

Do Parental Relations Impact on Involvement in Bullying? A Preliminary Investigation into the Relations Between Bullying and Parental Relations Self-Concept

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Christine-Mizell (2003) proposes that one of the factors which attribute to low self-concept in children is the damaging interactions and poor relationships children have with their parents. Only recently has literature suggested that bullying may be linked to a child's perceived self-concept specifically in the domain of parental relations (Eden, 1999). The present study aims to enhance bullying research by: (a) providing an overall critical literature review of the area; (b) investigating the multidimensional nature of the bully/victim process and its core determinants (parental relations self-concept); and (c) providing further understanding of the mediating factors which influence the bully/target cycle. This study explores the relation of one multidimensional domain of self-concept (parental relations) and bullying using the Adolescent Peer Relations Instrument – Bully/Target (Parada, 2000) and the Self-Description Questionnaire II-Short (SDQII-S) (Marsh, Ellis, Parada, Richards, & Heubeck, 2005). Participants include students from a co-educational secondary school ($N = 106$) from Years 7 ($n = 35$), 8 ($n = 24$), and 9 ($n = 47$). A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted on the data. Although the CFA resulted in a poorly fitting model due to the small sample size, correlations were noted among factors which revealed significant negative relations between involvement in bullying (in terms of bullying others and being bullied) and the parental self-concept factor. Future research would benefit with larger sample size to clarify the validity of these results.

Bullying has been defined as an abuse of power exploited from the aggressor toward the victim (Smokowski & Kopasz, 2005), and Olweus (1993) argues that this power imbalance which is exploited by the aggressor is used to control, inflict pain and disadvantage the victim in repetitious attacks over a period of time. Some research suggests that bullying behaviours can be classified into two distinct groups; namely direct and indirect types of bullying (Banks, 1999). More commonly, bullying is considered to happen in at least three ways: physical, verbal, and social/relational bullying (Beale, 2001; Marsh, Parada, Craven & Finger, 2004; Rigby & Slee, 1999). Physical involves behaviours such as hitting, making threats, and taking belongings from another person. Verbal includes making jokes about someone, or calling them names, and social can cover ostracism, spreading rumours and more recently exclusion by text messaging.

Both research and the popular media have suggested that the long-term effects of being bullied can lead to detrimental effects in self-concept and other psychological constructs. For example, those targeted by bullying may experience low social self worth, low global self-esteem, anxiety, depression and links to psychosocial adjustment problems (Kaltiala-Heino, Rimpela, Rantanen, & Rimpela, 2000; O'Moore & Kirkham, 2001). In more severe cases, bullying has been shown to play a role in suicidal ideation and death (Hawker & Boulton, 2000; Smokowski & Kopasz, 2005). It must also be noted though that individuals who engage in bullying behaviours, in contrast, can encounter long-term consequences as severe as those who are targeted by bullying. Extensive research enquiries have found links between bullies' externalising behaviour and the development of violence, delinquency, drug/alcohol abuse, depression and criminal behaviour outcomes (Marsh, Parada, Yeung & Healey, 2001; Parada; Marsh, Craven & Papworth, 2005).

Does self-concept play a role in bullying involvement?

Self-concept is a self-assessed system principally based on how an individual may perceive themselves (Parada, Marsh, Craven & Papworth, 2005). Self-concept theory has been subject to definitional problems, as it was thought that self-concept, global self-worth, and self-esteem were all interchangeably referred to as the same concept. For example, one theoretical position of self-esteem refers to the definition as a uni-dimensional construct. More recent work by Shavelson, Hubner and Stanton (1976) suggested that self-concept could be more accurately understood when multiple facets were examined. Marsh (1992) explored the multi-dimensional nature of self-concept constructs, and found ten different domain specific areas describing how individuals may perceive themselves (and one more general self factor). These factors include seven non-academic self-concept factors (physical abilities, physical appearance, same-sex relationships, opposite-sex relationships, honesty, parental relations, and emotional stability); three academic self-concept factors (verbal, maths, and overall school); and one overall global self-concept measure.

