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Bullying: A Qualitative Study of Siblings of Young Children with Disabilities

Lindsay Proctor Davis

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Educational Specialist

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ABSTRACT

Bullying: A Qualitative Study of Siblings of Young Children with Disabilities

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Research indicates that, in some instances, siblings can be a first line of defense when a child experiences bullying. Research also shows that children with disabilities are often prime targets of bullying. However, no research was located that specifically explored the relationship between siblings of children with disabilities, their perceptions of bullying and the roles that they play when bullying occurs. This study investigated siblings' perceptions of bullying through a qualitative interview. Twelve participants ranged in age from 7 to 13. Few participants described witnessing siblings with special needs being bullied; however, many of these children described themselves as bystanders who intervene when a peer is being bullied. Several factors, such as the young age of the participants' siblings or the fact that none of our participants attended school with their sibling, may be related to the lack of bullying that was reported. Future research may investigate the experiences of children with school-aged siblings with disabilities.

Keywords: bullying, siblings, disability, qualitative research

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This thesis is dedicated to my husband, Patrick, and to our unborn son, whose arrival we are eagerly anticipating. You both bring me more happiness than I have ever known. Patrick, thank you for your listening ear, your sympathetic heart, and your shoulder that has been wet by many tears. You are an incredible strength to me.

Thank you to my family—to my mother, father, and my three remarkable brothers. You each inspire me in very distinctive ways. I am the person I am today because of you.

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DESCRIPTION OF THESIS STRUCTURE

This thesis, *Bullying: A Qualitative Study of Siblings of Young Children with Disabilities*, is presented in a dual or hybrid format. In this hybrid format, both traditional and journal publication formatting requirements are met.

The preliminary pages of the thesis adhere to university requirements for thesis formatting and submission. The first full section of the thesis is presented in the new journal-ready format and conforms to the style requirements for future publication in education journals.

The full literature review, consent documents, interviewing instrument, and parent resource pages are included in Appendices A through D. Two reference lists are included in the thesis format. The first includes only the references found in the first journal-ready article. The second reference list includes all citations from the full literature review found in Appendix A.

Background

In the spring of 2009, Sirdeaner Walker-Hoover appeared on the syndicated talk show *Oprah* to talk about her son, Carl, a victim of bullying who ultimately completed suicide. Around the time that Carl entered junior high school, peers began to tease him, calling him “gay.” Sirdeaner worked with Carl and school officials to try to stop the teasing. On April 6, 2009, Carl came home particularly upset about an incident. According to Carl, his backpack had bumped a TV stand and the stand bumped into a girl, who then threatened to “beat him up.” Sirdeaner tried to assure her son that everything would be fine and went on fixing dinner. Minutes later, she proceeded upstairs to speak with her son and found him hanging from a banister in the hallway (“The Truth about Bullying,” 2009).

Bullying has been a topic of interest and study for over 20 years (Monks et al., 2009; Olweus, 1995; Weiner & Miller, 2006). Bullying has traditionally been studied within the school setting, which makes it pertinent for school officials, including school psychologists, to understand. The effects of bullying reach beyond the school into the home and community and can have long-term consequences for children (Monks et al., 2009).

Bullying, sometimes confused with teasing, has been defined as actions intended to harm another. Unlike simple teasing, however, these actions take place repeatedly over time and involve an imbalance of power. Additionally, it is difficult for the victim of bullying to defend himself or herself (Espelage & Swearer, 2003; Monks et al., 2009; Whitney & Smith, 1993). The types of bullying seen in schools include direct forms such as physical abuse (e.g., punching, slapping, kicking) or verbal abuse (e.g., threatening, name-calling, spreading rumors) and indirect forms such as social isolation and exclusion (e.g., deliberate ignoring) (DeVoe & Kaffenberger, 2005; Monks et al., 2009).

Researchers have defined three major roles within the sphere of bullying: bullies, victims, and victim-bullies (Espelage & Swearer, 2003; Reiter & Lapidot-Lefler, 2007). In instances of bullying, bullies are the aggressors, victims are the defenseless targets of the aggression, and victim-bullies sometimes play the role of the bully and other times are victimized. This three-category model has been adopted by most researchers in defining terms operationally. Espelage and Swearer (2003) propose a bullying continuum in which the traditional three-classification model is expanded to include bullies, aggressive bullies, bully-victims, victims, and bystanders.

Instances of bullying at school are frequent, and their effects can reach beyond the school. Current statistics and research examining the overall prevalence of bullying are inconclusive. It appears that the prevalence of bullying depends largely on where the data were gathered (Monks et al., 2009; Reiter & Lapidot-Lefler, 2007). One study reported that victims of bullying and their aggressors make up a minority of the population, with aggressors (2–20%) being often fewer in number than victims (5–20%). According to a 2009 report by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), during the 2007–08 school year, 25% of schools nationwide reported incidences of bullying on at least a daily or weekly basis. This same report showed that 32% of students nationwide age 12–18 reported being bullied at least once that year (U.S. Department of Education, 2009).

Surprisingly, studies have shown that there is no correlation between school size, residential area (rural or urban), class size, or ethnic mix and prevalence of bullying (Monks et al., 2009; Whitney & Smith, 1993). There is, however, a higher rate of bullying in disadvantaged areas. Within the school grounds, bullying is more likely to occur in areas of the

school where supervision is limited, such as the playground, the hallways, and even occasionally in the classroom (Whitney & Smith, 1993).

Children with disabilities are at an increased risk of becoming victims of bullying (Flynt & Morton, 2004; Monks et al., 2009; Norwich & Kelly, 2004; Rose, Monda-Amaya, & Espelage, 2011; Weiner & Miller, 2006). Children with disabilities such as deafness (Weiner & Miller, 2006), autism (van Roekel, Scholte & Didden, 2010), speech impairments (Barr, McLeod, & Daniel, 2008), emotional disabilities (Flynt & Morton, 2004) and learning disabilities (Flynt & Morton, 2004) may be targeted by bullies, according to the literature.

Researchers have theorized regarding reasons why children with disabilities become prime targets for bullying. Children with intellectual disabilities can be major targets for bullies because they tend to have lower self-esteem and they often look to others for social cues. Additionally, these children may lack awareness when a situation becomes threatening (Flynt & Morton, 2004). Children with learning disabilities tend to have poor social skills and may be ostracized by their peers. Children with physical impairments may be viewed as weak by bullies, and thus they also become victims of bullying (Flynt & Morton, 2004). In one study conducted in the Netherlands, 230 adolescents with Autism Spectrum Disorder were administered questionnaires regarding bullying. The reported results indicated that 7–30% of the sample reported that they were victims of bullying (van Roekel et al., 2010).

For many children in general education settings, siblings can be a first line of defense against bullies. This is especially true for children of an ethnic minority (Hadfield, Edwards, & Mauthner, 2006). Does the same hold true for children with disabilities? In a literature search of several databases, no research was located that investigated bullying, sibling relations and support between children with disabilities and their siblings.

Statement of Problem

It is clear that there exists a paucity of research concerning siblings of children with disabilities and bullying, something that is a very real concern for many children and their families. While all children are vulnerable, children with disabilities are in a heightened state of vulnerability and need to be protected. Additionally, siblings of children with disabilities face an overabundance of challenges and responsibilities in and out of the home. This makes them vulnerable as well. The lack of research in this area warrants an investigation into siblings' perceptions of bullying.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study was to ascertain perceptions of siblings of children with disabilities regarding bullying, specifically, the roles they take in such situations, and how they describe their experiences involving bullying. It is hoped that through this study, teachers, schools, and parents will be better informed about the relationship between bullying, children with disabilities, and their siblings.

Research Questions

To address the need for research in this area, the following research questions were investigated:

1. What perceived roles do siblings of children with disabilities take in bullying situations?
2. How do siblings of children with disabilities describe their experiences regarding bullying related to their sibling with a disability?

