

Running Title: Perceptions of Bullying

Children's Perceptions of Bullying Situations:  
Factors Influencing Peer Interventions

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# PERCEPTIONS OF BULLYING

## ABSTRACT

MINCHOFF, ALLISON Children's Perceptions of Bullying Situations:  
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Previous research is inconclusive as to whether racial biases are prominent in elementary school children and whether gender influences the children's perceptions of a bullying situation. Since both bullying and racial discrimination are of increased concern, I investigated how children perceive ambiguous situations that could be considered deliberate bullying or an accident, as a function of the gender, race, and reputation of the potential bully. Participants were asked to read three brief scenarios, each accompanied by a picture of the potential bully, and completed a questionnaire regarding how positive they would rate the actor, how negative they would rate the actor, and how likely they would say the actor was an actual bully. The scenarios involved ambiguous bullying or helping behaviors, and the pictures varied among participants according to race and gender. I hypothesized that participants would be more likely to perceive the actor negatively and as a bully when the actor was a boy compared to a girl, the actor was Black compared to White, and when the actor had a bad reputation compared to a good reputation. Results showed no significant differences as a factor of the potential bully's gender or race. There was a significant effect of reputation, such that participants were more likely to report negative traits about the actor and more likely to consider them an actual bully if they had a bad reputation. There was an interesting but non-significant trend in the interaction between race and reputation. Implications for intervention techniques are discussed.

## Children's Perceptions of Bullying Situations: Factors Influencing Peer Interventions

Bullying has become an increased concern in the past decade with a large increase in victimization numbers. A reported 22% of the population has reported having been a victim of bullying (Mayes et al., 2014). Bullying is an important behavior to monitor because it has several negative psychological consequences (Mayes et al., 2014). For example, bullying is positively correlated with suicide in the general population and suicide is currently the third leading cause of death in children ages ten to nineteen (Mayes et al., 2014). Racism also continues to be a controversial issue in the United States today. Recently, there has been an influx of racial discrimination instances in the news, including police brutality, burning of Black churches in the south, and various shootings of individuals of color. Many unarmed Black individuals are being shot by police officers for no other reason than racial profiling and discrimination. In June of 2015, an individual shot dead nine people during a church service at one of the oldest Black churches in the United States, in Charleston, South Carolina (Horowitz, Corasaniti, & Southall, 2015). After investigation, he confessed that he was hoping to start a race war (Mosendz, 2015). While many people like to think that racial discrimination acts are decreasing, it is evident that there is still a significant number of deadly discrimination acts occurring and that people make snap decisions regarding race. The purpose of the current study was to determine whether bullying and racism have a significant interaction. Specifically, this study examines the factors that students take into account when they perceive a situation for potential bullying and whether racist beliefs are an important influence in bullying situations.

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Bullying is characterized by someone being exposed, repeatedly over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more students (Olweus, 1995). Those negative actions may manifest themselves in physical contact, words, gestures, intentional exclusion, or imbalance of strength (Olweus, 1995). Bullying situations include a victim or group of victims and a bully or group of bullies. Victims are typically characterized by anxious, insecure, cautious, sensitive, and quiet personalities. Bullies, on the contrary, are typically more aggressive towards peers and adults, impulsive, and have little empathy (Olweus, 1995). As students get older, they are more likely to feel that bullies are feared but popular and less likely to feel safe at school because of the presence of bullying (Bradshaw, Sawyer & O'Brennan, 2007). There appears to be a peak in bullying behaviors that occurs during the middle school years (Bradshaw et al., 2007), which is why the current study chose this developmental stage to explore.

Bullying can be considered a subset of aggressive behavior. Aggressive behavior is defined as negative acts carried out intentionally to harm another person (Smith et al., 2002). This poses an issue for cross-cultural evaluation, because every culture has a different understanding of terms. Smith et al. (2002) had fourteen different countries do an international comparison of these terms and found that although different countries did not agree on understanding of one concept, most of the responses could be grouped into few categories, or types of bullying. They also found a developmental trend in how children can understand bullying, suggesting that children cannot distinguish bullying from aggression until about age fourteen (Smith et al., 2002). This is significant for the current study, which focuses on children aged slightly younger than this projected age.

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In a bullying scenario, there are four possible groups that an individual may fall into. One could be considered a bully, a victim, a bully/victim, or an uninvolved person. The bully refers to the person performing the aggressive acts. The victim is the person that those acts are being performed on. The bully/victim is someone who has experience with both bullying and victimization. A Scandinavian study of grades one through nine, whose results were applied to the United States, calculated that over 5 million children grades one through nine are involved as bully/victims during a school year (Olweus, 1995). The uninvolved person is someone who has experience with neither bullying nor victimization. Mayes et al.'s (2014) sample had very similar percentages of each group compared to the mean percentages overall. They reported bullies making up about 7% of the population, victims making up about 20%, bully/victims making up about 7% and the other 65% identifying as uninvolved (Mayes et al., 2014).

Another category of bullying behaviors could be prosocial or helping behavior, which is more like the opposite of bullying. In comparison to bully and victim groups, prosocial groups showed greater empathic awareness (Warden & Mackinnon, 2003). Prosocial individuals were found to be more likely to achieve popular status and less likely to receive rejected status compared to the other groups. Bully/victims were actually the most rejected group, because they did not efficiently fit in to either the bully group or the victim group (Warden & Mackinnon, 2003). Prosocial individuals tended to suggest more possible negative outcomes than bullies did and were more likely to suggest a directly assertive solution to bullying scenarios. There are many different bystander responses that individuals can employ in the situation of bullying, which are important to teach and understand when planning an intervention program from bullying in schools.

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Girls were more likely to use prosocial responses, like intervening directly, telling an adult or helping the victim (Trach et al., 2010). Keeping prosocial behaviors in mind can be helpful in looking at how race may interact with bullying. If there is no negative association between bullying behaviors and race, for example, there might be an association between helping behaviors and race.

It is important to study bullying among school children, because school staff members greatly underestimate the number of students that are involved with frequent bullying (Bradshaw et al., 2007). If teachers are reporting significantly lower numbers of bullying incidences at their schools than the students are reporting, it suggests that the teachers are not aware of the situations and, therefore, cannot accurately help their students. This is extremely problematic, because the most commonly cited locations for bullying to occur are the classroom, the hallway, and the playground, all of which typically should have teachers overseeing the activity (Bradshaw et al., 2007). As students get older and move into middle and high school, staff appear to support retaliation as a healthy way to deal with bullying, with over 7% of staff saying it is okay to hit someone if they hit you first (Bradshaw et al., 2007). Although this number is significantly lower than the number of students that find retaliation appropriate, this does not set a good example for the students. Many teachers feel they have effective strategies and a good efficacy for dealing with bullying situations, however, most students reported feeling like the school did not do enough intervention or made the situation worse (Bradshaw et al., 2007). The current study could be helpful for schools to get a better understanding of how bullying manifests itself and what factors may influence children's perceptions of bullying, especially since their perceptions seem to greatly differ from the

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perceptions of the staff. Perhaps the disconnection between student and staff perceptions of bullying is leading to the increase in victimization numbers, as bullies are getting away with this behavior more easily.

It is important to understand that bullying can manifest itself in many different ways, so each situation of bullying may look drastically different from the next. There are several different types of bullying. The majority of bullying behaviors can be categorized as physical bullying, relational bullying, verbal bullying, or cyber bullying. According to Bradshaw, Waasdorp & Johnson (2015), the most common type of bullying among high school students (grades nine through twelve), is verbal bullying (39.4%), followed by relational (24.5%), physical (17.5%), and then cyber bullying (11.8%). Verbal bullying involves name-calling, teasing, making fun of the victim, and/or making gestures and inappropriate comments towards them (Bradshaw et al., 2015). Relational victimization involves being the frequent target of peers' behaviors that attempt to harm the victim through manipulation of relationships, threatening to withdraw affection from them, excluding them from social groups, and spreading nasty rumors (Crick, Casas & Nelson, 2002). Physical bullying refers to the traditional kicking, shoving, pushing, hitting, or stealing towards a target repeatedly (Bradshaw et al., 2015) and appears to become the less popular type as children get older (Raskauskas & Stoltz, 2007). Lastly, cyber or electronic bullying uses electronics to taunt, insult, threaten, intimidate or harass a peer (Raskauskas & Stoltz, 2007). The most common platform for cyber bullying was text messaging (Raskauskas & Stoltz, 2007).

With the addition of the electronic bullying, many studies are beginning to look at multiple bullying scenarios, where there is a high probability for having multiple and

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different types of bullying experiences (Bradshaw et al., 2015). The Internet has brought a new opportunity for bullying, such that traditional bullies tend to start offline and then sometimes move to online bullying as well, creating more fear among those victims, as they can no longer escape (Raskauskas & Stoltz, 2007). A relationship has been shown between being a victim at school and then becoming a cyber bully at home as a way to retaliate from one's own victimization (Raskauskas & Stoltz, 2007). While cyber bullying has become more popular and more prevalent with the increase in technology and the Internet, face-to-face bullying is still more frequent (Lapidot-Lefler, 2015).

The importance of understanding bullying situations and how children perceive the situations based on certain factors revolves around the significant negative affects that bullying has on individuals later in life. Bullying from peers can disrupt adolescent emotional and social development (Raskauskas & Stoltz, 2007). It has been shown to impact depressive symptoms, self-esteem, self-blame, fear, and sadness (Raskauskas & Stoltz, 2007; Raskauskas, 2010). Bullying, and especially cyber bullying, is positively correlated with sadness, hopelessness, and depression, such that the more an individual is bullied, the sadder, more hopeless and more depressed they are. Electronic bullying at home also impacts an individual's desire to go to school, such that they are more afraid the more they are bullied (Raskauskas & Stoltz, 2007). These children that are electronically bullied at home may fear that they will also be victimized at school. Children who experienced multiple peer victimizations report more depressive symptoms, lower self-esteem, and more self-blame than those that only experience one form of bullying (Raskauskas, 2010). While different forms of bullying increased the negative effects that the bullying had on an individual, the same was not found to be true



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in relation to different locations of bullying. Individuals that were bullied in school and on the way to or from school had no more negative effects from the bullying than did individuals that were only bullied at school (Raskauskas, 2010). Bullies and bully/victims also appear to have lower levels of emotional warmth and socioeconomic status, and higher levels of rejection, especially among bully/victims. Uninvolved groups tend to have significantly higher socioeconomic statuses than individuals in any of the other groups (Veenstra et al., 2005). Due to the fact that bullies create all of these negative feelings, individuals tend to associate bullies with being disliked (Veenstra et al., 2005). Lastly, there appears to be some level of criminal tie to bullying behavior, such that 35%-40% of boy bullies in grades six through nine are convicted of at least three crimes by the age of twenty-four (Olweus, 1995). This is a very significant consequence and gives further evidence for the importance of understanding bullying scenarios in childhood.

With a clearer understanding of bullying and the consequences that victims of it must encounter, we can examine how different characteristics influence the experiences that the individual has. The current study focuses on gender, race, and reputation differences. Before delving into the current study, we examine the prior literature regarding each of these variables. There is a decent amount of literature on how both gender and race affect bullying, however the research is indecisive.

