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CHAPTER 4

DO THE ROLES OF BULLY AND VICTIM REMAIN STABLE FROM SCHOOL TO UNIVERSITY? THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

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(Final draft)

This chapter explores the continuities in bullying from school contexts to university contexts, and discusses the possible reasons why some people remain in the role of bully or victim over time and through various social contexts, whereas others find a way to escape these roles. Two theories – *peer community integration theory* and *positioning theory* – are reviewed to examine: the ways in which engagement in bullying processes at school is associated with the development of individuals' peer relationships and their position within the peer group; the impact of bullying on their perceptions of themselves and others; and how bullying affects the establishment of future peer relationships through which these individuals integrate into social communities in later life. The chapter concludes by discussing the impact that supportive peer relationships have for an individual who has been engaged in bullying. The significance of the social cognitive processes in which individuals make sense of their bullying experiences are emphasised, as they are able to re-determine their peer group position and change their role as bully or victim.

Introduction

Individuals integrate into groups and communities through their interpersonal relationships, and it is the quality of our interpersonal relationships that often promotes or prevents us from succeeding in the integration process. Hence, becoming an equal and accepted member of one's social community is important for our individual wellbeing and success. Bullying is widely identified as a pervasive social problem, which can prevent individuals from becoming equal and accepted members in groups and social communities in which they need or wish to integrate (Pörhölä & Kinney, 2010).

As schoolmates comprise the most important peer community for children and adolescents for a number of years, successful integration into this peer community becomes crucial for the psychosocial well being and development of individuals, and forms the foundation for their

ability to integrate into other communities, such as campus life during the undergraduate years, in later life. Being engaged in bullying at school therefore poses a severe developmental risk for individuals, whether they are in the role of bully, victim, or act in dual roles. In addition to causing several kinds of psychosocial and physical health problems (e.g., Due et al., 2005; Hawker & Boulton, 2000; Houbre, Tarquinio, Thuillier, & Hergott, 2006; Kaltiala-Heino, Rimpelä, M., Rantanen, Rimpelä, A., 2000), being engaged in bullying can prevent individuals from becoming integrated into their peer communities during childhood and adolescence, and even in young adulthood.

This chapter first reviews research on the continuities of abusive peer relationships in individuals' lives, focusing on repeated bullying and victimization experiences. The chapter continues by providing theoretical perspectives to help understand why these continuities tend to persist in individuals' peer relationships from one social context to another, hampering their integration into their peer communities.

Continuities of Bullying and Victimization

The studies examining the continuity of abusive peer relationships suggest that the roles of bullies and victims remain quite stable from elementary to middle school and high school (Boulton & Smith, 1994; Salmivalli, Lappalainen & Lagerspetz, 1998; Schäfer et al., 2005; Sourander, Helstelä, Helenius, & Piha, 2000). For example, Schäfer et al. conducted a six-year longitudinal study following German second and third graders through to the seventh and eighth grades, and found that bullying behaviour in elementary school was likely to continue at the later age, although being victimized by peers did not have similar continuity. However, in their eight-year longitudinal study among Finnish students, Sourander et al. found that bullying at age eight was associated with bullying at age 16, and being bullied at age eight was associated with being bullied at age 16.

Evidence also exists to suggest that the roles of bully and victim tend to remain stable from childhood to adulthood and from school settings to higher education and workplace contexts. For example, in a retrospective study by Chapell et al. (2006) in the United States, it was found that 54% of individuals who admitted to having bullied as adults had also bullied during childhood and adolescence. In Canada, Curwen, McNichol, and Sharpe (2011) examined 159 female and 37 male undergraduates who had bullied a fellow student at least

once since coming to university and detected that most of the bullies at university had a history of bullying at school. Bauman and Newman (2013) examined a sample of 709 university students in the United States and found that 3.7% of the students had been bullied at university at least occasionally. Of those who were bullied at university, 84.6% reported that they had been bullied in junior high school as well, and 80.8% reported that they had been victimized in high school; 73% had been victims of bullying at both school levels. Being a stable victim from junior high school to high school and then to university was more characteristic for male than female students (100% of males, 64.7% of females).