Method

Methods of data collection used in bullying research have included self-report (the preferred method), peer nomination, teacher nomination, and behavioral observation. The

possibility of priming has introduced controversy into self-report measures where a definition of bullying is given (Espelage & Swearer, 2003). Although Espelage and Swearer (2003) have promoted a more “real” method of data-collection, such as videotaping genuine interactions and employing direct observation, they recognize that there are difficulties to this method: it is a more expensive, intrusive and a less efficient method of data collection. Because of the small scale of our qualitative study, the researchers opted to employ data collection through the use of a semi-structured interview method, which utilizes a pre-selected list of questions. When using semi-structured interviews, participants’ responses to questions are analyzed by comparing and contrasting answers (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006).

Participants

Participants were recruited from Sibshops of Utah County. Sibshops are workshops for siblings of children with disabilities or, as the creators of Sibshops define them, “opportunities for brothers and sisters of children with special health, mental health, and developmental needs to obtain peer support and education within a recreational context” (Meyer & Vadasy, 2008; pg. 1). Twelve participants ranging in age from 7–13 were interviewed. Of these participants, seven had a sibling with autism, three had a sibling with Prader-Willi syndrome, one had a sibling with cerebral palsy, and one stated she did not know her sibling’s disability. The siblings’ reported ages ranged from 2–10 years old. All of the participants interviewed were older than their sibling with a disability and none of the participants reported attending the same school as their sibling with a disability. Three participants noted that their siblings were not old enough to attend school. Several of the participants were siblings with each other as well. The twelve participants came from seven families. See Table 1 for a description of the participants.

<Insert Table 1 here>

Settings

Data were collected during one of the monthly Sibshops at an early intervention center in Orem, Utah. Parents were contacted ahead of time via email to inform them of the study and to request the participation of their children. When parents signed their children in at the Sibshop, they were given the research consent form to sign. Participants were provided with and asked to sign an assent form (See Appendix B for the consent and assent forms). Interviews were conducted the same day in a room adjacent to the Sibshop activities.

Instrumentation

The Sibling's Perception of Bullying Interview was used to guide the interviews. Questions and prompts that were included in the structured interview are found in Appendix C. It includes eight items used to develop rapport with the participants, followed by approximately twenty questions directly related to bullying (e.g. Have you ever seen anyone be bullied at school, in your neighborhood or anywhere else? Tell me about it. Where did it happen? What did the bully do?). The instrument was developed by the primary investigator for the purpose of this study.

Procedures

Prior to data collection, the researcher introduced the topic of bullying to all of the Sibshop participants by showing selected pictures from the books *Nobody Knew What to Do: A Story About Bullying* by Becky Ray McCain (2001), and *Say Something* by Peggy Moss (2008). Pictures from these books depict three types of bullying—physical, verbal, and relational (DeVoe & Kaffenberger, 2005; Monks et al., 2009). The researcher selected pictures that portrayed primarily the bully and the victim to avoid introducing bystander roles that may have influenced what the participants perceived as the “proper” role of a bystander. Questions were

asked to the group to clarify what constitutes bullying, and a short discussion of the types of bullying took place. It was hoped that through introducing the topic of bullying to the group in this way, participants would have a similar conceptualization of what constitutes bullying and that the responses and information elicited would be more useful. The books were not read in their entirety so as to avoid priming participants on the proper way to respond in bullying situations. After showing the pictures and discussing them with the group, one-on-one interviews were conducted with the twelve participants. The interviews were video-recorded in a private room adjacent to the Sibshop activities.

Research Design

A qualitative research design utilizing a semi-structured interview with children ages 7–13 was selected for this study. Interviews were conducted in a one-on-one setting and were video-recorded and later transcribed. Each interview lasted approximately five to eight minutes. Because of a malfunction with the technology, four of the interview tapes could not be recovered and so field notes for these four interviews were included in the data analysis; however, no direct quotes will be included from these four interviews. The interviewer took detailed notes of the participants' responses during the interview.

For confidentiality purposes, each participant was assigned an identifying code at the time of transcription and was documented in the interviewer notes. Names have been changed in the results and discussion to preserve anonymity of participants and of those persons mentioned by the participants. Electronic data were stored on a password-protected computer with access given only to the principal investigator and one additional researcher. The video-recordings will be destroyed after publication.

Data Analysis

The data analysis utilized was based on grounded theory, from which themes and ideas emerge from the collected data (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Johnson & Christensen, 2007). This method was chosen because it was the most appropriate analysis identified to analyze interview data. In qualitative research, researchers seek to establish trustworthiness and credibility in the acquisition and analysis of data, similar to reliability and validity. Trustworthiness involves a rigid application of the selected procedures, while credibility refers to the process of triangulation, or ensuring that the participants and data are credible to the best of the researcher's ability. In order to establish reliability, two analysts used descriptive and analytic coding to identify themes, topics, ideas, concepts, terms, phrases or keywords that emerged in the data. When analysts disagreed on a code or theme, a trained third party assisted in identifying the appropriate coding.

For this project, data were selected and condensed by summarizing data, coding, finding themes, clustering, and drawing out stories. Throughout the discussion, the researcher sought to utilize both description and direct quotation, which allowed the reader to "enter into the situation and thoughts of the people represented" (Patton, 2002 as quoted in Barr et al., 2008). Interjections and tangents were removed from direct quotes to make them more readable while maintaining the context and the intended meaning to the best of the analyst's knowledge.

Results

The following research questions were posed before the commencement of this study:

1. What perceived roles do siblings of children with disabilities take in bullying situations?
2. How do siblings of children with disabilities describe their experiences regarding bullying related to their sibling with a disability?

The purpose of this study was to ascertain perceptions of siblings of children with disabilities regarding bullying, specifically, the roles they take in such situations, and how they describe their experiences involving bullying. Answers to the research questions will be discussed, as related to the results of this qualitative study and to the current literature on the topic of bullying as perceived by siblings of children with disabilities.

Participants were asked about and provided definitions of bullying at the outset of the interview. They also provided an account of their experiences related to bullying. Participants were asked whether they had ever witnessed someone being bullied, if they had ever been bullied, and whether they had ever seen their sibling with a disability being bullied.

As indicated in the table below, researchers identified two main themes from the data: definitions of bullying and experiences with bullying. Four subthemes emerged from the category of definitions of bullying: physical, verbal, relational, and general. Six subthemes emerged from the category of experiences with bullying: settings of witnessed bullying, types of bullying, participants in bullying, outcomes, emotional reactions to witnessing bullying, and rationale for and against bullying (See Table 2). Each theme and its accompanying subtheme will be discussed

<Insert Table 2 here>

Participants' Definitions of Bullying

Participants' responses regarding the definition of bullying were reflective of each of the three types of bullying—physical, verbal and relational (DeVoe & Kaffenberger, 2005; Monks et al., 2009). The frequency of responses regarding physical and verbal bullying was fairly consistent, with three participants mentioning physical bullying and four participants mentioning verbal bullying. A 13-year-old male participant was the only participant to mention more than

one type of bullying in his definition. He stated that bullying was “verbally hurting [the victim]. And by physically, probably like poking them and punching them, or something like that.”

Responses that indicated that bullying was physical were mentioned by three participants. A 9-year-old female respondent said, “I think [bullying] means that, like, you punch them a lot... And sometimes bullies will steal your lunch money.” A 10-year-old male participant stated that bullying was to “do like some kind of violent thing, or something. Like you’re trying to scare them.” A 13-year-old male participant noted that bullying could be “physically probably like poking them and punching them.”

Four participants mentioned some type of verbal bullying in their definitions of bullying. Three of these participants were female and mentioned bullying behaviors such as saying mean things, calling names, and threatening.

Only two participants mentioned behaviors that might be considered relational bullying in their definitions of bullying. A 7-year-old female participant noted that bullying meant “to exclude [someone]. Or talk behind their back and stuff.” A 9-year-old male participant stated that bullying was “to have [the victim] give you whatever you want ‘cause they’re scared of you.”

