Bullying and the Gifted:
Victims, Perpetrators, Prevalence, and Effects

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ABSTRACT

Gifted eighth graders (N = 432) in 11 U.S. states participated in a retrospective national study that explored the prevalence and effects of being bullied and being a bully during kindergarten through grade 8. No significant differences were found related to size of city, race/ethnicity, and geographical region in terms of either being bullied or being a bully. Sixty-seven percent of all participants had experienced at least 1 of 13 kinds of bullying listed on the survey, more in grade 6 than in other grades, and 11% had experienced repeated bullying. Name-calling and teasing about appearance were the most common kinds of bullying, and the latter was among several kinds of bullying significantly related to emotional impact. In grade 8, 16% were bullies, and 29% had violent thoughts. At all grade levels, a larger percentage of males than females were bullied, were bullied more than 10 times, and were bullies.

PUTTING THE RESEARCH TO USE

This study provides information to parents, school personnel, and counselors that can be useful when advocating for the safety and well-being of gifted students. The reality that many victims apparently do not report incidents to adults at school or at home means that parents, teachers, and counselors should keep bullying in mind when attempting to ascertain why a child expresses hopelessness, appears uncomfortable in school, withdraws socially, becomes hypervigilant, or has problems eating or sleeping.

Direct questions about bullying (e.g., "Have you ever seen someone being bullied?" "Have you ever been bullied?"), including references to a wide range of bullying behaviors (e.g., "Have you ever seen a student threaten someone?"), may generate important revelations. Open-ended questions are best for generating conversation without provoking defensiveness (e.g., "Tell me about recess, the lunchroom, lining up for the bus. How do the kids behave when they're not in the classroom?" "How do you feel when you're on your way to school in the morning?"). Teachers, in the classroom and when supervising elsewhere, need to consider bullying broadly, watch for both overt and subtle bullying, not ignore bullying when it occurs, and not blame the victim. The finding that gifted children and early adolescents can also be bullies suggests that teachers should be particularly alert to nonphysical bullying, which the study found to be associated with gifted bullies, and intervene immediately. Proactive psychoeducational curriculum for young gifted children and others, as well, can encourage pro-social behavior and enhance coping and general interpersonal skills.

Bullying has been defined in various ways. It has been described as "negative physical or verbal actions that have hostile intent, cause distress to victims, are repeated over time, and involve a power differential between bullies and their victims" (Craig & Pepler, 2003, p. 577). Some researchers have distinguished between bullying as proactive aggression, which seeks to improve social status and control others, and bullying as reactive aggression, which is related to anger (Bosworth, Espelage, & Simon, 1999). Olweus (1991) referred to indirect (e.g., social isolation, exclusion, nonselection) and direct (e.g., open attacks) bullying. Bosworth et al. defined bullying as a kind of aggressive behavior with potential to cause physical or psychological harm to the recipient. For Craig and Pepler, "all bullying is abuse" (p. 581), and level of distress reflects level of seriousness.

In recent years, national media in the United States have helped to raise concerns about bullying, including

connecting it to incidents of school violence. As a result, at least 22 states have passed anti-bullying legislation since 1999 (Payne, 2005). However, the phenomenon of bullying among school children has received substantial research attention only relatively recently in the United States (e.g., Berthold & Hoover, 2000; Haynie et al., 2001; Hunter & Boyle, 2002; Juvonen, Graham, & Schuster, 2003; Nansel et al., 2001). In contrast, international research attention to bullying began in the 1970s (e.g., Olweus, 1973, 1978), continuing to the present (e.g., Andreou, 2001; Baldry, 2003; O'Connell, Pepler, & Craig, 1999; Olweus, 1997; Pateraki, 2001; van der Wal, de Wit, & Hirasing, 2003; Wolke, Woods, Stanford, & Schulz, 2001; Zhang, Gong, Wang, Wu, & Zhang, 2002).

One of eight findings in a United States Secret Service investigation of 37 incidents of targeted violence in schools (Vossekuil, Reddy, & Fein, 2001) was that bullying played a key role in the attacks. Spivak and Prothrow-Stith (2001) also concluded that the link between bullying and later violence is clear. News analysts (e.g., Hughes, 1999) and other media (e.g., Brown & Merritt, 2002) have indicated that the perpetrators of some of these tragedies were highly intelligent, even identified as "gifted." It is somewhat surprising, then, that there has been little research attention to bullying among gifted children and adolescents.

Because of the dearth of research related specifically to gifted students and bullying, ascertaining the prevalence of bullying among gifted students—as victims, bullies, or bullies/victims—has not been possible. Common stereotypes of gifted students do not include individuals who are bullies. However, as teachers and school and mental health counselors, the authors had seen that gifted children and adolescents were not immune to traumatic victimization by bullies. The authors speculated that some characteristics associated with giftedness (Piechowski, 1997; Robinson, 2002) might contribute to hypersensitive responses to bullying. They also viewed bullying within a developmental framework, recognizing that developmental transitions can challenge gifted children somewhat uniquely (Peterson, 2001), with the trauma of bullying potentially exacerbating already difficult developmental transitions. In addition, many gifted school-age individuals are silent about inner conflict (Peterson, 2001) and do not ask for help easily (Peterson, 2002). Gifted victims of bullying may therefore suffer in silence, and educators and parents may not know when a gifted child is being victimized.

When they first imagined the study, the authors assumed that gifted bullies did exist, but also assumed that the study would focus largely on gifted victims. In the end, their findings challenged those initial assumptions. Those findings can provide helpful information for educators, parents, and counselors of the gifted, as well as for gifted children and adolescents themselves.

Review of Literature

Research and conceptual literature related to bullying comes almost entirely from outside of the field of gifted education—for example, developmental, educational, school, and social psychology; sociology; health and medicine; criminal justice; education; and counseling. The following review of literature discusses sampling, prevalence, intervention, social context, gender, characteristics, and method across a wide array of representative studies. The review concludes with reference to pertinent literature related to giftedness.

Literature From Other Fields

Samples. Samples have typically been drawn from within an age range of 9 to 14 (e.g., Haynie et al., 2001; Hunter & Boyle, 2002; Phoenix, Frosh, & Pattman, 2003; van der Wal et al., 2003), although a few have included primary-level children (e.g., Pateraki, 2001) or older students (Nansel et al., 2001) or both (Smith, Madsen, & Moody, 1999). Sample size has ranged from an unusually high 83,000 (Olweus, 1993a) to fewer than 100 (e.g., Hawkins, Pepler & Craig, 2001).

Prevalence. Studies have looked at prevalence and found that bullying is pervasive. In the United States, studies have found that more than one third of middle school students felt unsafe at school because of bullying (Batsche & Knoff, 1994; Hazler, Hoover, & Oliver, 1993). In Orpinas, Home, and Staniszewski's (2003) U.S. study, 89% of elementary school children reported being the target of at least one aggressive act, and in Hoover, Oliver, and Hazler's (1992) study of Midwestern adolescents, approximately 75% reported that they had been bullied at some time during their school years. Regarding repetition, percentages vary, perhaps because of varying definitions of *bullying* and of *repetition*. Slee (1994) found in a study of Australian adolescents that 26% were bullied frequently. In a British study, Boulton and Underwood (1992) found that 10% of children ages 9–12 were extreme victims, and in a U.S. study of elementary children, Orpinas et al. found that 37% reported 10 or more acts of bullying.

