

## Introduction

We began our research on school bullying in about 2010 when we noticed the disparate coverage of two bullying-related youth suicides in Massachusetts. In the first case, an eleven-year-old African American boy named Carl Walker-Hoover died by suicide on April 6, 2009, in Springfield. In the second case, a fifteen-year-old Irish immigrant girl named Phoebe Prince died by suicide on January 14, 2010, in South Hadley. In both cases, the suicide was linked to bullying victimization. The two suicides occurred less than one year apart and in towns separated by less than twenty miles, and both youths possessed characteristics supporting an “ideal victim” construction (e.g., young, vulnerable, defenseless, and worthy of sympathy). However, only the Prince case evolved into a “signal crime,” that is, involving “events that, in addition to affecting the immediate participants . . . impact in some way upon a wider audience . . . caus[ing] them to reconfigure their behaviors or beliefs in some way” (Innes 2004, 52). The Prince suicide led to the filing of charges against nine individuals, massive news coverage, and Massachusetts’s enactment of a new antibullying law. The media gave the Carl Walker-Hoover suicide relatively scant attention. In conference papers and presentations, we explored issues of gender, race, and criminalization around this differing coverage.

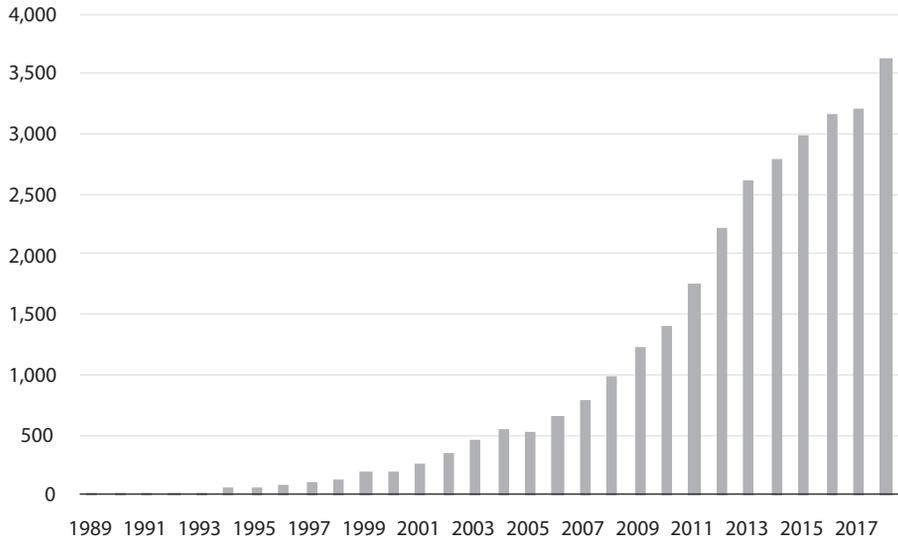
We also rapidly expanded our research to include media reports of bullying more generally, which led to the publication of the book *Confronting School Bullying: Kids, Culture, and the Making of a Social Problem* (Cohen and Brooks 2014). In that book, we explored how the media constructed the phenomenon of school bullying from a relatively minor, localized problem through to its emergence as a major national and international public health concern. We noted that the linking of school bullying to retaliatory violence (e.g., school shootings) and to suicide had by 2013 become a dominant

discourse in mainstream news media. Emphasizing such extreme outcomes—and linking them together to suggest first a trend and then an epidemic—is an important factor contributing to how school bullying came to be perceived as a serious social problem. This contrasts with the early 1990s, when the threat of bullying was usually constructed in rather mild terms. While few dismissed bullying entirely with a “kids will be kids” attitude, descriptions like the following 1993 excerpt from Lawrence Kutner’s *New York Times* “Parent and Child” column were not uncommon: “A 10-year-old who is extorting milk money or threatening to chase a child home after school can loom large in the fears of an 8-year-old. Handing over a quarter a day to avoid possibly being beaten up seems a small price to pay” (October 28, 1993, C12). By 2010, bullying had been elevated to a threat of catastrophic proportions; John Quiñones opened a segment of NBC’s *Prime Time Live* by asking, “Harmless bullying? A simple part of growing up? Or a tragic epidemic that leaves entire schools heartbroken, parents childless and families torn apart?” (October 29, 2010).

