The Impact of Fostering Social Interest on Bullying Behavior

A Masters Paper

Presented To

The Faculty of the Adler Graduate School

In Partial fulfillment of the Requirements for

The Degree of Masters of Arts in

School Counseling

By

Tabitha Cadmus

July 2013
Abstract

Everyday millions of children around the world are bullied. This bullying can lead to fear of attending school, mental health issues, suicide, or even homicide. These issues pose a serious threat to the development of the children of the world. It is clear that this is an issue that needs to be controlled, however, there is not much consensus as to how it is best to be handled. The purpose of this project is to review literature in order to investigate whether students who bully may possibly be positively affected by a psychoeducational group counseling group for bullies focusing on increasing social interest and the skills needed to be a socially interested person. This may serve as a foundation as a possible intervention addressing the bullying issue. This project takes an Adlerian perspective regarding bullying behavior and how it can be best addressed.
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FOSTERING SOCIAL INTEREST ON BULLYING

The Impact of Fostering Social Interest on Bullying Behavior

Across the globe, millions of students are bullied every day. When bullying goes on for an extended period of time, it can create mental and emotional distress in children. This distress can lead victims to lash out lethally against themselves or others. Almost 75% of school shootings in the United States occur in relation to bullying (Saufler, 2004.) Punishment is rarely effective with bullying behavior. Rehabilitation is the key to promoting safe and respectful schools (Roberts, 2006).

Responsibility for this rehabilitation in schools lies mainly with the school counselor. In order to be helped, school counselors need to change the way that bullies perceive themselves and others. Though bullying can be addressed with students at the classroom, group or individual level, this paper will focus on how school counselors can cultivate social interest in bullies in a group counseling setting. Group counseling is an ideal situation for fostering social interest, as building belongingness is vital for group cohesion, and is also one of the main aspects of social interest (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005) (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956).

The goal of this paper is to discuss whether developing social interest in bullies would reduce reports of bullying within schools. This will begin by examining the prevalence and effects of bullying, will continue with exploring tools to increase social interest in bullies, discussing some characteristics hypothesized to explain why bullies bully, then investigating specific programs and techniques used in schools to reduce rates of bullying, considering Adlerian psychology’s view of bullies, and will conclude with the implications of these findings for the school counselor. The conclusion will reflect the hypothesis that creating a sense of social interest in bullies will lower rates of bullying in schools.
Prevalence of Bullying

Students coming to school in distress have a much more difficult time hearing, engaging, and learning, thus are less likely to achieve in school (Schonert-Reichl & Hymel, 2007). As school counselors, one of the important roles we play are to help students resolve outside problems so they can better focus and thereby succeed in school. School counselors should focus on bullying because it is a widespread problem impacting many of our students.

Within the last four years there have been two reports generated from large segments of student self-reports of bullying within schools across the United States. These reports reveal different percentages of students who have been bullied because of various factors including size of the participating population, various schools polled and the type of student selected to participate (National Center for Education Statistics, 2011; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2012).

In a 2011 report from the National Center for Educational Statistics, 28% of all students surveyed claimed they had been bullied during the 2008-2009 school year. This number may seem small when considering how popular the topic of bullying has become within the past few years, however in population size this percentage reflects 7,066,000 students between the ages of 12 and 18. Of these students, 18.7% reported being bullied 1-2 times per month, 7.8% reported being bullied 1-2 times per week, and 6.3% reported being bullied almost every day. Of these occurrences, an adult was notified 36.3% of the time (National Center for Education Statistics, 2011).

The second report (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2012) addressed bullying and the general behaviors of youth. This report is generated annually by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, in the 2011 version, it is stated that 20.1% of students who completed
the questionnaire nationally reported being bullied on school property the 12 months prior to the study. This number is reflective of a total 15,425 total completed questionnaires (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2012).

The Minnesota Student Survey (2010) reported that the percentage of students who have hit or beat up another student in the last year has consistently decreased through the years. Sixth graders continually self-report the highest numbers of physical assault 47.9% in 1992, and 25.6% in 2010. Twelfth graders regularly have the lowest numbers, reporting 30% in 1992 and 14.2% in 2010 (Minnesota Departments of Education, 2010).

It appears that bullying has decreased over the last twenty years. The reason for this seems to be unclear to researchers (Ferguson, San Miguel, Kilburn, & Sanchez, 2007). What these numbers show is the need for action on the part of the schools, not only to better enable students’ success in school, but also in life. There are many effects that bullying has on each person involved in bullying behavior, some of these effects are long lasting and may continue to be felt as adults (Aluede, Adeleke, Omoike, & Afen-Akpaida, 2008). If a school counselor effectively intervenes these effects may be reduced even more.

Effects of Bullying

There is no student involved in a bullying situation that is unaffected by it. Bullying effects the victim, the bully, and the bully/victim in differing, sometimes similar and nearly always negative, ways. In fact, all children involved in a bullying situation show more psychiatric symptoms than those not involved in any bullying (Ttofi & Farrington, 2008).

