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## **21. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CULTURAL DIVERSITY AND BULLYING**

### *Peer Victimization at Different Levels of Education and Adulthood*

Bullying is an unbalanced power relationship between the strongest and the weakest, who are unable to reply to the hostility, attack, or violence of the strongest. According to Kolstrein and Toledo (2013), it is the “recurrent harassment of a student or group of students by another student or group” (p. 46). Bullying is displayed through physical belligerence, verbal belligerence, and exclusion. This unacceptable act of cruelty is present among all age groups and diversities. With discrimination being such a prevalent part in today’s society, bullying is at high risk for increased rates. Specifically, the educational setting is a target. With each passing day, K-12 schools, colleges, and universities are becoming more and more diverse. Exploring and learning about bullying in concerns to diversity can aid in providing safe and healthy educational environments. This chapter discusses and analyzes features of bullying, including characteristics of bullies and of those affected, bullying within the classroom setting, the connection between diversity and bullying, and bullying at different levels of education.

Even though children, adolescents, and adults normally view bullying in a negative way, it is still a large-scale issue amongst all age groups. Why, then, do individuals participate in this cruel act? Through extensive research, it is apparent that bullies’ main goal is to get hold of or keep a dominant role in a peer group. In coherence, bullies work to gain respect and supremacy. It appears that bullies end up obtaining what they desire through the significant aspects of power and popularity (Sentse, Veenstra, Kiuru, & Salmivalli, 2015, p. 944). Research has turned its attention to the difference between popularity and likeness. Specifically, Sentse et al. (2015) studied these characteristics in regard to their relationship with bullying. Just because an individual is popular does not mean that he or she is well liked. Even though bullies have established high-ranking positions (popularity), research has indicated that their peers generally do not like them. These two characteristics refer to an individual’s social status within the peer group; therefore, the members of the peer group determine rank and approval of other members (Sentse et al., 2015, p. 944). Individual characteristics are only a small part to the complex system of bullying.

In addition to traits of individuals, settings and environments such as classrooms play a large role in the act of bullying. Bullying in the classroom setting is not

always what one might expect. In addition to bullies and their victims, classmates engage in the process as well. Sentse et al. (2015) describe how classmates can add fuel to the fire by contributing (participating) or supporting (expressing amusement, applauding) the bullying. In contrast, classmates can stand up for the victim or remain neutral by not participating on either side. K-12 school is generally a place where children do not willingly go but instead are required to show up five days a week. Classrooms are places where students socialize with one another and spend most of the school day. Each classroom has its own standards and frequencies of bullying. The occurrence rate depends on the particular classroom's norm. Sentse et al. (2015) discuss the effects of two different norms that are commonly associated with classroom behavior: descriptive norm and injunctive norm. The descriptive norm describes how prevalent behaviors are within a particular setting. When behaviors occur frequently, individuals begin to subconsciously see the behavior as "normal." When an individual sees an act of bullying occur often in a classroom, they begin to believe that it is acceptable for that particular environment. This may cause someone to engage in bullying in one classroom but not another (Sentse et al., 2015, p. 944). In relation to the descriptive norm, the injunctive norm incorporates the outlook on bullying from each individual. Whether it is in a negative or positive fashion, whichever way a classroom as a whole tolerates bullying, that attitude will transfer to new students coming into the classroom. Sentse et al. (2015) state that both

prevalence of behavior and collective attitudes towards such behavior are sources of how normative and legitimate behavior is for individuals in the group and it can be assumed that children are more inclined to bully when their context (classroom climate) is permissive with regards to such behavior as compared to when their context is less permissive. (p. 944)

Also, another reason as to why individuals choose to participate in bullying may be because they perceive it as worthwhile to do so. For instance, studies have shown that, when bullying was engaged in at higher frequencies, it was less likely to be connected with peer rejection and more with peer approval (Coulter, Herrick, Friedman, & Stall, 2016). This environmental characteristic causes individuals to act in equivalence to the classroom norm. The fear of being rejected for going against the class norm overpowers the individual from doing the right thing. With this behavior, the phenomenon of "pro-bullying" happens. Pro-bullying occurs when individuals with a lower popularity status participate in bullying in order to raise their status or to prevent further rejection from others (Sentse et al., 2015, p. 945). These negative aspects can put a great deal of strain on a classroom environment. This can cause unnecessary trouble for teachers and constrict learning possibilities for students, which needs to be prevented.