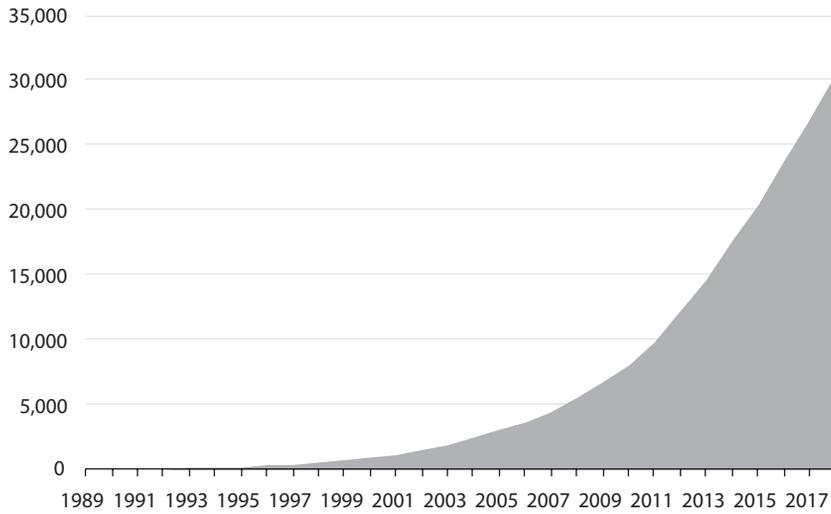
The confluence of exhaustive media reports, an explosion of academic research, and increased concerns from school systems led to the creation of an antibullying industry marked by consultants, experts, corporate entities, and entertainment celebrities and vehicles. The rise of the antibullying industry helped solidify bullying as a national social problem and also created a risk of cynicism and burnout (Cohen and Brooks 2014).

## ACADEMIC INTEREST IN SCHOOL BULLYING

Interestingly, academic interest in school bullying is said to have begun in earnest after several suicides in Norway were linked to bullying (Beaty and Alexeyev 2008). The research was pioneered by Olweus (1993), who in addition to researching the causes and consequences of bullying also developed a leading bullying prevention program. Academic interest quickly spread to neighboring European countries and then additional ones. Research in the United States was slower to start, increasing dramatically after about 2007. Figures 1 and 2 provide representative examples of the steep increase in academic publications concerning school bullying. Each figure represents the number of academic publications returned from a search on the comprehensive academic search engine Google Scholar using the search term “school bullying” (in quotation marks). Figure 1 shows the number of academic



**FIGURE 1.** Number of new publications per year generated on the academic search engine Google Scholar using the term “school bullying,” 1989–2018.



**FIGURE 2.** Cumulative number of publications generated on the academic search engine Google Scholar using the term “school bullying,” 1989–2018.

works (e.g., articles, monographs, book chapters, and books) that were added each year, from 10 in 1989 to 3,620 in 2018. Figure 2 shows the yearly cumulative number of academic works, beginning with 10 in 1989 and increasing to 30,399 in 2018. As large as these recent numbers are, they are a vast understatement considering that many academic works on school bullying do not necessarily use the words *school bullying* in that order. A search of the term without quotation marks yielded 614 “hits” for 1989 and a cumulative 358,000 hits for the period 1989–2018. Many of these results are not on point (some results use the two terms but in an unrelated way), so it is not possible to know the precise number of publications.

