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Chapter 4

Outsiders' and Defenders' Bullying-related Behavioral Reputation Versus Daily Self-reported Provictim Intervention Behavior

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Abstract

Despite a reputation as those who avoid involvement in bullying, outsiders do sometimes defend victims. The present study investigated whether the reputational differences between outsiders and defenders could be linked to their actual daily reported behavior in response to witnessed victimization. Do outsiders lack a defender reputation because they intervene in inconspicuous ways or because they only intervene on behalf of friends? Or are outsiders — compared with defenders — cognitively overestimating their involvement in witnessed victimization? The self-reported daily behavior of 448 Dutch early adolescents (50.2% boys; $M_{\text{age}} = 12.1$ years) in response to witnessed victimization was related to their peer reputation as outsider or defender. The results suggest that — regardless of friendship connection to the victim — students' defender reputation is related to their indirect intervention behavior, while their outsider reputation is related to their nonintervention behavior. The findings are discussed in terms of their contributions to research and practice.

Keywords: Bullying, Outsiders, Defenders, Daily Reports, Peer Nominations

Introduction

Bullying in schools is a group process that concerns the repeated exposure of someone (the victim) to the intentionally damaging actions of one or more, more powerful, others (the bullies; Olweus, 2010; Salmivalli, 2010). Within this group process, some youth actively help the initiating bully as *assistants* or actively incite the bullying to continue as *reinforcers*. However, there are also youth who actively come to victims' aid as *defenders*, as well as a large subgroup of those who remain evasive in witnessed victimization as *outsiders*. Across middle childhood and adolescence, bullying becomes more frequent in the peer group (Pellegrini & Long, 2002), positive attitudes about defending victims become less frequent (Goossens, Olthof, & Dekker, 2006), and avoiding involvement in witnessed victimization becomes more frequent (Pozzoli & Gini, & Vieno, 2012). The present study focuses on those youth who have a behavioral reputation as outsider or defender and aims at investigating whether these reputations are consistent with their daily behavior in response to witnessed victimization.

Understanding differences between outsiders and defenders is important for three interrelated reasons (Pronk, Goossens, Olthof, De Mey, & Willemen, 2013). First, peers are almost always present when someone is being victimized (Hawkins, Pepler, & Craig, 2001; Nishina & Bellmore, 2010). Although peers do not defend victims often, acts of defending are mostly effective (Hawkins et al., 2001) and alleviate victim suffering (Nishina, 2012). Second, outsiders and defenders both have antibullying attitudes (Olthof & Goossens, 2008; Salmivalli & Voeten, 2004) and are willing — or at least claim to be willing — to perform provictim interventions (Pronk et al., 2013). Defenders also act according to their attitude, while outsiders only do so occasionally (Goossens, Olthof, & Dekker, 2006; Salmivalli, Lagerspetz, Björkqvist,

Österman, & Kaukiainen, 1996). Third, more than half of the classroom consists of students who can be characterized as outsiders (one-third) and defenders (one-fifth; Olthof, Goossens, Vermande, Aleva, & Van der Meulen, 2011). When outsiders can be persuaded to act according to their beliefs, a new and more dominant within-classroom defender-subgroup could emerge. This new dominant subgroup — in turn — could have a positive influence on the antibullying attitudes and behaviors of the other classroom students (Salmivalli & Voeten, 2004; Salmivalli, Voeten, & Poskiparta, 2011). With the increasing susceptibility to peer influence throughout adolescence (Dishion & Tipsord, 2011), outsider activation could not only aid in alleviating victims' suffering, but could also positively influence the general peer group processes within classrooms (Salmivalli, 2010; Pronk et al., 2013).

Despite a peer reputation among classmates of actively avoiding involvement in witnessed victimization, research suggests that outsiders are quite similar to defenders. Outsiders and defenders are generally liked by classmates (Goossens et al., 2006; Salmivalli et al., 1996) and they are high in empathy (Gini, Albiero, Benelli, & Altoè, 2008). Moreover, outsiders and defenders are morally sensitive about victims' fate and unlikely to show moral disengagement in response to witnessed victimization (Thornberg & Jungert, 2011). Finally, both outsiders and defenders are able to avoid being victimized themselves without having to resort to aggressive behaviors (Camodeca & Goossens, 2005).