Not only do individual and group characteristics contribute to bullying, but diversity is also one of the main factors in the occurrence of bullying. Numerous studies have researched the relationship between target groups and the act of

bullying. No two people are alike. Diversity is what makes each individual who they are and what brings groups of people together at the same time. One might ask oneself, “Why does discrimination have to occur?” It is something that cannot fully be answered but can and has been researched to reduce its occurrence and affects. Such extensive research has analyzed features such as gender, sexual orientation, race/ethnicity, and disabilities.

Gender is one trait of diversity that affects bullying. Research shows that males bully (participant) and are bullied (victims) more often than females. Even though both males and females use a variety of techniques for bullying, they usually use methods on opposite ends of the spectrum. For instance, in general, males result more toward physical violence whereas females tend to use verbal violence. Physical aggression is easier to notice than verbal aggression, which may be the reason as to why males are reportedly more involved with bullying than females (Espelage & Swearer, 2003).

Not only does gender affect the rate and extent of bullying, but sexual orientation does too. Homophobia is the “irrational fear of, aversion to, or discrimination against homosexuality or homosexuals” (“Homophobia”, n.d.). It is highly prevalent in today’s society and often the underlying cause for different instances of bullying. Studies conducted in the United States have confirmed that classmates frequently abuse sexual minorities verbally while trying to make them take on “accepted” sexual behaviors (Kolstrein & Toledo, 2013, p. 49). Humans have an instinctive drive to be well liked and confident in themselves. The Five Cs model consists of five characteristics that serve as stepping-stones to wellbeing. The main goal of the Five Cs model is to endorse “positive youth development” (Coulter, Herrick, Friedman, & Stall, 2016, p. 691). The Five Cs consist of competence, confidence, connection, character, and caring/compassion. Research has indicated that sexual minorities suffer from less support, lower success in academics, and less mental stability than heterosexual individuals. With these aspects being related to the Five Cs, it is probable that sexual minorities undergo a less positive youth development than heterosexuals (Coulter, Herrick, Friedman, & Stall, 2016, p. 691). To further research on the relationship between sexual orientation and bullying, Coulter et al. (2016) conducted a study that examines how bullying victimization attributes to sexual orientation dissimilarities in positive youth development. The results indicate that, in comparison to sexual minorities (e.g., non-heterosexual or bisexual), heterosexuals were less likely to fall victim of bullying. Also, heterosexuals showed higher rates of the traits within the Five Cs model, which indicates that they had more positive youth development. Coulter et al. (2016) note that “Bullying hinders sexual minority youths’ access to the essential building blocks of health and well-being, making it imperative for interventions to explicitly address bullying victimization against sexual minority youths” (p. 696). Three out of four individuals who are bullied through sexual orientation name-calling do not classify as being lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning (LGBTQ) (Riese, n.d.). Such insulting comments are commonly used in a broad manner and are not actually used to offend

someone who identifies with the sexuality being exploited. This form of bullying can offend both parties. Sexual orientation is one of many aspects of diversity within bullying that is unsolicited.

