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# Preservice teachers' response to bullying vignettes: The effect of bullying type and gender

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**Abstract:** This study compares the responses to bullying incidents of 101 fourth year preservice teacher trainees in an education college in central South Korea. The subjects were asked to respond to 6 vignettes that varied in the types of bullying, relational, verbal or physical and in the gender of the students in the vignettes in that they either took place at a girls' high school or boys' high school. They were then asked what they would do with the perpetrators and the victims of the bullying. The subjects were much more likely to respond to physical and verbal bullying than relational bullying and when they did respond they took stronger action for both victims and perpetrators of verbal and physical bullying. When comparing the responses across the gender of the high school students the respondents were more likely to respond to cases of male physical bullying if the respondents themselves were male and to female relational bullying if the respondents themselves were female. This research suggests that preservice teachers require more in depth training in how to deal with differing bullying types.

**Keywords:** Bullying, Gender, Vignettes, Relational, Preservice Teachers

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## 1. Introduction

Bullying is an issue that finds itself on the forefront of many educators' minds when considering schooling and student safety (Cooper & Snell, 2003; Garbarino & deLara, 2003). To create an environment where learning can be lasting and effective, students must feel comfortable and absent from fear (Jeffery, Miller & Linn 2001; Sharp, Thompson & Arora, 2000). Across the world research into Bullying has been shown to be closely related to serious negative outcomes for students across all grades and for both genders (Cooper & Snell, 2003; Fleming & Jacobson, 2009; Garbarino & deLara, 2003; Kim, Koh, & Leventhal 2005). Large scale studies of bullying have been conducted in Korea and have shown rates of bullying between 2% and 48% depending on the bullying typology used and data collection methods (Kim, Koh & Leventhal, 2004; Kim, & Park 1997; Koo, Kwak, & Smith 2008; Lee & Kwak, 2000; Park, Son, & Song, 1998; Yang, Kim, Kim & Yoon 2006). An issue in Korea is the lack of a clear definition of bullying across the research. This mimics a problem internationally, in that no one clear definition exists (Smith

2004). Therefore, it is necessary to define bullying before continuing. The most commonly used definition of bullying in education is that bullying has three facets: that there is a power imbalance between victim and bully, that the action is intended to harm, and that the behavior is ongoing (Bauman & Rio 2006; Craig, Henderson, & Murphy 2000; Jacobsen & Bauman 2007; Kim, Koh & Leventhal, 2004; Koo, Kwak, & Smith 2008; Nicolaides, Toda & Smith 2002; Olweus 1993, 1995; Smith & Brain 2000)

Though domestic violence towards children is generally asymmetrical, long term, and has intent to harm incidents, it falls outside the generally accepted realm of bullying. (Doe, 2000; Hahm & Guterman, 2001; Olweus 1993).

### 1.1. Research Questions

There are two questions that this paper seeks to find the answers to:

Do the responses among preservice teachers vary based on bullying types?

Do the responses among preservice teachers vary based on student gender?

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Effects of Bullying

There is a common misconception among some teachers and the community at large that bullying is not a serious problem, or that, "boys will be boys" (Cooper & Snell, 2003). However, there is a large amount of evidence that bullying causes serious emotional and physical problems for both the victims and perpetrators of bullying. More specifically, victims of bullying are more likely to suffer from depression, low self esteem, school phobia, loneliness, suicidal ideation, sleeping problems, and psychosomatic problems. While perpetrators of bullying are more likely to suffer depression and have problems at home and with the law in the future (Morita 1985; Salmon, James & Smith 1996; Cooper & Snell, 2003; Kim, Koh & Leventhal, 2004; Garbarino & deLara, 2003; Sharp, Thompson, & Arora, 2000). Suicide in particular is a tragic problem, being the leading cause of death of people between the ages of 15 and 24 in Korea (Statistics Korea 2010). School bullying in Korea has been shown to directly contribute suicide ideation in students (Kim, Koh & Leventhal, 2004; Kim, Leventhal, Koh, & Boyce 2009).