In general, prevalence figures vary widely. Baldry (2003), in a study of students ages 8–15 in Italy, found

that 59% had been victims during the preceding 3 months. In a Canadian study, Craig and Pepler (2003) found that 34% of males and 27% of females in grades 6, 8, and 10 had been victims in the past 6 weeks. Similarly, in a U.S. study, Berthold and Hoover (2000) found that 30% had been victims in grades 4–6. Two other studies in the United States, both associated with the 1998 World Health Organization's Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children survey, had dissimilar findings. Haynie et al. (2001) found that 31% of middle school students had been victimized three or more times and that 24% had bullied someone in the preceding year. More than half of bullies reported being victims, as well. In contrast, Nansel et al. (2001) found that 11% in grades 6–10 had been bullied, 13% had been a bully, and 6% had been bullies/victims. Others have also found relatively lower percentages. Weir (2001) summarized fairly consistent international figures of victimization, ranging from 14% in Norway to 19% in England, and noted that bullying appears to peak in prevalence at age 7 and again at ages 10–12. Batsche and Knoff's (1994) summary of U.S. studies of various age ranges had a 15–20% rate for victims. Wolke et al. (2001) found that 24% of children age 6–8 in England and 8% of 8-year-olds in Germany were bullied weekly, and Pellegrini, Bartini, and Brooks (2001) found that 14% of students were bullied in the United States during elementary school.

Percentages of students who bullied others have also varied. Craig and Pepler's (2003) Canadian study found that 54% of males and 32% of females of students in grades 6, 8, and 10 were bullies. In the Haynie et al. (2001) U.S. study, 24% of middle school students had bullied someone during the preceding year, and more than half of them reported being victims, as well. In two U.S. studies, 20% were bullies in grades 4–6 (Berthold & Hoover, 2000), 23% had been bullies, and 6% had been bullies/victims in grades 6–10 (Nansel et al., 2001). Boulton and Underwood's (1992) British study found that 17% of 8- and 9-year-old males had bullied others, and Batsche and Knoff's (1994) U.S. summary showed an 8–20% range of bullies across various age levels.

Variation from study to study in the definition of bullying (e.g., a continuum of behaviors or physical aggression only) and time frame (e.g., past 30 days, past 3 years, past month) probably accounted for at least some of the differences in findings just summarized. However, most definitions include repetition and power imbalances (Espelage & Swearer, 2003). Bosworth et al. (1999) noted three other problems across research studies: focusing on only the ends of a continuum of behaviors; underreporting because of students' potential discomfort in describ-

ing their behaviors as bullying; and the fact that studies in the United States have focused on physical aggression. In terms of types of bullying, Zhang et al. (2002), in a large Chinese study of elementary and junior-middle-school students, and Rivers and Smith (1994), in a British study of children age 8–16, found that direct verbal bullying was most common.

Social Context. In a study of students in grades 6–8 in England and in grade 8 in Germany, socioeconomic status and ethnicity were only weakly associated with bullying behavior (Wolke et al., 2001), and Seals and Young (2003), in a U.S. study of students in grades 7 and 8, found no significant differences in involvement in bullying based on ethnicity. Juvonen et al. (2003) also found relatively low percentages of bullying among low-socioeconomic Hispanic and African American sixth graders in the United States (N = 1,985): 7% bullies, 9% victims, and 6% bullies-victims. In the Nansel et al. (2001) study of students in grades 6–10 in the United States, African American youth reported being bullied relatively less frequently, and Hispanic youth slightly more frequently, than the total sample, but found no significant differences in frequency among urban, suburban, town, and rural areas.

Akiba, LeTendre, Baker, and Goesling (2002) concluded, based on international data, that societal patterns such as social-integration variables, divorce rates, and percentage of linguistic minority were not related to national patterns of school violence. This finding "calls into question the link between cultural conflict, parental bonding, effective parenting, and their relation to juvenile violence" (p. 846). These authors speculated that "factors outside of school may not be as strong as previously hypothesized" (p. 847) and that school violence must be considered independently. However, low-monitoring, low-warmth, overprotective, and neglectful parenting styles have all been implicated, and in Baldry's (2003) Italian study of elementary and middle school children, those exposed to interparental violence were more likely to bully others directly. Regarding school factors, Akiba et al. found that schools with greater achievement differences between high-achieving and low-achieving students tended to have more violence and argued that equalizing the quality of education would lessen the possibility that achievement differences would spawn violence.

In terms of social context, bullying can begin in early childhood, when children struggle to establish social dominance (Long & Pellegrini, 2003). Conduct problems may then continue into the early school years (Young, 1999). The Wolke et al. (2001) study of 6- and 8-year-olds in England and Germany found that most bullying

occurred in playgrounds and classrooms, although Craig and Pepler (2003) noted that bullying can also occur on the Internet, at the mall, and at home among siblings. Long and Pellegrini's North American longitudinal study, with observations first in grade 6, suggested that bullying, especially for males, increases while dominance is being established during transitions into new environments and different social structures (e.g., early in middle school) and then decreases over time. Dominance in females may appear to decrease over time, but that decrease might actually mask an increase in alternative, less physical forms of aggression, including relational aggression. Two other studies supported the latter assumption. Craig and Pepler (2003), in Canada, found that the percent of female victims did not decrease with age, and Bjorkqvist, Osterman, and Kaukiainen (1992), in Finland, found that physical aggression declined, but verbal and indirect aggression increased, during childhood and early adolescence. In terms of immediate social context, Hawkins et al. (2001) found, in their study of Canadian children ages 6–12, that peers were present 88% of the time when bullying occurred and intervened 19% of the time, and that 57% of interveners were effective in stopping the behavior.

In regard to changes in prevalence of bullying over time, Smith et al. (1999) offered several tentative hypotheses. Each successive grade level means less likelihood of victimization for a child, because increasingly fewer are older in the peer hierarchy. Students again become vulnerable to older adolescents when entering secondary school, but experience less bullying from same-age peers because peer-status factors related to establishing social dominance may stabilize by age 15. In addition, increasing social skills and social cognition, socialization, and more complex group structures contribute to a decline in bullying. Finally, increased understanding of others' feelings means more prosocial behavior, but also, paradoxically, increased skills at deception.

One study of school-culture factors found that bullying was a systemic problem (Craig & Pepler, 2003). Ma's (2002) finding that schools with a positive discipline climate and high parental involvement had fewer bullies in grade 6 supports the notion that systemic interventions can decrease bullying.

Gender. In addition to the conclusions discussed in regard to social context, other gender-related findings should be noted. More males than females were perpetrators and victims in both the Haynie et al. (2001) U.S. study and the Wolke et al. (2001) study of English and German elementary-age children. More males than females reported direct, open victimization in Baldry's (2003)

Italian study of elementary and middle school children and in the Nansel et al. (2001) U.S. study of grades 6–10. Females have been associated with indirect modes of bullying, such as exclusion and spreading rumors, in recent literature (Simmons, 2002). In a study of Norwegian students in grades 6–9 (Endresen & Olweus, 2001), females increased in empathic concern for both genders in distress, but males decreased in concern for distressed males. One relatively weak finding suggested that empathic concern for peers in distress may inhibit aggression.

Characteristics. The idea of a predisposition for aggressiveness has been supported by research findings showing that individual differences in aggressiveness appear stable over time (Eron & Huesmann, 1990). Researchers have also studied correlates of bullying. Olweus (1995) associated bullies with aggressive reaction patterns, physical strength, impulsivity, and a need to dominate others. According to Young (1999), violent youth are characterized by "the habit of dehumanizing others," which sharpens "the perceived differences between 'us' and 'them'" (p. 10). Socially, bullies are central individuals who have a great deal of social control within their peer group (Craig & Pepler, 2003). During middle school in the United Kingdom, they are developmentally more advanced, more likely to be involved in romantic relationships, and more likely to report verbal and physical aggression within romantic relationships, according to Connolly, Pepler, Craig, and Taradash (2000). Craig and Pepler commented accordingly: "With heightened awareness of emerging sexuality and sexual identity, adolescents can readily acquire power over others by identifying vulnerabilities related to sexuality and using these as a means to bully through sexual harassment" (p. 579). In terms of conflict, Bosworth et al. (1999), in their study of U.S. middle school students, found that bullying was negatively correlated with confidence in using nonviolent strategies. Wolke et al. (2001) found that most bullies were also victims in their study of English and German elementary-age children.

