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Views of Catholic Middle School Students on Handling Peer Aggression

Ishita Khemka¹, Linda Hickson² and Lina Gilic³

Abstract: Aggression toward peers who are perceived as weaker or different is a widespread problem for middle school students including those attending Catholic middle schools. Middle school students' normative beliefs about the acceptability of various types of aggressive behavior influences their own potential involvement in bullying. Therefore, how middle schoolers decide to respond to situations of peer aggression may affect their standing as either victims, bystanders to bullies, or as bully-victims in school environments over time. This study looks at how middle schoolers (sixth, seventh, and eighth grade girls and boys) in Catholic schools think it best to respond to peer aggression by examining their decision-making preferences for how targeted peers (from a vulnerable group) should respond to physical, verbal, or cyber aggression situations. Although significant effects regarding gender, grade, and type of peer aggression were found for the decision-making of the middle schoolers, findings reveal that overall middle schoolers' preferences were well developed for resisting peer aggression. The study provides important insights for how to supplement commonly existing curricula on social emotional learning in Catholic Schools with decision-making training inputs for the design of future school-based bullying prevention programs. Preparing middle schoolers in Catholic schools to respond to stop peer aggression in a proactive way supports the mission of Catholic schools to create safe and caring school environments.

Keywords: Catholic middle schools, peer aggression, bullying, bystander, decision making

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Peer victimization in the form of aggression toward peers, especially those perceived as weaker or different, is a widespread problem among middle school students. Repeated peer aggression can lead to bullying and lasting implications for the peer victim, the bully, and the bully-victim. Since teaching students Church morality and ethics is a principal goal of Catholic schools, the anti-bullying message is clear and emphatic, with students being empowered and rewarded for taking proactive stances in bullying prevention. Keeping with the goals of Catholic education, finding ways to reduce peer victimization is a high priority. Social emotional learning (SEL) curricula taught in many Catholic schools teach both students and adults how to prevent bullying and provide healthier environments for learning and growth. To do so, SEL focuses on establishing and maintaining positive relationships and making responsible decisions. Therefore, better understanding of relationship dynamics in the decision-making behaviors of those involved in bullying situations is of central importance. Recent research suggests that the extent to which bystanders, or witnesses, endorse victim retaliation—which in turn tends to escalate the aggression or bullying—may play a key role in the frequency of peer aggression. This study aims to gain a clearer understanding of Catholic middle schoolers' endorsements of victim response. The extent to which their responses are related to gender and/or age is also examined to identify risk factors and provide a basis for designing peer aggression interventions.

Peer aggression takes many forms, ranging from direct physical aggression to direct or indirect relational aggression. Bullying is defined as repeated aggression toward another person who is perceived as weaker and less capable of defending himself or herself from the aggressor (Olweus, 1991). Bullying is most prevalent in the middle school grades of all school communities (Bradshaw et al., 2007; Yanez & Seldin, 2019). Previous research has found that 29.9% of U.S. youth are involved in bullying, with bullying frequency being highest among sixth through eighth grade students (Nansel et al., 2001). Relational aggression has been defined as non-physical aggression with “the intent to harm or manipulate someone’s social relationships or social status” (Low et al., 2010, p. 536). Relational aggression may be either direct, including verbal or nonverbal threats or actions (e.g., social exclusion), or indirect, which includes spreading lies and rumors, either face-to-face or remotely through social media technology, referred to as cyberbullying. Although programs have been developed to reduce peer victimization, Dailey et al. (2015) concluded from their review that relational aggression may be less responsive to interventions than physical aggression. Huesmann and Guerra (1997) examined participants’ normative beliefs about the acceptability of various types of aggressive behavior. They found that normative beliefs which endorsed retaliatory aggression predicted increases in observed aggression. Frey et al. (2009) reported increases with age for the endorsement of physical, verbal, and relational retaliation. It has been found that for victimized children, beliefs endorsing retaliatory aggression constitute a

powerful risk factor for further victimization (Kochenderfer & Ladd, 1997).