Furthermore, a nationally representative sample of 5,086 university students in the University Student Health Survey 2008 in Finland revealed that 51% of those individuals who had bullied their fellow students during higher education had also bullied their schoolmates, while 47% of those who had been victimized during their higher education had previously been subjected to school bullying (Pörhölä, 2011a). It is worth noting that those who bully at school are most likely to continue to engage in various kinds of abusive behaviours in their social relationships. Particularly males who bully at school have been shown to have a heightened risk for sexual harassment (DeSouza & Ribeiro, 2005; Pellegrini, 2002), and dating violence (Connolly, Pepler, Craig, & Taradash, 2000; Pepler, Craig, Connolly, & Henderson, 2002).

Preliminary research also exists to link experiences involving bullying at school with continued exposure in the workplace. Smith, Singer, Hoel and Cooper (2003) conducted a retrospective study in which 5,288 British working adults reported on whether they had been bullied at school and whether they were being bullied in their workplace and found a positive relationship between having been bullied at school and being bullied in their workplace. Those who had been in both roles at school, bullying others and simultaneously being victimized, were even more likely to be bullied as adults at work.

As a social problem taking place between individuals in their interaction processes, bullying can have serious negative effects on the developmental courses of the involved individuals' peer relationships. Being victimized by the majority of one's classmates and having only a minority of defenders among them, which is often the case (e.g., Hodges & Perry, 1996; Salmivalli, Lagerspetz, Björkqvist, Österman, & Kaukiainen, 1996), can result in an inability to trust any of one's peers and, consequently, in difficulty in establishing and sustaining

friendships with them. Indeed, evidence shows that during their school years victims of bullying tend to avoid social contacts and events (Crick & Grotpeter, 1996; Slee, 1994) and suffer from loneliness (Crick & Grotpeter; Juvonen, Nishina, & Graham, 2000; Kochenderfer & Ladd, 1996). For example, in a cross-cultural comparison in seven countries conducted in primary and secondary schools, Eslea et al. (2003) found that victims of bullying reported having the fewest friends and being left alone at playtimes most often, and those who occupied dual roles (bully-victims) reported similar experiences on a less frequent basis. Furthermore, a meta-analysis of 18 longitudinal studies conducted by Reijntjes, Kamphuis, Prinzie, and Telch (2010) revealed significant associations between peer victimization and internalizing problems including anxiety, depression, withdrawal and loneliness among primarily middle school students over time.

However, those who bully also tend to have a range of difficulties in their peer relationships. Recent studies have indicated that children who bully consistently at a moderate or high rate from elementary through high school have peer relationship problems, including high conflict with peers, association with similarly aggressive peers, and susceptibility to negative peer pressure (Pepler, Jiang, Craig, & Connolly, 2008). Further, a cross-cultural, cross-sectional survey including nationally representative samples from 25 countries indicated that bullies, victims and bully-victims report higher levels of health problems and poorer school adjustment than non-involved youth. Victims and bully-victims reported poorer emotional adjustment and relationships with classmates, whereas bullies and bully-victims reported greater alcohol use (Nansel et al., 2004). The nationally representative sample of Finnish university students also revealed significantly higher levels of substance abuse among those university students who had a history of bullying their schoolmates, as compared to victims and those without a history of being engaged in bullying processes during their schooling (Pörhölä, 2011b).

In another study in Finland among seventh and eighth graders (see, Pörhölä, 2008; 2009b), it was found that victimized students reported the most peer relationship problems (for example, having fewer or no close friends; not feeling valued and being actively disliked by peers; having few contacts with classmates; being unsuccessful in the establishment of peer relationships; and being afraid of peers in general). These problems occurred less for bullies, who usually had a group of close friends and companions, felt highly respected and valued by their peers, and found it easy to establish social relationships with equals, although they were

also simultaneously afraid of losing their friends and, except for their best friends, were also poorly integrated with the rest of their schoolmates. Finally, individuals uninvolved in bullying reported the highest quality in their peer relationships and acceptance in peer communities.

