bullying involvement and whether these students were at greater risk of dual involvement in bullying as both bullies and as victims than the general population. In addition, the study also aimed to investigate possible psychoeducational risks that increase the likelihood of these students becoming involved as bully/victims.

Researchers have been studying bullying for decades and have unveiled much interesting and important information about students who are bullies and those who are victimized. Until recently there has been little focus on students who are dually involved as both the bullies and the victims. It was hypothesized that typically this student is a target and is victimized, due to a lack of social skills, and then lashes out aggressive tendencies because of their inability to exercise self-control. In other words, these children are at risk of victimization and also at risk of being the victimizers.

Unfortunately, these are the children we are likely to find in the Learning Strategies/ Social Skills Class, otherwise known as 'The Behaviour Class'. These students may struggle on a daily basis with peer relationships. These children are likely to be victimized by their peers because they do not have the social skills necessary to negotiate social situations. They also act out because of frustrations, at a fairly high level, in the form of aggression; thus the risk is present for some of these students to switch from



being a victim to being a bully. The present study expanded on past research on bullying by exploring the experiences of students with behavioural exceptionalities in an effort to determine if indeed these students report greater involvement in bullying and victimization than students who are not in the behaviour class. The aim was also to explore possible psychoeducational risks that may increase the likelihood of these students becoming involved as bully/victims.

### Problem

The dual role of bully/victim raises much concern for the emotional and psychological well being of the children involved. Research suggests a significant relationship between the self reports of bully/victims and elevated levels of maladjustment (Marini, Dane, Bosacki & YLC-CURA, 2006a). This problem has been recently brought into sharp focus by the research of Kochendenerfer-Ladd and Ladd (2001), where they discuss that it is the cycle of victimization and of bullying that is at the root of the mental health and behavioural issues experienced by those involved. More and more children and adolescents are experiencing mental health and behavioural issues as a result of their experiences with bullying and victimization.

As a teacher/researcher involved with children who are identified as exceptional in behaviour, I was interested in investigating whether these children reported higher level of dual involvement, and explore possible connections between their involvement as bullies and/or victims and their behavioural difficulties. This connection is particularly important to explore because research suggests that bullying and victimization lead to psychological, social and behavioural difficulties (Marini et al., 2006a; Craig, 1998; Wolke, Woods, Bloomfield, & Karstadt, 2000).



The conceptual framework used in this study is similar to the one developed by Marini et al., (2006a) who have reported that bullying is prevalent in the general school population, finding that as many as 25% of school age children are involved in bullying as bullies, victims or both. However, current research has not examined children previously identified as exceptional in behaviour and evaluated their bully/victim experiences. This study attempted to expand on previous research with mainstream students (Marini et al., 2006a; Craig, 1998; Wolke, Woods, Bloomfield, & Karstadt, 2000), and to investigate the bullying experiences of students with behavioural exceptionalities. Ultimately as a researcher, I wanted to provide teachers and other professionals with information and intervention ideas for working with this group of children that may be over represented in the bully/victim category.

#### Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to investigate the experiences and examine the impact and consequences of dual involvement in bullying (as bully and victim) in children with behavioural exceptionalities. The focus of the research was to capture, describe and analyze the experiences of students identified by the school board as presenting a complex array of behavioural difficulties. The following questions were examined; Do students with behavioural exceptionalities experience both bullying and victimization and what are their bully/victim experiences? What is the reported prevalence rate of dual involvement, and is the rate of bully/victims reports higher in this population than the general population? Do they understand their role as bully/victims and how do they make sense of their experience as students with exceptionalities and as



bully/victims, for example; do they legitimize antisocial behaviour such as bullying?

What suggestions do the students make regarding what should be done about bullying?

### Rationale

The phenomenon of aggressive children, bullies and victims has raised much concern in the education setting and has grabbed the attention of researchers over the past three decades. More recently, research has focused on a new and emerging group of children who are involved in bullying as both a bully and a victim (Wolke, et al., 2000; Marini, et al., 2006a). The children who are identified as bully/victims display characteristics of both bullies and victims. However, they are at greater risk than those students that are singularly involved. The bully/victim engages in bullying often as a response or a reaction to his/her own victimization.

There is limited research that focuses on children in special education and their experiences with bullying and victimization. We do know that children with various disabilities bully and are bullied more often than mainstream peers (O'Moore & Hillary, 1989; Greenspan & Love, 1997). It is suggested by O'Moore and Hillary, (1989), and Greenspan and Love, (1997) that this increase in bullying behaviour and victimization in special education is a result of the students' lack of social skills and their decreased opportunity for appropriate peer interaction. Thus, it is quite likely that children in behaviour classes are at considerable risk of being involved in bullying as both bullies and victims.

Research suggests that children who are bully/victims tend to experience more psychological problems, behavioural difficulties and social problems than either bullies or victims (Marini et al., 2006a; Wolke et al., 2000). Wolke et al. (2000) found that this



group of children are more often identified as having co-morbid difficulties at school such as difficulty with peer relationships, anxiety and behavioural problems such as aggression. These difficulties are often identified by school personnel and parents who do not make a direct connection to the peer victimization and bullying that this child may also experiences on a regular basis. Students in behaviour classes can often be described as having these characteristics.

The previous concepts served as motivation for the present study. What are some of the characteristics of this new group of bully/victims?; what is the rate of involvement?; what role do children within behaviour classes have in the composition of this group?; and, how does the research on bully/victims inform our understanding of children with behaviour problems?

### Theoretical Framework

#### *Bullying*

Bullying has been an issue in schools for decades. Research on bullying behaviour dates back to Olweus (1978), when bullies were known as ‘whipping boys’. Throughout the decades much research has attempted to understand and develop interventions for these socially aggressive youth. It must also be noted that all bullies have their victims; this underrepresented group of children who live in fear of their next encounter with the bully. It has not been until the last two decades that bullies and victims have been further subdivided into several subgroups that will be discussed in the next chapter. The notion of Olweus’ ‘whipping boys’ has become a much more complex area of research that continues to branch off into many areas including, education, mental health, social function, long term outcomes and interventions to name a few. However,



despite efforts of researchers, bullying continues to be a concern, bullies continue to dominate playgrounds as well as many other social domains, and their numbers continue to rise.

### *The Participants*

There are groups of individuals in the school system who tend to have more learning needs than others and are thus classified as 'at risk'. 'At risk' simply means that these children are predisposed to having difficulty in one area or another because of their home life, their temperament, or various other reasons. They are 'at risk' of further developing psychological, social or mental health problems because of their past and current situation. Often, 'at risk' students are involved in specialized programs or educational settings in order to meet their specific needs and in hopes of preventing further problems. The group selected for this study has been identified by IPRC as exceptional in behaviour and can be considered 'at risk' of having further problems. For one reason or another, some children have difficulty controlling inappropriate behaviour. As they develop into pre-adolescents and adolescents, this inappropriate behaviour can manifest as aggression toward others as well as disrespect for rules and authority. Difficulty making and maintaining friendships with others is also an ongoing challenge for these children. Given the apparent level of antisocial behaviour, it is not surprising to see their involvement in bullying. This study attempts to gain insight into the bullying experiences of some of these 'at risk' students.

### *The Bully/Victim*

An area of particular interest lies in the role that bullies, victims and especially bully/victims have among special populations within the school system. O'Moore and



Hillary (1989) found that there was more bullying behaviour within special classes than any other classes. There are many speculations as to why this is the case. Children in special classes lack social skills as well as opportunities for appropriate peer interactions (Greenspan & Love, 1997; O'Moore & Hillary, 1989). If children start out at a social disadvantage and are not exposed to or taught appropriate social skills, they are in a position to experience more victimization as a result of this social disadvantage. Also, they may not have the social skills needed to negotiate social situations putting themselves at risk of bullying. Children in special education classes may not understand the cause and effect relationship of their actions or the actions of others (due to cognitive deficits or social deficits) and in turn act aggressively to peers.

The study by O'Moore and Hillary, (1989) is important in that it was one of the first investigations that highlighted the plight of children in special education classes by focusing on the real possibility that these children are likely to become involved in both bullying and victimization. While the study did not explicitly address issues related to the dual role of the bully/victims, the finding of O'Moore and Hillary, (1989) can be used as an important base in furthering our understanding of children who are involved in special education programs, and who are likely to be identified as bully/victims.

When considering the available data, it is reasonable to argue that children who are the most at risk of dual involvement in bullying are those that have aggressive tendencies, have learning difficulties, are in special education classes or have been identified as exceptional and experience social difficulties because of these factors. This unique group of children include those that are most frequently targeted for victimization and also are more likely to engage in anti-social acts towards their peers.



### *Social Intelligence*

Social Intelligence, as referred to by Greenspan and Love (1997) is the ability one has to act in a wise way in his/her relations with others by understanding interpersonal transaction and situations and thus being able to achieve a desired interpersonal outcome (social interaction). Barrett and Jones (1996) found a strong association between the presence of a learning disability and a social disadvantage for the child. The social information processing of children with learning disabilities has been suggested to display problems at each stage of the information processing model (Colman et. al, 1992 as cited in Barrett & Jones 1996). These problems include a failure to encode social information due to attention or inappropriate cues; a failure to chunk bits of information in an effective manner; an ineffective use of memory strategies for example mnemonics, rehearsal and matching; the inability to represent information and make meaningful links with past experiences; and difficulty choosing behavioural responses and monitoring the outcome of one's actions (Colman et. al, 1992 as cited in Barrett & Jones 1996).

Sabornie (1994) studied victimization and social competence in children with and without learning disabilities. The author reported a correlation between victimization and social competence for students with learning disabilities compared to peers without learning disabilities (Sabornie, 1994). Findings from this study support the research that indicates that children with learning disabilities are less socially competent and as a result are possible targets of peer victimization.



## Scope and Limitations

The current study focused on the bullying experiences of students in one Learning Strategies Class (Behaviour Class) in Southern Ontario. The results apply to similar students enrolled in this type of class.

## Outline of the Remainder of the Document

The subsequent chapters first review the literature (Chapter 2) by focussing on bullying research and incorporate research on special populations and mental health issues associated with bullying experiences. Chapter 3 discusses the mixed methodology used for the collection of data. Chapter 4 provides a detailed presentation of the results as well as an analysis of data. Finally, in Chapter 5 conclusions are then drawn from the data analysis and presented with implications for bullying research and education practice.



## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Bullying is one of the pervasive and serious socioeducational problems facing students (Juvonen & Graham, 2001; Olweus, 2001; Rigby, 2002). Marini, Spear and Bombay (1999) indicate that bullying can be defined as the abuse of physical and psychological power that is used to intentionally and repeatedly create a negative atmosphere of severe anxiety, intimidation and chronic fear in victims. Bullying is a major concern for educators and health practitioners because of its prevalence and its considerable impact on the victims, the victimizers and the bystanders (Marini et al., 2006; Olweus, 2001; Smith, Pepler & Rigby, 2004). Studies suggest that bullying behaviours have a much earlier onset than originally thought, that the number of students affected is high (20% to 25% report involvement as bullies, victims, or both), and that the range of behaviours involved are severe and the consequences are long lasting (Craig, Pepler, & Atlas, 2000; Olweus).

### *Aggression and Bullying*

A distinction needs to be made between bullying and aggression. Bullying can be defined as the acts that are taking place, including physical violence or aggression, as well as verbal and emotional abuse. Aggression has two definitions worth discussing; aggression as the verb and aggression as the adverb. Aggression as the verb defines the actual acts (acts of aggression) that are occurring; for example, hitting, kicking, and fighting. Aggression as the adjective is a personality trait; for example, having aggressive tendencies. It is generally accepted that there are two major distinctions between aggression and bullying, namely, bullying is repetitive in nature and tends to be



carried out in a systematic way. Hence, bullying can be more accurately regarded as a sub-type of aggression.