Other indications of increased academic interest in school bullying include the number of papers devoted to the subject at international conferences. For instance, the 2016 meeting of the American Society of Criminology showcased fifty presentation titles addressing schools and another twenty-two addressing bullying. New journals have been introduced, including the *Journal of School Violence* in 2002 and the *International Journal of Bullying Prevention* in March 2019, the latter sponsored by the International Bullying Prevention Association. Many other journals have devoted special issues to school bullying, including *American Psychologist* (2015), *Journal of Adolescence* (2017), and the *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* (2019), to name a few.

Notwithstanding this explosion of research, important questions remain about many aspects of school bullying, something we explore in detail in this volume. There are fundamental questions about how bullying and cyberbullying ought to be defined and measured, how bullying is related to and different from other forms of peer aggression, and how trajectories of bullying and victimization develop over childhood and adolescence, among many others. Because psychological approaches and quantitative measurement have dominated bullying research, there is much to learn from continuing the more recent sociological and cultural approaches as well as greater use of qualitative research methods and mixed methods research.

#### THE MOTIVATION BEHIND *CRIMINOLOGY EXPLAINS*

The idea for a book series arose when one of us was teaching a class that had equal numbers of criminology and psychology students and thus had to provide an overview of each field to the students. Since we were working on our

book *Confronting School Bullying* at the time, we decided to introduce criminological theories by defining each and then describing how they would explain school bullying. It appeared that students more clearly saw the similarities and differences among the theories because they were being applied to the same phenomenon. We quickly applied this concept to our teaching of the course Criminology. We have found that criminology textbooks offer a detailed and comprehensive discussion of a wide variety of criminological theories and crimes, but they do not typically have a “through line” that would allow the reader to make connections across theories and chapters. Such texts frequently promise a “bio-psycho-social model” but in fact offer a section on biological influences, some on psychological theories, and some on social and cultural models. In order to overcome this, we assigned students to locate articles about bullying that used various levels of explanation, and students presented their research as we moved through the book. Again, we found that students were able to make clearer connections across theories because of the focus on the same dependent variable.

By focusing all of the theories on one problem, volumes in *Criminology Explains*, including this one, provide a through line, allowing for greater synthesis and thus deeper and longer-lasting retention of learning. Applying different (and sometimes wildly divergent and conflicting) explanatory models to the same problem serves to highlight the similarities and differences among the theories, and allows linkages across explanatory levels and across time and geography. The intent, then, is to emphasize the “social-ecological model,” which views social phenomena as having multiple inputs at different levels of influence that include individuals, institutions, communities, and larger social and cultural structures and processes. We designed the volumes in part to be an adjunct to criminology textbooks, with chapters arranged in the same general order as most such textbooks.

#### THE DESIGN AND ORGANIZATION OF THIS VOLUME

In this volume, we have provided a broad overview of how criminological theory can enlighten our understanding of school bullying. Given the conflict between the massive amount of academic work about school bullying on the one hand, as noted above, and our space limitations on the other hand, we are not able to delve deeply into all aspects of the phenomenon. We also note that research applying criminological theory to school bullying is a relatively

recent development (picking up around 2008 or 2009), and so have done our best to fill in gaps in the literature when necessary. We also included research that is not explicitly criminological but that appears to mirror or invoke criminological theories or principles. For example, much research that explains peer influences is based in psychological theories but also suggests aspects of differential association theory from criminology. We also provide an overall impression of the utility of criminological theory to explain school bullying. For example, some research suggests that school bullying is actually quite normative, and some commentators have questioned whether applying criminological theory to school bullying contributes to the criminalization of student behavior more generally. That is certainly not our intention—rather, we believe such theory can have broad application because much of it was theorized and tested in adolescent populations as to a variety of delinquency behaviors, including those based in aggression.