### *Gender Differences*

The research on gender differences in bullying situations is not conclusive. Some researchers argue that girls bully more than boys, but that they do so in more subtle ways (Olweus, 1995). Other studies, however, show that boys are more likely to bully and that girls are more likely to be the victims (Seals & Young, 2003; Veenstra, 2005). In one

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study, boys were two times more likely to be identified as bullies than females were, suggesting these more recent trends of boys being more involved with bullying is true. Research has found a difference in the mode of bullying most typically used as a function of gender, such that girls are more likely to be associated with relational victimization or bullying and boys are more likely to be associated with physical victimization or bullying (Bradshaw et al., 2015; Crick, Cass & Nelson, 2002; Trach et al., 2010). While boys are more likely to physically bully, they are also more likely to be the target of physical bullying. Girls, on the contrary, use relational bullying more and are more likely to be the targets of relational bullying, especially within female-female interactions (Crick et al., 2002). These findings lead me to think that participants in the current study will be more likely to perceive a situation as bullying if there is a boy actor.

There was an interesting effect of gender on bully/victims, such that the probability of boys being bully/victims was 2.5 times higher than the probability of girls being bully/victims (Veenstra et al., 2005). While boys were much higher on the bully/victim classification, girls were 1.74 times more likely to be victimized compared to boys (Veenstra et al., 2005). Male victims reported more bullying by individual male, group male, or gender combined groups rather than female majority groups (Seals & Young, 2003). When individuals did bully alone, their target was typically one of the same gender as themselves, whereas when they bullied as a group, there were typically many more females involved in the groups (Seals & Young, 2003).

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Lehman (2014) looked specifically at academics-influenced bullying victimization and the gender differences among those associations. Using a study of sophomore year high school students from almost 600 schools, they were able to conclude how time spent on homework and GPA impacted bully victimization for males and females separately. He found that with every unit increase on homework, there was a 10% increase in the expected number of reported bullying victimizations for that individual (Lehman, 2014). Similarly, with every unit increase of GPA, the individual's expected number of bullying victimizations increased by 11% for males and actually decreased victimizations for females. Time on homework and GPA proved better predictors of bully victimizations among males than females (Lehman, 2014). Increased time spent on homework and increased GPA for males also increased the chances that they would be bullied and picked on, suggesting femininity to academics (Lehman, 2014). These findings are especially relevant, because in a school setting this could become a serious problem. Students should want to strive to do their best, get a high GPA, and work hard on their homework, but if that is manifesting itself in being bullied, children will be guided away from those behaviors.

Based on the previous research regarding gender and bullying, in the current study, I hypothesize that participants will be more likely to identify the actor as a bully if he is a boy. If girls are typically less involved with bullying, the participant might not think of bullying as a possibility. Furthermore, the situations in the current study are mostly examples of physical bullying, which are more frequently associated with boys. Participants might be more likely to think the situation was an accident if it is a girl actor, since girls typically do not push, kick, and shove as often as boys.

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As the current study begins to look at the interrelation between bullying and racism, it is crucial to examine the previous literature on racism and discrimination, especially among middle school children. One of the biggest questions that researchers debate regarding racism, is how it pertains to young children. Is racism an innate characteristic that individuals are born with (Doyle & Aboud, 1995), or is it a social construct learned over time (Telzer et. al, 2013). Another interest in racism research is the way in which racial schemas guide an individual's interpretation of ambiguous situations (Correll et. al, 2002; Sagar & Schofield, 1980). With the increase of bystander intervention and helping behavior research, more focus has been placed on the influence race has in the decision to intervene or help an individual in need, which could be a type of discrimination depending on the results (Kunstman & Plant, 2008). The purpose of this study is to investigate peer inter-racial interactions as they pertain to ambiguous bullying situations, as a factor of gender, race, and reputation.

### *Racial Differences*

Like with any discussion of race, it is important to discuss cultural differences and how those may impact the present study. The way that different cultures parent could tell us a lot about how their children will perceive or act in certain situations. Asian American and African American parents tend to favor corporal punishment, or spanking, more than European American or Hispanic families (Jambunathan, Burts, & Pierce, 2000; Kotchick & Forehand, 2002). If African American parents tend to use more physical punishment, their children might view that as the best way to deal with their problems and will, therefore, be more likely to physically bully someone they do not get along with at school. Perhaps this situation could go in the other direction though, if the participant

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perceiving the situation understood and knew about that cultural difference. They may excuse the actor for hitting the victim because they attribute it to their culture. Some other differences among cultures is that African American mothers tend to have lower empathetic awareness for their children's needs, which could trickle down into their children's behaviors towards peers at school (Jambunathan et al., 2000). Parents with lower socioeconomic status often must rely on adverse conditions, like dangerous communities, which causes them to use more physical parenting (Kotchick & Forehand, 2002). Perhaps children in these conditions see physical aggression more and will, therefore, do it more often with their peers at school.

Some of the early research suggests that older children are less prejudiced than younger children (Doyle & Aboud, 1995). In this study, they looked at 6-year-old kindergarten students and then followed up on students of that generation again when they were in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. They used the Preschool Racial Attitude Measure (PRAM II) and a multiple-response racial attitude measure (MRA) to measure racial prejudice towards Black children, and found that prejudice is high in kindergarteners, suggesting young children are not very tolerant (Doyle & Aboud, 1995). They discovered that while older children were less prejudiced than younger children, the favorable-White and unfavorable-Black evaluations did not decline with age. Rather, unfavorable-White and favorable-Black evaluations increased with age, suggesting that age increased the child's understanding that racially different perspectives are both acceptable (Doyle & Aboud, 1995). By the third grade, half of the students were no longer classified as prejudiced anymore, but this could be due to learning better strategies to mask their beliefs.

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Telzer et al. (2013), however, finds the opposite outcome in children using a neuroscience technique. By monitoring fMRIs, they examined the neurodevelopmental path of the amygdala's response to an African American face in children age 4 to 16. Contrary to Doyle & Aboud's (1995) findings, they found that neural biases to race are not innate and race is learned over time (Telzer et al., 2013). Amygdala sensitivity to faces of African Americans was not evident in early childhood but seemed to emerge during adolescence, suggesting that there was a positive correlation of the importance or noticing of race and age (Telzer et al., 2013). Individuals with greater peer diversity had a weakened response to the African American faces, suggesting that heterogeneous friend groups could help decrease racial prejudice. The response to race is likely a result of a developmental process in which the amygdala acquires emotional knowledge over time, becoming more sensitive to African American faces, a learned cultural knowledge (Telzer et al., 2013). If discrimination is a social constructed bias, proper bullying intervention programs could focus on decreasing the bias starting at a young age so that racial bullying does not occur.

Due to the fact that there is no clear answer as to when racial beliefs are developed, the current study works to determine whether or not middle school students hold racial beliefs or biases. Doyle & Aboud (1995) suggest that discrimination begins to decrease by third grade, while Telzer et al. (2013) argues that that is the period where racial bias really begins. By analyzing middle school students in the current study, we should be able to get an idea of which finding is more accurate, or at least know whether these beliefs are present at that age. Since middle school is also an important time in the increase of bullying victimizations (Bradshaw et al., 2007), it was decided that the end of

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elementary school and the beginning of middle school would be the prime age group to focus on.

Previous research has shown evidence that bullying and discrimination are associated with each other and co-occur in adolescents (Garnett et al., 2014). Any discrimination has been showed to increase depressive symptoms, self-harm, and suicide ideation in the victim. This is problematic given the fact that over 50% of ninth through twelfth grade students in Boston public schools have reported at least one discriminatory experience in the past year (Garnett et al., 2014). On a slightly more positive note, while racial discrimination did result in higher depressive symptoms, it did not result in any higher self-harm or suicide ideation experiences compared to discrimination categories as a whole (Garnett et al., 2014).

Although there were no differences in victimization rates based on ethnicity, there did appear to be a difference in bullying and perceived bullying and victimization rates based on race/ethnicity. Bullying was most common among Blacks (Connell et al., 2015). This leads me to believe that children will perceive Black actors as more likely to be a bully than White actors in the current study, because it is more common. Black participants were more likely to report their own actual bullying but perceived bullying significantly less than other race/ethnicity groups (Connell et al., 2015). This could relate to my study in that Black participants may perceive the ambiguous situation as less likely to be bullying than non-Black participants, according to this finding. It was interesting to see how a school's diversity may impact bullying, such that more diverse schools typically have more bullying by White students at least, as a way for them to keep their power (Connell et al., 2015). This was surprising because I would have thought that more

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diverse schools had more interaction with different races and ethnicities and would, therefore, think that they were more similar. This could be important for my study based on how diverse my school samples are. This is relevant to the current study, because the current study does not explore the race of the victim, it only looks at the race of the actor and knowing that there is prior research explaining Black individuals to be more associated with bullying helps support my gender hypothesis.

Contrary to the findings of Connell et al. (2015), there is also evidence that there are differences in victimization based on race. African American youths are more likely to be members of the victim or bully/victim groups than their peers (Goldweber, Waasdorp, Bradshaw, 2013). In addition, bully/victims are more likely to use race and skin color as a reason to bully others (Goldweber et al., 2013). There tends to be an association with racial minorities and urbanicity, such that minorities tend to live in urban areas more than they live in rural ones. Therefore, it makes sense that urbanicity would be associated with an increased likelihood of being bullied about race (Goldweber et al., 2013). Urban individuals are more likely to be victims or bully/victims (Goldweber et al., 2013). This suggests that the victimizations of urban individuals, especially racial minority urban individuals, may be centered on racial discriminations. This is another important factor to take into account in the present study, depending on the sample that is used. An urban sample may be more likely to show an impact of race on children's perceptions of the situations that may not be present among a rural sample.

An interesting intersection of sexual orientation, gender, and race/ethnicity in bullying and suicide ideation consequences of bullying experiences is evident in previous literature. Black and Hispanic heterosexual females are less likely to report bullying



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instances than White heterosexuals are (Mueller et al., 2015). This same finding is found among Black and Hispanic heterosexual males. Since this was found in both males and females, it suggests there might be a race effect on reporting bullying, such that Black individuals are less likely to report bullying. This may be related to their culture and different beliefs in what is acceptable to report or not. Further results that Black lesbians and bisexuals as well as Hispanic lesbians are just as likely as White heterosexual females to report bullying (Mueller et al., 2015) lead me to believe that the differences in reporting bullying are not a function of sexual orientation, but may better be explained by racial differences. White and Hispanic gays and bisexual males, however, are more likely than White heterosexual males to report bullying (Mueller et al., 2015), which supports that sexual orientation may play a more important factor among sexual minority males. This importance of sexual orientation playing a factor in the increase of reporting is also evident among White lesbian and bisexual females and Hispanic bisexual females, suggesting that sexual minorities are more likely to report bullying experiences than the sexual majority, despite gender or race (Mueller et al., 2015). Sexual minority males and females regardless of race or ethnicity are also more likely than White heterosexuals to report suicide ideation (Mueller et al., 2015). Among the sexual majority, race did play a factor for females, such that Black heterosexual females were more likely to report suicide ideation than White heterosexual females (Mueller et al., 2015). This was interesting, because according to Garnett et al. (2014), bullying is typically positively correlated with suicide ideation. In this case, Blacks were more less likely to report bullying but more likely to report suicide ideation.