Although it has been widely assumed that physical aggression is the domain of boys and relational aggression the domain of girls, recent studies have questioned these assumptions, with some studies reporting similarities in perpetration and victimization patterns in boys and girls (Juvonen et al., 2013) and others reporting higher levels of both physical and relational aggression in boys than girls (Salmivalli & Kaukiainen, 2004). Eriksen and Lyng (2018) suggested that the boys' relational aggression in their study may have been underestimated by school staff members because they lacked the lens for seeing and reporting it. In addition, boys may be reluctant to report relational aggression victimization due to social expectations which condemn boys for being heavily invested in social relationships. Rice et al. (2015) found a strong gender effect in their study of cyberbullying experience patterns and behaviors among middle school students, with girls displaying a higher risk than boys for becoming the perpetrator or victim of cyberbullying (leading to bi-directional cyber bullying).

Past research on risk factors associated with peer victimization has focused on identifying personal variables such as cognitive and social skills, communication, internalizing and mental health characteristics, adaptive behavior, and awareness deficits as potential risk factors. Recent research has begun to draw attention to social context and its impact on peer relationships and peer groups, especially in the context of a school environment. The ecological systems model recognizes the underlying environmental influences (e.g., family, classroom, peer groups, social) on individual behavior (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Espelage et al., 2015) and provides a strong contextual framework for understanding bullying behavior by examining the various peer interactions that surround an individual student and can impact her/his overall social functioning in school. Thus, the correlation with victimization during middle school years pertains, to a large extent, to peer social expectations and endorsements of social rules and interaction boundaries. In a situation of peer victimization or bullying, the presence and role of peer witnesses as bystanders can be pivotal. The response of the bystander student can play an important role in the outcome of bullying. Different bystander roles have been identified in a number of school-based samples, ranging from assistance to reinforcement to defense by standing up for the victim (Adams & Lawrence, 2011; Crapanzano et al., 2011; Datta et al., 2016). Since adolescents in peer groups often encourage each other's antisocial behavior, especially when the criteria for appropriate conduct are unclear (Bazelon, 2013), shaping appropriate bystander behaviors could be vital in middle school bullying prevention. The bystander response can change the security expectation that peers feel in a school climate. Researchers have found that some students are frequently targeted in schools and face a higher risk of becoming victims of aggression or bullying by peers. Vulnerable students typically targeted in middle schools include students from minority groups, students whose sexual orientation or gender identity are questioned, students with weight issues, students with

disabilities or special learning needs, or students struggling socially (Blake et al., 2016; Espelage et al., 2015; Farmer et al., 2015; Lafee, 2012; Phillips & Cornell, 2012; Rice et al., 2015). According to Yanez & Seldin (2019), the most frequent reasons students are bullied are based on their physical appearance, race/ethnicity, gender, disability, religion, or sexual orientation.

Student attitudes and expected norms for bullying behaviors toward vulnerable groups, along with perceived beliefs for how to handle such situations of peer aggression, directly influence students' own potential involvement in bullying as bullies or bystanders in school environments. Students' expectations for how vulnerable groups should respond to situations of peer aggression provide insight into their own response to peer aggression and bullying, allowing for a better understanding of the social context and the prevention and intervention strategies that can be developed to address these issues in middle schools. In this study, the focus was on the experiences of students in Catholic middle schools.

Although research investigating bullying in Catholic schools is limited, a few studies shed light on the circumstances of bullying and related risks. In an online survey research study by Murphey (2018) involving 282 Catholic middle school students from Grades 6-8, 44.7% of the middle school students believed their peers were available to them whenever they needed help. About 10% of student-victims reported that they did not get any help from their peers when faced with bullying, with the majority of student-victims (80%) indicating that their teachers provided support. Student-victims felt they received more support from their teachers than from their peers. Students in general thought of school as an important and good place for them to be, and the majority of students stated that they did not encourage others to hurt weaker students. While it is commonly assumed that small caring school or religious education communities have a smaller likelihood of bullying, Zulkey (2017) presented compelling evidence that Catholic middle school students might not be free from the effects of bullying. Huggins (2016) asserts, "while bullying is unacceptable behavior in any school, it is particularly problematic in Catholic schools, which must embody Gospel values" (p. 160).

