

Why Do Bullies Bully? Motives for Bullying

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Although bullying has a long history of research, the question of why exactly people bully has received relatively little attention until recently. A closer view on motives provides a better understanding of the needs individuals try to fulfill and the goals they try to achieve by bullying. To understand why people bully, the better question to ask is “what do bullies want?” Slowly, more attention is being paid to motives in bullying research. This chapter reviews research on bullying motives (and related concepts such as needs and goals) and explains the value of taking these into account in anti-bullying interventions.

Motives are commonly defined as the “why” of behavior (McAdams, 2002). Someone who is motivated will be moved to do something (Ryan & Deci, 2000, 2017). People have different types of motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000), for instance a motive for status or belonging. Goals are a reflection of these motives (Volk, Dane, & Marini, 2014). Distinct, but related, to motives are the terms needs and drives. We will not focus on the differences between definitions but rather on the question that all these terms help to answer: why do bullies bully?

Motives can shed light on the purpose of bullying behavior. For example, consider a high school student who wants to belong to a group. If it appears (consciously or unconsciously) to her that the goal of being part of a group can be reached by bullying, she might be inclined toward bullying behavior. Bullying can be considered goal-oriented behavior; in this case, the purpose is being accepted by peers. Other researchers have argued that bullying should be seen as goal-directed behavior (e.g., Volk et al., 2014). As Volk, Veenstra, and Espelage (2017) suggest, using a goal-oriented focus to study bullying allows researchers to better understand why youths are motivated to bully, as well as to identify potential alternative approaches in which adolescents can achieve their desired goal.

Bullying has often been viewed as a deficiency of social-cognitive skills, such as a lack of empathy, poor interpersonal skills, or difficulties with theory of mind. However, this

impression of bullies is not always correct. Many bullies are perceived as popular, are socially competent, high in status, and at the center of peer groups (Garandeau & Cillessen, 2006; Prinstein & Cillessen, 2003; Sutton, Smith, & Swettenham, 1999; Vaillancourt, Hymel, & McDougall, 2003). Some bullies can even be very skillful in their use of aggression by also demonstrating prosocial behaviors to their peers (Hawley, 2007; Wurster & Xie, 2014). Harassing others therefore should not necessarily be interpreted as maladaptive deficient behavior, and can, in fact, be seen as advantageous for the individual, although still harmful behavior to others.

We state that bullies want to gain something with their behavior. The concept of the cost-benefit ratio (Volk et al., 2014) supports that bullying is used for personal gain. A person may bully if the benefits of bullying appear to outweigh its costs. If prosocial behavior has a better cost-benefit ratio than bullying, then people should prefer prosocial manners instead of aggressive manners to reach their goals. Thus, not everyone who might have motives to bully will actually engage in it.

The idea that bullying is a way to gain something can also be seen in the light of Bandura's social learning theory (Bandura, 1986) and Dodge's SIP model (Crick & Dodge, 1994; Dodge, 1986). Individuals build expectations about the effectiveness of aggression by watching others getting what they want via aggressive means. Students who associated aggression with high social status in school had a higher chance of becoming antisocial themselves (Juvonen & Ho, 2008). If you want to have status, you learn from observing others that aggression can be an effective way to achieve your goal. In this way, social learning plays a role in the link between status motivation and bullying.

Of course, innate motives and the interaction between the person and the (social) context are also important when looking at bullying. This chapter is not about the role of the context or the interaction between person and context, but we do mention it a few times where it is relevant and useful. We do not focus on the exact underlying mechanism of how motives lead to certain behavior. Instead, we focus on how the concept of motives can help to explain bullying behavior.

In this chapter, we will provide an inventory of the different motives that have been mentioned in the literature as the motives for bullying. We will review the main motives underlying bullying that have been identified; they indicate what people are hoping to achieve with bullying behavior. We focus predominantly on studies on bullying in schools, and also consider bullying motives in other contexts, including work settings. We conclude with implications for anti-bullying interventions.