### 2.2. The role of the Teacher

The majority of what is generally termed bullying happens at school (Koo, Kwak, & Smith 2008; Olweus, 1993; Kasen, Berenson, Cohen, & Johnson, 2004). Therefore teachers and schools are in a strong position to elevate the stress bullying causes on students and to reduce its frequency and punish perpetrators (Olweus 1997; Lee 2003; Yoon, Bauman, Choi, Hutchinson, 2011). Yoon and Barton (2008) have shown that the role of the teacher and the way in which they interact with students is the most important factor in bullying prevention. A lack of response by teachers has been shown to lead in increased levels of bullying (Marachi, Astor, & Benbenishty 2007). Teachers have ongoing consistent interaction with children on a day to day basis, and through this interaction move children towards learning not only academic but also social goals (Yoon, Bauman, Choi, Hutchinson, 2011).

The role of the teacher in classrooms throughout the world in preventing or reducing bullying is very important; furthermore, this role takes on critical importance in a country like Korea. There are two interrelated but separate reasons for this. The first is simply the total amount of time a Korean student spends in the classroom. According to the OECD (2012) Korean high school students spend more time in the classroom than students from any other nation. The second reason is the role of the teacher in Korean society, in that, teachers in Korea are highly respected and their behavior is seen as an exemplar for students to follow (Shin & Koh 2005).

### 2.3. Types of Bullying

A commonly used typology divides bullying into three types: physical, verbal and relational bullying. School counselors have been shown to treat relational bullying as being less serious when compared to verbal and physical bullying (Jacobson, & Bauman 2007). Teachers have been shown to respond differently depending on the types of bullying they see or hear about (Yoon, Bauman, Choi & Hutchinson 2011; Holt & Keyes 2004). Yoon (2004) has argued that perceived seriousness of any particular bullying incident is the most important factor in predicting whether or not a teacher will intervene. Therefore how teachers judge the seriousness of any particular bullying incident is of upmost importance. A great many studies report that teachers perceive there to be less bullying occurring in a school than students do. A further finding has been that teachers often do not follow the Olweus's three factors defining bullying when responding to incidents. Instead teachers are much more likely to respond to incidents that are physical in nature and that they personally observe (Craig, Henderson, Murphy, 2000). Preservice teachers have also been shown to not treat relational bullying as seriously as verbal and physical bullying (Holt & Keyes, 2004; Bauman & Del Rio, 2006; Craig, Henderson, Murphy, 2000). In another typology, Byers, Caltabiano and Caltabiano (2011) have shown that teachers are much less likely to respond to covert bullying than overt bullying. They also demonstrated that even teachers with high levels of self efficacy towards bullying and high levels of empathy towards students were unlikely to intervene in covert bullying incidents.

Even though teachers often do not treat it as seriously as other types of bullying it has been seen that relational bullying can have serious adverse affects on student learning outcomes and perceptions of their school environment (Olweus 1997). This is particularly the case in Korea where a particular form of relational bullying called "wang-da" occurs. Wang-da involves the exclusion of a student from the group and is often cited as the defining characteristic of school bullying in Korea. Though wang-da is generally defined as a particular type of relational bullying, it can include physical as well as verbal bullying within its definition (Chee 2006; Koo 2007; Koo, Kwak, & Smith 2008). The main feature of wang-da is its feature of generalized relational bullying, therefore it is important to ascertain how teachers in Korea perceive and believe they would treat the differing kinds of bullying they may encounter in a school setting.

### 2.4. The Gender of the Perpetrator or Victim

Girls and boys are more similar than they are different when it comes to bullying. However, there are some differences derived from the differing ways girls and boys interact with within their peer group. Boys are much more likely to be involved in bullying than girls as both victims and perpetrators both in Korea (Yang, Kim, Kim, Shin &

Yoon2006) and internationally (Craig, & Pepler, 2003).

The types of bullying they engage in are different. With girls more likely to commit acts of relational bullying as opposed to boys who are more likely to commit acts of physical bullying, however boys and girls can engage in and be harmed by all forms of bullying (Whitted, & Dupper, 2005). Both girls and boys are more in danger than they could be from relational and physical bullying respectively because of the nature of how their genders interact with those bullying types. Girls tend to be more interconnected in their social networks and are better able to hide incidents of bullying from parents and teachers (Mishna, Scarcello, Pepler, & Wiener, 2005). This type of bullying is often done over a long period of time, can be between “friends”, and appear to be simple squabbles to outsiders. This can make it difficult for parents and teachers to detect, and if detected hard for them to intervene (Smith, Cousins, & Stewart, 2005).