Racism is a major element of diversity and another reason for bullies to target specific individuals. Xenophobia is the “fear and hatred of strangers or foreigners or of anything that is strange or foreign” (“Xenophobia”, n.d.); therefore, racist or xenophobic bullying occurs when bullying is aimed at someone because of their ethnicity or culture. Bullying in regard to race is derived from one’s ethnic foundation, skin color, or religion. In recent years, student race or ethnicity has gained more concentration. Studies have come up with varying results, but all agree that there is a significant relationship between bullying and race/ethnicity. Not only do individual factors of race and ethnicity take part in bullying, but the racial make-up of schools and classrooms contribute as well. Referenced in Fisher et al. (2015), “The relationship between race and bullying is multifaceted and influenced by the racial make-up of schools and classrooms” (Juvonen et al., 2006; Graham, 2006). A recent study conducted by Fisher et al. (2015) “explored the relationship between school diversity, student race, and bullying within the school context” (p. 1,241). The purpose of the study was to determine the impact of school diversity on bullying and race-based victimization. There were 4,581 participants; of those, 89.4% were Caucasian, and 10.6% were African American. The study projected that the strength of a particular group is partly decided by the number of members within the group. An imbalance or balance of group numbers among various ethnic groups can result in higher degrees of peer victimization (Fisher et al., 2015, p. 1,242). First, the results indicate that Caucasian middle school-aged students face bullying more often than African American students of the same age, particularly when they were minorities within the school setting. Second, Caucasian students face race victimization roughly three times more than African American students when diversity was constant. Lastly and captivantly, African American students face race victimization roughly twice as much as Caucasians when the school setting was comprised of mostly students of color (Fisher et al., 2015, p. 1,241). As stated previously, studies in this particular area vary in outcomes, but all prove that there is a negative significant relationship between race/ethnicity and bullying. Students are more at risk to be bullied if they do not fit within the ethnic norm of the school setting; therefore, ethnic minorities might be more likely to experience racist victimization (Fisher et al., 2015, p. 1,243).

Individuals with disabilities often undergo experiences that others do not encounter. Sometimes, an individual with a disability may experience the same situation as someone without disabilities, but they may interpret it differently or have different emotions and reactions. For example, the effects and frequencies of bullying differ for someone with disabilities than for someone without disabilities. It is often difficult to determine the exact degree to which the bullying has affected an individual with cognitive, physical, or psychological disabilities. However, bullies often target those with disabilities or special needs. Since bullies choose victims who are unable to react or defend themselves, those with disabilities are “easy”

targets. Subsequently, those who are cognitively disabled and show less self-esteem or confidence are at higher risk of being bullied (Kolstrein & Toledo, 2013, p. 51). Furthering their discussion, Kolstrein and Toledo (2013) explain that individuals with social impairments are sometimes excluded by their peers because they do not fit in with the norm; therefore, they are at high risk for becoming victims of bullying.

It is often assumed that bullying primarily or solely occurs in school-age student grades K-12. This assumption is false. Not only does bullying occur in grades K-12, but it is also heavily present in higher education and the workplace. Like most research, the research on bullying at the different levels of education varies in findings, but all share a general idea of what is occurring. Some studies insinuate that bullying peaks in the middle school years and then starts to decrease. In contrast, other research studies imply that some forms of bullying may stem from childhood but start developing in adulthood. This type of bullying occurs in higher education and the workplace. Common types of bullying are verbal and physical violence, language (jokes), teasing, belittling, insulting an individual's characteristics or personality, etc. Bullying impacts school grades K-12, higher education, and the workplace in different ways but causes each group to be unproductive.

Grades K-12 are developmental stages when bullying is often generated. With K-12 being a large time frame, there are roughly three stages that make up K-12 as a whole. Elementary school students make up the youngest age group that is affected by bullying. At this stage of development, children are not capable of rationalizing and often result to small acts of physical aggression and name-calling. Bullying at this level reduces academic achievement and can even cause trouble with mental wellness and physical injury (Jan & Husain, 2015). These children might engage in what one refers to as "picking on" or "getting picked on." These actions are a milder version of bullying that older students engage in. Some actions include "name calling, hitting or threatening others, and spreading false rumors" (Jan & Husain, 2015, p. 43). Elementary school-aged victims are often socially isolated and apprehensive because they are incapable of adapting to the changes and desires needed to keep up with the group norm. These characteristics make them easy targets. Schools have a moral and legal duty to form a safe and welcoming environment for students. In comparison to elementary school-aged students, middle school-aged students take bullying a bit further. At this stage, the characteristics and effects are more developed and harmful. Also, the various locations where bullying takes place start to become more relevant. Perkins, Perkins, and Craig (2014) discuss how locations of bullying have changed since the year 2000. Before, bullying usually took place in areas that were recreational, unstructured, or away from adults. In recent studies, elementary school students suggest that bullying takes place on the playground, but middle school students state that bullying begins to take place in classrooms and hallways. This may be because children in middle school are more mature and are not as afraid of authoritative figures. In addition, middle school bullying might take place in cafeterias or locker rooms (Perkins, Perkins, & Craig, 2014). In middle school, cyberbullying is introduced through the use of electronics and social media. Faucher,

