Sticks and Stones May Break My Bones, but Words WILL Actually Hurt Me:

A Multi-level Perspective on Bullying

GAP Fellows 2010-2012
Objectives

• At the conclusion of this presentation, participants will
  • be able to define bullying as a complex social phenomenon
  • examine real life cases of bullying
  • be aware of strategies and resources to counteract such acts
For today...

• Part 1: Background
  • Definition
  • Epidemiology
  • Model to describe phenomenon

• Part 2: Explanations of 4 levels of bullying

• Part 3: Case and Implications
  • Tyler Clemente

• Part 4: Solutions
Part 1: Background

• Definition

• Epidemiology

• Model to describe phenomenon
Definition

• Dictionary.com:
  • *Bully (n.)*: a blustering, quarrelsome, overbearing person who habitually badgers and intimidates smaller or weaker people.
Dan Olweus' Concept of Bullying

"A student is being bullied or victimized when he or she is exposed, intentionally, repeatedly, and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more students."
VICTIM-BULLY-BYSTANDER PARADIGM

Four markers of bullying

• Imbalance of power
• Intent to harm
• Threat of further aggression
• Terror
Bullying results from an *imbalance of power*, which can manifest in many ways.
Warning signs

- Change around school
  - Interest, unusual routes, grades
  - Beeline to bathroom after school
  - Hungry after school
- Change in behavior
  - Isolative, no longer interested
  - Stealing
  - Derogatory language for peers
  - Sad, angry, or scared after call or email
- Change in physical health
  - Unexplained injuries
  - Somatic complaints
  - Disheveled clothing
Epidemiology

• 2001 National US Study of 6th- through 10th-graders
  • 29.9% involved in bullying
    • 13.0% as a bully
    • 10.6% bullied
    • 6.3% in both roles
  • Males more likely than females to be both perpetrators and targets
  • Higher among younger students than older students
Epidemiology

• **International Trends**
  
  • Adolescents in Baltic countries reported higher rates of bullying and victimization
  
  • Northern European countries reported the lowest prevalence
  
  • Boys reported higher rates of bullying in all countries
Epidemiology

• Cyberbullying

  • More friends protective against in-school bullying, but not against cyber-bullying

  • Many victims do not know the identity of the perpetrator, even though there may be a high overlap between victims of cyber- and in-school-bullying
Video

Jonah Mowry
Part 2: Explanations of 4 Levels of Bullying

• We decided to approach bullying from a multi-level perspective that goes beyond the school to society.
• Ecological or social environmental approaches have been shown to be helpful in various health interventions, such as suicide, obesity, and cancer prevention.
• Utilizing a broad public health perspective, we hope to shed light on bullying as a complex social and cultural phenomenon with many avenues of intervention.
• Many high level media cases can be analyzed by the four levels.
Bullying in a larger context

- Societal
- Institutional
- Interpersonal
- Individual
Societal Level

• Bullying occurs within multiple, interacting contexts, and has received wide media attention, even in the Obama administration recently.

• Broad, societal and cultural factors may be related to rates of bullying:
  - Gender norms and ideas of gender “deviance”
  - Views and policies towards sexual minorities
  - Class differences
  - Views and policies towards discrimination on the basis of race/ethnicity
  - Views and policies towards discrimination on the basis of disability status
  - Societal views towards violence and aggression
  - Access to technology and cyberbullying
Societal Level

- In a study of 37 countries, countries with higher income inequality had higher rates of bullying among pre-adolescents\(^1\)

- Controlling for differences in wealth using multi-level analyses

- Social support from families and schools was independently associated with less bullying, but did not explain relationship between income inequality and bullying
Societal Level

• States that enacted laws offering protection against discrimination for sexual minorities have been found to have lower suicide rates among non-Hispanic White adolescent boys\(^1\)

• Looked at suicide rates before and after implementation of laws, and found a reduction after law passage.