Many of the participants’ responses regarding the definition of bullying were reflected in very general terms. For example, a 7-year-old female said that bullying was “pretty much just to be mean.” An 8-year-old female participant stated that bullying was when “You’re being rude... You’re not doing the right thing. And getting in trouble a lot.” And a 13-year-old male participant stated that bullying is “kind of like trying to hurt them, like make them not feel as good about themselves, or something like that.”

Several of the participants' responses reflected an awareness of the imbalance of power between the bully and the victim. For example, a 9-year-old female participant stated, "I think it means you pick on... someone that's smaller than you. And you think it's funny." Another 9-year-old male participant stated that "bullying is where you tease people who are younger and not as strong as you."

Participants' Experiences with Bullying

Participants were asked to describe specific scenarios where they were either bullied or witnessed bullying taking place. Several subthemes emerged from the participants' described experiences and aligned with many of the elements of bullying that have been studied in bullying research. Some of these themes were settings of witnessed bullying, types of bullying, participants in bullying situations, outcomes, emotional reactions to witnessing bullying and rationale for and against bullying. It should be noted that participants often described a single significant experience of bullying. As pertaining to the accepted definition of bullying as persisting over time, the researcher could not be certain that the described experiences were not, in fact, simply incidences of aggression rather than genuine bullying. Very few of the incidences described by participants included an element of persistence over time.

Settings of witnessed bullying. A majority of the specific bullying scenarios described by participants took place at school. Seventeen bullying scenarios were set at school or on the way to school and only one was described as occurring in the community. None of the participants described bullying taking place in the home setting or via technological devices such as a phone or the internet.

Within the school setting, five described scenarios took place at recess, two took place in class, two occurred on the bus, one occurred at lunch, and one at the bus stop. Six other scenarios

were described more generally, as happening “at school.” A 9-year-old male participant described an incident where his 4-year-old brother with autism was bullied at a community playground.

Types of bullying. Participants described 15 scenarios that involved verbal bullying, 9 scenarios that involved physical bullying and 1 scenario that involved relational bullying. No scenarios involving technology or any type of cyber-bullying were mentioned by any of the participants.

Of the 15 scenarios of verbal bullying, 7 involved a peer as the victim, 7 involved the participant as the victim, and one involved a non-disabled sibling as the victim. The types of verbal bullying described most often involved name calling (n=7), taunting (n=5), and threatening (n=2). In describing name-calling, a 9-year-old female participant related a time when a bully bullied her non-disabled sister by indicating that the bully “would call her names like ‘fat’.” In describing a scenario where a peer was bullied by taunting, a 13-year-old male participant said, “A lot of people were [saying to the victim], ‘Were you adopted?’” A 9-year-old male participant described a peer being threatened by saying, “Well, [the bully] was kind of picking on him... Uh, like threatening to punch him.”

Of the nine scenarios that involved physical bullying, five involved a peer as the victim, three involved the participant as the victim, and one involved a sibling with a disability as the victim. In describing a peer being physically bullied, one 9-year-old female participant said, “When they play dodgeball, they always go for [the victim] and then he goes inside and starts crying.” In describing a time when she was bullied, an 8-year-old female participant said, “Well I had a hole [in my mask] so I could see but he also, when I was trying to turn [the mask] he punched me, in the eye.” A 9-year-old male participant described a time when he witnessed his

4-year-old sibling with autism being physically bullied by saying, “[The bully] was pushing [my brother], taking his toys away, um, and a bunch of other stuff.”

A 7-year-old female was the only participant to describe relational bullying and she recalled, “Well, there was one friend of mine that, um, a lot of people think that she is kind of mean, um, well cuz she tries to only... her friends she wants them to only have one friend and she won’t let them have any other friends and so they always talk, like, behind her back a lot. They think she’s mean.”

Participants in bullying situations. Three main roles in the bullying situations discussed by participants were identified: bullies, victims, and bystanders. Each will be discussed.

Bullies. Two female participants related three experiences that involved a single female as the bully. A 7-year-old female participant identified the bully as a female “friend,” and later described a group of females as participating in relational bullying. She stated, “My friends talk behind her back so they’re being a little bit of a bully, but then she is one because she talks about others behind their back and also isn’t a really good friend to pe—, to people.”

In nine other instances, eight participants identified the bully as either a single male bully (in six cases) or a group of males (in three cases). The 13-year-old male participant identified a group of bullies in a scenario of witnessed bullying and added that it was “mostly the guys.” Two participants indicated that the bully was older than the victim by one to four years. Two participants described three scenarios where the bully was identified generally as a group of “kids” or “people.”

Victims. While only one participant answered the question, “Have you ever seen your sibling with special needs being bullied?” by answering “yes,” two participants answered the question “no,” but then went on to say, “only by my little sisters” (9-year-old female) and

“except when my parents get really mad at him” (10-year-old male). It was not made clear in either case whether the participant truly viewed their sibling with a disability as being bullied by a family member. (The 10-year-old laughed as if he was making a joke by saying this.) A 9-year-old female participant identified a non-disabled sibling as a victim in one scenario.

Participants identified a single peer as the victim in eight scenarios, and seven participants identified themselves as the victims in eight scenarios. The victim was identified as male in 12 scenarios and as female in 8 scenarios.

Bystanders. Eleven participants identified bystanders when describing scenarios of bullying. They often included themselves as bystanders when describing instances in which they witnessed bullying. Bystanders’ roles were classified as intervening, doing nothing, or joining in the bullying.

The most common bystander role identified in 12 bullying scenarios was the bystanders’ intervening on behalf of the victim. In 9 out of these 12 scenarios, the participants identified themselves as the bystander who intervened on behalf of the victim. Comments included, “I told our teacher,” “I tried to tell [the bully] to stop,” and “I usually try to stop it.” One participant, a 9-year-old male, described several scenarios in which he intervened in a violent way to stop the bully. For example, in describing a scenario in which a friend was being bullied, he said, “I kind of, um, just start getting physical with them. Um, like I tell them to knock it off or else I’m going to have to tell the teacher. Um, or I get physical with them... I’ve gotten into a punching fight once and it didn’t turn out well. I nearly got a black eye. The guy did get a black eye and I nearly, um, he punched me to the ground in my chest and, um, I got this (points to his face).” The same participant, in describing an incident in which his sibling with a disability was being bullied, stated, “Like [the bully] was pushing [my sibling], taking his toys away, um, and a

bunch of other stuff. So I got mad and... pushed [the bully] off the slide.” In two scenarios, it was a group of peers who intervened on behalf of the victim, and in one scenario, adults were identified as bystanders who intervened to stop the bullying.

In six scenarios, the bystanders were described as passive observers who did nothing. A 13-year-old male stated, “Usually they just try to stay out of it... ’cause they don’t wanna have like any, like anything to do with being annoyed, or something like that.”

Three participants described three scenarios in which bystanders engaged in bullying behaviors along with the bully. Regarding a scenario of relational bullying, a 7-year-old girl stated, “Sometimes they’ll try to stop [the bullying] but they, a lot of times they’ll just be talking about it too.” A 9-year-old female stated, “[The bullies] tell everyone to go for Corey and, and then everyone starts being mean to him... And so when they play dodgeball, they always go for him and then he goes inside and starts crying and tells our teacher.”

Outcomes of bullying situations. Three general outcomes to bullying scenarios were identified from participants’ responses: (1) A bystander or victim sought help from an adult or teacher, (2) A bystander intervened to try to stop the bullying, and (3) Nothing was done/no resolution.

Seeking help. Four participants described seven bullying scenarios in which a teacher or adult was informed of the bullying and involved in the resolution of the scenario. This was the most common response or outcome of bullying scenarios communicated to the interviewer. Participants commented on a general outcome as a result of informing the teacher by saying, “[The bully] had to call his mom” (8-year-old female) and “[The bullies] got in trouble” (9-year-old female). A 9-year-old male described a bullying situation in which both he and the teacher were involved in the outcome and resolution. He stated, “Well, [the bully] was kind of picking

on [my friend]. Punching him. Uh, like threatening to punch him. And so I went over there and just pushed him away from my friend and told [my friend] to go tell the teacher. But when the teacher came back we were both in trouble ‘cause we were both punching each other.’”