### *Dimensions of Bullying*

Bullying has been categorized based on characteristics that have been found to be consistent over various studies. There are three major dimensions of bullying; form, function and type. The first dimension, form, describes the continuum of behaviours from direct to indirect. The form of bullying is the modes or means of how the attacks are carried out (Marini, McWhinnie, & Lacharite, 2004). Direct bullying is usually characterized by open aggression, while indirect bullying involves covert and secretive forms of attack (Crick, 1996; Rigby, 2002; Smith & Sharp, 1994). The second dimension is the function of bullying or the motivation to bully. It can be described by different types or outcomes of aggression and varies along the dimensions of physical and psychological forms of aggression. The function of the bullying can fall into either reactive or proactive behaviour (Marini et al., 2006). Reactive bullies are characterized by impulsivity, emotional reactivity, a tendency to make hostile attributions, and proneness to frustration and hostility, whereas proactive bullies have a positive evaluation of aggressive acts (Marini & Dane, 2008). The third dimension is the type of involvement including singularly involved or dually involved. Singular involvement includes children who are only bullies, victims or bystanders. Dual involvement includes children who are involved in bullying on multi levels, namely, bully/victims.

### *Context and Bullying*

One contributor to bullying behaviour, as discussed by both Bernstein and Watson (1997) and Horne and Socherman (1996), involves the characteristics of the bully as



stemming from his/her home environment. Three reasons are suggested to explain the connection between bullying and home environment which include a) the caregiver's attention is taken up with problems such as violence, b) social-economic status, and c) psychiatric illness or substance abuse. With any of these factors present, the children may become neglected and these problems may cause stressful reactions in parents and these situations provide a model for children of how to act toward others (Bernstein & Watson).

From a different perspective, Bernstein and Watson (1997) suggest that bullying in the earlier elementary years may be a way for the child to establish his/her place in the peer hierarchy. A child may feel that he/she does not have control in his/her life and may exercise bullying behaviours as a way to establish control over some aspect of his/her life, similar to the way violence cycles through families and generations.

The following sections outline the major participants involved in bullying and victimization: bullies, victims, and bully/victims, as well as sections on types of bullying and special populations and bullying.

### Bullies

Children who bully are reported as having little empathy for peers, a positive value of violence, and tend to be impulsive with a strong need to dominate others (Bernstein & Watson, 1997; Horne & Socherman, 1996; Marini, Fairbain & Zuber, 2001). Bullies can exert their 'power' in a range of domains, such as physical, social, and emotional. Hence, it is not surprising that bullies tend to pick on those who do not have the physical, cognitive, social, and emotional resources necessary to oppose them (Marini et al.).



Several studies, as discussed in Olweus (2001), have noted that bullies have aggressive personality patterns that predispose them to respond aggressively, and this aggression and antisocial behaviour is often stable over time. Vernberg, Jacobs, and Hershberger (1999) found that adolescents' attitudes about aggression predicted their likelihood to bully others. Specifically, when adolescents had a positive attitude toward aggression they were more likely to use aggression towards others in social situations (Vernberg et al.). This suggests a strong link between one's view of aggression and his/her likelihood to engage in or support overt bullying behaviour. It appears that the belief system that what children learn at home or at school about aggression may impact their role in bullying with peers. Current intervention programs aim to target home and school in order to send a consistent message to students about bullying (Marini & Dane, 2008).

Bosworth and Espelage (1999) suggest that aggressive children and adolescents lack basic social skills when interacting with peers. This poor assessment of risk may lead children to break more social rules, which increases their susceptibility to victimization or exploitation (Barrett & Jones, 1996).

Bullies tend to have an antisocial personality, which includes a large repertoire of aggressive behaviour (Craig, 1998). Horne and Socherman (1996) found that a bully's lack of social skills combined with an inability to be empathetic towards other children can result in rejection by peers and/or the development of aggressive behaviour toward others. Aggressive children report being confident that they can be successful in achieving what they want by being aggressive, whether it be power over another, more access to playground equipment, or control of a peer situation (Horne & Socherman).



According to Bosworth and Espelage (1999), students between 6th and 8th grade were significantly more likely to bully peers if they reported high levels of anger, impulsivity, feelings of depression, feelings of not belonging at school, and held beliefs supportive of violence (assessed based on various scaled questions on a questionnaire). They also found self-reported anger to be a powerful predictor of bullying behaviour (Bosworth & Espelage). Also, childhood and adolescent aggression and bullying has been linked to maladjustment in adulthood, including criminal convictions, unemployment, smoking and substance use, partner abuse, depression and anxiety, lower level of education, high school drop out, and lower status occupation (Farrington, 1993; Moffitt, Caspi, Harrington, & Milne, 2002; Rigby, 2001).

### Victims

Children who are victims of peer bullying exhibit an array of poor social skills, different from their bullying counterparts. Victims tend to be less assertive, more anxious, and more insecure than other peers. In addition, they are often described as being more cautious, sensitive, and quiet and display lower self-esteem compared to other children their age (Craig, 1998; Rigby, 2002). It is not surprising then that victimized students report feeling more lonely and less happy at school and as having fewer good friends (Haynie et al., 2001).

Victims fall into two categories: the passive victim, which is the withdrawn, socially isolated child, and the provocative victim, which is the child that is aggressive and tends to provoke attacks (Bernstein & Watson, 1997). Victims respond differently to bullying including avoidance and escaping behaviours (not going to school, running away, and even suicide attempts) and more overt and reactive behaviours (fighting back).



Regardless of their coping behaviours, victimized children can experience consequences well into adulthood. For example, Kumpulainen, Raesaenen, and Henttonen (1999) and Olweus, (2001) discuss that as young adults, former victims of bullying had more symptoms of depression, lower-self esteem, and are more at risk of being victimized as adults.

### Bully/Victims

Many children that are bullies indicate that they have been victimized and vice-versa (Craig, 1998; Marini et al., 2006a). This tells us that bullying behaviour involves more than a bully and a victim, but rather that there is a significant group of children that engages in both roles. About 33% of the students involved in bullying and victimization are bully/victims (Marini et al.). Recent literature describes the bully/victim as an individual who possesses characteristics of both roles as well as many additional characteristics. These young individuals are very complex in terms of their experiences and personalities.

Three unique features of bully/victims were identified by Marini and Dane (2008). Firstly, internalizing problems where the child becomes more lonely, more anxious, and less assertive (Toblin, Schwartz, Hopmeyer Gorman, & Abou-ezzeddine, 2005; Schwartz, 2000, as cited in Marini & Dane 2008). Secondly, these characteristics may make them viewed by peers as easy targets for bullying. Thirdly, high exposure to restrictive discipline and maternal hostility, and more exposure to marital and parental aggression (Schwartz, Dodge, Pettit, & Bates, 1997). Theoretical models suggest that bully/victims are likely to be emotionally dysregulated youth who both provoke victimization and engage in bullying. Furthermore, some researchers have suggested that



these deficits in emotional regulation may stem in part from exposure to problematic interactions between temperament and family processes (Schwartz et al.). For example, Schwartz et al. found from their longitudinal study that boys who were aggressive victims in third and fourth grade were found to have preschool histories of experience with harsh, disorganized, and potentially abusive homes. They also discuss that aggressive victims had frequent early exposure to violence at home and as well, were themselves recipients of physical abuse.

The current research suggests that children who are involved in bullying situations, especially bully/victims, tend to experience not only more psychological problems as compared with bullies or victims but also co-morbid problems (Wolke et al., 2000; Marini et al., 2006a; Kaltiala-Heino, Rimpela, Rantanen, & Rimpela, 2000). The range of behaviours involved in bully/victim situations are severe and the consequences are long lasting (Craig et al., 2000; Olweus 2001). For example, in a recent study, Marini et al. (2006a) have suggested that internalizing (i.e., depression and anxiety) as well as externalizing (i.e., delinquency and antisocial behaviours) problems occur in a significant number of students involved in bullying. Other researchers have shown that depression is associated with many serious behavioural and psychological outcomes, including loneliness, disordered eating, substance abuse, and suicide (Birmaher, Ryan & Williamson, 1996; Swearer, Grills, Hayes, & Cary, 2004). Also, social anxiety, which is particularly common among youth, is associated with school avoidance or refusal, suicidal ideation, substance abuse and conduct problems (Harrington, Rutter, & Fombonne, 1996; Levy & Deykin, 1989; Verhulst et al., 1997).



Overall, bully/victims have been found to have more severe problems with emotional and behavioural dysregulation than do their peers (Schwartz, Proctor, & Chien, 2001). It is suspected that because they also tend to be involved in more deviant peer groups and less able to form positive peer relationships, and this may lead to antisocial behaviour in adulthood (Haynie et al.). Haynie et al. found that the bully/victims in their sample of 6th to 8th graders scored in the highest or in the lowest range among controls, bullies and victims on all psychosocial, parenting, and school variables. For example, high scores included variables, such as problem behaviours, behavioural misconduct, deviant peer influences, deviance acceptance, and depressive symptoms (Haynie et al.). Low scores included variables, such as self-control, social competence, school adjustment, school bonding, parental involvement and parental support (Haynie et al.). Mynard and Joseph (1997) found that bully/victims were most easily characterized in terms of personality and scored high in neuroticism and psychoticism when assessed using Eysenck's personality dimensions. These difficulties are often identified by school personnel and parents, who are not likely to make a connection to the peer victimization and bullying that this child also experiences on a regular basis. Repeated victimization and bullying behaviour continues to be linked to more compounding mental health issues among youth.

### Reactive Bullies and Aggressive Victims

It must be noted that bully/victims are also described as aggressive victims in a number of studies. They both tend to have temperamental characteristics including irritability, low frustration tolerance, and emotionality that predispose them to react aggressively when faced with confrontation (Marini et al., 2006; Pellegrini & Bartini,



2000). They also demonstrate difficulties with social information processing especially for blame, anger, and retaliation (Camodeca, Goosens, Schuengel & Meerum, 2003), and have difficulties with emotional regulation and peer relations (Toblin et al., 2005).

Reactive bullies can be characterized as being impulsive, reacting emotionally charged, making hostile attributions, and being easily frustrated and hostile, all contributing to their emotional or explosive aggressive reactions to perceived provocation (Dodge, Lockman, Harnish, Battes, & Pettit, 1997; Little, Brauner, Jones, Nock & Hawkley, 2003; Raine et al., 2006; Vitaro, Brendgen, & Trembley, 2002). Reactive bullying involves a more immediate reaction to a perceived provocation, usually driven by frustration, instantaneous emotional release, defense against a perceived threat, and general lack of inhibition (Dodge & Coie, 1987; Poulin & Boivin, 2000).

Schwartz et al. (2001) suggest that the common risk factor that predisposes bully/victims is the difficulty with the regulation of emotions. Since they are prone to emotional reactivity, they are likely to overreact to provocation, such as teasing with explosive outbursts. Their predisposition to frustration and anger may make them more susceptible to being aggressive, and their emotional volatility may alienate peers and make them targets of bullying. Marini et al. (2006b) note that the implications for bully/victims are severe due to the complexity of their dual experiences and research and interventions are needed to address this group's unique and broad range of needs that could have long lasting detrimental effects.