Motives for Bullying

A number of papers have given us lists of bullying motives (Baas, de Jong, & Drossaert, 2013; Bosacki, Marini, & Dane, 2006; Fluck, 2014; Frisén, Jonsson, & Persson, 2007; Ireland & Archer, 1996; Raskauskas & Stoltz, 2007; Smith, Talamelli, Cowie, Naylor, & Chauhan, 2004; Thornberg, 2010; Thornberg & Knutsen, 2011; Thornberg, Rosenqvist, & Johansson, 2012; Varjas, Talley, Meyers, Parris, & Cutts, 2010; Volk, Camilleri, Dane, & Marini, 2012). Within these lists ten motives featured

prominently: dominance, status, resources, revenge, justice, belonging, romance, identity, well-being, and entertainment.

In the empirical literature on bullying and its motives, a substantial amount of research focused on the motive for status. The other motives for bullying have been documented far less frequently. The motives for entertainment, well-being, identity, and justice have limited empirical research in relation to bullying specifically. The limited number of studies on these topics reflects the common conception that status is the primary motive for bullying. However, this can be questioned. Status indeed was one of the most cited motives in the articles with aforementioned bullying motives lists. However, the entertainment motive was mentioned just as often. Well-being and revenge motives were found in more than half of the existing motives lists, and the motives for dominance, justice, and belonging were represented in over a quarter of all articles. The motives that were least referred to were the romance and identity motives.

Not everyone will have each motive to the same degree (Reiss, 2004). Some people may be highly motivated by status, whereas others may be highly motivated by preserving their self-image and only a little bit by status. All combinations are possible. A motive does not have to lead to bullying, it can also lead to other behaviors. Someone with a high need to belong has an increased chance of acting on a belonging motive. This motive could manifest itself in different ways, but an individual who is highly motivated to fit in with peers or to avoid being ostracized may be more likely to bully with an underlying motive of wanting to belong.

Dominance

Researchers consider dominance as an important bullying motive (e.g., Volk et al., 2014). “Bullying is about power and being the boss” an 11-year-old describes when asked why a bullying incident took place (Thornberg, 2010). Children and adolescents indicate that bullying is used to gain dominance or power within a group (Thornberg & Knutsen, 2011; Thornberg et al., 2012). Power-driven bullies harass their peers in order to demonstrate control over them or over desired resources.

An association between being high in social dominance and high levels of bullying has been found, even in young elementary school children (Reijntjes et al., 2013a). Vaillancourt and colleagues (2003) found that having power was uniquely associated with bullying, even when accounting for other related qualities, such as leadership and aggression. Furthermore, they found that only a few bullies could be considered as having low power, with the majority of bullies having moderate to high power. This study could not tease apart the direction of this finding (if bullying predicts gaining dominance or power or whether a goal for dominance predated bullying); nonetheless, it provides compelling evidence of the overlap between bullying and power.

Moreover, in a retrospective study with college students, high social dominance orientation was associated with elevated self-reported past bullying behaviors (Goodboy, Martin, & Rittenour, 2016). Consistent with these findings, other researches support the positive association between a desire for dominance and bullying (Björkqvist,

Ekman, & Lagerspetz, 1982; Olweus, 1993). Björkqvist and colleagues (1982) found that adolescent bullies perceived themselves as dominant, and that boys who bullied were not yet satisfied with their dominance. In other words, these bullies already felt dominant, yet still wanted to be even more dominant.

Status

Status refers to (perceived) social standing and relative position in a social hierarchy. Individuals may bully others to try to damage their social standing (and subsequently increase one's own standing in the social hierarchy; Salmivalli, 2010). Likewise, children and adolescents indicate that bullying takes place to maintain their own status or popularity (Caravita et al., 2020; Frisé et al., 2007; Houghton, Carroll, Tan, & Nathan, 2013; Smith et al., 2004; Thornberg, 2010); "Some people want to show off as popular. They think they are so cool, and really want to show that by bullying someone else" (Thornberg & Knutsen, 2011). In a study by Thornberg et al. (2012), one-third of the adolescents indicated status goals being a factor in school bullying.