Previous studies have revealed that even in their later lives, former victims of school bullying tend to have difficulties in maintaining friendships, suffer from loneliness and display lowered levels of self-esteem (Schäfer et al., 2004). Further, victims of bullying have been found to have a tendency to anticipate negative evaluation and experience high levels of anxiety in social situations (Storch, Brassard, & Masia-Warner, 2003; Storch & Masia-Warner, 2004). Young people victimized by their peers in adolescence also still tend to have negative perceptions of their peers' behaviour toward them in young adulthood (Salmivalli & Isaacs, 2005). This set of peer relationship problems might partly explain formerly victimized individuals' lower levels of trust and satisfaction in their friendships during young adulthood (Jantzer, Hoover, & Narloch, 2006). In the following sections, two theories will be discussed to examine how individuals' interpersonal relationships with other peer group members in childhood, adolescence and young adulthood affect their success in peer integration processes and determine their current position, and direct their future position, in peer communities, enabling the continuities of abusive peer relationships into the university years.

Bullying and Peer Community Integration

The peer community integration theory (e.g., Pörhölä, 2009a, 2009b) describes how interpersonal peer relationships either promote or prevent individuals from integrating into their peer communities. While peers are usually understood as people who are at the same level with an individual in their cognitive, emotional and social development, *peer community* refers here to the crowd of peers with whom an individual has, or could, have an interpersonal relationship (Pörhölä, 2009a).

During childhood and adolescence school peers, and particularly the student's own class, form an important peer community. In their school class, students tend to develop some sort of interpersonal relationship with each of their classmates. In addition to their school and classmates, children and adolescents might establish peer relationships, for example, with individuals living in their neighbourhood, with relatives of the same age, or peers who get

together because of their shared leisure-time activities, or peers who communicate only virtually, for example, via the Internet. Successful integration into one's peer community is a reciprocal process which can be defined as the individual feeling accepted, liked and valued by peers; as well as showing acceptance, care and respect for peers; and, consequently, feeling an equal member of the peer community (Pörhölä, 2009b; Pörhölä & Kinney, 2010).

The basic assumption in the peer community integration theory is that individuals become integrated into the surrounding peer community through their interpersonal peer relationships. In the integration process, different kinds of dyadic peer relationships have different impacts or *weights*. Five kinds of relationships are distinguished on the basis of the impact these relationships have on the integration process: (1) *friendships* in which partners show mutual commitment, trust, support, valuation, love and care, are assumed to have the highest value, +2; (2) *companionships*, which are characterized by a substantial amount of time spent in shared activities, also hold positive value, +1; (3) *neutral relationships*, which can be characterized by a mutual lack of interest to the company of the other, are considered neutral in value, 0; (4) mutually hostile *enemy relationships* carry negative value, -1; and (5) *abusive relationships*, such as bullying relationships, which carry the most negative value, -2, for both perpetrator and victim (Pörhölä, 2008, 2009b).

While enemy relationships can be characterized by mutual verbal, nonverbal or physically hurtful behaviour, manifested as repeated conflicts and fights, an abusive relationship is characterized by an imbalance of power, unilateral subjection and hurtful behaviour, and the victim's inability to affect the nature of the relationship. As compared with the mutually hostile enemy relationship, an abusive relationship, such as a bullying relationship, can be presumed to be more devastating for both parties. In this relationship, the victim, as the less powerful party, can only lose without being able to terminate or change the nature of the relationship. However, as the winner of each confrontation with their victims, bullies have only positive outcomes from their behaviour, which increases their tendency to continue this kind of behaviour and even extend adopting it in various peer relationships. In the long run, this would result in these individuals failing to achieve integration into their peer community.