Cassidy, and Jackson (2015) further explain information on how gender affects cyberbullying. These researchers note that female students in grades K-12 are more likely to be the ones participating in cyberbullying. Because males engage in more face-to-face bullying, they do not use the passive-aggressive outlet of cyberbullying as often as females do. The last stage of K-12 is high school. High school bullying takes the features of elementary and middle school bullying and develops them into more complex and severe actions. Here, cyberbullying continues and transfers into the world of video games. This worldwide community works with each other through indirect communication. Jackson et al. (2009) state that “students reported various types of inappropriate messages, including gender-based harassment, harassment about sexual orientation, having personal information posted about them online, being deliberately excluded, and received messages that made them afraid.” Students who are bullied or undergo some type of peer maltreatment suffer from lower academic achievement than those who are not bullied. Studies have shown that students who have a better relationship with their teachers have higher academic success.

Continuing from K-12 school to higher education, cyberbullying is a pressing issue of faculty’s everyday jobs. For a long time, bullying in higher education did not have much attention. When a student from Rutgers University unexpectedly committed suicide after a video of him and another male participating in sexual activities was exposed, the awareness of bullying after grades K-12 increased significantly (Faucher et al., 2015, p. 111). Differing from school grades K-12, males in higher education are more likely to participate in cyberbullying than females. In this case, males are viewed as the perpetrators, and females as the victims. Also, in post-secondary education, female students are generally sought out by someone whom they know or are aware of while males are generally sought out by someone whom they do not know. Not only are students affected by bullying in higher education, but faculty and staff are, too. In some cases, the faculty is sought out by their own students (Faucher et al., 2015, p. 114). In addition to gender, within the environment of higher education, sexual orientation is targeted by bullies. Referenced in Faucher et al. (2015), “Finn (2004) reports that lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender college students are twice as likely to experience online harassment as heterosexual students” (p. 114). Additionally, racist and sexist bullying incidents are frequent. Bullying takes a step further at this level of education because it can occur over longer periods of time, such as months or years, due to the long-term relationships that are formed (Faucher et al., 2015, p. 113).

Workplace bullying is different from the other forms because it is not related to education. Referenced in the study conducted by Faucher et al. (2015), “Bullying at work means harassing, offending, socially excluding someone or negatively affecting someone’s work” (Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf, & Cooper, 2003, p. 15). As in K-12 and higher education, gender differences are reported in the workplace. In general, women seem to be bullied more than males in the workplace. Also, men tend to be the perpetrators. As in the educational setting, racial and sexual minorities also tend to be more susceptible to bullying (Faucher et al., 2015, p. 114). Not as

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much research has been conducted on the differences in gender targeting within businesses or corporations although one study does report that “men and racial or ethnic minority individuals are more likely to be bullied by their superiors whereas women and GLBTQ staff are more likely to be bullied by their superiors, colleagues, and subordinates” (Sallee & Diaz, 2012). On the other hand, Namie and Namie (2009) report that same-gender bullying is more common, particularly with females. In the workplace, bullying affects witnesses and bystanders in the same manner. Some of these effects include stress, less job satisfaction, avoidance, absence, less efficiency, and mental and physical impacts (Faucher et al., 2015, p. 118). The workforce is a place where individuals spend much of their time. Bullying and discrimination in this environment can be detrimental in many ways. Since not as much research has been conducted in this particular area, further investigation might help understand why it occurs and how to prevent or decrease it.

Bullying is an issue that exists in the every day lives of students. It does not just affect the victim, but also affects the person who bullies, witnesses, and those who intervene. Not until recently has bullying been studied outside of the educational setting. It is now researched in other settings such as personal relationships and the workplace. The influence of bullying in relation to discrimination should not be taken too lightly. Bullying must be acknowledged, comprehended, and taken seriously. Discrimination is impossible to completely eliminate but can be decreased through prevention tactics.

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