

5-1-2014

Attributions and Coping Behaviors Communicated Among Bullied Students: An Analysis of Bullying Blogs

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ATTRIBUTIONS AND COPING BEHAVIORS COMMUNICATED AMONG
BULLIED STUDENTS: AN ANALYSIS OF BULLYING BLOGS

By

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Bachelor of Arts in Communication Studies

University of Nevada, Las Vegas

2011

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the

Master of Arts - Communication Studies

Department of Communication Studies

Greenspun College of Urban Affairs

The Graduate College

University of Nevada, Las Vegas

May 2014

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THE GRADUATE COLLEGE

We recommend the thesis prepared under our supervision by

Carly Marie Danielson

entitled

Attributions and Coping Behaviors Communicated Among Bullied Students: An Analysis of Bullying Blogs

is approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts – Communication Studies

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Abstract

Student bullying is a growing and damaging problem in society today. This study investigates the role of bullied students' attributions and coping strategies through Heider's (1958) attribution theory (AT) and Crick and Dodge's (1994) social information processing model (SIP). Rich data are obtained from bullying blogs that showcase how bullied individuals make sense of their experiences online. The important findings that emerge from this investigation relate to similarities in men's and women's attributions and differences in their coping strategies and resources to manage victimization. Additionally, both men and women experienced similar negative outcomes with particular coping strategies and resources, suggesting that future research is warranted to improve social support strategies with parents and teachers. These findings will aid those interested in bullying programs and interventions, in the hope to reduce destructive attribution formations and coping behaviors that often lead to prolonged victimization and detrimental consequences.

Keywords: attribution theory, bullying, coping, social information processing

Acknowledgements

I will never forget taking Conflict Management as an undergraduate at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, taught by Dr. Emmers-Sommer. This was my first upper division communication course and also the first class in which I wrote a research paper. Surprisingly, it was the first paper I researched about bullying and harassment. Since taking this course and writing this paper, I knew that I wanted to study interpersonal communication, particularly with bullying. This is largely thanks to Dr. Emmers-Sommer's guidance. Dr. Emmers-Sommer, you are someone I aspire to be one day: hardworking, intelligent, caring and fabulous. I knew that selecting you as my advisor and thesis committee chair would be a rewarding decision, and it has surely surpassed my expectations. I thank you immensely for your support and help throughout my undergraduate and graduate programs, as well as providing timely and detailed feedback on this project.

I would also like to acknowledge Dr. McManus for her high quality teaching and assistance with my thesis. I had the pleasure of taking several courses taught by Dr. McManus during my undergraduate and graduate programs. Dr. McManus, I praise your teaching style; you are very organized, thoroughly review course material, offer Power Points with fill in the blanks that really help learning course content and connect theories and concepts to real world issues, particularly in the Advanced Topics in Relational Communication course. This course was one of my favorite courses that I took during graduate school. Furthermore, I will never forget the day you gave me back my Issues in Interpersonal Communication research paper as an undergraduate, suggesting that I apply to the graduate program. And, I am very glad that I took your advice. I thank you greatly

for your help during the last year with my thesis, especially for your thoughtful comments about formatting and the method section. You are someone I truly strive to model as teacher and researcher.

Dr. Guthrie is another individual who I would like to acknowledge. Although I met Dr. Guthrie less than a year ago, I feel as though I have known her for much longer. Dr. Guthrie, I am glad that you were able to serve as a committee member for my thesis. Luckily, we research similar topics and use similar methods to do so. Thus, I was able to gain a lot of knowledge from you about my project, and I am appreciative of your assistance, especially with APA formatting. Not only have you helped tremendously with my project, but you had a big smile on your face during the entire experience. You are one of the most genuine individuals who I know; someone who pops in my office to say hello, asks how the project is coming along, offers any assistance and provides motivation. I am thankful that this project is one of the first that you worked on as a committee member and wish you the best at UNLV.

Dr. Kennedy is another individual who has provided wonderful assistance with my project. Dr. Kennedy, I am thrilled that you could serve as the outside member for my thesis committee. You raised several important questions and comments during my defense that greatly improved my final project. I appreciate the time and energy you put in my project and for your thoughtful feedback. I wish the best for you and your son as he continues to manage bullies in his school.

Last, and most important, I want to give the greatest thanks to the individuals who I studied in this project. These individuals have experienced ridicules, aggression and violence from bullies, and some had completely lost hope for their lives because of this. I

thank you all for sharing your involvements with bullying, and I urge that you continue to spread awareness about your experiences. With awareness and education, we can bring about change to the growing epidemic of bullying and, hopefully, reduce and prevent this issue from occurring to others. We are all human and do not deserve to be downgraded for our differences; rather, these differences should be celebrated. Without your voices, stories and experiences, this project could not have been possible. Thus, I give my greatest gratitude to you all, as well as anyone who has ever been victimized by bullies.

Dedication

This thesis would not have been possible without several individuals and one organization in my life, and I dedicate this thesis to them. First, I devote this thesis to my loving mother, Diane Sorenson. Mom, I thank you for always pushing me to succeed during the last 20 years of my life attending school. I could have never gone this far with my education without your support, guidance and, most importantly, love. Mom, you always told me to follow my dreams and instincts, and to have a career that will forever make me happy. I followed through with your advice and could not be happier with the route in which I have taken. You are the one person who has and always will be there for me, and I promise to do the same for you. I strive every day to make you a proud parent and will not let you down (*on most days*).

I want to also dedicate this project to my Fond Du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Tribe. My college education would be nonexistent without the financial support from my tribe. Specifically, Bonnie Wallace and Patty Petite have provided ample assistance throughout my undergraduate and graduate programs. Thank you both for always answering my questions and aiding me through the paperwork process each semester. I feel truly blessed to have had the opportunity to advance my education this far, largely thanks to my tribe. I will continue to embrace my history, as well as make my ancestors and tribe proud.

Last and not least, I dedicate this project to Michael Eisenstadt. YOU are the one person who has and will continue to inspire me to achieve success. You are the most intelligent and caring person I know; someone I strive to emulate and someone who motivates me on a daily basis. I could not imagine what the last two years of graduate

school would have been like without you. Late nights in the office, breaks from schoolwork and lunches around campus with you got me through graduate school. As we move forth with different Ph.D. programs, know that we will forever be close; whether or not we are physically close, you will always be near in my thoughts. I look forward to us achieving our statuses as Dr. Danielson and Dr. Eisenstadt. It is my goal to publish at least three articles with you before we retire, so let's make that happen. Team Awesome for life, pound it!

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Chapter 1: Introduction - Student Bullying in America

Bullying is a relational problem where aggression and power are used to harm others (Pepler, Jiang, Craig & Connolly, 2008). This phenomenon is becoming an increasingly grave problem for youth in schools. The U.S Departments of Education, Health and Human Services, Agriculture, Interior and Justice held the first ever Federal National Bullying Summit in 2010 and reported that one out of three American students in middle and high school (i.e., 8.2 million students) were bullied during school and one out of nine (i.e., 2.8 million students) were physically harmed at school each year (Duncan, 2010). Other research claims over 70% of high school students experience bullying at some point in their student career (Nasel et al., 2001) and North American youth, ages 8-15, rank bullying as the most prevalent form of violence in their lives (Kaiser Foundation, 2001), contributing to over 160,000 American students missing school each day in fear of being bullied (Nasel et al., 2001). The increase in technological sophistication and time spent online has moved student bullying outside of the classrooms and schoolyards and on to the Internet (i.e., cyber bullying). i-Safe America (2004) claims that 58% of children receive hurtful messages online and 53% say hurtful messages to others online. With the onset of technological options (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, websites, email, blogs, etc.), the experience of student bullying has seemingly transcended to being a universal one.

Bullying can result in devastating outcomes. Those who are targeted with bullying are usually emotionally scarred and left with long-term consequences (Fekkes, Pijpers & Verloove-Vanhorick, 2004; Marr & Field, 2001; Shelley & Craig, 2010). These consequences are plaguing today's mainstream media with "bullycide" becoming a

common occurrence on the news, a situation in which bullied individuals opt to kill themselves than face another day of torment by their perpetrators (Marr & Field, 2001, p. 6). Bullying tops the list of reasons for attempted suicides among adolescents (“National Institute,” 2007), contributing to this phenomenon being considered a public health concern. The consequences of school bullying raise questions that need to be addressed through an interpersonal communication lens to help society better understand the perceptions and communicative behaviors of the individuals targeted with bullying, in hopes to decrease their prolonged victimization. Individuals face increased negative consequences as victimization continues (Shelley & Craig, 2010); thus, the need to reduce and effectively manage victimization is vital.

Individuals must make decisions about how to make sense of and respond to bullies when they are confronted with bullying behaviors. Attributions are particularly relevant to help understand bullied targets’ assessments of bullying and coping behaviors, and those assessments likely affect their subsequent (mal)adjustment later in life (Crick & Dodge, 1994). Heider’s (1958) attribution theory (AT) provides a useful theoretical lens in making sense of the meanings and causes individuals associate with bullying behaviors. Also, Crick and Dodge’s (1994) social information processing model (SIP) of social adjustment provides a useful theoretical framework for understanding how individuals interpret and respond to bullying by considering the links between attributions and coping. The current paper explores previous research about bullied targets’ attributions and coping responses from AT and SIP to better understand what most effectively reduces victimization. Informed by the extant research on this subject matter, a study is conducted to fill voids in communication research about attributions

and coping behaviors. Data are gathered from blogs that allow access to examine the manner in which people communicate their identities and perceptions about their experiences through story-telling (Kent, 2008). This information will be shared with those engaged in bullying programs and research so they can educate children, families and society about the constructive cognitive and communicative processes involved with coping from bullies to help discontinue targets' victimization. Further, this information might assist those who bully by illuminating how harmful their actions are and serve as an impetus for change.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This paper first reviews previous literature about the characteristics of bullying, and its consequences, forms and trends. Then, an overview of this study's theoretical perspectives is provided, along with previous research about attributions and coping behaviors associated with bullying.

Bullying

Olweus (1993), a leading authority on bullying, identifies bullying with three vital dimensions from the perspective of the target. First, bullying involves aggressive behaviors that are intentionally enacted by an individual or group of individuals against a target. Incidental mishap can certainly harm individuals, but does not constitute bullying without a conscious motivation by a perpetrator to a target. Also, as the second characteristic suggests, bullies use a repetitive pattern of aggressive actions toward a target. An incidental mishap would not likely be perceived as bullying unless those incidental behaviors were persistent. For example, Sherer and Clark (2009) claim that 60% of seventh graders acknowledge bullying at least once or twice a month and 26% bully on most days or several times a day. Also, 52% of eighth graders acknowledge bullying their targets once or twice a month and 27% indicate they bully almost daily or several times a day. Furthermore, Dinkes, Kemp and Baum (2009) report that 25% of school principals suggest bullying occurs on a daily or weekly basis in their schools, demonstrating the severity of these persistent behaviors. The final dimension of bullying specifies an imbalance of relational power between the target and bully. Targets usually have minimal influence on bullies' behaviors, and targets' characteristics most often signal an imbalance of power. For instance, minority group members often feel more

vulnerable to experiencing victimization in the classrooms (Graham, 2005), and 94% of students with disabilities (Little, 2002) and 85% of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer students (Kosciw, Diaz & Greytak, 2008) experience bullying. In addition, Wessler and De Andrade (2006) claim that the majority of students in their study heard degrading language, slurs and jokes multiple times a day targeted at physical attributes, clothing, race, sexual attributes, homophobia and religion. An imbalance of power can be due to ethnicity, sexual orientation, values, social status and personal attributes, as well as how individuals choose to present themselves with artifacts and other relationships (Wessler & De Andrade, 2006). Targets might also be perceived by the bully as physically weaker, mentally weaker and/or younger than the bully (Porhola, Karhunen & Rainivaara, 2006). These are the three characteristics of bullying that help distinguish it from teasing, a behavior that can be both productive in relationships often as children age, as well as destructive and harmful, aligning with bullying (Sherer & Clark, 2009).

There are four different forms of bullying that often overlap to marginalize students: verbal, cyber, physical and relational. Verbal bullying is directed at a target with the intention of psychologically hurting them and includes name-calling, belittling, slurs and taunting (Liepe-Levinson & Levinson, 2005). Name-calling is the most common form of bullying that accounts for nearly 70% of all incidents, is often a precursor to the other forms (Liepe-Levinson & Levinson, 2005) and occurs throughout the schooling years (Mills & Carwile, 2009). The rise of cyber bullying has moved traditional face-to-face (FTF) verbal bullying in the classrooms on to the Internet, a potentially easier medium for bullies to bully (Farrell, 2013). Cyber bullies often bully anonymously, making it harder to trace perpetrators (Dehue, Bolman & Vollink, 2008). Targets

perceive cyber bullying just as harmful as FTF bullying, and when bullying is experienced through both of these mediums their prolonged victimization increases (Farrell, 2013). Third, physical bullying is the most troubling and visible form and includes punching, scratching, kicking, choking, hitting and destructing property (Liepe-Levinson & Levinson, 2005). Men are more often physically bullied than women (Mills & Carwile, 2009). Moreover, middle school students are more likely to be the targets of physical bullying than high school and elementary school students (Unnever & Cornell, 2004). The last form of bullying is relational and occurs when bullies harm an existing relationship or feelings of acceptance with others (Liepe-Levinson & Levinson, 2005). Relational bullying is often achieved indirectly through gossip and rumor spreading, as well as through non-verbal behaviors that demolish a target's self-esteem, such as isolation, exclusion and ignorance. Girls are more likely than boys to use relational bullying (Liepe-Levinson & Levinson, 2005), and as adolescents age they engage in relational bullying more frequently as physical bullying decreases (Crick, Grotpeter & Bigbee, 2002). Relational bullying can sometimes be more emotionally harmful than verbal or physical forms because targets might not recognize who their perpetrators are and do not get the opportunity for initial defense, whereas others might prefer to be verbally or physically bullied than ignored (Mills & Carwile, 2009).

Bullying can create severe harm for targets. There are many negative emotional ramifications bullied individuals likely face, including depression, fear, anxiety and low self-esteem (Graham, 2005; Reid, Monsen & Rivers, 2004). These emotional consequences can lead to body image concerns, eating disorders (Fekkes et al., 2004) and social (mal)adjustment issues, such as peer rejection and difficulty making and/or

sustaining relationships (Hawker & Boulton, 2000). Bullying can also decrease student ambition for educational learning, concentration, performance and attendance (Reid et al., 2004). Education is an indispensable and essential component of child development and when students experience bullying they often become fearful of the academic environment and redirect their attention to self-preservation and away from learning.

Furthermore, bullied individuals might also act out their repressed aggression through bullying others or school violence (Easton & Aberman, 2008). Many perpetrators of bullying claim they have been previously bullied by others prior to enacting their bullying behaviors on others (Easton & Aberman, 2008) and nearly two-thirds of school shootings include an attacker who had previously experienced longstanding bullying by others prior to the incident (Dake, Prince, Telljohann & Funk, 2004). For instance, reports indicate that the Columbine shooters were two students who were consecutively bullied by football players, leaving many uninvolved individuals dead (Liepe-Levinson & Levinson, 2005). This not only puts bullied targets in danger of bullying but society, as well. Those who bully also face negative outcomes, such as poor relationships later in life and an increased chance of becoming incarcerated criminals by the time they reach their twenties (Conn, 2004). Bullying can create a ripple effect; those who victimize others increase the chance of their targets becoming bullies. The ways targets make sense of their encounters influences their actions and having a better comprehension of these behaviors might help alleviate these devastating outcomes.

It can be difficult to escape the school years without receiving some form of bullying. Bullying occurs in nearly every school, but generally begins in elementary school, increases frequently in middle school and then, decreases in high school. Children

who are 11 to 15 years of age experience bullying most frequently, and age 14 is the peak of adolescent social aggression (Sherer & Clark, 2009). Bullying encounters spike in middle school as children experience changes in social settings and peer group structures. Middle school requires children to renegotiate their dominance in relationships, and bullying can be a strategy used to gain dominance often among boys (Pellegrini & Long, 2002). Middle school is also a time when children increase their levels of same-sex friendships and gain more sensitivity to rejection (Sherer & Clark, 2009). Additionally, the capacities of children to process social information, produce complex responses, enact effective strategies and use self-defense of their own behalf increases with age (Crick & Dodge, 1994). Unfortunately, young children are at a vulnerable age where they are most likely to experience bullying but often have not yet developed the conflict skills to effectively manage or discourage bullies.

Parents might be waiting too long to discuss important issues like bullying with their children. The Kaiser Family Foundation and Children Now (2001) conducted a nationwide survey with parents and their children about tough issues they communicate about. They share that 75% of parents whose children are 8-12 years of age are not talking enough about violence with their children, and when these conversations do take place, 56% of parents wait too long to discuss the issue. The study also claims children are eager to hear more information about a variety of topics, and how to be safe from violence is the leading one (80%). Children might not be receiving adequate information or information whatsoever about how to manage bullies. Therefore, it is imperative that children are accurately informed about constructive communication processes involved with managing bullies.

Theoretical Perspectives

Attributions offer insights into the interpretive processes that are fundamental to human communication. Attributions are often studied through attribution theory (AT), a framework that analyzes how receivers in interpersonal interactions make inferences about the responsibility and causality underlying observed behaviors (Heider, 1958). According to Heider (1958), people go through life as amateur scientists piecing together messages to make sense of the world they encounter by assigning causes to them. The cause of a person's own behaviors, another's behaviors or communicative exchanges in interpersonal interactions is not directly observed. Rather, attributions are ascribed about the responsibility underlying observed behaviors that frame their experiences (Crick & Dodge, 1994).