Outsiders' intervention preferences seem to explain, at least partially, why they do not have a defender reputation. Using imaginary scenarios, Pronk et al. (2013) found an indirect intervention preference (e.g., consoling the victim or warning the teacher) among outsiders and conversely a direct intervention preference (e.g., confronting the bully) among defenders.

Perceived competence in performing interventions rather than friendship selectivity in intervening on behalf of victims explained the differences between outsiders and defenders. Consistent with other studies (Nishina & Bellmore, 2010; Oh & Hazler, 2009), friends were more likely to be helped by both outsiders and defenders. Based on their findings, Pronk et al. hypothesized that outsiders may do more on behalf of victims than their peers observe, that is, they may just intervene in less conspicuous ways (*intervention-conspicuousness hypothesis*).

However, in Pronk et al. (2013) defenders were identified based on their tendency to show the more inconspicuous — or indirect — defender behaviors. Therefore it seems unlikely that outsiders' defender attempts will go unnoticed by classmates while those of defenders are noticed. An alternative hypothesis based on Pronk et al. is that outsiders are not viewed as defenders because they only intervene on behalf of friends. However, classmates may interpret only interventions on behalf of nonfriends as defending (*intervention-selectivity hypothesis*).

Still, peer report procedures have repeatedly shown that at least some outsiders receive some defender nominations (Salmivalli et al., 1996; Goossens et al., 2006). Therefore, it could also be that outsiders' potential lower frequency in performing provictim interventions is due to a lower awareness of victimization taking place. They may simply not intervene as often as defenders because they do not witness victimization as often or because they are less aware of victims' suffering caused by victimization (*victimization awareness hypothesis*). Finally, it may also be that Pronk et al.'s findings regarding outsiders' indirect intervention preferences are due to their tendency to cognitively overestimate their actual behavior in response to witnessed victimization (*intervention overestimation hypothesis*).

In the present study we will put these hypotheses to the test, by investigating the relation between students' daily self-reported provictim intervention behavior and their peer reputation of showing outsider and defender behavior. Unlike the imaginary scenarios used by Pronk et al. (2013) to investigate students' social cognitions about their provictim intervention behavior, daily reports provide snapshots of *actual* witnessed victimization and students' subsequent self-reported behavior in response to it, with limited memory bias (Nishina & Juvonen, 2005). Specifically, we will investigate whether Dutch early adolescents' behavioral reputation as outsider or defender — assessed through peer nominations — could be predicted by their daily reported behavior in response to actual witnessed victimization events.

If Pronk et al.'s (2013) intervention conspicuousness hypothesis is correct, students with an outsider reputation will report to have intervened indirectly in response to witnessed victimization, potentially at a similar level as students with a defender reputation. The difference between students' outsider and defender reputation may then be mainly the result of defenders' direct intervention behavior. If the intervention-selectivity hypothesis is correct, only interventions directed towards nonfriend victims will be associated with receiving defender nominations from classmates. The provictim interventions of students with an outsider reputation will be mainly directed at friends who are victimized. If the intervention awareness hypothesis is correct, students who show outsider behavior — compared with those who show defender behavior — will be less likely to report having witnessed victimization. Finally, if the intervention overestimation hypothesis is correct, Pronk et al.'s findings regarding outsiders' indirect intervention preferences may have been the result of the cognitive overestimation of their actual bullying-related behavior, that is, of their nonintervention behavior.

We were not specifically interested in investigating gender differences in students' self-reported daily behavior in response to witnessed victimization and/or in their bullying-related reputations. However, previous studies have found gender differences in students' willingness to intervene on behalf of victims (Pronk et al., 2013) and in their tendency to show outsider and defender behavior (Goossens et al., 2006; Olthof et al., 2011; Pronk, Olthof, & Goossens, 2014; Salmivalli et al., 1996). Therefore, gender was included in all analytical models.

Method

Participants

Participants were 448 fifth- and sixth-grade students (50.2% boys; 92.9% born in the Netherlands; $M_{\text{age}} = 12.1$ years, $SD = 9$ months) from 19 classrooms of eight primary schools in the Netherlands. Participants ranged in socioeconomic status from working class to upper middle class. According to a procedure preferred by schools and endorsed by the ethical committee of the faculty, informed passive consent was obtained. The 478 potential participants' parents received a letter about the study's aim and procedures and could decline consent by returning a preprinted objection note ($n = 30$; 6.3%). Preceding testing, the students themselves were informed they could cease participating in the study whenever they wanted, but none did.