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While there are evident racial differences in bullying, it is also interesting to examine whether these racial differences manifest themselves in helping, or prosocial behaviors as well. If the racial differences occur in both negative and positive settings, there may be a greater chance that the differences are a result of racial discrimination or racial biases, rather than a simply interaction of race and bullying. In an older study of 40 White undergraduate females, Gaertner (1975) looked at helping behaviors as they relate to how the bystander may perceive the degree to which help is needed. He staged a scene in which a confederate in the next room over, whom the participant saw walk in, needed help. The study examined the frequency and the length of time it would take for participants to help the victim (Gaertner, 1975). Overall, Black victims were helped less than White victims were helped and were helped after a longer period than White victims (Gaertner, 1975). Unique differences were also found as a function of whether the bystander was alone and was the only witness versus if there was a group of bystanders. When the participant witnessed the bullying alone, they were equally as likely to help Black and White victims, however, it took two times longer for them to intervene with the Black victim than with the White victim (Gaertner, 1975). In situations where the bystander was not the only witness and there were other witnesses there together, participants were less likely to help the victims than they would have been in the alone condition (Gaertner, 1975). This decrease in helping behavior was more significant for Blacks than Whites, such that in the together condition, participants were more likely and much quicker to help a White victim than a Black victim (Gaertner, 1975). Participants reported the reasoning for the decrease in helping behaviors to be due to the fact that they judged the situation based on the other bystanders who appeared to think the Black victim

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was less seriously injured than the White victim (Gaertner, 1975). These findings are very critical in supporting the idea that racial discrimination does exist, because not only do Black individuals seem to get bullied more (Goldweber et al., 2013), they are also helped less in situations where they are bullied (Gaertner, 1975). The current study attempts to explore whether this can also apply to looking at the bully instead of the victim, such that if they perceive they are alone with a Black bully they would be more likely to help than if they perceive that there is a group of other students that also witnessed the bullying behavior. Although the present study does not specifically analyze and focus on helping behaviors, there is some level of prosocial analysis involved.

In a more recent study on helping behaviors, very similar findings were reported from participants, including both males and females (Kunstman & Plant, 2008). Overall, White participants were more likely to help in high emergency conditions than low emergency conditions (Kunstman & Plant, 2008). Although race was a non-significant factor, it was very close to significant and did present an interesting trend. In high emergency situations, White participants were more likely to help a White victim than a Black victim, however, in low emergency conditions there was no difference in the percent of victims receiving help based on race (Kunstman & Plant, 2008). Again, although this was non-significant, it presents a serious concern for Black individuals in emergency situations. In high emergency situations, the helping response time was much quicker than that of low emergency situations, and the race effect was significant among White participants (Kunstman & Plant, 2008). In high emergencies, White individuals are two times slower to help a Black person than they are a White person (Kunstman & Plant, 2008), just like was found by Gaertner, 1975 over thirty years prior. In low

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emergency situations, however, participants were equally quick to respond despite racial identity of the victim. White individuals perceived the situation as less severe and felt less of a responsibility to help when the person in need of help was Black compared to when the person was White (Kunstman & Plant, 2008). Black participants, on the other hand, did not differ in how likely they were to help, how quick they were to help, or how severe they perceived the situation based on race, such that they were equally likely to help Black victims as they were to help White ones (Kunstman & Plant, 2008). These findings suggest that White individuals may hold racial biases but that those biases are not evident in Black individuals. Furthermore, Black individuals do not show any trends of racial biases. Although the findings of both this study and the Gaertner (1975) study were based on research of undergraduate college students, the current study explores if these same findings occur in younger children's school bullying situations.

The following studies take into account all of the findings from the above studies and better lead into the present study. Research has found that individuals hold a stereotypic association between African Americans and violence, aggression, and meanness (Correll et al., 2002; Eberhardt et al., 2004; Sager & Schofield, 1980). This is important for the current study because if bullying is associated with aggression, this might mean that there is a stereotypical association between African Americans and bullying as well. Correll et al. (2002) investigated how a target's ethnicity can effect one's decision to shoot the target or not using a videogame that simulates a situation that a police officer confronted with an ambiguous but potentially aggressive target must decide to shoot or not. The findings showed that the decisions that individuals made were strongly related to different schemas that they held related to factors about the target.

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Overall, participants made a quicker correct decision to shoot when there was a gun than to not shoot when there was no danger (Correll et al., 2002). Further, there was a racial component, such that participants fired at an armed person quicker if they were African American than if they were White and they did not shoot at unarmed White individuals faster than unarmed African American individuals (Correll et al., 2002). This led participants to make more false alarms than misses, such that they were more likely to shoot an unarmed African American and not shoot an armed White individual. Correll et al. (2002) explains these findings with the idea of decision criterion. This is the idea that there is a threshold that helps decide to shoot or not and the decision criterion for a certain task can be different for everyone. In this study of White undergraduate students, there appeared to be a lower decision criterion needed to shoot an African American than there was to shoot a White individual (Correll et al., 2002). Based on this finding, the current study explores the decision criterion for perceptions of bullying situations. It can be hypothesized that the decision criteria to judge the ambiguous situation as actual bullying would be lower for Black actors than it will be for White actors, such that participants will think Black actors are actual bullies for doing less aggressive things than White actors do. Interestingly, participants in the Correll et al. (2002) study that scored higher on the prejudice scales were no more biased during the shoot or not game. However, individuals that had more contact with African Americans in their day-to-day lives were more likely to have a shooter bias. This showed that awareness of a stereotype itself may produce bias in an individual whether they think that they are prejudiced or not (Correll et al., 2002). The results also suggest that participants use racist schemas when playing the game. These schemas may also be present in the current study.

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A schema is essentially a mental concept developed from past experiences that informs a person what to expect from certain situations. A continuation of schema presence is the idea that social groups can activate concepts and vice versa (Eberhardt et al., 2004). The mere presence of a person can lead one to think about certain concepts that that person's social group is typically associated with, for example, the presence of a Black man might lead one to think about violence or criminality (Eberhardt et al., 2004). Undergraduate male students were primed with a Black face, a White face, or were given no prime and they were asked to distinguish what the object pictured was as quickly as possible as it got clearer and clearer as time went on. Participants that were given Black face primes were able to detect crime-relevant objects much quicker than the White face prime or the no prime conditions (Eberhardt et al., 2004). In addition, when primed with a Black face, it took participants less time to detect crime related objects than it did for them to detect the crime-irrelevant objects. For the White face prime condition, the results were opposite, such that it took longer for them to detect crime relevant objects (Eberhardt et al., 2004). As this study suggests that racial primes can cause a difference in how individuals detect the real world, the present study explores whether racial primes will lead to different detections or perceptions of bullying.

Evidence showed that activation of a race prime facilitated identification of crime related objects. Findings took this even further to show that activation of crime concepts can also facilitate identification of racial individuals (Eberhardt et al., 2004). When presented with a crime related prime, participants were able to locate the dot in the Black face location faster than when the dot was in the White face location (Eberhardt et al., 2004). They also directed their attention to the Black male face when crime was activated

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over 350ms faster than if there was no prime, suggesting that the crime prime facilitated attentional direction to the Black face. Using this finding together with the previously cited findings from this study, it is clear that bi-directionality occurs between crime and Black faces and Black faces and crime (Eberhardt et al., 2004).

Additional explorations of the schema and prime relationships led to the finding that the associations were not specific to adverse primes. Stereotypes can influence visual attention regardless of emotion (Eberhardt et al., 2004). It was discovered that if primed with basketball instead of with crime, participants were still able to identify the dot faster when it was in the Black face location (Eberhardt et al., 2004). When primed with something associated with Black stereotypes, the prime pushes Black faces into the footlights of attention so that they are more quickly detected, which is essentially the same as a schema. This may impact the current study because perhaps the visual of the potential bully will prime participants about the race of the actor and if the actor is Black, the participant may be more likely to send the schema of aggression, violence, and criminality to the footlights of their attention. If this negative stereotype of Black individuals is in the attentional view of the participant, they will most likely rate the situation as more aggressive.

Although much older than many of the previously cited studies, Sagar & Schofield's (1980) study explores whether these negative stereotypes that shift to the forefront of an individual's attention have an impact on daily life interactions. This study used 6<sup>th</sup> grade boys with an equal distribution of Black and White students. They found that racial stereotypes and cultural differences do influence interpretations of ambiguous social behaviors. Participants were presented with four common ambiguous interactions,

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such as a bump in the hall or using another's pencil without asking, each of them accompanied by one of four stimuli representing different racial permutations. They were then asked to rate adjectives of the actor's behavior and probable positive and negative characteristics of both the actor and the target in the interaction (Sagar & Schofield, 1980). Results showed that subjects rated behaviors of Black actors more mean and threatening than identical behaviors done by a White actor (Sagar & Schofield, 1980). Black actors were seen as only a little bit more threatening than White actors, but White targets were considered much less threatening than equally passive Black targets, suggesting that the decision criterion for a target to be seen as not threatening, is much higher for Black targets (Sagar & Schofield, 1980). The target's race did not significantly influence the participant's judgment of the actor's behaviors, which is why the current study chose to leave out the manipulation of target characteristics and focused solely on differing characteristics of the potential bully. It was interesting to find that these more negative ratings of Black actors' behaviors were coming from both Black and White subjects, suggesting that Black participants have internalized the negative stereotypes society has about them (Sagar & Schofield, 1980). The correlations were significantly stronger among White participants' ratings, however. This data agrees with that of Correll et al. (2002) in that, schemas from society can affect possible biases that interfere with how the individual perceives another depending on racial identification.

In general, both Black and White subjects agreed that the actors were ruder, meaner, more thoughtless, more threatening, un-friendlier, and less likable than the targets in the situations, regardless of the race permutations (Sagar & Schofield, 1980). In addition, White participants thought that the actors were stronger than the targets and the



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targets were more fearful than the actors, but this finding was not significant among the Black participants (Sagar & Schofield, 1980). The current study is structured off of the Sagar & Schofield's (1980) procedure. The current study incorporates how these racial stereotypes and cultural differences influence interpretations of ambiguous situations into specific potential bullying scenarios.

As was discovered in previous research, gender and race may help predict a child's perception of a situation, since there are clear differences among these factors in bullying situations. There does not seem to be a definite answer about which gender tends to bully more, girls or boys, with research supporting both cases. There is a significantly clear gender difference in the mode of bullying that individuals use, with boys being more associated with traditional physical bullying and girls being more associated with relational or social bullying. Prior research supports both, racism being an innate quality that you are born with and decreases over time, as well as, racism is a socially constructed phenomenon that is learned over time and does not really develop until adolescence. There are some fairly distinctive trends in research on racial discrimination, such that Blacks tend to be given more negative connotations, like being mean and threatening, more likely to be bullies, and more likely a violent criminal. Individuals tend to help Blacks less frequently and less quickly in emergency situations and tend to have lower decision criterion for them in negative situations. Recent research is growing to support the co-occurrence between bullying and racial discrimination, and the present study hopes to add to that literature by exploring how different factors impact whether a potential bully is considered an actual bully or not. The factors that the present study focuses on are gender, race, and reputation of the actor. There does not appear to be a lot

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of prior research regarding how reputation may impact bullying situations. Raskauskas (2010) saw that some victims developed a reputation for being a victim and were therefore likely to get bullied more often. The current study explores whether this may also be true for bullies, such that if they have a bad reputation, they will be perceived as a bully more often, and they will partake in bullying behaviors more than those with a good reputation.