Intervening. Four participants described five scenarios in which a bystander (including the participant acting as a bystander) attempted to intervene and tell the bully to stop. A 7-year-old female participant commented, “They usually talk behind people’s backs when they’re with me so I try to stop it and, like, bring up another subject.” A 9-year-old male described locating the bully at a time after the bullying incident. He reported, “And I found who the guy who threw the snowball at [the victim] and then, um, I said, ‘Bullying’s not fun for other kids. You could hurt somebody.’”

Failing to resolve. Six scenarios describing no resolution were presented by four participants. One 9-year-old girl commented, “So I wanted to stop the bully, but he didn’t really stop. He just told me to go away. And I could have stand up for myself, but I didn’t really want to call him names or anything. And I didn’t tell the principal because I usually don’t like going places myself... I don’t really feel comfortable without somebody.” The same 9-year-old girl, in describing witnessing a sibling being bullied (not the sibling with a disability) stated, “Well, um, I was kind of playing with my friends and kind of busy, but I thought that I would [intervene], but I never really did.” A 13-year-old boy, in describing a scenario in which he was the victim, commented, “I started... going to the bus stop a little bit later so I don’t run into them.” In describing a separate incident in which he was victimized as a second grader, the same boy said, “I started to avoid [the bully] a lot.”

Emotional reactions to witnessing bullying. Participants were asked how witnessing instances of bullying made them feel. In answering this question, a majority of participants’

responses indicated some type of unpleasant emotion. The most common word used to describe how witnessing bullying made the participants feel was “sad,” which was used nine times. The second most common response was that witnessing bullying made them feel “mad,” “angry” or “bad,” which were mentioned by the participants four times. Other responses that indicated negative feelings associated with bullying were “pretty bad,” “scared,” “not very good,” and “upset.”

A 13-year-old male participant indicated neutral emotion in witnessing a peer being bullied by saying, “Me, I didn’t really feel anything. I just kinda stay out of it.” This same participant, in describing his feelings toward two boys who bullied him, indicated sympathy toward the bullies by saying, “It kinda made me feel like maybe they kinda are in a tough situation at home, or something.” A 7-year-old female participant described feeling similarly to a bully who was engaging in gossiping and relational bullying when she said, “And I agree [with the bully] but I don’t directly say that. ‘Cause I try to just not to bring it up at all.”

Perceived rationale for and against bullying. Seven participants provided reasons why someone is or is not bullied. In four scenarios, the participant provided a reason why a peer was bullied. One 7-year-old female explained why a bully-victim was bullied by stating, “People think she is kind of mean.” In the other two scenarios, the participants used the word “weird” to describe why a peer was bullied. A 9-year-old female described a peer victim by saying, “There’s this kid named Corey and he’s always hyper and stuff... All the kids in the whole 4th grade think he’s weird.” A 13-year-old male participant also described a victimized peer by saying, “There’s this one kid at my school named John. But, and there’s actually a, a pretty good reason why he’s bullied. He’s really annoying. And he kind of goes up to people and go like

(noise)... John is always... like doing like all these weird sounds and noises. And he, he, he doesn't have a special need—he's just kind of weird.”

Additionally, five participants provided reasons why their sibling with a disability is *not* bullied. One 7-year-old female participant with a sister with Prader-Willi Syndrome said, “She doesn't go to school and she's so cute that everybody just ... And you can't really tell that she has Prader-Willi syndrome... They just think it's normal.” An 8-year-old female participant described why her 3-year-old brother with autism is not bullied by saying, “My friends like Mike. Whenever my mom leaves they come and play with us, with Mike.” A 9-year-old female participant described why her brother with special needs is not bullied by saying, “Most people think he's cool because my brother Adam taught him to high-five and do rocks.”

Discussion

Reflecting on the findings of this study, the following sections describe participants' experiences with and perceptions of bullying. The discussion section concludes with the study's limitations, implications for intervention, and suggestions for future research efforts..

Reflections on Findings

The participants provided personal definitions of bullying and related their individual experiences with bullying. These definitions and experiences are discussed in the following sections.

Participants' definitions of bullying. Participants' personal definitions of bullying varied. Many included very general definitions while others provided more specific definitions with examples. All of the participants who provided general definitions of bullying went on to discuss experiences that contained both verbal and physical bullying. This may suggest that, while some children might not be able to verbalize what bullying truly is, they are able to

recognize it when it occurs. Of those that provided definitions that included one or more of the three types of bullying, more than half related experiences that involved at least one of the types of bullying that they discussed in their definitions. Thus it seemed that participants' definitions of bullying may be influenced by their personal experiences related to bullying.

Participants' experiences with bullying. Participants provided deep insight as they related their personal experiences with bullying. Among these insights were the participants' perceptions of the roles they and others assume in bullying scenarios. A few participants related information that provided insight into their relationships with siblings, both disabled and non-disabled. Participants' experiences also revealed much information about the context of bullying scenarios, including where bullying takes place, how these scenarios are resolved (or are not resolved), and how participants reacted emotionally to witnessing bullying.

Perceived roles in bullying situations. The participants in this study discussed many scenarios of bullying and provided personal insights into their experiences throughout the interview process. The specific details of their reported scenarios, the key players, and how they experienced bullying varied from participant to participant. Unique to each participant's experience were portrayals of bullying-related roles, outcomes and participants' emotional reactions to witnessing bullying.

Participants' descriptions of the bully indicated that most often the bully was a single male (n=9). The bully was described as a group of males in three scenarios, generally as a group of kids/people in three scenarios and as a single female in three scenarios. A group of females engaging in relational bullying was mentioned once. This reflects closely what has been found regarding who bullies, with a single male being the most common perpetrator of bullying, followed by a group of boys, a mixed group (boys and girls), a group of girls, and a single girl

(Glew, Fan, Katon, Rivara, & Kernic, 2005; Whitney & Smith, 1993). This also reflects the finding that boys are more often identified as bullies than girls (Monks et al., 2009). None of the participants identified their sibling with a disability or themselves as the bully.

Seven of the participants provided experiences that portrayed themselves as the victim. None of these scenarios involved the sibling with a disability in any way, and all of the scenarios described occurred at school. Only one participant described witnessing a sibling with a disability being bullied. This was an interesting finding given research that suggests that children with disabilities are more likely to be bullied (Flynt & Morton, 2004; Monks et al., 2009; Rose et al., 2011; Weiner & Miller, 2006).

Eight scenarios were discussed that involved a peer as the victim. Of note to the researcher were the participants' comments describing several of these bullied peers as "weird" or "annoying." A 13-year-old participant seemed to justify a peer being bullied by saying, "There, there's this one kid at my school named John. But, and there's actually a, a pretty good reason why he's bullied. He's really annoying." Another participant described a bullied peer who had been retained several years and who she described as having some type of speech or communication problem. In the case of these peers, it is possible that one or more of them have a disability, something the participant would be unlikely to know for sure. This might support the idea that children with less severe or less visible disabilities are more likely to be bullied because often their disability is viewed as the person being different, odd, or quirky.

Interestingly, in a majority of the scenarios related to the interviewer in which a bystander intervened for the victim, the participant identified himself or herself as that bystander. In most cases, the participant described themselves seeking help from an adult or speaking with the bully directly. Only one participant, a 9-year-old male, shared experiences in which he

intervened in a violent way. He described several instances in which he intervened in a violent way to stop a bully who was bullying a peer as well as his four-year-old brother with autism. This is related to O'Connell, Pepler and Craig's (1999) finding that interventions that focus on bystanders' responses are more likely to be effective than interventions aimed at the victim.