Measures

Behavioral Reputation. An internet version of the Bullying Role Nomination Procedure (BRNP; Olthof et al., 2011), a Dutch adaptation of Salmivalli et al.'s (1996)

Participant Role Scales, was used. Students were presented a definition of bullying and completed 18 nominations pertaining to bullying-related behaviors, including one each for outsider (“Some classmates do not want to have anything to do with bullying. They stay away from the bullying, pretend not to see what is going on, or do not take sides with either the bullies or the victim”) and defender (“Some classmates try to help the victim. They tell them not to feel bad about the bullying, try to console them, are nice to them during recess, and or contact the teacher to talk about the bullying”). Students could nominate an unlimited number of classmates from dropdown lists containing all participating classmates’ names.

Proportion scores were calculated by dividing the number of received nominations by the number of within-classroom nominators. Scores could range from 0 to 1, with the latter score indicating all classmates nominated a student. Comparable to previous studies (Olthof et al., 2011; Pronk et al., 2013, 2014) the mean scores were .11 ($SD = .10$) for outsider and .10 ($SD = .12$) for defender. Students were also classified into outsider or defender roles (see Olthof et al., 2011; Pronk et al., 2013). To be classified as an outsider or defender, a student’s score on that role had to be at least .10 and needed to exceed scores for other roles by at least .01. Based on this procedure, 122 outsiders (40.2% boys) and 114 defenders (23.7% boys) were identified.

Daily Intervention Behavior. Students completed four structured daily reports over a 2 week period (two per week). The number of daily reporting instances was based on the finding by Nishina and Juvonen (2005) that increasing the number of daily reporting instances (i.e., from four to five daily reports) does not influence the total percentage of witnessed

victimization events students will report. On each report day, students read a definition of bullying, indicated whether they had witnessed a classmate being victimized, and if so, reported: (a) whether the victim was a friend, and (b) what they did in response (i.e., nothing, confronted the bully alone or with a friend, consoled the victim, or warned the teacher). Confronting the bully was considered direct intervention and consoling or warning reflected indirect intervention.

Procedure

Data were collected in 2012 with the cooperation of the schools and classroom teachers. The BRNP was administered on internet-connected computers in small groups. Seating arrangements made it impossible to communicate with or see classmates' responses and two research assistants — unfamiliar to the participants — were present. The daily reports were completed via paper surveys over a two-week period following the BRNP administration.

Results

Witnessed Victimization Associated With Behavioral Reputation

Descriptive information about victim type (friend, nonfriend), intervention type (indirect intervention, direct intervention), and their interaction for students' witnessed victimization is presented in Table 1. A subset of 279 students (62.3%; 48.0% boys) reported witnessing victimization at least once. Of those, 45.2% ($n = 126$) witnessed victimization at least twice, 13.6% ($n = 38$) witnessed victimization at least three times, and 5.4% ($n = 15$) witnessed victimization on all four days. Outsiders ($n = 74$; 60.7%) and defenders ($n = 71$;

62.3%) were equally likely to report witnessing victimization at least once, $\chi^2(1, N = 236) = 0.66, p = .80$. Moreover, outsiders ($M = .39; SD = .19$) and defenders ($M = .41; SD = .20$) also reported witnessing victimization on a similar proportion of days, $t(143) = 0.62, p = .54$. Given these similarities, and to maximize power while maintaining independent observations, each student's first witnessed event — without using role classifications — was used in the subsequent analyses examining the associations between daily intervention behavior and behavioral reputation.³

Table 1. *Descriptive sample information for daily witnessed victimization (N = 279)*

	N	%
Victim type		
Nonfriend	153	54.8 ^a
Friend	126	45.2 ^a
Intervention type		
Any intervention	125	44.8 ^a
Indirect	67	53.6 ^b
Direct	79	63.2 ^b
Intervention type × Victim type		
Nonfriend		
Any intervention	52	41.6 ^b
Indirect	24	46.2 ^c
Direct	38	73.1 ^c
Friend		
Any intervention	73	58.4 ^b
Indirect	43	58.9 ^d
Direct	41	56.2 ^d

Note. Percentages for indirect and direct intervention do not add up to 100% as some participants reported to have intervened both indirectly and directly.