The present study was designed to examine the normative beliefs of sixth, seventh, and eighth graders by asking them how a peer (from a vulnerable group) subjected to aggression should respond to various situations, representing physical, verbal, or cyber forms of aggression. Participants were presented with 12 hypothetical peer aggression situations and asked to choose one of four decision actions in response to the question: *What is the best thing for the protagonist (potential victim) to do in this situation?* Equal numbers of situations represented physical aggression, verbal aggression, and cyber aggression. Decision response options included recommending that the protagonist should: (1) verbally confront the aggressor and tell her/him to stop, (2) ask a friend or an adult to help, (3) hit back or retaliate (for physical or verbal aggression situations) or post a mean comment (for cyber aggression situations), and (4) utilize a take-no-

action response, such as walking away, signing off (for cyber aggression situations), or ignoring the situation. The purpose of the study was to compare the extent to which sixth, seventh, and eighth grade girls and boys endorsed each of the first three decision response options as a way of handling the three types of peer aggression situations. The study explored how well-prepared middle schoolers in Catholic schools are to proactively resist or stop bullying in their schools, an aspect of creating safe and caring environments that is important to the mission of Catholic schools. Specifically, the following research question was studied: To what extent are Catholic middle school students' endorsements for bullying situation responses associated with age, gender, and/or type of situation?

Method

Participants

A sample of 77 middle school students (51 girls and 26 boys) from two Catholic schools in the New York metropolitan area participated in the study. The average age of the sample was 12.5 years of age ($SD = 1.0$). Overall, participants were evenly distributed across three grade levels: sixth grade (28.6%), seventh grade (33.8%), and eighth grade (37.7%). Approximately 70% of participants were Caucasian ($n = 53$), with 9.1% being Hispanic ($n = 7$), and 9.1% being Asian or Indian ($n = 7$). The gender and ethnicity distribution is representative of student enrollment in Catholic schools in the New York metropolitan area. Students who did not fully complete their surveys or those who marked more than one multiple-choice response for any of the survey situations were removed from the data analysis. The final study sample included 69 students (45 girls, 24 boys).

Instrumentation

A decision-making survey created for this study presented 12 hypothetical situations as three to four sentence vignettes depicting an equal number of situations of physical, verbal, or cyber aggression. The internal consistency of this survey for the study sample was computed as Cronbach $\alpha = .66$. Each situation portrayed an instance in a school setting in which a peer was faced with aggression from a fellow peer (aggressor) and was required to respond to the following decision-making question: What is the best thing for (target) to do in this situation? The peers facing the aggression were depicted as having a vulnerable social status (linked to having a disability, a unique physical characteristic, or a different social standing), representing the group of students that face the most risk for peer victimization in middle school. A multiple-choice response format was used to measure participants' preferred type of response to each of 12 decision situations. The four response-type options represented the following suggested ways that the protagonist might respond to the peer aggressor: Type 1 – *verbally confront the aggressor and tell him/her to stop*; Type 2 – *get help from someone by either asking a friend or an adult for help*; Type 3 – *retaliate*

aggressively such as hitting back or posting a mean comment; Type 4 – *take no action such as walking away, signing off, ignoring or accepting the situation*. The number of responses in each decision response-type category were tallied across the 12 situations to create four decision response-type scores. A sample of each of the three types of peer aggression situations (physical, verbal, and cyber) along with examples of the four multiple-choice response-type options (Type 1- Type 4) are presented in Table 1. The situation type (physical aggression, verbal aggression, and cyber aggression) formed the repeated measure variable in this study.