We have designed the chapters to be read in conjunction with corresponding chapters in criminology textbooks, but the book also stands alone. Given this focus, we have attempted to devote relatively less space to descriptions of theory and more to applications of it. Chapter 1 offers an overview of school bullying, describing its nature and extent, definitional and measurement issues and challenges, how the phenomenon has been socially constructed, and various methods of response and prevention. The chapter ends with a brief discussion of the social-ecological model. Chapters 2 through 7 apply criminological theories. Chapter 2 discusses victimization, lifestyle, and deterrence theories. Chapter 3 considers individual-level (micro) theories at the biosocial and psychological levels. Chapter 4 discusses social structure theories, including social disorganization, strain, and subcultural theories. Chapter 5 looks at social process theories, including social learning, social control, and social reaction (or labeling). Chapter 6 explores various critical theories, such as feminist theory and critical race theory. Chapter 7 addresses integrated, developmental, and life course theories as well as the social-ecological view that incorporates “nested” levels of theory (i.e., micro to macro). Each of these chapters also includes a discussion of the policy implications that emerge from the theories covered and a Policy Box that asks readers to apply theoretical constructs to school bullying response and prevention.

# The Nature, Scope, and Response to School Bullying

School bullying, an age-old phenomenon, has only come to be recognized as an international public health concern in the twenty-first century (Olweus, Limber, and Breivik 2019). Research shows that bullying is correlated with serious harm to victims, bullies, and bully-victims, as well as to perpetrators, bystanders, families, and the school environment. All fifty US states and the District of Columbia have enacted antibullying statutes, and nearly all schools and school districts in the United States have adopted antibullying policies and programs. The construction of bullying as a serious social problem involved a confluence of parties (researchers and other experts, educators, and celebrities), social movements such as the demand for greater LGBTQ rights, and institutions (media, politics, and commercial interests), resulting in an “antibullying industry” (Cohen and Brooks 2014) or a “psychology-commercial complex” (Boge and Larsson 2018).

This chapter provides an overview of school bullying, including how interested parties have defined and measured it, and how prevalent it is. The chapter then details some of bullying’s harms to victims, perpetrators, and others and explains how schools and other institutions have sought to prevent and respond to it. The chapter concludes with a brief explanation of the social-ecological model and its relevance to the remainder of the book.

## DEFINING SCHOOL BULLYING

Many groups need to have workable definitions of school bullying, including researchers, policy makers, and legislators (Patchin and Hinduja 2015).

Educators and students also need valid bullying definitions in order to evaluate and respond to it.

### *Academic Definitions*

Social scientists require definitions of phenomena that are clear and consistent. It is thus surprising that, despite the prominence of bullying as a social problem, the term has been inconsistently defined (Green, Furlong, and Felix 2017).

*Traditional Bullying* Academic research has mostly coalesced around the definition developed by Dan Olweus (Volk et al. 2012): “aggressive behavior or intentional ‘harm doing,’ which is carried out repeatedly and over time in an interpersonal relationship characterized by an imbalance of power” or in which the subject is unable to defend himself or herself (Olweus 1993, 8–9). The element of intentionality distinguishes bullying from harassment, which depends not on intent but on the victim’s perceptions (Cascardi et al. 2014). The element of repetition emphasizes bullying’s systematic nature and separates it from fighting. The power imbalance element differentiates bullying from teasing, roughhousing, and other types of aggression between equals (Green, Furlong, and Felix 2017). The power imbalance is sometimes based in physicality—that is, where the bully is bigger, stronger, or older (Langos 2012). However, the imbalance can also be rooted in social or intellectual power (Espelage 2018), including one’s status in a peer network (Faris and Felmlee 2011b; Nelson et al. 2019), and in cultural norms such as notions of “proper” sexual and gendered behavior (Rosen and Nofziger 2018).

Academic researchers have further categorized bullying as direct or indirect. Direct bullying occurs in the presence of the victim and involves physical and/or verbal aggression, while indirect bullying is aggressive communication that is not directed at the victim, such as spreading false and damaging rumors (Gladden et al. 2014, 7). Much of indirect bullying is also “covert”—that is, hidden from or not easily recognized by adults (Barnes et al. 2012). Researchers have also broken down bullying into subtypes that include physical, verbal, relational, destruction of property (Gladden et al. 2014, 7–8), and cyberbullying.