^a percentage of total witnessed events; ^b percentage of total interventions; ^c percentage of total interventions on behalf of nonfriends; ^d percentage of total interventions on behalf of friends.

³ All analyses were also run by using a randomly-selected witnessed event for students who reported witnessing victimization on multiple days. The results were similar, although effect sizes were slightly larger in these analyses.

Daily Intervention Behavior Predicting Behavioral Reputation

To investigate the links between students' daily behavior in response to witnessed victimization and their behavioral reputation as outsider or defender, a repeated measures ANOVA was run. Students' *behavioral reputation* was a 2-level within-subjects variable based on the proportion of received outsider and defender nominations (normalized per class with the Rankit procedure). *Daily intervention behavior* (intervention, nonintervention), *victim type* (friend, nonfriend) and *gender* (boy, girl) were 2-level between-subjects variables.

Table 2. Means and standard deviations for the daily intervention behavior \times behavioral reputation interactions ($N = 279$).

	Defender		Outsider	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Any intervention				
Yes	.14	.14	.11	.10
No	.08	.09	.11	.09
Indirect intervention				
Yes	.15	.16	.11	.10
No	.09	.10	.11	.10
Direct intervention				
Yes	.12	.12	.11	.09
No	.10	.12	.11	.10

First, a gender main effect was found, $F(1, 271) = 55.16, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .17$. Girls ($M = .15; SD = .10$) received more outsider and defender nominations than boys ($M = .07; SD = .07$). Second, a daily intervention behavior \times behavioral reputation interaction was found, $F(1, 271) = 7.39, p = .007, \eta_p^2 = .03$. Students who reported intervening after witnessing victimization received more defender than outsider nominations, whereas those who did not intervene received more outsider than defender nominations (see Table 2). Victim type did not

differentially influence the daily intervention behavior \times behavioral reputation interaction and no other significant effects were found (all p 's $> .05$).

Finally, separate repeated measures ANOVA models were run to determine whether the above interaction held specifically for indirect or direct intervention.⁴ Intervention type (indirect intervention, direct intervention) could not be included in the above model as a between-subjects factor, because some students reported to have intervened both indirectly and directly (see also Table 1). The results indicate that only for indirect intervention a daily intervention behavior \times behavioral reputation interaction was found, $F(1, 271) = 8.31, p = .004, \eta_p^2 = .03$. Students who reported intervening in the witnessed event by consoling the victim or warning the teacher received more defender than outsider nominations, whereas the reverse pattern was found for those who did not intervene (Table 2). Again, victim type did not differentially influence the daily intervention behavior \times behavioral reputation interaction *and* no other effects were found for either indirect or direct intervention (all p 's $> .05$).

Discussion

The transition into adolescence coincides with a rise in bullying frequency (Pellegrini & Long, 2002), a decline in defending likelihood (Goossens et al., 2006), and an increase in peer influence susceptibility (Dishion & Tipsord, 2011). As such, it is a critical developmental period to study and to intervene in the bullying process. The present study therefore focused on differences between peer reputational outsiders (potential interveners) and defenders (actual interveners) in terms of their daily behavior in response to witnessed victimization. The

⁴ In both the indirect and the direct intervention models gender main effects favoring girls were found; $F_{\text{indirect}}(1, 274) = 56.10, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .17$, and $F_{\text{direct}}(1, 274) = 59.33, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .18$.

findings suggest that early adolescents' behavioral reputation as outsider or defender is quite consistent with their daily behavior in response to witnessed victimization.

The findings indicate that students whose daily reports indicated that they executed at least one provictim intervention were more often viewed as defenders by classmates. This behavioral difference was specifically noticeable when intervention was demarcated as indirect provictim intervention (i.e., consoling the victim or warning the teacher). Outsiders were recently found to believe that they would perform indirect interventions with an equal self-efficacy as defenders (Pronk et al., 2013). The present findings suggest that outsiders' daily reported behavior in response to witnessed victimization is not in line with their beliefs. Pronk et al.'s (2013) intervention conspicuousness hypothesis was therefore not supported by the present data, that is, outsiders do not simply intervene in less conspicuous ways. At the same time, the victimization awareness hypothesis was ruled out as outsiders and defenders were equally aware of victimization taking place within their classrooms. Rather, it seems that outsiders may have cognitively overestimated their own involvement in witnessed victimization in Pronk et al. (2013) as hypothesized in the intervention overestimation hypothesis. Outsiders' daily reported behavior confirmed their reputation as noninterveners, even when demarcating intervention as the less conspicuous — indirect — provictim interventions.