So far, there has been a growing amount of literature in support of self-concept as being recognised as one of the key mediating factors that can contribute to an individual's involvement in bullying. Consistent relationships have been found between low self-concept and being bullied, however, mixed results of high and low self-concepts have been found for individuals that bully (O'Moore & Kirkham, 2001; Parada et al., 2005).

A classic example can be found in the work of Hay (2000), whose research explored students who were suspended from school for exhibiting anti-social

behaviours. Hay's research investigated whether students suspended from school had a low general self-concept or whether their antisocial behaviours attributed in gaining an enhanced self-concept. The results identified that students suspended from school held a low general self-concept, specifically scoring low in areas of academic performance, parental/child relationships, and school connectedness. Interestingly, Hay (2000) found similar results to Parada et al., (2005), in that bullying was related to lower parental, peer relationships and school self-concepts.

Family influence on bullying behaviour

As seen from the above literature, the role of the self has been found to play an integral part in bullying. However, recent developments in the field have asserted that the role of the family also plays an important role in developing one's self-concept as well as furthering our understanding of involvement in bullying. To date, little research has investigated areas of family structure, parenting styles, and how parental involvement and self-concept affects bullying (Eden, 1999).

Clear links have previously been found between children's family history and their participation in the bully-victim cycle. A review article by Smokowski and Kopaz (2005) found children who engage in bullying often report their parents as inconsistent, overprotective, or neglectful. In addition, both those who bully or are bullied have often described their families as lacking in warmth and parental management skills (Smokowski & Kopaz, 2005). In line with these findings Christine-Mizell (2003) proposed that one of the factors that contribute to low self-concept in children is the damaging interactions and poor relationships children have with their parents, which can lead to a less positive view of the self. This can then affect relationships with others. Christine-Mizell (2003) further found correlations between poor parental relations, lower levels of self-concept and participating in bullying behaviour. Consistent with the above findings, the research by Marsh, Parada, Craven and Finger (2004) found that self-concept and bullying were related over time. The findings showed that for both bullying and being bullied, a general trend was identified where bullying lead to lower self-concepts and higher levels of depression. The opposite was true for students less likely to be involved in bullying, thus suggesting students were more likely to have higher levels of self-concept and lower levels of depression when they were neither bullied nor were bullies. In addition, being a bully lead to lower levels of parental relations and honesty/trustworthiness factors. While bullying research has primarily investigated the relation of bullying with multiple self-concept factors, the present study offers a new and preliminary examination of only the parent subset of self-concept in order to grasp the unique contribution parental relations have.

The Present Investigation

The focus of this investigation is to examine the parental relations self-concept factor within the multidimensional self-concept instrument; the Self Description Question II-Short (SDQ II-S), in conjunction with bullying and being bullied instruments as measured by the Adolescent Peer Relations Instrument - Bully/Target (Marsh, Ellis, Parada, 2005; SDQII-S & APRI-BT; Parada, 2000). The aim of the present study is to discover how parental relations self-concept is related to bullying and being bullied for the sample utilised within this investigation. The purpose of this

study is to further build the on the limited literature of how adolescent perceived family relations influences individual involvement in the bully/victim cycle.

Aims and Research Questions

This study aims to further investigate the influence of the multi-dimensional self-concept on the bully/victim cycle. The research question explored: Does the parental relations self-concept factor hold significant relations within involvement in bullying?

Method

Participants

Students ($N = 106$; male = 54, female = 52) from one independent faith-based school in the Sydney metropolitan region, from Years 7 ($n = 35$), 8 ($n = 24$), and 9 ($n = 47$). This was a co-educational secondary school where students' ages ranged from 12 to 17, with a mean age of 13.6 years. Student participation was voluntary and with parental permission approved.