Perry, Kusel, and Perry (1988) found a connection between being a victim and unpopularity in a study of U.S. children in grades 3–6 and noted that the propensity to be victimized was established by middle school. According to Boulton and Underwood (1992), that tendency is stable through the years. Other scholars have related victimization to low self-esteem and low assertiveness (Rigby, 2003), social anxiety (Slee, 1994), internalizing disorders such as anxiety and depression (Rodkin & Hodges, 2003), absenteeism, and the belief that school is not a safe place (Rigby, 1995). Olweus (1993b) associated being bullied with small stature and an implicit

message that there will be no retaliation. Bowers, Smith, and Binney (1994) found that some victims come from enmeshed, overprotective households that do not promote assertiveness. Juvonen et al. (2003), studying U.S. Hispanic and Black children in low-socioeconomic circumstances, found that victims were socially marginalized and emotionally distressed, and that those who were both bullies and victims had the most conduct, school, and peer-relationship problems.

Skliopideou's (2002) adult participants, looking retrospectively at their school years, reported that they rarely told anyone about being bullied. Perhaps pertinent to that finding, van der Wal et al. (2003), studying children ages 9–13 in the Netherlands, found that both bullies and victims reported more depression and suicidal ideation than a control group, underscoring the need for attention to the mental health of both perpetrators and victims. Similarly, in their overview, Spivak and Prothrow-Stith (2001) noted that bullying and being bullied were both associated with poor psychosocial functioning.

Poor functioning later in life has also been associated with bullying during the school years. Bullying is a precursor of more serious aggression (Batsche & Knoff, 1994) and is related to a criminal record later in life (Eron, 1994), therefore ultimately detrimental to bullies (Clarke & Kiselica, 1997). Indeed, bullies are likely to continue to use power and aggression in relationships over the lifespan (Craig & Pepler, 2003), including in the workplace (Dilts-Harryman, 2004). School interventions are therefore critical for bullies, as well as for victims. Tremblay (1992) found a direct causal link between disruptive behavior in grade 1 and subsequent delinquent behavior. Yet, pertinent to the present study, intelligence can help antisocial youth change course (Young, 1999).

Intervention. Prevalence can be modified with bullying-prevention programs (Nansel et al., 2001; Orpinas et al., 2003). U.S. professionals have argued for school-wide interventions (e.g., Dake, Price, Telljohann, & Funk, 2003; Heinrichs, 2003; Naylor & Cowie, 1999). For Weddle (2003), the focus should be on both the situation at hand and the general climate of the school, and for Dupper and Meyer-Adams (2002), changing the school culture can make schools safe havens for all students. Finnish researcher Salmivalli (1999) emphasized that attention should shift from victims to peers who have participant roles in bullying. Regarding interventions, a number of empirically validated programs and strategies for reducing bullying in schools have been documented (e.g., Howard, Horne, & Jolliff, 2001; Olweus, 1993b, 2001, 2003; Orpinas et al., 2003). Smith et al. (1999) emphasized that understanding

development is important when designing interventions against bullying.

However, Spivak and Prothrow-Stith (2001), in a broad discussion, noted that school shootings have also generated "disturbing" practices such as profiling, labeling, and rigid and punitive school policies in the United States. Instead, according to Furlong, Morrison, and Greif (2003), interventions should focus on the relational aspects of bullying. Cameron and Thorsborne (2001), also countering a punitive emphasis, advocated a restorative-justice approach, aimed at restoring positive relationships. Recognizing that victims often feel inappropriate shame, Rigby (2003) supported this approach, in which victims are allowed to express hurt to perpetrators. He recommended developing cooperative problem solving, emotional sensitivity, and independent, critical thinking in students, instead of implementing strict codes of behavior or utilizing individual counseling. Smith and Sandhu (2004) also proposed a positive approach, promoting optimal levels of development instead of repair of dysfunction. In fact, "Bullying at School" (2004), from the juvenile-justice literature, listed several common approaches as ineffective: (a) conflict-resolution training, because the conflicts are not between peers of equal status, and students alone cannot solve bullying problems; (b) a "zero-tolerance" policy, because it is often implemented without in-depth analysis of the school context, and suspensions result in unsupervised bullies in the community; (c) group therapy, because most bullies do not have low self-esteem; and (d) encouraging victims to "stand up" to bullies, because challenging bullies may be dangerous.

Method. Studies generally have not explored the connection between types of bullying and degree of trauma. In addition, survey research to determine prevalence of bullying has generally been cross-sectional at various grade levels, asking students if they were bullies or victims in the past year, for example (Haynie et al., 2001), and not retrospective or longitudinal. Long and Pellegrini's (2003) complex study of the long-term nature of bullying and dominance is an exception. Studies have also generally used self-report questionnaires, sometimes using a single item to inquire about bullying behavior (Haynie et al.). Absence of a clear definition on surveys (Furlong et al., 2003) may mean that bullying is underreported in studies, just as in schools, where often only physical aggression and extortion are seen as bullying (Garbarino & deLara, 2003), especially at the primary level (Smith et al., 1999). In addition, almost all research has been school based; notable exceptions are two studies in the United Kingdom of calls to a free telephone

helpline for children (LaFontaine, 1991) and a similar study in South Australia (Rigby, 1996).

Literature Related to Giftedness

The review of literature found no studies of bullying among gifted children, despite the rapidly growing research base for bullying in general. However, some of the gifted education literature related to social and emotional concerns is relevant to bullying. Particularly pertinent is the literature about sensitivities and intensities in gifted children (e.g., Piechowski, 1997), which refers to consequent anxiety, phobias, and interpersonal problems (Fiedler, 1999); gifted children's lack of fit with the school environment (Gross, 2002); and the harassment experienced by gifted teens who are perceived to be gay (Peterson & Rischar, 2000). Scholars have suggested that gifted students may be vulnerable to isolation and loneliness and at risk for developing internalizing disorders (Robinson & Noble, 1991; Webb, 1993). Developmental asynchrony (Silverman, 2002) and non-stereotypical gender behavior (Hébert, 2002) may also contribute to vulnerability to bullying, and emotional intensity of gifted children (Piechowski) may make bullying particularly traumatic for them.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to address the gap in the literature just described, exploring the phenomenon of bullying among gifted children and early adolescents and giving attention to both victims and perpetrators. The research questions that guided the study are as follows:

1. To what extent are K–8 gifted students victims or perpetrators of bullying?
2. Does prevalence of bullying among K–8 gifted students differ according to gender, grade level, race/ethnicity, geographical location, and population density?
3. What kinds of bullying are experienced by gifted victims, and in what kinds of bullying are gifted perpetrators involved?
4. To what extent are gifted bullying victims affected by being bullied?
5. Do K–8 gifted students have violent thoughts and do violent deeds?

Findings in this study might guide future confirmatory and comparative studies examining bullying and giftedness.

Participants

Participants were 432 gifted eighth graders. The study focused on this grade level for several reasons. First, eighth grade is sometimes the last grade for formal gifted education "programs" (cf. Feldhusen, 1997), and therefore it was deemed advantageous to secure participants before high school began. Second, eighth graders were assumed to be able to recall experiences from kindergarten through grade 8 somewhat clearly. Third, gifted eighth graders were assumed to be able to articulate complex situations and emotions, thereby illuminating the phenomenon of interest.

Students in 16 school districts in 11 states (California, Arizona, Wyoming, Georgia, Texas, Maryland, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Illinois, and Nebraska) participated. Explanatory material for cooperating teachers accompanied the surveys and indicated that eighth graders who had been identified by their school district as gifted were invited to participate, regardless of the form of a particular program. Regional distribution of participants was as follows: 50% Midwest (Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Nebraska); 26% East (Maryland); 13% South (Georgia); 9% West (Wyoming, California, Texas, Arizona); and 2% mixed (summer residential institute for gifted students). Participants were also categorized according to the population density of the community where their school was located: 54% Large City (> 75,000); 14% Medium City (25,000–75,000); 24% Small City (15,000–25,000); and 7% Rural (< 15,000).