Researchers who study attributions often refer to three dimensions: locus of causality (i.e., internal or external), stability (i.e., stable or unstable) and controllability (i.e., controllable or uncontrollable; Manusov & Spitzberg, 2008). Locus of causality refers to whether individuals attribute internal causation and perceive themselves as the cause of behaviors (e.g., I am to blame for this outcome) or external causation and attribute others or outside circumstances as the cause (e.g., they are to blame for this outcome). Behaviors or events attributed as stable are perceived to continue over time (e.g., things always have and always will be this way) and unstable when they are unlikely to repeat or occur just a few times (e.g., things were this way until I got help to make it stop). Last, controllable attributions refer to individuals feeling their own actions can alter their outcomes (e.g., I can do something to change this outcome) and uncontrollable when an event is seen as something that will result in the same outcome

regardless of their actions (e.g., I do not know how to change this outcome; my actions will not influence the outcome). These three dimensions of attributions, along with others, then affect subsequent communicative behaviors and social actions (Weiner, 1991), such as coping. The study of attributions examines how individuals make sense of behaviors and motives, helping to understand how individuals respond differently to events (Shelley & Craig, 2010).

Along with AT, the social information processing model (SIP) provides an understanding about how individuals interpret events in their social environments, as well as how they act upon them. Crick and Dodge (1994) provide SIP, a decision-making model that suggests individuals, especially children, interpret their social interactions by accessing relevant memories and making causal and intent attributions to the behaviors or events under question. Those attributions then produce a distinct set of emotions that influence coping behaviors that, in turn, influences social adjustment.

The SIP model includes six decision-making steps: (1) encoding internal and external cues; (2) interpreting those cues through attributions; (3) selecting a goal or set of goals; (4) generating possible responses to the behaviors or events; (5) deciding on a response; and (6) enacting the chosen response. Once a response is enacted, an individual experiences evaluation from peers and re-engages in the process to respond. This is a continuous cycle of processing social information. This paper does not assess the temporal sequencing of this model. However, the model serves as a guide to assess bullied targets' subsequent decisions on how to cope in step six and ultimately how that influences their victimization. The model also exhibits the cognitive processes of how attributions influence coping behaviors. Although AT and SIP both stem from and are

extensively studied in the field of psychology, both theories offer the field of communication beneficial lenses to understand the ways bullied individuals communicate their experiences through attributions and coping behaviors.

Attributions. Attributions play an important role in the initiation and maintenance of coping behaviors; coping is the behavioral enactment of attributions (Shelley & Craig, 2010). One dimension in particular, locus of causality, is a particularly significant attribution. When young bullied targets attribute internal causation in their hostile encounters and conclude they deserved to be bullied (i.e., self-blame), it can be problematic. Children who self-blame might engage in self-fulfilling prophecies where they inadvertently behave in ways to confirm their victim reputations (Graham, 2005). Also, Perren, Ettekal and Ladd (2013) suggest children with higher levels of self-blaming attributions face increases in internalizing problems and that a child's tendency to attribute self-blame is rather stable. When children attribute internal causation they face negative outcomes and are likely to continue making that inference.

Self-blame consists of two forms. Behavioral self-blame occurs when an undesirable outcome is associated with one's modifiable behaviors that can be controlled (e.g., it is something about what I did in this situation). Characterological self-blame occurs when an undesirable outcome is blamed on one's nonmodifiable character or disposition that cannot be controlled (e.g., it is something about the way I am; Janoff-Bulman, 1979). Whereas both types of self-blame are associated with the negative outcomes of internal causation, those who attribute characterological self-blame are more likely to face severe symptoms, such as depression, prolonged victimization and (mal)adjustment (Harper, 2011; Shelley & Craig, 2010). Self-blaming attributions and

especially characterological attributions among bullied targets can result in continued involvement with bullying and adverse consequences.

Few scholars have examined whether bullied youth are more likely to make internal or external causal attributions. Graham (2005) and Graham, Bellmore and Mize (2005) claim that students who are targets of hypothetical peer harassment scenarios make more characterological self-blaming attributions than behavioral and external attributions in self-report surveys, and are at a higher risk of loneliness, social anxiety and feelings of unworthiness. However, harassment is a form of bullying when it is based on a student's race, color, national origin, sex or disability ("Pacer Center," 2013) and does not always encompass the broader behaviors both direct and indirect that constitute bullying. For example, attacks against appearance, clothing, hygiene and friends might not be assessed under harassment, common loci of attack bullied targets face (Lutgen-Sandvik & McDermott, 2011; Mottet & Thweatt, 1997). Additionally, Joscelyne and Holttum (2006) interviewed children from the U.K. about imagined peer bullying and found they used several attributions in their stories to make sense of bullying among others, especially characterological and behavioral attributions (e.g., "Because she's small ... because she's walking back and she bumped into Sarah..."; p. 108). This study simultaneously coded multiple attributions for bullying; something this study will accomplish, along with assessing explanations for actual bullying behaviors rather than hypothetical behaviors.

The influence of gender on causal attributions is also relatively unexplored. Perren et al. (2013) and Prinstein, Cheah and Guyer (2005) claim that gender is not associated with causal attribution styles about bullying victimization, but suggest that

future research should further investigate if gender moderates attributions. Likewise, Graham et al. (2005) report no gender differences with causal attributions for student harassment. However, this study has an unbalanced gender representation and also suggests for gender causal attribution differences to be further explored, a worthy area of research this study intends to examine. Communication research can benefit from understanding whether bullied targets are more likely to blame themselves or others for bullying. If targets are likely to blame themselves then bullying intervention messages can target youth by letting them know that they are not the cause for bullying. Rather, it is the fault of bullies. Also, if gender differences exist, further research is needed about how to target and help particular genders make sense of bullying.

Along with locus of causality, stability is also another important attribution.

Although the definition of bullying suggests repeated harm and many scholars agree that bullying is persistent and long-term (Olweus, 1993; Porhola et al., 2006; Sherer & Clark, 2009), relatively few researchers study the duration of these behaviors. One study by Smith and Shu (2000) surveyed English students about the duration of bullying. They reported that 48% of bullied students were bullied for about a week and 17% for about a month, whereas 13% were bullied all term, 9% for almost a year and 13% over several years. Additionally, those who were still being bullied at older ages were less likely to tell anyone about it, likely a reason why they still received bullying behaviors. The duration of bullying might affect the particular strategies targets use. It seems likely that those bullied for over a year might not be enacting effective coping strategies or their resources (e.g., parents, school officials or peers) might be failing to address the issue.

Beyond Smith and Shu's (2000) study of bullying behaviors among English students and Sherer and Clark's (2009) analysis of bullying frequencies, little is known about the duration (e.g., several days, weeks, months or years) that targets usually face harm by bullies. If bullying behaviors span a long duration for students, it emphasizes that schools might need better intervention programs or that youth need education about how to best manage bullies. This is significant because bullies are likely to continue bullying if nothing is stopping them. Olweus (1993) suggests that one's aggressive tendencies after seeing negative behaviors rewarded (i.e., overcoming the target) rather than punished by peers, teachers and/or parents perpetuates bullying behaviors. Also, over time, targets who are subjected to continual bullying are at risk for more serious consequences, such as mental health issues, stress, eating disorders, suicidal thoughts (Porhola et al., 2006) and an increased likelihood of becoming bullies themselves (Liepe-Levinson & Levinson, 2005). Bullying behaviors that are not reprimanded influence the potential for bullied targets to become bullies, too. Therefore, it is vital to understand what best helps reduce bullying.

There are several other factors that might influence the stability of bullying. With the rise of technology comes the potential for bullies to contact their targets easier (Dehue et al., 2008). Whereas Jose, Kljakovic, Scheib and Notter (2011) claim New Zealand bullied targets are more likely to face stable involvement of traditional FTF bullying, rather than cyber bullying, over a three year period, little is known about how FTF and cyber bullying work together to influence the stability of bullying victimization. Targets might try to change classes or schools to avoid their bullies, but the Internet allows bullies to torment their targets if they are physically separated (Dehue et al., 2008).

Therefore, the duration of bullying might have increased due to dependence on technology, allowing bullies to contact their targets after they depart high school and even into college.

In addition, few scholars study gender differences with the stability of bullying. Camodeca, Goossens, Terwogt and Schuengel (2002) claim that male students from the Netherlands are more likely than female students to face stable involvement being both bullies and targets over the span of one year. However, little is known about the duration of these behaviors beyond one year and would be useful to study with American students. Other researchers (Perren, Ettekal & Ladd 2013; Porhola et al., 2006) also claim that boys are more frequently victimized than girls, but the duration of received bullying behaviors is relatively unexplored. This further credits the importance of studying gender differences with the duration of bullying.

The last attribution, control, also affects bullying outcomes. The attribution of control shapes how individuals perceive influence over their events and their ability to manage the effects of those events (Lutgen-Sandvik & McDermott, 2011). Individuals who attribute control over their bullies are likely to engage in behaviors that seek to manage or stop the bullying behaviors (Cutrona & Suhr, 1992). For instance, a target who feels control over bullying might effectively manage the bully directly or gain appropriate help from parents and/or school officials to stop the bullying. Individuals who attribute control might also describe bullying as something they have gotten over or are not affected by anymore. Those who exhibit no control feel helplessness, loneliness, grief and guilt (Cutrona & Suhr, 1992). For example, someone who feels bullying is

uncontrollable might strive to escape or avoid the situation and/or express anguish, isolation and feelings of powerlessness (Porhola et al., 2006).

The imbalance of power between the bully and target is a characteristic suggested in the definition of bullying and this inequality might heavily weigh on how targets perceive control over their bullies (Mishna & Alaggia, 2005). Porhola et al. (2006) claim that targets have difficulty defending themselves against those who bully, suggesting they might perceive relatively low control over their bullies in the context when bullying occurs. However, just because targets have less power in the moment of being victimized does not suggest they lack enough control to stop the bully, tell someone or reach out to others for assistance. Further, Liepe-Levinson and Levinson (2005) suggest that young targets are often left feeling powerless because they struggle to make sense of why such acts are occurring and what might be done about it, so they rarely tell anyone about the incident. This further credits the importance of educating youth about how to manage bullies. Understanding how bullied individuals perceive control is significant because those who lack control and do not tell someone about their bullies or do nothing to stop it are at a higher risk of repeated and stable victimization, leading to harsh consequences (Mishna & Alaggia, 2005; Smith, Talamelli, Cowie, Naylor & Chauhan, 2004).

Although, just because an individual seeks help does not always mean that they perceive control over bullying; their sought help might provide inadequate assistance, leaving the individual helpless.

Gender differences with specific attributions to control are also unstudied.

Whereas some researchers (Kochenderfer-Ladd & Skinner, 2002; Tenenbaum, Varjas, Meyers & Parris, 2011) suggest that boys more often than girls use avoidance in response

to bullying, it is unclear whether it is due to them perceiving that their actions cannot alter their outcomes (i.e., uncontrollable) or if their bullies did not affect them enough to actively seek out help (i.e., controllable). However, this data was gathered with surveys and interviews; thus, to be socially desirable (Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974), boys might say they used avoidance to exhibit control over bullies. Also, researchers (Kochenderfer-Ladd & Skinner, 2002; Shelley & Craig, 2010) claim that seeking social support is effective for girls and has the opposite effect for boys, meaning boys might be left with perceptions of less control over bullying if the support they receive does not provide effective bully management. However, these explanations were not further investigated. Very little also appears to exist in the extant literature about whether a particular gender is more likely to perceive enough control to directly confront a bully or use self-defense on their own behalf, beyond that confrontation and self-defense increase with age (Porhola et al., 2006). Furthermore, Twenge, Zhang, and Im (2004) found that male and female children and college students feel that, in general, outside forces control their lives, more than they feel that they control their lives. Both men and women equally felt more powerless to change the world and control their own destinies, although, this was not specifically analyzed with bullying victimization.

Specific attributions for control about bullying by gender are unexplored and this study seeks to clear up these uncertainties about gender differences with perceptions of controllability. If bullied youth believe that they cannot alter their outcomes, then bullying interventions might want to target them with messages about how to locate reliable outlets to gain support and power from to manage bullies, something that might need to be gender specific. Further, the rise of technology might influence how bullied

individuals attribute control. Many instances of cyber bullying occur from an anonymous perpetrator, making targets unaware of their perpetrators' identities (Dehue et al., 2008). Individuals might perceive less control over bullying if they are unable to track their bullies. Thus, how bullied male and female students attribute control is worthy of analysis.

Although the study of the three dimensions of attributions with actual bullied students has not been analyzed, one study has analyzed these dimensions with bullied adults in the workplace. Lutgen-Sandvik and McDermott (2011) reported that adult targets attributed causality to their bullies and made stable and uncontrollable attributions about their experiences. Interestingly, adult targets blamed their bullies and perceived them as mentally ill, evil and/or power hungry and were not attributing self-blame, which was found in Graham's (2005) study with harassed students. It would be compelling to analyze how the results of this study compare with both Lutgen-Sandvik and McDermott's and Graham's applications of attributions to further explore if attributions are dependent on age or context (e.g., school, workplace, etc.). Given that previous research is lacking in knowledge about attributions to bullying and scholars (e.g., Graham et al., 2005; Perren et al., 2013; Prinstein et al., 2005) suggest analyzing gender differences with these attributions, the first set of research questions are advanced:

RQ1a: Do male and female students differ regarding their attributions for locus of causality with bullying victimization in blog posts?

RQ1b: Do male and female students differ regarding their attributions for stability with bullying victimization in blog posts?

RQ1c: Do male and female students differ regarding their attributions for controllability with bullying victimization in blog posts?

Interpersonal and health communication scholars and practitioners can benefit from the analysis of what attributions bullied students are most likely to make and whether that relates to gender. Identifying these attributions can help understand the sensemaking and assessments individuals most frequently make about bullying. These processes can also aid bullying campaigns in drafting messages to send children to help deter detrimental attributions and reduce victimization.

Coping strategies. After bullied individuals make attributions about their experiences, they must decide how to respond to their bullies. Coping strategies are assessed in stages four and five of the SIP model where possible responses are generated to address dilemmas, and coping behaviors are enacted in stage six (Crick & Dodge, 1994), the focus of this research. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) define coping as “constantly changing cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person” (p. 141). How individuals choose to cope significantly influences their bullying victimization.

There are several different conceptual constructions involving coping subtypes. First, Folkman and Lazarus (1980) theorize that coping can be understood as problem-focused and emotion-focused. Problem-focused responses are directed toward resolving the stressful relationship between the self and the problem, such as seeking social support (i.e., discussing the issue with someone else, turning to others for advice and assistance), confrontation (i.e., taking aggressive actions to the source of the issue), planful problem

solving (i.e., analyzing the problem and deciding on a course of action to manage the stressor, often alone) and accepting responsibility (i.e., recognizing how one contributed to the problem and attempting to make a change). Emotion-focused strategies manage negative emotions that arise as a result of stress and not the issue directly, including distancing (i.e., detaching oneself from the situation and minimizing its importance), self-controlling (i.e., regulating ones feelings and emotions), escape-avoidance (i.e., thoughts and behaviors to escape and avoid the problem) and positive reappraisal (i.e., thinking positively about the situation). Generally, problem-focused coping is associated with increased adaptive emotional regulation and problem-solving skills, whereas emotion-focused coping is associated with distressing emotions (Ben-Zur, 2005; Causey & Dubow, 1992). Research demonstrates that problem-focused coping strategies compared to emotion-focused are more productive and beneficial for individuals.

Another theory of coping from Roth and Cohen (1986) group coping strategies into two other types: approach and avoidance. Approach strategies attempt to directly resolve stressful situations, similar to problem-focused strategies, whereas avoidance strategies attempt to stay away from the stressor and escape the issue, similar to emotion-focused strategies. Approach and avoidant strategies influence the likelihood of continued or discontinued involvement with the stressor and (mal)adjustment. Roth and Cohen found that avoidance strategies reduced stress, but rarely contributed to a resolution of the issue. Causey and Dubow (1992) developed a coping measure based off the approach-avoidance model with five subscales. The approach subscales include seeking social support (i.e., disclosing the issue and/or asking for help or advice) and self-reliance/problem solving (i.e., thinking of different ways to solve the issue and

deciding on a course of action). The avoidance subscales include distancing (i.e., refusing to think about the issue, cognitively reframing and/or make believe nothing happened), internalizing (i.e., managing the issue cognitively, often with fear, anxiety, sorrow and/or crying alone) and externalizing (i.e., aggressively dealing with the emotional reactions by taking them out on others or objects, such as yelling to let off steam, hitting things or fighting with others). Approach strategies are often associated with more positive outcomes, whereas avoidance can be linked with loneliness, anxiety and (mal)adjustment (Kochenderfer-Ladd & Skinner, 2002). However, although approach strategies might resolve a stressful situation, it can also induce anxiety from the confrontation of the distressing situation (Tenenbaum et al., 2011).

The conceptual construction of Tenenbaum, Varjas, Meyers and Parris' (2011) coping behaviors contribute to the development of the coping schemes for the present study. These scholars interviewed children who were perceived by the school administrators, teachers and parents as chronic targets of bullying. An initial coding typology was formed based off bullied targets' coping mechanisms: problem-focused and emotion-focused. However, unlike Causey and Dubow's (1992) conceptualization of coping subtypes under problem-focused and emotion-focused coping, Tenenbaum et al. found several coping subtypes that were both problem- and emotion-focused, and grouped coping behaviors into different categories.

The first tactic in Tenenbaum et al.'s (2011) coping model includes standing up to the bully, responding to the bully directly by making their views known and negotiating with a bully about how to resolve the situation. This was coded as only a problem-focused tactic (i.e., cognitive processes were used to decide on the course of action to

manage the issue). The second coping strategy is self-defense, engaging in protective physical action to shield oneself from bullies' physical danger. Self-defense was only used as a problem-focused tactic (i.e., thinking about the problem and deciding that self-defense was the best way to resolve it). Third, seeking social support involves disclosing victimization to others and turning to others for advice/assistance. Seeking social support was an emotion-focused tactic (i.e., the individual sought/received emotional support), problem-focused (i.e., they told someone about the issue to help avoid victimization) and both problem- and emotion-focused (i.e., they sought help to manage the resulting emotions, as well as advice on how to make it stop). The fourth coping tactic is distancing, trying to detach oneself from the stressful situation and/or continue with daily life. Distancing was used as a problem-focused strategy (i.e., they analyzed the issue and decided that ignoring it was the best strategy), emotion-focused (i.e., they ignored the problem to help manage pain and continued with life) and both problem- and emotion-focused (i.e., they avoided the issue to prevent exacerbating the situation and to control their emotions). Internalizing, not letting others know about his/her experiences being bullied and keeping emotions to themselves, is the fifth coping strategy. Internalizing was used as a problem-focused tactic (i.e., hiding one's feelings about the issue was a mechanism to avoid future victimization) and emotion-focused (i.e., they felt sad and hurt and displayed depressive tendencies). The sixth coping strategy is tension-reducing/externalizing, engaging in behaviors that let go of steam to reduce stress and displace energy. This was only an emotion-focused coping strategy (i.e., they engaged in other behaviors and activities to take their minds off of the problem and did not seek to directly address the issue). Retaliation was coded as an externalizing emotion-focused

coping response although it was directed at the source of the issue, because it was described as something they later regretted and was not used to effectively resolve the situation. Focusing on the positives is the seventh coping strategy that involves maintaining a positive attitude about their bullying situations. This was only an emotion-focused strategy (i.e., they focused on positive things even though the bullying continued and there were no attempts to stop it). This model shows that coping strategies do not always fit into the distinct categories of emotion- and problem-focused and that the strategies can be used in both categories simultaneously. Thus, this model serves as an appropriate coding typology to use for this study.