Boys have been shown to be more aggressive than girls across all age groups (Craig, & Pepler, 2003). This problem is further complicated by the fact that boys are more accepting of violence (Scheithauer, Hayer, Petermann, & Jugert, 2006). However, Goldstien (2001) argues, society indirectly and directly encourages boys towards being more aggressive; however, boys are not mentally or emotionally tougher than girls, despite stereotypes to the contrary.

### 3. Method

#### 3.1. Subjects

The subjects were students in their 4<sup>th</sup> and final year of an education degree at a large public university in central South Korea. Completion of this degree would make them eligible to teach their subject matter at middle or high school. There were 101 participants total of which 70% (n = 74) were female and 30% (n = 27) were male. The participants were a spread of different subject majors, see table 1. The age of the subjects ranged between 22 and 27 with the mean age being 23.5. In terms of major, gender and age the subjects in this study are broadly representative of the college of education. The students were spread across majors in the school of education: Korean Education 24, English Education 24, Earth Science Education 15, Music Education 10, Social Studies Education 9, Pedagogy 6, Computer Education 4, History Education 2, Chinese Education 2, Environmental Education 2, Chemistry Education 2, and Ethics Education 1.

#### 3.2. Measures

A survey was used containing vignettes devised by Yoon and Kerber (2003) and also used in similar research by Bauman and Rio (2006). The questions were initially created for use in the Bullying Attitude Questionnaire (Craig, Henderson, & Murphy, 2000). The vignettes and questions are clear and involve situations which are clear cut and the teacher observes directly. There are 6 vignettes

within the survey after which are three Likert type items rating the subjects beliefs about the seriousness of the event portrayed in the vignette, the amount of empathy they have for the student victim in the vignette, how likely they are to intervene. Following the three Likert items are two questions asking, “What would you do with the perpetrator?” And, “What would you do with the victim?”

The vignettes are divided into three different types. In which, two show examples of physical bullying, two show examples of verbal bullying, and two show examples of relational bullying. Added to and differing from Yoon and Kerber’s (2003) vignettes is a sentence at the beginning which states that the event occurs in a first grade classroom at either a girl’s or a boy’s high school. This was done to gauge the different reactions of the preservice teachers depending on whether the scenarios took place in a girl’s or boy’s high school.

The surveys were also split in half so as to gather information on all the vignettes for both the girl’s and boy’s high school scenarios. See appendix one for a breakdown of the differing vignettes in each survey.

The vignettes were translated into Korean and some of the phrases uttered by the students in the scenarios were changed to more accurately reflect what Korean students say. The translated and change vignettes were then checked by six Korean middle and high school teachers for authenticity. There was some discussion that some of the described incidents may be infrequent, that is the cases of physical bullying of females, however, all were judged to be appropriate and realistic in a Korean high school context.

#### 3.3. Procedure

Members of several different education departments within the university were contacted and given as many surveys as they believed they could have completed. Participation was voluntary and only members and no data is available on students who were offered the survey but choose not to take it.

Of 150 surveys given out 116 were returned. 10 of the surveys were completed by special education majors and 7 by Early Childhood education majors; these were removed as it was thought that the participants may have had slightly differing perceptions of the vignettes even though they stated that the incident occurred in high schools. A review of the open ended questions in those 17 surveys confirmed this suspicion with a strong tendency for the respondents to treat the incidents like they had occurred in either a special education environment or a preschool.

As in Yoon and Kerber (2003) and in Bauman and Rio (2006) if multiple responses were given the highest rated response was chosen. So for example if a subject wrote: “Talk to him and then make him do pushups.” Even though it contains elements of the category, “discuss it with them” it would be coded as, “discipline” as the highest rated response in the answer.

To quantify the preservice teachers’ perception of bullying, we analyzed the collected data using SPSSWIN

19.0. First we wanted to identify the recognition of different bullying types. So we produced the average of perception of different bullying types and compared them to the standard deviation. Secondly, we used matched-pairs t-test to each bullying type, that is, Verbal, Relational and Physical to decide whether the perception is different according to gender of subjects. We considered a level of below 0.05 as significant in the matched paired t-tests to be significant.

