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## **Bullying Contextualized: Changing the Group Process by Changing Outsiders' Involvement**

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**Summary**

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**Bullying Contextualized:**

**Changing the Group Process by Changing Outsiders' Involvement**

In **Chapter One** the theoretical background for the school bullying dynamics was outlined. First of all, bullying was contextualized as a group process in which several different types of behavior could be distinguished. Secondly, outsiders' potential role in changing the social dynamics of bullying was clarified. Finally, a brief prelude to the empirical chapters of this thesis was given.

In **Chapter Two** an empirical study on the social cognitions of outsiders and defenders about their intervention strategies in response to witnessed victimization events was described. The main question under investigation was how outsiders and defenders think about behaving when confronted with imaginary witnessed victimization scenarios. And what is the role of different competence beliefs or of friendship selectivity in provictim intervention. The results showed that friendship selectivity did not differentiate outsiders from defenders, that is, both claimed an intervention preference for victimized friends. With regards to competence, defenders — compared with outsiders — claimed to be more likely and better able to perform direct intervention. No competence differences were found for indirect intervention, but outsiders — compared with defenders — claimed to be more likely to perform indirect interventions. Moreover, outsiders — compared with defenders — also expressed a lower ability to cope with the consequences of being victimized themselves. These findings suggest that outsiders — like defenders — have the intention to help victimized classmates *and* that they already do so at the cognitive level, at least by using indirect intervention strategies. With a view to intervention strategies, the findings suggest that outsiders need to be persuaded to act in accordance with their cognitions.

In **Chapter Three** an empirical study on the social cognitions of outsiders and defenders about the antecedents of their provictim interventions in response to (imaginary) witnessed victimization events was described. Based on the social psychological theories on bystanders' behavior in response

to emergency situations, the main question under investigation was whether students' provictim intervention decision was based on a cost-reward analysis or on an analysis based on the presence and reactions of others in the witnessed victimization event. The results showed that neither a cost-reward analysis nor a social-situational analysis could fully explain students' behavioral reputation as outsider or defender. However, awareness of victim's distress caused by victimization and a moral commitment to the victim's fate (i.e., experiencing feelings of guilt and shame for not helping the victim) were positive predictors for students' defender reputation. With a view to intervention strategies, the findings suggest that outsiders' awareness need to be increased, both with regards to the negative consequences of victimization on victims and with regards to their own role in the (dis)continuation of victimization. Outsiders need to be aware of the fact that their victimization-avoidant behavior can reinforce the bullies' behaviors.

In **Chapter Four** an empirical study on outsiders' and defenders' actual (daily reported) behavioral response to witnessed victimization events was described. The main question under investigation was whether students' behavioral reputation as outsider — despite previous findings of their occasional performed and believed defensive behaviors — could be explained by their actual provictim intervention behavior. Do students with an outsider reputation intervene less conspicuously or only selectively for friends, *or* do they cognitively overestimate their actual behavior in response to witnessed victimization events. The results showed that — regardless of friendship connection to the victim — students' outsider reputation is related to their nonintervention behavior, while having a defender reputation is related to actually performing indirect interventions. With a view to intervention strategies, the findings suggest that the differences between outsiders and defenders are only small and that outsiders could become defenders by increasing their awareness of indirect provictim intervention

strategies and how to execute them skillfully. Outsiders seem to cognitively overestimate their actual behavioral response to witnessed victimization events.

In **Chapter Five** an empirical study on differences in outsiders' and defenders' personality profiles was described. The main question under investigation was whether differences between students' behavioral reputation as outsider or defender could be explained by differential personality characteristics, based on the Big Five and on the Reinforcement Sensitivity models. The results showed that both students' reputation as outsider and defender was characterized by a prosocial nature, that is, by agreeableness. However, only students' outsider reputation was also characterized by introversion (lacking in dominance ambition), emotional stability (impulse control), punishment sensitivity and reward insensitivity. With a view to intervention strategies, these findings suggest that antibullying programs seeking to activate outsiders' defender potential should be aware of these personality tendencies and incorporate strategies to bypass them. Outsiders need to increase their social and emotional competence and resilience.

In **Chapter Six** a two-study empirical report on the longitudinal (in)stability of students' behavioral reputation as outsider in relation to their perceived popularity status was described. The main questions under investigation was whether students' outsider behavior remained at a stable level during the transition from middle childhood into adolescence and whether this (in)stability was related to their social dominance position and/or a change in peer group composition due to the transition from primary to secondary school. The results showed that a lack of social dominance related to students' future tendency to show outsider behavior *and* vice versa, while social dominance did not relate to their future tendency to show defender behavior *or* vice versa. Moreover, some students with an outsider reputation started to (also) show defender behavior over time, but this was unrelated to the

change in peer group composition due to school transition. With a view to intervention strategies, the findings suggested that outsiders' defender potential may be activated by using defenders as role models for behavioral change. Outsiders — at least some of them — are able to transcend their outsider niche and to activate their defender potential.

In **Chapter Seven** an empirical study on the practical application of an antibullying intervention — the Stand Strong: Interact training — that aimed at activating outsiders' defender potential by increasing their social and emotional resilience was described. The main question under investigation was whether Stand Strong: Interact could effectively reduce students' tendency to show outsider behavior, while at the same time increasing their tendency to show indirect defender behavior. The results showed that Stand Strong: Interact indeed effectively reduced students' tendency to show outsider behavior. While students' tendency to show indirect defender behavior did not increase, the normal decreases in indirect defender behavior — visible in the control sample — were counteracted by Stand Strong: Interact. These findings suggest that it is possible to effectively intervene in the bullying group process by focusing intervention efforts on a subgroup of classroom students and that outsiders can potentially be activated to support victims of bullying like defenders do.

In **Chapter Eight** the empirical findings obtained in Chapter Two through Seven were discussed in light of the main aims of this thesis as outlined in Chapter One. First, a theoretical framework for outsiders and their defender potential was created. The presented research suggests that outsiders are quite similar to defenders and that outsiders could become defenders by working on their social and emotional competence, and on within-classroom friendship connectivity. Second, practical and theoretical implications of the presented research were discussed. Finally, some recommendations for future practical and theoretical research were provided.