Researchers have questioned the Olweus conceptualization (e.g., Rawlings 2016; Walton 2011). Some have called for relatively minor tweaks, as in the “uniform definition” of bullying issued by US federal agencies (Gladden et al. 2014, 7). Others have argued for changes that are more significant. For

example, Volk, Dane, and Marini (2014) conceptualized bullying as “aggressive, *goal-directed* behavior that harms another individual within the context of a power imbalance” (328, emphasis added). Others have gone further and suggested that bullying be seen as a multidimensional construct that includes the form of aggression (physical, verbal, social, or cyber) and its functions (offensive, defensive, or instrumental aggression; Little et al. 2003). Some researchers have also conceptualized bystander behaviors multidimensionally (e.g., Lambe and Craig 2020).

*Cyberbullying* A leading question is whether cyberbullying can be “plugged into” the Olweus definition (Tokunaga 2010). Because there is high correspondence between cyber and traditional perpetration, and cyber and traditional victimization (Gini, Card, and Pozzoli 2018; Modecki et al. 2014), many researchers conceptualize cyberbullying as simply bullying through electronic means (e.g., Gladden et al. 2014, 8; Kowalski et al. 2014). Other researchers have questioned whether the Olweus elements apply to cyberbullying. For instance, some have argued that “repetition” by the initial perpetrator should not be required because digital postings can be easily shared and repeatedly viewed by others (e.g., Grigg 2010; Englander et al. 2017; Langos 2012; Patchin and Hinduja 2015). Researchers have also debated the “power imbalance” element as to cyberbullying. It could be that

- power relations in the “online world” mimic those in the “real world,” given that traditional bullying and cyberbullying significantly overlap, or
- power may flow from one’s technical proficiency with digital communication technologies (Langos 2012; Vandebosch and Van Cleemput 2008); a claim that applied research has not clearly supported (Grigg 2010), or
- cyberspace represents an “equalizing arena for individuals of varying physical strengths to aggress” (Barlett et al. 2017, 23).

Other researchers have argued that cyberbullying relates more to other types of online aggression than it does to traditional bullying. Grigg (2010) grouped cyberbullying behaviors with electronic stalking, harassment, hacking accounts, and spreading viruses (151). Pyżalski (2012) proposed the concept “electronic aggression” after finding that a significant percentage of the Polish schoolchildren in his study had acted aggressively online against persons outside their peer group and that only 25 percent of students’ online aggression qualified as cyberbullying.

### *Lay Understandings of Traditional Bullying and Cyberbullying*

Research has demonstrated differences in understandings of bullying, both within groups and between groups. An example of *intragroup* differences is that teachers' perceptions "can be [differentially] shaped by time spent in the profession and confidence in managing aggressive behavior" (Chandler 2018, 37, citing Reid, Monsen, and Rivers 2004) and can vary according to the source of information being accessed (Rigby 2018). Parents' definitions also vary widely (see Harcourt, Jasperse, and Green 2014), and children define bullying differently as they develop (Smith et al. 2002). An example of *intergroup* differences is the finding that teachers and students differed as to which Olweus definitional elements to include (Naylor et al. 2006). Understandings of bullying also have cultural and linguistic influences (Maunder and Crafter 2018; Sittichai and Smith 2015; Smith and Monks 2008). Bullying manifests differently in Eastern and Western cultures (Smith, Kwak, and Toda 2016). Additionally, the word *bullying* does not always have a clear counterpart in many languages, and use of words that seem similar may result in under- or overreporting (Smith et al. 2002). Unfortunately, standardized measures may not capture these differences (Gaffney, Farrington, and Ttofi 2019).