Procedure

Informed consent procedures were conducted by the school counselors in accord with protocol approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the first author's institution. The school counselor at each of the two participating Catholic middle schools sent out a letter to parents/legal guardians of all students in grades sixth through eighth explaining the purpose of the study and seeking informed consent for participation. Based on informed consents received, a list of students by grade was generated at each of the two schools and shared with the researchers, along with each student's date of birth. Information was also collected on whether a student was receiving any instructional accommodations as part of their regular academic program.

Administration of the study survey was done in a single setting of approximately 40 minutes at each of the schools' cafeterias, with students sharing tables while spaced enough apart to allow for individual testing. The date and time of testing was coordinated with the help of the school counselors, who arranged the student schedules to allow for minimum disruption in instructional time and to make it possible for all participating students to gather for one testing session. The first and third authors and a doctoral graduate student assistant were present at the testing. Directions for completing the survey were verbally read out to the students after which the students individually wrote their responses to complete the scales. The students were told that the survey was not a test, there were no right or wrong answers, and they should attempt all questions to their best understanding. The school counselor was present during testing at the two schools and provided minor individual assistance with survey completion as needed by students (e.g., difficulty reading a word or figuring out the response format).

Results

Preliminary Analyses

Preliminary *t*-tests were done to check if the groups of students from the two Catholic schools were comparable on average chronological age. The *t*-test for age between the two schools was not significant and, therefore, the sample was treated as a whole. Only 10 students in the entire sample reported receiving instructional accommodations, equally distributed across the two schools (4 in

one, 6 in another). Having instructional accommodations did not necessarily mean that the student had an identified disability.

Main Analyses on Decision-Making Responses

Gender (2) x Grade (3) x Situation Type (3) ANOVAs with repeated measures on the third factor were performed on the frequency of Type 1, Type 2, and Type 3 decision-making responses.

Type 1 Responses. The analysis for Type 1 decision responses yielded only one significant main effect for situation type ($F(2/126 \text{ df}) = 5.52, p < .005$) and no significant interactions. Overall, there were significantly more Type 1 decision responses (*i.e., confronting the aggressor and telling them to stop*) for cyber aggression situations (Mean = 2.12, SD = 1.29) and verbal aggression (Mean = 1.97, SD = 1.20) situation vignettes than for physical aggression situation (Mean = 1.54, SD = 1.24) vignettes, with the frequencies of Type 1 responses for verbal aggression and cyber aggression situation vignettes not differing from each other. Overall, 47% of the decision responses involved confronting the aggressor (Type 1).

Type 2 Responses. A 2 x 3 x 3 ANOVA on Type 2 decision-making responses again yielded only a situation-type main effect ($F(2/126 \text{ df}) = 3.15, p < .05$). Overall, there were significantly more Type 2 responses (*i.e., ask a friend or an adult for help*) for cyber aggression (Mean = 1.48, SD = 1.30) than for verbal aggression (Mean = 1.14, SD = 1.05) situation vignettes. The frequency of Type 2 responses for physical aggression vignettes (Mean = 1.26, SD = 1.29) did not differ from the other two types of aggression situations. Overall, 32% of participants' decision responses involved asking for help (Type 2).

Type 3 Responses. A 2 x 3 x 3 ANOVA on Type 3 decision-making responses (*e.g., Hit back; post a mean comment*) yielded three significant main effects and two significant interactions. A significant main effect of gender ($F(1/63 \text{ df}) = 13.81, p < .001$) indicated that boys (Mean = 2.33, SD = 2.73) produced significantly more Type 3 decision responses than girls (Mean = .56, SD = 1.45). A significant main effect of grade ($F(2/63 \text{ df}) = 5.39, p < .01$) indicated that eighth graders (Mean = 2.12, SD = 2.60) produced significantly more Type 3 decision responses than either sixth graders (Mean = .57, SD = 1.12) or seventh graders (Mean = .70, SD = 2.03), and that sixth and seventh graders did not differ from each other. The main effect of situation type ($F(2/126 \text{ df}) = 21.40, p < .001$)