Although bullies are often popular, there is some evidence that adolescents' popularity may not predict bullying over time (Berger & Caravita, 2016). This makes sense as popular adolescents might not necessarily use bullying to maintain their status; contrarily, an unpopular adolescent may want to gain status and therefore may bully. Therefore, popularity goals may be a better predictor of bullying than popularity itself. To this end, a lot of recent research has investigated striving for status, in addition to having status. Positive associations between (relational) aggression and status-related goals have been found (Cillessen, Mayeux, Ha, de Bryun, & LaFontana, 2014; Dawes & Xie, 2014; Dyches & Mayeux, 2015).

However, the association between bullying and status goals does not always appear to be straightforward, and the association may vary based on other individual characteristics (e.g., gender, having status, age). For example, Sijtsema, Veenstra, Lindenberg, and Salmivalli (2009) found that status goals predicted being a bully in 14-to-15-year-old boys, but not in 10-to-11-year-old boys, or in girls. Likewise, Duffy, Penn, Nesdale, and Zimmer-Gembeck (2017) found that popularity prioritization was associated with bullying, but that this association was qualified by gender and popularity. Specifically, boys with high popularity prioritization and high levels of popularity were more likely to bully, whereas girls with high popularity prioritization but low levels of popularity were more likely to bully. The gender differences found in past research might be explained by status being more important for boys (Volk et al., 2012), or because boys and girls differentially use aggression to achieve their goals.

Status goals appear to be more salient in adolescence (LaFontana & Cillessen, 2010), perhaps given developmental changes that occur in adolescence, such as a shift in focus on peer relationships. From an evolutionary perspective, reproductive desirability is a key function of adolescence; therefore, it is sensible that status is a prominent motive in this developmental stage as it is associated with more romantic success (Ellis et al., 2012).

Pellegrini (2002) theorized that the move to a new school results in a need to negotiate new peer groups and determine a new hierarchy, and therefore aggression increases during this transitional phase (Long & Pellegrini, 2003; Pellegrini & Long, 2002). However, other studies did not confirm an increase in bullying behavior during the school transition (Farmer, Hamm, Leung, Lambert, & Gravelle, 2011; Wang, Brittain, McDougall, & Vaillancourt, 2016). It is also conceivable that a transition to a new school could decrease bullying, as bullies may end their relationships with other bullies and subsequently end their bullying behavior (Farmer et al., 2015).

Using bullying as a means to obtain status is not unique to children. Adult employees sometimes try to increase their status by lowering that of colleagues through bullying (Salin, 2003). In prison, bullying was positively correlated with the perceived importance of social status (South & Wood, 2006). Prisoners who were both perpetrators and victims of bullying (bully-victims) were especially likely to value status. The authors argued that this group consisted of victims who were dissatisfied with their status and became bullies to obtain a higher status.

Taken together, it appears that bullying does result in more status and prestige. Popularity is related to bullying (Sijtsema et al., 2009) and to physical and relational aggression (Cillessen & Mayeux, 2004; Prinstein & Cillessen, 2003; Vaillancourt & Hymel, 2006), especially when youths care about being popular (Cillessen et al., 2014; Dawes & Xie, 2014). However, it is interesting and important to note that not just being aggressive, but the combination with prosocial behavior, makes children more popular than peers using only aggressive or prosocial tactics (Hawley, 2007; Olthof, Goossens, Vermande, Aleva, & van der Meulen, 2011; Reijntjes et al., 2018).

Resources

Bullying to obtain resources is mentioned in research among schoolchildren (Bosacki et al., 2006; Smith et al., 2004), Volk and colleagues (2014) summarize how a motive for non-social resources may underlie bullying. As they suggest, bullying to achieve survival-based goals is no longer common in modern-day society. Nevertheless, other non-social resources (e.g., toys, privileges) can still motivate bullying, particularly within sibling relationships (Rafaelli, 1992; Skinner & Kowalski, 2013).