Other scholars have analyzed the influence of particular approach strategies. For instance, revenge seeking and confronting the bully directly can increase the severity of aggression during bullying (Mahady-Wilton, Craig & Pepler, 2000). However, disclosure, revealing information to others often to gain help or provide emotional release by getting things off their minds (Matsunaga, 2010a), can provide an effective path toward effectively coping for bullied individuals. Bullied students who revealed their victimization to family members, friends and/or teachers showed better post-bullying adjustment, emotional stability, satisfaction with their life experiences and were more likely to escape victimization than those who do not disclose or directly confronted the bullies (Hunger & Borg, 2006; Kochenderfer-Ladd & Skinner, 2002). Also, even if disclosure does not result in an immediate resolution of bullying, it helps reduce targets' stress and minimizes other negative consequences of bullying (Matsunaga, 2010b).

Disclosure often serves as a gateway to seeking social support. Seeking social support is one approach strategy scholars disagree about. Several scholars (e.g., Hunter &

Borg, 2006; Matsunaga, 2009; Porhola et al., 2006) discuss how seeking social support has a critical role in an individual's effective coping processes, as it provides them a reduced risk for negative consequences and better adjustment than those who cope with the hardships alone. In addition, many anti-bullying programs encourage bullied targets to tell someone so that they can then be helped to resolve the problem (e.g., Olweus Bullying Prevention Program, Pacer's National Bullying Prevention Center, Reach Out and Stop Bullying). Further, trainee teachers reported seeking support as the coping strategy they would recommend to students (Nicolaidis, Toda & Smith, 2002). However, the literature has produced discrepant findings about the effectiveness of seeking social support.

Research suggests that the effectiveness of disclosure and seeking social support might vary by gender, helping to understand the discrepancies about this particular coping strategy. Kochenderfer-Ladd and Skinner (2002) and Shelley and Craig (2010) suggest that seeking social support is mostly used by girls and protects them from social problems but has the opposite effect for boys. Boys can be expected to handle bullying incidents alone and their efforts to seek assistance might be met with disapproval, whereas girls often are socialized to focus on their relationships and sharing information (Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974). Further, Shelley and Craig report no coping styles that reduce victimization for boys. The use of particular coping strategies appears to have different outcomes for men and women. However, Tenenbaum et al. (2011) claim that seeking social support that is both problem-focused (i.e., seeking problem-solving advice) and emotion-focused (i.e., seeking emotional support) provides both genders positive feedback and more beneficial outcomes than simply reporting the problem to an

adult/peer. The use of coping strategies that are both problem- and emotion-focused (e.g., seeking support) might be more beneficial for bullied men and women. However, few scholars have studied bullied individuals' use of both problem- and emotion-focused strategies to manage bullies, something this study seeks to accomplish.

The type of support provided to an individual seeking help can also explain the discrepancies about seeking social support. Some supportive messages might actually impede, rather than enhance, individuals' coping and adjustment. Matsunaga (2010b) suggests that when there is a gap between the desired support by the recipient and their received support it prevents positive reappraisal, the process when individuals specifically examine conditions of the given environment and assess the likelihood of successful coping (Folkman, Lazarus, Dunkel-Schetter, DeLongis & Gruen, 1986). This is in line with expectancy violations research, suggesting messages that go against expectations can be highly upsetting and creates intense emotional responses (White, 2008).

Matsunaga (2010b; 2011) has studied the influence of children's received social support about bullying from parents. Matsunaga (2010b) reports that emotional support, behaviors that convey caring, concern, empathy and sympathy (e.g., "I love you" and "are you feeling better?"; Cutrona & Suhr, 1992), best enhances bullied targets' appraisals, the cognitive process where individuals attribute meaning of the support (Folkman et al., 1968), communication satisfaction, post-bullying adjustments and overall well-being. In another study by Matsunaga (2011), emotional support and esteem support, messages that express respect to the recipient and confirm their personal value (e.g., "you're better than them" and "I know you can handle this"; Cutrona & Suhr,

1992), for bullied targets enhance their positive reappraisal. Individuals who experience positive reappraisal from social support are more willing and comfortable to self-disclosure and have better post-bullying adjustments and long-term well-being. Matsunaga (2010b; 2011) claims in both studies that network support, connecting individuals to third parties with similar interests and concerns (e.g., counselors, teachers, etc.) to manage the problem impedes positive reappraisal, helping to elucidate why certain messages provide effective support and post-bullying adjustment for bullied targets, whereas other messages do not. For instance, individuals who are provided network support might fear that their parents might contact their bullies and make the situation worse. Although seeking a third party for intervention might be needed in particular circumstances, Matsunaga's (2010b; 2011) research suggests that parents who are approached for support might want to offer emotional and then esteem support before offering network support.

Along with emotional, esteem and network support, there are two other types of social support that individuals might provide to someone who is disclosing or seeking help. Informational support includes advice, factual input and feedback (e.g., "I think you should tell your mom" and "if you don't tell someone, it will get worse"; Cutrona & Suhr, 1992). Tangible support offers needed goods and services (e.g., transportation, band aids, money, etc.; Cutrona & Suhr, 1992). There have been no scholars who have analyzed how informational and tangible support affects bullied individuals' thoughts, behaviors or victimization. This study intends to analyze how bullied individuals who disclose or seek help to manage bullies describe the effectiveness of these types of social support on their well-being and victimization.

Along with approach strategies, bullied targets might also engage in avoidant strategies. Although research findings are unclear regarding the effectiveness of particular approach strategies, the negative influence of avoidant strategies are clear. Avoidance can reduce stress, but rarely contributes to a resolution of the problem (Hunter & Borg, 2006; Tenenbaum et al., 2011) and increases bullying victimization for men and women (Shelley & Craig, 2010). This makes sense given that these strategies manage thoughts related to the stressor and not the stressor itself, as Conn (2004) discusses how targets often attempt to “blend into the background, in the futile hope that their tormentor(s) will forget them or simply go away” (p. 31). The use of avoidant strategies has also been found to depend on gender. Research suggests boys mostly use externalizing (Tenenbaum et al., 2011) and distancing (Kochenderfer-Ladd & Skinner, 2002) as coping strategies, whereas others report no gender differences in the use of these strategies (Ben-Zur, 2005). Again, the discrepancies in the use of these behaviors suggest the need to further explore this area of study.

Targets of bullying often use avoidant strategies for several reasons. Targets worry about getting an adult involved and feel that they should handle their own problems (Mishna & Alaggia, 2005), as well as worry about bullies’ revenge (Christensen, 2009; Matsunaga, 2010a; Mishna & Alaggia, 2005). Matsunaga (2010a) suggests that U.S. bullied youth base their disclosure decisions on negative self-consequences and self-protection concerns. Targets would not likely disclose information if it is seen as something that would cause personal harm or exacerbate the problem. Mishna and Alaggia (2005) discuss how children often fear bullies’ retaliation for being reported, a perception supported by Tenenbaum et al. (2011) who found that bullies

reacted poorly to being ratted out. Perpetrators who get reprimanded for bullying can sometimes feel justified in obtaining payback (Christensen, 2009), a potential reason why seeking social support might not be effective for some individuals. A bullied target who seeks help from an individual who rats out the bully might face payback from the bully and, consequently, perceive social support as ineffective. Targets might perceive more risks than benefits in disclosing or seeking help. However, this can be problematic because if they do not tell someone about their dilemmas they likely face more continued involvement with bullying compared to approach strategies (Hunter & Borg, 2006).

The inconsistencies in previous research about what coping strategies bullied male and female targets mostly engage in and how that influences their victimization suggests that it is warranted to further investigate these behaviors. Also, Tenenbaum et al. (2011) have been one of the few scholars to examine bullied individuals' use of coping strategies that are both emotion- and problem-focused. They suggest coping strategies are complex and need to be examined in a way that accounts for simultaneous use of multiple strategies by documenting how various strategies are used together, something this study has the potential to do. Given that previous literature suggests that men and women engage in different coping strategies that have different effects on their victimization, this study will not analyze gender differences with coping strategies. Rather, this investigation seeks to better understand what behaviors bullied male and female targets most frequently use to manage bullies and whether they perceive their chosen coping strategies as effective. The next set of research questions address these behaviors:

RQ2a: What strategies do male and female students most frequently report using to cope with bullying victimization in blog posts?

RQ2b: How do male and female students describe the effectiveness of their chosen strategies to cope with bullying victimization in blog posts?

This research can offer beneficial knowledge about the strategies bullied targets mostly engage in and how they perceive the effectiveness of that selection. This knowledge can be shared with bullying programs and families so they can educate children and society about how to properly manage bullying situations to result with the most productive outcomes, as well as discourage ineffective strategies.

Coping resources. The use and effectiveness of coping strategies has also been found to depend on the person from whom an individual seeks coping help. The Kaiser Foundation and Children Now (2001) report that 54% of children, ages 10-12, seek their mother as a primary resource for information on sex, drugs and violence. When they do not seek their parents for information about violence, they turn to the media (57%) or friends (36%) for guidance. Teens, ages 13-15, are most likely to name friends as a common resource about violence (60%) and 61% say most kids their age get information about violence from the media. This can be problematic if children are obtaining incorrect information about how to manage bullies from these sources.

Furthermore, several other bullying researchers have analyzed from whom bullied children seek help and the outcomes of those decisions. Matsunaga (2010a) claims that U.S. bullied targets typically disclose to their best friends (44%) and that positively relates to their well-being and post-bullying adjustment, whereas very few disclose primarily to their parents and/or teachers. This finding is also supported by Fekkes et al. (2005) who share that 30-50% of bullied targets do not disclose their predicament to their parents and/or teachers and the Kaiser Foundation and Children Now report 48% of 10-

12 year olds avoid discussing violence with their parents. However, Hunter and Borg (2006) suggest that bullied children who get help from their parents have less stress and are more likely to escape victimization than those who do not disclose the issue. Additionally, Davidson and Demaray (2007) claim that teacher, classmate and school support for bullied men and parental support for bullied women decreases their victimization and stress. There are relatively few studies that have analyzed who bullied male and female students mostly seek help from for their victimization and, of those that have studied this, there have been discrepant findings about these behaviors and outcomes. This study will further explore these coping behaviors and effects.

Although research suggests mixed results about who bullied targets seek help from and whether that person helps them appropriately, other scholars (Hunter & Borg, 2006; Matsunaga, 2009) indicate the importance of adult interventions to manage bullies. Mishna and Alaggia (2005) claim that adults play a key role in identifying signs of victimization, helping children disclose and balancing the unequal power distribution in bullying. Also, Matsunaga (2009) indicates that the discrepancies between children's experiences with bullying and their parents' knowledge are worrisome.

There are several reasons why children might not tell adults about their bullying victimization. As noted earlier, children might not tell adults because they want to handle their own problems (Mishna & Alaggia, 2005) or fear that the bullying will worsen (Christensen, 2009). They also might perceive adult interventions as ineffective, a perception that increases with age (Mishna & Alaggia, 2005). Moreover, Mishna (2004) suggests that children often avoid seeking help from teachers and school officials because they are not receptive to bullying reports or misjudge the severity of the incident.

Likewise, Tenenbaum et al. (2011) conclude that children who seek assistance from an adult or teacher perceive that as ineffective because they do not believe them or do not effectively address the problem. Although some children might perceive adult help as ineffective, previously bullied children who did not tell an adult recommend for other bullied children to tell an adult (Mishna, 2004). Previous research has inconsistencies about adult interventions with bullying and this study seeks to further explore the roles of adults and peers with bullying management.

The rise of technology might alter how children seek help about their victimization. Technology allows bullied targets to reach out to closer family members or friends who are not physically near, enhancing social bonding (Greenhow & Robelia, 2009). Individuals have many online outlets (e.g., Facebook, blogs, email, etc.) they can utilize to connect to for help, as well. Child and Agyeman-Budu (2010) claim that people feel comfortable revealing personal and private information online, whereas FTF interaction requires people to judge a set of criteria about what they are willing to reveal (Petronio, 2002). In addition, individuals might not even seek other people, but sources of published information (e.g., WebMD, bullying intervention websites and/or books) for help. Again, boys might seek different sources for help than girls, given that they are socialized to handle problems alone and they might be faced with disapproval for seeking social support from family or friends. Thus, they might be likely to not seek help from individuals, rather online published sources. Girls often are socialized to focus on their relationships and sharing information and might be more likely to seek out help from individuals, rather than online published sources (Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974). Therefore, whom or what bullied targets seek help from to manage bullies and whether that source

of information provides adequate help might differ than previous findings. Given that few studies have analyzed whom or what bullied male and female students seek help from to manage their victimizations and the outcomes of those decisions, this study seeks to analyze from whom or what they most frequently seek resources from. The last set of research questions investigates these behaviors:

RQ3a: Whom or what do male and female students most frequently report seeking help from to cope with bullying victimization in blog posts?

RQ3b: How do male and female students describe the effectiveness of whom or what they chose to seek help from to cope with bullying victimization in blog posts?

A clear understanding about why particular sources of help do or do not provide adequate assistance can help programs decrease the high rates of concealment about bullying, as well as improve suggestions for parents, school officials and peers about how to respond when bullied individuals seek help from them. Researchers might be able to identify why particular resources provide faulty or ineffective help to ensure they are equipped properly to help bullied individuals in need. For instance, if results suggest that teachers do not effectively respond to a targets' request to manage bullies, then training teachers to assist bullied students is warranted. Likewise, if results reveal that parents do not offer children productive help, then scholars might want to focus on how to improve family communication to reduce prolonged victimization (e.g., Matsunaga, 2009). Also, if peers do not offer their friends effective help when approached, bullying campaigns might want to continue telling children to seek an adult for help. This knowledge can also encourage bullied targets to seek particular sources of help (e.g., parents, school officials,

teachers, bullying intervention websites or friends) or several of these sources to best combat bullies.

The attributions and coping strategies individuals use to manage their bullies and whom or what they seek resources from is particularly significant when others (e.g., teachers, parents or friends) face difficulties identifying bullied youth (Mills & Carwile, 2009). Matsunaga (2011) discusses how bullying is often maintained as an invisible occurrence to outsiders who do not directly observe the hostility. For example, many signs that an individual is getting bullied (e.g., anxiety, lack of motivation for school and/or absences from school) can associate with other causes by teachers (e.g., fear of course material, tests or school) and parents (e.g., puberty or peer issues). Parents, teachers and bystanders also might misjudge the severity of bullying and see it as a form of messing around or teasing. A bystander can perceive a message as a harmless joke, whereas someone else perceives it as a repeated and painful insult. This is problematic when individuals do not usually offer help unless they perceive a risk or are asked by others who need help. It often falls in the hands of the bullied individuals to seek coping resources or else it remains unavailable (Matsunaga, 2011).

Further, the need to deter destructive attributions and coping behaviors are necessary, because these destructive behaviors, even if an individual is only bullied for a short duration, can lead to harsh outcomes. As Kochenderfer-Lass and Skinner (2002) state, “even infrequent peer victimization experiences may be associated with maladjustment if children’s coping resources are inadequate or if their cognitive interpretations are maladaptive” (p. 267). Given that outsiders face difficulties identifying bullying and inadequate interpretations and coping behaviors about bullying create severe

harm for targets, the meanings targets attribute to bullying and their use of coping behaviors are significant factors for analysis.

Chapter 3: Method

Procedures

With the rise of technology and people's comfort revealing things online (Child & Agyeman-Budu, 2010), many bullied individuals now share their experiences in online bullying blogs. A blog refers to an online written diary where people construct the meanings of their lives through their thoughts, experiences and viewpoints (Kent, 2008). These locations offer stories that showcase how bullied individuals frame and make sense of their experiences with no assumption of privacy. Blogging has major strengths for researchers and bullied targets by allowing targets to frame and share their bullying experiences through storytelling rather than a researcher generated text (e.g., interviews, surveys, etc.). Whereas interviews involve a private dialogue between the researcher and informant, blogs constitute an often public presentation of the self that occurs when the writer feels comfortable and safe sharing their experiences. Thus, blogs offer a unique window into the construction of bullying from bullied targets' perspectives. Hookway (2008) discusses the possible effects blogs can have on its reliability as a source of data and argues their trustworthiness is comparable to interviews; even if people alter their identities their narratives still provide insights into the social construction of the topic of interest. Blogs have great potential for gathering and understanding a world of diverse information.