A significant gender-by-situation-type interaction ($F(2/126 \text{ df}) = 4.67, p < .05$) was obtained. See Table 2 for means and SDs. As can be seen in Figure 1, there was an ordinal interaction with boys choosing more retaliatory aggression (Type 3) responses than girls for all three situation types, but especially for physical aggression vignettes. The grade-by-situation-type interaction was also significant ($F(4/126 \text{ df}) = 7.22, p < .01$). See Table 3 for means and SDs. The interaction is illustrated in Figure 2, which shows generally few Type 3 responses for sixth and seventh graders.

However, eighth graders showed an increased tendency to choose retaliatory aggression (Type 3) decision-making responses to verbal and, especially, physical aggression vignettes. Overall, participants from all three grade levels produced Type 3 responses to cyber aggression vignettes relatively infrequently.

Discussion

Almost half of the responses in this study involved standing up to a peer aggressor and telling them to stop. This response was more often the case with cyber and verbal aggression situations than with situations involving physical aggression. An additional third of the students' responses consisted of asking a friend or an adult for help, especially in response to the relational aggression situations that were depicted in the cyber aggression vignettes. Seeking outside help was not recommended by participants as frequently for situations involving verbal or physical aggression. These findings reveal that middle schoolers' normative beliefs on how to handle relational aggression is generally well developed for resisting peer aggression. Two thirds of the vignettes used in the present study (i.e., 4 verbal aggression and 4 cyber aggression situations) presented relational aggression scenarios, for which middle schoolers endorsed speaking out or getting help as the best ways to confront the peer aggressor.

Though fewer in number, the middle school students' responses included suggesting some sort of retaliatory aggression (e.g., posting a mean comment in response to cyber aggression or hitting back in response to physical aggression) as a response to peer aggression situations 10% of the time. Although such decision responses reflect a stance against the peer aggressor, the response intends to inflict retaliatory harm and therefore carries the risk of instigating further aggression among peers. Such patterns of retaliatory aggression can lead to the victim perpetuating physical aggression toward others and assuming the status of bully-victim over time. This tendency to endorse the use of physical aggression was observed more often in boys than in girls and in eighth graders than in eighth or seventh graders. This suggests a gender-specific coping pattern for peer aggression, with boys tending to endorse physical retaliation as a means of self-defense more often than girls. This can make boys more vulnerable to physical aggression and to becoming bullies or bully-victims in their peer groups. In addition, middle school students tend to increase their endorsements for physical retaliation in aggressive situations as they move through middle school, reaching significantly higher levels of retaliation endorsement in eighth grade.

Within these overall trends, some interesting patterns emerged. A significant gender-by-situation-type interaction indicated that the boy/girl difference was most apparent for physical aggression (one third of the situations in the decision-making survey included overt physical aggression by a peer), with boys choosing retaliatory responses involving physical aggression significantly more than girls. This suggests that middle school boys, relative to girls, might be

more prone to physical fights or violence when interacting with peer aggressors. As bystanders to bullying, middle school boys might be more likely to urge their peers to adopt physical retaliation toward their aggressors, thereby increasing the risk that peer victims will escalate situations by involving the use of physical aggression. In addition, a significant grade-by-situation-type interaction shows an increased tendency for eighth graders to endorse retaliatory aggressive responses involving verbal aggression, but most especially for situations involving physical aggression. Although the present study is limited in its involvement with students at only two middle schools, similar differences in bullying reactions by gender have been documented in other research. Sentse et al. (2015) found gender differences in bullying reactions, in which peer rejection predicted concurrent and longitudinal bullying in boys. In a study by Carbone-Lopez et al. (2010), it was found that boys engaged in both forms of bullying (direct and indirect) more than girls, and that while girls showed more indirect verbal expressions of violence in their relationships, boys displayed more direct forms of bullying such as physical violence.