• Since the study was ecological, unable to determine specific causes of this association.
Institutional Level

• Multiple studies have examined bullying from the schoolwide level, to classroom level, to individual level.
• Various interventions have shown to be helpful in reducing the rate of bullying in schools.
• Prime opportunity to utilize the clinical and integrationist perspective of “bully-victim-bystander” relationship by Twemlow.
Interpersonal Level

• The victim and victimizer relationship is a dialectic, meaning neither side has any meaning without the other.

• According to Ogden, it is “a process in which each of two opposing opposites creates, informs, preserves, and negates the other; each standing on the dynamic, ever-changing relationship with the other.”

• The bully bystander engages in “voyeuristic, sadomasochistic fantasies while watching assaults.”
The Bully, the Bullied and the Bystander

No Innocent Bystanders

Bystanders have the following excuses:

- Bully is my friend
- It's not my problem
- Bullied is not my friend
- Bullied is a loser
- Bullied had it coming
- Bullying will toughen him up
- Kids have a code of silence and don't want to be a snitch
- Better to be in the in-group than to defend outcasts
- Too much emotional tension to defend the bullied
The Bully, the Bullied and the Bystander

Families play a role in development of the bully, bullied and bystander.

*Brick-Wall Family* (parent has absolute authority; enforces order with threatening or actual violence; attempts to break child's will and spirit; uses humiliation; relies on competition; child learns in an atmosphere of fear; gives highly conditional love; teaches what to think instead of how to think)

*Jellyfish Family* (arbitrary punishments/rewards; arbitrary 2nd chances; threats and bribes commonplace; parents labile; highly conditional love)

Backbone Family (able to preclude development of a bully, a bullied or a bystander)
The Bully, the Bullied and the Bystander

Backbone Family

• Children learn to accept their own feelings and to act responsibly on those feelings through a strong sense of self-awareness
• Competency and cooperation are modeled and encouraged
• Love is unconditional
• Children are taught how to think
• Children are buffered from the possible impact of a bully or from the need to become a bully by the daily reinforcement of the messages that foster a strong sense of self: I like myself, I can think for myself and there's no problem so great it can't be solved
• Family is willing to seek help
Individuals \textit{AT RISK} for Being Bullied

- Children
  - Precociously developing girls
  - Later developing boys

- "Internalizing Difficulties"
  - Anxious appearing
  - Prone to displays of sadness
  - Withdrawn/introverted

- History of rejection by peers

- White and/or "other"

- Socioeconomically disadvantaged
Part 3: Case example and Implications
Violent Acts Reported in the Media Associated with Bullying

- 1999: Columbine High School Shooting
- 2002: Suicide of 14 y/o Matt Eppling in East Lansing, MI
- 2003: Suicide of 20 y/o Jeremy Williams
- 2006: Suicide of 13 y/o Megan Meier
- 2007: Virginia Tech Shooting
- 2008: Murder of Lawrence King by 14 y/o Brandon McInerney, Suicides of 14 y/o Alex Wildman, Tesa Middlebrook
- 2009: Suicides of 11 y/o Jaheem Herrera, 17 y/o Eric Mohat, 11 y/o Carl Walker-Hoover, 15 y/o Holly Grogan, 17 y/o Tyler Long
- 2010: Suicides of 15 y/o Phoebe Prince, 13 y/o Asher Brown, 13 y/o Seth Walsh
- 2010 Suicide of 18 y/o Tyler Clemente
  - NJ anti-bullying law
- 2011: Suicides of 15 y/o Jamie Hubley, 14 y/o Jamey Rodemeyer, Jacob Rogers
- 2012: Suicides of 14 y/o Phillip Parker, 14 y/o Eden Wormer, 18 y/o Jeffrey Fehr, 11 y/o Mitchell Wilson
Tyler Clemente

- Tyler Clemente: 18 year-old student at Rutgers University in Piscataway, NJ
- Jumped to his death in the Hudson River from the George Washington Bridge between NJ and NYC on 9/22/10
- 3 days prior, his roommate, Dharun Ravi, and hallmate, Molly Wei, used webcam to view Tyler kissing another man
- They then urged friends and Twitter followers to watch a second time, though this viewing never occurred

- Tyler read the following statement on Dharun’s Twitter account: "Roommate asked for the room till midnight. I went into molly's room and turned on my webcam. I saw him making out with a dude. Yay."
Tyler Clemente

- In 2011, Molly Wei entered a plea agreement to avoid prosecution.

