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# Bullying in American Schools: A Social-Ecological Perspective on Prevention and Intervention, edited by Dorothy L. Espelage & Susan M. Swearer

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Rolheiser quotes the words of St. Augustine: “For you have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you” (p. 111). Perhaps the most important realization is that the answers can be found only when we look inward and find contentment in knowing that the restlessness that we feel is part of our journey here on earth, and that the true alleviation of loneliness will be found when we are united with God. The combination of narrative, anecdotes, stories, and quotations makes the reading enjoyable and pertinent to every aspect of our lives. *The Restless Heart* leaves the reader with a feeling of connectedness to other Christians who all hunger for the same true meaning in life.

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## **BULLYING IN AMERICAN SCHOOLS: A SOCIAL-ECOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE ON PREVENTION AND INTERVENTION**

DOROTHY L. ESPELAGE & SUSAN M. SWEARER, EDS.  
LAWRENCE ERLBAUM ASSOCIATES, 2003  
\$45.00, 408 pages

*Reviewed by Adrianna Duncan*

Misery is...

Misery is when you go to school and bullies pick on you.

Misery is when you share with someone, but they don't share with you.

Misery is when bullies become friends, and friends become bullies.

Misery is when you go to school and people threaten you by telling you that they will get you after school.

Misery is when you are at breakfast recess and people push you around for no reason.

Misery is when people invite everyone but you to play tag and football.

-Written by a 10-year old depressed and anxious bully victim. (Espelage & Swearer, 2004, p. 63)

Bullying is a phenomenon that does not discriminate. It affects people of all age, race, class, religion, and gender. Each morning, thousands of children across the nation awake to the dread of a new school day. The U.S. Departments of Education and Justice reports,

In 2003, 7 percent of students ages 12-18 reported that they had been bullied at school during the last 6 months....Grade level was inversely related to students' likelihood of being bullied: as grade level increased, students' likelihood of being bullied decreased....In 2003, 14 percent of 6th-graders, 7 percent of 9th-graders, and 2 percent of 12th-graders reported that they had been bullied at school. (DeVoe, Peter, Noonan, Snyder, & Baum, 2005, p. 38)

*Bullying in American Schools: A Social-Ecological Perspective on Prevention and Intervention* (Espelage & Swearer, 2004) provides a compilation of research that addresses this crisis. Espelage and Swearer begin by introducing the social-ecological framework in which bullying occurs. They emphasize that bullying does not occur in isolation. The authors stress that relationships across family, peer, school, and community contexts will influence the engagement, or non-engagement, in bullying and victimization behaviors. They aver that in order to tackle the problem, interventions will be most effective if they target multiple environments. Other researchers affirm their theory.

These researchers state that data should be collected across settings (e.g., home, school, community, laboratory) by multiple informants (e.g., observers, children, peers, parents, teacher) and using multiple methods (e.g., home observations, lab tasks, classroom, playground, questionnaires, interviews, phone interviews, standardized tests, records). (Espelage & Swearer, 2004, p. 4)

*Bullying in American Schools: A Social-Ecological Perspective on Prevention and Intervention* is organized into five sections. The first four sections address the different systems in the social-ecological framework. Each chapter of research includes a section titled "Translating Research Into Practice: Implications for Bullying Prevention and Intervention Programs" which gives practical advice to aid teachers and administrators in making research-based decisions when assessing their own circumstances and planning for intervention and prevention. The final section reviews and analyzes three different research-tested programs that have been used successfully in schools.

Section 1 includes three chapters that address the individual characteristics associated with bullying. The chapter "Gender Differences in Bullying" offers research that both boys and girls display aggressive behaviors toward others in the form of bullying. Studies show that males tend to be the more aggressive sex when it comes to physical aggressive acts, and females tend

to participate in less overt acts of aggression including indirect aggression, relational aggression, and social aggression.

The chapter “Internalizing Problems in Students Involved in Bullying and Victimization: Implications for Intervention” examines the depression, hopelessness, locus of control, and anxiety problems which result from bullying. It suggests that all people on the bully/victim continuum are affected by these problems at different degrees. The chapter also recommends interventions for these conditions.

Section 2 focuses on the peer characteristics associated with bullying. It discusses the peer ecologies of bullies, and how peer groups can both positively and negatively influence bully behavior.

Section 3 takes a look at the classroom characteristics associated with bullying. The chapter “Teachers’ Attitudes Toward Bullying” describes how teachers’ attitudes and the classroom climate affect bullying behaviors. A large number of studies show that teachers are often unaware of the extent of bullying in their schools.

Section 4 presents five different chapters that address these larger systems. “The Impact of Family Relationships on School Bullies and Victims” is particularly interesting, providing descriptions of attachment theory, social learning theory, family systems theory, and parenting styles. It goes on to discuss how familial relations shape the behaviors of children.

Section 5 reviews three different research-based programs—Bully Busters, Expect Respect, and the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program—all of which have been implemented in schools in the United States.

*Bullying in American Schools: A Social-Ecological Perspective on Prevention and Intervention* is a well-organized book that contains a solid research base on the complexities of bullying. It helps readers to understand that in order to change bully behaviors, one must target the entire system, not just the individual behavior. It provides valuable information to aid educators, administrators, parents, and psychologists, in making data-driven decisions to help schools choose, develop, and implement effective bullying prevention programs.

## REFERENCES

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