Several other possible explanations exist for the participants' high rate of self-identification as bystanders who intervene. One possible explanation is that these children may be sensitive to others who might be seen as "different." While very few participants reported witnessing their sibling with a disability being bullied, nearly all reported some type of witnessed bullying and many of the participants identified some trait of the victim that made them "different." Another explanation could be that the participants were more likely to remember an incident of bullying when they took an active role to end it. Bullying situations can be highly emotionally stimulating, which may make them more memorable to the participants.

Sibling support. A few participants described bullying scenarios involving siblings. The roles assumed by the participants in these scenarios varied. Scenarios involving siblings with and without disabilities are discussed.

Only one participant described witnessing his sibling with a disability being bullied, compared to 18 bullying scenarios described by the participants. This is an interesting finding given the research suggesting that people with disabilities are at a heightened risk of being bullied (Flynt & Morton, 2004; Monks et al., 2009; Rose et al., 2011; Weiner & Miller, 2006). In this case, the lack of evidence to support that siblings with disabilities are at a greater risk of being bullied is, in itself, an interesting finding that may have many significant implications.

Several factors may have influenced the relative absence of witnessed bullying of the participants' siblings. One possible explanation for this could be the young age of many of the

participants' siblings. The participants' siblings ranged in age from 2–10, with the mean age being 4.4. As a 7-year-old female participant noted when providing a reason why she believes her sibling is not bullied, “You can’t really tell that she has Prader-Willi syndrome... a lot of people haven’t heard of it, so they just, they hardly know... she doesn’t always have her tube in ‘cause she’ll pull it out... and so they don’t always see that and then they don’t, like, she can’t talk but they don’t really, a lot of people don’t know that she’s two because she’s really tiny so they just think it’s normal.” It could be that some very young children with disabilities are not bullied because they are highly supervised by family members. Furthermore, odd behavior displayed by these young children may be overlooked as a function of being young.

Additionally, none of the participants attended school with their sibling. Given the finding that a majority of witnessed bullying occurred at school (Diamanduros, Downs, & Jenkins, 2008; Monks et al., 2009), this may be an explanation for the lack of observed bullying related to the participants' siblings. It is possible that the participants' siblings are bullied at school, but it has gone undetected by the participant, or, in the case of those whose siblings do not yet attend school, it might be that the children with disabilities have not yet been exposed to an environment where bullying may be more likely to occur (e.g., school). These children simply may be too young to experience bullying (Espelage & Swearer, 2003; Reiter & Lapidot-Lefler, 2007). If this were the case, having the children and their siblings in separate school settings may be removing a possible protective factor for the siblings with disabilities if the participants would be more likely to intervene as a bystander.

Of note was a 9-year-old female's description of witnessing a non-disabled sibling being bullied. The sister that was described in the scenario was also interviewed as a participant, and both sisters described a similar scenario that may have been the same incident—Sister 1 as a

bystander and Sister 2 as the victim. Both sisters are of minority racial status, which was of interest to the researcher because of research presented by Hadfield et al. (2006) regarding minority siblings as a support in bullying situations. Sister 1 described the scenario as follows: “And um, at my old school in Creek City... I would go on the bus and, um, at school at recess sometimes people would call my sister, Anna, fat... I was kind of playing with my friends and kind of busy, but I thought that I would [intervene], but I never really did... I felt really sad someone would be bullying my sister like that.”

In this description, Sister 1 describes her feelings of sadness at seeing her sister being bullied; however, she indicated her role as a passive observer during this incident and did not intervene to stop the bully or support her sister. Sister 2 recalled a similar incident by stating, “When I was down in Creek City, before we moved here...I rode a bus to school. And some kid called me fatso... My sister [saw it happen].” When the interviewer asked how her sister responded, Sister 2 said, “Um, I don’t remember.” This scenario, described very similarly by both sisters, may also support the idea that instances of bullying are emotional and thus highly memorable. Also of note is that Sister 2 did *not* remember (or did not report) how her sister who witnessed the incident did not intervene to help.

Outcomes of bullying situations. Outcomes of bullying scenarios described by participants mainly included involvement of an adult, intervention of a bystander, or no resolution. In other cases, participants did not discuss outcomes. Of the three outcomes described, none stood out as the primary outcome or resolution. As many researchers have discussed, children need to know the potential harm that can result from taking a passive role as a bystander, which can reinforce a bully’s behavior (O’Connell et al., 1999; Storey, Slaby, Adler, Minotti, & Katz, 2008). Additionally, children should be warned about the dangers of involving

themselves in potentially dangerous or hostile situations. Whenever possible, children should be encouraged to involve a responsible adult when they witness bullying.

Settings of witnessed bullying. An overwhelming majority of the participants' described experiences that occurred within a school setting. This gives credence to the large emphasis on bullying research that has been focused on school settings (DeVoe & Kaffenberger, 2005; Diamanduros et al., 2008; U.S. Department of Education, 2009). Because so many children report bullying at school, and none of our participants attended school with their sibling with a disability, this may have influenced the results.

Emotional reactions to witnessing bullying. A majority of the participants indicated some type of unpleasant emotion related to witnessing or experiencing bullying. This was similar to the 83% of participants in O'Connell et al.'s (1999) study who reported that bullying made them feel "a bit" or "quite" unpleasant. These researchers provided a positive solution to children's unpleasant experiences:

We would recommend intervention strategies in which peers are taught to attend to their discomfort. A heightened awareness of the negative aspects of bullying might lead peers to spend less time passively viewing, and perhaps increase their active opposition to bullying. When the peer group stops being an audience, the bully's attempts to gain dominance go unnoticed, therefore, the peers' reinforcement of the bully is removed. (p 448)

In responding to a question about how being bullied made him feel, a 13-year-old male participant indicated that it made him wonder about what the bullies were experiencing in their personal home lives. This answer was a unique stance that was not seen in other responses. Interestingly, this same participant was the only one to indicate emotional apathy at witnessing a

peer being bullied. He stated, “Me, I didn’t really feel anything. I just kinda, stay out of it.”

Limitations

There are a few limitations of this study. First, the study was limited by the definition and perception of terms. For example, a 14-year-old’s understanding of bullying may differ from that of a 9-year-old. In order to address this potential limitation, examples of three types of bullying were taught to the participants prior to the individual interviews. Another limitation was the suggestibility of children and the possibility of priming them for answers. For this reason, no pictures were shown that depicted the reaction to bullying of the victims or bystanders.

Another possible limitation might have been the unwillingness of some children to share private or sensitive information. Some children may not feel comfortable discussing bullying. For this reason, children were prompted and encouraged to give answers but were not required to answer all of the questions. At the outset of the interview, the children were informed that they did not need to answer questions if they felt uncomfortable. Most interviews were very brief, generally lasting between 5 and 10 minutes. This may be seen as a limitation because of the inability to gather a depth of experience in such a short time. Alternately, it may be seen as a strength of the study because of the children’s ability to relate only the most pertinent information.

Few participants reported witnessing their sibling with a disability being bullied. This was another limitation of this study. It is possible that the siblings’ young ages acted as a protective factor against bullying. It is also possible that the young siblings with disabilities have been bullied, but their older siblings are not present in those settings to witness the bullying take place.

Implications for Practice

While we may not have gained much insight into sibling support related to children with disabilities and bullying as a result of this study, participants' experiences provided important implications for school psychology practice. First, bullying is a very real experience for many children and is witnessed primarily within the school setting. This makes bullying an important issue for school practitioners to acknowledge and understand. School personnel can teach children about appropriate ways to respond when witnessing bullying, including the potential harm that can result from taking a passive role as a bystander. Professionals and other adults can also help children to develop a clearer understanding of the types of bullying and how to recognize them, specifically those types that are less conventional, such as relational and cyberbullying which were reported less frequently than would be expected in this study. This study also has implications for how children could be further benefitted through a sibling support program, such as Sibshops. Sibling support group facilitators are in a unique position to influence children who have siblings with disabilities and to assist them in developing the skills to intervene in safe and appropriate ways when they witness bullying—either of a sibling or a peer. These children, who have implicated themselves as active bystanders, should be taught that they can have a significant role in acting as a protector for their siblings with disabilities.