### Special Populations

An area of particular interest lies in the role that bullies, victims, and especially bully/victims have among special populations within the school system. O'Moore and



Hillary (1989) found more bullying behaviour within special classes than any other classes. There are many speculations as to why this is the case. Children in special classes lack social skills as well as opportunities for appropriate peer interactions (Greenspan & Love, 1997; O'Moore & Hillary). If children start out at a social disadvantage and are not exposed to or taught appropriate social skills, they are in a position to experience more victimization as a result of this social disadvantage. Also, they may not have the social skills needed to negotiate bullying situations, thus putting themselves at risk. Children in special education classes may not understand the cause and effect relationship of their actions or those actions of another person (due to cognitive, emotional and/or social deficits) and, in turn, act aggressively towards peers, and then the child is modelling the bullying behaviours. The findings of O'Moore and Hillary are important to understand when looking at children who are identified as bully/victims and who are also involved in special education programs. From these results it can be reasonable to assume that children who are the most at risk of dual involvement in bullying are those that have aggressive tendencies, have learning difficulties, are in special education classes, or have been identified as exceptional and experience social difficulties because of these factors. This unique group of children include those that are most frequently targeted for victimization and also are more likely to engage in antisocial acts towards their peers.

Barrett and Jones (1996) concluded that the status of learning disabilities combined with a lack of social support made children more vulnerable to developing ineffective coping behaviours. Students with learning disabilities were found to perform about one standard deviation below their peers on measures of tact, nonverbal sensitivity,



and empathy (Swanson & Malone, 1992, as cited in Greenspan & Love, 1997). Hodges and Perry (1999) found that peer victimization, personal difficulties, and peer relational problems operate together as a system in which all components are fuelled by each other. This concept supports the previous ideas suggested by both Bernstein and Watson (1997) and Bosworth and Espelage (1999).

Results from the current study will provide educators and professionals with a better understanding of the dynamics involved in bully/victims among younger children who are also identified as exceptional in behaviour. Targeting this specific group may give insight into any combination factors involved in the experiences of bullying and victimization in children with exceptionalities in special classes.

### Summary of Key Concepts

The research presented thus far seems to suggest three main areas of importance. Firstly, students who experience repeated victimization are at a greater risk of mental health problems including depression, anxiety, and behavioural problems and are more likely to bully their peers (Kumpulainen, et al., 1999; Olweus, 2001). Secondly, students who are victimized and who also bully others make up a substantial group. Thirdly, students in special education classes, children identified as exceptional, and children with mental health problems are more likely to fall into the group of bully/victims than other children (Marini et al., 2006a). These key factors support the need for the current study involving children in a special class that have been identified as exceptional in the area of behaviour and their experiences with bullying and victimization.

Research strongly suggests relationships between the dual representation in both bully and victim groups and a series of mental health and behavioural concerns (Marini et



al., 2008). This problem has been recently brought to light when Kochendenerfer, et al. (2001) discuss that it is the cycle of victimization and of bullying that is the root of the mental health and behavioural issues and not vice-versa. Furthermore, research conducted with adolescents involved in bully/victim situations suggests that these students experience many psychosocial problems including internal and external difficulties (Marini et al., 2008).

As a teacher/researcher involved with children who may experience the bully/victim role and who are identified as exceptional in behaviour, I am interested in discovering if there are any connections between students in behaviour classes and their bully/victim experiences. However, current research has not examined children previously identified as exceptional in behaviour and evaluated their bully/victim experiences. The following questions will hopefully be answered: Do students with behavioural exceptionalities experience both bullying and victimization and what are their bully/victim experiences? What is the reported prevalence rate of dual involvement, and is the rate of bully/victims reports higher in this population than the general population? Do they understand their role as bully/victims and how do they make sense of their experience as students with exceptionalities and as bully/victims, for example; do they legitimize antisocial behaviour such as bullying? What suggestions do the students make regarding what should be done about bullying?



### CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

The present study used a mixed methodology based on two main components. The first component involved quantitative research including self-report questionnaires and the second component involved qualitative approach using interview based journaling (Appendix A). Both qualitative methods and quantitative methods attempted to address similar topics by comparing results across the small group as well as individually.

In the past, research in the area of bullying has focused mainly on quantitative methods of data collection, using self-report questionnaires, and less on qualitative methods, such as interviews or observations, (Bosacki, Marini & Dane, 2006; Neary & Joseph, 1994). Although quantitative data have provided most of the framework for bullying identification, classification, and intervention to date, many researchers have been making a case for using more qualitative measures. Owens, Shute, and Slee (2000) and Goodwin (2002) indicated that children's experiences as a bully or a victim are multidimensional and complex and it is, therefore, difficult to capture their experiences using only self or peer reported measures. Bosacki et al. (2006) used interviews and drawings to capture the bullying experiences of the children in their sample. By using these qualitative measures, the researchers were able to capture many specific and rich details of the bullying experiences of the children.

Due to the unique characteristics of the group of subjects in this study, it was believed that a combination of self-report questionnaires and interviews through journaling would be an effective way for the participants to report on their experiences. This type of mixed methodology proved to be effective in illuminating this group's



specific role in bullying, as well as capturing the rich details of their personal experiences by giving them a voice through journaling activities.

### Site and Participant Selection

At the time of the study, the 11 students were enrolled in a Learning Strategies/Social Skills Class in a school in southern Ontario. The Learning Strategies class is a self-contained special education class that is designed as a therapeutic and educational program for students with behavioural disorders (conduct disorder or oppositional defiance disorder). Most of the students in the program had co-morbid difficulties, including learning disabilities, Tourette's, Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, Attention Deficit Disorders, obsessive compulsive disorder, and sometimes various combinations of these. The students ranged in age from 10 to 14 years of age (10 boys and 1 girl; which is not an atypical makeup of a behaviour class). Much of the research suggests that boys are overrepresented in special classes and are much more likely to engage in antisocial behaviour than girls which can explain the gender makeup of the present class (Salmavalli, Kaukiainen, & Legerspetz, 2000). From the entire class, all students but 1 boy participated in the study (for a total sample of 10).

Haynie et al. (2001) examined bullies, victims, and bully/victims with a sample of students within the same age range as the current research study; however, they omitted the students with special needs due to their difficulty reading. The current study selected a specific group of students who were identified as having special needs in the area of behaviour but also in various learning areas and made accommodations for any reading or writing difficulties. This group of students was selected as participants for this study because of informal observations made by the teacher-researcher regarding characteristics



of bullying behaviour and the notion that students with complex behavioural and learning needs could be at risk of falling into the bully/victim group. The participants provide a unique window into the bullying experiences of children with behavioural difficulties.

The classroom was a self-contained class within a regular school and had one Special Education Teacher and one Child and Youth Worker (CYW) in the classroom at all times. The students came from various areas within the school board as this class was the only class of its nature for this age group. The students were exposed to the regular curriculum subjects with accommodations, as well as significant amounts of time spent on Social Skills Training, Behaviour Modification, Problem Solving, and Goal Setting. The principal of the school and the resource teacher were closely connected to the classroom and offered support on an ongoing basis. The questionnaires and journal activities from this study would potentially provide reflection and opportunity for discussion about peer relations and experiences the students may have had, that integrate with the alternative learning programs that were being used.

### Measures and Instrumentation

#### *Quantitative*

Four questionnaires were used to gather data from the students on various issues including bullying, decision making and beliefs of various social acts.

*Measure of bully, victim and bystander.* The *School-Life Questionnaire* (Appendix B) is a bullying measure developed by Marini (1998). The students were asked to complete a behavioural checklist on their involvement in bullying behaviours. Three sections of the School-Life Questionnaire were used to gather data regarding each of the three roles involved in bullying; the bully, the victim, and the bystander (Marini et.



al, 2006). For each of the three sections, participants ranked themselves using a 5- point Likert scale ranging from never to very often over the last school year, on a series of 13 statements identifying various bullying behaviours including indirect and direct acts. Indirect bullying statements included “Excluding someone from joining an activity”, and direct bullying statements included “kicking and hitting.”

In the first section, participants were requested to identify how often they have seen or witnessed various bullying acts (bystander). In the second section, participants ranked how often they have been the recipient of these same acts (victim). The third section asked how often they have performed these acts (bully). The results of these sections gave insight to the role that bullying currently played in their lives. Also, if participants scored high; for example, selected sometimes (3) or higher 60% of the time or more in both the victim and bully section, then this indicated their role as a bully/victim.

*Measure of antisocial beliefs. Legitimizing Antisocial Behaviour* (Appendix C) adapted from Bombay (2002) outlines a variety of statements that target at risk or antisocial behaviour outlined by Jessor, van den Bos, Vanderryn, Costa and Turbin’s (1995) Attitudinal Intolerance of Deviance Scale. The students were asked to rate how ‘wrong’ they felt acts were on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from very wrong to not at all wrong. The 11 statements included moral issues that were relevant to students in this sample age group (10-15 years); such as, “To take things that don’t belong to you”, “To borrow \$5 from a friend without expecting to pay it back”, and “To damage public or private property that does not belong to you just for fun.” These measures gave the researcher insight as to the level of belief the behaviour students had with engaging in



antisocial behaviour. Jessor et al. discussed that students' beliefs about the rightness or wrongness of antisocial behaviour may help to predict the likelihood of engaging in delinquent acts, such as bullying. This questionnaire provided some relevance to identifying motive for engaging in bullying behaviour. Children that scored high on this scale, choosing 3 or 4 (a little bit wrong or not at all wrong) 60% of the time or more were more likely to engage in bullying behaviour.

*Measure of coping. Choices Inventory* (Appendix D) is adapted from Lopez and Little's (1996) Behavioural Inventory of Strategic Control asked the students to say how true the statements are of themselves. They identified their responses to conflict situations involving peers and families. This measure asked children to rate on a 4-point Likert scale questions such as "When I'm threatened by someone, I often threaten back." The choices ranged from 'completely true' to 'not at all true' and assessed coping strategies including avoidance, social cooperation, emotional support, aggressive individualism, social exploitation, and hostility (Lopez & Little). This measure was included in the data collection in that children's coping strategies have been recognized as mediators of relations between psychological control and emotional adjustment (Lopez & Little). Thus, these results gave insight into the students' psychological control and emotional adjustment by way of the choices they make when in social confrontations and making difficult decisions. According to Little et al. (2003), this scale gives the ability to purely identify the functions of aggression, including knowing the reasons why an adolescent is aggressive separate from how as different intentions would necessitate different approaches for interventions.



*Measure of problem solving and impulsivity. Self-control Constructs* (Appendix E) adapted from Wills et al. (2006), evaluated how children react in certain situations and their level of self-control. Wills et al. 2006, used this inventory to study how behavioural and emotional self-control are related to adolescent substance use. As the study consisted of adolescents who have identified behaviour problems, it was felt that their behavioural and emotional self-control would impact their ability to make decisions regarding everyday situations involving peers and moral issues, not unrelated to adolescent substance abuse. The children were required to rank their responses or reactions on 5-point Likert scales to statements from two scales; Problem Solving and Impulsiveness. The Problem Solving scale included statements such as “When I have a problem at school or at home I...”, “think hard about what steps to take”. Statements on the Impulsiveness scale included “I have difficulty saving money to buy something several weeks later.” The students selected the choice that best describes themselves, which ranged from never to often. It was hoped that this measure would give some insight into the thought processes involved in decision making and how behavioural and emotional self-control impact the decisions made by individuals in this group. One question that the researcher posed is; ‘do individuals with issues regarding behavioural and emotional self-control tend to be involved in bullying as a result of the desire to seek short term gratification?’

### *Qualitative*

Interview style questions were asked through the use of a journal in order to obtain qualitative data about their peer relationships, bullying experiences, and ideas for intervention.



*Journaling.* The students journaled two to three times per week during the regular school day. The journaling took place over a 2 month period. The students worked individually through the 27 (Appendix A) journal questions and had as much time as needed to complete the entry, there were no time constraints or length requirements placed on the journal entries. The journal questions were adopted from some of the main concepts from the quantitative measures as well as some of the pressing bullying and peer issues facing youth. As journaling has not previously been used in this type of study, the researcher used information gathered throughout the research process to help develop the questions. The questions can be divided into three sections including; questions involving a moral dilemma, such as elements of peer pressure and friendship, questions about bullying knowledge and bullying experiences, and questions allowing for personal opinion about bullying and methods of intervention.