Large-city schools in Maryland and Iowa and one large suburban Illinois school district provided the bulk of participants. To some extent, the sample was a convenience sample, because professional acquaintances in 12 of the school districts helped to gain access to school-age participants. However, of the districts initially contacted, 54% either denied access outright or delayed approval too long for the project to include them, even when an advocate was contacted directly. Of the 46% of the contacted schools who participated, the participation rate per school ranged from 8% to 80% of identified gifted eighth graders. Parental permission was required for participation, and, based on informal reports of the designated contact persons, level of participation appeared to vary according to the extent of local investment in the project, the contacts' access to teachers who would administer the survey, and the level of encouragement to students to secure parent permission and participate.

Gender distribution was 48% male and 52% female. Racial/ethnic distribution was 68% White, 15% African

American, 6% Multiracial, 5% Asian/Pacific Islander, 2% Hispanic, and 2% Other.

Procedures

Most potential school sites for the study were contacted by regular mail. They received a packet containing cover letters for administrators and cooperating teachers, a parent permission form, approval from the human subjects review board, a detailed description of the study, and a copy of the survey. In a few cases, the initial contact was made by e-mail. In some cases, several weeks of communication with district administrators followed. In others, regardless of school or district size, permission was granted quickly. When an agreement to participate was in place, the sites received the appropriate number of surveys and permission forms. The contact at the site then organized the process of securing parental permission and administering the survey, enlisting the help of teachers when the survey was done in classrooms. The contact returned the completed surveys and parental permission forms by mail. Subsequent to data analysis, participating schools received a summary of major findings. Schools received an additional summary of findings related specifically to their context if there had been enough participants to ensure that individual students could not be identified in the aggregated data.

Instruments

A nonstandardized survey instrument (see Appendix) included items requesting both quantifiable and narrative information. The survey items were created based on the researchers' tacit knowledge from accumulated school counseling experience and on various studies described in the existing literature. Items were intentionally greater in number and in scope than those in most available surveys in order to capture nuances of the complex phenomenon of bullying. No precise narrative definition was provided, but several kinds of bullying were listed early in the survey in order to ensure that participants would perceive the construct broadly, in accordance with existing literature attesting to a wide range of bullying behaviors. Nonphysical, as well as physical, kinds of bullying were included with the rationale that sensitivity and overexcitabilities, as described in the literature (Piechowski, 1997), might contribute to intense responses to nonphysical bullying. Categories related to number of bullying experiences ranged from *1* to *10 or more* per grade level, moving away from the idea that repetition of behavior is part of the definition of bullying,

and reflecting the hypothesis that even one incident might have significant repercussions. For many of the questions, all grade levels were listed in table form so that, for example, participants would identify specifically when they were victims or perpetrators of bullying.

Data Analysis

Statistical analysis was conducted with SPSS version 11.5. Because of the sample size and because responses were so often differentiated by grade level, each participant was associated with 549 potential data points. Therefore, selectivity of analyses was essential. Logistic regression and ordinal regression were the primary methods of analysis. Some significant differences were found, but not for several variables of particular interest (e.g., the relationship between various types of bullying and degree of impact, and between being bullied and thinking about, or committing, violence). Nevertheless, percentages were compelling and are presented here. Factor analysis was conducted regarding kinds of bullying.

Narrative responses on the survey were usually brief, often just one or two words, and were easily categorized without extensive qualitative analysis (e.g., participants told parent, friend, sibling, teacher, principal; participants were called names related to appearance, intelligence, personality, expletives; participants worried about grades, drugs, violence). Longer responses were analyzed independently by one researcher and one assistant, each developing a color-coding scheme to identify themes that emerged, reflecting the constant-comparative methodology of Glaser and Strauss (1967), with categories open to modification and language units continually reassessed for fit. Subsequently, the researcher and assistant compared analyses and met with the second researcher, who served as a peer debriefer for verification (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Some participant comments were then regrouped according to consensus.

Findings

Findings from statistical analysis of most of the survey data will be the major focus here. Findings related to narrative responses are presented at the end of this section.

Prevalence of Being Bullied

Prevalence of being bullied at some time during all 9 years of school (K–8) was 67% (73% of males; 63% of

Table 1

Prevalence of Being Bullied, Grades K–8, by Gender (N = 432)

Category	Grade								
	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Total sample	27%	28%	31%	36%	39%	42%	**46%**	44%	42%
Males	32%	33%	34%	38%	44%	45%	**54%**	48%	46%
Females	22%	23%	28%	33%	34%	**39%**	**38%**	**39%**	**38%**
1 time	**15%**	11%	11%	10%	11%	10%	10%	9%	9%
2–3 times	7%	10%	10%	10%	11%	12%	15%	**16%**	**16%**
4–6 times	2%	2%	4%	7%	6%	5%	6%	8%	7%
More than 10 times	2%	3%	4%	4%	7%	10%	**11%**	7%	8%
Of *all* males	3%	4%	5%	5%	9%	10%	**14%**	11%	9%
Of *all* females	1%	2%	3%	3%	5%	**9%**	8%	4%	7%
Of *bullied* males	11%	13%	15%	14%	23%	23%	**25%**	22%	19%
Of *bullied* females	4%	10%	10%	9%	14%	**24%**	21%	10%	18%

Note. Boldface indicates peak percentages.

females), and ranged from 27% of all participants in kindergarten to 46% (54% of males) in grade 6, after which it declined. Prevalence of females being bullied remained steady at 38% or 39% during grades 5 through 8, the peak years for females.

More participants were also victims of repeated bullying in grade 6 than in other grades, with 14% of *all* males, and 25% of male *victims* being bullied more than 10 times. Approximately the same percent of female *victims* (24%) were bullied to that extent in grade 5. These percentages declined steadily at the next grade levels. In general, in terms of gender, a higher percentage of gifted males than gifted females were bullied, but the percentages of male and female students bullied more than 10 times were fairly similar in grades 5 and 8. Table 1 displays prevalence per grade level, including number of incidents per year.

What Kind of Bullying?

Participants were asked to discriminate among several kinds of bullying, both physical and nonphysical. Name-calling (highest in grade 6 at 35% of all participants) was the most prevalent kind of bullying reported across all school years, followed by teasing about appearance (24%, grade 6), teasing about intelligence and grades (19%, grades 8 and 7), pushing/shoving (13%, grade 6), beating up (12%, grade 6), knocking books (11%, grade 8), and hitting/punching (9%, grade 8). Name-calling, teasing about appearance, pushing/shoving, and beating up showed small declines after grade 6, but almost all other kinds of bullying continued to increase gradually in prevalence through grade 8, including hitting/punching. Table 2 summarizes the prevalence of various kinds of bullying.

Name-calling, the highest prevalence category, was differentiated during analysis into five thematic categories: appearance, intellectual capability, expletives, sexual, and personality. These categories, in rank order from most to least frequent, with percent of total responses and examples (when publishable), are as follows: (a) appearance—41%, with a 3:1 ratio of weight to height: *whale, fatboy, tubby, chubbs, ugly, big boobs, midget, anorexic freak, twig, stringbean*; (b) intellectual capability—36%: *dork, geek, nerd, smarty, idiot, moron, retard, dumb;* (c) expletives—8%, associated with grades 7 and 8: unpublishable; (d) sexual references—8%, mostly associated with grades 7 and 8, with many unpublishable: *slut, bitch, fag, gay*; (e) personality—6%: *crybaby, jerk, mean, freak, wacko, loser, snot, poser, skater, weird.* Appearance was a focus of teasing from grades 5–8, with more than 1 in 5 participants experiencing this kind of teasing.