Suggestions for Future Research

As with most research, the results of this study have elicited more questions than answers. Directions for future research in this area are expansive. Given that many of our participants interact with their siblings primarily within a home environment, research regarding sibling-targeted bullying within the home and neighborhood may produce interesting results and

seems to be a new area of interest for bullying research, among other settings (Monks et al., 2009).

Future research should include participants of varying ages (e.g., older and younger siblings) who attend the same school as their sibling with a disability. Additionally, insight may be gained from investigating comparison groups of children—those with siblings with disabilities and those with normally developing siblings—and their reactions to and roles in bullying scenarios. Researchers might also investigate a sibling's severity of disability and implications for becoming a victim of bullying. A longitudinal study of children with siblings with disabilities may yield interesting insights into how attitudes and reactions regarding bullying may change over time.

Finally, researchers might investigate how children's personal definitions of bullying are influenced by their experiences with bullying. Also, to enhance our research in the future, we could include in our instrument questions regarding whether the participant themselves have ever engaged in bullying, an element that was left out of our interview.

Conclusions

This study explored the experiences of siblings of children with disabilities related to bullying. Little research has been found that investigates this group of children and their experiences related to witnessing a sibling with a disability being bullied and the roles they assume. Interviews with these children revealed two major themes: definitions of bullying and experiences with bullying. While little was revealed regarding the participants' siblings as victims, bullies, or bystanders, the participants described a wealth of experience relating to bullying and provided many insights into bullying roles and rationale. This research has

implications for school psychologists and other practitioners who work with children and families, who are in a powerful position to address bullying and its dire effects.

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Table 1

Participants and Their Siblings

| Interviewee | Sibling's Disability | Sibling's Age | School Attended by Siblings (Same/Different) |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|---------------|--|
| 7-year-old female | Prader-Willi Syndrome | 2 | Sibling does not attend school |
| 8-year-old female | Autism | Younger | Different |
| 9-year-old female (1) | Unknown | 3 | Different |
| 9-year-old female (2) | Autism | 3 | Different |
| 9-year-old male (1) | Autism | 4 | Different |
| 9-year-old male (2) | Autism | 3 | Different |
| 10-year-old male | Autism | 8 | Different |
| 13-year-old male | Autism | 10 | Different |
| *8-year-old female | Cerebral Palsy | 5 | Different |
| *8-year-old female | Prader-Willi Syndrome | 2 | Siblings does not attend school |
| *11-year-old female | Prader-Willi Syndrome | 2 | Sibling does not attend school |
| *12-year-old female | Autism | 6 | Different |

* Participants' interviews could not be transcribed because of technical malfunction. Data from these participants were included, but no direct quotes are given.

Table 2

Themes and Subthemes Related to Participants' Responses About Bullying

| Theme | Subtheme | Description |
|---------------------------|---|--|
| Definitions of bullying | Physical Verbal Relational General | |
| Experiences with bullying | Setting of witnessed bullying | School Community |
| | Types of bullying | Verbal Physical Relational |
| | Participants in bullying | Bullies Victims Bystanders |
| | Outcomes | Adult help sought Bystander intervention No resolution |
| | Emotional reactions to witnessing bullying | Agrees with bully Neutral response Unpleasant emotion |
| | Rationale for and against bullying | Reasons why a victim is bullied Reasons why a sibling with special needs is not bullied |

Appendix A: Review of Literature

This review will discuss the types of bullying that are observed within the school, current bullying statistics, why bullying is a problem worth studying, and how siblings can be safeguards against bullying. Bullying among students with disabilities as well as sibling relations and support for children who are bullied in the general education setting will be examined.

Bullying

In the field of educational psychology, there has been a lack of consensus surrounding the definition of bullying. The disparities are largely issues of semantics, but, as Espelage and Swearer (2003) point out, most definitions describe bullying as a subset of aggression. Bullying, sometimes confused with teasing, has been defined as actions intended to harm another. Unlike simple teasing, however, these actions take place repeatedly over time and involve an imbalance of power. Additionally, it is difficult for the victim of bullying to defend himself or herself (Espelage & Swearer, 2003; Monks et al., 2009; Whitney & Smith, 1993). Whitney and Smith (1993) distinguished the difference nicely when they stated, “It is not bullying when two children... of about the same strength have the odd fight or quarrel” (pg. 7). Another definition states that bullying does not have to take place repeatedly, but must be severe enough that the victim feels its effects long after the event (Olweus, 1995).

Researchers have identified several types or classifications of bullying. According to one report, bullying can be categorized into either direct or indirect forms (DeVoe & Kaffenberger, 2005). Direct bullying involves overt, physical contact, while indirect bullying involves social isolation or exclusion. The types of bullying seen in schools include direct forms such as physical abuse (e.g., punching, slapping, kicking) or verbal abuse (e.g., threatening,

name-calling, spreading rumors), and indirect forms such as social isolation or exclusion (e.g., deliberate ignoring) (Monks et al., 2009).

Research is now beginning to focus on newly emerging forms of bullying such as cyberbullying and bias bullying. Cyberbullying involves the use of technology such as the internet or cell phones to bully (Diamanduros, Downs, & Jenkins, 2008; Monks et al., 2009; Willard, 2008). Bias bullying is bullying a person because of his or her group identity (Monks et al., 2009).

Settings of Bullying

An emphasis has been placed on bullying research within the school setting, where much of the research takes place (Monks et al., 2009; O'Connell et al. 1999;). Surprisingly, studies have shown that there is no correlation between school size, residential area (rural or urban), class size, or ethnic mix and prevalence of bullying (Monks et al., 2009; Whitney & Smith, 1993). There is, however, a higher rate of bullying in disadvantaged areas. Within the school grounds, bullying is more likely to occur in areas of the school where supervision is limited, such as the playground, the hallways, and even occasionally in the classroom (Whitney & Smith, 1993).

However, Monks et al. (2009) emphasize that the ethos of the school, along with staff attitudes, supervision, and an effective school policy can greatly influence the amount of bullying that occurs within a school. While bullying generally occurs at school during times when students are unsupervised, bullying can occur anywhere, and its effects reach beyond the school into the home and community.

Impact of Bullying

The impact of bullying on students is detrimental and has far-reaching consequences. Victims of bullying report disruptions in sleep, enuresis, feelings of sadness, stomachaches, and headaches. A correlation was also reported between experiencing bullying and feeling anxiety, depression and low self-esteem (Monks et al., 2009). Because these symptoms are common to many ailments, doctors or school health care professionals need to be careful in diagnosing children who display such symptoms.

As stated previously, instances of bullying at school are frequent, and their effects can reach beyond the school. According to a 2009 report by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), during the 2007–08 school year, 25% of schools nationwide reported incidences of bullying on at least a daily or weekly basis. This same report showed that 32% of students nationwide age 12-18 reported being bullied at least once that year. Of those children being bullied, 21% reported being made fun of, 18% reported being the subject of rumors, 11% were physically abused (e.g., pushed, tripped, spit on), 6% were threatened with physical harm, 5% were purposefully excluded, and 4% were forced to participate in things they did not want to do, or had property destroyed (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). In an earlier study involving junior high and high school students, 50-62% of victims experienced name-calling, while 25-33% of victims were physically hit, threatened, or had rumors spread about them (Whitney & Smith, 1993). In a study conducted by the American Association of University Women (2001), 81% of students reported experiencing sexual harassment at school.

Participants in Bullying

Researchers have defined three major roles within the sphere of bullying: bullies, victims, and victim-bullies (Espelage & Swearer, 2003; Reiter & Lapidot-Lefler, 2007). In instances of bullying, bullies are the aggressors, victims are the defenseless targets of the aggression, and victim-bullies sometimes play the role of the bully and other times are victimized. This three-category model has been adopted by most researchers in defining terms operationally.