Before the series of journaling began, it was explained to the students that the journals would be kept confidential and that only the teacher and the CYW would read them. It was explained that the students would be asked to answer the questions and could write as much or as little as they wished. The teacher/researcher also explained that the students could write something about the topic even if it was not personal. The researcher explained that they should use the journal as a tool to communicate their ideas about the topics presented. The researcher also explained that they had the opportunity to draw their own pictures or symbols to represent the topic they were responding to. These images were included in the journaling as Tharinger and Stark (1990) and Naglieri and Pfeiffer (1992) found that children's drawings can give valuable qualitative data about the emotional well being of children. Drawings are also a tool for students who have



difficulty expressing themselves verbally, and were thought to be useful in the current study. However, drawings were not analyzed and included in the data due to the limited number of drawings that were included in the journal responses.

### Procedures

The two main forms of data collection involved clinical methods through interview style purposeful journaling and a series of questionnaires. Little et al. (2003) discussed that self-ratings were preferred when looking at aggression because as of late childhood, one's sense of self is sufficiently developed such that an individual would have some insight into why he or she was acting aggressively. Interviews have been more recently favoured as a way to capture rich data from personal experiences (Bosacki et al., 2006; Goodwin, 2002). The teacher/researcher felt that interviews through journaling was an effective way to capture the experiences of this group. The researcher also felt confident that the students would feel comfortable sharing their stories due to the previous activities similar in nature as well as the relationship and level of trust already established between the students and the teacher.

### *Quantitative*

Several questionnaires were administered in order to establish each child's role in bullying situations and their coping mechanisms employed when faced with problems or confrontation by peers. The questionnaires were administered one time to gather some background information about each student's beliefs and experiences. The results from the questionnaires were mirrored with the results from the journals to make specific comparisons for each child's experiences.



The data collection took place between March and June of 2005, at various times during the day including as part of a social skills lesson, during the end of the day reflection or when a child had completed all other work and chose to complete the journal entry at that time. The journaling was considered a portion of the social skills program in order to allow for class time allocation for completion of the journals. As the journal questions were reflective and related to topics in the social skills program it was fitting to include the journaling at this time since all students were participating.

### *Qualitative*

The teacher and the student corresponded through a private journal where the teacher asked a series of questions, one question at a time, and the student responded using words and illustrations. The teacher responded to the student by making general comments, restating the question, and asking probing questions for more information. The journaling served as a tool for an interview and the students worked through the questions with the teacher present to discuss situations as needed by the student. If the student wanted to talk about a question then the teacher would listen and jot notes in the journal and if the student wanted to work independently and privately he/ she could do that. The CYW was involved in the journaling process as a scribe for the students who had difficulty writing. A Contract of Confidentiality was signed by the CYW before commencement of any data collection (Appendix J).

The main questions were consistent for all of the students and the probing questions varied according to the responses provided by the student. The probing questions involved general heuristics, such as give me an example of that... or tell me



more about that. This type of activity had been used in the class in the past and is not outside of what students enrolled in the class would normally do (Appendix, E).

The researcher began each journal with the same question for everyone, "Do you agree or disagree that if someone looks or acts differently he/she is asking to be made fun of?" Based on the response given by the student, the researcher either probed the student by asking general heuristic questions, such as "why" or "give me an example" or move on to the next questions. The first 11 questions evaluated the students' perception of right and wrong in relation to others on a general level. Questions 12 through 19 targeted their perceptions and experiences with bullying and victimization. When journaling these questions, the prompts varied depending on several things including how much information the student gives in the initial response and what information they are giving. If a student answers the question "Why do people bully other people?", by saying "because they are mean", the researcher will prompt the student by asking "Why do you think the bully is mean?" This was an attempt to get the student to think critically about the situation. Questions 20-23 asked the students for their input into the problem of bullying and what adults should do. Questions 24-27 asked the students to think about their role in the global problem of bullying in society based on their own lives. These questions gave insight into the level of awareness these children have of their role in bullying. For those students who had difficulty spelling and writing (based on previous academic performance), the Child and Youth Worker or the teacher scribed their responses verbatim for them. After scribing, the responses were read back to the child for clarification and confirmation of what they wanted to say. The student will mark his/her response to indicate it is what he/she said.



### *Quantitative*

The questionnaires were administered consecutively during the same time frames as the journals. The questionnaires were administered by the teacher or the CYW as a class where each question was read aloud for all students to account for comprehension and reading difficulties. The students completed the questionnaires and journals at their individual desks which were adequately spaced out. One student had difficulty following and worked on his questionnaires on an individual basis with the CYW reading for him. The CYW ensured comprehension only by asking if the student understood the question. If the student did not understand the question, then the CYW explained the question by providing an example. If the question was asking the student to rate him/herself by very true to not true at all and the statement is “When I really want something, I cannot keep my mind off of it”, the CYW would say “ I might say very true, if I really wanted a new car, and I would think about it all the time, even when I was trying to do my work.”

### **Data Analysis**

The journaling was analyzed using well established coding techniques described below. Key concepts that were coded include occurrence of bullying, occurrence of victimization, types of bullying, identification of feelings from situations (negative and positive), and method of reparation (revenge, resolution). The journals were read through completely to absorb some of the key ideas that surfaced. The journals were then reread while key concepts and key words were underlined. The concepts and words were then organized and the codes were developed. Each code was given a value of how often it was mentioned for a specific answer. These values were used to get percentages discussed further in Chapter Four. It was expected that there would be a change in the



coding as the study progresses such as more responses in respect to resolution at the end in comparison to revenge at the beginning of the journaling.

### Ethical Considerations

There was a minimal chance of risk to the participants in that the research methods were not unlike activities and topics that the students were typically exposed to. Discussions and questionnaires about bullying and victimization complimented the Social Skills Programs already in place within the classroom. If topics evoked emotional reactions, the staff, consisting of the Special Educator as well as the CYW, were available and trained to work through any difficulties the children may have experienced. The researcher knew the identity of the participants, but their names were kept confidential in any written report of the findings. The students and parents had the study explained to them with the letter of information and letters of consent were signed by both student and parent. The research study also met the ethical review expectations of Brock University (Appendix H) as well as the criteria for the School Board.



## CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

The current study examined the bully/victim dynamic with a specific focus on youth aged 10 to 14 that were enrolled in a contained class for students with behavioural problems. The study examined the experiences of students with behavioural exceptionalities involved in dual role bullying. Results from one questionnaire suggest that these students are experiencing bullying and victimization at about the same frequency (total score on bullying measure-61 and total score on victimization measure-64). The journal answers also indicated that all students had experienced dual role bullying. The following research questions were examined; Do students with behavioural exceptionalities experience both bullying and victimization and what are their bully/victim experiences? What is the reported prevalence rate of dual involvement, and is the rate of bully/victims reports higher in this population than the general population? Do they understand their role as bully/victims and how do they make sense of their experience as students with exceptionalities and as bully/victims, for example; do they legitimize antisocial behaviour such as bullying? What suggestions do the students make regarding what should be done about bullying?

The journals were examined for themes and salient information and the questionnaires were examined for unique features and Crombach Alpha for reliability. The current chapter will discuss details and results that emerged from the data analysis of the aforementioned measures.

### Quantitative Measures

The questionnaires were selected in order to complement data collected from the journals. Major themes paralleled each other, such as bullying, self-control, and decision



making, in order to establish reliability. Four questionnaires were administered: (a) to measure bullying behaviour, The School Life Questionnaire (Marini, 1998); (b) to measure antisocial beliefs, Legitimizing Antisocial Behaviour (Jessor et al., 1995); (c) to measure coping behaviour, Behavioural Inventory of Strategic Control (Lopez & Little, 1996) and (d) to measure problem solving and impulsivity, Self-Control Constructs (Wills et al., 2006). Pearson Correlations were completed for all measures; however, there were not any significant correlations to the current study. (see Appendix I for Correlation Table).

#### *Measure of Bully, Victim and Bystander*

The School- Life Questionnaire asked various questions about experiences with bullying behaviours as a witness, a recipient, and a participant including direct acts, such as pushing and shoving, and indirect acts, such as excluding someone from joining an activity. Cronbach Alphas for the 3 parts of the School-Life Questionnaire were reasonably high for the student's experience as a) a bystander, 0.86; b) a victim, 0.91; c) a bully, 0.88. The students were asked to rank themselves using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from never to very often over the last school year, on a series of 13 statements identifying various bullying behaviours including indirect and direct acts. Table 1 illustrates how many students chose each measure for bully and victim sections as well as how many students chose measures for both sections (bully/victim). All students reported witnessing both indirect and direct forms of bullying with most choosing 3 (sometimes) or higher for most items in this section. There were 8/10 students who indicated that they witnessed 'threatening and intimidating' often or very often. For the second section where students were asked how often they had been the recipient of each



of the items, all students identified being the recipient of at least 4 of the behaviours.

Most students selected 5 (often) or 7 (very often) on at least 1 item, and 3 students chose 5 (often) or 7 (very often) on at least 10/13 bullying behaviours.

### *Measure of Antisocial Beliefs*

The Legitimizing Antisocial Behaviour questionnaire adapted from Jessor et al.'s (1995) Attitudinal Intolerance of Deviance Scale, outlines a variety of statements that target at risk or antisocial behaviour. The Cronbach alpha for this test was 0.83, indicating a good internal consistency. Jessor et al. note that students' beliefs about the rightness or wrongness of antisocial behaviour may help to predict the likelihood of engaging in delinquent acts and other aggressive acts, such as bullying. The results from this measure indicate that the students in this study may have a higher likelihood of engaging in bullying behaviours because they are more prone to other types of antisocial behaviour. There were several questions that were selected by more than one student as being 'not at all wrong' or 'a little bit wrong.' Aggressive behaviours, such as, "To break something that belongs to another person just to get even", and "To get in fist fights with other people" were both selected 40% of the time. Seventy percent of the students felt that it was not very wrong to "Give your teacher a fake excuse for being absent", or "To cheat on a test" (see Table 2).

### *Measure of Coping Behaviour*

The third questionnaire was adapted from a portion of Lopez and Little's (1994) Behavioural Inventory of Strategic Control, in which the students must identify their responses to every day conflicts. The aim of this questionnaire was to get a deeper look into the coping strategies of these students when faced with conflicts. This data gives



some insight into the reactivity level of the individual as he/she copes in a stressful and confrontational situation. Cronbach Alpha for this measure was 0.76 indicating good reliability. Most of the statements provided the students with opportunities to tell how 'true' a negative reaction to a situation was for them. For example, the statements 'When I'm hurt by someone, I often fight back' and 'When I'm threatened by someone, I often threaten back', all the students said it was completely true or somewhat true of themselves.

#### *Measure of Problem Solving and Impulsivity*

The fourth questionnaire *Self-control Constructs* adapted from Wills et al. (2006), evaluated how children react in certain situations and their level of self-control. The children were required to rank their responses or reactions on 5-point Likert scales to statements from two scales, Problem Solving and Impulsiveness. The choices range from never to often. The Cronbach alpha for the Problem Solving scale was 0.77, and 0.84 for the Impulsiveness scale, both indicating a reliable measure. All of the students said that when it came to thinking about choices before they do anything, they only did this 'a little' or 'never'.

#### Qualitative: Journaling

The Journal questions were designed to target three areas including behaviour and friendships, bullying, and bullying prevention. The questions were presented in a general to specific format to allow the students to ease into the more personal questions. The questions were all open ended to elicit as much information as possible.