Table 2

Types of Bullying Experienced by Victims, Grades K–8 (N = 423)

Type of bullying	Grade								
	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Name-calling	21%	20%	22%	26%	28%	32%	**35%**	33%	32%
Teasing									
Appearance	7%	7%	10%	13%	17%	21%	**24%**	23%	23%
Intelligence	2%	3%	5%	8%	12%	13%	17%	18%	**19%**
Grades	2%	3%	4%	7%	11%	14%	18%	**19%**	18%
Family	1%	1%	1%	1%	3%	4%	5%	5%	**6%**
Social status	1%	1%	2%	2%	4%	4%	4%	5%	**6%**
Knocking books	1%	1%	2%	2%	3%	4%	10%	10%	**11%**
Damaging possessions	1%	1%	1%	2%	3%	4%	4%	**5%**	5%
Taking possessions	1%	2%	1%	2%	2%	3%	3%	4%	**5%**
Threatening, intimidating	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	2%	**3%**
Hitting/Punching	2%	2%	3%	3%	5%	7%	7%	8%	**9%**
Pushing/Shoving	6%	7%	10%	8%	10%	11%	**13%**	12%	11%
Beating up	1%	2%	3%	4%	7%	7%	**12%**	11%	11%

Note. Boldface indicates peak percentages.

Table 3

Impact of Being Bullied, Grades K–8: Extreme Categories

How much were you affected by bullying?	Grade								
	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
	N = 117	N = 125	N = 140	N = 158	N = 174	N = 186	N = 203	N = 195	N = 186
"A lot"	3%	5%	5%	6%	9%	**13%**	11%	9%	8%
"Not at all"	11%	11%	11%	10%	11%	11%	12%	11%	**16%**

Note. Boldface indicates peak percentages.

Impact of Bullying

Bullied participants were asked to rate the emotional impact of being bullied on a continuum from *not at all* to *a lot*. Grade 5 represented the peak year in terms of emotional impact (13% indicating *a lot*), after which percentages declined. The percentage of students who checked *not at all* was fairly steady from kindergarten through grade 7 (10% to 12%), with grade 8 showing a sudden increase in *not at all* from 11% to 16%. In grade 6, where so many percentages peaked, 46% of all participants were bullied, 11% were bullied more than 10 times, and 11% were bothered a lot by being bullied. Table 3 shows the percentages of participants who indicated extremes on that portion of the survey.

Ordinal regression (the Polytomous Logit Universal Models procedure from SPSS 11.5) was used to examine the emotional impact of various kinds of bullying because this analysis can accommodate categorical predictor and criterion variables with multiple levels. Name-calling was consistently the most prevalent kind of bullying, but its relationship with impact was not statistically significant at any grade level. However, other kinds of bullying were associated with impact. The relationship between being teased about appearance and being bothered "a lot" was significant in grades 6 and 7 ($p < .001$) and in grade 5 ($p < .002$). The relationship between being teased about intelligence and being bothered a lot was significant in grade 7 ($p < .01$), as was the relationship between having someone take possessions and being bothered a lot in grades 3 and

T a b l e 4

Percent Who Were Bullies, Grades K–8, by Gender (N = 432)

Gender	Grade								
	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Male	4%	8%	7%	10%	13%	13%	17%	19%	**21%**
Female	3%	3%	4%	6%	7%	8%	**12%**	**12%**	11%
Total Sample	3%	6%	5%	8%	10%	10%	14%	15%	**16%**

Note. Boldface indicates peak percentages.

5 (p < .01). Regarding physical bullying, the relationship between being "beaten up" and being bothered a lot was significant in grade 7 (p < .01) and grade 8 (p < .001). In grades 1 and 8, being hit was significantly related to being bothered a lot (p < .01). Being threatened with physical violence was significantly related to being bothered a lot in grade 2 (p < .01) and grade 8 (p < .001).

Gifted Children as Bullies

The study also explored the prevalence of bullying *by* gifted children and adolescents. Of all participants, 28% (33% of males; 22% of females) bullied someone at some time during the first 9 years of school. Approximately 1 in 5 gifted males (21%) in this study was a bully in grade 8, and more than 1 in 10 females were bullies in grades 6 (12%), 7 (12%), and 8 (11%). The percentage of all participants who were bullies increased fairly steadily throughout the school years, from 3% in kindergarten to 16% in grade 8. Bullying by gifted students stayed fairly stable (14–16%) during grades 6–8. Table 4 shows the percentage of participants who were bullies.

The survey also asked participants to indicate what kinds of bullying they perpetrated. There were several noteworthy findings. Gifted children were increasingly perpetrators of name-calling through grade 8, from 4% in kindergarten to 14% in grade 8, while gifted *victims* experienced less name-calling after grade 6. Pushing by gifted children first appeared in grade 1 and disappeared after peaking at 4% in grade 5. Threats by gifted children first appeared in grade 1 and increased to 6% by grade 8. Teasing by gifted children about others' appearance first appeared in grade 3 and increased to 8% in grade 8. Hitting by gifted children first appeared in grade 4, at 3%, increased to 4% in grade 7, and then disappeared. Finally, gifted bullies began to use more *kinds* of bullying in grade 6.

One of the most clear and consistent findings in this study was that grade 6 represented peak prevalence in many categories, with (a) 46% of all participants bullied,

(b) 54% of males bullied and 14% bullied more than 10 times, (c) 35% of all participants called names and 24% teased about appearance, (d) 13% pushed and 12% threatened, (e) 12% of all participants committing some sort of violent deed, and 19% of males committing some sort of violent deed, and (f) 12% of females bullied.

Violent Thoughts and Deeds

With school violence in mind, the survey included two questions related to violent thoughts and deeds. These were closed questions, without any definitions to guide the participants, because it was assumed that including a list of categories would presuppose knowing what thoughts or deeds occurred and might miss important categories. Almost 3 in 10 (29%; males 37%, females 23%) of all participants had violent thoughts in grade 8, which had the highest prevalence. Grade 6 had the highest percentage committing some kind of violent deed, 12% of all participants (19% of males). The highest percentage of females reporting violent deeds (7%) was in grade 8. Violent thoughts increased steadily throughout the first 9 school years. Table 5 summarizes the percentages of students who reported violent deeds or violent thoughts. In response to a question asking how they responded effectively to bullying, 11% indicated that they responded with violence.

Near the end of the survey, three questions asked how much participants thought about violence occurring at school, at home, and in the world. While the majority (52%) of the participants reported "never" thinking about violence at school, another 41% thought about it once a day. Even more participants reported never thinking about violence at home (78%), but 14% thought about it once a day. On the other hand, many students thought about violence in the world: 53% once a day and 22% 2–5 times per day. Small percentages of students thought "all the time" about violence in the school (3%), at home (3%), and in the world (6%).

Table 5

Percent With Violent Thoughts or Violent Deeds, Grades K–8, by Gender (N = 432)

Gender	Grade								
	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Thought violent thoughts?									
Males	7%	10%	11%	14%	22%	22%	30%	34%	**37%**
Females	2%	3%	5%	9%	12%	16%	18%	21%	**23%**
Total Sample	5%	6%	7%	12%	16%	19%	24%	28%	29%
Did something violent?									
Males	4%	8%	9%	8%	15%	17%	**19%**	18%	16%
Females	1%	1%	1%	4%	5%	5%	6%	6%	**7%**
Total Sample	3%	4%	5%	6%	10%	10%	**12%**	**12%**	11%

Note. Boldface indicates peak percentages.

Table 6

Logistic Regression: Gender Differences (N = 432)

Survey question	β	S.E.	Wald	Df	Sig.	Expβ
Were you ever bullied?	.444	.210	4.482	1	.034★	1.559
Were you ever a bully?	.554	.219	6.369	1	.012★	1.740
Did you ever think violent thoughts?	.591	.200	8.760	1	.003★★	1.805
Did you ever do something violent at school?	1.007	.222	20.640	1	.000★★★	2.737

★p < .05, ★★p < .01, ★★★p < .001
Note. Gender was the predictor variable, and answers to survey questions were the response variables.