Based on previous research, the current study measured children's perceptions of ambiguous situations that could be viewed as bullying or could be taken as a mistake. Like Sagar & Schofield (1980), participant children in fifth and sixth grade were presented with several situations each accompanied by a picture of the prospective potential bully. Following the description of the scenario, participants were asked to complete the student packet, which included a measure of how positive they would rate the actor and how negative they would rate the actor, a measure of how likely they thought the actor was an actual bully, and an optional demographics page. Participants were asked to respond to the questions using a rating scale as to how much they believed the statement to be true about the actor. Since Sagar & Schofield (1980) found the victim characteristics to not be influential, the present study focuses solely on characteristics of the actor that may influence the situation. Those characteristics that the study analyzes are gender, race, and reputation.

There were three main hypotheses in the current study. It was hypothesized that gender, race, and reputation would all influence a child's perception of the ambiguous bullying situation. It was first hypothesized, that children would perceive the actor as having more negative and less positive traits and as being more likely to be an actual

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bully, if the actor was a boy in comparison to if the actor was a girl. Based on the fact that girls are more associated with relational bullying than physical bullying (Crick et al., 2002), and the majority of the scenarios in the current study deal with physical bullying, I expected children to perceive the situation to be less likely a mistake when a boy was the actor. Additionally, it was hypothesized that children would rate the potential bully as more negative and less positive if the actor was Black compared to White, based on previous findings (Correll et al., 2002; Eberhardt et al., 2004; Sagar & Schofield, 1980). Furthermore, it was hypothesized that the actor will be perceived as more likely to be an actual bully, based on contextual schemas that come to the footlight when primed with a Black face (Eberhardt et al., 2004). It was also hypothesized that an actor was more likely to be considered a bully and be characterized by more negative traits than positive traits, if the actor has a bad reputation for bullying. If someone already has a name for himself or herself as a bully, the decision criterion to call them an actual bully may be much lower than someone that has a good reputation. Further results from this study can be used to create efficient and effective intervention strategies to help prevent so many bullying incidences occurring.

### *Hypotheses:*

It is expected that children will perceive actors in an ambiguous situation, that could be bullying or could be a mistake, as being characterized by more negative traits and less positive traits and more likely to be considered an actual bully, if the actor...

1. Is a boy compared to a girl.
2. Is Black compared to White.
3. Has a bad reputation compared to a good reputation.

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### Method

#### Participants

Sixty-seven fifth and sixth grade students, from a central Massachusetts public school district, took part in this study. In this district, fifth graders were part of the Elementary School and sixth graders were part of the Middle School, so two schools from the district participated. There were 26 participants from the 5th grade and 41 participants from the 6<sup>th</sup> grade class ( $M_{\text{age}} = 11.28$ ,  $SD = 0.70$ ). Of the sixty-seven participants, sixty-three of them reported their gender, and it was reported that 32 were boys (47.8%) and 30 were girls (30%). The participant sample was almost homogenously White, with only 1 student identifying as Hispanic/Latino and 1 student identifying as Asian. Students' beliefs about whether bullying was a problem at their school varied from not at all ( $N=9$ ) to a big problem ( $N=17$ ), with the majority of participants believing it was a little bit of a problem (58.2%,  $N=39$ ). When asked specifically about their experiences with bullying, 32 participants reported experience as a physical victim (50%), 41 participants reported experience as a verbal victim (65.1%), 17 participants reported experience as a physical bully (26.2%), and only 13 participants reported experience as a verbal bully (20.0%).

#### Materials

The author created the questionnaire used in this study, similar to that used by Sagar & Sager (1980). The questionnaire contained 3 short scenarios each followed by 10 questions, as well as an optional demographics page that contained an additional 10 questions. Each scenario described an interaction between two characters that is found frequently in elementary and middle school settings. The scenarios were all ambiguous

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situations that could be considered a case of bullying or could be perceived as an accident. The scenarios that were portrayed are explained in more detail below and can also be seen in Appendixes C and D. The three stories were always presented in the same order, and were not counterbalanced.

Beside each scenario was a visual stimulus depicting just the head of the actor, or potential “bully” from the story. There were four different pictures used that varied across gender and race. There was a Black girl, a White girl, a Black boy, and a White boy character. The character stimulus was randomly assigned to each story and the stimuli varied throughout each participant’s questionnaire. These stimuli were used to manipulate race and gender in the stories. The third independent variable that was explored, reputation, was manipulated in story 2 by slightly changing one sentence in the story indicating whether the actor was recognized as someone who is always in the office for getting in trouble, or always on the bulletin board for helping out. The visual stimuli were pilot tested by a small group of students at Union College. There were 10 participants in the pilot study and they each rated 32 different versions of the stimuli on how happy, sad, mad, scary, and mean they looked. They also were asked to identify the race of each character. The purpose of this pilot test was to make sure the most neutral faces were being used and to insure that the races we wanted to portray were accurately being portrayed. The pilot test yielded results that a straight-line mouth was the most neutral and confirmed that the races were accurately portrayed. The 4 different stimuli, as well as which were used for each scenario, are shown in Appendix D.

Complete comparability between the different visual stimuli was necessary in order to be sure of an accurate attribution to the trait causing the results. Complete

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comparability was reached by photocopying line drawings of both a boy and a girl. The racial identities were changed as necessary by coloring in the drawing with either a brown or peach colored pencil. The eyes, nose, and mouth on all of the characters were kept exactly the same. Hair was consistent across race within each gender, such that all of the boy characters had the same color and cut of hair and all of the girl characters did as well. It is important to keep in mind that this was a difficult task due to other differences in racial cultures besides just skin color, such as facial shapes, hairstyles and hair colors. However, to keep the stimuli the most neutral and most comparable this step was taken.

The first story manipulated race and gender, meaning all four of the stimuli were used across participants on story 1. Story 1 read:

*The bell for lunch just rang and your class is in the hallway walking to the cafeteria. Student A (pictured to the right) was walking back to class and brushed shoulders with one of your classmates. Your classmate got pushed into the wall in front of you and Student A continued walking to class without looking back. Your classmate does not cry but seems to be in some pain.*

The second story manipulated race and reputation. Since gender was not being manipulated for this story, the gender was kept constant across all participants, such that every participant was shown a picture of a boy character. The character did differ, so that approximately half the participants saw a Black boy depicted and approximately half saw a White boy. Reputation was also manipulated in story 2. The good reputation condition read:

*Your class is just returning from lunch and it is time to sit in your seats to study math. As you are sitting down, you notice your classmate has tripped and fallen on the ground. You see Student B (pictured to the right) standing next to your classmate. You recognize Student B because his picture is always on the bulletin board for helping out a lot.*

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The bad reputation condition read the same except the last sentence was changed to “*you recognize Student B because you often see him in the office getting into trouble.*”

The third story was used as a filler story and was not analyzed during this study. It provided a more positive sounding scenario. This story manipulated both race and gender using all 4 different stimuli, as in Story 1. The text of Story 3 can be found in Appendix C. For the sake of this study, Story 3 will not be included in any of the results.

Participants were asked to use a 5-point Likert scale to answer the questions following each scenario. They were to choose the number on the scale that best represented how they felt. The scale consisted of 1 = *definitely not*, 2 = *probably not*, 3 = *maybe*, 4 = *probably yes*, and 5 = *definitely yes*. These questions were used to compose a positive trait score, a negative trait score, and a bully score all related to the potential “bully” in that corresponding story.

### *Positive and Negative Traits*

The positive and negative traits section of the questionnaire followed each of the scenarios. This section was comprised of 10 adjectives that potentially described the potential “bully” in the story. These adjectives included: mean, threatening, friendly, strong, weak, caring, thoughtless, harmless, aggressive, and nice. Each adjective was rated using the 5-point Likert scale described above, based on how much the participant thought each characteristic described the actor in the story.

After all of the data were gathered, in order to determine which adjectives tended to trend together to construct two separate variables, a positive one and a negative one, a correlation matrix was computed using the data from story 1. See Table 1 for the various correlations between the 10 adjectives from the first story. This correlation matrix

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showed that “mean” was significantly positively correlated with both “threatening” and “aggressive” (Table 1). However, “threatening” and “aggressive” were not significantly correlated with each other. Despite this finding, I decided to create the negative trait variable using these three characteristics. The Cronbach’s alpha was computed to test the reliability of this newly constructed “negative traits” measure and it was found that the internal consistency was  $\alpha = 0.59$  (Story 1) and  $\alpha = 0.90$  (Story 2). A participant’s scores on these three traits were averaged together to create the negative trait score. Based on this reliability score, if a participant gave an answer for at least one of these three adjectives, a negative trait score would be computed. A high score on this dimension meant that the participant perceived the potential “bully” as being meaner, more threatening, and more aggressive compared to if they had a low score.

The “positive traits” dimension was developed using the characteristic traits “friendly”, “caring”, and “nice”, which were all significantly positively correlated with each other in story 1 (Table 1). The Cronbach’s alpha for the positive trait dimension was  $\alpha = 0.67$  (Story 1) and  $\alpha = 0.95$  (Story 2). Like the negative trait score, the three characteristic trait scores were averaged together to produce the positive trait score. Again, as long as the participant responded to one of these adjectives, a positive trait score could be computed. A high score on this dimension means the participant perceived the potential “bully” as being friendlier, more caring, and nicer; an overall positive person.

### *Bully Dimension*

The second part of the questionnaire that followed each section was comprised of 9 questions regarding how the participant perceived the situation and what they would do



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in that situation (Appendix C). Some of the questions, such as “*would you tell your teacher what Student C did?*” were used as filler questions that could be analyzed further in a later study. For the purposes of this study, I was interested in the questions that analyzed the participant’s perception of whether the potential “bully” was actually a bully or not. The questions that addressed this were: *Do you think it was Student A’s fault that your classmate fell?* “*Do you think that Student A is a bully?*” “*Do you think that Student A bumped your classmate on purpose?*” and “*Do you think that Student A was trying to hurt your classmate?*” After data were collected, each participant’s responses for these four questions were averaged together to produce a Bully dimension score, since the responses to these questions were all positively correlated (Table 2). A higher score on this dimension meant that the participant perceived the potential “bully” as more likely a bully. A Cronbach’s alpha was computed using data from story 1 and revealed the internal consistency of this new Bully dimension was  $\alpha = 0.71$ .

Since the questions following story 2 were slightly different to better correspond with the story, the Bully dimension for story 2 was constructed separately, using the same process. This dimension used the questions: “*Would you blame Student B for what happened to your classmate?*” “*Would you tell your friends that it was Student B’s fault?*” “*Do you think that Student B is a bully?*” “*Do you think that Student B tripped your classmate on purpose?*” and “*Do you think that Student B was trying to hurt your classmate?*” which were all positively correlated with each other (Table 3). A Cronbach’s alpha revealed the internal consistency between these questions was  $\alpha = 0.89$ .