There are many online bullying blogs where individuals can go to share their bullying experiences. Several steps were taken to locate the most utilized and reliable blogs on the Internet in which to gather data. First, a search was conducted on Google.com, Yahoo.com and Ask.com with the terms "bullying blogs" and "bullying

stories,” producing pages of results. This helped locate the most utilized bullying blogs on the Internet. Second, after perusing websites in the first several pages of results, it was clear that many of these sites were bullying intervention websites that did not contain blogs with stories from bullied individuals. Rather, some bullying sites (e.g., Stop Bullying, The Anti-Bullying Blog, Bully Bloggers, Gang up for Good, Bullying Statistics and Edutopia) offered a venue where bullied individuals can locate bullying resources (e.g., bullying hotlines, how to request school bullying interventions and tips for what to do when bullied). These blogs were excluded because they did not offer narratives about bullying. Third, of the websites that did have bullied individuals’ stories, some sites offered blogs that were not of use to this current study. For instance, some blogs were specifically for adults to share their bullying stories (e.g., Bullying Stories from an Adult Perspective), whereas others required a user login (e.g., Beat Bullying). These blogs were excluded because this study did not want to only focus on adult perspectives or websites that indicated a high expectation of privacy. Also, some bullying blogs were stationed outside the U.S. (e.g., Stamp Out Bullying) and were excluded from analysis, because this study sought to focus on U.S. perspectives. The top hits on all three search engines that contained bullying blogs targeted at individuals of all ages, did not require a user login and were stationed in the U.S. included: Pacer’s National Bullying Prevention Center, I’m Getting Bullied, Reach Out, Bully Ville and No Place 4 Hate. This study collected data from these five blogs to provide stories from the top bullying blog websites on the Internet, as well as from a diverse group of individuals from all over the U.S.

Although many researchers utilize a random sample to gather data, this study gathered data with purposive sampling (Baxter & Babbie, 2004). Due to the aims of this

research, there were four factors that served as determinants/decision rules for data selection that made conducting a random sample difficult. First, bullying blogs include stories from targets of bullying, as well as their friends or family members. Stories written by targets and not their family members or friends were chosen for examination to obtain target perspectives about bullying. The stories were explicit about whether the person writing the story was the target or a supporter of the target. Second, stories needed to explicitly reference bullying in the school environment for selection, whereas some might reference work or sibling bullying, areas that are not of interest to the current study. Third, if a story suggested the target was located outside the U.S., it was not selected for analysis. This study narrowed on American bullied individuals and many of these websites are available to others outside the country. Last, given this study sought to determine gendered responses, stories that did not reference a gender were not selected for analysis. There were relatively few stories that were anonymous or difficult to identify the gender of the writer. If a blog post met these four requirements for this study's purpose, then it was selected for data analysis.

My intent was to gather 20 stories (10 women and 10 men) from each of the five blogs for a total of 100 stories to analyze. The most recently posted 20 stories from each blog that met the four criteria were gathered to obtain the most current perspectives about bullying. However, two blogs did not have enough male stories to gather; No Place for Hate only had four male stories and I'm Getting Bullied had nine. To ensure an equal gender representation in the sample, seven additional male stories were gathered from Pacer's National Bullying Prevention Center. This blog was in the top three hits when

searching for bullying stories on all three search engines and offered the lengthiest and most detailed stories compared to the others.

Sample

The current study gathered data through purposive sampling (Baxter & Babbie, 2004) due to the nature of the research aims (i.e., locate U.S. bullied individuals' narratives about school bullies that are gender specific). The sample included 100 blog posts with a balanced sample of data in terms of gender representation (50 men and 50 women). The 100 blog posts consisted of 27 stories from Pacer's National Bullying Prevention Center, 14 stories from No Place for Hate, 19 stories from I'm Getting Bullies, 20 stories from BullyVille, and 20 stories from Reach Out. The final data sample included 109 double-spaced pages of text. Also, the sample included a range of ages among individuals. The blogs were posted from children who recently experienced bullying, as well as adults reflecting back on their bullying experiences. Of the bloggers who indicated an age, the youngest female and male blogger were each eight years old, the oldest female blogger was 48 and the oldest male blogger was 31. Of those who reported grade levels, there was a range from 6th to 12th grade for girls/women and 1st to 10th grade for boys/men. Whereas some stories indicated an age or grade level, others were broader and suggested they were either a current student or adult. There were 11 women who suggested that they were a current student and one who was an adult. Of the men, nine suggested that they were a current student and four stated they were an adult. Last, there were 14 women and 12 men whose age or grade level was not identifiable. Although the range of ages is large for this sample, it includes both children and adults reflecting on their experiences of school bullying.

Data Analysis

An iterative analysis (Tracy, 2013) was used to analyze the data, given that the attributions and coping categories in previous literature deductively informed the development of coding categories, while an open-mind was also kept to allow new patterns to inductively emerge that helped make sense of the data. The coding categories were examined based off the frequencies of attributions and coping behaviors in bullying blogs to reveal which behaviors bullied individuals mostly engaged in. The first step in the analysis process was to read the bullying stories several times to become familiar with the content and to provide a holistic reading. Then, line numbers were assigned to each story to use for citations. A gender-based pseudonym was given to each individual for confidentiality and citations. After these steps, the main author independently coded the data in a gender specific coding sheet for each research question. After the data for each research question were coded and reviewed again to ensure confidence in the categories, an independent researcher who was unaware of the nature of the study coded a random 20% of the data for each set of coding to ensure reliability (Baxter & Babbie, 2004). There were few discrepancies with the coding by the author and independent coder. These minor discrepancies were discussed with the researcher and independent coder and recoded. After discussion, agreement across all the categories was met with 100%, $K=1.00$ (Cohen's Kappa).

Attributions. The stories were analyzed for frequencies of the attribution categories that surfaced in the data. The three categories of attributions (i.e., locus of causality, stability and controllability) informed the identification and development of categories. Internal causation was coded if individuals framed themselves as the cause to

their bullying (e.g., I thought it was my fault; I was getting what I deserved) and external if bullying was associated to an external factor (e.g., the perpetrator, the perpetrator's friends, their family or town were at fault for the bullying: the bully was mean; my family moved a lot so I was always the new girl, making me an easy target). Also, if stories specifically associated characterological self-blame (e.g., my skin color caused bullying), behavioral self-blame (e.g., I used to wear weird clothing, attracting peers to bully me) or a combination of several causal attributions in one thought (e.g., Because I was social and had a lot of friends, the bully was jealous and ridiculed me: internal and external causation), it was coded into those specific categories. Causal attributions were coded by the frequencies of thought units. For example, bloggers might associate blame one way in the beginning of the story, then in other ways as the story progresses. Each instance was coded separately.

Bullying was classified as stable if it was described as something that repeatedly occurred (e.g., I was bullied every day; I was bullied throughout school; my bullies always attacked me) and unstable if it happened just once, a few times or had shortly stopped after they sought help (e.g., I was only called names when I fell down the stairs; I was bullied and got help, making the bully stop). Stability often surfaced throughout the story: a story might have noted that they were bullied in 2nd grade, then it got worse in 3rd grade, and continued until their 6th grade. Rather than coding for thought units of stability, an overall assessment was made for each story and only coded once, if the story discussed it. The duration of bullying was also coded with stability. If stories described the length of their bullying experiences (e.g., 2 years; several months; one time), it was recorded to analyze how long individuals were mostly bullied.

Last, control was coded if individuals described that they could effectively manage the bullying situation and the effects of victimization. For example, they tried to change the situation and saw that action as effective (e.g., I went to my parents to help manage my bullies, making the bullying end), it was something that they brushed off, were not intimidated by anymore, they look back at the bullying now and feel that they are stronger because of it, blame/question bullies' motives and any instance that they seemed to feel confident and hopeful or that they could effectively change their outcomes and effects of victimization. Bullying was coded as uncontrollable if it was something individuals felt helpless or scared over (e.g., I felt scared and did not know what to do), if they never sought assistance or did seek help that failed at providing aid and were ultimately left feeling unsure about what to do or faced continued/increased victimization (e.g., I told my parents and they complained to the school, but that did nothing to help make the bullies stop; I stood up to the bullies, but that made them attack me more). Also, bullying was coded as uncontrollable if there were instances when individuals negatively managed the effects of victimization, such as blaming themselves, coping in detrimental ways (e.g., self-harm, became depressed/withdrawn), fearing school/the bully, or any instance indicating weakness or failure/fear to reduce victimization. The coding for controllability was based off the frequencies of thought units, so they might have made a variety of controllable attributions as the story progressed, each being coded separately.

Similar to other like-studies (e.g., Emmers & Canary, 1996; Joscelyne & Holttum, 2006), accounts of attributions were combed and each placed in the like category. However, if a new attribution was presented that did not fit with the established categories, a new one was formed (i.e., constant comparative method; Baxter & Babbie,

2004). After the categories were coded, the stories were reviewed again several times to confirm the reported observations and provide further assurance with the results.

A 2X3 (i.e., two genders by three causal attributions: internal, external, and internal and external) chi-square test of independence was used to analyze RQ1a, a 2X2 (i.e., two genders by two stable attributions: stable and unstable) chi-square test of independence was used to analyze RQ1b, and a 2X2 (i.e., two genders by two control attributions: controllable and uncontrollable) chi-square test of independence was used to analyze RQ1c to ascertain if observed levels of attribution are independent of what is theoretically expected by male and female bullied students.

Coping strategies. The development of coping strategies categories was based off Tenenbaum et al.'s (2011) typology of bullied individuals' coping behaviors. The categories include: standing up to the bully (i.e., responding to bullies' attacks directly by making their views known, sticking up for oneself and negotiating with bullies about how to resolve the situation), self-defense (i.e., engaging in protective physical action to shield oneself from bullies' physical danger), seeking social support (i.e., disclosing victimization to others and turning to others for advice/assistance), distancing (i.e., trying to detach oneself from the stressful situation and/or continue with daily life, such as ignoring the bully, avoiding the bully, walking away, just letting it happen and changing schools), internalizing (i.e., not letting others know about his/her experiences being bullied and keeping emotions to themselves, such as avoiding disclosure and managing the issue cognitively with anxiety, fear, withdrawal, isolation, low self-worth and/or suicidal thoughts), tension-reducing/externalizing (i.e., engaging in behaviors that let go of steam to reduce stress and displace energy, such as yelling at someone, physically

harming others, self-harm, listening to music to calm down, engaging in activities, crying and retaliating against bullies with negative physical or verbal violence to get payback) and focusing on the positives (i.e., maintaining a positive attitude about their bullying situations, such as describing great friends who helped them get through the issue, knowing that school is ending soon and their bullies will be gone, explaining how bullies made them stronger or sharing that they are bullied, but that it has got better).

To analyze what bullied individuals by gender mostly engaged in to manage victimization, an analysis was conducted based off the frequencies of coping strategies. The constant comparative method (Baxter & Babbie, 2004) was used to code the coping strategies. The first coping strategy was identified and coded; then, the next coping strategy was identified and compared to the previously coded category to determine its similarities and differences in the themes before placing it in a category. If a description surfaced that did not fit with the existing categories then a new category was created. A category was made for each coping strategy to form a typology of the most common strategies used by each gender (e.g., Emmers & Canary, 1996; Tenenbaum et al., 2011). The typology includes isolate coping strategies, because the use of multiple coping strategies used simultaneously was not as evident in the data.

A similar coding scheme was conducted to code how bullied individuals perceived the effectiveness of their chosen coping strategies. A coping strategy was coded as effective if it reduced or stopped their victimization and/or helped them mentally or physically. An ineffective coping strategy was coded if it increased or continued their victimization and/or did not provide any beneficial mental or physical help. Again, the constant comparative method (Baxter & Babbie, 2004) was used to

develop categories. The effectiveness of coping strategies was not coded by thought units; rather, an overall assessment of how they described the influence of each coping behavior. Someone might note in the beginning of the story that they sought help that made the bullying stop, but near the end of the story describe how the bullying started again after some time. Thus, that coping strategy was ineffective and was only coded once. Then, the properties of the categories were compared and contrasted to see if any of the initial categories could be collapsed or need further teasing out.

To address RQ2a and RQ2b, coping strategies and coping effectiveness frequencies are reported. Specifically, the frequencies of supraordinate coding schemes are reported to analyze which broader coping behaviors are most often used, along with the frequencies of superordinate categories to analyze which specific coping behaviors are most often used.

Coping resources. The coding for coping resources was based off the frequencies of whom or what bullied individuals sought help from to cope with school bullies. The constant comparative method (Baxter & Babbie, 2004) was used to identify the first coping resource to code into a gender specific coding sheet. Then, the next coping resource was identified and compared to the previously coded category to determine the similarities and differences between the themes. If a theme emerged that did not fit with the existing categories then a new category was created. A category was made for each coping resource to form a typology of the most common sources of help bullied individuals seek, depending on gender. The typology includes isolate coping resources, given that there were few instances when individuals described multiple resources they sought help from.

A similar coding scheme was used to analyze their perceptions about whether the source of help they chose provided effective assistance. The resource was coded as effective if they helped reduce or stopped their victimization, helped mentally or physically and/or provided useful social support. A resource was coded as ineffective if they did not help, did not believe them, did nothing, increased their victimization, did not offer useful social support and/or did not help mentally or physically. The constant comparative method (Baxter & Babbie, 2004) was used to develop categories for the effectiveness of coping resources. This was not coded by thought units, rather an overall assessment of how they described the influence of each coping resource. An individual might note in the beginning of the story that they went to their teacher who made the bullying stop, but near the end of the story describe how the bullying started again after the teacher left. Thus, this coping resource was ineffective and only coded once. Then, the categories were reviewed to determine if any could be collapsed or need further teasing out.

To address RQ3a and RQ3b, the frequencies of coping resources and the effectiveness of those resources are reported to reveal whom or what bullied male and female students most often sought for help, along with how they perceived the effectiveness of that help. Once reliability was confirmed among all the categories, excerpts that best reflected the findings were selected among each research question to use in the Results section.

Chapter 4: Results

Locus of Causality (RQ1a)

Research question 1a asked, “Do male and female students differ regarding their attributions for locus of causality with bullying victimization in blog posts?” To test RQ1a, a 2X3 (gender by locus of causality [external, internal, and external and internal]) chi-square test of independence was conducted. Results were non-significant, $\chi^2(2) = 1.85, p < 0.397$, meaning observed bullied men’s and women’s attributions for causality do not significantly differ from what is theoretically expected. Although men’s and women’s causal attributions were not statistically significantly different, there were unique patterns within the categories. Over half (51%) of the women attributed external causation, often to bullies, and 40% attributed blame internally. Nearly half (44.5%) of the men attributed internal causation, often to a characterological feature, whereas 41% attributed blame to external forces, often to bullies. Although there were slight variations with the supraordinate categories, 30% of men and women attributed causality specifically to bullies, the most frequent superordinate category. See Table 1 for full explications of locus of causality attributions for men and women.

Women often attributed external causality for their victimization (51%), particularly to bullies (30%). For example, Bonnie described how “bullies will just try to break you down and make you feel bad about yourself, but they’re just doing that to make themselves feel better” (20-22) and Nicole shared that bullies “make up rumors, and I’m the one that’s in tears. They never think of anyone else except themselves” (17-19). Chantel also discussed how her bully was to blame because she was jealous: “It all started when a boy showed me attention and another girl liked him...She saw me as a

threat...She was very persistent having to 'show' her friends that she was somebody to be feared" (1-6). Caitlin also blamed her bully for being jealous of her: "Do you want to know the cause? Jealousy. I was thin and fit; I had snowy-blond hair...what pissed her off the most was something I still can't comprehend. She said I was too nice. She thought there was something I had to be hiding. There never was" (23-27). As these excerpts demonstrate, women often perceived their bullies as the cause for their victimization. Women often attributed external causation, the most frequent supraordinate category, as well as blaming bullies, the most frequent superordinate category.

Men often reported blaming themselves for their bullying victimization (44.5%), specifically with characterological self-blame (22%). Many men associated their disability and medical conditions as the cause of their victimization, as Kenny shared, "I am in special education, so I think that is the reason kids bully me" (13-14). Brian also blamed his disability as the cause: "The fact that I'm bipolar, something I still deal with everyday, didn't help my situation. The ups and downs of the bipolar made me an easy target" (15-17). Several bullied men blamed their weight as the cause of their victimization: "I guess I should state that I'm not that thin of a person. That mostly contributed to being bullied" (Justin, 1). Whereas internal causation was the most frequent supraordinate causal attribution made by men, it is noteworthy that external causation to bullies (30%) was the most frequent superordinate attribution by men. For example, Sean wrote that bullies are "so insecure that they think picking on you is going to make them better" (26-27). In addition, Brandon blamed his bullies for "the money their family has, the body they have, or something that someone else has that they for

some reason have a problem with” (16-18). Interestingly, men and women attributed causality specifically to bullies the most and with the same frequency (30%).

Furthermore, many individuals in the narratives suggested that they blamed themselves while they faced victimization, but often came to blame the bullies after their victimization ended or as they grew older. For instance, a student blamed himself in the beginning of his story: “Is it because I’m little or because I can’t fight?” but came to blame his bullies near the end of the story: “The bullies only pick on you because they think it’s cool...cool is being nice but bullies think otherwise that’s why they want to fight” (Alex, 2-6). This theme is juxtaposed with Weick’s (1993) description of sensemaking, suggesting that reality is an ongoing process where people make efforts to create order and retrospective sense of what occurs. As individuals build narrative accounts of past events, it aids them to understand and organize their experiences. Sensemaking was also apparent in Joanna’s story where she originally blamed herself then came to blame her bullies later on: “over the years I have discovered that there was nothing wrong with me it was the other girls” (Joanna, 3-4). As many individuals were able to look back on their bullying experiences, they often had time to make sense of things rationally and blame their bullies.

Stability (RQ1b)

Research question 1b asked, “Do male and female students differ regarding their attributions for stability with bullying victimization in blog posts?” A 2X2 (gender by stability [stable/unstable]) chi-square test of independence was conducted to test RQ1b. Results were non-significant, $\chi^2(1) = 0.453, p < 0.501$, indicating that observed women’s and men’s reportings of stability do not significantly differ from what is theoretically

expected. Findings should be interpreted with some caution, however, given there are fewer than six (<6) observations per cell for the unstable variable. Women (98%) and men (95%) attributed bullying as a stable experience. Although women made more stable attributions than men, the frequency variation is not significantly different. See Table 2 for a breakdown of women's and men's stable attributions.

Both women and men attributed bullying as a stable experience. The duration of bullying was described as something that occurred daily: "Kids talk behind my back, and make fun of me on almost a daily basis" (Ryan, 4-5), weekly: "it has been going on for 5 weeks" (Laura, 2), monthly: "I have been a victim of bullying for the past few months" (Sandra, 1-2), yearly: "For three to four years I was bullied" (Ryan, 1) and throughout school: "I've been bullied all throughout school; from elementary school to even college" (Jose, 1). In addition, women (27%) and men (27.5%) most often experienced victimization for one to three years and, again, had nearly the same frequency for this duration of victimization.