Statistically Significant Findings

Initial analyses, using logistic regression, regressed the response variables of (a) having been bullied, (b) having been a bully, (c) thinking about doing violence, and (d) doing violence on the predictor variables of geographical region (East, West, South, and Midwest), school, population density (large city, medium city, small city, and rural), ethnicity, and gender. Significant differences were found only for gender (see Table 6). In general, males were more likely than females to be bullied ($p < .05$), be a bully ($p < .05$), think violent thoughts ($p < .02$), and do something violent at school ($p < .001$).

To determine whether being bullied led to bullying others later in school, logistic regression was again used, with being bullied in fourth grade as a predictor variable and being a bully in fifth, sixth, seventh, or eighth grade as a response variable. Because no significant correlations were found, similar analyses at other grade levels were not done. In addition, analyses using height or weight as predictor variables and being a victim of bullying as the response variable resulted in nonsignificant findings.

Factor Analysis

Given the exploratory nature of this study, the authors conducted a factor analysis of types of bullying to identify possible factors for future research. A principal components analysis with varimax rotation was performed on the eighth-grade responses. The factor structure was determined utilizing two criteria (Gorsuch, 1983): (a) eigenvalues greater than one, and (b) item loadings equal to or greater than .40. A scree plot was utilized as a visual structure to determine the number of factors. Three fac-

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Summary of Factor Analysis of Types of Bullying Experienced by Victims (N =432)

Factor	Factor Loadings		
	1. General bullying	2. Teasing about ability	3. Teasing about socio-economic attributes
Name-calling	**.586**	.392	–.013
Pushing	**.666**	–.253	–.126
Knocking books loose	**.631**	–.056	–.310
Hitting	**.711**	–.363	–.079
Teasing about poor grades	**.470**	–.015	.372
Teasing about appearance	**.637**	.309	–.054
Teasing about family	**.558**	–.161	**.609**
Teasing about status	**.527**	–.076	**.617**
Teasing about intelligence	**.587**	**.586**	.101
Teasing about good grades	**.427**	**.655**	–.154
Damaging possessions	**.725**	–.258	–.186
Taking possessions	**.619**	–.140	–.265
Being beaten up	**.471**	–.166	–.147
Threats	**.628**	–.159	–.064

Note. Boldface indicates eigenvalues greater than one and item loadings ≥ .40.

tors emerged: a general bullying factor that included all of the types of bullying reported (eigenvalue of 4.96; 35% of variance explained); teasing about ability (eigenvalue of 1.39; 10% of variance explained); and teasing about socioeconomic attributes (eigenvalue of 1.22; 9% of variance explained). Although the items from Components 2 and 3 did load on Component 1, they were such distinct factors in the second and third components that they were retained. Table 7 shows the factor loadings for these components.

Narrative Survey Responses

Findings related to brief narrative responses to open-ended questions provide additional dimensions to this discussion. Three questions, of several, are summarized here.

The Worst Case. Surprisingly, in response to the question asking for their "worst case" of bullying, the most-mentioned situations involved name-calling. The next most frequently listed instances involved physical bullying and teasing about physical appearance.

Who Offers Support. The survey asked what/who had been most helpful if participants had been bullied, a bully, or violent. In descending order, the top 8 of 15 categories that emerged were family, friends, self, no one, teachers, personal belongings, God, and counselors.

Worries. In regard to responses about worries, it should be noted that this study was done during the year following the attack on the World Trade Center in New York City. An urban male wrote the following: "Everyone is trying to get everyone to come together and not be violent, but it seems like there's more violence going on. It just kind of messed up everything." The following worry themes emerged, listed here from most to least mentioned: (a) grades, school; (b) terrorism, world events, war; (c) friends, family; (d) violence in general; (e) appearance, popularity; (f) relationships with other gender; (g) sports performance (or other competitions); (h) death; (i) money; (j) future, college; (k) sex-related issues; (l) pregnancy, rape; (m) disease, health; and (n) drugs, alcohol. When asked how often they talked with someone about their worries, 28% of participants checked "never," and 23% checked "not often" (i.e., 51% of all participants).

D i s c u s s i o n

Prevalence

The absence of significant differences in regard to location, population density, and race/ethnicity reflects

the literature (Nansel et al., 2001) and suggests that bullying of gifted children and adolescents occurs fairly universally. In fact, in this study, 67% of all participants had been victims at some time during the school years, including 73% of males. More specifically, almost half of all participants and more than half of all gifted males were bullied in grade 6, and 2 in 5 gifted females experienced some kind of bullying during middle school. These are higher total percentages than in most studies (e.g., Baldry, 2003; Berthold & Hoover, 2000; Boulton & Underwood, 1992; Craig & Pepler, 2003; Haynie et al., 2001; Pellegrini et al., 2001; Weir, 2001), but also lower than a few (e.g., Hoover et al., 1992; Orpinas et al., 2003). Of all participants, 11% were bullied repeatedly, a level similar to the 10% who were chronic targets in two studies (Boulton & Underwood; Perry et al., 1988) and lower than the 26% and 37% in the Slee (1994) and Orpinas et al. (2003) studies, respectively. The finding that the percentage of victims was always greater than the percentage of bullies reflects the literature, but the steady, gradual increase in the percent of gifted bullies, K–8, and of victims, K–6, differs from Weir's (2001) finding that bullying peaked at age 7 and again later at age 10 and 11. Whether that difference was associated with gifted students' earlier victimization was not ascertained in this study, as noted earlier.

Regarding bullies, the percentage during grades 3 and 4 (10% and 13%) in this study was lower than Boulton and Underwood's (1992) 17% at the same age level. However, the percent of all participants in this study who had been bullies (28%) was above the 8–20% range in Batsche and Knoff's (1994) summary of research. As mentioned in the review of literature, varying definitions and time frames make comparisons between the present study and other studies problematic.

Prevalence was highest during the middle school years, but more than 1 in 4 gifted elementary school children also experienced bullying. The high percentages for various kinds of bullying, in an extensive list, were surprising and raise concern about school safety and the mental health of gifted children and gifted early adolescents. However, it should be noted that the survey used here delineated several kinds of bullying, unlike surveys that might refer only to physically aggressive types of bullying or include only two yes/no items about bullying and being bullied. The list at the outset of the survey, indicating that nonphysical behaviors could also qualify as bullying, may have resulted in higher percentages of students identifying themselves as victims and bullies than in many previous studies of general school populations.

Only findings related to gifted bullies support the literature related to the decline of physical aggression and increase in verbal and indirect forms with development: By grade 6, gifted bullies were using more diverse kinds of bullying, including more verbal bullying. For victims, teasing about intelligence and grades was at its peak in grades 7 and 8, reflecting the literature and perhaps reflecting increasing awareness of achievement differences in the peer culture. However, the finding that some kinds of physical bullying did not decline for victims does not reflect the literature.

A higher percentage of gifted males than gifted females in this study were bullied and were bullies, although it is important to note that the survey did not list the indirect kinds of bullying that have been associated with females recently (Olweus, 2003; Simmons, 2002). The percentages for females might have been higher had the list included those. Nevertheless, the prevalence of bullying by and of females in this study does not appear inconsequential. In addition, an almost equal percentage of each gender were bullied more than 10 times, which suggests that both genders of gifted children are vulnerable to repeated bullying. Being teased about appearance, experienced by 23–24% of all participants in grades 6–8, was the only kind of teasing that was significantly related to emotional impact for more than one grade (grades 5–7), peaking in grade 5, with 13% of bullied students bothered "a lot." In general, emotional distress related to being bullied was associated with grades 5–8. Memories of earlier distress may have faded over time, of course; however, it is also possible that other factors contributed to the level of impact in the older grades, including developmental changes, salience of social relationships, perceived danger from bullies' increasing physical stature, perceptions that adult protection in and outside of school was decreasing, or media accounts of threats to safety.