The peer community integration theory (Pörhölä, 2009a, 2009b) suggests that the nature of individuals' peer relationships determines how well they succeed in integrating into the peer community. While friends and companions pull an individual toward the centre of the peer

community, enemy relationships and abusive relationships operate in the opposite direction, pushing individuals away from the centre of the peer community. Each relationship impacts the integration process in accordance with its weight. The more enemy relationships, and particularly abusive relationships, a person has, the less successful the integration process will become for him or her, and vice versa: the more supportive relationships, like friends and companions a person has, the more successful he or she will be in integrating into the surrounding peer community.

Furthermore, the peer community integration theory assumes that the level of an individual's integration into their peer community during childhood and adolescence is reflected in later life in their ability to integrate into other peer communities. Individuals who have failed to integrate into their peer community because of being bullied by their schoolmates, and who move on to the next educational level (university), are likely to see the new peer community as a threat rather than as a positive challenge. They may be frightened of their new peers, have difficulty trusting them, feel insecurity in their presence, and expect that they will not be approved, valued and liked by their new peers, and that their peers will not want to be in their company. After having had only limited opportunities to practice their communication skills with their peers, and having received mostly negative feedback from their interactions with peers, they may also have deficiencies in peer interaction skills, which could help in establishing and maintaining rewarding peer relationships. Suffering from long-lasting and severe problems in their psychosocial well being and health, can further lower their ability to integrate into the new peer community at university.

Individuals who have bullied others for several years at school, and have therefore failed to integrate into their peer community, may also lack peer interaction skills on account of their previous experiences of biased peer feedback, which may have prevented them from being able to practice their skills as an equal member of the peer community. After having bullied their schoolmates, they might also experience being disliked by most peers, and therefore see the new peer community at university as a threat. In this situation they might end up gathering a group of trusted companions, but ignore the rest of the peer community or even start bullying some of them. Hence, the roles of victims and bullies both may transfer from one social context to another (Pörhölä, 2009b; Pörhölä & Kinney, 2010).

To conclude, the theory of peer community integration aims to explain how engagement in bullying is related to the development of the relationships of individuals within a group of peers, eventually forming a peer group position, which tends to remain stable for quite a long time in the individuals' lives. While this theory operates on interpersonal relationship and group dynamics levels, it does not yet offer explanations to the question *why* these developmental courses take place in individuals' lives, enabling the continuities of bullying and victimization from one social context to another. The following section will provide theoretical perspectives on some social cognitive level phenomena, which, in turn, could explain why these developmental courses take place.

Bullying and Positioning

Applying the positioning theory by Harré and colleagues (e.g., Harré & van Langenhove, 1999; Harré & Moghaddam, 2003b), to examine the continuities of bullying experiences in individuals' lives can extend our understanding of the ways in which engagement in bullying processes might affect the development of individuals' social positions within a peer group, and also have an impact on their self-positioning. Self-positioning, in particular, can further explain the ways in which peer group positions, being embedded in group structures and internalized by individuals, have a tendency to remain stable from one social context to another.

The positioning theory (Davies & Harré, 1999; Harré & van Langenhove, 1999; Harré & Moghaddam, 2003a) focuses on the ways in which identities, social positions and the meanings related to them are constructed in the course of interaction. Positioning can be seen as a way of building and rebuilding one's own and others' social positions and identities through interaction. Positions exist as patterns of beliefs in the members of a relatively coherent social community, and they are shared in the sense that the relevant beliefs of each member are similar to those of others in the community. Positions are relational, meaning that adopting a particular position for oneself assumes a position for other interaction partners as well. Although positions are jointly produced and reproduced, a person can either appropriate a particular position within a social group or community, or it can be given to him or her. Once having taken up, or been given, a particular position, the person inevitably sees the world from the vantage point of that position.