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### **Procedure**

The superintendent of the school district was first contacted to explain the current study and ask for approval for their school's participation. All of the materials that were going to be used in the study were presented to the superintendent to review and compare to the district's rules and regulations. Once the superintendent agreed to the study, the principals of both the elementary and middle schools were contacted to explain the study and provide them with a copy of the materials. After approval from all administrators was received, an informed parental consent form (Appendix A) was sent home to the parents of the fifth and sixth grade students. The parental consent form clearly stated that the study was anonymous, meaning that there would be no way that I could connect the student's name with their responses. Due to the fact that the middle school children are each supplied with their own Ipad for school use, the parental consent form was distributed electronically to parents of the sixth graders. A printed copy of the form was sent home with the fifth grade students. When the parental consent forms were returned, a time was arranged to visit each school to distribute the questionnaires in a group setting. The response rate for the parental consent forms was very low, approximately 12%. The response rate appeared much higher among the sixth grade parents than the fifth grade parents. The questionnaires were distributed at two times, once at each school, occurring on the same day. The questionnaires were distributed in a group setting using a pencil and paper format. All of the children who had parental consent were called down to complete the questionnaire. Before handing out the student packet (Appendix C), I read a verbal assent statement (Appendix B) to the group. All participants indicated their assent with a show of hands. Any students that did not want to participate at that point were told to

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leave at that point, without any penalties. Participants were then asked to complete the questionnaire, consisting of the three stories. The final page of the student packet was the demographics page and students were told it was optional to complete, which was a request from the school district. The demographics questionnaire (Appendix C) included questions regarding the child's gender, race, age, grade, past bullying experience, and access to social media. Upon completion of the student packet, students were given a debriefing (Appendix E) and were compensated for their participation with pencils and fruit snacks.

### Results

The means and standard deviations of all of the variables are reported in Table 4. Independent t-tests comparing the responses of girl and boy participants on the three major variables were computed. The t-tests showed no significant participant gender differences in the perception of negative traits  $t(57) = 1.19, p = 0.24$ ; perception of positive traits  $t(56) = -1.40, p = 0.17$ ; or Bully classification  $t(60) = 1.00, p = 0.32$  based on the data from story 1. Using the data from story 2, again the t-tests showed no significant participant gender differences in negative traits  $t(59) = -0.52, p = 0.61$ ; perception of positive traits  $t(57) = -0.39, p = 0.70$ ; or Bully classification  $t(60) = -0.29, p = 0.77$ . These results show that there were no statistically significant differences in responses for participant boys than participant girls. This allowed me to combine the data for boys and girls for the subsequent analyses.

Correlations revealed some interesting and important results that help strengthen the results discussed above. For both stories, the negative trait variable was negatively correlated with the positive trait variable, suggesting that the two traits are

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complimentary to each other. The correlation for story 1 was,  $r(61) = -0.56, p = 0.00$  and for story 2 was,  $r(62) = -0.74, p = 0.00$ . In both stories, the negative trait variable was correlated with the bully status variable, such that the more negative a participant rated the character in the story, the more likely they were to also consider them an actual bully. Story 1,  $r(62) = 0.62, p = 0.00$  and Story 2,  $r(64) = 0.74, p = 0.00$ . Lastly, in both story 1,  $r(61) = -0.43, p = 0.001$ , and story 2,  $r(62) = -0.74, p = 0.00$ , the positive trait variable was negatively correlated with the bully variable, such that the more positively the participant rated the character in the story, the less likely they were to call that character a bully.

It was first hypothesized that the gender of the potential “bully” would have an effect on how the participant rated that actor’s negative traits, positive traits, and bully status. More specifically, I thought that participants would be more likely to perceive the potential “bully” more negatively, less positively, and as an actual bully, if the actor was a boy compared to when the actor was a girl. In order to analyze this, a 2x2 (gender and race) analysis of variance was conducted to test the effects of the bully’s gender on these three factors. Results from story 1 indicate that there were no main effects of gender on negative traits  $F(1,60) = 0.59, p = 0.44$ ; positive traits  $F(1,59) = 0.01, p = 0.94$ ; bully status  $F(1,63) = 0.86, p = 0.36$ . Story 2 kept gender constant, therefore, hypothesis one failed to be supported.

The second hypothesis was that participants would perceive the potential bully differently based on the race of the character, specifically that participants would perceive Black characters as more negative, less positive, and more likely an actual bully than they would perceive White characters. Using data from story 1, a 2x2 (gender and

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race) analysis of variance was conducted to test the effects of the bully's race on the participant's perceptions of the situation. Results showed no main effects of race on negative traits  $F(1,60) = 0.15, p = 0.70$ ; positive traits  $F(1,59) = 0.17, p = 0.68$ ; or bully status  $F(1,63) = 0.56, p = 0.46$ , such that there was no difference in how participants perceived the situation based on the character's race. Story 2, which also manipulated race, showed no main effects of race on negative traits  $F(1,62) = 0.52, p = 0.47$ ; positive traits  $F(1,60) = 0.00, p = 0.99$ ; or bully status  $F(1,63) = 0.44, p = 0.51$ . These data fail to support hypothesis 2, because no differences were seen in perceptions of the situation based on the character's race.

The third hypothesis was that participants would perceive the actor as more negative, less positive, and more likely to be a bully if the character had a bad reputation than if the character had a good reputation. To analyze this hypothesis, a 2x2 (race and reputation) analysis of variance was conducted. Results showed there was a main effect of reputation on all three major dependent variables. There was a main effect on negative traits  $F(1,62) = 70.04, p = 0.00$ , such that participants were more likely to describe the character in the story as having negative traits if the character had a bad reputation ( $M = 3.3, SD = 0.15$ ) rather than a good reputation ( $M = 1.70, SD = 0.12$ ). There was also a main effect on positive traits  $F(1,60) = 89.81, p = 0.00$ , such that participants rated the story character more positively if they had a good reputation ( $M = 4.09, SD = 0.13$ ) than if they had a bad reputation ( $M = 2.05, SD = 0.17$ ). Lastly, there was also a main effect of reputation on bully status  $F(1,63) = 22.00, p = 0.00$ , such that if the actor had a bad reputation ( $M = 2.86, SD = 0.15$ ), participants were more likely to report them as being a bully than they would for actors that had a good reputation ( $M = 1.96, SD = 0.12$ ).

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Although it was not statistically significant, there was an interesting trend in the data suggesting an interaction between race and reputation on bully status  $F(1,63) = 1.79, p = 0.19$  for story 2. There was a bigger difference in perceptions of whether or not the actor was a bully when you looked at race and bad reputation than when you looked at good reputation. The difference in amount of bullying reports was much smaller when there was a good reputation than when there was a bad reputation (Figure 1). When the character had a bad reputation and was Black, they tended to be more likely to be labeled a bully ( $M = 3.05, SD = 0.20$ ) than if the character had a bad reputation and was White ( $M = 2.67, SD = 0.22$ ). Again, however, this was not statistically significant. It was only a trend in the data and therefore, no conclusions can be drawn from these data.

Additional correlations showed some additional interesting results. Results showed that participants' experience with physical victimization was positively correlated with their experience as a physical bully,  $r(62) = 0.43, p = 0.00$ . This suggests that the participants in this study that had been physically bullied were more likely to physically bully others. This correlation also exists among verbal victimization and verbal bullying,  $r(61) = 0.34, p = 0.01$ . I also found a correlation between participants' experience with physical victimization and their likelihood of calling the character in Story 1 a bully,  $r(63) = 0.25, p = 0.04$ , such that participants that had experience with being physically bullied were more likely to say the potential bully in Story 1 was an actual bully. There was a positive correlation that suggests participants who were bullied physically were also bullied verbally,  $r(60) = 0.42, p = 0.001$ . Social media use was also correlated with verbal bullying experiences, such that the more social media that participants had, the more likely they were to report having been a verbal bully,  $r(63) =$

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0.24,  $p = 0.05$ . However, there was no significant correlation between social media and verbal victimization experiences,  $r(61) = -0.03$ ,  $p = 0.83$  or physical victimization experiences,  $r(62) = -0.07$ ,  $p = 0.59$ .

### **Discussion**

The purpose of this study was to explore the decisions that middle school children make in their perceptions of bullying in ambiguous situations, which could be considered bullying or an accident, as a factor of gender, race, and reputation of the bully. This study determined whether there were any interactions between racism and bullying among children to better understand the increases in bullying victimizations and racism acts in the media recently. The study was specifically interested in how positively and negatively children rated the potential bully as well as how likely they thought the actor was a real bully.

The first hypothesis predicted that the potential bully's gender would have an influence on how children perceived the situation. More specifically, it was expected that when the actor was a boy, participants would be more likely to characterize the actor with negative traits, less likely to characterize them with positive traits, and more likely to think they are a real bully. Data from the current study fail to support this hypothesis, as there were no significant differences between participants' perceptions of a boy potential bully and their perceptions of a girl potential bully. The second hypothesis expected that the potential bully's race would have a significant effect on participants' perceptions of the situation, such that Black potential bullies would be more likely perceived as bullies and given more negative traits than positive traits. The results of this study fail to support this hypothesis since there were no significant race differences found. Lastly, it was

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hypothesized that a potential bully with a bad reputation would be perceived as more of a bully, more negative, and less positive than a potential bully in the exact same situation that has a better reputation. The data from this study support this hypothesis, such that reputation was a significant factor in influencing children's perceptions of an ambiguous situation. There was also an interesting trend in the data suggesting a significant interaction between reputation and race of the potentially bully, however the statistical analysis was not significant. The trend was interesting though, in that if the actor had a bad reputation and was Black, they were more likely to be perceived as a bully than if they had a bad reputation and were White.

The failure to support the first hypothesis regarding gender was fairly unexpected, given the previously mentioned research showing boys are typically more involved in bullying situations than girls (Seals & Young, 2003; Veenstra, 2005). While there seems to be more recent data supporting that boys are more involved with bullying than girls, earlier studies reported girls being more likely to be involved (Olweus, 1995). One explanation for why no significant differences were discovered could be due to the fact that we did not separate out the situations into different styles of bullying. Distinct modes of bullying and victimization have been conclusively identified for each gender, such that girls were more likely to be relational and boys were more likely to follow traditional bullying strategies (Crick, Cass, & Nelson, 2002). This led the present study to expect boy potential bullies to be rated as such more often, because most of the interaction stories involve physical bullying. However, since we did not specifically separate the types of bullying, this may have resulted in no clear differences being found.



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Given the previous research suggesting that bullying is more common in Black individuals than in White individuals (Connell et al., 2015), it is surprising that no differences were found in the current study. Furthermore, African Americans tended to be perceived as more violent, more aggressive, and meaner than White counterparts in previous research (Correll et al., 2002; Eberhardt et al., 2004; Sagar & Schofield, 1980). These prior data make it more shocking that there was not at least a significant difference among the negative characteristics between Black and White potential bullies. The lack of support for this hypothesis, however, could be due to the way that the study was structured. For example, gender and race were both manipulated using the presented stimuli next to the story but reputation was manipulated within the text of the story. Knowing that reputation was the only factor to show a significant effect, this could be a result of participants not registering the visual stimuli presented for each story. There is a chance that participants did not glance to the right to see the picture and, therefore, based their perceptions off of an ambiguous character. It may be a good idea to manipulate all of the variables in the same way to avoid this additional variable. However, if you explicitly write the gender and race of the potential bully into the story, participants would be more likely to catch on to the study and present with demand characteristics.