## 4. Results

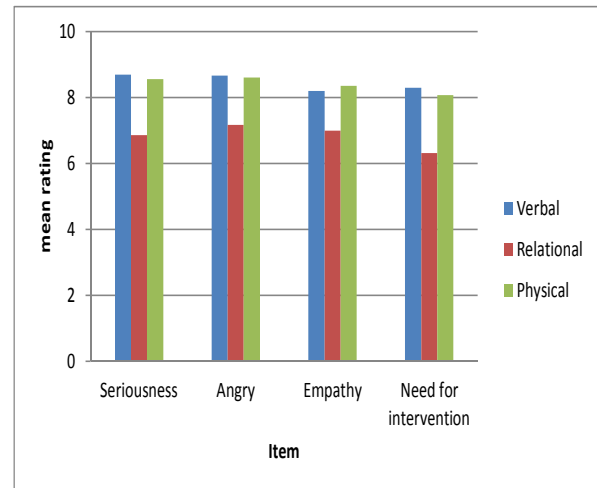
### 4.1. Do the Responses among Preservice Teachers vary Based on Bullying Types?

There was a clear difference in response between the three differing bullying types. Subjects found cases of relational bullying to be less serious, to have less anger at the perpetrators, less empathy for the victims, and to be less likely to be involved; when compared to physical and verbal bullying. To quantify preservice teachers' perception difference of bullying types, we compared verbal, physical and relational values of responses to the vignettes.

**Table 1.** Means and Standard Deviations of Vignette Ratings by Bullying type

Item	Bullying type					
	Verbal		Relational		Physical	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Seriousness(n=101)	8.69	1.22	6.86	1.46	8.56	1.45
Angry (n=101)	8.66	1.13	7.17	1.30	8.61	1.25
Empathy(n=101)	8.20	1.56	7.00	1.41	8.36	1.56
Need for intervention(n=101)	8.30	1.32	6.32	1.30	8.07	1.46
Total	8.46	1.09	6.84	1.17	8.4	1.23

Table 1 shows that mean values of the three types are respectively 8.46 for verbal, 6.84 for relational, and 8.4 for physical bullying. This means that verbal and physical bullying are perceived similarly, while relational bullying is considered to be less serious, there is less anger at the perpetrator, less empathy for the victim and less of a likelihood of subject response. These results show that preservice teachers recognize verbal and physical bullying more than relational bullying, and they think verbal and physical bullying are more serious problems than relational bullying.



**Figure 1.** Mean rating for vignettes

### 4.2. Do the responses among preservice teachers vary based on student gender?

To measure the gender difference in perception of bullying types, we used matched-pairs t-test for comparing responses of two gender groups to verbal, physical and relational bullying. Overall there was no statistically significant difference based on the gender of the students in the vignettes. However, when we separated male and female subjects and the types of bullying we found two interesting cases there was a significant difference in response.

In Table 2, V1S, R1S, P1S means respectively verbal bullying value, relational bullying value, physical bullying value of male students ; V2S, R2S, P2S means respectively verbal bullying value, relational bullying value, physical bullying value of female students. The Table shows that male preservice teachers have no difference in perception of verbal and relational bullying based on the gender of the students, but they do have perception difference in terms of physical bullying based on the gender of the students. That is, they think physical bullying is a more serious problem for male students than female students.

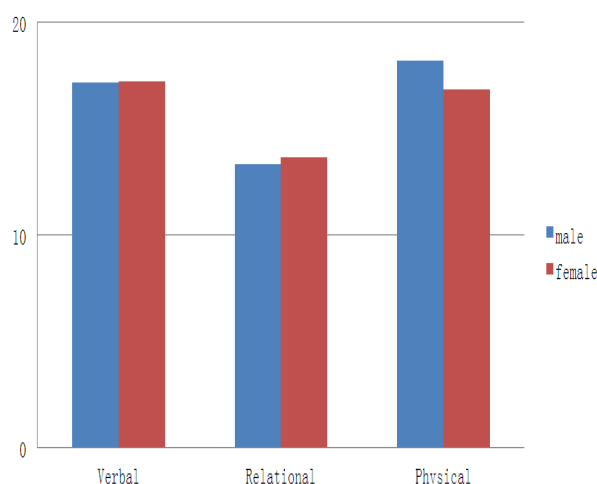
The Table shows that female preservice teachers have no difference in their perception of verbal and physical bullying based on the gender of the students, but they do have difference of perception when it comes to relational bullying based on the gender of the students. That is, they think relational bullying is more a serious problem for female students than male students.