Effects of Bullying on Victim

Most of the effects of a bullying situation lie with the victim compared to bully/victims or bullies. The victim may experience depression, anxiety, or suicidal ideation after being bullied.
(Aluede, Adeleke, Omoike, & Afen-Akpaid, 2008; Schuster & Bogart, 2013; Smokowski & Holland Kopasz, 2005; Ttofi & Farrington, 2008). Some victims can also experience symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (Schuster & Bogart, 2013). Victimized students’ anxiety may also manifest as psychosomatic complaints, including headaches, nausea, and stomach aches, among other ailments (Aluede, Adeleke, Omoike, & Afen-Akpaid, 2008). They may also make suicide attempts (Smokowski & Holland Kopasz, 2005) because victims are prone to internalizing what their bullies say to them (Ttofi & Farrington, 2008).

Victimized students may also have fear about coming to school which leads to higher rates of truancy and drop outs than those of their nonbullied peers. (Aluede, Adeleke, Omoike, & Afen-Akpaid, 2008). These students are more prone to bring weapons to school in an attempt to feel safe (Smokowski & Holland Kopasz, 2005). They are also more likely to have difficulty concentrating in school when they do attend (Aluede, Adeleke, Omoike, & Afen-Akpaid, 2008), which in turn leads to a drop in grades (Smokowski & Holland Kopasz, 2005). Some students can even expect physical injury or damage to their property (Smokowski & Holland Kopasz, 2005).

There are also long-term effects for victims of bullying. Victims can face a lifetime of depression, anxiety, and low self-worth. Some create an obsession out of revenge and in some severe cases, victims have murdered their former bullies. Former victims can also negatively impact their offspring by being overprotective and thus, the child is inhibited in the establishment of conflict-resolution skills, leading to a cycle of victimization (Smokowski & Holland Kopasz, 2005). It has also been shown that adult victims may have difficulty with trust and intimacy issues regarding the opposite sex (Ttofi & Farrington, 2008).
Effects of Bullying on Bully

The effect of bullying on bullies is similar to that of their victims. In the results of one study, bullies and victims were both more likely to feel sad most days and are more likely to feel unsafe at school than students not involved in bullying incidents. They also tend to have higher scores on depression and psychosomatic symptoms (Ttofi & Farrington, 2008). Bullies also have trouble making and keeping friends and may turn toward more anti-social behaviors in adulthood (Aluede, Adeleke, Omoike, & Afen-Akpida, 2008).

Effects of Bullying on Bully/Victim

As the name implies, a bully/victim is a person who is both a bully and a victim. Thus, because this student has been bullied and may continue to be bullied, this person finds outlet in victimizing others. Since these people are both bully and victim, they experience effects of both a bully and a victim. Like victims, they are likely to have a negative self-image (Smokowski & Holland Kopasz, 2005) and to complain of psychosomatic symptoms (Ttofi & Farrington, 2008). Similar to bullies, bully/victims tend to be anti-social and are diagnosed with Oppositional Defiant Disorder and Conduct Disorder at higher rates than bullies (Smokowski & Holland Kopasz, 2005). However, there are also some effects that belong to the bully/victim alone. Bully/victims exhibit problem behaviors, especially aggression and the likelihood of eating disorders among male bully/victims (Ttofi & Farrington, 2008).

Schools and people tend to use punishment to deal with bullies instead of discovering why they bully (Roberts, 2006). The focus on this paper is to find an alternative way to work with bullies using Individual Psychology.
Social Interest

Individual psychology lends itself to bullying because the expected results when teaching children social interest are very similar to the topics already discussed as being moderately effective with bullies. Therefore, the likelihood of effectiveness will be greater. Teaching bullies concepts such as, belonging and contributing, is more likely to foster empathy and increased social skills (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956; Cunningham & Whitten, 2007).

To adequately discuss various techniques that may increase social interest of bullies in the bully/victim dynamic, we first need to address the topic of social interest. Social interest, which was first introduced by psychologist Alfred Adler, delineates two components, the first being belongingness with empathy and the second being contribution (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956). He was known for saying, “Social interest is the true and inevitable compensation for all the natural weaknesses of individual human beings” (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956, p. 156). “‘To see with the eyes of another, to hear with the ears of another, to feel with the heart of another.’ Alfred Adler in his lifetime considered this an acceptable definition of social interest” (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956, p. 135).

Empathy and understanding are two important facets of social interest. Empathy must be trained and can only be taught if a person grows up in relation to others and feels like a part of a whole. “One must feel at home on this earth with all its advantages and disadvantages (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956, p. 136).” The ability to empathize which enables us to make friends, to love mankind, to sympathize, to find a successful occupation, and to love, is the basis for social interest and can only be used and practiced in conjunction with others (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956).
Contribution is the idea that a person understands how his or her actions affect his or her society (Griffith & Powers, 1984). Each person in a community affects it in some way. For example, when a teenager steals clothes from the local department store, the store must raise prices on their goods to make up for the loss. Thus, one person’s actions affect everyone. True social interest must take the form of some kind of contribution, though it does not always manifest itself in concrete participation (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956).