Relatively few studies have asked participants to explain cyberbullying (Alipan et al. 2015), and studies have shown mixed results. Not all participants have supported the notion of a power differential (Vandebosch and Van Cleemput 2008), and participants' interpretation may depend on the perpetrator's intent and/or the victim's experience (Baldasare et al. 2012; Vandebosch and van Cleemput 2008). Given these differences, it is important that researchers define cyberbullying in a way that resonates with participants' understanding (Volk, Veenstra, and Espelage 2017), but this may be difficult if there is so much intragroup variability.

### *The News Media's Construction of School Bullying*

The news media were drawn to school bullying by three "moral shocks" (see Jasper and Poulsen 1995)—the Columbine school shooting in 1999 and two deaths by suicide (termed "bullycides" by some media) in 2010, discussed further in this chapter's Policy Box. Media outlets blamed the Columbine massacre in part on the perpetrators having been bullied, although Cullen (2010)

effectively debunked that long-held assumption. News media linked both suicides to clusters of supposedly similar ones (Cohen and Brooks 2014). Moreno et al. (2019) showed that much of the news coverage in the bullicides era has been fear based, more so for cyberbullying (more than 40 percent) than traditional bullying (about 20 percent). Similarly, coverage in Spanish media was sensationalist, focusing on the extreme outcome of victim suicides (see Blanco-Castilla and Cano-Galindo 2019).

While news media initially seemed to draw from the Olweus elements, they expanded the scope of the bullying “epidemic” to take in an increasing range of behavior, including less serious behaviors such as teasing or roughhousing and more serious harms such as assaults and even homicide (Cohen and Brooks 2014).

### *Legislative Definitions*

Every US state and the District of Columbia have enacted antibullying legislation (Sacco et al. 2012), with a few states having criminalized some forms of school bullying (United States Department of Education 2011). Statutory definitions vary widely, including as to specific actions (physical, verbal, or written), the intent of the aggressor, and harm to the victim. Sacco et al. (2012) noted, “in many instances, minor language, omitted or inserted into laws, can significantly alter the way in which the behavior and circumstances are legally defined (e.g., inclusion of the terms ‘physical,’ ‘overt,’ or ‘repeated’)” (4).

Notably, as of 2012, few statutes followed research-based bullying definitions (Sacco et al. 2012, 5). In fact, many statutes’ conceptions “go well beyond research-based definitions of bullying” because they borrow language from statutes defining harassment (United States Department of Education 2011, 17). Language in twenty-two state statutes uses the terms “bullying,” “harassment,” and “intimidation” interchangeably, fourteen restrict their statute to “bullying,” and another eight include both “bullying” and “harassment” but define them separately (Cascardi et al. 2014, 265).

### *Why Definitions Matter*

Researchers have also sometimes failed to differentiate bullying distinctly from harassment and other types of peer aggression, creating “the potential to obscure important differences in etiology, impact, and effective prevention” (Cascardi et al. 2014, 255). This is of particular concern because some

evidence has shown that bullying has unique, and more serious, harms compared to other peer aggression (e.g., Ybarra, Espelage, and Mitchell 2014) and thus requires a different set of responses (Cornell and Limber 2015). It is difficult to develop evidence-based interventions and prevention methods if definitions vary or are uncertain (Corcoran, McGuckin, and Prentice 2015; United States Department of Education 2011).

The consistency and specificity of definitions also matter to teachers, administrators, and students. Most school districts require teachers and administrators to take action after alleged bullying incidents, such as reporting to the victim's parents and taking disciplinary action against the perpetrator. Since discipline must be consistent to be effective, teachers' and administrators' definitions should align with those of parents and students. In addition, bullying victims require different types of support than do other victims of peer harassment. Finally, a clash of definitions between those of adults and those of children can lead to poor outcomes, such as a decline in trust (e.g., Chandler 2018).

## OPERATIONALIZING SCHOOL BULLYING

**Operationalizing** means to turn a concept into something measurable. Even after decades of research, “measurement is still the Achilles’ heel of bullying research” (Volk, Veenstra, and Espelage 2017, 36) because it “is fraught with difficulty” (Vessey et al. 2014, 820).