It is important to remember that while being bullied bothered some victims a lot, a steady percentage (10–12%) across grades 1–7 indicated that they were not distressed at all, and that percentage increased to 16% in grade 8. It is wise, therefore, not to make broad assumptions about impact. Nevertheless, even if only approximately 1 in 10 gifted children, beginning with grade 4, were bothered a lot by bullying, those children's distress might have had impact on their perceptions about school, academic performance, and self-confidence. The small percentages for various kinds of bullying, effects of bullying, or violent thoughts and deeds indeed represent individual children, who may despair that their school life will not improve.

Similar to Skliopideou's (2002) finding, a large number of victims in this study indicated that they told no one about the bullying, suggesting that adults may not be aware of children's distress and therefore cannot respond to it. Bullying tends to become less apparent and more difficult to detect with age, as physical bullying gives way to other kinds (Rigby, 2003). It might be assumed that indirect bullying may generate increasingly less engaged adult response over time, in turn resulting in less reporting. It is also possible that the most distressed and discouraged victims are least likely to report bullying.

Connecting to the Sensitivity Literature

Though some of the percentages of prevalence were not high, the authors speculate that, if the literature attesting to a relationship between giftedness and emotional intensity and sensitivity is accurate, gifted children and early adolescents might be somewhat uniquely affected by bullying. However, this study did not compare gifted youth to children and adolescents not identified as such, and therefore it is only speculation that gifted students might respond with more sensitivity than others to teasing about appearance, for example. Nevertheless, the statistically significant relationship between that kind of teasing and being bothered "a lot" raises concerns, especially because teasing and name-calling about appearance were experienced by so many of these participants. Expletives may also have particularly negative effects on the self-esteem of children from families where expletives are not heard. In fact, many gifted children may be unused to and unprepared for aggression, social competition, and even nonhostile bantering. In addition, words challenging basic personality (e.g., *dork*) might be particularly troubling to children who do not have a solid self-concept during early adolescence, a time that has been associated with a tenuous sense of self (Erikson, 1968).

Connecting to the Developmental Literature

Middle school is usually understood to be a challenging time developmentally, and pre- and early adolescents are typically concerned with physical changes, changes in social milieu, adjustments to more departmentalized school structures, peer pressure to take dangerous risks, and, particularly for gifted students, high expectations in terms of planning for the future. With insecure identities, they are often newly preoccupied with peer acceptance and self-conscious about physical appearance, probably no less concerned with normal developmental challenges than are their age peers. Name-calling about appearance might be particularly troubling during this time of self-consciousness (Elkind, 1998), rapid or slow physical development, unsettling and confusing sexual thoughts, and social concerns. Being called "gay" or "lesbian," which was associated with grades 7 and 8 in this study, because of appearance, choice of school activities, or behavior may feel catastrophic.

Cognitively, many gifted children may have moved precociously into formal operations (Piaget, 1972), but are not necessarily advanced in physical, social, and emotional development. For children with advanced cognitive development, which allows them considerable control in many areas of life, these developmental phenomena—and bullying—may feel particularly uncontrollable. In addition, pain associated with being teased about appearance, intelligence, or grades may be exacerbated by gifted students' sensitivity to justice issues (Gross, 1993). Bullying, they can see, is not "the way it ought to be." Appearance cannot be altered much, nor can intelligence. High achievement may be valued by family, teachers, and even the gifted student, but not by the broad middle school culture. In developmental terms, teasing might contribute to difficulties incorporating intelligence and grades comfortably into an identity (cf. Brown & Steinberg, 1990). The significant relationship in this study between emotional distress and being teased about intelligence in grade 7, the only grade with that relationship, reflects literature that has associated underachievement among gifted adolescents with grade 7 (Peterson & Colangelo, 1996).

Concerns About Grade 8

Grade 8 marked a large increase in the number of gifted students being bothered "not at all" by being bullied. Self-esteem may be bolstered by other aspects of life by then, identity may be more developed, and gifted students may have devised effective strategies for coping with bullying. They may, in fact, be more resilient. However, the finding that 8% of gifted eighth graders were still bothered a lot raises the specter of long-term victimization and underscores that school does not feel safe for a number of gifted students even at the end of middle school.

The finding that 1 in 5 gifted males was a bully in grade 8 might suggest that gifted victims become gifted bullies, but this study did not continue to pursue that relationship after finding no significance initially. However, even if the percentages of gifted students who experienced threats, intimidation, damaged possessions, or teasing about family or social status were under 10% in grade 8, these percentages had continued to increase

through grade 8. Perhaps a child who was repeatedly bullied throughout the school years, especially during early adolescence, became an angry, reactive bully by grade 8, although the contrast in percentages between victims (46% in grade 6) and bullies (16% in grade 8) suggests that most victims do not become bullies. Regardless, the findings that so many males were involved in bullying behavior in grade 8 and that so many males and females had violent thoughts are unsettling. Because hitting was not a large part of gifted bullies' bullying repertoire and disappeared after grade 7, these bullies appeared to be engaged in nonphysical kinds of bullying. Data indicated an increase in *types* of bullying by gifted students in grade 6, perhaps reflecting that they were using intellectual nimbleness and capacity for subtlety in their bullying from then on.

The drop in the most violent bullying *by* gifted students after grade 6 may reflect a growing sense of self and sensitivity to peers. Nevertheless, some kinds of physical bullying *of* gifted students (hitting/punching, knocking books) continued to increase through grade 8. That trend may continue into high school for gifted students who remain vulnerable.

Implications for Teachers, Counselors, and Other Professionals

Teasing about appearance and intelligence increased in the upper elementary grades. Gifted education and classroom teachers and school counselors should therefore be alert for this kind of bullying, proactive with attempts to prevent it, and consistent in responding to it when it occurs. Bullies can be popular (Pellegrini et al., 2001) and able to engage the peer ecology more effectively than nonaggressive peers (Pepler et al., 1998). In fact, Coie and Koeppl (1990) found that only one third of aggressive children were rejected. In contrast, victims can be on the periphery socially (Rodkin & Hodges, 2003). Certainly educators, parents, and the broader community should not assume that all popular children are prosocial or that all rejected children are aggressive (Rubin, Bukowski, & Parker, 1998). The bullying behaviors of popular bullies may not come to the attention of teachers and counselors. Similarly, the despair of victims, both aggressive and nonaggressive, may not be apparent.

School counselors in the United States are currently being trained to conduct proactive, prevention-oriented classroom lessons (Campbell & Dahir, 1997) on topics such as problem solving, friendship skills, making good choices, expressing feelings, organization, and career development. Counselors at the elementary school level are more likely to be involved in such large-group interventions than are counselors at the other levels. However, all school counselors are encouraged to increase their focus on prevention, in contrast to mostly crisis response, in order to build a positive, safe school culture. Bullying is an especially appropriate topic for classroom lessons at the elementary-school level.

Several scholars have advocated that educational discussion groups or classroom meetings be among core components of bullying-prevention programs (Dake et al., 2003; Olweus, 1993b), focusing on the expressive and emotional worlds of students (Kenway & Fitzclarence, 1997). Because females are more likely to label direct verbal and indirect bullying as bullying, conducting interactive group discussions with both genders together might be effective. Oliver, Hoover, and Hazler (1994) found that students perceived that victims are at fault, that teasing is usually not serious, and that bullying toughens children. In that regard, Demaray and Malecki (2003) promoted targeting students' perceptions of bullying in discussions, so that the "toughness" of bullies, currently not likely to be punished by peers, is no longer popular. There is reason to assume that the 16% of participants in this study who were bullies needed to be among those involved in the discussions.

Pertinent to these directions, school counselors in the United States are currently admonished to facilitate small groups, either for prevention or for intervention. Groups for both perpetrators and victims of bullying, or each separately, can help children to improve interpersonal skills, acknowledge the perspectives of others, solve social problems, express feelings, feel heard, and interact more effectively with peers. Gifted education teachers and school counselors might cofacilitate small groups for gifted children who are bullied or are bullying, making sure the groups are homogeneous in ability in the interest of establishing trust for communication (Peterson; 1990, 1995). Educators can be taught rudimentary group-process and listening skills and manage psychoeducational groups alone, as well (Peterson, 2003). Small groups, more than individual counseling, provide a social microcosm (Yalom, 1985) in which group members can learn communication skills, find commonalities, and "be known"—these goals especially appropriate for addressing bullying.