Social interest is more than a feeling, it is an evaluative outlook on life. To have true social interest, a person must feel it intrinsically. According to Adler, the purpose of education is to instill social interest in children. He considered social interest to be an “innate potentiality” that needed to be cultivated in children (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956, p. 134). As children grow, each is increasingly influenced by the relationships they are engaged in society. The educability of each depends on his or her level of social interest. Through education, children come to understand the societal ideal of contribution. This way, the demands of the community become the demands of the individual (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956).

Alfred Adler believed that the more socially interested a person is, the more mentally healthy that person can become (Griffith & Powers, 1984). This is because a person with adequate social interest does not view the adversities of life as personal injustice. They are more readily able to find strength to overcome these adversities (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956). There is a positive correlation between high levels of social interest and high levels of internal control as well as high levels of self-actualization (Johnson, Smith, & Nelson, 2003). In contrast, a study of the social interest of incarcerated criminals suggested that offenders with lower social interest levels were more likely to be unemployed, to have new felony arrests, or to be reincarcerated (Daughtery & Paugh, 2001).
When children are able to see that they make a difference and belong; they are more likely to grow up to become healthy, contributing adults (Dreikurs & Soltz, 1964). To help some children see this requires imparting three ideas to them, these being their mistaken goals of misbehavior, encouragement and a sense of belonging and contribution.

**The Mistaken Goals of Misbehavior**

The beginning of social interest for children is the four mistaken goals of misbehavior. Individual psychology assumes that all behavior is goal oriented, therefore even when children are misbehaving, they have a goal. However, most children are unaware of their goals (Dreikurs & Soltz, 1964). Rudolf Dreikurs, an associate of Alfred Adler’s, exposes four goals that children have when they are misbehaving. These are attention, power, revenge and assumed inadequacy (Dreikurs & Soltz, 1964).

In Individual psychology, a child misbehaves because that is how he or she has found consequence in the group. Thus, instead of belonging and contributing in a positive way, the child finds significance in commanding attention, grasping power, getting revenge, or giving up (Dreikurs & Soltz, 1964). It is important to teach misbehaving students about these goals so they are able to see why they misbehave. Like adults, once they are able to see why they do what they do and are willing to change their behavior, they can work on changing it.

**Encouragement**

The next and most vital technique for misbehaving children is encouragement (Dreikurs & Soltz, 1964). The reason that this is so important is because in Adlerian psychology, a child who misbehaves is a child who is discouraged. These students have found their attempts to gain significance foiled at every turn, thus they make themselves feel important by the only means that seems to work for them, misbehavior (Dreikurs & Soltz, 1964). Redirecting mistaken goals
necessitates restoration of children’s faith in themselves and their worth in the world, as well as being able to see their own strengths and abilities. Without encouragement change will not happen, and no counseling approach will make any difference (Stonstegard & Bitter, 1998).

**Belonging and Contributing in Group Counseling**

Encouraging a sense of belonging is vital for improvement of social interest. The strongest motivator for a child is the need to belong (Dreikurs & Soltz, 1964). The need to belong is primitive, it is how we as humans survive; we must depend on each other. As was discussed earlier, a person’s contributions are important in building a sense of belonging (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956). Long ago, Darwin concluded that one never sees weak animals living alone. This includes humans. We lack the physiognomy to fully defend ourselves alone (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956).

Much like society in general, belonging and contributing is also imperative for the success of group counseling, because group counseling can be seen as a microcosm of society, where group members are allowed to experience society in small doses (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005). All good group counseling groups begin with activities aimed at creating a sense of belonging within the group, so that individual members feel comfortable to share. Finding that they share common themes in their lives will encourage more emotional response, which will inspire a greater sense of belonging. Therefore the feeling of belonging is perpetuated. Group members often need this example of belonging in order to transfer it to the larger world context, for many group members, the group is practice for appropriate socialization (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005).

**Striving for Superiority**

In Individual Psychology, feelings of inferiority are not always viewed negatively. They are seen as the basis for human culture and are seen as the reason we are continually striving to
better our situation or striving for superiority over nature. Inferiority feelings only become abnormal when they are most deeply felt and as a consequence, a goal of superiority over others is created instead (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956). The goal of superiority is a result of psychological desperation, it is an overstressed attempt of the individual to act as if he or she were not inferior, it is an inflated act as if the individual were superior, though he or she feels very far from superiority (Mosak & Maniaci, 1999).

Often, “hated children” have this goal. These children have a tendency to use strength against others when they are stronger, sometimes cruelly against weaker people or animals. Their goal of superiority is to subdue others. Their deep inferiority feelings make them very suspicious and wily. It is difficult to foster social interest in these children and to engage them in useful work (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956, p. 118).

Hated children tend to become criminals, “at risk” students, and mentally ill. Because they generally lack social interest they also lack courage and self-confidence (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956). To help these children, the counselor needs to take on a very maternal role. The counselor needs to be a trustworthy person who can lead the child to increase his or her social interest and thereby strengthen the child’s independence and courage (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956).