One of the essential facets of position theory is the power dynamics, which shapes and is shaped, by interaction in positioning processes. A position can be seen as a set of rights and duties which delimit the possibilities of behaviour. Hence, a position implicitly delimits how much and what the person in that position can say and do, in a particular context and to particular interaction partners (Davies & Harré, 1999; Harré & Moghaddam, 2003a). For example, individuals in more legitimate positions are presumed to produce more relevant and worthy ideas, and, therefore, are more entitled to speak and to be heard. In each social community there is a kind of realm of positions which individuals can adopt, strive to locate themselves in, be pushed into, be displaced from or be refused access, or recess themselves from, in dynamic ways in their interaction processes.

In the positioning theory (e.g., Harré & Moghaddam, 2003a; van Langenhove & Harré, 1999), there are different categories of positioning, including the distinction between self-positioning and the positioning of others, both of which can be either deliberate or forced. Deliberate self-positioning takes place when someone intends to portray a particular identity usually in pursuit of a particular goal (for example, by using social or physical power to raise one's own status in a peer group). Forced self-positioning occurs as an obligatory response to the request of an external power (for example, the victim of bullying withdrawing from others' company, or responding with counter violence as self-defence). Deliberate positioning of others can take place in the presence (for example, by selecting persons to be included and excluded in a sports team or group work) or absence (for example, by gossiping and mocking someone behind the target person's back) of those to be positioned. The forced positioning of others can occur in cases when bystanders are required to position others, for example, bystanders in bullying situations can feel themselves being forced to turn their back on the victim, for fear of becoming bullied themselves if they refuse.

Applying the positioning theory, we can visualize what would happen in bullying processes in terms of positioning, to individuals in different bullying roles, and, in particular, how the ways of being positioned within a peer group could affect the peer group integration of victims later in life. In interaction processes, in which the role of bully is both taken by particular persons and given to them by the peer group, the bullies learn to position themselves as the authority above others. By means of their communication behaviour and physical acts they appropriate the right to choose other people to be included in and excluded from the group, and also to decide which rights and duties others in the peer group have.

Positioning oneself as this kind of authority would not be possible without the approval of the majority of the peer group. Again, in interaction processes within the peer group, the members of the group approve a particular person to have the right to use power, give orders, choose other members of the group and decide on their rights and duties. Hence, the right to be believed, obeyed and followed must be given by others to the person who strives to appropriate the position of authority. For example, by bullying and excluding some of their peers, these individuals succeed in convincing others of their extensive rights, thus further strengthening their position of authority in the peer group.

The position of the victims is determined in the bullying processes. For example, by mocking the target person's personal qualities (for example, by calling the person dumb, stupid or an idiot), the bully shows others that the target person has characteristics which mean that they do not have the right to be heard and valued in the peer group. By accusing the victim of lying or something that they deny having done – which is quite typical in bullying situations – the bully would show that this person has lost the right to be believed. As the bullying continues, the victim's rights are usually taken away while their duties are increased. Eventually, the victim's position can be made so low that they barely have the right to talk at all in the peer group, or even join the group. By means of physical forms of bullying (for example, physical violence, stealing or destroying their property or plagiarising their university assignments), the bullies can show that the target person no longer has the right to physical integrity, or to keep their own property, money or acknowledge their achievements. The victim can even lose the right to their own intellectual capacity, for example, by being told to do the bully's university work.

Due to their lack of rights within the peer group, victims usually find it very difficult to affect the position that they have been given. However, bullies have also taken and been given the right to reposition the victim with respect to others, thus being able to re-determine their victims' rights and duties. Sometimes this right can be used to return at least some of the rights to the victim, or releasing the person from their duties. This kind of repositioning could result, for example, at school level, from an intervention by teachers, parents or other classmates, or, at university level, by an event or change in the peer group dynamic that would motivate a re-evaluation of the victim's position and generate a repositioning process.

So, how does the theory of positioning increase our understanding of the tendency for victims to be revictimized later in life? Although the theory includes the assumption that repositioning is possible, and empirical findings exist to suggest that some victims of school bullying do succeed in escaping their roles as victims (e.g., Smith, Talamelli, Cowie, Naylor, & Chauhan, 2004), the experiences of bullying victimization may have a long-term impact on the self-positioning of victims in peer groups. After having learned to position themselves as a person with only duties and without any rights in the peer group, the victims may have created quite a permanent way to see themselves among peers. This perception can probably affect the ways in which they expect and accept to be positioned by new peers in new social contexts.