Bullying researchers have relied mostly on quantitative measures developed in the field of psychology (Eriksen 2018). More than 80 percent of reported studies have used **self-report measures** (Vivolo-Kantor et al. 2014). As of 2011, there were at least thirty-three such measures (Hamburger, Basile, and Vivolo 2011), although there are few separate measures of cyberbullying specifically (Vivolo-Kantor et al. 2014). Self-report measures are widely used because they are low cost, quick to administer, and easy to calculate. Researchers such as Olweus (2013) have argued that students are in the best position to know their own roles and behaviors; however, there is little research as to whether self-report methods produce more accurate assessments (Vivolo-Kantor et al. 2014). Another method, **nomination**, involves asking various informants, such as teachers, parents, and (usually) peers, to identify victims and perpetrators. An emerging method is network analysis, which examines how students are connected in order to reveal social patterns

of peer aggression (e.g., Faris and Felmlee 2011a, 2011b, 2014; Veenstra et al. 2013; Verlinden et al. 2014). Researchers use this method to “inform teachers about the group structure of their classroom, to give personal advice on their students’ relationships, and to make a tailored plan to assist or intervene with those relationships” (Volk, Veenstra, and Espelage 2017, 38). If used longitudinally, the method can answer questions such as whether existing friend groups bully students or whether those who bully students become friends (Volk, Veenstra, and Espelage 2017).

It is important that measures be valid and reliable. **Reliability** means how free from measurement error a measure is—that is, how consistent it is. Bullying researchers have focused more on reliability than validity (accuracy). Thus, Casper, Meter, and Card (2015) suggested that researchers have sacrificed the latter for the former. Even so, rigorous analysis has provided only limited support for reliability of instruments (see Vessey et al. 2014). Peer nominations are more reliable than self-reports because they come from multiple sources. However, they are subject to “biases related to reputational effects, prejudice, or non-bullying relationship problems,” and depend on peers having observed the bullying, some of which may be covert (e.g., relational or cyberbullying; Volk, Veenstra, and Espelage 2017, 38). Reliability also suffers when groups of students interpret the same behaviors differently. For instance, in one study, boys and minority students were less likely to label an incident “bullying” than were, respectively, girls and white students, even though all groups reported being subjected to similar bullying *behaviors* (Lai and Kao 2018).

Validity takes several forms; generally, it is an assessment of accuracy—how well a researcher has translated a concept into measurement (i.e., how well it measures what it is supposed to measure). Thus far, bullying research “has not strongly focused on the theoretical validity of its measures” (Volk, Veenstra, and Espelage 2017, 37). Of primary concern is variation in the assessment of bullying’s elements (Cascardi et al. 2014). Assuming that the Olweus conception is the “correct” one, researchers would need to measure each of its elements in order to have **content validity** (that is, to take in all aspects of the term’s meaning). However, Vivolo-Kantor et al. (2014) found fewer than half of the questionnaires in the studies they reviewed included all the elements. (This is aside from the question of whether the Olweus definition actually comports with students’ own perceptions of what constitutes bullying [Harbin et al. 2019].) Even where a questionnaire defines bullying’s elements, validity issues can still arise. For instance, Kaufman, Huitsing, and Veenstra (2020) administered a refined version of the Olweus Bully/Victim

Questionnaire and found that “more than half of the self-reported victims did not experience all characteristics of bullying.” The “power imbalance” element was the most likely for respondents to ignore. Another challenge to validity is that bullying is dynamic and highly dependent on context and interpretation. For instance, the “power differential . . . can change depending on the circumstances of a specific aggressive episode” (Cascardi et al. 2014, 254), and children draw on context to interpret whether bullying occurred (Forsberg 2019).