It should not be very surprising when a counselor asks this type of child if he or she has a goal of superiority that they answer in the negative. Because inferiority feelings are seen as a sign of weakness, these children tend to work so hard on overcoming these feelings that they become unconscious motivations (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956).
Characteristics of Bullies

To reveal if building a sense of social interest in bullies would be efficacious in lowering rates of bullying, it first needs to be established that other group counseling techniques with similar themes are found to be effective with bullies. In order to find what counseling techniques work best with bullies, we first need to find common characteristics within bullies to show what areas need to be redirected among them to enhance quality of life for all students.

Once counseling programs are created to inspire bullies to change, not only will the lives of these bullies change, but ideally, we will have made schools a safer and more welcoming place for all students. Research suggests that there are four characteristics that may be common amongst bullies, which may possibly be changed through psychoeducational group counseling. These are a lack of empathy, social skills deficit, feelings of inferiority, and a tendency towards delinquency.

Lack of Empathy

It has been established that there is a tendency for bullies to be lacking in empathy (Chaux, Molano, & Podlesky, 2009; Baldry & Farrington, 2000). Empathy in this sense is the ability of human beings to experience what the other people around them are feeling. This lack of empathy makes bullies uncaring of the hurt they cause others, thus they continually perpetrate the abusive acts that are the primary indicator of bullying. It is generally considered that this lack of empathy is due to a lack of experience with empathy, because families have not modeled or taught empathy to the child (Coloroso, 2003; Roberts, 2006).

One study conducted by Warden and MacKinnon (2003) has shown that bullies are significantly less empathetic than prosocial children. However, the results were confounded by gender. Antisocial girls were found to be more empathetic than prosocial boys. It was
hypothesized that prosocial boys are motivated more by other factors, such as need to be part of a
group or popularity, to be prosocial or that males and females may differ in how they observe
and recognize the importance of empathy. Thus, empathy may be more emphasized due to
gender than to socialness. Due to the exceedingly intrinsic quality of empathy, it is very difficult
to assess, which may in turn explain the perplexing results (Warden & MacKinnon, 2003).

**Social Skills Deficits**

Associations have been made between bullies and a lack of social skills. The idea is that
bullies use violence or verbal/ emotional attacks because they do not know better ways to get
what they want from people. It has been suggested that bullies be taught self-control through
teaching them anger management, self-regulation, and conflict-resolution skills (Milsom &
Gallo, 2006).

It is assumed that some bullies may do so because they have not been properly socialized.
Some believe it is because they have not had enough interaction with people and therefore do not
understand social rules or alternatives to their behavior (Milsom & Gallo, 2006); while others
believe that they have difficulty understanding the impact they have on their victims and
bystanders (Warden & MacKinnon, 2003). Research infers that bullies may lack social
information processing; one study found that bullies are able to foresee positive results stemming
from a bullying incident but overlook the negative consequences of their actions (Warden &

**Inferiority**

Most bullies bully out of fear. They are afraid to show others their weakness. Whatever
this weakness may be, they live in fear that it may be discovered, therefore they use their
perceived strengths to mask their weaknesses (Coloroso, 2003); (Roberts, 2006). Having control
over another person is the bully’s way of compensating for perceived inadequacies. It allows them to feel capable without overcoming their fears. The bully does this by finding a person who appears weak in an area in which he or she has strength, it may be physical, mental or social. Bullies also tend to project their fears onto their victims (Hazler, 1996).

The bully proceeds to torment his or her victim in order to make him or herself feel stronger and more able to ignore his or her own weaknesses. Bullies generally have few areas of competence, thus behaviors serve to preserve their self-image without having to face possible weaknesses. Consequently, they must use this scheme consistently, or be faced to consider their own fears and inadequacies (Hazler, 1996).

Research has shown that children who often use aggression as a means of getting what they want tend to continue these behaviors into adulthood unless they are provided reason to change (Roberts, 2006). Modern theories suggest creating opportunities for these children to “do good” (p.113). Chores and service projects send a message to children that they are needed; they need to believe that they can contribute and make a difference in their communities and families (Coloroso, 2003).

**Delinquency**

According to Kaiser and Raminsky (2003) bullies have a tendency to have more problems with delinquency, drugs and alcohol, and school dropouts (Milsom & Gallo, 2006). In research conducted by Baldry and Farrington (2000) regarding the correlation between bullying and delinquency the researchers found, “The relationship between bullying and delinquency was stronger for boys than for girls. Focusing on the SRD score dichotomized at the median, 77.1% of male delinquents were bullies, compared with 45.7% of male non-delinquents (odds ratio 4.0), 48.5% of female delinquents and 34.2% of female non-delinquents (odds ratio 1.8).” (p. 23) In
other words, the correlation between bullying and delinquency was found to be stronger for males than females.

In fact, many male bullies go on to become criminals in adulthood. “Olweus (1991) reported that approximately 60% of boys identified as bullies in Grades 6-9 had at least one conviction at the age of 24 and that 35% to 40% had three or more convictions. This was true of only 10% of the control group” (Batsche & Knoff, 1994, p. 2).