The resource motive is particularly prominent in research on adults. “They have something that the bully wants” was given by employees and patients as an explanation for bullying in a high-secure hospital (Ireland, 2004). Furthermore, bullying “for possessions” is common in prison (Ireland, 2005; Ireland & Archer, 1996). For example, victims were forced to send their cash to another prisoner’s family. The high prevalence of resource motives in prison (16% of men and 24% of women; Ireland & Archer, 1996) could be explained by the scarcity of resources in this environment.

The resource motive is also relevant in work environments, due to a variety of factors (Salin, 2003). People may bully to decrease the performances of colleagues in a company with a performance-related reward system. This reward system can also reinforce bullying of employees by supervisors to force them to reach targets. When people are assessed

by their performance as a group, bullying can also occur to put pressure on people to do better. Monetary rewards is the material resource in these examples.

In addition to material resources, immaterial resources such as “jobs” and “force victim to do something” are also included in lists of bullying motives (Fluck, 2014; Volk et al., 2012), and may be particularly relevant in the workplace. Bullies may victimize others to secure their job, as research shows that bullying increased during organizational change or times of job insecurity (Ramsay, Troth, & Branch, 2010). Another immaterial resource is getting a promotion; supervisors can bully a talented employee to prevent that person from taking their job one day (Salin, 2003). People (consciously or unconsciously) find resources important and are prepared to bully someone to reach their goal of getting material and immaterial goods.

Revenge

Revenge is another commonly cited motive that bullies provide when asked to explain their bullying motives (Runions, Salmivalli, Shaw, Burns, & Cross, 2018; Smith et al., 2004; Thornberg & Knutsen, 2011; Varjas et al., 2010). Moreover, in a study by Thornberg (2010), a fourth of the children thought the bullying cause was revenge or payback. For example, he or she said something mean, was nasty to the bully’s little brother, spread negative rumors, or snitched and told teachers. Interestingly, victims cited revenge as a bullying motive less often than bullies (e.g., Fluck, 2014). This suggests that bullies may perceive their actions as justifiable, as they were provoked or they needed to retaliate against the victim’s “wrong-doing.”

König, Gollwitzer, and Steffgen (2010) found that students bully their former perpetrators online. Cyberbullies who had been traditional victims (“offline” victims) chose their former bully as their cybervictim. With technological advances, traditional victims who are motivated by revenge can become cyberbullies because it is not necessary to be strong or tough to bully someone in the cyber world.

In a study with prisoners (Archer, Ireland, & Power, 2007), revenge plans and fantasies were positively correlated with bullying. Bullies and bully-victims scored higher than non-bullies on revenge plans and fantasies. They would more often respond with revenge thoughts to provocation than those not-involved. Revenge appears to be a motivational force when it comes to bullying in prison. However, in the study by Ireland and Archer (1996), prisoners did not name revenge motives when asked why others were bullied. The absence of revenge motives here may be explained by the questions the prisoners were asked to answer, which were victim oriented, therefore not focusing on the bully’s motives.

Justice

Some people bully out of a sense of righteousness, or to correct outliers who did something unacceptable according to social, moral, or cultural norms. Some research has posited that bullying can be a means to demonstrate to the victim and the rest of the

peer group which norms will and will not be tolerated (Juvonen & Galván, 2009). In schools, children may bully others to reprimand them for harassing others (Frisén et al., 2007). In both cases, bullies act aggressively as a way to correct others who do not follow their norms or whose behavior is perceived as wrong. These bullies victimize others with a drive for justice, even when there is not any overt benefit for the punisher (i.e., altruistic punishment; Fehr & Gächter, 2002).

Others who stand out from the crowd can also provoke individuals with a high need for justice. Abnormal appearance, behavior, or characteristics can all be interpreted as provocative (Thornberg et al., 2012). Reaction to deviance is often mentioned by youths as a motive for bullying (Thornberg & Knutsen, 2011; Thornberg et al., 2012). For example, perpetrators may bully others because they are “annoyed with the victim’s appearance or behavior” (Frisén et al., 2007, p. 754). Even the association with poor parents, odd friends, or a different ethnic culture can be enough to be seen as abnormal (Caravita et al., 2020; Thornberg, 2010). Van den Berg, Segers, and Cillessen (2012) found that reducing the physical distance between classmates with negative views of each other reduced overall victimization in the classroom. One possible explanation is that more contact with peers who are seen as different decreases bullying for deviant behaviors, because the increased interaction leads to more understanding.

