



Bully/victim Profiles' differential risk for worsening peer acceptance: The role of friendship☆



Karen P. Kochel^{a,*}, Gary W. Ladd^b, Catherine L. Bagwell^c, Brandon A. Yabko^d

^a Department of Psychology, University of Richmond, United States

^b T. Denny Sanford School of Social and Family Dynamics & Department of Psychology, Arizona State University, United States

^c Department of Psychology, Colgate University, United States

^d Posttraumatic Stress Disorder and Polytrauma Clinics, George E. Wahlen Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center, United States

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 9 July 2014

Received in revised form 13 May 2015

Accepted 20 May 2015

Available online 15 August 2015

Keywords:

Bullying

Victimization

Friendship

Peer relationships

Latent profile analysis

ABSTRACT

Study aims were to: (1) evaluate the association between bully/victim profiles, derived via latent profile analysis (LPA), and changes in peer acceptance from the fall to spring of 7th grade, and (2) investigate the likelihood of friendlessness, and the protective function of mutual friendship, among identified profiles. Participants were 2587 7th graders; peer nomination and rating-scale data were collected in the fall and spring. Four profiles, including bullies, victims, bully-victims, and uninvolved adolescents, were identified at each time point. Findings showed that for victims, more so than for bullies and uninvolved profiles, acceptance scores worsened over time. Results further revealed that bully-victim and victim profiles included a greater proportion of friendless youth relative to the bully profile, which, in turn, contained a greater proportion of friendless adolescents than the uninvolved profile. Findings also provided evidence for the buffering role of friendship among all bully/victim profiles and among bully-victims especially.

© 2015 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

In early studies of bullying in school, researchers primarily investigated two profiles of youth—bullies, or youth who repeatedly aggress against weaker peers with the intent to harm, and victims, the recipients of bullies' aggression (see Olweus, 1978). Recently, however, it became apparent that a classificatory dichotomy comprised of bullies and victims does not effectively characterize all youth involved in bully/victim episodes. The fact that victims may experience harassment by a dominant peer and, at the same time, bully others who have lower status in relation to them (Salmivalli & Peets, 2009) provides one theoretical basis for a bully-victim profile. In fact, a number of investigators have posited and tested hypotheses about the relative risk of youth involved in victimization, bullying, and both forms of peer adversity simultaneously. A discovery that emerged from this work is that bully/victim profiles exhibit variability in their adjustment, including peer relations (e.g., Juvonen, Graham, & Schuster, 2003; Nansel et al., 2001; O'Brennan, Bradshaw, & Sawyer, 2009; Veenstra et al., 2005). Knowledge on this topic can be extended in three ways.

First, investigators who have studied bully/victim profiles have typically employed theory-driven classification strategies (e.g., standard

deviation cut-offs, frequency or percentile criteria) based on the dichotomization of continuous data to create bully, victim, bully-victim, and uninvolved profiles (but see Barker, Arseneault, Brendgen, Fontaine, & Maughan, 2008). We aimed to empirically derive bully/victim profiles using latent profile analysis (LPA), a mixture modeling technique that organizes individuals into homogenous profiles based on observed responses to a set of continuous variables. Scholars are increasingly advocating for LPA as a useful approach for partitioning data because of some notable drawbacks associated with traditional methods of classifying participants into extreme groups (e.g., Giang & Graham, 2008; Nylund, Bellmore, Nishina, & Graham, 2007). For example, the practice of designating cut-off scores and frequency or percentile criteria is arbitrary, which increases risk for classification error and, in turn, has the potential to undermine the predictive utility of profiles and/or result in inaccurate prevalence rates. LPA addresses these drawbacks and, also, maximizes flexibility, minimizes measurement error, and produces statistical fit indices that facilitate decisions about the number of profiles and decrease the likelihood of identifying theorized profiles only. In short, the current study has the potential to empirically validate profiles that, to this point, are largely theoretical.