Students in blog posts most often experienced bullying for several years, and some even up to 15 years of their lives. Gisselle was victimized for the entire time she was in school: "I have basically been bullied my whole life since preschool and I'm now a senior in highschool (3). Likewise, James shared, "Throughout elementary school, middle school and high school, I was always picked on; therefore every day of 'school life' I missed" (1-3). Another student claimed, "From when I was in the 1st grade until I was a freshman in high school I have been bullied" (Marco, 1). These hostile experiences were perceived as a constant struggle that individuals continually faced or were still facing as they wrote their narratives. Bonnie was still being victimized as she wrote her

story: “Even to this day, I’m still bullied” (23). Moreover, Thomas vividly remembered the years he experienced victimization, something he still witnessed:

“I first was bullied in preschool, and since I was in 4th grade it started to get bad...at the end of the year it got worse...about a week later more kids joined in...I was being made fun of by nearly a third of the 7th grade class on a daily basis...I got made fun of almost the whole time during lunch on a daily basis, as well as regularly while switching classes...I still get bullied occasionally” (2-31).

Bullying was described as an experience lasting throughout school and some even shared that it was something they were still currently witnessing.

Not only was bullying framed as stable, but also as an experience that progressively got worse with time. For example, Ryan claimed, “For three to four years I was bullied...Just normal teasing and some pushing around. This was just a sign of what is to come. For the following three years, I would be pushed around and teased severely” (1-4). Victimization increased for many individuals throughout school, as Clarissa noted, “I’ve been bullied since I was in second grade. I am 15 years old now...It’s been happening for at least 7 years now...The bullying got worse in Junior High School, when I was in 7th grade...People threatened me. They used to jump me after school” (1-7).

Desiree also discussed the endurance of her bullying behaviors: “At first it started out as just name calling and rumor spreading, but it eventually got very bad” (3). Desiree’s story, along with others, illustrated how bullying was a stable experience, anywhere from a daily occurrence to 15 years that often progressed to more severe hostility with time.

Although there were few instances ($n=3$) when bullying was attributed as unstable, these students described similar negative experiences and emotions as those

who attributed stable experiences. One student who attributed bullying as unstable asserted, “In 7th grade I was assaulted behind our school by six high school guys...I fell into an emotional slide and struggled at home and at school” (Christina, 9-13). This one instance of being a target of victimization severely influenced this student. Although Olweus (1993) and several other bullying scholars (e.g., Matsunaga, 2009) contend that bullying is a set of repetitive aggressive behaviors, the findings from this study show that even one instance of bullying can have an equal effect on targets. For example, Craig was upset after being attacked once: “One of my classmates spoke to me in a really rude way, judging my height. And of course, I was really offended” (4-6). The definition of bullying might need to be revisited to encompass bullying behaviors that are only enacted once or a few times at individuals, given it can harm them equally.

Controllability (RQ1c)

Research question 1c asked, “Do male and female students differ regarding their attributions for controllability with bullying victimization in blog posts?” RQ1c was tested with a 2X2 (gender by controllability [uncontrollable/controllable]) chi-square test of independence. Results were non-significant, $\chi^2(1) = 0.147, p < 0.701$, indicating that observations do not significantly differ from theoretical expectations. Out of the women’s attributions for control, 60% of the instances described no control over bullying, whereas 40% did attribute control. Men’s attributions for no control over their victimization included 58% of the instances, whereas control was found for 42% of the instances. Again, although women attributed no control more often than men, these results are not statistically, significantly different. See Table 3 a full description of women’s and men’s attributions for controllability.

Both men and women described no control over their victimization for a variety of similar reasons. Several expressed pain and fear: “I hate having that feeling everyday that it’s almost like I’m afraid to do certain things because I’m scared of what people may think” (Roger, 13-15). In addition, many did not know how to manage their bullies: “There was nothing I could do. Ignoring didn’t do anything. Telling a teacher? Yeah right. That just invites even more ridicule” (Adam, 20-21) and coped in detrimental ways, such as cutting: “Every cut is every word that hurts. The scars remind me of the things I have went through and how badly they affected me” (Nicole, 2-4). Others exhibited no control when they described how they could not manage the effects of bullying: “Because of being bullied for so long, I now have several mental illnesses and struggle to keep going everyday” (Sheldon, 24-25). Victimized men and women most often attributed bullying as uncontrollable.

Furthermore, both men and women used a variety of explanations to describe control over victimization. For example, control was evident when they were not afraid of their bullies anymore: “When I hit high school I stopped caring about what bullies thought” (Tatiana, 14-15) and received effective help from others: “I’m perfectly fine now. I stopped cutting. I hardly ever cry. And all because I told someone who could actually do something” (Alana, 20-22). Also, individuals described control when they learned to deal with bullies: “I finally decided that I was not going to let people walk all over me. So on the first day of eight grade, I made it clear to the people that had bullied me before it was not going to be the same way this year...After that, things really got better” (Billy, 17-20). Individuals expressed control as they productively managed the effects of bullying, such as growing older and realizing that bullying made them a

stronger person: “I thought I couldn’t get through it, but I did and it made me stronger than ever. I have more self-esteem” (Ashley, 22-24), as well as having hope for their futures: “She gave me the sense of hope, the sense that no matter what, I could get through the dark times, and it would get better” (William, 34-35).

Attributions of controllability were heavily present in the data. However, there were few stories that made only controllable or uncontrollable attributions. These attributions often progressed as the story went on. Many individuals attributed bullying as uncontrollable after they first experienced victimization or while they were getting bullied. However, once they managed or coped from bullies effectively or as they got older and looked back on their victimization now, they framed bullying as controllable. For instance, Tony shared:

“I was bullied and harassed by a couple of kids...It was the most embarrassing thing ever. I was so close to tears I had to look down the whole time. But luckily, I got help with a school counselor and principal. So they stopped and now I’m not afraid to go to school anymore” (1-8).

Chantel’s story also exhibited the shift in attributions for control:

“No body knew what I was going through. I didn’t tell any of my friends that I had started self harming...I got sick of it so that year I tried to overdose...I didn’t want to go back to school...The bullying still happens but I’ve learned to not listen to what people say to me” (7-24).

Another student gained control over their victimization after they graduated high school:

“I told my mom, but she wasn’t much help. That’s when I realized that if I can’t tell my mom, I couldn’t tell anyone. So I just kept it inside. After that year, I will

still teased. But I knew that I would be leaving in a couple of years, so I didn't pay as much attention. Graduation day was the best day of my life" (Marissa, 18-22).

The definition of bullying suggests that targets of bullying usually have less power than bullies (Olweus, 1993). The results of this study support this pattern, as many individuals described no control over bullies as they were victimized. However, once targets productively coped or obtained power through seeking help from someone, they often gained control and power over their victimization.

In a similar vein, individuals often described control over their victimization as something that "got better." For instance, students wrote, "Things get better, high school isn't the end of the world" (Maria, 15-16), "Life always has their downs, but I promise it always gets better. It's all about time" (Rosa, 7-8), "Things really did start getting better" (Billy, 15-16) and "Now it's going lots better...when you're bullied it might seem like there is no way out but believe me, there is always light at the end of a dark tunnel" (Jacob, 18-22). Again, this reiterates the pattern of individuals using sensemaking (Weick, 1993) with their victimization. They initially felt no control during their victimization, but as they left high school and managed bullies they looked back on their bullying encounters and realized that they got through it and the bullies often made them a stronger person. Further, bullying often tends to decrease in high school and college (Sherer & Clark, 2009), so these individuals might have experienced less bullying and, thus, feel more control over their experiences.

Coping Strategies (RQ2a)

Research question 2a asked, “What strategies do male and female students most frequently report using to cope with bullying victimization in blog posts?” Both men and women engaged in a variety of coping strategies; see Table 4 for a complete list of men’s and women’s coping strategies. However, a new category of coping behaviors emerged that did not fit with Tenenbaum et al.’s (2011) typology: offering social support. This occurred when individuals would provide words of wisdom, support or advice to other bullied individuals or people reading their blog posts, such as “You need to accept yourself because everyone is special in their own way and is beautiful in their own way. It doesn’t matter what other people think. It only matters what you think!” (Lauren, 25-29), “If you are being harassed or bullied, find those in your life who truly matter. They will give you strength when yours is gone” (Natalie, 30-32) and “Always remember who you are and what you can do. Just stand tall, smile, laugh and move forward. Leave those who would stop you in your wake. If you commit to freeing yourself from the negative people, then there’s nothing you can’t do” (Brian, 32-36). Both men (20%) and women (14%) used offering social support as a coping strategy, and, whereas men most often engaged in offering social support, women most often engaged in externalizing/tension reducing behaviors to manage their victimization (23.5%).

The most frequent supraordinate category for women’s coping strategies was externalizing/tension reducing (23.5%). Women engaged in this form of coping would self-harm (6%), as Shana described, “I started cutting myself more and more until my thighs, and wrists were shredded” (26-27). Beverly also self-harmed: “I remember the first time I cut. I was so nervous, but I did it and kept doing it over and over. I got

addicted. I stopped for a month or two, but things got worse. So I started cutting again” (Beverly, 7-9). Crying (6%) was another common form of externalizing/tension reducing behaviors that women engaged in to cope. Bullied female students wrote that “it caused me to cry even more and more than usual” (Amina, 11) and “I go home every day and cry” (Laura, 4-5).

Along with coping with externalizing/tension reducing behaviors, women often coped with internalizing behaviors (21%), particularly with low self-worth (9%). Bullied female students would often put themselves down, as both Natalie: “I started believing them and doubting myself” (9) and Loretta: “I would never want to get out of bed in the morning. I felt as if I weren’t presentable to the world...I hated looking in the mirror. I hated what I saw. I hated the sound of my own voice!” (1-35) exhibited. Others expressed less self-esteem: “My self-esteem was so low that I missed out on opportunities” (Marissa, 38) and confidence: “I started to feel less confident about myself each day from her mean and cruel words” (Ashley, 6-7). Coping with low self-worth was the most frequent superordinate category for women’s coping. Furthermore, disclosure (8%) was another frequent superordinate category for women’s coping strategies. Molly disclosed her bullying to others: “At first I started talking to my friends” (22), along with Alana, “I decided to tell my family” (16-17). Bullied female students most often coped with externalizing/tension reducing and internalizing behaviors, as well as disclosure.

The most frequent supraordinate category of men’s coping was offering social support (20%). Men offered advice on how to manage victimization (9.5%), as Sean stated, “If you’re bullied please stand up for yourself or at least tell someone you trust. It will lift a weight off your shoulders” (23-24). Several individuals particularly told other

victimized individuals to disclose and seek help: “If you have been assaulted, please tell someone...If you have someone out there, even if you only ‘think’ they care, more than likely they will listen and help you. You’re not alone” (Christian, 26-33). Tanner suggested for others to seek an adult for help: “I would encourage the victims to tell an adult” (11). This is parallel with previous research suggesting that previously bullied children who did not tell an adult recommend for other bullied children to do so (Mishna, 2004). Other victimized men offered support to other victimized individuals (5.5%). James wrote, “Life gets more than better. Life gets fabulous! And even if you feel like there is no hope, people always care about you, even your parents (even if they do not show it!)” (32-34). Billy also offered esteem support: “We were put on this earth for a reason, and we have to live up to our full potential” (27-28). Offering social support emerged as a new category of coping that bullied men most often engaged in.

Along with offering social support, seeking social support (16%) was another common supraordinate category for men’s coping. Particularly, disclosure (11%) was the most frequent superordinate category for men’s coping. Paul disclosed his victimization: “I have told teachers about this before” (12-13), along with Jose: “I tried talking to an instructor about it” (28-29). Carlos disclosed to several sources: “I told the administration constantly...I told a teacher...I told my dad that I had been bullied” (18-21). Furthermore, avoiding bullies (6%) was another frequent superordinate category for men’s coping. Several male students decided to leave school or not attend school to avoid their perpetrators, including Sean: “I just had enough, so I walked out of school and ran home” (8-9) and Billy: “I missed half of my seventh grade year because I was afraid to face my problems, to face the bullies that called me these horrible names” (8-9). Others

planned strategies about navigating through their schools to avoid their bullies: “I only go to the bathroom during class with a pass from the teacher so that I can find a bathroom that no one is in and go and try not to walk down main hallways during passing time” (David, 6-8). Victimized men often coped with bullying by offering social support, disclosure and avoiding bullies. See Table 4 for further elucidation of men’s and women’s reported coping strategies.

Effectiveness of Chosen Coping Strategies (RQ2b)

Research question 2b asked, “How do male and female students describe the effectiveness of their chosen strategies to cope with bullying victimization in blog posts?” Not all stories discussed the influence of their coping strategy, but if they did it was coded as effective or ineffective. Both women (27.5%) and men (35%) most often reflected on the effectiveness of seeking social support (i.e., disclosure and seeking help/advice). This study intended to code the type of social support provided to these individuals, given the type of support provided influences how they perceive that support (Matsunaga, 2010b; 2011), but the narratives often would not discuss the specific types of support provided (e.g., “I told someone and they helped”). Therefore, this study was only able to code that provided social support was either positive or negative. See Table 5 for a full explanation of the effectiveness of chosen coping strategies for men and women.

There were 16.5% of women who described seeking social support as effective (e.g., positive social support provided, positive mentally and victimization reduced/stopped), whereas 11% described it as ineffective (e.g., negative social support provided and victimization continued/increased). Women shared that seeking social

support was effective for several reasons. First, it provided them with helpful social support:

“Telling her about what had happened was one of the most humiliating things I have ever had to do. I learned through this entire experience was that it’s okay to need help. At first I thought getting help was a sign of weakness. But I couldn’t continue on my own, and I realized that I wasn’t wise enough or strong enough to handle it on my own. So with the love and support of friends and family, those who really matter, I recovered and am stronger than before” (Natalie, 19-30).

Seeking social support also helped reduce or end their victimization: “I decided to tell my family...they talked to the head teacher. A week or so after that I was moved to another class and avoided my bullies during break. They soon forgot about me. I’m perfectly fine now...And all because I told someone who could actually do something” (16-22).

Although seeking help was useful for some bullied female students (16.5%), it was not for others (11%). Vanessa wrote, “I told my parents what was going on at school, but they didn’t listen until I tried to take my own life” (5-7). Likewise, Bonnie was provided ineffective informational support after seeking help: “I tried to tell the director, but all he said was ‘kids will be kids, just ignore them’” (15-16). Seeking social support had mixed results for how it influenced victimized women.

In addition, 8% of the women described avoiding disclosure/seeking help (i.e., internalizing) as ineffective, whereas none said it was effective. Many victimized women regretted not telling someone, as Marissa wrote, “I wish I had told someone, because then maybe my high school years would have been easier” (27-28). Shana also regretted avoiding disclosure, leading her to offer advice: “I didn’t tell my parents, the guidance

counselor...I told NOBODY...Don't do what I did, it was stupid and it led to very bad things. Speak up, tell an adult" (4-36). Amber has yet to disclose her victimization, but knows that is how she should cope: "I haven't yet really told an adult, but I know that I should" (18-19). Avoiding disclosure was an ineffective coping strategy for bullied women.

Men also most often reflected on the effectiveness of seeking social support. Most men (18.5%) described seeking social support as ineffective; however, 16.5% described it as effective. Again, for both men and women, the frequency of those who found seeking social support as ineffective was close to those who found it as effective. For example, after Carlos sought help from school administration, he was provided ineffective help: "The principal said he would take action. He never did...Action was finally took. What action? My principal told me to 'tell a teacher when it happens'" (19). Paul also perceived inadequate social support after disclosing his victimization: "I have told teachers about this before but I sometimes feel like they are actually holding back laughter while they are talking to me so at this point, where the heck am I supposed to turn?" (12-15). Other male students expressed that seeking social support was helpful: "I told her everything that was going on. After I had made a complete fool out of myself...she gave me the sense of hope, the sense that no matter what, I could get through the dark times, and it would get better" (Bill, 29-34). Christian also benefited from seeking help: "I have gotten help, and I continue to get help. I am doing better than I have ever done in my life" (7-8). Again, seeking social support had mixed results by bullied men for its effectiveness.

Men also often reflected on the effectiveness of standing up to bullies/sticking up for self. Victimized male students often suggested that this coping behavior was ineffective (10%). Standing up to bullies often led to their continued/increased involvement with bullying: “I tried to defend myself. So I was getting in fights every day. I got beat up most of the time. At least I tried, right? Wrong. I shouldn’t have tried. Losing got me antagonized even more” (Carlos, 12-13). Sheldon got in trouble for standing up to his bullies: “Some of the kids decided to make some smart comments to me...At that point, I took my glasses off and proceeded to walk up to his desk. I looked right at him and pretty much yelled in his face if he had an issue...my teacher was yelling at me to get down to the office” (7-15). In addition, Craig felt bad after standing up to his bullies: “one of my classmates spoke to me in a really rude way...I was really offended, so I fired back with a very judgmental comment about him...I stood up to him, but I was also being rude back too” (4-10). Standing up to bullies often had a negative mental effect on targets, as well as continued or increased their victimization. See Table 5 for full descriptions of men’s and women’s perceived effectiveness of their chosen coping strategies.

Coping Resources (RQ3a)

Research question 3a asked, “Whom or what do male and female students most frequently report seeking help from to cope with bullying victimization in blog posts?” Bullied women most often went to their parent(s) (30%) and friends (29%) for help. Bullied men most frequently went to their parent(s) (24%), school administration (22%) and teachers (20.5%) for help. See Table 6 for a full explication of men’s and women’s sought coping resources for bullying victimization.

Women most often sought help for bullying from their parents (30%). For instance, Bonnie shared, “I had to tell a parent who listened” (17). Also, Ashley: “I told my mom how I felt” (24-25), Bella: “I didn’t want to get in trouble, so I just told my mother” (3-4) and Kristie: “we both complained and cried to our mothers about leaving” (12-13) specifically used their mothers as coping resources. Along with parents, bullied women often went to their friends (29%) for help, as Margaret noted: “I told only my besties” (9-10). Maria went to her friends who had also experienced bullying: “I talk to everyone of my friends that have been bullied also” (21). Likewise, Ashley went to a friend to manage her victimization: “One person was always there, and she has been my best friend for 10 years. She talked me out of doing something stupid” (16-17). Parents and friends were the most common resources bullied female students sought help from to manage their bullying.