Bullying due to a sense of justice or because of a violation of accepted norms can be seen in other contexts as well. For instance, inmates mentioned that the victim being a sex-offender was a motive for bullying in prison (Ireland & Archer, 1996). In these cases, bullying is done to enact justice for a crime considered deviant and that warrants punishment.

Belonging

The need to belong is a fundamental human motivation (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Individuals need significant interpersonal relationships, to be accepted by a group, and to give and receive affection. The need to be accepted is initially linked to affection and thus prosocial behavior. However, it can also be associated with antisocial behavior, as bullying can be used to be accepted in a group or to acquire or maintain friends. In addition to the goal of becoming liked by others, we also discuss research on avoiding rejection by friends and peers in this section.

Bullying can be used strategically for friendship positioning; girls (but not boys) bullied others to get more friends or “because they want to have their friends for themselves” (Thornberg, 2010, p. 316). Children may bully to fit in or belong with their peers, or to avoid rejection (Baas et al., 2013; Strohmeier, Fandrem, & Spiel, 2012; Thornberg & Knutsen, 2011). Peer relationships are particularly important in adolescence (Cillessen, 2011), which could lead to bullying if bullying is seen as a way to gain peer acceptance. Among 10-to-13-year-old boys, bullying was related to their desire to be accepted by antisocial boys (Olthof & Goossens, 2008).

There is evidence that individuals may bully out of a desire to belong, but do bullies achieve what they want? Bullies are typically disliked, despite being seen as popular (Garandeau & Lansu, 2019). However, whether or not bullying is associated with peer

rejection can vary across contexts. For example, bullies were rejected less in classrooms with popular bullies (Dijkstra, Lindenberg, & Veenstra, 2008). Furthermore, bullies may not be uniformly disliked by all peers. Bullies appear to be rejected primarily by the gender for which they are a potential threat (Veenstra, Lindenberg, Munniksma, & Dijkstra, 2010). Moreover, for some adolescents, status motives are valued more than being liked, and these youths are more likely to bully others (Garandeau & Lansu, 2019).

Romance

Pellegrini (2002) theorized that in adolescence, dominance or status are not always the end goals of bullying but are instead used as means to obtain romantic relationships. Likewise, Volk and colleagues (2012) argued that increased sexual and romantic opportunities are one function of bullying from an evolutionary perspective. Consistent with these perspectives, bullies typically begin dating earlier than their peers and report more mating opportunities (Farrell & Vaillancourt, 2019; Provenzano, Dane, Farrell, Marini, & Volk, 2018; Volk et al., 2012). Dane, Marini, Volk, and Vaillancourt (2016) found that for boys, the number of dating partners was positively related to perpetrating physical bullying. Some researches suggest that adolescents who bully are found to be more popular for dating (Volk, Dane, Marini, & Vaillancourt, 2015), though others (Arnocky & Vaillancourt, 2012) have not found this relation.

Youths can use bullying to show their sexual interest or to get rid of competitors. For instance, one may spread rumors about or behave aggressively toward someone viewed as a sexual competitor (Vaillancourt, 2013; Varjas et al., 2010). Olthof and Goossens (2008) examined whether children were more likely to bully if they wanted to be accepted by the other sex. This was true for girls, but not for boys. The more girls desired to be accepted by boys (particularly antisocial boys), the more they bullied, which may stem from a motive for romance. Although there is evidence that bullying is associated with dating benefits for youths (e.g., more opportunities), it is important to note that bullying may also be associated with unhealthy romantic relationships (e.g., higher levels of dating aggression: Farrell & Vaillancourt, 2019).