Table 1

*Frequency of Bully, Victim and Bully/victim Behaviours*

	Performed (Bully)				Recipient (Victim)				Bully/ Victims
	3	5	7	T	3	5	7	T	B/V*
1) pushing and shoving	2	-	4	6	2	1	3	6	4
2) name calling and swearing	1	4	4	9	2	5	1	8	8
3) a group picking on someone	3	-	2	5	3	1	1	5	4
4) excluding someone from joining	2	2	-	4	1	2	2	5	4
5) demanding and taking thing from others	1	2	-	3	4	1	2	7	2
6) teasing and ridiculing	3	2	1	6	1	2	1	4	5
7) one daring another to hurt someone	3	-	3	6	3	4	-	7	4
8) spreading rumours and untrue stories	-	2	1	3	2	-	1	3	3
9) kicking and hitting	4	-	4	8	4	1	1	6	5
10) threatening and intimidating	2	2	3	7	3	1	2	6	5
11) a gang of students picking fights	1	-	1	2	1	1	3	5	2
12) writing hurtful and unsigned notes	2	-	-	2	-	2	-	2	1
13) other	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>47</b>

*Note:*

3- sometimes

5-often

7- very often

T- total

\* bully/victim totals were calculated when a student selected that statement on both the victim and the bully section of the questionnaire. For example, for question 1) pushing and shoving, 4/10 students identified that they had performed and that they were the recipient of this act.



Table 2

*Frequency of Students Choices on Ligitimizing Antisocial Behaviour Scale*

	1	2	3	4
To take things that don't belong to you	2	6	3	-
To give your teacher a fake excuse for being absent	1	3	5	1
To bother people in a movie theatre even if you have been asked to stop	2	5	2	1
To borrow \$5 from a friend without expecting to pay it back	4	4	3	-
To cheat on a test	3	1	4	2
To skip school without a good excuse	3	6	2	2
To get in fist fights with other people	3	5	2	-
To break something that belongs to another person just to get even	2	6	2	1
To break into a place that is locked just to look around	5	4	2	-
To damage public or private property that does not belong to you just for fun	4	3	2	2
To threaten a teacher because you were angry about something at school	6	4	-	-
<b>Total</b>	33	43	27	9

*Note:*

1-very wrong

2-wrong

3-a little bit wrong

4-not at all wrong

Table 2 illustrates student choices on the 'wrongness' of certain social behaviours. The totals under column 3 and 4 indicate antisocial behaviour. The degree of antisocial behaviour choices made by this sample is about one third of the total choices selected.



### *Choices and Decisions*

The first section of the journal questions involves questions related to making choices and decisions about issues faced by young people. Most questions involved a moral dilemma, including elements of peer pressure and friendships.

The students were first asked to comment on a statement about lying in order to get what you want. There were 8/10 students who claimed that they lie in order to not get in trouble and to get what they want, "If you don't lie than you might not get it," or, "I like to lie about when I do something bad."

Only one student said that if someone looks or acts different that he is asking to be made fun of. The other 9/10 demonstrated empathy for individual differences, "just because someone looks funny, doesn't mean you have to make fun of them." Another said, "No, because it's not always their fault, some people are born different."

There were 7/10 students who said that they sometimes make mistakes because they hang around with the wrong crowd; "...if my friend is doing bad things, I gotta do it to." While, 4/10 identified trying to "fit in" as motivation for doing things they felt were bad or wrong; "when you're with a certain group of people they can pressure you into doing things and it can be hard to say no."

When it comes to trust, 8/10 felt they could not trust people because they (people) often lie and several indicated having a friend lie to them; "...my friends will lie to me and say they are going someplace and they will be going some place else." One student admitted to lying in order to make or keep friends; "sometimes you have to lie to be friends with them..."



The students identified some common traits of how friends show each other respect, including trust, sharing, helping, being nice, caring, and being good to you.

There were 6/10 who felt it was no use to stay out of fights because they needed to stand up for themselves; “people will just try more to bug you.” (reactive bullies)

On another question, 9/10 felt they had no control over their own choices and no matter how hard they tried, they just could not stay out of trouble; “I am always in trouble, I make wrong choices.”

There were 6/10 who felt self-conscious about people laughing around them; “sometimes I think they are laughing at me.” “I take it personally.”

People are always trying to start fights with 8/10 of the students because of inferiority. They describe themselves here as victims; “they hate me”, “I am an easy target”, “make fun of me.”

Another 9/10 felt they are not trusted by others because they have lied in the past; “if you lie once, some people will never trust you.”

These are reasons they felt that having a friend is important; 1) a play companion, and 2) for help or protection.

### *Bullying Experiences*

The second section for the journal questions asked students specific questions about bullying and their experiences with bullying.

When asked to describe what bullying looks like, 6/10 students included both direct and indirect forms of bullying. For direct bullying, they included items such as, hitting, fighting, pushing, injuries, kicking, biting, taking someone’s lunch or money, hurting or victimizing. For indirect bullying, they included items such as laughing, put



downs, pick on, swearing, call names, belittle, disrespect, acting rude, make faces, and make one feel sad. Several students identified emotion felt by the person being bullied in their description; for example, one student said “bullies belittle you and make you feel like you are nothing.” Another said “making sure they (victim) have no fun and that no one likes them and making them feel sad.” Several students also used the first person when describing the acts of a bully, thus putting themselves into that role, “Bullying is when you.... pick on someone; hurt someone. 2/10 made reference to the size and strength of a bully; “A bully is big and some can be small, it can be a boy or a girl or anyone.” “bullying is when you pick on someone much weaker than yourself, much smaller, much younger.”

When students were asked to describe a time when they were bullied, 2/10 said they had never been bullied. Of the remaining 8, 2 identified only direct forms of bullying and the remaining 6 mentioned both direct and indirect forms of bullying in their stories. Most stories involved small groups of kids in unsupervised settings; for example, the skateboard park, or out on the street while playing alone or with other children. One student described his story, “I was walking by the skate park and these kids said to go away. They started cursing at me so I started cursing at them and this one guy came and pushed me on the ground.”

When asked if they have ever teased, made fun of or physically hurt another student, 10/10 said they had and most identified both direct and indirect acts. One student said, “I teased someone by telling them that they are useless and you can’t play because you suck at this; you are too small to play and I pushed him and that is how it ended to day for him.” When telling their stories of bullying others, the theme of



revenged surfaced in several stories; for example, “sometimes people make fun of me so I get back at them.”

When asked how they feel when someone picks on them, 7/10 said they felt angry or mad. They described their reactions similarly as 8/10 reacted with revenge; “I feel like I want to kill them”, “I would do the same thing back”, “I got some people to beat them up.”

When the students were asked to reflect back about how they felt when they bullied another person, they all related their bullying to revenge or getting someone back for doing something to them. There were 5/10 students who felt good about the bullying and 4/10 felt bad about the bullying. One student said, “I felt a bit better because at least they weren’t picking on me.” Another said, “I felt like I was getting revenge, I was hurt and angry and wanted them to feel it too.” The students were identifying the surge of adrenaline that accompanies an act such as bullying; “I felt like I was ruling the playground”, “I didn’t know how to deal with my anger so I took it out on someone else.” One child appeared to begin to understand the complexity of the bully/victim situation in his comment, “it makes me feel confused (bullying someone) because I don’t know if they are going to do anything back. One was remorseful and stated that “I felt bad because it wasn’t right.”

In your opinion, why do people bully and why are some bullied and others not? Four themes came out of this question; 4/10 said pleasure or fun, 5/10 said control, 5/10 made reference to size or social status. and only 2/10 said for revenge.

Table 3 and Table 4 illustrate the reasons given when answering journal questions about why someone including themselves would bully another person. These self-



reported qualifiers are categorized as Proactively Aggressive and Reactively Aggressive behaviours to show that although proactively aggressive behaviours were mentioned more frequently, both proactive and reactive behaviours were significantly mentioned. Proactively aggressive behaviours were mentioned more for the question “Why do people bully others?” and reactively aggressive behaviours were mentioned more when answering the question “Why do you bully other children?”

The responses are interesting following the previous question about how they personally felt after bullying someone. The author wonders what role they were taking bully or victim when answering this question. Some of the reasons that were given for why someone is a bully include, to feel in control, they have no friends, to feel cool, they feel sad inside, they are mad or or angry. The reasons given for why some people are bullied include, they are small, they have no friends, they are weaker, they are nerds, stupid and ‘mental’. One interesting comment made “People who don’t do anything, don’t get bullied.”

When asked why they felt they had been bullied, 4/10 felt it was because of some inferiority they had (i.e., size, likeability, special needs) and 3/10 felt it was because of lies; for example, “people say things about me that’s not true like I said something about their mom”. The remaining 3 felt that they were bullied due to the bully’s anger.

When asked why they bully other children, 4/10 said that it was fun or funny, 3/10 said they were angry and wanted to get back at the bullies and 2/10 said they did not know why they bullied other children. One said, “I just like bullying other people”, another includes, “I think it’s fun and people are weaker than me, sometimes I like it.”



Table 3a  
*Motivating Factors for Bullying: Why do people bully others?*

	<i>Proactively Aggressive (intention)</i>	<i>Reactively Aggressive (impulsive)</i>
Pleasure	4	
Control	5	
To get back		2
Size	3	
Social Status	4	
Anger		2
Frustration		3
Don't know	-	-
<b>Total</b>	16	7

\* the students felt that other children were bullies mainly for proactively aggressive or intentional reasons



Table 3b  
*Motivating Factors for Bullying: Why do you bully others?*

	<i>Proactively Aggressive (intention)</i>	<i>Reactively Aggressive (impulsive)</i>
Pleasure	4	
Control	-	-
To get back		4
Size	1	
Social Status	-	-
Anger		2
Frustration		3
Don't know		2
<b>Total</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>11</b>

\*the students indicated that they bullies others mainly for reactively aggressive reasons including a to get back at the bully; a direct reaction to being picked on.

\*the response 'Don't know' is considered a reactive response in that there is no intention indicate behind the actions, it is assumed to be a reactive response.



### *Interventions*

The third and final section of journal questions involved opportunities for the students to provide their personal opinion about bullying situations and what interventions should be implemented to help students.

There were 6/10 students who felt that victims need friends or help. “They need friends to stand up for them” one student responded. 3/10 felt the victims needed physical strength to “stand up for themselves.” They also readily recognized bullies as needing help or therapy (8/10); only one student indicated that bullies should be punished. This is telling adults and interveners that 90% of students felt that punishment was not a good intervention for bullies.

When it comes to the students’ view of what bully/victims need, 6/10 recognized some sort of help again; however, 4/10 identified these individuals as needing a change of behaviour. One student said, “they need to learn to control their anger and hurt.”, while another said “don’t be mean because if you are mean to others, they are mean to you.” These students are identifying some important factors that are involved in the bully/victim scenario. They are recognizing that the bully/victim is more complicated than a bully or a victim. They are recognizing the bully/victim’s need for more than one type of intervention, “they need help to stand up to them (bullies) and help to stand up for them (victims).”

Table 4 illustrates the students’ perspectives of what bullies, victims, and bully/victims need. There were 9/10 of the children who felt that adults have the key role in intervention for all children. They felt adults need to listen and help, “help them (children) to do things right and to understand,” “stop ignoring them (children) and listen



to their problems”, “pay more attention to children.” These are powerful comments made by children who are clearly expressing their own needs.

Most of the students felt they were equipped to help bullies or victims and to deal with bystanders; but, 8/10 felt they needed advice or help from an adult when asked how they would help a bully/victim. It is interesting how they are identifying the complexity experienced by bully/victim situations.

In the discussion that follows in Chapter Five, these findings will be further discussed and compared to previous research. Implications for research and practice will also be discussed at length. As well, conclusions will be drawn from the current research.