Research conducted among prison inmates has indicated that bullies were more likely to have been previously incarcerated in a juvenile facility and be affiliated with a gang than those not involved in bullying. It seems bullying is common among young offenders and that bullying may be a precedent to offending behavior (Viljoen, O’Niell, & Sidhu, 2005; Baldry & Farrington, 2000).

Because bullies may have a shortage of empathy, lack social skills, feel inferior and may exhibit antisocial orientation does not mean they cannot be helped. Intervention during childhood is believed to decrease the likelihood of criminality in adulthood, and increases chances of becoming a contributing member of society (DeRosier, 2004).

**Anti-Bullying Programs**

**Olweus Bullying Prevention Program**

The Olweus Bully Prevention Program has shown to be effective in reducing incidences of bullying. This program was created by Dan Olweus in Norway and first used in Norway and Sweden. With word of its effectiveness, it has spread around the globe and has become quite popular among schools in the United States (Limber, 2011).

When beginning the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program one of the first things done is to administer a questionnaire to the students and staff of the school to assess where, when and the
severity of the bullying in their school (Olweus, 1993). The Olweus Bully-Victim questionnaire has been found reliable and valid through independent sources (Kyriakides, Kaloyirou, & Lindsay, 2006). After this a detailed plan is constructed on several levels including school-wide, classroom, and individual, which includes soliciting parents for help with the program. One of the most interesting parts of the program is that it encourages the bystanders, or students who are neither the bullied nor bully to act. This empowerment of bystanders is one of the central tenets of the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (Olweus, 1993).

The effectiveness of the program depends on the commitment of staff and students to the program. Much of the responsibility for success lands on the shoulders of the adults in the school. The program requires that adults at the school are warm and caring, set firm limits to behavior, use negative consequences when those limits are reached, and act as positive role models (Limber, 2011). Once a school has tailored the program to their specific needs, it is up to the teachers, administrators and other staff to uphold the consequences of the program for those students that require it. Without the support of teachers, this program may fail, because they are the people with the closest and most frequent access to the students. This can be said of any bullying intervention in schools. They depend on school staff to create a climate that discourages bullying and includes and supports vulnerable students (Smith, Pepler, & Rigby, 2004).

It has been shown that schools that implement the program with fidelity have better outcomes than those who do not (Limber, 2011). Studies also suggest the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program may have varying influence depending on age and sex. In one study of seventh grade and eighth grade students, seventh grade female students responded positively with a 34.4% decrease in reports of exclusion, and a 31.1% decrease in reports of bullying; however eighth grade females responded negatively after administration of the program,
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reporting a 25% increase in bullying, a 20% increase in physical bullying, a 35.6% increase in reports of taking part in bullying, but a 35% decrease in reports of relational bullying. One hypothesis is that the older females may take longer to respond to this type of program; another hypothesis is that there may be an initial increase in reports of bullying because students better understand what bullying entails (Bowllan, 2011). Few significant findings were found for males, one being a 17.8% increase in reports of being talked to by a teacher regarding bullying by seventh grade males; eighth grade males did not conclude any significant findings (Bowllan, 2011).

Six large scale evaluations of the program have indicated, in varying degrees, a decrease in student reports of being bullied and bullying others. A follow up study between five years after the administration show a relative reduction in self-reporting bullying by 51% and a relative reduction in bully victimization by 40% (Limber, 2011). Other studies have shown a decrease in student reports of general antisocial behavior, such as theft, vandalism, fighting and truancy. Studies have also indicated an increase in classroom social climate; this includes reports of improved order and discipline, a rise in positive social relationships and intensification in positive attitudes toward school and schoolwork (Hazelden, 2007).

However, efficacy studies of the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program performed in the United States and elsewhere have not reproduced the dramatic results from initial studies conducted in Norway and Sweden. A reason for this may be the Olweus program relates better to Scandinavian schools due to small class sizes, highly qualified teachers, and an entrenched tradition of state intervention concerning social welfare. When the Olweus program was introduced in the United States, it had to be adapted to United States schools (Limber, 2011).
There is also the possibility that the program that Olweus and his associates created is less effective when modified (Ferguson, San Miguel, Kilburn, & Sanchez, 2007).

**Second Step**

Another school wide anti-bullying program gaining popularity is Second Step, created by the Committee for Children (2013). Second Step is targeted towards elementary age students in grades kindergarten through grade 8. The program teaches social-emotional skills such as empathy, problem solving, and emotion management. The rationale behind the Second Step program is that it fights bullying by teaching all students these skills. Thus, bullies learn a different skill set to handle situations without violence and bystanders are more likely to have empathy for victims and able to problem solve to help remove the victim from the situation (Committee for Children, 2013).