- In March 2012, Ravi was convicted on 15 counts of invasion of privacy, bias intimidation, tampering with evidence, witness tampering, and hindering apprehension or prosecution. Sentenced to 30 days in jail, 3 years probation, 300 hours of community service, a $10,000 fine, and counseling on cyberbullying and alternate lifestyles.
Tyler Clemente: Individual Level

- Vulnerability
  - Struggling with sexuality
  - Transitioning to college and adulthood
  - Socially isolated
  - Psychopathology?
Tyler Clemente: Interpersonal Level

- Ravi and Wei together – small “mob” mentality
- Would either of them have done it alone?
- Innocent bystanders watching on video feed and following on Twitter did nothing to stop it or reach out to Tyler
Tyler Clemente: Institutional Level

- School bullying/harassment policies and efforts to disseminate and teach such policies
- School online and social media policies
- Culture of tolerance or intolerance of bullying: Sensitivity trainings and education during orientation?
- Monitoring of inappropriate behavior and well-being of students in dorms: Are RAs “rule enforcers” getting free room and board or peer supporters/educators with appropriate training?
Tyler Clemente: Societal Level

• Homophobia

• Laws against harassment based on sexual orientation: Was this a “hate crime”? 
Implications
Long Term Psychological Implications in the Victim-Bully

• Victims:
  • High rates of depression, social anxiety, pathological perfectionism, and greater neuroticism in adulthood

• Bullies:
  • Significant associations between bullying and bipolar disorder, lifetime alcohol and marijuana use disorders, nicotine dependence, conduct disorder, antisocial, paranoid, and histrionic personality disorders
Bullying Behavior in Relation to Psychiatric Disorders in Children

(a) Psychiatric disorders

- **Externalizing disorder**
  - Victim
  - Bully or Bully-victim

- **Internalizing disorder**
  - Victim
  - Bully or Bully-victim

- **Odds ratio (OR)**
  - Boys
  - Girls

- **Statistical significance**
  - $p = 0.001$ for externalizing disorder
  - $p < 0.001$ for externalizing disorder
  - $p = 0.008$ for internalizing disorder
Bullying Behavior in Relation to Psychiatric Disorders in Children

b) Somatic health

- Odds ratio (OR) for chronic somatic diseases:
  - Victim: Boys vs. Girls
  - Bully or Bully-victim: Boys vs. Girls

- Odds ratio (OR) for overweight:
  - Victim: Boys vs. Girls
  - Bully or Bully-victim: Boys vs. Girls

$p = 0.041$
Part 4: Solutions
Societal: Bullying & the Law

- New Hampshire was the first state to require schools to develop anti-bullying policies (2000)
- 49 states have anti-bullying statutes (none in South Dakota or the District of Columbia)
- 39 states have specific laws or regulations that address "cyber-bullying"
- 34 states have specific laws that address "hazing"
- Details of state statutes available at: www.stopbullying.gov.
Societal: Advocacy in bullying

Features
- Build a Safe School Environment
- Youth Violence Prevention Week
- How to Talk About Bullying
- What Bystanders Can Do

WHAT YOU CAN DO
- Report Cyberbullying
- Bullying & LGBT Youth
- What Kids Can Do
- Bullying & Youth with Special Needs
- Know the Warning Signs
Institutional and Interpersonal: Evidence Based Interventions to Prevent Bullying Behaviors

- Interventions to prevent bullying behaviors have largely been targeted towards school aged children

- The effectiveness of several bullying prevention programs have been studied which showed mixed results¹

- Largest bullying prevention initiative to date showed that the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program
  - Reduced student self reports of bullying others
  - Improved students’ perceptions of adults’ responsiveness and attitudes about bullying²

Institutional and Interpersonal: Evidence Based Interventions to Prevent Bullying Behaviors