The current study found that having a bad reputation led participants to perceive that individual as more likely to be a bully and more likely to have negative characteristics than positive ones. Although there was a lack of research on the impact of reputation on bullying situations, this was expected due to the knowledge that developing a reputation can have an influence on victims (Raskauskas, 2010). This finding in the current study supports the social psychology theories of labeling and the self-fulfilling

## PERCEPTIONS OF BULLYING

prophecy as well. The labeling theory is the idea that the essence of one's behavior is not within that individual but within the response another has to their behaviors (Adler & Adler, 2016). This theory helps to explain how the same behaviors may be perceived very differently under varying conditions, like the present study showed (Adler & Adler, 2016). The ambiguous situations were identical between participants, but perceptions of the stories were received differently based on the conditions or the characteristics of the actor. In relation to the finding on reputation, labeling theory would explain that if an individual is labeled with a bad reputation, society will view them as more aggressive or deviant than someone that has a good reputation. This is associated with the self-fulfilling prophecy, because if individuals are constantly given a label by society, they will eventually internalize that label and begin to behave in accordance with it. If individuals have a bad reputation, they may internalize that label and then begin to actually do deviant or aggressive things so that their label and their actions are concurrent with each other.

The finding that there was a trend between reputation and race, such that among individuals with a bad reputation, Blacks were more likely to be considered a bully and be given negative characteristics than Whites were, was expected despite there being no significant effects of "potential bully" race. Previous research has made it clear that Black individuals have more negative connotations and schemas associated with them, like violence, criminality, and aggression, than White individuals do (Correll et al., 2002; Eberhardt et al., 2004; Sager & Schofield, 1980). Perhaps just like how seeing a Black face places both crime and basketball into the footlights of participants' attention, a Black

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stimuli may have placed bad reputation into their footlights and bad reputation may have then associated with more bullying or more aggressive behaviors.

The current study significantly adds to the literature on bullying but fails to significantly add to the literature on racism since the only effect of race that was found was non-significant. The fact that the gender hypothesis was not supported and there were no significant effects of gender compares well with the indecisive previously published literature despite the fact that it contrasts it. Since previous studies have both supported girls being more likely than boys and boys being more likely than girls to be involved with bullying, the current study suggests that there really is no difference and that those prior studies were significant only for those samples. Intervention and prevention strategies should be developed with the intention to target both boys and girls equally, however, the types of bullying these strategies focus on could be altered slightly for boys and girls to address the mode of bullying and victimization most relevant to each gender. Further research would need to be conducted with a much larger and more diverse sample in order to understand these effects on a general or countrywide level.

The findings on race effects of bullying are in contrast to the literature already reported on racial differences. Previous studies show a strong racial bias against Black individuals, such that Black individuals have been identified as having more negative connotations and schemas associated with them. The current study, however, found no such racial bias among children in fifth and sixth grade. Knowing that some researchers believe racism is an innate characteristic that decreases as an individual gets older, with there being a significant decrease in prejudice beliefs by the third grade (Doyle & Aboud, 1995), suggests that our study supports this belief. If the majority of prejudiced thoughts

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have disappeared by the third grade, the fifth and sixth grade students in the current study would rightfully not show much of a race effect. However, this does not explain the increasing number of racism acts in the media, almost entirely conducted by individuals over the age of ten-year-old third graders.

More recent researchers, using more advanced technological strategies, such as brain scanning, have found that racism is actually a socially constructed phenomenon and it does not develop until around the age of fourteen (Telzer et al., 2013). This seems to better explain why the current study contradicts a vast abundance of prior literature that have mostly been conducted on undergraduate college students or adults. If racism is not developed until the age of fourteen, the student participants in the current study would not be old enough to have developed a racial bias yet and would, therefore, report equal ratings for both Blacks and Whites. This would explain how racist beliefs develop and motivate individuals to participate in racial acts against Blacks later in life as well.

Given the fact that there was no prior research that specifically looked at reputation and bullying, the current study provides important information for the literature on factors influencing bullying situations. It was shown that victims that gained a reputation for being a victim were then more likely to get bullied (Raskauskas, 2010), however, there was no research suggesting that reputation also played a factor in the bullying side of the situation. Knowing that reputation can impact how people perceive you in certain situations has important implications for how to handle interventions of any negative behaviors, especially in school settings where bullying tends to be most common (Bradshaw et al., 2007). If teachers make too big of a deal when a student has their first incidence of bullying, it could lead to classmates thinking he has a bad

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reputation rather than making a mistake. Most children have had at least one instance of behavior that could be considered a bullying situation if it was repeated over time, but it is just a part of growing up and learning. If they develop a bad reputation, this could end up being detrimental to the child's social development as he gets older and his or her peers begin to perceive him as a bully, without giving him another chance. Using the information gathered in the current study and these additional findings, teachers and administrators should think about how to intervene best in a situation of bullying or other aggressive behavior, especially for the first few incidences.

Understanding how to properly deal with bullying situations surrounding gender, race, and reputation is also important in the long term, as it has been shown that nearly 97% of full-time employees have experienced some form of general bullying over the past five years of work (Fox & Stallworth, 2005). There are clear racial and gender differences that exist in these bullying experiences as adults in the professional work world that match those trends that were explored in the current study (Fox & Stallworth, 2005; Leo et al., 2014). As much as it is important for the school systems to address and prevent bullying at a young age, it is also important for managers and policy-makers to be aware of the prevalence and severity of bullying in their workplaces in order to address and prevent it from occurring in the adult setting as well (Leo et al., 2014).

### *Strengths*

There were a lot of strengths to the current study that allow readers to feel confident in the results that were found. The stimuli used in this study were identical in all aspects except for the variable that was being manipulated. Although there were not any significant effects of the manipulated variables, gender and race, had there been there

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would be confidence that the effects were a result of that variable and not another confound. Since the stimuli were all identical, we can be sure that there were actually no differences as a result of gender or race rather than the differences accidentally being misconstrued as another 3<sup>rd</sup> variable.

The current study accounted for the limitation of a diverse sample that Sagar & Schofield (1980) lacked in their study. This sample had a good distribution of both male and female participants, which was crucial in determining whether or not there were participant gender differences in their responses. Findings showed that male responses did not differ significantly from female responses on any of the dependent variables. While the current study's sample allowed for a better generalizability due to the diversity of gender, the generalizability was still fairly limited due to the practically homogeneously White, and upper-middle class distribution. Although the sample included two separate schools, they were both in the same school district, which also limits the generalizability of the findings. As is commonly cited, future research on this matter should include a larger sample size with greater diversity in all factors.

Lastly, the current study did a very nice job eliminating any potential demand characteristics. Participants had a hard time figuring out what the study was actually trying to measure, which is good for preventing participant bias. Many of the participants had questions about what the study was trying to get at when they were done completing the questionnaire. Since the gender and race manipulations were conducted through the use of visual stimuli, there was no explicit description of the potential bully that could prompt the participant to understand that racial biases were being analyzed. Avoiding demand characteristics in this study was also helpful in getting approval from schools and

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parents, because although the goals of the study were clearly stated on the consent forms, when shown the materials it was hard to realize how strong the focus on perceptions of racial biases was.

### *Limitations*

Although there were some significant strengths to the study, there were several limitations as well that may have influenced some of the surprising findings. First, the topic of this study was controversial, and this could have influenced the type subjects that participated in the study. The controversial nature of bullying and racial bias is most likely to blame for the extremely low response rate for this study. The low response rate could also have been due to having a short time constraint for parents to turn the permission forms back in. It also tends to be a struggle to get children to actually bring home the permission slips to their parents without forgetting them at school or in their backpacks. This could suggest why the response rate was slightly higher among the sixth grade students, whose informed consent form was sent home electronically via email to all of their parents. This avoided the potential of the paper getting lost, however, this was not a possibility for the students in fifth grade. Since the response rate was so low, it poses the question of whether the sample was large enough or representative enough of the population as a whole. Many parents, of young children especially, get nervous when they hear the words “bullying” or “racism.” The parents and students that ended up participating may have had certain characteristics affecting their responses on the questionnaire, such that maybe very racist families did not want their children to participate in fear that the responses and the data will somehow be connected back to them, despite full anonymity. The parents that returned the informed consent forms may

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be more likely to be involved with the school and more accepting of all different people and feel like they have affectively passed that on to their children. Parents of children that are frequently bullied may also not have wanted their children to participate, which would leave out an important population in the sample for this study.

The current study's findings may also be due to the story scenarios that were chosen. It is hard to tell whether all three of the stories used were truly ambiguous. Since all three variables were not manipulated in all three stories, perhaps there were between-story differences. The second story that manipulated reputation may have been innately less ambiguous and more clearly an actual bullying situation than the first story, which would cause the results to be skewed. It may appear that the reputation caused participants to rate that bully more aggressively, but perhaps the wording of the story was more aggressive. The stories were also presented in a fixed order for all participants and were not counterbalanced. This presents the potential of order effects on the results. If the first story was less aggressive sounding than the second story for example, participants may have rated the bullies in the second story as more aggressive, allowing a difference in the variables to be seen. If the first story was not aggressive enough, participants could have rated all of the potential bullies as not likely to be a bully, which would not allow a significant difference to be seen.

### *Future Research*

For future research, despite the fact that Sagar & Schofield (1980) did not find victim characteristic effects and the current study chose not to explore them, different characteristics of the victim should also be analyzed. This research could provide very unique and interesting interactions between bully and victim characteristics that will help



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schools and workplaces better identify the causes and triggers of bullying scenarios.

Perhaps there are power dynamics that would come into play if you analyzed different interaction possibilities.

In addition to looking at victim characteristics as much as bully characteristics, it would be useful to investigate what interventions the schools already have in place at the time of data collection. This would help guide results to be most useful and productive for individual schools and businesses to make the best possible changes in their own plans to increase the prevention of bullying situations.

Overall, only the third hypothesis was supported. Gender and race did not seem to influence children's perceptions of ambiguous situations or not. However, reputation was related to children's perceptions, such that actors with bad reputations were perceived as more mean, threatening, and aggressive and more likely to be identified as an actual bully than actors with good reputations were. Although not significant, if the actor was also Black, they were perceived as having even more negative characteristics. However, these results should be further studied to examine the relationship between bullying and racial biases in children.

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PERCEPTIONS OF BULLYING

Table 1.

Pearson's *r* Analysis for Characteristics of the Potential Bully (Story 1)

<u>Measure</u>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Mean	1	.34**	-.30*	.01	-.23	-.25*	.23	-.23	.50**	-.54**
2. Threatening		1	-.31*	.32*	.10	-.29*	.14	-.04	.14	-.22
3. Friendly			1	.20	.20	.28*	-.07	.001	-.32*	.48**
4. Strong				1	.04	.11	-.09	-.001	-.15	.26*
5. Weak					1	-.10	-.07	.26*	-.19	.24
6. Caring						1	-.22	-.03	-.25	.45**
7. Thoughtless							1	.08	.36**	-.18
8. Harmless								1	-.13	.35**
9. Aggressive									1	-.43**
10. Nice										1

Note. \* $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ . For threatening, friendly, strong, weak, caring, aggressive, and nice,  $N = 63$ . For mean,  $N = 64$ . For Thoughtless,  $N = 66$ .

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Table 2.

Pearson's *r* Analysis for Bully Status Dimension (Story 1)

<u>Measure</u>	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Was it character's fault?	1	.21	.28*	.24*	.38**	-.40**
2. Is character a bully?		1	.38**	.59**	.46**	-.26*
3. Did character do it on purpose?			1	.71**	.51**	-.31*
4. Was character trying to hurt classmate?				1	.51**	-.28*
5. Negative Traits					1	-.56**
6. Positive Traits						1

---

Note. \* $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ . For positive traits,  $N = 63$ . For negative traits,  $N = 64$ . For, Did the character do it on purpose?  $N = 66$ . For, Was it character's fault? Is character a bully? Was character trying to hurt classmate?  $N = 67$ .