Through several studies, the effectiveness of the Second Step program has been shown to reduce aggression, increase prosocial behaviors, and increase social competence. In one trial, observations of student behavior along with teacher reports were used to assess the program over a one year period. Data concluded physical aggression was reduced in Second Step classrooms compared to control classrooms. Six months after the program conclusion, students exhibited continued low levels of aggression as well as an increase in prosocial behaviors compared to control classrooms. Students who received the Second Step curriculum correspondingly showed significant gains in knowledge surrounding empathy, anger management, impulse control, and bully-proofing. In a similar study, teacher ratings demonstrated an increase in social competence, a decrease in aggression, and a greater likelihood to choose positive goals after receiving the curriculum (National Center for Mental Health Promotion and Youth Violence Prevention, 2013).
Bully Busters

The last school-wide anti-bullying program to be discussed is Bully Busters. It is targeted at teachers. Its premise is that aggression and bullying are a result of social skills deficits. Bully Busters therefore attempts to increase the awareness, knowledge, and efficacy of teachers’ reaction to aggression and bullying behavior (Bell, Raczynski, & Horne, 2010).

The approach is a psychoeducational curriculum taught mainly by the school counseling department to the teaching staff, the teaching staff then disseminates it to students. The purported results of the Bully Busters are: an increase of student exposure to social models who are able to successfully and compassionately manage bullying behaviors, reduced exposure to aggressive and bullying behaviors due to changing school climate caused by new teachers attitudes, provide teachers and students with materials and activities related to bullying, and to offer controlled exposure to social skills related to conflict management (Bell, Raczynski, & Horne, 2010).

Research related to the efficacy of Bully Busters is limited. Perhaps with further investigation, Bully Busters will prove to be an effective tool in the fight to reduce bullying, however the little research there is currently suggests that this program yields a slight decrease in bullying behavior. Teacher perceptions of the school climate offer a slim decrease in bullying behavior, whereas student perceptions are inconsistent in reporting that bullying had both decreased and increased (Bell, Raczynski, & Horne, 2010).

However, there is one unmistakable positive outcome from Bully Busters. That is teachers’ feeling of awareness and knowledge of bullying behavior, positively impacted the teaching staff. Thus, teachers felt more effective in dealing with bullying situations (Bell, Raczynski, & Horne, 2010).
Effectiveness of School-Wide Anti-Bullying Programs

Due to the creation of many school-wide anti-bullying programs, there have been several meta-analytic studies of popular programs to understand the efficacy of each. However, results seem to be uninspiring. The consensus seems to be that the success of anti-bullying programs is minimal (Smith, Schnider, Smith, & Ananiadou, 2004; Ferguson, San Miguel, Kilburn, & Sanchez, 2007).

Perhaps bullying is more beneficial to some individual students than non-bullying. If bullies do not see a personal benefit to changing behavior, they may simply reject it. Studies have also shown that there may be a genetic proclivity to violence, thus behavior may be learned and genetic. This does not mean that behavioral interventions may not be effective, but it does explain resistance to these interventions. Lastly it has been posited that bullying has hit a “floor effect” since there has been a substantial decrease in bullying in the past decade, though the reasons for this are not well understood (Ferguson, San Miguel, Kilburn, & Sanchez, 2007, p. 411).

It has been suggested that though these reviews indicated the efficacy for school-wide anti-bullying programs is low, that they should continue to be utilized until such a time as further studies examining the value of these programs are completed. This is mainly because studies show that other modalities of bullying procedures such as group counseling and individual counseling display similar low results, thus one method is not better than any other. Also, due to its high resistance to intervention, significant albeit small gains regarding bullying and aggression should not be lightly dismissed (Ferguson, San Miguel, Kilburn, & Sanchez, 2007).
Group Counseling Bully Interventions

Since common problems of bullies have been identified, it is now the time to address how school counselors can help bullies increase their skill in empathetic response and socialization. Establishing school counseling groups for bullies may not be appropriate for every counselor. It has been suggested that counseling should not be performed in group modality with bullies, because they tend to be hard to control and they may give each other ideas on how to bully others. Instead bullies should be dealt with individually (Roberts, 2006). Most of the groups mentioned below are psychoeducational groups, meaning they are focused on teaching and practicing skills instead of expressing feelings.

Empathy Building Groups

The focus of an empathy building group is to enhance the bullies’ ability to “walk in someone else’s shoes.” Empathy training for bullies is considered one of the most important components for an effective anti-bullying program. This training should include perspective taking skills and teaching bullies to label their own emotions (Milsom & Gallo, 2006). Though this researcher found many articles claiming the effectiveness of empathy building groups for bullies, no actual research findings were discovered to attest to this claim.

Recent research has found that children identified as bullies may have very strong perspective taking skills, thus enabling them to better manipulate their victims. It is the connection of these perspectives to emotion that some may lack, this connection is called morality. It has been shown that socially adept bullies have the ability to separate their moral knowledge from their moral motivation. In other words, socially skilled bullies are able to understand that they should not morally do something, but are able to ignore this social mandate because they do not have any motivation to follow it (Gasser & Keller, 2009). The problem is
that most empathy building programs in schools today are focused on perspective taking, thus they do more harm than good (Cunningham & Whitten, 2007).

There is some conjecture that the empathetic responses of bullies may be goal oriented, therefore if a bully needs to hurt someone to get what he or she wants, he or she may be able to ignore the automatic empathetic response. Therefore, empathy building group counseling may in fact, have a detrimental effect on bullying, since this kind of group may simply make it even easier for bullies to control their victims (Dautenhahn, Woods & Kaouri, 2007).