Table 4

*Factors for Intervention Practices*

	<i>Bully</i>	<i>Victim</i>	<i>Bully/Victim</i>	<i>Total</i>
Friendship		4	3	7
Physical strength		2		2
Emotional strength		1		1
Help from peers	2	2		4
Help from adults	2	1	1	4
Help not specified	2	3	4	9
Punishment	1			1
Change			4	4
Therapy	3			3



## CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

This study is an investigation of the bullying experiences of students who are identified as exceptional in the area of behaviour. These children participated in a series of activities that allowed them to describe their experiences including questionnaires, drawing, story telling, and journaling. In addition, the study looks at the greater problem encountered by this specific group of children who are at risk of being victimized and of victimizing others. The bully/victim scenario raises much concern for the emotional and psychological well being of these children. By targeting this specific group of youth, the researcher hoped to gain insight into any combination of factors involved in the experiences of bullying and victimization in children with exceptionalities in special classes. The researcher was also interested in discovering if there are any connections between the students' role as bully, victim or both and the form and function of their behavioural difficulties.

### Summary of the Study

The present study consisted of two main approaches. The first component was quantitative research including self-report questionnaires, and the second component was qualitative research using interview based journaling. Both qualitative methods and quantitative methods attempted to address similar topics and compare qualitative and quantitative results across the small group as well as individually as case studies.

The journaling served as a tool for an interview and the students worked through the questions with the teacher present to discuss situations as needed by the student. Several questionnaires were used to help assess and identify the students' involvement in dual role bullying and what psychological and behavioural factors may contribute to this



dynamic. Measures were selected to include one's involvement in bullying (*School- Life Questionnaire*, Marini, 1998); one's belief in antisocial behaviours (*Legitimizing Antisocial Behaviour*, Jessor et al., 1995); how one makes social decisions, (*Choices Inventory*, Lopez & Little, 1996), and how one copes with problems or confrontations by peers, (*Self-control Constructs*, Wills et al., 2006).

#### Summary of Chapter Four

The self-reported data collected from the journals and the questionnaires indicated that these students are, in fact, bully/victims and have varying degrees of other issues (i.e., behavioural, social, emotional issues) they face on a regular basis that contribute to their victimization and bullying behaviour. For instance, according to the School Life Questionnaire (Marini, 1998), all of the students reported being bullied and bullying others to some degree. This is a sharp contrast to studies involving general population where the prevalence of bully/victims is 33% (Marini & Dane, 2008). Although they present themselves as bully/victims, the journals indicate that they tend to be more reactively aggressive than proactively aggressive, engaging in bullying for reasons of revenge and anger, rather than pleasure or control.

The data collected from the other questionnaires, Legitimizing Antisocial Behaviour (Bombay, 2002); Choices Inventory (Lopez & Little, 1996); and Self-Control Constructs (Wills et al., 2006) give insight into the students' varying degrees of inability to regulate their behaviour and emotions. They stated that many antisocial behaviours were not wrong or only a little bit wrong; yet, they all had enough sense to know that they should not say that threatening a teacher is okay.



When it comes to making choices, both questionnaire and journal responses indicated that this is another area of difficulty for these students. Impulsivity and reactivity were common threads throughout the responses on both behavioural scales (Lopez & Little, 1996; Wills et al., 2006) and in the journals. The findings on these scales are not surprising for this group of students given their difficulties with behaviour and self-regulation. These findings give support to the existing repertoire of underlying difficulties that bully/victims tend to have including anxiety, impulsivity, difficulty with peers, and difficulty making good choices.

### Discussion

Much interesting and informative data have been collected and presented in the previous two chapters. The unique sample of youth between the ages of 10-14, who have been identified as having behavioural problems among other special needs including ADHD, Tourettes, and varying degrees of Learning Disabilities including borderline giftedness, provided information worthy of noting in the realm of bullying research.

The students gave accounts of their perceptions and experiences with bullying, particularly as both bullies and victims. There is now a better understanding of the bully/victim experiences of students with behavioural exceptionalities answering the first research question. We now know that in this sample of students with behavioural exceptionalities there was a prevalence rate of 100% for dual role involvement as bully/victims. We can better understand their roles as bully/victims and, more specifically, as reactive bullies and the dynamics that influence their behaviours including high belief in antisocial behaviour and difficulty making good choices. Finally, the students were given a voice to give their ideas for what we can do to help bullies, victims,



and bully/victims. They identified clear ways that we can help bullies and victims but found it more difficult to decide how to help bully/victims.

These students seem to understand the dynamics of bullying behaviour; they know what bullying is and what it feels like. They also know what being a victim is and what it feels like. The students did not appear to recognize their own specific role as bully/victims although they discussed their experiences as both on more than one measure. They did not make the connection between their own involvement in both roles. They personally related themselves to both these situations, leading to the conclusion that they are, thus, bully/victims and, perhaps, victims first and then bullies second. Thus, they appear to fit into a group called reactive bullies as discussed in Chapter Two and will be further discussed in this chapter. Their personal life experiences give researchers a glimpse into the complicated dynamic in which these youth engage on a daily basis.

### *Reactive Bullies*

As discussed in Marini and Dane (2008), reactive bullies make up a subgroup of children that fall into the bully/victim category. These children are first victims who then bully others usually out of frustration and reaction for their own victimization. Reactive bullies tend to have their own set of identifying characteristics including impulsivity, emotional reactivity, a tendency to make hostile attributions, and have low frustration and hostility tolerance (Dodge et al., 1997; Little et al., 2003; Marini & Dane, 2008). These characteristics were also found in the subjects for this study, for example, they have difficulty making decisions, they demonstrate impulsive tendencies, and exhibit low



frustration and hostility. This identification is important when interventions are discussed later in this chapter.

### *Quantitative*

The students involved in the current study report involvement as bully/victims on more than one measure (i.e., journals, bullying questionnaire). The answers provided in the journals give insight into the awareness the children have of taking part in both bully and victim roles. They are aware of their involvement and discuss feeling 'bad' or 'mad' about being victimized, yet they justify bullying another as a form of 'getting back at them' or for 'fun.' On the School Life Questionnaire, most students selected 5 (often) or 7 (very often) on at least one item indicating their experience as a victim. There were three students who chose 5 or 7 on all but three items in this section, indicating a high incidence of victimization. These same three students also indicated that they performed most of the behaviours listed at a frequency of often or very often. This clearly shows that these three individuals are experiencing victimization and engaging in bullying at a high rate. The complex dynamic helps to illustrate how these young people live their day to day lives treading water as they wait to be victimized and wait for their turn to take out their frustrations on someone else.

When examining the data collected from the Choices Inventory questionnaire (Lopez & Little, 1996), outlining students' decisions to various peer issues, the theme of reactive victims surfaces. For example, the questionnaire included statements 'When I'm hurt by someone, I often fight back' and 'When I'm threatened by someone, I often threaten back', where all the students said it was completely true or somewhat true for themselves.



### *Emotional Dysregulation*

Emotional Dysregulation is a term used to describe the emotional process of bully/victims or reactive bullies. Theoretical models suggest that bully/victims are likely to be emotionally dysregulated youth who both provoke victimization and engage in bullying. It has also been found that bully/victims have more severe problems with emotional and behavioural dysregulation than do their peers (Schwartz et al., 2001). It is not surprising that the students in this sample that have behavioural problems can be classified as being emotionally dysregulated. Some researchers have suggested that these deficits in emotional regulation may stem in part from exposure to problematic interactions between temperament and family processes (Schwartz et al., 1997). The students in this sample demonstrate characteristics of emotional dysregulation which involves a specific set of factors that make up one's temperament. These factors include high negative emotionality (i.e., high anxiety, anger, frustration and irritability, and low or average fear); high approach and low effortful control (Marini et al., 2008; Schwartz et al., 1997). These are all characteristics that are typical of students with behavioural problems as those in this study.

### *Belief about Antisocial Acts*

The measure used in this study that aimed to address the students' outlook on various social behaviours, Legitimizing Antisocial Beliefs (Jessor et al., 1995), gave some insight into the thought processes involved in decision making and how behavioural and emotional self-control impact the decisions made by individuals in this group. For example, it was notable that one student answered 'very wrong' to all items except two including 'to take things that don't belong to you' and 'to bother people in a theatre even



if you have been asked to stop.’ It is interesting how this student varied the degree of rightness and wrongness in this case on these two items. Although the thought process is unclear, it would be interesting to ask this individual why he/she chose these responses. Perhaps they felt these things were only ‘wrong and not ‘very wrong’ because he/she had performed them. It is also worthy of noting that one student presented an opposite view of rightness and wrongness. He chose ‘a little bit’ or ‘not at all’ on all items except two where he chose ‘wrong.’ This student felt that it was ‘wrong’ ‘to take things that don’t belong to you’ and ‘to threaten a teacher because you were angry about something at school’, but felt that the other items were not really wrong. Perhaps they legitimize these antisocial beliefs because they engage in them or perhaps they just do not know any better. Either way, this notion that these students struggle making ‘good’ choices is indicative of the way they will interact with others and, thus, can foreshadow their involvement in bully/victim dynamics.

Future research and interventions could take it one step further and actually discuss this complexity with the students to help them see the whole picture or to understand the cyclical pattern of victimization in which they are engaged.

### *Qualitative*

The information presented in the questionnaires and the journals provide an in-depth look into the social lives of a specific group of children who share many similar challenges with peers. Unlike many other children their age, they experience most of their interaction with others in the role of a bully/victim who is usually reactively aggressive in most peer interactions. Through the journals, they have given accounts of their personal experiences as both a bully and a victim and provided us with the



opportunity to better understand their interactions. They have also provided us with their point of view in regards to adult intervention for all individuals involved in a bullying situation; bullies, victims, bully/victims, and bystanders. This data will help researchers, psychologists, school administrators, teachers, and youth workers to better understand and better develop programs for the prevention and intervention of bullying.

It is notable how early in the journal questions 9/10 students demonstrated empathy and said it was not right to make fun of someone just because he is different; however, many discussed bullying others because it is fun. This finding is surprising in one way and also predictable in another way. Surprising that they would make such comments about everyone being different and “people are different in their own way,” and then turn around and pick on other children because “they are smaller and weaker,” and because it is “fun”. This is not surprising if you examine the responses given. One can identify that the students may be disagreeing with making fun of differences because they are describing their personal experiences with being made fun of because of their own differences. One student mentioned being born different and gave examples of difficulties he experiences, such as Tourettes. Another described the difference of dressing and acting different as not a reason to make fun of someone as she has been teased for acting and dressing differently. This type of response gives us the notion that these students have the potential to not bully others as they possess a certain degree of empathy based on their personal experiences. They fit into what has been described as reactive bullies as discussed in Chapter Two (Dodge et al., 1997; Little et al., 2003; Raine et al., 2006; Vitaro et al., 2002). With their low tolerance to frustrating situations, and emotionality that predispose them to react aggressively when confronted by others,



namely bullies (Marini et al., 2006), these students then become bullies as a result of being victimized by others.

There was a certain degree of feeling useless that resonated in the journal answers when the students were asked questions about trying to do things differently or to get help if they have a problem. There were 6/10 of the students who felt it was no use to stay out of fights because they needed to stand up for themselves; “people will just try more to bug you” (reactive bullies). It was also mentioned several times that it was no use to get help because the teachers did not believe them or did not do anything about it. It is important for adults to understand this point of view of students especially when looking at intervention and prevention strategies to use in schools. If the students are feeling as though the adults, who are supposed to be there to help them, are not going to help them or don’t care about their problem, then these students’ needs are not being met. It is important for schools and policy makers to ask students simple questions about what helps them and how adults can help them, namely in bullying situations.

### Implications

The data collected in this study contribute to and expand on bullying research as a whole as well as within the more specific and newly discovered domain of bully/victims (Marini et al., 2006; Toblin et al., 2005; Schwartz, 2000). The identification that this unique group of children can be classified as not only bully/victims, but as reactive bullies contributes to this area of bullying research as well (Crick, Grotpeter & Bigbee, 2002; Dodge et al., 1997; Little et al., 2003). The following sections outline implications for, theory, practice, and future research.