Men also most often went to their parents (24%) for help. After being tormented at school by bullies, Andreas sought help from his parents: “It got so bad that I would constantly call home during lunch, begging my parents to let me come home” (28-29). Moreover, Josh went to his parents for help: “I told my parents” (6-7), as well as Amir who went to his dad: “I came home to my dad sobbing” (11). Interesting, 44.5% of male students went to someone in their schools, including the school administration (22%) and teachers (20.5%) to help manage bullying, whereas only 9% of women suggested they went to someone in school. Men would often seek help from their guidance counselors: “I got through this by seeing an adult. First, I told my school’s guidance counselor” (Michael, 6-7), principals: “I spent 2 days in the principal’s office half the day telling about everything that has happened” (Thomas, 27-28) and teachers: Carlos: “I told a

teacher” (21). Bullied male students often went to their parents, school administration or teachers to help manage their victimization.

It is interesting to note that 17% of women and 20.5% of men indicated that a bullying blog, hotline or support group was their coping resource. Although all these individuals shared their narratives in a blog and it might be assumed that they all used these blogs as a resource, only those individuals who were direct about using it as a resource was coded. For instance, Tara shared, “I was so glad when I found out about imgettingbullied.com. It truly saved me from doing something more drastic than just going home at night and crying about it” (14-16). Others created an anti-bullying support group as a coping resource: “I have an account on Instagram that’s anti-bullying and I post uplifting pictures and quotes and offer advice and love to anyone who needs it” (Gisselle, 19-21). Billy also started a support group against bullying at his school: “I wanted to start an Anti-Bullying group called IOGB (It Only Gets Better)...On our first meeting day, I had a lot of people show up!...I was actually happy with my life for once” (21-26). Both victimized men and women used bullying blogs and support groups as a resource to manage bullying. See Table 6 for a complete description of women’s and men’s coping resources.

Effectiveness of Chosen Coping Resources (RQ3b)

Research question 3b asked, “How do male and female students describe the effectiveness of whom or what they chose to seek help from to cope with bullying victimization in blog posts?” Women most often sought their parents for help with bullying and most often reflected on the influence of seeking help from parents. Women seeking help from parents had mixed perceptions of their help: 21.5% thought parents

provided effective support, whereas 17% found their support as ineffective. Men most often reflected on the influence of seeking help from their school administrations and teachers. Most (24.5%) described seeking help from the school administrations as effective, whereas 20.5% suggested seeking help from teachers was ineffective. Full results for women's and men's effectiveness of chosen coping resources can be found on Table 7.

Bullied women had mixed results for how they perceived the usefulness of seeking help from their parents. Most women described that their parents offered productive social support (21.5%), including Lauren: "My mom told me that it doesn't matter what other people think. She said, because 'you didn't go to school for that. You went to learn, and all you needed was family and your real friends'" (15-17). Ashley's mom also offered her useful informational support about how to manage her bullies: "I told my mom how I felt, and she told me that I should stand up for myself and tell them how I felt...So I spoke up...finally, the teasing stopped" (24-31). However, not all parents provided their children beneficial social support (17%). After Marissa's failed attempts to get help from her mom, she lost hope about getting help from anyone: "I tried to tell my mom, but she didn't really believe me because the same kids who teased me were also nice to me...Finally, I told my mom again, but she wasn't much help. That's when I realized that if I can't tell my mom, I couldn't tell anyone" (7-20). Additionally, Vanessa's parents didn't offer any help until she attempted suicide: "I told my parents what was going on at school, but they didn't listen until I tried to take my own life. After that, I was homeschooled for the rest of the year" (5-8). Bullied female students reported that parents did and did not offer productive help to manage their bullying.

Along with discussing the outcomes of seeking help from parents, bullied women also reflected on seeking help from their friends. Women most often found help from friends as effective (20%); Chelsi shared that “I had a lot of friends who got me through it” (10). Friends often provided helpful social support to bullied female students. As Nicole wrote, “I learned who my real friends were...they reassured me and made me feel valued. Without them, I doubt I would have been able to stay at that school” (12-16). Jackie’s friend also offered useful social support and saved her life: “There was one person who was there for me. My best friend. She was the only one who liked me for me. She has been the one without even knowing it shopped me from killing myself, because if there is one person who cares for me I don’t care how many hate me” (19-22). Women found that their friends were a beneficial resource to cope with their bullying victimization.

Men most often reflected on the outcomes of seeking help from school administrations. Most described seeking help from school administrations as effective (24.5%). For example, Thomas got appropriate help from his principal: “I spent 2 days in the principal’s office half the day telling about everything that has happened...The kids who I told about got parent notifications for their behaviors...After this, I still got bullied occasionally, but not by any of the main 7th graders anymore” (27-32). Tony went to his school counselor who helped stop his victimization and reduced his fear: “I got help with a school counselor. So they stopped and now I’m not afraid to go to school anymore” (7-8). Billy also received productive help from his school counselor: “My counselor totally changed my life...At first I wasn’t very talkative with him, but as my trust grew for him, I told him more and more. He helped me get through everything, and before I knew it,

seventh grade was over” (13-16). Although most men stated that their school administrations offered useful help, they suggested that seeking help from teachers was mostly ineffective (20.5%). David shared that his teachers did not offer practical information: “I have told some teachers, but they say to stand up to them or confront them or something, but never anything actually helpful or anything that is maybe going to show them that what they’re doing is not ok” (10-12). Likewise, Carlos’ teacher failed to provide any useful advice: “I told a teacher. How did she respond? ‘Don’t be a tattle tale.’ That one instance was enough to make me never go to a teacher again” (21-22). Several male students noted that their teachers did nothing, including Jose: “I tried talking to the instructor about it, but she actually didn’t do anything about it” (28-29) and Aaron: “The head teacher did nothing. They just sat back and let me endure 30 months of, the only way to describe it is a ‘living hell’” (9-11). Men suggested that their school administrations often provided effective help, whereas their teachers did not.

Similar to women, roughly half (12%) of the men discussing the influence of seeking help from parents viewed it as effective, whereas 10% found it as ineffective. Marcel’s mother was a beneficial resource with his bullying: “I know if I didn’t have my mother then I would have been dead years ago” (27). However, David’s dad did not offer useful informational support for how to manage his victimization: “My dad says to stand up to them and ‘kick their ass’ but I know that is not right” (9). Scholars (Hunter & Borg, 2006; Matsunaga, 2009) indicate the importance of parental interventions to manage bullies, but both men and women in this study had varied influences of parental help. Again, see Table 7 for a full explanation of women’s and men’s effectiveness of chosen coping strategies.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Discussion

This study examined how male and female bullied students attribute locus of causality, stability and controllability about bullying experiences in bullying blog posts, as well as how they coped, whom or what they sought coping resources from and how they described the effectiveness of those coping decisions. Men's and women's attributions were not significantly different (for RQ1a-RQ1c); nevertheless, the findings of this investigation provide a significant contribution to the understanding of how bullied individuals sensemake and form attributions to manage their bullying experiences. Also, these findings contribute to AT literature that has not extensively studied gender differences with these attributions to bullying victimization. Furthermore, men and women engaged in a variety of coping strategies to manage their victimization, and these results contradict how previous coping literature suggests men and women cope. Last, many individuals were not provided effective social support when they sought help, particularly from teachers and parents. This study's findings suggest strategies to facilitate bullied students' positive attributions, reinforce the coping strategies that many current bullying campaigns promote in their programs and inform future research about how to improve the social support provided to bullied targets seeking help.

The results for causal attributions in the current investigation support those findings reported in the extant literature (Graham et al., 2005; Perren et al., 2013; Prinstein et al., 2005), suggesting that gender is not associated with causal attribution styles for victimization. In this study, both women and men most often attributed external causation specifically to bullies (30%). This is important because individuals who

attribute external causation are less likely to face prolonged victimization and (mal)adjustment (Perren et al., 2013). And, although women's and men's causal attribution patterns were not statistically different, there were some unique sex differences among the supraordinate categories. For example, the most frequent supraordinate category for women's causal attributions was external causation (51%) and men's was internal causation (44.5%). Further, both women (40%) and men (44.5%) made a marked amount of internal causal attributions and somehow thought they were getting what they deserved, putting them at a higher risk of negative consequences. And, whereas Joscelyne and Holttum (2006) found that bullied individuals from the U.K. made a combination of internal and external attributions for their victimization, that theme was not as prevalent in this study.

Causal attributions often shifted throughout the stories. Many individuals blamed themselves while they faced victimization, but often came to blame the bullies after their victimization ended or as they grew older. This reflects Weick's (1993) description of sensemaking, the process when individuals make retrospective assessments of past events that allows them to reframe and reorganize their experiences. As individuals build narratives of past events, it helps them analyze their experiences from a new perspective. Whereas some individuals engaged in sensemaking after they managed bullies or grew older, it might have been the case that sharing bullying stories on bullying blog spaces allowed these individuals to better make sense of their experiences. Further, they were able to read other bullied individuals' stories and that might have allowed them to better make sense of their bullying experiences. After many individuals had time to reflect on their bullying encounters, they were often able to identify bullies as the cause for their

victimization. Many individuals often attributed cause more productively after they engaged in sensemaking; therefore, it might be of interest to analyze how connecting bullied individuals to blogs to read stories and/or share their own stories influences how they attribute blame. If doing so tends to trigger more positive attributions, then connecting students to school approved bullying blogs can be a useful strategy for programs.

In addition, given that many individuals attributed internal causation at some point during their bullying experiences, warrants the consideration that bullying programs and campaigns should educate youth in schools about what causes bullying (i.e., bullies usually bully because they have received similar treatment from others and lack social skills; Easton & Aberman, 2008). This could deter individuals from blaming themselves and justifying bullies. Although many bullying programs (e.g. Olweus Bullying Prevention, No Bully and Bullying Prevention) define bullying, its consequences, warning signs that someone is bullied, offer prevention resources and advice on how to manage bullies, what causes bullying is often overlooked. Educating students about bullying causes could potentially reduce self-blaming attributions among bullied individuals, as well as prevent bullies from enacting bullying behaviors. For example, if bullies are aware that other students understand that they lack communication competence, they might not enact bullying behaviors due to fear of having that stigma.

Furthermore, it would be compelling to further analyze factors, such as the location of bullying (e.g., school, workplace and home) and age that associate with changes in causal attributions about bullying. Lutgen-Sandvik and McDermott (2011) revealed that bullied adults in the workplace attributed causality to their bullies, whereas

there were many instances when bullied students in this study attributed internal causation. How age and context influence causal attributions have yet to be explored among bullied individuals, and future research exploring these factors could contribute to bullying and AT literature.

Women and men did not significantly differ with their attributions for stability with bullying victimization. Women (98%) and men (95%) attributed bullying as a stable experience that lasted anywhere from several days to 15 years. This further signifies the importance of proper bullying interventions in schools to reduce such lengthy victimizations. Furthermore, both women (27%) and men (27.5%) most frequently reported that bullying lasted from one to three years of their lives. Previous scholars (Camodeca, Goossens, Terwogt & Schuengel, 2002; Perren et al., 2013; Porhola et al., 2006) found that male students were more likely than female students to face stable involvement with bullying. However, the findings for stable attributions in the current investigation modify extant literature, given that gender was not associated with stable attribution styles. Gender does not seem to influence the stability of bullying, revealing that male and female students likely face lengthy bullying experiences.

The findings for stable attributions expand bullying literature and AT, because this study was able to analyze the longevity of bullying experiences. Smith and Shu (2000) have been one of few researchers to analyze the duration of bullying, but were only able to report that targets faced bullying for several years. Bullying literature was lacking in longitudinal studies that have examined the duration of bullying. And, although this study was not a longitudinal study per se, it was able to capture bullied individuals' descriptions of lengthy (i.e., 15 years) bullying encounters. Furthermore,

Jose et al. (2011) found that bullied targets self-reported witnessing more stable involvement of traditional FTF bullying, rather than cyber bullying, over a three year period. However, this study was able to investigate how FTF and cyber bullying work together to influence the stability of victimization with bullying beyond three years.

Bullying was not only attributed as a stable experience, but as something that often progressed to worse hostility with time. One student wrote, “I’ve been bullied since I was in second grade... The bullying got worse in Junior High School... They used to jump me after school” (Clarissa, 1-7). Many students shared that bullying got worse and increased to more severe hostility as they entered middle or junior high school. This is reflective of bullying research indicating that bullying behaviors, particularly physical bullying increases in middle school (Unnever & Cornell, 2004) and middle school students are most likely to be targets of bullying (Sherer & Clark, 2009). This finding supports previous bullying literature about when the different forms of bullying (i.e., verbal and physical) are most likely to occur, as well as what grades tend to experience the most victimization.

Although most individuals in this study attributed bullying as stable, there were three individuals who attributed bullying as unstable. It is interesting to note that those individuals experiencing unstable bullying experiences described similar negative experiences and emotions as those who attributed stable experiences. Bullying scholars (Olweus, 1993; Matsunaga, 2009) claim that bullying is a set of repetitive and aggressive behaviors that occur over a prolonged period of time. However, this study’s findings have the potential to modify understandings of bullying. For instance, if an individual is only targeted once with bullying behaviors and experiences the same negative emotions

associated with it, does this then get labeled as bullying or another form of aggression? The definition of bullying suggests that bullying behaviors are repetitive, but this raises the concerns of how to conceptualize this issue and from whose standpoint. These individuals experiencing unstable victimization went to a bullying blog to share their stories, suggesting that they perceived these unstable aggressive behaviors as bullying. But, according to how bullying is conceptualized in bullying literature, these individuals' experiences are not bullying. This raises questions, such as whether bullying is defined by targets' perceptions, the intent of the bullies, how meanings are relationally negotiated or a combination of each?

Further research is warranted about how to conceptualize bullying and differentiate bullying from other types of aggressive acts, such as harassment, a physical attack, hazing and teasing. How society defines bullying can have significant implications. For example, terms like *bullying* and *teasing* likely provoke different perceptions, and teasing can be deemed as less negative, compared to bullying (Mills & Carwile, 2009). But, if bullying literature and bullying websites claim that bullying is repetitive and individuals who experience unstable bullying victimizations read these messages, these individuals might not report or seek help to manage the one or two instances of being victimized. Rather, they might associate their experiences with the less negative term of teasing, or come to realize that their one or few instances of victimization are too insignificant to seek help about; until, of course, those experiences become stable and repetitive and are then termed as bullying. Other studies have questioned how to conceptualize sexual and domestic violence (Muehlenhard & Kimes, 1999), as well as teasing (Mills & Carwile, 2009). Thus, findings from this investigation

suggest that the definition of bullying could benefit from being revisited and potentially conceptualized differently to offer society and particularly victimized individuals more effective understandings of bullying. It is worth exploring whether the current conceptualization of bullying is too narrow and who might be excluded from this understanding.

This study's findings indicate that women's and men's attributions for controllability were not significantly different. Both women (60%) and men (58%) most frequently reported bullying experiences and their ability to manage the effects of bullying as uncontrollable. Very little appears in the extant literature about whether a particular gender is more likely to perceive control over bullying. Twenge et al. (2004) found that male and female children and college students feel that outside forces control their lives, more than they feel that they control their lives. This study's findings reinforce this literature, as both men and women equally felt more powerless to change their experiences, than they did powerful. However, the current investigation also extends this literature by specifically applying control with the context of student bullying.

There were few stories that made only controllable or uncontrollable attributions; these attributions often changed as the stories went on. Many individuals attributed no control over their victimization as they were being bullied, due to fear, pain, uncertainty, and destructive coping behaviors and management of bullying effects. However, many described control as they managed their bullies effectively or got older and reflected back on their bullying experiences. How this study measured causal and controllable attributions is a contribution to the extant literature and AT; many studies (e.g., Cutrona & Suhr, 1992; Lutgen-Sandvik & McDermott, 2011) that code attributions of causality

and controllability only code external or internal, as well as controllable or not controllable, rather than thought units of these attributions. This study was able to analyze how causal and controllable attributions shifted in narratives and the factors (e.g., stability, effective coping, growing older, graduating or moving to another school) that likely influenced this shift. Future research analyzing thought units of both causal and controllable attributions for a variety of contexts (e.g., divorce, domestic abuse and conflict) could reveal how and why attributions change.

The definition of bullying suggests that targets of bullying usually have or perceive less power than the bully. The results of this study support this pattern, as many individuals described no control over bullies as they were victimized. However, once targets productively coped or obtained power through seeking help from someone or as they left school, they often gained control and power over their victimization. Again, Weick's (1993) concept of sensemaking helps elucidate this pattern; many felt no control while being victimized, but felt control as they grew older or effectively managed bullying. Also, perhaps, blogging about bullying experiences provides bullied individuals a sense of control. Blogs can be a safe space to share personal stories and read others' stories; thus, blogs can serve as a venue where individuals sensemake.

Pennebaker's (1997) notion of expressive writing helps understand how blogging might shape individuals' attributions of controllability. Expressive writing is a form of writing therapy when individuals express their deepest thoughts and feelings surrounding an experience. This has been found to enhance individuals' adjustments of the experiences (Pennebaker, 1997). These individuals might have gained control over their experiences after sharing their stories in the blogs. As noted earlier, future research would

benefit from analyzing how writing about bullying experiences influences individuals' well-being and attribution processes. If this shows to be an effective tactic, this could inform bullying programs about techniques to aid victimized students.