It has been hypothesized that a program that focuses on the affective side of empathy may be beneficial for male bullies (Jolliffe & Farrington, 2011). There is conjecture that male bullies may not know how to recognize and utilize their feelings correctly, and helping them to do so may cause a reduction in the amount of bullying because they would have a more difficult time ignoring their feelings. As discussed earlier, there is discordance between gender and empathy results, meaning that girls that are antisocial tend to have higher levels of empathy than even prosocial boys, thus the same group for female bullies would probably be considerably less efficacious (Jolliffe & Farrington, 2011).

Roots of Empathy (Bornstein, 2010) is a program created in Canada. The program is very unique in that it utilizes infants to nurture empathy in students. The founder of Roots of Empathy envisioned it as a deep rooted parent education program that started in kindergarten. After working for years with neglectful and abusive parents, she realized these parents lacked empathy for their children because they were not exposed to it enough. The program consists of three monthly visits to classrooms, one pre baby visit, one baby visit, and one post baby visit. In the monthly baby visits, a mother and infant visit the classroom, mother and child sit on a green blanket while the children try to understand how the baby is feeling. Research has shown that
through the program students become more understanding, kind and less aggressive (Bornstein, 2010).

This is due to a biological basis for compassion. Thinking of violence done to others activates the same regions in the brain that fire when mothers gaze at their children. This suggests we are programmed to care for strangers. When we help others, the pleasure centers of the brain light up. It is suggested that the best way to create a caring climate is to engage children collectively in an activity that benefits another. In Roots of Empathy, students are asked to do something to care for the baby. It is hypothesized that being around the infant changes students biologically. Exposure to the child may place students in a physiological state in which students are more receptive to socialization. This may be due to an increased amount of Oxytocin created within the students, this hormone is linked to caring and trusting (Bornstein, 2010).

Roots of Empathy has been the topic of many efficacy studies. In one such study of first through third grade students who exhibited “proactive aggression”, 88% decreased behavior after participation in the program, whereas only 9% of the control group did. These findings were reproduced in fourth through seventh graders in a randomized controlled trial (Bornstein, 2010).

The program has also been shown to produce significant drops in relational aggression as well as an increase in parenting knowledge of the students. Studies have found these outcomes are maintained or increased three years after conclusion of the program (Bornstein, 2010). Nine independent studies have shown Roots of Empathy schools experience “reduced aggression” and “increased prosocial behavior” (Szalavitz, 2010, p. 45).

Not only does Roots of Empathy impact behavior in a positive way, it may also impact academics (Schonert-Reichl & Hymel, 2007). Studies have elucidated that children’s prosocial behaviors were better predictors of academic achievement than standardized test scores. Also
studies suggest that school interventions that increase social and emotional competence yield higher academic achievement levels; though the reverse is untrue, academics do not increase empathy (Schonert-Reichl & Hymel, 2007). Roots of Empathy has been regarded as a highly effective tool for teaching social/emotional learning by faculty in schools that utilize the program (Cain & Carnellor, 2008).

The Pikas Method of Shared Concern (Rigby, 2005) is another form of group counseling specific to bullying. However, it is not traditional group counseling, and is rather a form of mediation. It is seen as ideal for a third party to report the bullying incident, so the victim does not appear to be informing an adult about the situation (Rigby, 2005).

Then, a person trained in the method interviews suspected bullies starting with the assumed ringleader, without any accusations of bullying behavior. Often, these suspected bullies will admit involvement in the bullying situation, not always with a sense of culpability. Then the student is asked what could be changed to improve the situation, positive suggestions are reinforced, and arrangements are made to meet again at a later time. This is repeated with each of the students identified as a bully (Rigby, 2005).

After meeting with the suspected bullies the counselor meets with the victim. The interview is initiated with general questions about school and after the child reports abuse, the counselor displays concern and support over the issue. The counselor asks if the victim may have incited the abuse from the suspected bullies somehow. After this, the counselor reveals that he or she has been involved in interviews with the suspected bullies and is working with them to come up with a solution (Rigby, 2005).

Once interviews have been conducted with each of the suspected bullies and it seems progress is being made, the counselor then convenes the group of suspected bullies together to
compliment them on their work towards a solution thus far, and to attempt to provoke a suggestion that the group of suspected bullies meet with the victim to work on a solution. The counselor should not do with without reassurances that the suspected bullies will act in a proactive and positive manner in the presence of the victim. Typically, the victim can be induced to accepting the invitation with the assurance that the suspected bullies will be solution focused and a resolution to the problem will occur. It is important that the counselor not convene this meeting before it is evident a constructive outcome will occur (Rigby, 2005).

Lastly, the large group meeting between the suspected bullies and the victim occurs. In this meeting it should be established that the bullying is over and that acceptable relations have been achieved between the victim and the suspected bullies. If the victim has been provocative towards the suspected bullies behavior adjustments on both sides are discussed, then after a consensus has been reached, all students sign a document stating how they will behave in the future (Rigby, 2005).