**Table 2.** Do male preservice teachers recognize bullying differently depending on the gender of the student?

	Response difference					t	Degree of freedom	P-value (both parts)
	Average	SD	Average Standard Errors	95% confidence interval				
				Lowest limit	Highest limit			
Verbal bullying	-.07407	3.44100	.66222	-1.43	1.28714	-.112	26	.912
Relational bullying	-.33333	3.57341	.68770	-1.74	1.08026	-.485	26	.632
Physical bullying	1.37037	2.52903	.48671	.369	2.37082	2.816	26	.009

**Table 3.** Do female preservice teachers recognize bullying differently depending on the gender of the student?

	Average	SD	Average Standard Errors	Response difference		t	Degree of freedom	P-value (both parts)
				95% confidence interval	Lowest limit Highest limit			
Verbal Bullying	-.47297	3.60830	.41946	-1.308	.36300	-1.128	73	.263
Relational Bullying	-1.148	4.13698	.48091	-2.107	-.19019	-2.388	73	.020
Physical Bullying	.36486	3.97793	.46243	-.55675	1.28648	.789	73	.433

**Figure 2.** Mean results for bullying type by gender

## 5. Discussion

The participants in this study would intervene in cases of relational bullying less than in cases of physical bullying for both perpetrators and victims. They also were more likely to take action when the incidents involved females than when they involved males. In cases of male bullying the respondents had a strong tendency to involve another teacher or the principal to deal with perpetrators but were unlikely to involve anyone for male victims. In cases of female perpetrators and victims there was a strong tendency to involve the parents of the victim and the perpetrator. This follows international research on this problem (Bauman & Del Rio 2006) in that preservice teachers find relational bullying to be less serious than other types of bullying. This is a serious problem internationally, and is particularly salient in Korea because relational bullying is the most prevalent type of bullying that students are exposed to (Chee 2006; Koo 2007; Koo, Kwak, & Smith 2008). Of interest is that in this research unlike Bauman and Del Rio's verbal bullying is treated as being as serious as physical bullying. This effect may be caused by one of the vignettes (see appendix 3), vignette 3 which contained a student asking another student for money. The subjects in this study found that vignette to be more serious than physical bullying. In casual communication with some of the subjects about this after the survey was completed, they generally explained this as feeling like asking for money was a, "crime" while a student being punched was seen as

being part of day to day school life. The students in the classroom environment would observe and react to the punishment schedule and adapt their behavior accordingly. The lack of responses towards relational bullying may serve to indirectly promote, or at least fail to reduce relational bullying.

Male subjects treated incidents of physical bullying more seriously than did female subjects. In turn female subjects treated incidents of relational bullying more seriously than did male subjects.

### 5.1. Limitations and Recommendations for Further Study

It is therefore needed to make preservice teachers more sensitive to differing types of bullying and encourage them to react and deal with relational bullying. They must also be made aware of the need to treat incidents involving boys as being serious so that they do not inadvertently encourage the bullying of boys or girls.

Furthermore, to induce more realistic responses, video vignettes could be used as opposed to the written vignettes used in this and most other studies. This would bring out a stronger effect, if one exists, in terms of the effects of gender on teacher response. For example, it is one thing to respond to a piece of writing about a girl being hit, another to watch a video of a girl being hit.

## Appendix

### Appendix 1

*Survey 1* (n = 40) contained 6 vignettes which were broken down as follows; vignette 1, verbal bullying male; vignette 2, relational bullying female; vignette 3, verbal bullying female; vignette 4, physical bullying male; vignette 5, relational bullying male; vignette 6, physical bullying male. *Survey 2* (n = 42) contained the same vignettes with a differing first sentence describing the gender of the bully and victims. *Survey 2* was broken down as follows; vignette 1, verbal bullying female; vignette 2, relational bullying male; vignette 3, verbal bullying male; vignette 4, physical bullying male; vignette 5, relational bullying female; vignette 6, physical bullying female.