Moreover, inconsistent with previous findings (Nishina & Bellmore, 2010; Oh & Hazler, 2009; Pronk et al., 2013), no intervention-selectivity favoring provictim interventions on behalf of friends or nonfriends was apparent in outsiders' or defenders' daily reported behavior. However, Pronk et al. (2013) relied on sixth-grade students' beliefs about their

provictim intervention behavior and Oh and Hazler (2009) relied on retrospective measures of college students' beliefs about their provictim intervention behavior during high school or middle school. Finally, Nishina and Bellmore (2010), who also used daily reports, only found friendship-selectivity for ninth-grade students and — consistent with the present findings — not for sixth-grade students. So, while early adolescents may believe they are more likely to help victimized friends, their daily reported behavior suggests friends and nonfriends are equally likely to be helped. As peers become increasingly important during the transition into adolescence (Dishion & Tipsord, 2011), friendship selectivity — while present in sixth-grade students' beliefs — may only become behaviorally noticeable during middle adolescence (i.e., around ninth-grade).

A first limitation of this study is that students' defender reputation was determined by nominations received for indirect provictim intervention rather than for direct or more general provictim helping behavior. Future studies should be aware of the fact that defender subtypes may behave differently in response to witnessed victimization. For example, it was recently suggested that direct defender behaviors may be reserved for probullying students to defend each other (Huitsing, Snijders, van Duijn, & Veenstra, 2014). A second limitation of this study was that it was impossible to compare student's actual behavior with their beliefs and self-efficacy about their behavior, as no data were collected for the latter. Antibullying programs could benefit from more theoretical knowledge regarding these links. At present antibullying programs try to activate outsiders defender potential by teaching them to actively stand up for victims by confronting the bullies. However, a recent study suggests that students who defend victims are at risk for retaliation by the bullies (Huitsing et al., 2014). Outsiders may therefore

not intervene, or only infrequently, to protect themselves from harm. Previous reports have already suggested that outsiders have a skills deficit (Gini et al., 2008; Pozzoli & Gini, 2010; Pronk et al., 2013; Thornberg & Jungert, 2013) and are hindered by an inhibitive and punishment sensitive personality profile (Pronk et al., 2014). Therefore, teaching and persuading them to perform indirect interventions may be more effective, as providing emotional or outside help is easier and safer than confronting bullies directly. Moreover, the negative consequences of victimization on victims were recently found to be due to their ineffective ability to cope with victimization (Troop-Gordon, Rudolph, Sugimura, Little, 2014). Indirect defensive acts on their behalf by classmates could therefore be most beneficial for their future mental health.

Notwithstanding these limitations, a strength of this study was focusing on the reputations and behaviors of students who can contribute to the discontinuance of within-classroom bullying, the outsiders and defenders. As declines in defender behavior have been observed during the transition into adolescence (Goossens et al., 2006), gaining knowledge about differences between outsiders and defenders is valuable to achieve behavioral change in outsiders. Increasing the number of within-classroom defenders can have an effect on the attitudes and behaviors of the entire classroom (Salmivalli & Voeten, 2004; Salmivalli et al., 2011) and, as such, enlarge victims' safety net. Second, to our knowledge, this study was the first to investigate students' reputation as interveners in victimization incidents in combination with daily reports of their actual provictim intervention behavior. While still a self-report measure, daily reports assess students' behavioral responses to victimization on the day it was witnessed, thereby limiting memory biases (Nishina & Juvonen, 2005). Other research (e.g.,

Pozzoli & Gini, 2010; Pronk et al., 2013) tends to rely on students' self-reported or peer reported beliefs about general provictim intervention behavior rather than on actual behavior in response to a specific and recently witnessed victimization incident.

Taken together, the present findings suggest that students' peer reputation as outsider or defender is quite consistent with their self-reported daily behavior in response to witnessed victimization. Moreover, antibullying programs that aim at promoting prosocial behavior within the bullying dynamic should be aware of the fact that the differences between interveners (i.e., defenders) and potential interveners (i.e., outsiders) may be relatively small. In combination with previous findings, it seems that outsiders could become defenders by increasing their awareness of indirect provictim intervention strategies and how to execute them skillfully.