The trend observed in this study for an increase of retaliatory aggression endorsements from sixth to eighth grade does not parallel trends reported in the literature based on self-reports of actual behavior. For example, Farrell et al. (2018) reported that the frequency of self-reported physical aggression did not change from sixth to eighth grade. However, the gender differences in peer aggression situation decision-making observed in this study do somewhat align with the findings of Orpinas et al. (2014), who reported that approximately half of the sixth to eighth grade students in their study followed a trajectory of low aggression, but that more boys than girls followed trajectories of higher perpetration of aggression. The present study offers important insights for further exploring the developmental impact on coping with and responding to peer aggression and bullying, and how this might differ for girls and boys. A majority of the decision-making responses endorsed by the middle school students suggested awareness of peer aggression and a need to resist when faced with it. A limited 11% of participant decision responses endorsed taking no action against the peer aggression and to either accept or ignore the situation (e.g., *walk away, ignore the situation*). This has important implications for preparing young, vulnerable adolescents for peer aggression risks in middle school and teaching students to be proactive, responsible bystanders who are prepared to intervene and take a stand against bullying. In the absence of active bystander intervention, vulnerable middle school students remain exposed to the risk of peer aggression.

To address the problem of middle school bullying and develop a positive school climate, schools need to recognize not only the magnitude and range of bullying, but also the dynamics and roles of peers in perpetuating power imbalances that lead to peer aggression (along a bullying continuum, with peers acting as a bully, victim, bully-victim, or bystander). In this regard, bystanders can have an important effect not only on the behaviors of their peers as bullies but also on peer-victim

behaviors through their own response and involvement in stopping the bullying. Research has demonstrated that bystanders as witnesses and active defenders are crucial to inhibiting or fueling bullying (Menesini & Salmivalli, 2017; Polanin et al., 2012). Therefore, enhancing bystander awareness and involvement within the bullying context to support vulnerable peers is important. By applying a decision-making perspective, this study offers a preliminary understanding of bystander behavior in Catholic middle schools and highlights potential areas for future bystander interventions.

Social victimization by peers is known to be a common occurrence in schools, with the risks being most obvious in middle school. Vulnerable individuals (represented as the protagonists in the decision-making situations in this study) face heightened risk for peer aggression, which often easily escalates into incidents of bullying (or cyberbullying). Both victims and perpetrators can suffer short-term and long-term psychological distress and social relationship difficulties as a consequence of their experiences and actions. Due to increasing awareness of the seriousness of this problem, social skills training or bullying prevention programs are becoming an established part of the social emotional learning (SEL) curriculum for youth in Catholic middle schools (Zulkey, 2017). Catholic schools experience increased pressure to address bullying within a social-justice framework and to develop effective intervention programs so students feel safe and can maintain a strong connection with their Catholic school communities (Accordino & Accordino, 2011).

Because of the emphasis on core Catholic values like compassion, bullying prevention among youth is important to both teachers and families in Catholic schools. Increasingly, SEL has been recognized as a useful approach for reducing peer victimization and for promoting prosocial attitudes and behaviors among students (Bradley-Levine, 2021; Espelage et al., 2016; Nickerson et al., 2019). This approach helps students develop social skills and greater self and external awareness by learning to navigate emotions and personal responsibility. SEL resonates naturally with Catholic teachings that guide students to live a life of virtue through the elements of 'knowing and controlling oneself, relating to others, and making good choices' (Richards, 2020). Within this context, teaching adaptive decision-making skills, as examined in this study, is another way to effectively guide Catholic middle schoolers to examine their peer relationship behaviors and strategies for faith community contribution.

Therefore, investigation of complex peer relationship dynamics and peer aggression, as undertaken in this study, warrants continued attention. Overall, we recommend exploring the potential for developing and evaluating broad-based bullying prevention programs (Bradshaw et al., 2013; Gaffney et al., 2019), while focusing on fostering effective decision-making skills among middle school students so they can successfully navigate the different peer roles within schools, including self-protection and active bystandership. Further, intervention programs should consider how training elements could be specifically tailored for girls and boys in specific grades.