### *Implications for Theory*

This study has theoretical implications that are three-fold. Firstly, there are implications for bullying research on the whole which includes the work of Dodge et al., 1997; Little et al., 2003; Marini et al., 1999, Marini et al., 2001, Marini et al., 2006, and Marini et al., 2008. Secondly, there are implications for educational policy (i.e., Safe Schools Strategy, Ontario Ministry of Education & Training, 2007). Thirdly, there are implications for educational and clinical theory (i.e., intervention and prevention programs for bullying, and Rights Education, Covell, 2001).

*Implications for bullying research.* The data support the theoretical model that bully/victims are emotionally and behaviourally dysregulated youth that provoke and engage in bullying behaviours (Marini et al., 2008; Schwartz et al., 1997). When the students described why they bullied other children, they responded with reactive responses including anger and revenge (see Table 3). The current research also supports the work of Marini et al., (2006), and Kochendenerfer-Ladd and Ladd (2001), where they discuss that dual role bullying and victimization is at the root of mental health and behavioural issues faced by young people. As the students in this study dealt with many personal issues including behavioural and mental health, their journals provided rich examples of the peer issues they face on a daily basis and the difficulties they face dealing with these peer issues, namely bullying and victimization.

Bullying research as a whole can now include these behaviour students as potentially becoming contributing members of the bully/victim group and, more specifically, reactive bullies. The fact that this study has lead bullying research to find a unique group that fits into the reactive bully subgroup is notable. In accordance with















Marini and Dane (2008), the data collected clearly indicate that these students are, in fact, reactive bullies; victims who bully others usually out of frustration or impulsivity.

Future research on reactive bullies and behavioural students would benefit from a larger sample size to expand the current findings.

*Implications for educational policy.* The new Safe Schools Initiative includes all acts of bullying as grounds for suspension and even expulsion as well as remediation (Lacharite & Marini, 2008). This concept is a step in the right direction for decreasing bullying in schools; however, a problem still remains. It is one thing to implement this new initiative within a school board or even a school, but the problem lies in the schools and the school boards' ability to provide adequate and effective remediation and intervention programs. There is a need for educational services to fund, implement, and provide programs to all students including small groups of students. The Ministry of Education should allocate funding for intervention programs in order for school boards to be accountable to implement effective programs that will target the specific needs of all students, particularly those involved in bullying. Perhaps the Boards of Education could do more targeted policy development that is specific to bullying and children with various exceptionalities.

The research on bullying clearly indicates that the consequences of bullying are severe and will not self-correct. The programs have been developed and are available and the government needs to take responsibility not only as their liability but as an investment for the future. Prevention and intervention that targets specific groups can work and, thus, alleviate the social responsibility we will have for these young people who will grow up with behavioural and psychological problems.



*Implications for educational and clinical theory.* Research, such as this, reminds educators of the importance of the continuous adaptation and development of the educational theories that govern our school systems. This unique group of students has unveiled much information regarding their personal experiences with bullying in school. Their experiences tell us that their emotional needs are not being met. When asked what they needed, 4/10 indicated that bully/victims (themselves) needed ‘change.’ The type of change was not specified, but perhaps a change in school or program as this is something they have possibly experienced as a positive. The input provided by the students’ personal experiences allows policy and program developers to take a closer look into what the needs of students involved in bullying, namely from a specific group.

There is a great deal of research that promotes excellent intervention programs and suggestions of how to adapt programs for bully/victims or reactive bullies. These are further discussed in the Implications for Practice section that follows.

### *Implications for Practice*

*Programming.* Students need the tools and support to break this cycle. Their aggression is generally reactive in nature: they do not know any better, they do not have the support they need from adults. Intervention programs need to be developed that target specific subgroups of students involved in bullying. Programming designed for students in special classes as well as in high risk groups could be effectively implemented as part of the curriculum. If further research supports the current findings, then programs that target reactive bullies specifically could help students predisposed to dual roles in specialized learning programs including Learning Strategies Classes and other behavioural support programs for teens. Marini and Dane (2008) have made this



distinction for intervention programs to be specialized. Their main concept for individualized intervention programs is to try to reduce biases about positive outcomes for aggressive behaviour. According to Marini and Dane, in order to be effective, exercises should include building empathy and changing school attitudes about bullying. When thinking about this type of intervention, questions arise, such as how to link proactive aggression to negative relational consequences. Proactively aggressive children may focus mainly on consequences for themselves rather than harming others. This mindset needs to be altered and increased attention to how proactive aggression harms others. Intervention programs should put emphasis on the consequences for others when working with proactively aggressive children through social problem solving activities (Marini & Dane).

Another concept for individualized intervention could focus on personal rights, such as Covell's Rights Education Program (Covell, 2001). This type of program would be effective for reactive bullies as well as other bully/victims in that it could target the empathy needed for these children to recognize how their actions affect not only the victims, but also themselves. If they can develop a good understanding of personal rights based on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of The Child (1998) and see how their rights are infringed upon by the actions of others, they may be able to recognize the impact that their actions have on the 'rights' of another student (Lacharite & Marini, 2008).

Marini and Dane (2008) provide many suggestions for intervention programs that specifically target bully/victims. They suggest that because of the parallel of characteristics between bully/victims and reactive bullies, interventions used with



reactive bullies could be more useful to bully/victims than traditional intervention programs. To date, intervention programs for reactive bullies include anger management, social skills training, and parent focused components to enhance relationships and discipline (Lochman & Wells, 2004; Merk et al. 2003, as cited in Marini & Dane, 2008). Marini and Dane offer further suggestions to compliment these interventions including cognitive behavioural therapy based programs to help target the anxiety and depression that many bully/victims experience. They recommend cognitive restructuring exercises that challenge students to recognize a distorted thought and ultimately replace it with a more adaptive thoughts as well as problem solving exercises that help to identify adaptive strategies for dealing with stress (Marini & Dane). It is clear from the current study as well as the theories presented thus far that bullying interventions need to be specialized in order to meet the needs of students from various groups and with various experiences. Perhaps students that are identified as being at a higher risk of dual involvement and/or reactive bullying can access more specialized programs as part of their involvement in special education classes. It would be interesting to see how these types of interventions paired with a Rights based program, incorporated as part of the curriculum, would impact the overall outcome of students in Learning Strategies Classes and Behavioural Intervention Programs.

The students themselves indicated that bullies and victims both need help; however, they said that bully/victims needed the most 'help' including needing 'change' (refer to Table 4). How can we ensure the needs of these children are, in fact, being met by schools through intervention programs? It is imperative that school boards take responsibility for this specific group of children and attempt to evaluate the success of



current intervention programs to see if they are working. I believe that awareness is the key. These young people need to be made aware of their role as a bully/victim or a reactive victim in order to help them recognize how their actions participate in this social issue.

### *Limitations*

The limitations of this study included the selected small sample size. The results obtained from this population may not be generalizable to the larger, general population (students in the mainstream) because the sample is rather unique and specialized. The convenience sample may limit generalization as does the close contact the researcher had with the participants. It is possible that the students wrote answers they thought the teacher wanted.

### *Implications for Future Research*

Future research that could further expand and develop this area of study could begin by looking at common characteristics of larger groups of bully/victims that are identified by schools as having behavioural problems as well as other difficulties that impact social skills including anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues. It would be interesting to see if there were parallel experiences between groups of children and bullying and victimization among groups that have similar experiences and dynamics.

A replicated study that includes a larger sample would further establish and support these findings. Large scale programs involving youth with behavioural problems would be ideal samples for this type of study. It is highly suspected that there would be an abundance of extremely rich and educative data collected.



Another area would be attempting to figure out why these students have such difficulty making good choices and deciphering between what is socially acceptable and what is not. What is motivating their poor decisions and why has there not been intervention for this?



## Final Words

The current study has provided the area of bullying research with a small piece of new information to add to the big puzzle. Various issues in the bullying field have been brought together including bullying and special populations, social intelligence, bully/victims, reactive bullies, and intervention practices. This mixed methods study has captured, described, and analyzed the experiences of students identified by the school board as presenting a complex array of behavioural difficulties. The results clearly indicate that these students are over-represented in the bully/victim category and present themselves as reactive bullies. It can be concluded that this research fills a small piece of something much larger; however, it is a piece that is very important in beginning to understand bullying as a whole. It provides solid evidence to support past research for implementing specialized programs for students involved in bullying at various levels with various underlying issues. Looking ahead, these findings provide an opening for future studies exploring how bullies, victims, and bully/victims are intertwined with many specific groups of students; in this case, students with behavioural problems.



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## Appendix A

### Questions for Journaling

1. Comment on the following statement: sometimes you have to lie to get what you want. Yes or No. Why?
2. Do you agree or disagree that if somebody looks or acts differently he/she is asking to be made fun of.
3. Do you feel that sometimes you make mistakes because you hang around with the wrong crowd?
4. Do you agree or disagree that you can't trust people because they will often lie to you.
5. How do friends show each other respect?
6. Do you agree or disagree that it is no use to try to stay out of fights.
7. Complete this idea, no matter how hard I try I just can't stay out of trouble...
8. How do you feel when you hear people laughing around you? Why?
9. Complete this idea, people are always trying to start fights with me...
10. Do you agree or disagree that you might as well lie because when you tell the truth people don't believe you anyway.
11. Complete this idea... having a friend is important because...
12. What is bullying? What does bullying look like?
13. Have you ever been bullied? Describe a time when you were bullied by another child or group of children. (Draw a picture)
14. Have you ever teased, made fun of or physically hurt another student? Describe a time when you did this. Were you alone or with other children?
15. How did you feel when someone picked on, teased or physically hurt you? How did you react?
16. Think back to when you picked on, teased or physically hurt another child. How did it make you feel when you picked on, teased or physically hurt another child? Why do you think you felt this way?



17. Why do people bully other people? Why are some people bullied and others are not?
18. Why do you think you have been bullied?
19. Why do you think you bully other children?
20. What do you think children who are bullied need?
21. What do you think children who bully others need?
22. What do you think children who are bullied by others and who also bully need?
23. What do you think adults need to do for children?
24. How would you help a friend that is being bullied?
25. How would you help a friend that was a bully?
26. How would you help someone who was bullied by others but who also bullied people?
27. What would you say to someone who watched someone be bullied?



## Appendix B

### Questionnaire 1: School Life Questionnaire

The purpose of this questionnaire is to find out about your school-life; things such as social relationships, discipline and safety. We would like to know what your experience has been as an observer, participant and recipient of some of these behaviours. We would also like to know your ideas and suggestions as to what we can do about these concerns.

Please **do NOT** put your name on this paper. Read the questions carefully and answer them honestly and to the best of your ability.

I am in Grade: \_\_\_\_\_ I am \_\_\_\_\_ years old I am male: \_\_\_\_\_ I am female: \_\_\_\_\_

We will ask you questions; please use the following scale, depending how often you have seen, been the recipient of or performed these acts or behaviours yourself:

<b>Descriptor:</b>	<b>Never</b>	<b>Rarely</b>			
<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Often</b>	<b>Very Often</b>			
Frequency of behaviour:	(0 times)	(1-2 times)	(3-4 times)	(5-6 times)	(7 or more)
Number to be circled:	0	1	3	5	7

For the following questions please circle the option which best describes your answer. Base your answers on the interaction you have had during the last year of school.

How often have **you seen** these acts during the last school year?