Espelage and Swearer (2003) propose a bullying continuum in which bullying is viewed as dynamic instead of static. They reject the dichotomous, categorical and dyadic view of classifying children as either victims or bullies, pointing to new research indicating that bullying is a group phenomenon. These researchers expand the traditional three-classification model to include bullies, aggressive bullies, bully-victims, victims, bystanders and normal controls.

Current statistics and research examining the overall prevalence of bullying are inconclusive. It appears that the prevalence of bullying depends largely on where the data were gathered (Monks et al., 2009; Reiter & Lapidot-Lefler, 2007). One study reported that victims of bullying and their aggressors make up a minority of the population, with aggressors (2-20%) being often less in number than victims (5-20%). Especially at risk are victim/bullies who participate in bullying and are also bullied themselves (Monks et al., 2009).

In one study, a group of middle- and high-school students was asked how they responded when witnessing incidences of bullying. Thirty-four percent of high school-aged students and 54% of middle school-aged students reported that they tried to help the victim in some way. Forty-seven percent of high school students and 27% of middle school students reported that they did nothing, but thought about helping the victim. Nineteen percent of high school students

and 20% of middle school students said they did nothing to help and didn't think it was their business to intervene (Whitney & Smith, 1993).

Bullies. Boys are more numerous in the category of bullies, whereas boys and girls are about equal in number in the victim category (Monks et al., 2009; Whitney & Smith, 1993). While bullying and aggression have historically been seen as a principally male tendency, new research is beginning to show that gender may not play as significant a role as previously thought. Espelage and Swearer (2003) emphasize that relational aggression does not account for sex differences in aggression.

In one study examining participants of bullying in depth, researchers found that bullying is perpetrated by children in the following order from most to least commonly: a single boy, a group of boys, mixed group (boys and girls), a group of girls, and a single girl (Whitney & Smith, 1993). This has been found to be true in other research, as well (Glew, Fan, Katon, Rivara, & Kernic, 2005).

Boys and girls differ in the type of bullying in which they principally engage; boys are found to participate more often in direct forms of physical bullying (e.g., punching, kicking, pinching) while girls participate in more indirect forms of bullying, such as relational bullying (e.g., spreading rumors, excluding).

The prevalence of bullying has also been linked to age. It appears that bullying occurs most frequently in the middle school/junior high years and during emerging adolescence, then wanes in high school as children move into their teens (Espelage & Swearer, 2003; Reiter & Lapidot-Lefler, 2007; Whitney & Smith, 1993).

Risk factors: Victims and bullies. What puts a child at risk for becoming a victim of bullying? According to Monks et al. (2009), those who are bullied often have few friends, come

from over-protective families and/or have a disability. If the victimized child has friends, they are of equally low status. Additionally, as children mature into adolescence, they may be bullied as a result of their sexual orientation (Monks et al., 2009).

Children who engage in bullying often come from unstable home environments which lack warmth and consistent discipline (Olweus, 1995). These children tend to be irascible, impulsive and may have trouble with social skills. On the other hand, some bullies (known as “ringleader bullies”) are skilled social manipulators. Children classified as bully-victims tend to come from exceptionally troubled homes where abuse and violence may be present (Monks et al., 2009). However, there is no set of conditions, biological or environmental, that predicts bullying completely. Bullies may come from stable or unstable home environments.

Students with disabilities. Children with disabilities are at an increased risk of becoming victims of bullying (Flynt & Morton, 2004; Norwich & Kelly, 2004; Rose, Monda-Amaya, & Espelage, 2011; Weiner & Miller, 2006). Children with disabilities such as deafness (Weiner & Miller, 2006), autism (van Roekel, Scholte, & Didden, 2010), speech impairments (Barr, McLeod, & Daniel, 2008), emotional disabilities and learning disabilities (Flynt & Morton, 2004) may also be targeted by bullies, according to the literature.

Researchers have theorized regarding reasons why children with disabilities become prime targets for bullying. Children with intellectual disabilities can be major targets for bullies because they tend to have lower self-esteem and they often look to others for social cues. Additionally, these children may lack awareness when a situation becomes threatening (Flynt & Morton, 2004). Children with learning disabilities tend to have poor social skills and may be ostracized by their peers. Children with physical impairments may be viewed as weak by bullies, and thus they also become victims of bullying (Flynt & Morton, 2004). In one study

conducted in the Netherlands, 230 adolescents with Autism Spectrum Disorder were administered questionnaires regarding bullying. The reported results indicated that 7-30% of the sample reported that they were victims of bullying (van Roekel et al., 2010).

Researchers have demonstrated that children with disabilities likewise fulfill all three bullying roles, namely bully, victim, and victim-bully. It has been emphasized that children with disabilities are at a heightened risk of becoming victims of bullying. However, children with emotional and behavioral disorders, who may have a tendency toward physical aggression, are often identified as bullies. Additionally, many students with disabilities, such as those with learning disabilities, have been found to be bullies and victims (Flynt & Morton, 2004).

However, as Reiter and Lapidot-Lefler (2007) note, “We suspect that to some extent nearly all students with disabilities are victims. Even those considered bullies at school are actually victims outside the school walls” (p. 179). According to these authors’ findings, many of these children with disabilities who are categorized as bullies should actually be categorized as victim-bullies.

Bullying of students with disabilities occurs not only in general education schools, but in special education schools as well. Reiter and Lapidot-Lefler (2007) examined children in two special education schools in Israel and found equal prevalence of bullying compared to peers in regular classroom settings (about 49%).

Across all settings, bullying peaks in middle school, and then decreases in prevalence over time. Several researchers show that as children age, incidences of bullying decrease (Espelage & Swearer, 2003; Reiter & Lapidot-Lefler, 2007; Whitney & Smith, 1993). This is true for children with disabilities as well as for their normally-developing peers (Reiter & Lapidot-Lefler).

In this same study, researchers found that, similar to their normally-developing peers, children with developmental disorders who were classified as bullies exhibited violent behavior, hyperactivity, and behavior problems. Likewise, children with disabilities who were victims of bullying displayed emotional and interpersonal problems (Reiter & Lapidot-Lefler, 2007). However, they found no prototype characterizing the three subgroups (bully, victim, bully-victim), as was found in regular schools. Reiter and Lapidot-Lefler (2007) found negligible differences between the three groups in terms of social skills (e.g., bullies will have better social skills than victims), something they had hypothesized finding.

Siblings as a support. As stated earlier, no research was located that investigated sibling support for children with disabilities who are bullied. While not related to bullying specifically, one study by Barr et al. (2008) found that children who have a sibling with a speech impairment often assume the role of protector and interpreter. Furthermore, several studies in the past decade have investigated sibling relations and sibling support for normally developing children and siblings in the general education setting. Researchers in England investigated newly implemented peer mentoring programs for victims of bullying. The idea behind these programs is to create a sibling-like relationship to foster support for the victimized child (e.g., big-brother, big-sister type programs). These researchers wondered whether actual sibling relationships could function better as support systems in bullying situations (Hadfield, Edwards, & Mauthner, 2006). In their investigation of the literature, Hadfield et al. found that, “The issue of sibling relations has been highlighted in psychological studies, where support from siblings for children who face bullying at school is not regarded in a completely positive light. These demonstrate negative links between sibling support and peer bullying and victimisation” (p. 66).

Similar to other studies, Hadfield et al. (2006) found that, in general, children prefer to seek out support from parents or peers rather than siblings. Interestingly, however, they found that minority children, specifically Black and Asian children, were more likely to step in to protect a sibling in a bullying situation and were more likely to confide in their siblings than other children.

Sibling relations and children with disabilities. Sibling relationships may be unique when a child with a disability is involved. Research has shown that siblings of children with disabilities face a profusion of challenges including increased responsibilities, pressure to achieve, isolation, loneliness, loss, and many others (Meyer & Vadasy, 2008). Meyer and Vadasy put it plainly when they stated, “As disabilities and illnesses affect people from all walks of life, siblings will experience these conditions in innumerable ways. If we listen to brothers and sisters long enough, however, we hear recurring themes” (p. 8). Some of these themes, as a result of added pressure and responsibility, are feelings of resentment, overidentification, embarrassment, shame and guilt (Meyer & Vadasy).