Positioning oneself as an outsider, without the right to be heard, believed, valued or cared about, would presumably result in avoiding or defensive behaviour in a new peer group. Instead of eagerly joining others, making friends with them, and displaying the self-disclosure that is needed for building social relationships, these people would most likely withdraw from social interaction, limit their self-closure, and hesitate, or even show defensiveness, in situations where peer relationships are established. Due to this behaviour they would increase the risk of again being positioned as outsiders with duties but no rights. In turn, this kind of peer group position would put them at risk of further victimization and abuse.

Those who have occupied the bully's position have learned to see peer relationships as social battlefields on which individuals must fight for their rights, in order to gain social power over others and to avoid being given the position and duties of the victim. As the establishment of new peer relationships is not difficult for this group of individuals (Pörhölä, 2008, 2009b), they would quickly be able to gather a new group of peers around them, and, with the assistance of these companions, take on a leading position within the new peer community at university. As they have previously gained social power by bullying others, the risk of them repeating the same strategy is high.

The impact of friends on stopping the continuities of peer victimization and bullying

Friends can play a significant role in peer community integration processes, by affecting the positioning and self-positioning of individuals. For example, Hodges, Boivin, Vitaro, and

Bukowski (1999) found that aggressively-behaving children avoided bullying children who had friends. They suggested that, in addition to serving a physically protective function, friends may improve the self-esteem and social skills of the victims of bullying, and provide emotional and cognitive support. It has even been shown that some victims have managed to escape their role as victim by acquiring new friends (Smith et al., 2004).

Having friends can also reduce the negative consequences of bullying. Evidence shows, for example, that having pro-social relationships with some classmates moderates the relationship between victimization and loneliness felt by the victim (Storch & Masia-Warner, 2004).

Correspondingly, Newman, Holden, and Delville (2005) found that victimization by peers during high school damaged most those who also felt isolated, whereas those who were bullied frequently in high school, but received social support from peers, reported fewer stress symptoms in college. Hence, the benefits of peer support for coping with victimization seem obvious. Storch and Masia-Warner (2004) suggest that supportive peer relationships may provide an arena in which negative beliefs about oneself and others can be corrected, thereby reducing the loneliness and enhancing the self-esteem of the victimized person.

Why do friendships have such an important meaning to the victims of bullying? Can friends contribute to the positions of victims in the peer group and their prospect of being revictimized in the future? The peer community integration theory (Pörhölä, 2009a, 2009b) assumes that friendships in which partners show mutual commitment, trust, support, valuation, love and care, are the most powerful relationships to pull individuals towards the centre of the peer community. Having peer relationships, in which a person shares mutual rights and duties with their partner, can have a significant impact on that individual's peer group positioning. Even though friends might not be able to prevent the person from being bullied by other peers, they are able to affect the victimized person's self-positioning and, in this way, can contribute to the future peer group positioning of that person. When the victimized person perceives that they can have equal rights and duties in a peer relationship, this perception can change their expectations of future peer relationships. It can encourage a more positive self-positioning as a potential insider of a peer group, which in turn, would affect their behaviour when entering a new peer group. Having friends would also provide opportunities for the victims of bullying to practice their peer interaction skills, which would further help them to be able to establish rewarding peer relationships and to integrate them into new peer communities, for example, when moving from school to university.

Regarding those who bully, friends can contribute by changing the course of their behaviour and preventing their bullying behaviour. With feedback from their friends bullies can be helped to re-determine their own position in the peer group and give up the rights they have appropriated and been given to determine the positions of others in the peer group. In this way the bullies would also have a better chance of having balanced peer relationships and success in integrating into the peer community at university with due respect for the rights of others to study and socialise in harmony with their peers.

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