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Table 3.

Pearson's *r* Analysis for Bully Status Dimension (Story 2)

<u>Measure</u>	1	2	3	4	5
1. Would you blame character?	1	.58**	.57**	.69**	.69**
2. Would you tell friends it was character's fault?		1	.57**	.58**	.59**
3. Is character a bully?			1	.66**	.59**
4. Did character do it on purpose?				1	.64**
5. Was character trying to hurt classmate?					1

---

Note. \* $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ . For, Would you blame character? Would you tell friends it was character's fault? Is character a bully? Did Character do it on purpose? Was character trying to hurt classmate? N = 67.

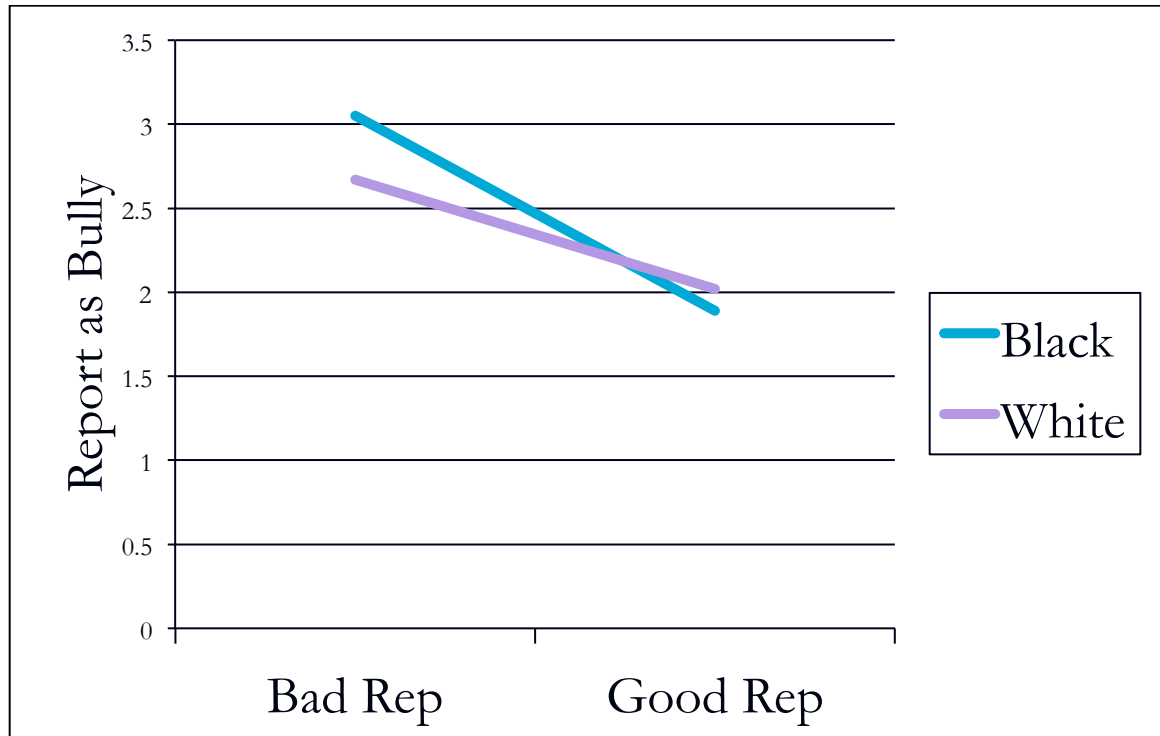
PERCEPTIONS OF BULLYING

Table 4.

Means, Standard Deviations, and Cronbach's Alphas for the Major Variables

Variables	N	M	SD	$\alpha$
<b>Story 1:</b>				
Negative Traits	64	2.71	0.76	0.59
Positive Traits	63	2.11	0.81	0.67
Bully Status	67	2.75	0.84	0.71
<b>Story 2:</b>				
Negative Traits	66	2.36	1.10	0.90
Positive Traits	64	3.29	1.29	0.95
Bully Status	67	2.33	0.89	0.89
<b>Other Variables:</b>				
Forms of Social Media	65	3.05	1.47	----
Participant Physical Victim	64	0.78	0.92	----
Participant Physical Bully	65	0.32	0.59	----
Participant Verbal Victim	63	1.16	1.05	----
Participant Verbal Bully	65	0.22	0.45	----
Participant Age	64	11.28	0.70	----

## PERCEPTIONS OF BULLYING



*Figure 1.* The Interaction of Character Race and Reputation on Participants' Reports of Character Bully Status in Story 2. Data were not significant for this interaction,  $F(1, 63) = 1.79, p = 0.19$ , but an interesting trend is shown. When participants had a bad reputation and were Black they were more likely to report the character as a bully ( $M = 3.05, SD = 0.88$ ) than if they have a bad reputation and are White ( $M = 2.67, SD = 1.03$ ). In the good reputation condition, the differences between participant responses whether the character was Black ( $M = 1.89, SD = 0.61$ ) or White ( $M = 2.02, SD = 0.63$ ) were much smaller.

**APPENDIX A**

**Informed Consent To Parents**

Dear Parent/Guardian,

My name is Allison Minchoff, and I am a psychology student at Union College in Schenectady, NY. I am currently working on my senior thesis, and I would like to invite your child to participate in my project. I am interested in what elementary school children think when they witness an ambiguous situation that could be considered deliberate bullying or just an accident. I am exploring how children's perceptions of these various situations may change as a factor of different variables, such as gender, race, and the bully's reputation. For instance, will the potential bully's gender, race, or reputation affect how the child perceives the situation?

If your child takes part in my project, I will provide them with 3 short stories in which a character might be bullying or it may just be an accident. A picture of the potential bully described in that situation will accompany each story. Every story will be followed by a short set of questions in order to understand how the child perceived the situation. Sample questions include, "Do you think the character was aggressive?" Or "Was the situation an accident?" Or "Would you go tell a teacher?" If you choose to allow your child to participate and they are not able to read the given scenarios, I will read them out loud and ask the questions verbally. Your child's participation should take approximately 20 minutes total. I would like to emphasize that involvement in my project is completely voluntary, and you may choose to allow your child to take part or not. Your child will also be asked for verbal consent before participating, so if they would not like to participate that is completely fine.

I need to obtain your written permission before your child can participate. I would appreciate if you could fill out the attached permission slip and return it to your child's teacher as soon as possible. No names will be used in any portion of my senior thesis. I want you to feel confident that your child's responses will be kept confidential. This means that your child's name will not be written on his/her answer sheet. Student's answers will only be identifiable by a number.

There will be no risks to your child from participating in this project. However, if your child no longer wishes to continue at any point, he or she has the right to withdraw from the project, without penalty, at any time. Your child will receive a small token of appreciation in return for their participation.

Please return the attached permission slip to your child's teacher. I will be in contact with the school regarding which children have been granted permission. Please feel free to contact me at any time at [minchofa@union.edu](mailto:minchofa@union.edu). My thesis supervisor, Dr. Linda Stanhope, can also be reached at any time at [stanhopl@union.edu](mailto:stanhopl@union.edu) or at (518)-388-6543. We can answer any other questions you may have. Thank you in advance!

Sincerely,

Allison Minchoff

PERCEPTIONS OF BULLYING

**Consent Permission Form**

I, \_\_\_\_\_, give my  
child,

\_\_\_\_\_ ,  
permission to participate in Allison Minchoff's project about children's perceptions of  
bullies depending on certain gender, race, and reputation factors. I fully understand that  
this is a voluntary opportunity and both my child and I are free to withdraw from the  
project at any time. I understand that all answers and information will be kept  
confidential.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Classroom Teacher:

\_\_\_\_\_

**Thank you for your consideration!**

**APPENDIX B**

**Verbal Assent for Participants:**

Hi. My name is Allison Minchoff and I am a student at Union College in NY. I am working on my senior project, and would love your help. I am interested in what kids your age think about common situations that they may face in school and what they do about it. If you participate, I will ask you to read 3 really short stories about kids and answer the questions that follow each one. If you have any trouble reading the stories on your own, I can read them to you. The whole thing should take about 20 minutes. I have a small thank you gift I would like to give you at the end. You do not have to participate if you don't want to, and if you decide to help but you change your mind and want to quit at any point, that is completely fine too. Your parent or guardian has already given their permission for you to participate. There are no right or wrong answers to these questions; it is all about what YOU think. Please do not share your answers with your friends or talk while you are taking this. You will not put your name on the questionnaire so I won't be able to know which one is yours, and you can answer truthfully about how you feel. The last page of the questionnaire is optional, if you do not wish to complete those questions, you do not need to. However, I would really appreciate if you completed them. Please let me know now if you would not like to participate.

Thank you!

APPENDIX C

Student Packet

**FORM NUMBER 1**

**Participant ID #:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**(For distributor purposes only - do not complete)**

**You are going to use this scale to answer the questions today:**

**SCALE:**

---

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
(Definitely Not)	(Probably Not)	(Maybe)	(Probably Yes)	(Definitely Yes)

**Here is an example of how to use the scale:**

**EXAMPLE:**

If the question is... "Are you excited for winter?"  
*If you are definitely NOT excited, circle 1.*  
*If you are probably NOT excited, circle 2.*  
*If you are maybe or maybe not excited, circle 3.*  
*If you are probably excited, circle 4.*  
*If you are definitely excited, circle 5.*

**Answer:**                    1                    2                    3                    4                    5

---

**\*\*\*If you have any questions about this scale, please ask now before moving on to the next questions. \*\*\***

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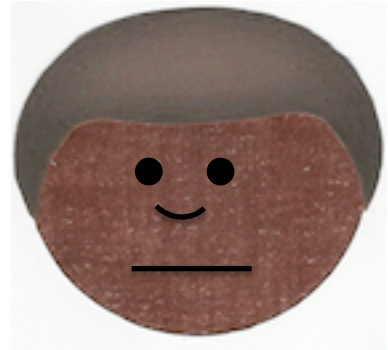
### SCALE:

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
(Definitely Not)	(Probably Not)	(Maybe)	(Probably Yes)	(Definitely Yes)

**Now, Read Story 1 and answer the questions that follow it using the same scale.**

#### Story 1:

The bell for lunch just rang and your class is in the hallway walking to the cafeteria. Student A (pictured to the right) was walking back to class and brushed shoulders with one of your classmates. Your classmate got pushed into the wall in front of you and Student A continued walking to class without looking back. Your classmate does not cry but seems to be in some pain.