### Appendix 2

The open ended questions were translated into English for the author by his students, and then another group of

students checked the translations for accuracy and consistency. The answers were then coded by the author into 8 different categories which were used for both the victim and the perpetrator: The first category of response coded was, "no response" which contained these types of responses, "Do nothing." "Watch." "I don't see what the problem is." "It isn't my job to make them friendly with each other." "It doesn't matter." "It isn't serious." The second category of response coded was, "talk to him/her" which contained these types of responses: "Discuss it with them." "Warn him." "Encourage her to do better." "Talk." "Console." "Counsel." The third category of response coded was, "teach a solution" which contained these types of responses: "Role play the scenario." "Teach her what she did was wrong." "Teach him to fight back." "Give her a strategy so she doesn't hit others when she is angry." "Ask her to read the book 'The Little Tree' so she can be more confident." The fourth category of response coded was, "discipline" which contained these types of responses: "Discipline." "Make him stand with his arms in the air." "Hit his feet with a stick." "Make him write some lines about his actions." The fifth category coded was for victims only and was, "See if they brought it on themselves." These responses were initially coded as, "Talk to him/her." However, they were prevalent and showed an interesting attitude by the trainee teachers so were coded into a separate category. The fifth category contains these types of responses: "I think she caused it, so I would ask her to stop." "I would see if she is the cause." "She is the problem, so I would tell her not to talk." "Ask him why she causes that kind of behavior." The sixth category coded was, "involve another teacher/principal" which contains these types of responses: "Call in another teacher." "Send him to the principal." "Send him to another teacher." "Get the school counselor to come and speak to them." "Ask a senior teacher to handle the situation." The seventh category coded was "involve the parents" which contains these types of responses: "Call their parents to school." "Have a meeting with their parents." The eighth response coded was "transfer the student" which contained these types of responses: "Send him to another school." "Send him to another class." "Expel him." "Suspend him."

### Appendix 3

Age:  
Grade:  
Major Subject:  
Minor Subject:  
Gender:

You are a teacher in a boys'/girls' first grade high school class, when you witness this incident. At the writing center you hear a student chant to another student, "Teacher's pet, brown nose, suck up, kiss ass." The student tries to ignore the remarks but sulks at his desk. You saw the same thing happen the other day.

You are a teacher in a boys'/girls' first grade high school class, when you witness this incident. During project time

you overhear a student say to another student, "If you don't let me use your dictionary, I won't invite you to my house." This is not the first time you have heard this student say this type of thing.

You are a teacher in a boys'/girls' first grade high school class, when you witness this incident. Your class is getting ready to go to lunch and you hear one student say to another, "If you don't give me some money for snacks I will punch you in the face." The student complies at once. This is not the first time this has happened.

You are a teacher in a boys'/girls' first grade high school class, when you witness this incident. A student bought a nice pen to school. He boasts that he won it in a game on the street (what are they called?). Another student goes over and smacks his head telling him to stop boasting and demands the pen. The student refuses at first, but eventually gives in.

You are a teacher in a boys'/girls' first grade high school class, when you witness this incident. You have allowed your students to have a little free time because they have worked so hard today. You witness a student say to another student, "No absolutely not. I already told you that you can't play with us." The student is isolated and plays alone for the remaining time with tears in her eyes. This is not the first time this child has isolated someone from playing.

You are a teacher in a boys'/girls' first grade high school class, when you witness this incident. You have assigned your students work to do in groups of 4. While the students are getting into groups you see a student push another student with enough force for the student to fall to the ground. The push was clearly intentional and was not provoked. The student that fell yells, "Stop pushing me around! You always do this, just go away."

In your opinion, how serious is this situation?

I would be upset by the student's behavior

I would feel sympathetic to the victim

How likely are you to intervene in this situation?

If you would respond to this situation:

What would you do with the perpetrator?

What would you do with the victim?

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