This method of mediation would work well with other childhood problems, especially friendship problems, because the relationship between the two students is fairly equal. However, this program seems to be ineffective in bullying situations, first because bullying is an inherently unequal relationship made to gratify one person and subjugate another. Secondly, bullies are capable of being very socially adept, thus they will agree to what is said and retaliate later. If utilizing this particular method, it is important for the school counselor to understand the kind of bully he or she is working with (Bazelon, 2013).

**Social Skills Development**

In this type of group counseling, the school counselor works on social skills within the group of bullies to develop more prosocial ways of getting what they want. The most effective
counseling services for bullies tend to emphasize development of skills to replace aggressive behaviors with more socially acceptable ones (Batsche & Knoff, 1994). Social skills training helps students to better interact with the general public, and thus may aid in prevention of future antisocial affiliations (DeRosier, 2004). In more recent research, social skills groups have been found to be moderately efficacious in general (Gerrity & DeLucia-Waack, 2007).

The effectiveness of a social skills group for all bullies is questionable, because although there are bullies who may have social deficits, there are also bullies who are extremely socially adept, and actually use this skill to bully (Cunningham & Whitten, 2007). Thus, when creating a social skills group, it is important to differentiate between bullies with high and low social skills to reduce the harm that may occur to possible victims.

Summary

After a review of the available literature, the evidence suggests that a social interest group counseling group may prove to lower rates of bullying in schools. A social interest group that focuses on the bullies’ sense of belonging and the emotional cultivation of empathy by focusing on the mistaken beliefs of each and beginning to rectify them, may give bullies the internal motivation to change their behaviors.

This kind of group would likely increase the empathetic response and social skills of the participants, both of which are conjectured to be reasons that bullying occurs. This group would first focus on their individual emotions and the emotions of other bullies in the group, which would hopefully enhance empathetic response. Once these skills were practiced within the group setting, the hope would be that these individuals would be able to extend them to the greater public. It is also assumed that group members would enhance their social skills vicariously simply by belonging to the group and through interactions with the public.
Since there is little emphasis on perspective taking or the emotions of others, the possibility of increased harm to victims is lessened. At the very least, students will come out of this social interest group with a greater understanding of themselves and a sense of belonging, both of which are advantageous for any person.

**Alfred Adler’s Perspective on Bullies**

Though Alfred Adler does not directly address bullies, he does address aggressive children and criminals. About both aggressive children and criminals Alfred Adler claims they have deep rooted feelings of inferiority (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956). In order to make themselves feel better about themselves, aggressive children are aggressive, cruel, or mean and criminals, lie, cheat, steal, injure or kill. In Alfred Adler’s writings he claims, “No act of cruelty has ever been done which has not been based upon a secret weakness (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956, p. 390).”

Adler also claims both aggressive children and criminals lack social interest, because it was never taught to them as children. In Adlerian psychology, social interest is the measure of one’s mental health; therefore the more social interest a person has, the more mentally healthy a person is (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956).

Though social interest is thought to be innate, it also needs to be developed in a child. The driving force behind development of social interest is the mother. If the mother does not model and foster social interest, the child will not learn it (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956). Research has shown that it is also important for other family members to model social interest to the child as well (Johnson, Smith, & Nelson, 2003).

This may lead the person to deep feelings of inferiority and to mental illness if social interest is not enhanced. But, social interest is a skill that can be taught at any time, thus if a child
does not learn it whilst he or she is very young, he or she may not be doomed for a life of misery and hopelessness (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956).

Implications for School Counselors

- Though the effects of anti-bullying programs may be minimal, it is important to continue to work to prevent bullying because of the negative and sometimes, lasting effects it has on each person involved.
- Individual psychology and modern theories of bullies both suggest deep feelings of inferiority on the part of the bully.
- Both Individual psychology and modern thought on bullies propose that bullies help others, in order to find their own importance.
- Fostering social interest in bullies should increase empathy, enhance social skills, diminish feelings of inferiority, and reduce the likelihood of delinquency.
- Programs that have elements of social interest, such as belonging and contributing, like Roots of Empathy, have demonstrated success in reducing bullying and aggression.

Conclusion

In conclusion, a group counseling group focused on fostering social interest among bullies in schools may be a better alternative than some other anti-bully initiatives that are being espoused today. Since most of the ideas being taught have a very individual focus and meaning, the likelihood that they can be perverted into a means to better intimidate victims is decreased.

Overall, this author feels more current research needs to be done on bullying. Much of the research found on bullies was done between 15 and 20 years ago. This is the main research that still seems to be used, though much of it has been discredited recently through other research. Thus our schools are using outmoded programs that may actually prove more
detrimental to our schools than beneficial. New research needs to be done on what inspires bullies to change and new programs need to be created based on that research.

A social interest group aimed at bullies is not the sole solution. It should be only part of a multilevel program with intervention on the classroom, group and individual levels. However, this author feels that it may be a vital aspect of any program designed with the ideal of security for every student in mind.
References