Identity

Bullying can be a way to boost one's self-esteem or positive self-image. Self-esteem is the view that a person has of her or himself. "Low self-esteem" is a common answer by students to the question why adolescents bully (Frisén et al., 2007; Thornberg, 2010; Thornberg & Knutsen, 2011; Thornberg et al., 2012). Bullying may also be used to protect one's self-image. If a peer tries to damage this image and endangers an individual's identity, he or she may, in defense, choose to retaliate through bullying.

It is still unclear whether people with a low or with a high self-esteem are more prone to display aggressive behavior. Low self-esteem could lead to bullying to protect oneself

against a negative self-image or to increase one's self-esteem. A high self-esteem or idealized self-perception is damaged easily and the person might quickly think he or she is mistreated, which can lead to aggression (Ostrowsky, 2010).

Salmivalli, Kaukiainen, Kaistaniemi, and Lagerspetz (1999) argue that there is more to self-esteem than it being just high or low. For example, defensive egotism (defensiveness in response to criticism of a grandiose and self-enhancing attitude) seems more relevant to bullying research than the level of self-esteem. In a sample of Finnish students, Salmivalli et al. (1999) found a correlation between defensive egotism and bullying in boys. This suggests that adolescent boys who want to be the center of attention and think too much of themselves will respond with bullying if someone has endangered their inflated self-esteem.

We did not find research on bullying as a response to a person's identity being under threat, but in the literature on aggression there are a couple of studies on this theme. For example, the experience of identity threat was positively related to antisocial behavior directed at colleagues in the workplace (Aquino & Douglas, 2003). In addition, people in bars, particularly young men, responded with aggression to defend their identity if they were humiliated (Graham et al., 2012). Taken together, bullying or aggressive behaviors appear to be a way in which some individuals cope with threats to their identity or self-esteem.

Well-being

Bullying may also be motivated by the goal to avoid emotional or physical harm. We call this the well-being motive. It includes harassing others to avoid stress, conflicts, or other negative feelings such as anxiety. Bullying can thus be done out of self-preservation (Fluck, 2014; Varjas et al., 2010). For example, avoiding victimization was named by children (Thornberg & Knutsen, 2011; Thornberg et al., 2012) as a reason for bullying. The anxiety of becoming bullied can make children participate in bullying of deviant peers (Fluck, 2014; Thornberg, 2010).

Bullying can also be used as a distraction from negative feelings in order to feel good. "She's sad so she wants to make someone else sad" (Bosacki et al., 2006, p. 239). Adolescents were bullying because they were feeling bad, wanted to feel better, or wanted to reduce stress (Thornberg & Knutsen, 2011; Thornberg et al., 2012; Varjas et al., 2010), for instance, after being a victim of bullying themselves (Baas et al., 2013; Smith et al., 2004).

Few empirical bullying studies name the well-being motive, even though a lot of children and adolescents point to this motive. Whether their responses actually indicate the bullies' true motives is debatable, since the studies cited above rely on self-report, and participants were not bullies but children in general. Nonetheless, the well-being motive is extensively described in general human motives literature; for example by Maslow (1943) as "safety needs" and by Murray (1938) as "harm avoidance," and since well-being is also cited by many interviewed youths in bullying research, it is worth while examining this motive further as a bullying motive.

Entertainment

Lastly, bullying out of entertainment or excitement, because one is bored, is frequently named as a motive by children and adolescents (Baas et al., 2013; Gradinger, Strohmeier, & Spiel, 2012; Raskauskas & Stoltz, 2007; Smith et al., 2004, 2008; Tanrikulu & Erdur-Baker, 2019; Thornberg, 2010; Thornberg & Knutsen, 2011; Thornberg et al., 2012; Varjas et al., 2010). Fluck (2014) found that “fun” was one of the most commonly reasons bullies gave for bullying a fellow student.

When researching boredom in students, it appeared that aggression and hostility levels were associated with elevated boredom proneness scores (Dahlen, Martin, Ragan, & Kuhlman, 2004). Moreover, Runions and colleagues (2018) found that bully-victims were more likely than pure bullies to endorse “recreation” motives. Connell, Farrington, and Ireland (2016) found that among adolescent incarcerated males, “I enjoy a fight” was the strongest predictor of bullying. These articles suggest that the entertainment motive is more prevalent in some groups than others.