Instruments

The Adolescent Peer Relations Instrument (APRI). The Adolescent Peer Relations Instrument - Bully/Target (APRI-BT). The Adolescent Peer Relations Instrument - Bully/Target (APRI-BT)(Parada, 2000) is a self-report measurement consisting of 36 items, designed to measure 3 types of bullying (18 items) as well as three types of target behaviours (18 items): physical, verbal, and social/relational. Items were measured using a six-point likert scale ranging from 1= never to 6= everyday. The questions were behaviourally based, asking respondents how often they had engaged in specific forms of bullying (i.e., 'I have said things about their looks they didn't like', 'I have got my friends to turn against a student') or being bullied ("I was teased by students saying things to me", 'I was hit or kicked hard') within the school year. Even though this scale has only been recently developed the scale has been shown to be a psychometrically robust tool (i.e., internal consistency, reliability) (Marsh et al., 2004; Parada, Marsh, & Craven, 2005).

Parental Relations Self-concept Scale from The Self-Description Questionnaire II-Short (SDQII-S). The Self-Description Questionnaire II-short (SDQII-S)(Marsh, Ellis, Parada, Richards, & Heubeck, 2005) is a modified questionnaire from the original SDQ-II. The short version contains 51 items from the original 102-item questionnaire, measuring multi-dimensional self-concept in adolescences. SDQII-S contains 11 self-concept factors including three academic subscales (Math, Verbal, General School performance), seven psychosocial scales (Physical Ability, Physical Appearance, Opposite-Sex Relations, Same-Sex Relations, Parent Relations, Honesty/Trustworthiness and Emotional Stability), and one global self-concept measure. The SDQII-S is presented using a six-point likert response scale (ranging from 1=false to 6= true), with some items negatively worded. The shortened instrument has been found to achieve excellent psychometric properties (including internal consistency and reliability), approximately as efficacious as the SDQII (Marsh et al., 2005).

Procedure

Authorisation to conduct the study was granted by the University of Western Sydney Human Research Ethics Panel, followed by the school Principal. After

permission was granted by the school Principal to conduct the study, information letters were sent to the school Principal, teachers, school counsellor and year advisors, detailing the outline of the study. Two weeks prior to testing, consent forms were sent to parents of students in years 7, 8 and 9.

On commencement of testing, teachers received a package including the list of students who had permission to participate in the study, dialogue sheet and questionnaire sheets to handout to students. Questionnaire included information sheet, demographics sheet, APRI-BT, and SDQII-S. Students were separated into different classrooms according to their various grades and class division. All students participated simultaneously, to prevent feedback with other students. Prior to testing, teachers were instructed to read out the dialogue sheet to students. Students were assured that participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any time, without penalty. Students each received 30 minutes to complete questionnaire. After completion of task, teacher's collected questionnaires. At the end of study the teacher thanked, debriefed, and advised students that a school counsellor was available for further debriefing.

Statistical Analyses

Data screening was conducted, followed by a preliminary analysis of reliability estimates were assessed on the subscales of the APRI-BT. Hills (2005) suggest a Cronbach's Alpha estimate above .70 is generally considered satisfactory, while above .80 is considered excellent.

Data screening was run on all items using SPSS 14.0 to check for missing values, extreme scores, as well as the assumptions of normality, linearity, and homoscedasticity. Participants with more than 5% missing values were deleted. Other missing values were replaced by using the expectation-maximization (EM) algorithm. Results of evaluation of assumptions were met when univariate outliers were deleted based on observations of continuous extreme scores and multivariate outliers were checked with Mahalanobis distance score ($p < .001$) (Hills, 2005).

An initial Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) of latent factors utilised within this was conducted with LISREL 8.72, using maximum likelihood estimation. Based on the advice of Marsh, Balla & McDonald (1988), for goodness of fit indices, emphasis was placed upon root-mean-square error of approximation (RMSEA), Comparative Fit Index (CFI) and Non-Normed Fit Index (NNFI). For the RMSEA, values less than .05 reflect close fit, and values above .95 for the CFI and NNFI represent excellent fits for the data.