Second, what has been learned to this point concerns within-time (as opposed to across-time) links between bully/victim profiles and peer relations. Accumulated evidence lends support for an association between bully/victim status and peer relationships, but it does not permit inferences about the extent to which bully/victim status *forecasts* longer-term social consequences. Longitudinal studies are needed,

☆ This study was conducted as part of the Pathways Project, a longitudinal study of youths' psychological, social, and scholastic adjustment. The Pathways Project was supported by the National Institutes of Health (1-RO1MH-49223, 2-RO1MH-49223, RO1HD-045906).

* Corresponding author at: Department of Psychology, 28 Westhampton Way, University of Richmond, VA 23173, USA. Tel.: +1 804 289 8131; fax: +1 804 287 1905.

E-mail address: kkochel@richmond.edu (K.P. Kochel).

therefore, to clarify whether bully/victim status interferes with the development of adaptive peer relations.

Third, an accruing body of evidence supports the perspective that, among youth as a whole, friendship buffers risk for victimization by (1) altering the link between risk factors and victimization, and (2) serving a protective function against the negative consequences associated with victimization (see Bagwell & Schmidt, 2011). It is unknown, however, whether mutual friendship buffers risk for declines in peer acceptance for some profiles of youth more so than others because researchers have yet to evaluate the relative protective function of mutual friendship for differing bully/victim profiles. This study was designed to extend prior research by permitting an evaluation of: (1) the relation between bully/victim status, derived via LPA, and changes in peer acceptance from the fall to spring of 7th grade, and (2) the likelihood of friendlessness, and the protective function of mutual friendship, among bully/victim profiles. An investigation that addresses these aims has the potential to shed light not only on bully/victim profiles' relative risk for longer-term social consequences but also the relative protective function of friendship.

Victimization and bullying: Precipitants of decreases in peer acceptance?

The perspective that being disliked by peers increases susceptibility for maladaptation (Ladd, 2005; Parker & Asher, 1987) has impelled investigations into factors that influence acceptance, rejection, and preference by the peer group. Acceptance (and rejection) are defined as the number of strong positive (or negative) links youth have with peer group members, and preference, or relative likeability, is a derivative construct that represents a combination of these two dimensions (Bukowski, Sippola, Hoza, & Newcomb, 2000; Ladd, 2005). Not surprisingly, perhaps, acceptance and rejection, and especially acceptance and preference, appear to be closely related constructs (e.g., $r_s = -.29$ to $-.46$ and $.71$ to $.83$, respectively, in the 3rd through 8th grades; Ettekal & Ladd, 2015). Given the conceptual and empirical overlap between acceptance, rejection, and preference, we review literature related to each of these constructs.

Results from longitudinal studies imply that victimization contributes to increases in peer rejection and low peer acceptance in preadolescence and adolescence (e.g., Hodges & Perry, 1999; Kochel, Ladd, & Rudolph, 2012). The fact that most youth disapprove of bullying (Salmivalli, 2010) suggests that bullying likewise has the potential to elicit peer rejection and low levels of peer acceptance and social preference. Bullies, though, are sometimes perceived popular and other times unpopular (Dijkstra, Lindenberg, & Veenstra, 2008; Peeters, Cillessen, & Scholte, 2010) with the former group being less likely to elicit negative peer evaluations (Peeters et al., 2010).

Studies that focus on peer acceptance among bully/victim profiles of American, Korean, and Dutch samples of youth yield evidence that suggests that bullies are more preferred and less rejected than bully-victims (Juvonen et al., 2003; Shin, 2010; Veenstra et al., 2005). Peer acceptance among victims versus bully-victims and bullies, however, is less clear. Some evidence suggests that victims score more favorably than bully-victims (Juvonen et al., 2003; Shin, 2010; Veenstra et al., 2005). Findings from other studies suggest the reverse is true (Scholte et al., 2009). With regard to victims' versus bullies' peer rejection, some research indicates that these profiles do not differ (Juvonen et al., 2003; Veenstra et al., 2005), but findings from at least one study imply that victims fare worse than bullies on peer preference (Shin, 2010). All in all, evidence suggests that bully-victims and victims and, to a lesser extent bullies, are at risk for being disliked by peers; however, inconsistent findings across studies, and the fact that studies have yet to focus on the relative contributions of bully/victim status to peer acceptance (i.e., across-time linkages), limits the conclusions that can be drawn. Longitudinal studies are needed to clarify bully/victim profiles' relative risk for decreases in peer acceptance and factors that mitigate such risk.