• Cochrane review (2009) showed that school based secondary prevention programs reduced aggressive behavior in both school aged children although further research is required to establish that such programs reduce the incidence of aggression beyond 12 months\(^1\)

• Vreeman et al conducted a systematic review which showed that multidisciplinary or whole school interventions were most effective in reducing bullying behaviors
  • Bullying is a systemic group process
  • Multidisciplinary interventions include training for school personnel, parent teacher workshops, mentoring programs, and promoting community awareness\(^2\)

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1. School based secondary prevention programmes for preventing violence (Review) Copyright 2009 The Cochrane Collaboration. Published by John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.
Individual: Psychotherapy

• For Bullies:
  
  Brief Strategic Family Therapy (12 weeks)

  Integrative Family Therapy (6 months)

  Individual Mode Deactivating Therapy, CBT, or Skills Training

• For the Victims:

  Individual: CBT for co-morbid anxiety and depression

  Society: School-based programs using CBT and social learning techniques
In sum
I shall remember forever and will never forget

Monday: my money was taken
Tuesday: names called
Wednesday: my uniform torn
Thursday: my body pouring with blood
Friday: it's ended
Saturday: freedom

The final diary pages of thirteen year old Vijay Singh. He was found hanging from the banister rail at home on Sunday.
References

• An Ecological Perspective.” Am J Community Psychology. 2009. 43:257-266.
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• School based secondary prevention programmes for preventing violence (Review) Copyright 2009 The Cochrane Collaboration. Published by John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

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THANK YOU!

The End
Ethical and Moral Considerations

• Bullying violates universally recognized ethical principles

• Moral disengagement is the cognitive process by which individuals justify the practice of socially unacceptable, immoral, or unethical behavior

• Aggressors remove self regulatory sanctions against inappropriate behavior, such as shame, guilt and self condemnation, thus weakening inhibitions to engage in damaging behaviors
Ethical and Moral Considerations

- Mechanisms which facilitate moral disengagement

- Moral disengagement has been associated with antisocial behavior and aggression in children and adolescents, including bullying

- Defenders of bullying victims, in contrast to perpetrators and bystanders, demonstrate high levels of moral sensibility, courage, and capacity for empathy
Power Differential

Bullying results from an *imbalance of power*
Power Differential

Bullying results from an *imbalance of power* - can manifest in many ways.
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Elder Bullying
Standardized types of elder abuse:
1. Physical Abuse
2. Sexual Abuse
3. Emotional or Psychologic Abuse
4. Financial or Material Exploitation
5. Abandonment
6. Neglect
7. Self-neglect
Characteristics of Nursing Home Residents

- Aged >85: 49%
- Nonwhite: 9%
- Receives assistance with >3 ADLs: 83%
- Mild to moderate cognitive impairment: 71%
- Exhibits physically aggressive behaviors: 9%
- Exhibits any behaviors (e.g. verbally or physically aggressive, resists nursing care, socially inappropriate): 30%

Elder Abuse

• Prevalence 5-30%, perhaps 20% for bullying

• Examples include social exclusion from activities and cafeteria, taking friends away by “cliqueing,” and verbal or physical assault
Tactics for the Bully or Bystander:

- Intervene immediately with discipline
- Create opportunities to "do good"
- Nurture empathy
- Teach friendship skills
- Closely monitor electronic devices and violence content
- Engage in more constructive, entertaining activities
- Teach child to do what it right even when burden is heavy

Four additional antidotes to bullying:

- Strong sense of self
- Being a friend
- Having at least one good friend or a buddy
- Being able to successfully get into a group
I shall remember forever and will never forget

Monday: my money was taken
Tuesday: names called
Wednesday: my uniform torn
Thursday: my body pouring with blood
Friday: it's ended
Saturday: freedom

The final diary pages of thirteen year old Vijay Singh. He was found hanging from the banister rail at home on Sunday.
The Bully, the Bullied and the Bystander

Kids don't share their being bullied due to:

- Shame
- Retaliation
- Don't think anyone can help
- Don't think anyone will help
- Believe it's just part of growing up
- Adults also bully them
- Tattling is bad
Power Differential

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