Furthermore, "it gets better" was a common pattern about how individuals described controllability for bullying. It would be interesting to analyze if things got better for these individuals because they are managing bullying better, experiencing bullying behaviors less or a combination of both. Also, Dan Savage's "It Gets Better" (2014) bullying campaign sends a similar message to students, although, it is a campaign focused on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer bullying. The "It Gets Better" blog only contains videos from users and would be a useful blog to further examine attributions and coping behaviors. Given that Savage's campaign and many individuals in this study suggested that bullying gets better, it would be interesting to analyze how individuals whom are still victimized respond to such messages. From an AT and SIP standpoint, the message of "it gets better" might help alter bullied individuals' negative perceptions about their roles and control in bullying, along with deter destructive coping behaviors. If schools enforce policies and programs for bullied students, it might also be helpful to display flyers and resources to blogs that have stories from previously bullied individuals who made it through bullying and shared that it got better, along with promoting the campaign message that bullying gets better.

However, this message might also deter individuals from seeking help or managing their victimization. If the message of "it gets better" is targeted at bullied youth, they might also wait around for their victimization to "get better," rather than seeking to end the bullying immediately. Additionally, there might be instances when

individuals are bullied in middle and high school and they do not seek help because they want things to “get better,” yet they are still bullied in college. This could result in more detrimental attributions and coping behaviors, because things have yet to get better. Further analyzing how this message influences bullied students can aid and potentially alter interpersonal, campaign and health communication.

Women and men engaged in a variety of coping strategies to manage their victimization. Women most often coped with externalizing/tension reducing behaviors (23.5%), particularly by self-harming (6%) and crying (6%), as well as with internalizing behaviors (21%), such as low self-worth (9%). These findings go against previous coping literature, suggesting that girls mostly use disclosure/seeking social support to cope with bullying (Kochenderfer-Ladd & Skinner, 2002; Shelley & Craig, 2010). Women most often coped with destructive coping behaviors (i.e., self-harm, crying and low self-worth) that can potentially hinder their well-being and lead to more serious consequences, such as depression and suicide (Lohmann, 2012). And, although men also used these coping behaviors, it was not as frequent. This knowledge can aid bullying interventions, campaigns and family communication; educating girls and young women about more productive means to cope is justified. Also, this information can inform parents and friends about signs of someone being bullied, so they can get these individuals help before they resort to more destructive coping behaviors.

Men most frequently coped by offering social support and advice to others (20%), as well as seeking social support and disclosure (16%). This refutes previous coping literature, suggesting women disclose more often than men (Kochenderfer-Ladd & Skinner, 2002; Shelley & Craig, 2010). Offering social support was a new coping

strategy that emerged in this study and, thus, contributes to Tenenbaum et al.'s (2011) typology of coping strategies for bullied students. Whereas psychology literature on adolescent coping (Patterson, Hamilton & McCubbin, 1987) and depressed adults (Beckham & Adams, 1984) found "helping others" as a common coping strategy, helping others (i.e., offering social support) had not been found with bullied students. This study's findings enhance bullying literature about coping, given that offering social support had not yet been categorized.

However, it should be noted that those individuals who write and share stories on blogs are likely different than those whom do not share their stories and/or lack access to the Internet. Given that these individuals shared their bullying stories online reveals some degree of openness and recognition that the occurrences exist. This study's results regarding men using disclosure might be reflective of their openness to share their stories online; hence, they might generally be more open than other men. Although blogs are a great location to gather and analyze narratives about bullying, those who write in blogs might be different than the general population of bullied individuals. Future research, perhaps using interviews and surveys, could obtain a more diverse group of individuals who might not be as open to writing blog posts and, therefore, using disclosure to cope.

On the other hand, offering social support and seeking help behaviors among men might be reflective of society's changing perceptions of men seeking help and by research efforts targeted at men's seeking help behaviors. Whereas boys have often been expected to handle victimization and many issues alone (Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974), the stigmas of men seeking help in today's society are likely changing. For example, The National Institute of Mental Health (2013), The American Psychological Association

(Winerman, 2014) and numerous researchers (e.g., Oliver, Pearson, Coe & Gunnell, 2005) study men's seeking help behaviors and inform programs about strategies to encourage these behaviors. It is worthy to explore if men's use of seeking help to manage bullying is reflective of the venue in which data was gathered (i.e., blogs) or if they had been encouraged by others to do so, thus altering society's general disapproval of men seeking help (Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974). Additionally, connecting men to blogs might be a strategy these programs consider using to encourage seeking help behaviors among men. Reading and sharing stories online does offer some sense of privacy, compared to FTF interaction, and might help men feel more comfortable seeking help and sharing their experiences. Therefore, future research exploring the influence of blogs on men's seeking help behaviors can inform programs that aim to increase men's seeking help behaviors for a variety of issues (e.g., victimization, post-military deployment and divorce).

This study also analyzed the effects of coping strategies on bullied individuals' victimization and well-being. First, there were no instances reported in the analyzed data in which avoiding disclosure was useful for women (8%) or men (4.5%). This finding reinforces previous coping literature, claiming avoidance rarely contributes to a resolution of the problem and carries negative outcomes (Hunter & Borg, 2006; Shelley & Craig, 2010; Tenenbaum et al., 2011). Further, those who avoided disclosure often suggested for others being bullied to tell someone or seek help. This finding supports extant literature, suggesting those who did not disclose their victimizations suggest for others to tell someone and get help (Mishna, 2004). Many bullying campaigns (e.g., Olweus Bullying Prevention Program) tell bullied individuals to disclose their

victimizations to someone. This study's findings highlight the importance of not avoiding disclosure and for bullying campaigns to continue targeting this message to bullied youth. Also, recall that bullied men who stood up to the bully mostly reported this as an ineffective coping strategy (10%). This finding supports previous studies, revealing that bullied students who directly confronted bullies had worse post-bullying adjustments and were less likely to escape their victimizations (Hunger & Borg, 2006; Kochenderfer-Ladd & Skinner, 2002). Again, many bullying campaigns (e.g., Kids Health) tell bullied individuals to not confront bullies. This knowledge supports current health and campaign communication, given confrontation and avoiding disclosure were often negative coping behaviors for bullied targets.

The influence of bullied women's and men's use of seeking social support produced mixed results. There were nearly an equal number for both genders who found seeking support as effective, as well as ineffective. This goes against previous research suggesting that seeking social support protects girls from social problems and has the opposite effect for boys (Kochenderfer-Ladd & Skinner, 2002; Shelley & Craig, 2010). The discrepancies with seeking social support likely depend on whom they sought help from and the type of support that was provided to them.

Both women (30%) and men (24%) most often went to their parents for help with bullying. And, although Hunter and Borg (2006) suggest that bullied individuals who get help from their parents have less stress and are more likely to escape victimization, the results from this study for the effectiveness of seeking support from parents had mixed results for men and women. Roughly half of the women (21.5%) and men (12%) who reflected on seeking help from parents described this resource as effective, whereas

roughly the other half of women (17%) and men (10%) found parents' help as ineffective. Davidson and Demaray (2007) claim that parental support for bullied women decreases their victimization and stress; however, that finding was not completely supported by this study's results. Research in the realm of family communication (e.g., Matsunaga, 2009) should continue to examine ways in which family members and especially parents offer social support to their bullied children seeking support, given parental support was not always effective. This research can help improve family communication about bullying.

In addition, Mishna and Alaggia (2005) suggest that age influences how children perceive parental support; as children grow older, they are more likely to perceive parental interventions as ineffective. Although the ages of individuals in this project could be analyzed in conjunction with the effectiveness of coping resources, not all individuals indicated an age; rather a grade level or student status, and several stories had non-identifiable information about their age, grade or student status. How age influences receiving social support is worthy to further explore. This knowledge can inform family communication about when children might be less receptive to parental support and, thus, enhance social support strategies used by parents.

Friends were another common resource bullied individuals went to for help with their victimization. Friends were particularly common resources among women (29%) whereas 11% of men went to their friends. Matsunaga (2010a) claims that U.S. bullied targets typically disclose to their best friends (44%) and that positively relates to their well-being and post-bullying adjustment. This study's findings for the effectiveness of women seeking friends for help supports Matsunaga's results, as 20% of women

described friends' help as effective. This finding highlights the significance of friendships for female adolescents and emerging adults to manage victimization. However, there were no men who reflected on the effectiveness of seeking help from friends, suggesting further exploration about the effects of men's seeking help behaviors from friends.

Likewise, The Kaiser Foundation and Children Now (2001) report that children, ages 10-12, most often seek their mother as a resource for information on violence (54%), but that teens, ages 13-15, are most likely to name friends as a common resource about violence (60%). Future research would benefit from analyzing how age influences bullied individuals' decisions about whom to seek help from to manage victimization. Again, this study was not able to successfully capture every individuals' age, and thus cannot determine how age influences sought coping resources. Gaining a better understanding of how age influences who individuals seek for help can inform particular sources of help about when they are most likely to be sought out for help, as well as educate them about how to properly assist those in need.

Along with parents, male students often went to their school administrations (22%) and teachers (20.5%) for help. Most men (24.5%) described their school administrations as effective sources of help, although Shelley and Craig (2010) reported that no coping styles reduced victimization for boys and Mishna (2004) claimed that youth avoid seeking help from school administrations because they are not receptive of bullying reports. This finding can inform programs and bullied students, particularly men, about seeking their school administrations for assistance to manage bullies, given that this was an effective resource for men.

However, most of the bullied male (20.5%) and all of the bullied female (7%) students described seeking help from teachers as ineffective. This is a troubling pattern if it is the case that teachers did not offer productive help to bullied individuals seeking them out. Tenenbaum et al. (2011) concluded that children who sought assistance from a teacher perceived that as ineffective because they did not believe them or did not effectively address the problem. Likewise, Mishna (2004) suggested that children often avoid seeking help from teachers because they are not responsive to bullying reports or misjudge the severity of the incident, supporting this study's results. And, whereas Davidson and Demaray (2007) claim that teacher and school support helps bullied males, this was not the case for teachers in this study.

This highlights the importance of improving education and programs for teachers about fostering an anti-bullying classroom environment. This is particularly significant when middle school students rank teacher involvement as the most preferred tool to manage bullies (Crothers, Kolbert & Barker, 2006) and poor classroom management by teachers is mostly associated with bullying problems (Hirschstein, Van Schoiack Edstron, Frey, Snell & MacKenzie, 2007; Rowan, 2007). Educating teachers about how to discourage bullying and properly respond to bullied students seeking help might be a more beneficial avenue for future bullying interventions and campaigns. Further, not all bullied individuals have a support system outside of school (e.g., family and friends) that they can seek for help. However, they can always find teachers or school administration for help, further warranting the importance of educating school staff about how to manage bullying incidents.

This study did not code for the effectiveness of coping strategies and coping resources by thought units, rather an overall assessment of how individuals described the effects of each coping behavior. There were instances when individuals noted in the beginning of their stories that they sought help and that initially was not effective, but as the bullying persisted and they sought help again from that individual, they were then provided effective help. This study did not code for thought units of the effectiveness of coping behaviors, given that there were not a significant amount of stories that had this pattern. It would be interesting to specifically analyze coping behaviors with thought units in the future to reveal how these behaviors might shift throughout stories, similar to the coding for causal and controllable attributions. This can help understand what factors (e.g., asking the same person for help several times) enhance or impede particular coping behaviors and inform literature on coping.

Future research should also extend this study to examine how attributions direct other attributions and coping behaviors. This study was unable to capture the temporal sequencing of the SIP; rather, it analyzed how individuals make attributions in step two and enact a coping behavior in step six. How individuals attribute blame likely influences if or how they cope. For instance, if bullied individuals blame themselves for their victimization, they are more likely to be depressed (Perren et al., 2013); therefore, they might cope in more detrimental ways. Also, considering that several students suggested that the longer they were victimized, the more they blamed themselves and/or coped in different ways, it would be of value to analyze how the stability of victimization influences causal attributions and coping behaviors. Some students suggested that the longer (i.e., stable) they were victimized the more they blamed themselves. For example,

Marissa shared, “A girl who I didn’t even know made a point to tell me I was ugly. Every day...After a while, I started believing it” (9-11). Kristina also started to believe her bullies after prolonged victimization: “After being called disgusting, a whore, a slut, nasty, and etc. ALL DAY, EVERYDAY. You start to think that of yourself too. You say to yourself ‘I AM worthless. Nobody cares about me. Maybe I should just kill myself’” (18-21). These individuals began to blame themselves for their victimizations after being continually bullied.

Additionally, the stability of victimization also likely influences how individuals cope. For instance, Thomas claimed that he stopped doing anything to manage his victimization after being tormented for nine years: “I didn’t do anything about it though because I was used to it” (32-33). Some research suggests more frequently bullied pupils report greater use of seeking a teachers’ and/or parents’ help (Hunter & Borg, 2006), whereas others discuss how individuals bullied the most are less likely to disclose to an adult (Mishna & Alaggia, 2005). Using a qualitative matrix analysis (Baxter & Babbie, 2004) to explore how attributions influence other attributions (i.e., how stability influences causal attributions) and coping behaviors is a worthy avenue for future research. This can contribute to SIP literature and help understand why individuals might resort to more productive or destructive attribution styles and coping strategies.

Last, this study extends SIP literature by using it in a new context (i.e., bullying narratives posted in public blogs). Researchers (e.g., Dodge & Crick, 1990; Dodge et al., 2003; Weiss, Dodge, Bates & Pettit, 2008) using SIP have extensively analyzed how social-information processing patterns associate with aggressive behaviors in children (i.e., why bullies bully), yet have not thoroughly analyzed the social-information

processing patterns of bullied targets. Additionally, these same researchers utilized SIP by surveying and interviewing children. There has been no research that has applied SIP to blogs or online data; therefore, this study contributes to SIP literature and, hopefully, broadens the types of data in which the model can be applied.

Limitations

Although this study has offered compelling findings and contributions to the extant literature in theory and practice, there are some important limitations to address. AT and SIP each offer, respectively, an individual-centered lens (Manusov & Spitzberg, 2008), and the data collected for these perspectives rest on the ability and capacity of individuals to articulate their stories through narratives. A focus on attributions and coping behaviors as a purely cognitive process pays little attention to interaction and social-communicative functions, as well as bullies' perspectives (Bazarova & Hancock, 2010). Spoken attributions can develop collaboratively in conversations as a joint process, so research would benefit from paying close attention to how attributions and coping behaviors are negotiated and enacted in bullying scenarios. YouTube has videos of children and teenagers in actual bullying episodes that can provide a useful relationship or discourse centered lens to study this phenomenon.

Further, this study does not assess the temporal sequencing of SIP. Rather, SIP is used to help understand attributions and coping, and is assessed by the manners in which individuals present these items through story-telling in blogs. As noted earlier, future research can benefit from exploring the temporal sequence of SIP to reveal how attributions direct coping decisions with a qualitative matrix analysis (Baxter & Babbie, 2004). However, it might be difficult to assess the entire decision-making model with

blogs, given that the data is limited to what information is provided in the posts. It might be of interest for future research to use triangulation, gathering data through multiple methods (Baxter & Babbie, 2004), potentially with interviews and blogs to analyze the six steps in the SIP with bullied individuals. This can shed light on how and why individuals might engage in more productive or negative attributions and coping behaviors.

Blogs allow individuals the freedom to create and share their own stories when they feel comfortable, but it does not allow researchers to follow up on certain questions for elaboration. For example, this study hoped to code for simultaneous use of multiple coping strategies and coping resources. However, individuals in blog posts often did not report multiple uses of coping strategies and resources. And, when they did, even less discussed the effectiveness of that particular combination of strategies or resources. Likewise, this study intended to analyze what types of social support were provided to individuals seeking social support, given Matsunaga's (2010b; 2011) research suggests that the types of social support provided influence the effectiveness of that support. Although individuals in blog posts described their received social support, it was often broad (e.g., I told my mom and she helped me get through it). There were few instances that could be coded into types of received social support when analyzing the effectiveness of coping behaviors and coping resources. Of the categories that were created, it had a wide variety of different specific categories (e.g., received emotional and esteem support that mentally helped them, received tangible and information support that increased their victimization and received information support that did not mentally help) that each had an insignificant occurrence.

Future research with interviews would allow researchers to obtain more in-depth responses about the use of multiple coping strategies and resources, along with the types of received social support for bullied individuals and how they perceived such support. Individuals responding in interviews might be more reluctant to share private information, but the researcher does have the opportunity to ask individuals to further explain any discrepancies or briefness in their responses (Baxter & Babbie, 2004), such as the types of social support they were provided. Additionally, there was a point of saturation, when redundancy is achieved in the data and no new themes or patterns emerge (Baxter & Babbie, 2004), met among the attribution categories. However, it was not met with the coping categories, as exemplified with the insufficient data to code for the types of social support provided. Future research with a larger sample and possibly with triangulation (e.g., interviews and blogs) can provide saturation in these categories. This would contribute to bullying literature and campaigns, as well as social support research that educate bystanders and society about how to respond when someone discloses or seeks help for their victimization. This would be a useful area of research, given this study revealed many instances when seeking social support was ineffective for bullied individuals.

Gaining more knowledge about what types of social support are effective to provide bullied individuals seeking help can inform education programs for teachers. As noted earlier, middle school students favor teacher involvement for bullying management (Crothers et al., 2006) and teachers' classroom management is a large predictor of bullying problems (Hirschstein et al., 2007; Rowan, 2007). Therefore, further analyzing how students prefer the types of social support provided by teachers can inform schools

about how to educate teachers' responses to students seeking help. Matsunaga (2010b; 2011) reveals that bullied children's well-being and victimization are most enhanced when offered emotional and then esteem support from their parents. Similar to this study, future research should analyze the outcomes of different types of support and the process in which different types of support are offered by teachers to bullied students. This can educate programs and teachers about the processes involved with offering the most appropriate social support to students to enhance their well-being and reduce their victimization.

Additionally, researchers using surveys and interviews are able to ask participants direct questions related to their study. Researchers who analyze blogs will have to depend on what the individual provided in the story and frame their research questions around its content. However, there are many blog sites online that offer lengthy, detailed and rich data about how individuals made sense of and responded to bullying. It is hoped that scholars will continue to analyze a variety of interpersonal behaviors and issues in blogs (e.g., infidelity and sexual abuse), given that blogs offer a window to sometimes difficult and sensitive topics that might be difficult to assess through surveys and interviews.