**Student A**

**Use the scale above to answer the following questions. (Circle the number that best represents how you feel)**

1. Do you think that Student A is...

A) <b>Mean?</b>	1	2	3	4	5
B) <b>Threatening?</b>	1	2	3	4	5
C) <b>Friendly?</b>	1	2	3	4	5
D) <b>Strong?</b>	1	2	3	4	5
E) <b>Weak?</b>	1	2	3	4	5
F) <b>Caring?</b>	1	2	3	4	5
G) <b>Thoughtless?</b>	1	2	3	4	5
H) <b>Harmless?</b>	1	2	3	4	5
I) <b>Aggressive?</b>	1	2	3	4	5
J) <b>Nice?</b>	1	2	3	4	5



PERCEPTIONS OF BULLYING

**SCALE:**

---

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
(Definitely Not)	(Probably Not)	(Maybe)	(Probably Yes)	(Definitely Yes)

**Using the same scale, answer the following questions based on what you think about the story you just read. (Circle the number that best represents how you feel)**

2. Would you tell your teacher what Student A did?  
1 2 3 4 5

3. Do you think it was Student A's fault that your classmate fell?  
1 2 3 4 5

4. Would you do nothing and pretend like you did not see the situation?  
1 2 3 4 5

5. Would you tell your friends about what happened?  
1 2 3 4 5

6. Would you go get help for your classmate who got pushed into the wall?  
1 2 3 4 5

7. Do you think that Student A is a bully?  
1 2 3 4 5

8. Do you think that the situation was an accident?  
1 2 3 4 5

9. Do you think that Student A bumped your classmate on purpose?  
1 2 3 4 5

10. Do you think that Student A was trying to hurt your classmate?  
1 2 3 4 5

# PERCEPTIONS OF BULLYING

## SCALE:

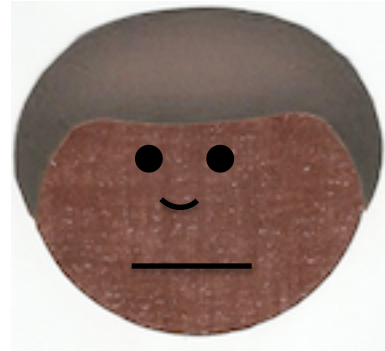
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<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
(Definitely Not)	(Probably Not)	(Maybe)	(Probably Yes)	(Definitely Yes)

Now, Read Story 2 and answer the questions that follow it using the same scale.

### Story 2:

Your class is just returning from lunch and it is time to sit in your seats to study math. As you are sitting down, you notice your classmate has tripped and fallen on the ground. You see Student B (pictured to the right) standing next to your classmate. You recognize Student B because his picture is always on the bulletin board for helping out a lot.



**Student B**

Use the scale above to answer the following questions. (Circle the number that best represents how you feel)

1. Do you think that Student B is...

- |                        |   |   |   |   |   |
|------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|
| A) <b>Mean?</b>        | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| B) <b>Threatening?</b> | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| C) <b>Friendly?</b>    | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| D) <b>Strong?</b>      | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| E) <b>Weak?</b>        | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| F) <b>Caring?</b>      | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| G) <b>Thoughtless?</b> | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| H) <b>Harmless?</b>    | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| I) <b>Aggressive?</b>  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| J) <b>Nice?</b>        | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

PERCEPTIONS OF BULLYING

**SCALE:**

---

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
(Definitely Not)	(Probably Not)	(Maybe)	(Probably Yes)	(Definitely Yes)

**Using the same scale, answer the following questions based on what you think about the story you just read. (Circle the number that best represents how you feel)**

2. Would you blame Student B for what happened to your classmate?  
1 2 3 4 5

3. Would you tell your teacher Student B tripped your classmate?  
1 2 3 4 5

4. Would you do nothing and pretend like you did not see the situation?  
1 2 3 4 5

5. Would you tell your friends that it was Student B's fault?  
1 2 3 4 5

6. Would you offer to help your classmate who fell?  
1 2 3 4 5

7. Do you think that Student B is a bully?  
1 2 3 4 5

8. Do you think your classmate tripped on his or her own shoelace?  
1 2 3 4 5

9. Do you think that Student B tripped your classmate on purpose?  
1 2 3 4 5

10. Do you think that Student B was trying to hurt your classmate?  
1 2 3 4 5

## PERCEPTIONS OF BULLYING

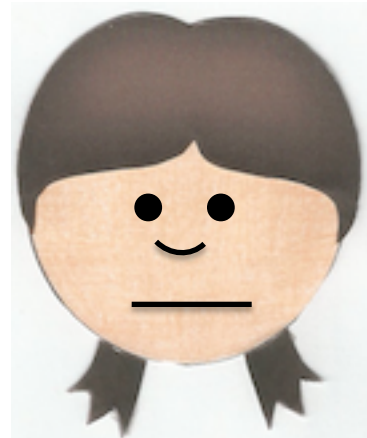
### SCALE:

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
(Definitely Not)	(Probably Not)	(Maybe)	(Probably Yes)	(Definitely Yes)

**Now, Read Story 3 and answer the questions that follow it using the same scale.**

### Story 3:

In the middle of class, Student C (pictured to the right) gets up to use the bathroom. As Student C is leaving the classroom, you see her knock all of the papers off of your classmate's desk. Student C immediately gets down on her knees to pick up the papers and apologizes to your classmate before continuing on to the bathroom. It was snowing that morning, so the floor was wet and some of your classmate's papers were ruined.



**Student C**

**Use the scale above to answer the following questions. (Circle the number that best represents how you feel)**

1. Do you think that Student C is...

A) <b>Mean?</b>	1	2	3	4	5
B) <b>Threatening?</b>	1	2	3	4	5
C) <b>Friendly?</b>	1	2	3	4	5
D) <b>Strong?</b>	1	2	3	4	5
E) <b>Weak?</b>	1	2	3	4	5
F) <b>Caring?</b>	1	2	3	4	5
G) <b>Thoughtless?</b>	1	2	3	4	5
H) <b>Harmless?</b>	1	2	3	4	5
I) <b>Aggressive?</b>	1	2	3	4	5
J) <b>Nice?</b>	1	2	3	4	5

PERCEPTIONS OF BULLYING

**SCALE:**

---

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
(Definitely Not)	(Probably Not)	(Maybe)	(Probably Yes)	(Definitely Yes)

**Using the same scale, answer the following questions based on what you think about the story you just read. (Circle the number that best represents how you feel)**

2. Would you tell your teacher what Student C did?  
1                      2                      3                      4                      5
3. Do you think it was Student C's fault that your classmate's papers fell?  
1                      2                      3                      4                      5
4. Would you do nothing and pretend like you did not see the situation?  
1                      2                      3                      4                      5
5. Would you tell your friends about what happened?  
1                      2                      3                      4                      5
6. Would you go help your classmate get new clean copies of the papers?  
1                      2                      3                      4                      5
7. Do you think that Student C is a bully?  
1                      2                      3                      4                      5
8. Do you think that the situation was an accident?  
1                      2                      3                      4                      5
9. Do you think that Student C knocked the papers off your classmate's desk on purpose?  
1                      2                      3                      4                      5
10. Do you think that Student C was trying to hurt your classmate's feelings?  
1                      2                      3                      4                      5

## Final Questionnaire:

(These questions are optional but I would really appreciate if you completed them)

1. **You are: (please circle one):**  
A) Male      B) Female
2. **Which of the following best describes your ethnic background? (Pick 1)**  
A) Hispanic/Latino  
B) Asian  
C) Black or African American  
D) White  
E) Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_
3. **Your Age:** \_\_\_\_\_
4. **Your Grade:** \_\_\_\_\_
5. **This year, has anyone ever pushed, shoved, or kicked you repeatedly, purposely trying to hurt you? (Circle one)**  
A) Never      B) Once or Twice      C) A Few Times      D) Very Often
6. **This year, has anyone ever gossiped or spread rumors about you repeatedly, purposely trying to hurt you?**  
A) Never      B) Once or Twice      C) A Few Times      D) Very Often
7. **This year, have you ever pushed, shoved, or kicked anyone on purpose? (Circle one)**  
A) Never      B) Once or Twice      C) A Few Times      D) Very Often
8. **This year, have you ever gossiped or spread rumors about someone repeatedly, intending to hurt them?**  
A) Never      B) Once or Twice      C) A Few Times      D) Very Often
9. **Do you think that bullying is a big problem at your school? (Circle one)**  
A) Not at all      B) A little bit of a problem      C) A Big Problem
10. **Do you have your own... (Circle yes or no for each question)**

A) Facebook account?	Yes	No
B) Instagram account?	Yes	No
C) Twitter account?	Yes	No
D) Cellphone?	Yes	No
E) Email?	Yes	No
F) Texting on your phone?	Yes	No

APPENDIX D

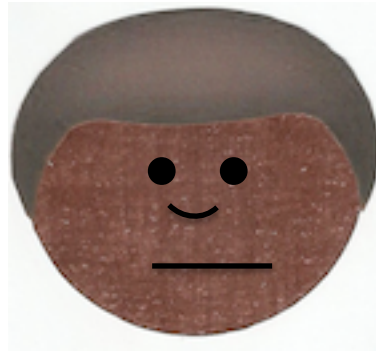
Alternatives for Manipulations

Four different stimuli used for the manipulations of this study:

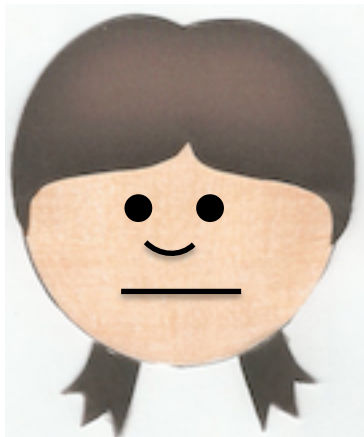
Black Girl



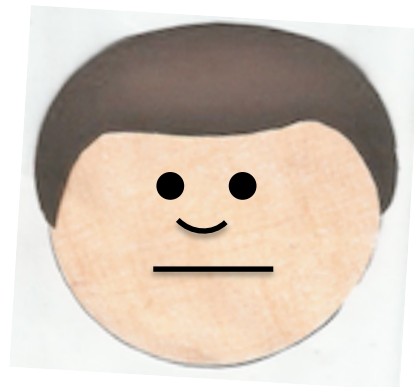
Black Boy



White Girl



White Boy



**Story 1:**

- Used All 4 Manipulations (shown above)

**Story 2:**

- Used only the 2 Boy Manipulations (Black Boy and White Boy)
- Used a written manipulation for reputation (below)

## PERCEPTIONS OF BULLYING

### **Reputation Manipulation:**

**Good Reputation:** *“Your class is just returning from lunch and it is time to sit in your seats to study math. As you are sitting down, you notice your classmate has tripped and fallen on the ground. You see Student B (pictured to the right) standing next to your classmate. You recognize Student B because his picture is always on the bulletin board for helping out a lot.”*

**Bad Reputation:** *“Your class is just returning from lunch and it is time to sit in your seats to study math. As you are sitting down, you notice your classmate has tripped and fallen on the ground. You see Student B (pictured to the right) standing next to your classmate. You recognize Student B because you often see him in the office getting into trouble.”*

### **Story 3:**

- **Used All 4 Manipulations (shown above)**



**APPENDIX E**

**Child Debrief**

Thank you for helping me with my project. Not necessarily in your school, but in many schools bullying is a problem. I am interested in learning more about what kids your age think about bullying and whether a situation is bullying or just an accident. For example, I wonder if kids are more likely to think boys are bullies than girls are. Your answers to these questions will help me figure out how students your age treat each other and think about situations. Many of the situations you were asked about could be seen as either an accident or as bullying. By looking at this information, we will hopefully be able to figure out better ways to prevent bullying from happening so much at school. I would like to ask you to please not talk with other students about any of the stories or questions that I have asked you today.

Do you have any questions before I let you get back to class?