Given that so many aspects of bullying peaked during grade 6, it seems obvious that prevention-oriented large- and small-group work should be facilitated during upper elementary grades—certainly during grade 6. Successful

group work might help to prevent the continued escalation of some kinds of bullying in grades 7 and 8. In addition, regular classroom and gifted education teachers, as well as parents, can advocate for adequate adult-to-student supervision ratios, especially on the playground, in hallways, and on buses. These adults can also encourage a broader definition of bullying (Cooper & Snell, 2003) and can recognize that bullying is the responsibility of the system as a whole (Garbarino & deLara, 2003).

With the goal of changing an aggressive school climate to a caring one (Littrell & Peterson, 2005; Naylor & Cowie, 1999), systemic interventions should aim to modify the environment, educate the students, and train teachers (Orpinas et al., 2003). Serious conversations with parents of both victims and bullies should be part of schoolwide programs (Olweus, 2003). In addition, just as peers can enable bullies, they can also intervene successfully (Hawkins et al., 2001). Strategies should therefore formally or informally utilize peer-group power to halt bullying, perhaps through peer-counseling programs (Salmivalli, 1999) or other peer-support systems (Naylor & Cowie). In general, anti-bullying curricula should be developmentally appropriate, such as focusing on developing problem-solving skills in older children (Rigby, 2003). Such curriculum may be especially important for bullies, given the evidence that bullies lack confidence in nonviolent strategies (Bosworth et al., 1999).

Bullying is of particular interest in schools. Yet, the broader community also has a stake in the sequelae of bullying, given its association with later violence and criminality (Batsche & Knoff, 1994; Eron, 1994) and adult bullying in the workplace (Dilts-Harryman, 2004). The law enforcement, criminal justice, legislative, social services, and medical communities can provide expertise to schools and parents with bullying issues and also work collaboratively with schools and parents to address the problem of bullying systemically in the community.

Limitations and Future Directions

This study was not comparative and therefore could not ascertain how gifted students compare with the general population in regard to the prevalence and impact of bullying. In addition, though 32% of participants were students of color, the small percentage of Hispanic participants represents a threat to generalizability. The self-report and retrospective aspects of the study also were limitations.

This study was constrained by a number of other factors, as well, including the many-layered process of securing cooperation of school districts, a problem noted in the literature (Bosworth et al., 1999). In several situations that process took months, sometimes precluding a school's participation. In general, a key challenge for contact persons was gaining access to, and generating investment by, teachers in terms of administering the survey, securing parental permission, and reminding students to return the permission form.

Anticipating accurately how many schools would agree to participate in this study was difficult, and the choice of some schools not to participate ultimately affected the geographical distribution of the sample, as well as the sample balance regarding population density. The detail and complexity of the survey items reflected initial optimism about level of participation. With participation of schools and students not as high as anticipated, small numbers in several of the cells limited the number of statistical procedures that were feasible (e.g., related to size of victims and age, size, and socioeconomic status of bullies). In addition, gender differences should be interpreted with caution. This study was conducted prior to the intense interest in kinds of bullying now being associated with females (e.g., Simmons, 2002). Similar to other studies (e.g., Demaray & Malecki, 2003), the survey could have included more of the low-level direct physical behaviors and relational kinds of bullying that females appear to engage in, including social exclusion or rumor-spreading.

However, the findings in this study may accurately reflect reality and certainly provide direction for future research. The percentages related to gifted students are not unlike some reported elsewhere, and, in some cases, the percentages are even higher than for students in the general population. Researchers might make adjustments in the areas just described and conduct further exploratory or confirmatory studies. For instance, studies might explore what kinds of violent thoughts gifted students have and what kinds of "violent deeds" they do at school, at home, or in the community. Sociocultural differences in responses to bullying and in selection of bullying behaviors might also be studied. In addition, future studies might focus on illuminating the complexities of gifted bullies, including more about how they bully, the function of their intelligence in their aggressive behavior, whether and when they cease their bullying, and whether their bullying is proactive and goal-oriented or reactive and related to anger. Regardless of specific research purposes or designs, however, it is important that bullying be clearly defined for participants.

Conclusion

The findings in this study have powerful implications not only for gifted education, but also for all of K–12 education. Bullying appears to be a significant problem for gifted children and early adolescents. Evidence of continued escalation of certain kinds of bullying throughout middle school in this study raises concerns that bullying might continue in high school in altered, but still insidious, forms. On the other hand, the decreasing percentages after grade 6 in name-calling and teasing about appearance, the two most common kinds of bullying, provide some hope that bullying is actually less a problem during high school than earlier (cf. Long & Pellegrini, 2003). However, the continuing increase of thinking about doing something violent tempers that optimism, as well as the reality that 41% of the gifted eighth graders in this study worried about violence in school daily. Educators and parents certainly should not assume an absence of bullying just because gifted children and adolescents do not speak of it and adults do not see it.

Perhaps the most surprising finding of this study is that 16% of the gifted participants were bullies in grade 8, after steadily increasing in number from kindergarten on. Gifted bullies may or may not be among the proactively aggressive bullies who are perceived to be popular. Regardless, as noted in the literature, the long-term prognosis for bullies is not positive. In terms of long-term health and well-being, it is just as important for educators and parents to intervene with gifted bullies as with gifted victims of bullying, while recognizing that the latter are more numerous, according to this study. The noteworthy percentages of gifted victims and bullies certainly stand in stark contrast to the research literature about the low scholastic competence of both bullies and their victims (e.g., Mynard & Joseph, 1997).

The findings in this study can help to raise awareness of the need for proactive, prevention-oriented, systemic school programs, especially during the late-elementary and middle-school grades. No single approach is "best practice" (Rigby, 2003), and schoolwide prevention programs must be specific to context. Nevertheless, preprofessional training and continuing education of teachers about bullying, collaborative efforts of educators and parents to protect children from bullies, and empirically proven curricula to alter perceptions of bullying and develop effective social skills all have the potential to make bullying abnormal and unpopular, instead of accepted as a normal part of development during the school years.

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Author Note

Appendix

The survey questions (often followed by grids differentiating grade levels, levels of severity, or characteristics) that generated responses discussed in this article are the following:

- (2 Grids: grade level) Height and weight (check: above average; average; below average)
- (Yes/No) Have you ever been bullied? (If "No," directed to a later section)
- (Grid: grade levels, prevalence) During which school years, and how many times?

- (Grid: grade levels, kinds of bullying) What kinds of bullying in each grade?
- (Grid: grade levels, writing space) If called names, what names were you called?
- (Grid: grade levels, categories) Who was/were the bully/bullies? (check: same age, older, younger, bigger, smaller, same size, upper class, middle class, lower class, more than one bully)
- (Grid: grade levels) How much did the bullying bother you? (check: a lot, some, not much, not at all)
- (Yes/No, followed by grid: grade levels, writing space) Did you tell anyone about the bullying? If yes, who?
- (Yes/No) Were you able to respond to the bullying in an effective way?
- (Writing space) What is the worst case of bullying you ever experienced?
- (Yes/No) Were you ever a bully during your school years? (If "No," directed to a later section)

- (Grid: grade levels, kinds of bullying) What kind of bullying did you do?
- (Writing space) If you have been bullied, or a bully, or violent, what/who has been most helpful to you?
- (Yes/No, followed by grid: grade levels) Did you ever do anything violent in school?
- (Yes/No, followed by grid: grade levels) Have you ever thought of doing something violent in school?
- (Writing space) What do you worry about most these days?
- (Grid) How much do you worry about violence occurring in school? (check: never, once a day, 2–5 times a day, at least once every hour, almost all the time)
- (Grid) How much do you worry about violence occurring at home? (same as above)
- (Grid) How much do you think about violence that you hear about in the news? (same as above)