There is also rather weak **concurrent validity** across measures—that is, different measures sometimes produce different prevalence rates and classify different students as bullied and nonbullied (Cascardi et al. 2014). In addition, the agreement between self-reports and nominations by teachers or peers is only modestly positive (Branson and Cornell 2009; Lee and Cornell 2009).

Many researchers have called for more qualitative research to better understand children’s experiences (e.g., Tholander, Lindberg, and Svensson 2019) and to help explain the relatively low success rates of bullying interventions (see Patton et al. 2017). Qualitative research explores how participants construct their understanding of school bullying, how this understanding plays out within particular institutional and cultural settings, and how all of this fits with researchers’ notions of the phenomenon (Maunder and Crafter 2018; Patton et al. 2017). It can involve methods such as in-depth interviews (e.g., Side and Johnson 2014), focus groups (e.g., Chandler 2018), content analysis (e.g., Osvaldsson 2011), ethnography (e.g., Gumpel, Zioni-Koren, and Bekerman 2014; Thornberg 2018), and other methods that involve direct observation. For instance, Craig and Pepler employed cameras and wireless microphones to record students’ interactions on playgrounds (1998; Craig, Pepler, and Atlas 2000), thus capturing language and behavior that usually occur beyond adults’ perceptions and “revealing new insights about [the] forms, frequency, and social structures” of school bullying (Volk, Veenstra, and Espelage 2017, 39).

Qualitative research can also explore what a student is bullying—or being bullied—*about* (e.g., physical characteristics, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation), a question absent from nearly all quantitative measures (American Educational Research Association 2013). This question is important because, for example, ethnic/cultural bullying is difficult to detect with current instruments (Rodríguez-Hidalgo et al. 2019), and it is correlated more strongly with poor health outcomes than is traditional bullying (Russell

et al. 2012). However, qualitative measures have their own reliability and validity challenges. For instance, observations are better at capturing physical aggression than relational aggression, and direct observations of cyberbullying have many practical limitations. In addition, ethnographic findings may not be **generalizable** to other populations.

## PREVALENCE OF SCHOOL BULLYING

Researchers have reported wide variation in the percentage of students who are involved in bullying, due to a number of factors, including the reliability and validity issues identified above (Modecki et al. 2014; Selkie, Fales, and Moreno 2016; Vivolo-Kantor et al. 2014). For instance, Selkie, Fales, and Moreno (2016) noted highly varying rates of cyberbullying perpetration (1–41 percent) and victimization (3–72 percent) in the fifty-eight studies they examined (129). Schwartz, Proctor, and Chien (2001) reported varying percentages of students who are bully-victims—from 0.4 percent to nearly 29 percent—across ten studies using self-reports. Use of peer reports results in less variation in the percentage of bully-victims (from 6 percent to 10 percent), yet this is still a large difference in relative terms (Yang and Salmivalli 2013).

Meta-analyses, which create average means across many studies, show bullying perpetration and victimization are common. For instance, a meta-analysis of eighty studies reported a mean rate of 35 percent for traditional bullying perpetration and 36 percent for traditional victimization, and 15 percent for cyberbullying and 16 percent for cybervictimization, with a great deal of overlap between cyber and traditional bullying (Modecki et al. 2014). Large-scale population studies, particularly recent ones, have shown lower but still troubling prevalence rates. One 2015 study found 20.8 percent of students in grades six through twelve had been bullied during the 2014–2015 school year (United States Department of Education 2016b), a significant decline in victimization from the rate of 27.8 percent during the 2010–2011 school year (United States Department of Education 2013). Some localized studies show decreases that are even more dramatic. For instance, self-reported bullying victimization among students in grades four through twelve in more than one hundred Maryland schools declined from 28.5 percent in 2005 to 13.4 percent in 2014 (Waasdorp et al. 2017). Changes in rates could result from actual changes in behavior or could be an artifact caused by phenomena such as **response shift** (see Shaw, Cross, and Zubrick 2015) or