Let's Talk about our Pictures: Exploring Parents' and Children's Perspectives about Family Life, Parent-Child Communication, and Bullying

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Review of The Literature

The scholastic environment goes far beyond academic achievements for children (Lawson, 2003). It is a place where they learn to get along with other people and develop social skills (Lawson, 2003). For some children, school can be a positive experience. For others it can be a negative experience (Lawson, 2003). Bullying in school is one such negative experience.

Bullying is unwanted verbal, physical, social or psychological behavior that is harmful and involves the misuse of power by a student or group of students toward another student (Educational & Communities, 2014). It can be repeated, or has the potential to be repeated, over time (Educational & Communities, 2014). Bullying has become a universal problem that is increasing within the school system (Mishna, Pepler, Wiener, 2006). It can affect children in all grades. Children with learning disabilities are at greater risk of being bullied (Mishna, 2003). They are particularly more vulnerable to experiences of aggression, since they are perceived as different, and usually have fewer supportive friendly relationships (Kokkinos & Antoniadou, 2013). Additionally, they may have limitations in their cognitive, emotional or social abilities (Kokkinos & Antoniadou, 2013). These weaknesses make them more likely to be rejected by their peers (Mishna, 2003). Furthermore, children who bully and children who are victims of bullying are at greater risk of developing social, emotional and psychological problems (Mishna, 2003).

It is important to study bullying because it affects those who are bullied, those who bully and those who witness bullying (Monks & Smith, 2006). When bullying does occur, there are ramifications not only for the child but also for the parents (Humphrey & Crisp, 2008). Parents

report feeling a variety of emotions when learning that their child is being bullied at school (Sawyer, Mishna, Pepler, & Wiener, 2011). Parents report feeling angry, helpless, frustrated, guilty, worried and stressed in response to their child's experience of bullying (Harcourt, Jasperse & Green, 2014). Many parents feel that it is up to them to keep their child safe (Brown, Aalsma, & Ott, 2013). Especially, when parents see that their child's school is being unresponsive (Humphrey & Crisp, 2008). Brown et al. (2013) have discovered a three-stage pattern that parents experience when they find out their child is being bullied. This idea will be discussed in detail in a later section.

What is Bullying?

It is important to note that there is no universal agreement on the definition of bullying (Monks & Peters, 2006). However, Olweus defines bullying as a behavior that hurts or harms another student, with intent to do so; the hurt or harm may be physical, verbal or psychological and could be repeated; there is a power imbalance, which could be social, psychological or physical (Olweus, 1997). This power imbalance makes it difficult for the victim to defend him or herself (Olweus, 1997).

A victim can also experience different forms of bullying. Farrington (1993) noted that bullying could take three different forms. The first form is physical bullying; it involves hurting a person's body or possessions (Farrington, 1993). Some examples of physical bullying include hitting, kicking, pinching, spitting, tripping, pushing, taking or breaking someone's things and making mean or rude hand gestures. The second form of bullying is verbal bullying; it involves saying or writing mean things (Farrington, 1993). Some examples of verbal bullying include teasing, name-calling, saying inappropriate comments, and threatening to cause harm. The third form of bullying is social bullying sometimes referred to as relational bullying; it is aimed at

damaging the peer relationships of the victim (Farrington, 1993). This form of bullying can be either direct or indirect. An example of a direct form of social bullying would be telling someone that they couldn't play or join in with another group. An indirect form of social bullying can include spreading nasty rumors or telling a group to ignore a particular individual. Bullying involves multiple players: bullies, victims, bully victims and bystanders.

Bullies are characterized as students who are impulsive and who have a strong desire to dominate others (M.Omizo, S.Omizo, Baxa, & Miyose, 2006). They also tend to be physically bigger and stronger than their classmates (Omizo et al., 2006). They have a positive attitude toward violence and use violent means to get what they want (Olweus, 1997). They hold a positive regard of themselves despite their negative behaviors (Omizo et al., 2006). However, evidence has shown that these students are anxious and insecure under the surface (Olweus, 1997).

Victims are physically weaker and appear to be lonely in school; they lack appropriate skills to get along with others (Omizo et al., 2006). They have low self-esteem, appear to be maladjusted, and view their peer relationships negatively (Omizo et al., 2006). They seem to send out a message to other students that they are insecure children who will not fight back (Omizo et al., 2006). Furthermore, Besag (1989) noted that victims could be grouped in several categories. The first category is the passive victim, which is a student who is fearful, physically weaker than his/her peers, is cautious, withdrawn, and often finds it difficult to make friends (Besag, 1989). The second category of victim is the provocative victim (Besag, 1989). This is an individual who intentionally provokes the behaviors of others. They tease and insult and yet are quick to complain. The third category of victim is the colluding victim (Besag, 1989). This is a person that takes on the role of the victim to gain acceptance and popularity. The fourth category

of victim is the false victim (Besag, 1989). This is an individual who seeks attention and is sometimes referred to as bully/victim.

Bully/victims are individuals who bully in one situation but are victims in another (Omizo et al., 2006). They are characterized as students who have an increased obsession with their own self (Bowers, Smith & Binney, 1994). They are said to be anxious, depressed, lonely and high-strung (Dewar, 2008). Perren and Alsaker (2006) reported that students that were identified as bully-victims are less cooperative and less social than others. They are more likely to be avoided by their peers (Dewar, 2008). They have been found to exhibit higher levels of arousal in their environments (Dewar, 2008). In addition, these students are more likely to feel unsafe and feel that they do not belong at school (Dewar, 2008).

Bystanders are students who witness the acts of bullying (Cranham & Carroll, 2003). These individuals have been identified as passive bystanders (Cranham & Carroll, 2003). Passive bystanders do not take an active part in bullying; they simply witness the bullying behavior as it occurs (Cranham & Carroll, 2003). However, some bystanders directly intervene. They do this by discouraging the bully, defending the victim, or redirecting the situation away from the bullying (Cranham & Carroll, 2003). Other bystanders get help. They get peers to stand up to the bully or they report the bully to an adult (Cranham & Carroll, 2003). Consequently, a student who does nothing to help the victim may feel bad or guilty about it later (Education Development Center, 2013). Bystanders who laugh or join in on the bullying are at risk of becoming bullies themselves (Education Development Center, 2013).

Gender and Bullying

Boys and girls approach bullying very differently (Gordon, 2014). Each gender has its own aggressive style (Monks & Smith, 2006). This is because boys and girls socialize differently