Implications for Intervention

In order to tackle bullying, it is not sufficient to just look at the behavior; it is necessary to also address the underlying motive. You have to understand why someone is bullying (i.e., what is in it for them), to change behavior. By looking at why bullies do what they do, it is possible to “design better interventions that work with, instead of against, adolescent goals and motivations” (Ellis et al., 2012, p. 607). People will continue to bully as long as it brings them more gains than losses (Bosacki et al., 2006; Crick & Dodge, 1994; Ellis et al., 2012; Hawley & Williford, 2015; Reijntjes et al., 2013b; Volk et al., 2012). Bullying will be positively reinforced from the bully’s perspective if it brings wanted social or material rewards. Anti-bullying programs should therefore focus on the functionality of bullying, as individuals have a goal with their bullying behavior (Ellis, Volk, Gonzalez, & Embry, 2016).

In a review, Ttofi and Farrington (2011) concluded that overall anti-bullying programs are effective with a mean decrease of around 20%. However, a lot is still unclear about what exactly works for whom and in what condition (Garandau, Lee, & Salmivalli, 2014; Smith, Salmivalli, & Cowie, 2012; Ttofi & Farrington, 2012). Theoretical grounding for programs is also often missing (Hawley & Williford, 2015). By taking motives into consideration one gets to the core of bullying behavior, useful theories can be derived, and insight can be gained into what exactly might work in interventions.

Distinguishing between groups that differ in their bullying motivation provides more knowledge on which elements of programs work, why they work, and for whom they work. For example, Garandau and colleagues (2014) found that a Finnish bullying intervention (KiVa) was effective for less popular bullies, but not for popular bullies, which may stem from popular bullies having different motives than other bullies.

Researchers can also account for how motives change from childhood to adolescence, which may help address why bullying interventions are often less effective in adolescence than childhood (Yeager, Dahl, & Dweck, 2018; Yeager, Fong, Lee, & Espelage, 2015).

Some previous anti-bullying programs did not show a decrease in bullying despite addressing positive attitudes toward bullying (Merrell, Gueldner, Ross, & Isava, 2008). Taking motives into account may help increase the success of these interventions by determining the right target group. For instance, in the case of belonging, youths primarily care about the opinion of a specific group (Olthof & Goossens, 2008). Targeting specific influential groups instead of everyone may be a more efficient and successful approach.

Decreasing bullying motivation can be done by changing contextual factors such as the school culture. Strategies to eliminate stable hierarchies in the classroom, which may result in smaller status differences among students, appear effective against bullying because there is less competition for status (Garandeau et al., 2014).

Of course, the same motive can lead to other behaviors instead of bullying. This is exactly the point of the Meaningful Roles intervention (Ellis et al., 2016): stimulating prosocial alternatives for bullies to meet status goals. Likewise, Sijtsema et al. (2009) and Volk et al. (2012) suggested that sports activities and group work may provide other ways for youths to fulfill their status needs. These examples focus on the need for status. It is important to note that if bullying is not driven by a status motive, but rather by another motive, then intervention programs should address youths in another way. Individuals do not all have the same motives; some will be more prone to bully out of a certain motivation than others. Differentiating between groups by motives is essential when setting up anti-bullying programs.

Discussion

In this chapter, we provided a narrative review of the various motives for bullying that have been considered in the literature. The motives we identify specify why people may be motivated to bully, but this does not always mean that they will actually engage in the behavior. Motivation is not the same as actual behavior. Not everyone who is motivated to bully will actually do it. The translation of motivation into actual behavior may, in the case of bullying, be explained by the cost-benefit ratio (Volk et al., 2014). The cost-benefit ratio seems to be a central theme that can help to understand bullying and its causes. It may explain, for example, why a physically small boy will not bully because the potential cost (being beaten by a target) may be much higher than the potential benefit (obtaining power). Only when the benefits outweigh the costs someone will try to fulfill a need by bullying. If prosocial behavior has a better cost-benefit ratio than bullying, then it is more likely that individuals will prefer prosocial behavior instead of aggressive behavior to reach their goals.