Another limitation is that there are likely other factors that influence individuals' attributions and coping behaviors. For instance, Ames, Ames and Garrison (1977) suggest socially adjusted children (e.g., greater peer status) are more likely to make external attributions for negative behaviors, whereas rejected children are more likely to attribute negative events to internal causes. However, others indicate rejected children blame negative events to external causes (Crick & Ladd, 1993). The predispositions of children can influence how they make attributions to bullying. Analyzing how other

factors, such as social status and age influence attributions and coping behaviors would also contribute to bullying literature.

Furthermore, this study's sample included adults and young adults reflecting back on their bullying experiences. This creates a potential bias of recall error (Baxter & Babbie, 2004). Adults making retrospective accounts might have inaccuracies with their stories. However, analyzing this population allows researchers to explore how these individuals engaged in sensemaking and how attributions and coping behaviors changed over time.

Last, there is one population of bullied individuals that this study likely did not capture. The perceptions and behaviors of those who committed suicide might not be reflective in this study's data. Although they might have written stories before committing suicide, this study was unable to code committing suicide as a coping behavior, only suicidal tendencies. Likewise, this study was unable to capture attributions and coping behaviors from those who do not have internet access or reveal their bullying stories in blog sites. Conducting interviews or surveys at schools could capture individuals who lack the resources or desire to utilize online bullying blogs.

Despite the limitations and various suggestions for future research, this study's results shed light on the perceptions and coping behaviors bullied targets have about their experiences from an AT and SIP perspective. It seems imperative to bring more bullying literature into the interpersonal communication field, given many students experience bullying that carries a detrimental aftermath. Further studying this phenomenon from a communicative perspective can provide a great deal of knowledge about the social construction of self and how students manage their bullying. And, although there are

individuals who might have never been bullied or do not have children in schools, this issue does influence society as a whole. Exploring these behaviors now can help pave the way for future bullying programs and, therefore, create less aggressive environments for our children or our friends'/families' children in the future. Also, this research can hopefully prevent bullies and targets of bullying from retaliating with violence and suicide in our communities and schools. Thus, gaining more knowledge about these behaviors can inform programs about constructive means to assess and cope from bullies, as well as how to respond to bullied targets seeking help, in the hopes to reduce victimization and devastating outcomes of bullying. Schools might not be able to completely prevent bullying, but programs can help prevent bullied targets from validating bullies attacks, as Eleanor Roosevelt (1940) once said, "No one can make you feel inferior without your consent" (para. 1).

Appendix

Table 1: Women's and Men's Locus of Causality for Victimization*

	Women		Men	
	n	%	n	%
External Causation	36	51%	26	41%
Bullies	21	30%	19	30%
Family	5	7%	1	1.5%
Friends	4	5.5%	1	1.5%
School	4	5.5%	4	6.5%
Location/Town	1	1.5%	1	1.5%
Significant other	1	1.5%	0	0%
Internal Causation	28	40%	28	44.5%
Behavioral Self-Blame	16	23%	9	14.5%
Characterological Self-Blame	10	14%	14	22%
Internal-Broad	2	3%	5	8%
Internal and External Causation	6	9%	9	14.5%
Total	70	100%	63	100%

* $\chi^2(2) = 1.85, p < 0.397$

Table 2: Women's and Men's Stability of Victimization*

	Women		Men	
	n	%	n	%
Stable	43	98%	38	95%
Daily	2	5%	5	12.5%
Weekly	2	5%	0	0%
Monthly	3	7%	2	5%
1-3 Years	12	27%	11	27.5%
4-6 Years	7	16%	4	10%
7-9 Years	4	9%	2	5%
10-12 Years	3	7%	6	15%
Stable-Broad	10	22%	8	5%
Unstable	1	2%	2	5%
Total	44	100%	40	100%

* $\chi^2(1) = 0.453, p < 0.501$

Table 3: Women's and Men's Controllability about Victimization*

	Women		Men	
	n	%	n	%
Uncontrollable	176	60%	152	58%
Controllable	117	40%	108	42%
Total	293	100%	260	100%

* $\chi^2(1) = 0.147, p < 0.701$

Table 4: Women's and Men's Coping Strategies for Victimization

	Women		Men	
	n	%	n	%
Externalizing/Tension Reducing	68	23.5%	32	16%
Self-Harm	18	6%	5	2.5%
Crying	17	6%	7	3.5%
Leisure/Recreational Activities	8	2.5%	5	2.5%
Suicide Attempt	6	2%	5	2.5%
Aggressive with Others	4	1.5%	1	0.5%
Sleeps	4	1.5%	1	0.5%
Religion	3	1%	1	0.5%
Food	3	1%	1	0.5%
Drugs/Alcohol	2	0.5%	0	0%
Retaliation	1	0.5%	5	2.5%
Yells to Let off Steam	1	0.5%	1	0.5%
Changes Appearance	1	0.5%	0	0.5%
Internalizing	62	21%	33	16%
Low Self-Worth	26	9%	7	3%
Avoid Disclosure	13	4.5%	4	2%
Fear	8	2.5%	6	3%
Suicidal Thoughts	6	2%	6	3%
Withdrawal	4	1.5%	3	1.5%
Isolation	3	1%	3	1.5%
Anxiety	2	0.5%	0	0%
Internalized-Broad	0	0%	4	2%
Offering Social Support	41	14%	40	20%
Offering Support	20	7%	11	5.5%
Offering Advice on how to Cope	14	5%	19	9.5%
Offering Advice to Bullies	3	1%	6	3%
Standing up for other Bullied Individuals	2	0.5%	3	1.5%
Creating an Anti-Bullying Support Group	2	0.5%	1	0.5%
Seeking Social Support	37	12.5%	33	16%
Disclosure	24	8%	23	11%
Seeking Help/Advice	13	4.5%	10	5%
Distancing	38	13%	27	13.5%
Avoiding Bullies	17	6%	12	6%
Ignoring Bullies/Stop Caring	15	5%	12	6%
Changing Schools	6	2%	3	1.5%
Focusing on the Positives	27	9.5%	20	10%
Is Stronger/Happier Now	11	4%	4	2%
Great Friends	5	1.5%	3	1.5%
Focusing on the Future	4	1.5%	8	4%
Bullies Apologized	4	1.5%	2	1%
Victimization Not as Bad	3	1%	3	1.5%
Standing up to Bullies/Sticking up for Self	13	4.5%	11	5.5%
Self-Defense	5	2%	6	3%
Total	291	100%	202	100%

Table 5: Women's and Men's Effectiveness of Chosen Coping Strategies*

	Women		Men	
	n	%	n	%
Seeking Social Support				
Disclosure				
Effective	17	13.5%	9	10%
Positive Social Support	8	6.5%	5	5.5%
Positive Mentally	5	4%	3	3.5%
Victimization Reduces/Stops	4	3%	1	1%
Ineffective	11	8.5%	12	13%
Negative Social Support	8	6.5%	10	11%
Victimization Continues/Increases	3	2%	2	2%
Seeking Help/Advice				
Effective	4	3%	6	6.5%
Positive Social Support	3	2.5%	0	0%
Positive Mentally	0	0%	3	3.5%
Victimization Reduces/Stops	1	1%	3	3.5%
Ineffective	3	2.5%	5	5.5%
Negative Social Support	0	0%	3	3.5%
Negative Mentally	2	1.5%	0	0%
Victimization Continues/Increases	1	1%	2	2%
Externalizing/Tension Reducing				
Leisure/Recreational Activities				
Effective	7	5.5%	5	5.5%
Positive Mentally	7	5.5%	4	4.5%
Victimization Reduces/Stops	0	0%	1	1%
Self-Harm				
Effective	1	1%	0	0%
Positive Mentally	1	1%	0	0%
Ineffective	5	4%	1	1%
Negative Mentally	2	1.5%	0	0%
Victimization Continues/Increases	3	2.5%	1	1%
Crying				
Ineffective	3	2.5%	2	2%
Negative Mentally	0	0%	2	2%
Victimization Continues/Increases	3	2.5%	0	0%
Suicide Attempt				
Effective	1	1%	0	0%
Victimization Reduces/Stops	1	1%	0	0%
Ineffective	1	1%	1	1%
Victimization Continues/Increases	1	1%	1	1%
Drugs/Alcohol				
Ineffective	2	1.5%	0	0%
Victimization Continues/Increases	1	1%	0	0%
Negative Mentally	1	1%	0	0%
Food				
Effective	0	0%	1	1%
Victimization Reduces/Stops	0	0%	1	1%
Ineffective	2	1.5%	0	0%
Negative Mentally	2	1.5%	0	0%

Change Self-Image				
Ineffective	1	1%	0	0%
Victimization Continues/Increases	1	1%	0	0%
Religion				
Effective	0	0%	1	1%
Positive Mentally	0	0%	1	1%
Ineffective	1	1%	0	0%
Negative Mentally	1	1%	0	0%
Retaliation				
Effective	1	1%	1	1%
Positive Mentally	1	1%	1	1%
Yells to Let off Steam				
Ineffective	1	1%	0	0%
Negative Mentally	1	1%	0	0%
Distancing				
Ignoring Bullies/Stop Caring				
Effective	4	3%	8	9%
Positive Mentally	2	1.5%	5	5.5%
Victimization Reduces/Stops	2	1.5%	3	3.5%
Ineffective	8	6.5%	5	5.5%
Negative Mentally	2	1.5%	1	1%
Victimization Continues/Increases	6	5%	4	4.5%
Changing Schools				
Effective	4	3%	0	0%
Positive Mentally	1	1%	0	0%
Victimization Reduces/Stops	3	2.5%	0	0%
Ineffective	3	2.5%	2	2%
Negative Mentally	1	1%	1	1%
Victimization Continues/Increases	2	1.5%	1	1%
Avoiding Bullies				
Effective	1	1%	1	1%
Positive Mentally	0	0%	1	1%
Victimization Reduces/Stop	1	1%	0	0%
Ineffective	6	5%	0	0%
Negative Mentally	1	1%	0	0%
Victimization Continues/Increases	5	4%	0	0%
Internalizing				
Avoiding Disclosure				
Ineffective	10	8%	4	4.5%
Negative Mentally	7	5.5%	4	4.5%
Victimization Continues/Increases	3	2.5%	0	0%
Low Self-Worth				
Ineffective	3	2.5%	0	0%
Victimization Continues/Increases	2	1.5%	0	0%
Negative Mentally	1	1%	0	0%
Suicidal Thoughts				
Ineffective	2	1.5%	0	0%
Negative Mentally	1	1%	0	0%
Victimization Continues/Increases	1	1%	0	0%
Isolation				
Ineffective	2	1.5%	3	3.5%

	Negative Mentally	2	1.5%	2	2%
	Victimization Continues/Increases	0	0%	1	1%
Fear					
	Ineffective	1	1%	0	0%
	Negative Mentally	1	1%	0	0%
Standing up to Bullies/Sticking up for Self					
	Effective	4	3%	4	4.5%
	Positive Mentally	2	1.5%	2	2%
	Victimization Reduces/Stops	2	1.5%	2	2%
	Ineffective	4	3%	9	10%
	Negative Mentally	1	1%	0	0%
	Victimization Continues/Increases	3	2.5%	9	10%
Self-Defense					
	Effective	2	1.5%	3	3.5%
	Positive Mentally	0	0%	2	2%
	Victimization Reduces/Stops	2	1.5%	1	1%
	Ineffective	3	2.5%	3	3.5%
	Victimization Continues/Increases	3	2.5%	3	3.5%
Focusing on the Positives					
	Is Stronger/Happier Now				
	Effective	3	2.5%	1	1%
	Positive Mentally	3	2.5%	1	1%
Offers Social Support					
	Offering Support				
	Effective	3	2.5%	0	0%
	Positive Mentally	3	2.5%	0	0%
	Standing up for Other Bullied Individuals				
	Effective	1	1%	0	0%
	Positive Mentally	1	1%	0	0%
Total		125	100%	92	100%

*Note: columns do not add to 100% due to rounding error

Table 6: Women's and Men's Coping Resources for Victimization

	Women		Men	
	n	%	n	%
Parent(s)	20	30%	13	24%
Friends	19	29%	6	11%
Bullying Support Group/Blog/Hotline	11	17%	9	16.5%
Teachers	6	9%	11	20.5%
School Administration	5	7.5%	12	22%
Other Bullied Individuals	3	4.5%	1	2%
Significant Other	2	3%	0	0%
Bystander	0	0%	1	2%
God	0	0%	1	2%
Total	66	100%	54	100%

Table 7: Women's and Men's Effectiveness of Chosen Coping Resources*

	Women		Men	
	n	%	n	%
Parent(s)				
Effective	15	21.5%	6	12%
Positive Social Support	11	15.5%	4	8%
Positive Mentally	1	1.5%	0	0%
Victimization Reduces/Stops	3	4.5%	2	4%
Ineffective	12	17%	5	10%
Negative Social Support	8	11.5%	5	5%
Victimization Continues/Increases	4	5.5%	0	0%
Friends				
Effective	14	20%	0	0%
Positive Social Support	12	17%	0	0%
Victimization Reduces/Stops	2	3%	0	0%
Ineffective	6	8.5%	0	0%
Negative Mentally	3	4.5%	0	0%
Victimization Continues/Increases	3	4.5%	0	0%
School Administration				
Effective	5	7%	12	24.5%
Positive Social Support	4	5.5%	5	10%
Positive Mentally	0	0%	2	4%
Victimization Reduces/Stops	1	1.5%	5	10%
Ineffective	3	4.5%	5	10%
Negative Social Support	1	1.5%	3	6%
Victimization Continues/Increases	2	3%	2	4%
Bullying Support Group/Blog/Hotline				
Effective	5	7%	5	10%
Positive Social Support	2	3%	3	6%
Positive Mentally	3	4.5%	2	4%
Ineffective	3	4.5%	1	2%
Negative Social Support	1	1%	0	0%
Negative Mentally	2	3%	0	0%
Victimization Continues/Increases	0	0%	1	2%
Teachers				
Effective	0	0%	1	2%
Positive Social Support	0	0%	1	2%
Ineffective	5	7%	10	20.5%
Negative Social Support	5	7%	8	16.5%
Victimization Continues/Increases	0	0%	2	4%
Other Bullied Individuals				
Effective	2	3%	1	2%
Positive Mentally	2	3%	1	2%
Ineffective	0	0%	1	2%
Negative Social Support	0	0%	1	2%
Bystander				
Effective	0	0%	1	2%
Victimization Reduces/Stops	0	0%	1	2%
God				
Effective	0	0%	1	2%

	Positive Mentally	0	0%	1	2%
Total		70	100%	49	100%

*Note: columns do not add to 100% due to rounding error

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Curriculum Vitae

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Education

University of Nevada, Las Vegas M.A., Communication Studies <i>Honors Diploma</i> <i>Lambda Phi Eta Honor Society</i> <i>Phi Kappa Phi Honor Society</i>	May 2014
University of Nevada, Las Vegas B.A., Communication Studies Minor, Business Management <i>Dean's Honor List</i>	December 2011
College of Southern Nevada A.B., Business Management	December 2009
Spring Valley High School, Las Vegas <i>Honors Diploma</i> <i>National Honor Society</i>	June 2007

Scholarships and Awards

- Induction into Lambda Pi Eta Communication Studies Honor Society (Fall 2012)
- Induction into Phi Kappa Phi National Honor Society (Spring 2014)
- UNLV Honorable Mention at The Graduate and Professional Student Association Research Forum (Spring 2014)
- Graduate and Professional Student Travel Awards (Fall 2013, Spring 2014)
- Department of Communication Studies Travel Awards (Fall 2013, Spring 2014)
- Greenspun College of Urban Affairs, Dean's Associates' Travel Awards (Fall 2013, Spring 2014)
- Fond Du Lac Tribal Scholarship (Fall 2007-Spring 2014)
- Millennium Scholarship (Fall 2007-Spring 2009)

Professional Presentations

Danielson, C. M. (2013, November). "I thought it was my fault": Attributions in a bullying blog. Paper presented during the "Looking for Solutions: Informing, Analyzing and Reframing Sex, Health and Scandal" session at the 99th annual convention of the National Communication Association in Washington, DC.

Danielson, C. M., Miller, J., Sahlstein-Parcell, E., & Boucher, T. (2014, February). "Why'd you post that?": Family conflict and Facebook. Paper presented during "The Dark Side of Personal Relationships: Old Problems Meet New Media" session at the Western States Communication Association in Anaheim, CA.

Works in Progress

Danielson, C. M. (2014). Attributions and coping behaviors communicated among bullied students: An analysis of bullying blogs. Thesis successfully defended on April 10, 2014.

Guest Lectures

Danielson, C. M. (2013, November). Back to school means back to bullies: What to do? Research presented during Dr. McManus' Issues in Interpersonal Communication undergraduate course at UNLV.

Danielson, C. M. (2013, November). The patriarchal and ideological messages featured in *Seventeen Magazine's* online website: Implications and future directions. Research presented during Dr. Engstrom's Communication Between the Sexes undergraduate course at UNLV.

Teaching Experience

University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Graduate Teaching Assistant

Fall 2012-May 2014

- Experience teaching public speaking as part of the basic course requirements for undergraduate students
- Experience with team teaching in a large lecture/small lab format
- Responsible for 75 students among three sections per semester
- Responsible for developing lectures, activities, rubrics, and exam questions, along with classroom management
- Responsible for grading student performance of oral speeches and written assignments, as well as recording attendance, participation, and grades
- Emphasis was placed on creating a comfortable and supportive classroom environment for many students with high communication apprehension

- Experience developing, maintaining, and integrating online learning through WebCampus

Part-time Instructor of Record

Summer 2013, Summer 2014

- Experience teaching public speaking as part of the basic course requirements for undergraduate students
- Independently taught 25 students in accordance with department standards
- Responsible for all aspects of curriculum development, including PowerPoint presentations, classroom assignments and activities, multi-media presentations, and tests
- Responsible for grading student performance of oral speeches and written assignments, as well as recording attendance, participation, and grades

Research Experience

University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Research Assistant under the Direction of Dr. Sahlstein-Parcell

Summer 2013-Fall 2013

- Responsible for coding a qualitative content analysis about the communication strategies of deployed military members with their families during and after deployment

Community Service Experience

- Nevada Public Radio sustaining member
- USO volunteer and charitable donator
- Goodwill volunteer and charitable donator