Preliminary Results

Data screening lead to a reduction of participants from 121 to 106. Furthermore, variables with missing variables below 5 % were subsequently replaced with scores from the Expectation Maximization (EM) algorithm in SPSS. The EM function predicts replacement values based on available information from cases answered, this function was used in present investigation (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). Internal consistency reliability analysis was conducted on the six factors of the APRI-BT. For Bully Total with a sample of ($N = 106$) Cronbach's Alpha reliability estimates were very strong ($\alpha = .941$). Total Target bullying factor Cronbach's Alpha reliability estimates were at ($\alpha = .952$).

Reliability of the SDQII-S.

SDQII-S eleven-factor structure was analysed for internal consistency reliability. Based on the sample Cronbach's Alpha reliability estimates were sound (range of $\alpha = .789$ - to $.890$). The lowest score came from the Emotional scale however; it was still satisfactory ($\alpha = .789$). This analysis contains a small sample size ($n=106$). However, this study is within the limits of Tabachnick and Fidell (2001) recommendation for analysis.

Reliability of the APRI-BT

An Internal consistency reliability analysis was conducted on the two factors of the APRI-BT this included Bullying Total and Target Total. Reliability analysis was run on a total sample of students ($N = 353$). Study One Cronbach's Alpha reliability for Bullying Total estimates were very strong ($\alpha = .933$). Cronbach's Alpha reliability estimates for Target-total factor were once again very strong ($\alpha = .929$).

Results

A confirmatory factor analyse (CFA) was run on the three relational SDQ-II-S factors and the six APRI-BT factors. The goodness of fit criteria for the overall CFA was poor (RMSEA = $.09$, CFI = $.88$, NNFI = $.87$), yet this results is most likely due to the small sample size (Marsh, et al., 1988). Correlations were analysed between the latent bullying factors and the latent self-concept factors of parental, opposite-sex and same-sex relations. Table 1 and 2 displays the correlations between the latent self-concept variables and the latent bullying and being bullied variables.

Table 1

Confirmatory factor analyse (CFA) correlations among Relational Self Concept factors with the latent bullying factors.

Self Concept	Bullying Factors		
	Physical	Verbal	Social
Parental Relations	-.29*	-.32*	-.34*

* $p < .05$

Table 2

Confirmatory factor analyse (CFA) correlations among relational self concept factors with targeted by bullying factors.

Self Concept	Targeted by Bullying Factors		
	Physical	Verbal	Social
Parental Relations	-.37*	-.38*	-.41*

* $p < .05$

Discussion

It was found that certain factors of self-concept were significantly related to involvement in bullying. The results of the CFA revealed a number significant negative relations between bullying and being bullied with parent relations self-concept. This result is in line with Marsh et al.'s (2004) study, which found similar

self-concept trends for both bullying and being bullied, thus further providing evidence that bullies and victims are more alike than different.

The outcomes of this study were supported by the results of Hay's (2000) research, which indicated a complex pattern of high and low self-concepts for students suspended due to anti-social behaviours. These students showed lower self-concept scores on academic, school and parental relations factors. Thus, such findings support the notion that the qualities of the parental/child relationship may be important predictors of adolescent behavioural outcomes, including motivation to, and resilience against bullying. In addition, the results are supported by Marsh et al.'s (2004) findings which indicate that healthy child/parental relations leads to reduced chances of adolescences participating in the bullying and victimisation behaviours. Furthermore, it was suggested that students with high self-concepts hold a psychological advantaged in that higher self-concepts may act like a protective mechanism in against students being trapped in the bullying cycle.

Due to small sample size utilised within this study, the results should be interpreted with considerable caution. However, some confidence could be maintained in the results of this study as the findings are consistent with the accumulating self-concept/bullying literature (Marsh et al., 2004; Parada et al., 2005). Regardless, future research should concentrate on implementing bullying prevention programs that include building and protecting positive relational self-concepts, especially with regard to students' confidence in having positive relations with their parents. Additionally, such intervention research would be better served with a larger sample size than that of this paper, so that the results will be further substantiated.

Future research would benefit from continuing to explore the links between family factors and self-concept, and how these variables may influence students who participate in bullying. In addition, future research should incorporate parents in bullying prevention programs, aiming to a more holistic approach.

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