Exploring mutual friendship among bully/victim profiles

Liking appears to be a defining feature of friendship; however, peer acceptance (i.e., relative likeability) reflects a consensus among the peer group whereas friendship, a dyadic relationship, does not. Not surprisingly, therefore, research suggests that liking and friendship are related but partially distinct relational systems (Bukowski et al., 2000; Ladd, Kochenderfer, & Coleman, 1997). Friendships, and the provisions derived from them, including intimacy, companionship, support, and protection, are influential in adolescents' mastery of key developmental tasks (e.g., identity development, establishing romantic relationships; Bagwell & Schmidt, 2011). The latter provision implies that, though friendships may be developmentally significant for all adolescents, they might be especially so for youth involved in victimization and/or bullying. In view of this, an objective of the current study was to examine bully/victim profiles' relative risk for friendlessness (i.e., lack of involvement in mutual friendship).

Compared to victims and bully-victims, bullies are probably less risky peers with whom to affiliate, in part because they may be less liable to jeopardize peers' social standing. At the same time, bullies are prone to behaviors including aggression, impulsivity, and hostility (Veenstra et al., 2005) that are expected to decrease both their opportunities for developing friendships in the first place and their likelihood of maintaining friendships. It is possible, therefore, that a greater proportion of bullies experience friendlessness compared to youth uninvolved in victimization or bullying. We anticipate, however, that establishing and maintaining mutual friendships might be especially challenging for victims and bully-victims compared to bullies. Victims tend to exhibit a range of interpersonal and intrapersonal problems, including shyness, withdrawal, anxiety, submissiveness, low self-esteem, and insecurity (see Salmivalli & Peets, 2009), and these characteristics are not ideal for attracting or keeping friends. Indeed previous research suggests that highly victimized, relative to nonvictimized, youth have fewer friends (e.g., Scholte et al., 2009). Compared to victims, bully-victims may be at even higher risk for friendlessness. Bully-victims have been characterized as having low levels of self-control and social competence (Haynie et al., 2001) and high levels of externalizing behaviors (Arseneault et al., 2006; Kumpulainen et al., 1998) and conduct problems (Juvonen et al., 2003). As such, bully-victims may be less often sought out by peers as friends, and peers may be more apt to refuse their social overtures. In short, bully-victims are unlikely to provide the emotional support and careful balancing of reciprocal interactions that are signatures of good friendships.

Studies focused on the friendships of youth with different bully/victim profiles provide mixed support for the above theoretical perspectives. Findings from investigations of childhood and adolescent samples recruited from the United States, Switzerland, and Korea imply that, compared to victims and bully-victims, bullies are more likely to have mutual friends (O'Brennan et al., 2009; Shin, 2010); moreover, Nansel et al. (2001) reported that, among a representative American sample of 6th through 10th graders, the ability to make friends was positively related to bully status but negatively related to victim status (and not significantly related to bully-victim status). It is unclear how the friendships of bully-victims and victims compare, but findings from several studies suggest that bully-victims' and victims' friendships do not differ markedly (e.g., in terms of number of friends; O'Brennan et al., 2009; Scholte et al., 2009; Shin, 2010). Research is needed to clarify bully/victim profiles' relative risk for friendlessness.

A related objective was to examine the possibility that friendship moderates the link between bully/victim profiles and changes in peer acceptance over the course of a school year. To our knowledge, investigators have yet to evaluate the protective function of friendship among bully/victim profiles, and thus, it is unknown whether friendship buffers risk for decreases in peer acceptance for youth involved in victimization alone or in combination with bullying.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/359604>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/359604>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)