The study findings suggest important recommendations for Catholic schools' designing of moral education curricula and the support of strong character development. By including interpersonal decision-making skills training and related skills development (e.g. emotion identification, stress management, social communication) in their middle school social curricula, Catholic schools could help their students understand the role of personal choices and decision-making in character formation, as well as promote personal responsibility for the care of each other. By developing prosocial dispositions and effective decision-making skills, middle schoolers could acquire greater self-protection skills to resist negative peer pressures and social bullying while also exercising more personal agency in victimization prevention in their daily lives (e.g., witnessing an incident of bullying and standing up to the bully as a bystander). By teaching anti-bullying strategies as part of a comprehensive character education initiative, Catholic schools could help promote a culture of kindness and respect (Lickona, 2012).

This study is only a first step, and more research is needed to help teachers in Catholic middle schools identify practices that align with value-based education and ethical leadership to promote a more inclusive culture for all students, especially those that have been traditionally marginalized in K-12 Catholic Schools. Bradley-Levine (2021) emphasizes the need for greater teacher advocacy for students with exceptionalities in building more inclusive Catholic schools and communities. Given the high rates of peer victimization and bullying in middle schools involving students with exceptionalities (Khemka & Hickson, 2021), increased understanding of the decision-making behaviors of students toward their marginalized peers is essential.

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Table 1*Sample Vignettes and Types of Decision Responses from the Decision-Making Scale*

Situation involving verbal aggression

Oscar frequently worries about his grades at school. Oscar's friend, Cole, is aware of this and often laughs behind Oscar's back. One time, Cole finds out Oscar has gotten a failing grade on his math test. Cole comes up close to Oscar in the hallway and says "Wow, your math scores suck. You're so stupid!" loud enough for all of Oscar's classmates to hear.

Decision-making question: *What is the best thing for Oscar to do in this situation?*

- Walk away and forget about the situation (No Active Decision Response)
- Confront Cole and tell him to stop (Type 1 Decision Response)
- Punch Cole in the face (Type 3 Decision Response)
- Ask a friend or an adult to help (Type 2 Decision Response)

Situation involving physical aggression

Emily always gets good grades in her World History class and likes to talk about old maps and dates of historical events. During class, Emily's classmate Sherry often interrupts Emily and tells her to stop talking. One day, during class discussion, when Emily keeps persisting at expressing her ideas, Sherry throws a huge paper ball hard at Emily's face hitting her eye.

Decision-making question: *What is the best thing for Emily to do in this situation?*

- Confront Sherry and tell her to stop (Type 1 Decision Response)
- Throw something hard at Sherry (Type 3 Decision Response)
- Walk away and forget about what happened (No Active Decision Response)
- Ask a friend or an adult for help (Type 2 Decision Response)

Situation involving cyber aggression

Gina is overweight and her classmates know that Gina feels shy about her looks. Eileen, Gina's classmate, often giggles at Gina's clothing size in the gym changing room. One day, Gina finds out that Eileen has taken a picture of Gina in the gym changing room and posted it on Facebook with the caption "Sexy Triple X Queen."

Decision-making question: *What is the best thing for Gina to do in this situation?*

- Sign off Facebook and forget the situation (No Active Decision Response)
 - Ask a friend or an adult to help (Type 2 Decision Response)
 - Spread a mean rumor about Eileen on Facebook (Type 3 Decision Response)
 - Confront Eileen and tell her to delete the picture (Type 1 Decision Response)
-

Table 2

Means and Standard Deviations (SDs) for Gender by Situation Type Interaction for Type 3 Decision-making Responses

Gender	n	Physical Aggression	Physical Aggression	Verbal Aggression	Verbal Aggression	Cyber Aggression	Cyber Aggression
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Female	45	.38	.89	.18	.61	.00	.00
Male	24	1.33	1.49	.71	1.12	.29	.55

Table 3

Means and Standard Deviations (SDs) for Grade by Situation Type Interaction for Type 3 Decision-making Responses