	<u>Please circle one number</u>				
1) Pushing and shoving	0	1	3	5	7
2) Name calling and swearing	0	1	3	5	7
3) A group of students picking on someone	0	1	3	5	7
4) Excluding someone from joining an activity	0	1	3	5	7
5) Demanding and taking things from others	0	1	3	5	7
6) Teasing and ridiculing	0	1	3	5	7
7) One student daring another to hurt someone	0	1	3	5	7



8) Spreading rumors and untrue stories	0	1	3	5	7
9) Kicking and hitting	0	1	3	5	7
10) Threatening and intimidating	0	1	3	5	7
11) A gang of students picking fights	0	1	3	5	7
12) Writing hurtful and unsigned notes	0	1	3	5	7
13) Other _____	0	1	3	5	7

How often have **you been the recipient** of these acts during the last school year?

	<u>Please circle one number</u>				
1) Pushing and shoving	0	1	3	5	7
2) Name calling and swearing	0	1	3	5	7
3) A group of students picking on someone	0	1	3	5	7
4) Excluding someone from joining an activity	0	1	3	5	7
5) Demanding and taking things from others	0	1	3	5	7
6) Teasing and ridiculing	0	1	3	5	7
7) One student daring another to hurt someone	0	1	3	5	7
8) Spreading rumors and untrue stories	0	1	3	5	7
9) Kicking and hitting	0	1	3	5	7
10) Threatening and intimidating	0	1	3	5	7
11) A gang of students picking fights	0	1	3	5	7
12) Writing hurtful and unsigned notes	0	1	3	5	7
13) Other _____	0	1	3	5	7

How often have **you performed (done)** these acts during the last school year?

Please circle one number



1) Pushing and shoving	0	1	3	5	7
2) Name calling and swearing	0	1	3	5	7
3) A group of students picking on someone	0	1	3	5	7
4) Excluding someone from joining an activity	0	1	3	5	7
5) Demanding and taking things from others	0	1	3	5	7
6) Teasing and ridiculing	0	1	3	5	7
7) One student daring another to hurt someone	0	1	3	5	7
8) Spreading rumors and untrue stories	0	1	3	5	7
9) Kicking and hitting	0	1	3	5	7
10) Threatening and intimidating	0	1	3	5	7
11) A gang of students picking fights	0	1	3	5	7
12) Writing hurtful and unsigned notes	0	1	3	5	7
13) Other _____	0	1	3	5	7



## Appendix C

### Questionnaire 2: Legitimizing Antisocial Beliefs- Taken from Jessor (1995)

Rate yourself on the following statements based on how wrong **you** think it is. Circle your choice: very wrong, wrong, a little bit wrong, and not at all wrong.

How wrong do **you** think it is to do these things

1. To take little things that don't belong to you.

Very wrong	wrong	a little bit wrong	not at all wrong
------------	-------	--------------------	------------------

2. To give your teacher a fake excuse for being absent

Very wrong	wrong	a little bit wrong	not at all wrong
------------	-------	--------------------	------------------

3. To bother people in a movie theatre even if you have been asked to stop.

Very wrong	wrong	a little bit wrong	not at all wrong
------------	-------	--------------------	------------------

4. To borrow \$5 from a friend without really expecting to pay it back.

Very wrong	wrong	a little bit wrong	not at all wrong
------------	-------	--------------------	------------------

5. To cheat on a test

Very wrong	wrong	a little bit wrong	not at all wrong
------------	-------	--------------------	------------------

6. To skip school without a good excuse

Very wrong	wrong	a little bit wrong	not at all wrong
------------	-------	--------------------	------------------

7. To get in fist fights with other people

Very wrong	wrong	a little bit wrong	not at all wrong
------------	-------	--------------------	------------------

8. To break something that belongs to another person just to get even

Very wrong	wrong	a little bit wrong	not at all wrong
------------	-------	--------------------	------------------

9. To break into a place that is locked just to look around

Very wrong	wrong	a little bit wrong	not at all wrong
------------	-------	--------------------	------------------

10. To damage public or private property that does not belong to you just for fun

Very wrong	wrong	a little bit wrong	not at all wrong
------------	-------	--------------------	------------------



11. To threaten a teacher because you were angry about something at school
- |            |       |                    |                  |
|------------|-------|--------------------|------------------|
| Very wrong | wrong | a little bit wrong | not at all wrong |
|------------|-------|--------------------|------------------|

Questions obtained from an open source, Jessor, R., van den Bos, J., Vanderryn, J., Costa, F. & Turbin, M. (1995).

Protective factors in adolescent problem behaviour: moderator effects and developmental change. *Developmental*

*Psychology*, 31(6), 923-933.



## Appendix D

**Questionnaire 3: Choices Inventory (adapted from Little et al., 2003)**

For each of the following sentences say how true each statement is for you.

1. When I'm hurt by someone, I often fight back.

completely true	somewhat true	hardly ever	not at all
--------------------	------------------	----------------	---------------

2. I often keep others from being in my group of friend to get what I want.

completely true	somewhat true	hardly ever	not at all
--------------------	------------------	----------------	---------------

3. When I'm threatened by someone, I often threaten back.

completely true	somewhat true	hardly ever	not at all
--------------------	------------------	----------------	---------------

4. If others have angered me, I often hit, kick or punch them

completely true	somewhat true	hardly ever	not at all
--------------------	------------------	----------------	---------------

5. When I am upset with others, I often ignore or stop talking to them.

completely true	somewhat true	hardly ever	not at all
--------------------	------------------	----------------	---------------

6. I often tell my friends to stop liking someone to get what I want

completely true	somewhat true	hardly ever	not at all
--------------------	------------------	----------------	---------------

7. If others make me mad or upset, I often hurt them.

completely true	somewhat true	hardly ever	not at all
--------------------	------------------	----------------	---------------

8. I often threaten others to get what I want.

completely true	somewhat true	hardly ever	not at all
--------------------	------------------	----------------	---------------

9. When I am mad at others, I often gossip or spread rumours about them.



completely true	somewhat true	hardly ever	not at all
--------------------	------------------	----------------	---------------

10. I often hit, kick, or punch others to get what I want.

completely true	somewhat true	hardly ever	not at all
--------------------	------------------	----------------	---------------

11. To get what I want, I often put others down.

completely true	somewhat true	hardly ever	not at all
--------------------	------------------	----------------	---------------

12. To get what I want, I often ignore or stop talking to others

completely true	somewhat true	hardly ever	not at all
--------------------	------------------	----------------	---------------

13. To get what I want, I often say mean things to others

completely true	somewhat true	hardly ever	not at all
--------------------	------------------	----------------	---------------

14. To get what I want, I often hurt others

completely true	somewhat true	hardly ever	not at all
--------------------	------------------	----------------	---------------

15. If others upset or hurt me, I often tell my friends to stop liking them.

completely true	somewhat true	hardly ever	not at all
--------------------	------------------	----------------	---------------

16. If others hurt me, I often keep them from being in my group of friends.

completely true	somewhat true	hardly ever	not at all
--------------------	------------------	----------------	---------------

17. To get what I want, I often gossip or spread rumours about others.

completely true	somewhat true	hardly ever	not at all
--------------------	------------------	----------------	---------------

Questions obtained from an open source, Lopez, D. and Little T. (1996). Children's action-control beliefs and emotional regulation in the social domain. *Developmental Psychology* 32(2), 299-312



## Appendix E

### Questionnaire 4: Self- Control Constructs (adapted from Wills, 2002)

#### Part I.

Here are some things people may do when they have a problem at school or at home.  
Read each one and circle the choice to show how much you do each thing when you have a problem.

When I have a problem at school or at home:

	I get as much information as I can				
never	a little	sometimes	pretty often	often	

	I think hard about what steps to take				
never	a little	sometimes	pretty often	often	

	I think about choices before I do anything				
never	a little	sometimes	pretty often	often	

	I think of different ways to take care of it				
never	a little	sometimes	pretty often	often	

	I try different ways to solve the problem				
never	a little	sometimes	pretty often	often	

	I do something to solve the problem.				
never	a little	sometimes	pretty often	often	

	I make a plan of action and follow it.				
never	a little	sometimes	pretty often	often	

	I tell myself 'stop and think before you do anything'				
never	a little	sometimes	pretty often	often	



## Part 2

Here are some things people may say about themselves. Read each one and circle how true the statement is for you.

1. When I really want something, I cannot keep my mind off of it.

not at all	a little	somewhat	pretty	very
true	true	true	true	true

2. I don't understand why people save their money when they could enjoy it right now.

not at all	a little	somewhat	pretty	very
true	true	true	true	true

3. I have difficulty saving money to buy something several weeks later.

not at all	a little	somewhat	pretty	very
true	true	true	true	true

4. It's difficult for me when I have to wait my turn for a long time.

not at all	a little	somewhat	pretty	very
true	true	true	true	true

5. I tend to spend my money as soon as I get it.

not at all	a little	somewhat	pretty	very
true	true	true	true	true

6. I usually do what I want, when I want to. I don't think about what it will mean to me later.

not at all	a little	somewhat	pretty	very
true	true	true	true	true

7. I don't like being in a boring situation

not at all	a little	somewhat	pretty	very
true	true	true	true	true

8. I feel that having a good time now is more important than thinking about what might happen "sometime or later"

not at all	a little	somewhat	pretty	very
true	true	true	true	true



## Part 3:

Here are some things people may do when they have a problem at school or at home. Read each one and circle the choice to show how much you do each thing when you have a problem.

When I have a problem at school or at home:

I get mad at people

never      a little    sometimes    pretty often    often

I take it out on someone else

never      a little    sometimes    pretty often    often

I blame and criticize other people

never      a little    sometimes    pretty often    often

I throw things or break something

never      a little    sometimes    pretty often    often

I do something bad or cause trouble

never      a little    sometimes    pretty often    often

I do something exciting or risky

never      a little    sometimes    pretty often    often

I yell and scream at someone

never      a little    sometimes    pretty often    often

Questions obtained from an open source, Wills, T., Walker, C., Mendoza, D., & Ainette, M. (2006). Behavioural and emotional self control: Relations to substance use in samples of middle and high school students. *Psychology of Addictive Behaviours*, 20(3), 265-278.



## Appendix F

### Script for Child Participants

Read by the teacher/researcher

You are going to be asked to participate in a project over the next few months. It is your choice whether or not you want to participate in this project. The project will become part of the Social Skills program. If you decide to participate you will be asked to answer some questionnaires and respond to some journal questions using words or pictures if you choose. It is not going to be extra work. If you do not participate you will continue working on the regular social skills program. All of the activities for this project will be completed at school and you will receive help to write your answers if you need it.

I am doing this project because I want to learn more about your experiences with other kids and with bullies, either here or at your past schools, or at home. I want to hear about your stories.

If you choose to participate, everything you tell me will be kept confidential which means that I cannot use your name if I talk or write about your experience.

By choosing to participate in this study, you will help adults learn about your experiences with other kids and with bullies. You will also have a chance to tell me what you think schools should do about bullying. You may also learn something about yourself and what sort of things are important to you when it comes to friends.

If you choose to participate and then later change your mind, you will not be punished in anyway. You will simply continue working on the regular social skills program. If you choose to participate, you will sign a form indicating that you want to participate. Also, your parents will sign a form indicating their permission for you to participate.

When the project is finished you will have the opportunity to hear and read about what I learned from you.

Does anyone have any questions?

(I will then proceed to field any questions that they may have related to the study)



## Appendix G

## Correlations Among Psychosocial Factors Related to Bullying Involvement

Psychosocial Factors	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Bullying	---	.52	.57	.01	.84**	-.50	.06
2. Victimization		---	-.02	.08	.45	-.19	.06
3. Bystander			---	.04	.38	-.23	.62
4. Anti-social Beliefs				---	-.15	.27	.20
5. Choices/Decisions					---	-.37	.01
6. Self-Control (Do)						---	.16
7. Self-Control (Say)							---

*Note:* All correlations are not significant, except otherwise indicated  
 (\*\* =  $p < .01$ ; 2-tailed)