In this perspective, bullying is seen as functional behavior to reach certain goals. But even when the benefits outweigh the costs, it does not necessarily mean that all bullies successfully reach their goals. Other skills are required as well, such as certain behavioral (social)

skills for bullying to be successful. An example is given by bullies who are not socially skilled and not popular (Peeters, Cillessen, & Scholte, 2010). Bullies who do not combine their behavior with social tactics, will probably not get what they want (Hawley, 2007). It is often not possible to obtain one's bullying goals by force alone; social interactions with others, building a network, and getting people on one's own side are necessary as well.

The social context also plays a very important role. Whether or not an individual's motives lead to bullying, or even whether they have certain motives, also depends on the social context and especially the norms that exist in a certain social context. For example, in social contexts where popularity is strongly linked to bullying (bullying as a "popularity norm"), bullying is viewed less negatively than in other social contexts. This contributes to youths using bullying to achieve their goals (Dijkstra et al., 2008). In contrast, consider a context in which bullying is not associated with popularity. In this context, bullying will lead to social sanctions and rejection by the group. If one's goal is acceptance and status in the peer group, bullying behavior will not be effective in such a context.

Besides social context, individual characteristics of the bullies also play an important role. For instance, cyberbullying motives for revenge and dominance were linked to moral disengagement (Tanrikulu & Erdur-Baker, 2019). One's personal moral compass may also play a role in the (unconscious) consideration to bully or not. For someone with high empathy or who rejects bullying morally, a victim's sadness or one's own guilt or shame may be enough reason not to bully, regardless of any potential benefits. Thus, these individual characteristics (moral considerations, empathy, guilt) seem to function as moderators that suppress the association between bullying motives and actual bullying behavior.

Motives can also differ depending on the individual's developmental stage. An evolutionary perspective could give valuable input. According to this perspective, reproductive desirability is a central factor in adolescence; it can be hypothesized that romantic motives are important during this stage. Seeing motives (Bernard, Mills, Swenson, & Walsh, 2005), aggression (Georgiev, Klimczuk, Traficonte, & Maestriperi, 2013), and bullying (Volk et al., 2012) as evolutionary adaptations can therefore be of inspiration for theories on bullying motives as it gives a further look into the origin of bullying motives.

Given the importance of the social context and bullies' characteristics, it is necessary to study bullying motives in a wider perspective. Research should examine how motives are related to specific environments (e.g., school, prison, online), social contexts (e.g., social norms of the peer group), and individual characteristics (e.g., developmental stage, personality). In this way, intervention programs can be tailored to specific contextual factors and the dynamics of a group because different motives are relevant in different groups and situations.

One challenge for research on bullying motives is that it typically relies on self-report. However, not all motives are conscious (Bernard et al., 2005) and therefore self-perceived motives may be unreliable. Often, in the human motivation literature (e.g., Bernard, Mills, Swenson, & Walsh, 2008; Murray, 1938; Reiss, 2004), motives are measured implicitly by not asking about motives directly, but assessing behavior and preferences linked to a specific motive. This literature could be used as a guideline to develop implicit measures for the assessment of bullying motives.

Conclusion

The motives perspective answers the question of why bullies bully and what needs they try to fulfill with their bullying behavior. We discussed ten key motives for bullying: dominance, status, resources, revenge, justice, belonging, romance, identity, well-being, and entertainment. All of these motives were prominent in research on motives and have been studied empirically to varying degrees. As is clear, a variety of goals underlie bullies' behavior. As bullies try to satisfy their needs through bullying behavior, anti-bullying programs should take motives into consideration. A motives perspective on bullying is a valuable addition to the field by providing another perception on antisocial behavior and by acknowledging that bullying has a purpose and is functional behavior.

Acknowledgment

We would like to thank Jochem D. Masman for proofreading this chapter.

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