Grade	n	Physical Aggression	Physical Aggression	Verbal Aggression	Verbal Aggression	Cyber Aggression	Cyber Aggression
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
6 th Grade	21	.43	.87	.00	.00	.14	.36
7 th Grade	23	.35	1.03	.26	.69	.09	.42
8 th Grade	25	1.28	1.43	.76	1.16	.08	.28

Figure 1
Gender X Situation Type Interaction for Type 3 Decision-Making Responses

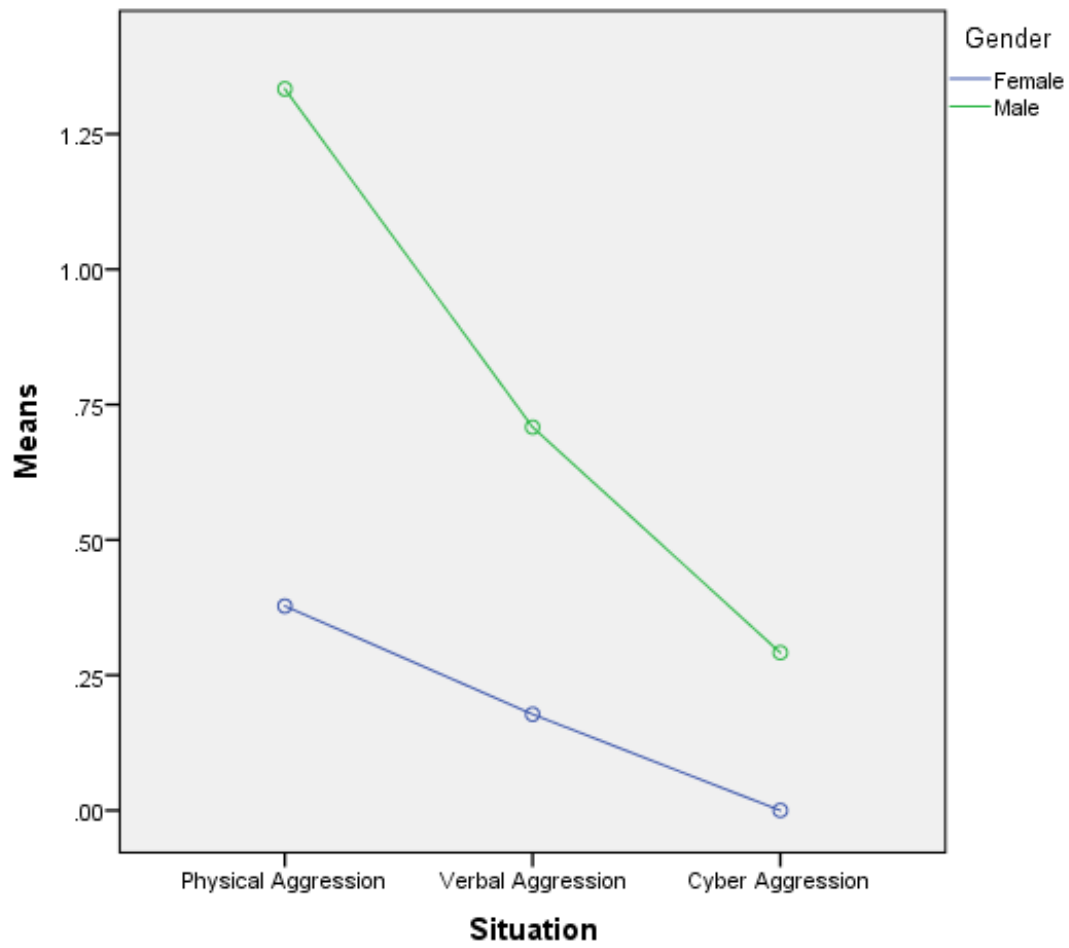


Figure 2
Grade X Situation Type Interaction for Type 3 Decision-Making Responses