Aksoy and Bercin Yildirim (2008) studied children’s acceptance of their sibling with a disability and non-related persons with disabilities. They discovered, interestingly, that children’s attitudes were more positive toward their sibling with a disability than toward a stranger with a disability. Furthermore, Aksoy and Bercin Yildirim found that:

While the relationship of the non-disabled children with their disabled siblings is positive, this positivity decreases when their acceptance and acknowledgement of their disabled siblings is concerned. This negative correlation between the sibling relations and acceptance is mainly caused by the fact that the child does not see his sibling’s disability as a barrier in the secure, safe, and warm family environment. Here, the blood relation is

at the foreground. As a result, acceptance is under the influence of behaviors and viewpoints of the social environment, whereas sibling relations develop in a positive manner under the family roof. (p. 774)

In a Turkish study by Girli (1995), researchers found that the “acceptance attitude of normal (non-disabled) children having a disabled sibling is more positive than those not having a disabled sibling” (as cited in Aksoy & Bercin Yildirim, 2008, pg. 774). In this study by Girli, it was also found that the more “non-visible” the disability, the more difficult it is for siblings to cope with the challenge, and create more stress. Disabilities that are clearly “visible” such as Down syndrome or physical impairments are easier for the sibling to explain and understand.

Aksoy and Bercin Yildirim (2008) also found that children’s acceptance attitudes were dependent on the type and severity of their sibling’s disability. They encouraged researchers in the future to give proper attention “to training programs to determine how non-disabled siblings of those children with various types and degrees of disabilities are influenced by this situation, as well as the level and extent of this impact” (p. 778).

Purpose of Study

It is clear that there exists a paucity of research concerning siblings of children with disabilities and bullying, something that is a very real concern for many children and their families. While all children are vulnerable, children with disabilities are in a heightened state of vulnerability and need to be protected. Additionally, siblings of children with disabilities face an overabundance of challenges and responsibilities in and out of the home. This makes them vulnerable, as well. The lack of research in this area warrants an investigation into siblings’ perceptions of bullying.

It is hoped that through this study, teachers, schools and parents will be better informed

about the nature of bullying, children with disabilities, and their siblings. (See Appendix D for a current list of resources for parents and teachers).

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Appendix B: Consent and Assent Forms

Parental Permission for a Minor to Participate in Research

Perceptions of Bullying: Siblings of Children with Special Needs

INTRODUCTION

My name is Lindsay Davis. I am a Sibshops volunteer and a graduate student at Brigham Young University conducting a research study about the attitudes and perceptions of siblings of children with special needs regarding bullying. I am inviting your child to take part in this research because he/she is a participant in the Sibshops of Utah County and is between the ages of 8–14.

PROCEDURES

If you agree to let your child participate in this research study, the following will occur:

- Your child will be interviewed regarding their experiences with and feelings about bullying.
- This interview will take place at Sibshops in a semi-private room and the interview will be video recorded.
- Your child's interview will last 20 to 30 minutes.

RISKS

There may be some discomfort at being asked some of the questions during this interview. Your child may refuse to answer any question or to discontinue the interview at any time without affecting his/her standing at Sibshops.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The research data will be kept in a secure location and electronic data will be password protected. Only the researcher and one co-investigator will have access to the data. At the conclusion of the study, all identifying information will be removed and the data will be kept in a locked cabinet or office. Audio- and videotapes will be destroyed at the end of the study.

BENEFITS

There are no direct benefits for your child's participation in this project. However, your child may gain greater insight regarding how to prevent and/or respond to bullying.

COMPENSATION

Participants will be provided with a list of resources and a bullying guide.

QUESTIONS ABOUT THE RESEARCH

If you have any further questions about the study, you may contact **Lindsay Davis** at **435-714-0751** or **lindsay_proctor@hotmail.com**, or you may contact **Dr. Tina Dyches**, by calling 801-422-5045.

Questions about your child's rights as a study participant, or comments or complaints about the study also may be addressed to the IRB Administrator, Brigham Young University, A-285 ASB, Provo, UT 84602; 801-422-1461 or irb@byu.edu

You have been given a copy of this consent form to keep.

PARTICIPATION

PARTICIPATION IN THIS RESEARCH STUDY IS VOLUNTARY. You are free to decline to have your child participate in this research study. You may withdraw your child's participation at any point without penalty. Your decision whether or not to participate in this research study will have no influence on you or your child's present or future status at Sibshops of Utah County or Brigham Young University.

Child's Name _____

Signature _____ Date _____
Parent

Signature _____ Date _____
Researcher

Children's Assent
Brigham Young University Study on Bullying

I understand researchers at Brigham Young University are studying what children know about bullying. My parents have agreed to have our family help.

If I participate, I will answer questions that the researchers ask of me.

The researchers who interview me won't share things I don't want to have shared.

I understand that I don't have to answer all of the questions. I can quit taking part in the study at any time. If I have questions, I can call Lindsay Davis (435-714-0751) or Dr. Tina T. Dyches (422-5045). I can also contact BYU at irb@byu.edu (801) 422-1461.

My family will receive a packet of information that will help us learn more about how to prevent and deal with bullying.

I would like to be a part of the study.

Signature of the Child

Date

Appendix C: Siblings' Perception of Bullying: Interview Questions

1. Tell me about yourself (e.g., How old are you? How many kids are in your family? What do you like to do for fun?)
2. Tell me about your brother/sister who has special needs.
 - a. Is your sibling with special needs a boy or a girl?
 - b. Is he/she older or younger than you?
 - c. Do you attend the same school?
 - d. What is your sibling's special need? What is his/her disability?
3. What do you think it means to bully someone?
4. Have you ever seen anyone be bullied at school, in your neighborhood or anywhere else?
 - a. Tell me about it.
 - b. Where did it happen?
 - c. What did the bully do?
 - d. What did you do?
 - e. Did anyone else see it happen? If so, what did he/she/they do?
 - f. How did it make you feel?
5. Have you ever been bullied?
 - a. Tell me about it.
 - b. Where did it happen?
 - c. What did the bully do?
 - d. What did you do?
 - e. Did anyone else see it happen? If so, what did he/she/they do?
 - f. How did it make you feel?

6. Have you ever seen your brother/sister with special needs being bullied at school, in the neighborhood, or anywhere else?
 - a. Tell me about it.
 - b. Where did it happen?
 - c. What did the bully do?
 - d. What did you do?
 - e. Did anyone else see it happen? If so, what did he/she/they do?
 - f. How did it make you feel?

Appendix D: Resources for Parents and Teachers

Beat Bullying

<http://www.beatbullying.org/>

This website includes some informational videos and also has a “cyber-mentor” feature that allows kids to chat online with a peer mentor about bullying. It also includes resources for teachers.

Center for Social and Emotional Education

<http://www.schoolclimate.org/>

From the homepage, click on the Bully Prevention tab and you will find lots of informational resources about bullying, a toolkit, as well as a link to current laws and legislation regarding bullying.

National Association of School Psychologists (NASP)

http://www.nasponline.org/resources/handouts/bullying%20template%209_04.pdf

This brief, 4-page handout is specifically for parents from NASP. It includes basic facts about bullying, warning signs to look for, and ways you can get involved.

National Parent Teacher Association

http://www.pta.org/bullying.asp?gclid=CMf_IYyfmKECFQgSawodKS2naw

This website includes a host of resources for your local PTA to get involved with bullying prevention in your local schools.

Pacer Center:

<http://www.pacer.org/bullying/>

This is a national bullying website that provides you with resources, as well as information about bullying news and stories in the national spotlight. It includes lots of resources for kids and teens such as music videos and an electronic anti-bullying petition.

Stop Bullying Now

<http://stopbullying.gov>

Another great national resource with links to each state's policies and laws, as well as information on bullying and links to free webinars, etc.