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Students With Disabilities and Involvement in Peer Victimization: Theory, Research, and Considerations for the Future

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> Bullying can have destructive consequences for our young people. And it's not something we have to accept. As parents and students; teachers and communities, we can take steps that will help prevent bullying and create a climate in our schools in which all of our children can feel safe. (Obama, 2011)

As demonstrated by President Obama's statement at the 2011 White House Conference on Bullying Prevention, there is a growing consensus that bullying is a harmful force in schools. A recent report by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and United States Department of Education presents a uniform definition of bullying that includes "unwanted aggressive behavior . . . that involves an observed or perceived imbalance of power and is repeated multiple times or is highly likely to be repeated" (Gladden, Vivolo-Kantor, Hamburger, & Lumpkin, 2014, p. 7). Although concern about peer victimization is now at the forefront, interventions to reduce its occurrence often come up short (Merrell, Gueldner, Ross, & Isava, 2008; Ttofi & Farrington, 2011). At one level, efforts to prevent peer victimization should center on the creation and dissemination of more effective intervention approaches (Bradshaw, Waasdorp, O'Brennan, & Gulemetova, 2013; Cook, Williams, Guerra, Kim, & Sadek, 2010). At a second level, it is necessary for researchers and stakeholders (e.g., teachers, parents, policy makers) to understand that bullying is often rooted in natural social dynamics in school and to ask ourselves how these dynamics can be leveraged to reduce bullying (Farmer, Lines, & Hamm, 2011; Rodkin, 2011).

Peer systems in schools function as communities that differentially promote and constrain social roles, opportunities, and interactions available to students and, in turn, may affect the outcomes of individually focused interventions, including efforts to reduce involvement in peer victimization (Ahn & Rodkin, 2014; Farmer, Lane, Lee, Hamm, & Lambert, 2012). Furthermore, the peer community can be managed by teachers to create social ecologies to support vulnerable youth (Gest, Madill, Zadzora, Miller, & Rodkin, 2014). On this count, it is useful to view peer victimization from a person-in-context framework that focuses on the interplay between characteristics of students, the relationships they form, and the broader social structures within schools (Rodkin, Hanish, & Wang, 2014; Swearer, Espelage, Vaillancourt, & Hymel, 2010).

The overarching goal of this special issue is to consider peer victimization involvement and corresponding interventions for youth with disabilities from a social dynamics perspective that situates risks for being a victim, perpetrator, or both within a person-in-context framework. The focus here is not on a specific age range or type of disability. Rather, the aim is to provide a broad overview of issues related to peer victimization involvement of children and adolescents with various disabilities and special education needs. In this introduction, we begin with a discussion of aspects of a person-in-context perspective that provide insights into the social dynamics of the peer victimization process. This is followed by a brief review of literature on risk factors for involvement in peer victimization for students with disabilities. Next, we summarize approaches for promoting school contexts that support students' social success and reduce their risk for involvement in peer victimization. In the final section, we provide a brief review of the articles in this special issue and consider them in light of the

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potential to establish a national program of research on disability and peer victimization.

A Person-in-Context Perspective of Peer Victimization

A person-in-context perspective centers on the dynamic interchanges between individuals and the ecologies in which they are embedded (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000; Farmer et al., 2013). A critical aspect of this framework for understanding peer victimization is that students tend to coordinate their interactions in ways that lead to distinct social roles and relationships that may shape the ways youth respond to specific peers (Adler & Adler, 1996; Cairns & Cairns, 1994). In this process, students' social competencies and behaviors contribute to the types of relationships and roles afforded to them; in turn, their relationships and roles may constrain their social skills and behaviors (Farmer, Lane, et al., 2012). To understand youth with disabilities' risk for involvement in peer victimization, it is helpful to consider how the classroom social system is organized and how the characteristics of students fit with their placement in this social system (Estell et al., 2009; Swearer, Wang, Maag, Siebecker, & Frerichs, 2012).

Peer Groups, Social Structures, and Peer Victimization Involvement Subtypes

In schools and other social systems, children and adolescents tend to align themselves with peers who either reflect or complement the characteristics, competencies, and values that are important to them (Cairns & Cairns, 1994). In this ongoing process of sorting and selective affiliation, students develop social roles, peer groups, and social structures that may lead to the establishment of distinct in-group and out-group boundaries as well as enemy relationships and the emergence of dominant leaders and social scapegoats (Adler & Adler, 1996; Rodkin, 2011). In many classrooms, perceived popularity (e.g., social salience) may be a key characteristic around which groups are organized or formed (Logis, Rodkin, Gest, & Ahn, 2013). Furthermore, students' efforts to sort themselves along dimensions of perceived popularity are reflected in the peer affiliations of bullies (Witvliet et al., 2010), and bullying may serve as a mechanism to maintain group boundaries and assert the social dominance of the group (Olthof, Goossens, Vermande, Aleva, & van der Meulen, 2011).

In some respects, there is considerable confusion with regard to the peer relations of youth involved in peer victimization. This confusion centers on differences in the social relations of students representing distinct types of involvement in peer victimization (Rodkin, 2011). It is possible to distinguish among pure bullies (aggressive perpetrators who are not victimized), pure victims (non-aggressive youth who are victimized by peers), and bully-victims (youth who are simultaneously perpetrators and victims of bullying; Hanish & Guerra, 2004; Yang & Salmivalli, 2013). Youth who are characterized by these different victimization involvement types tend to have distinct social roles and peer relationships (Farmer et al., 2010). Specifically, bullies tend to be socially dominant, are perceived to be popular, and are leaders or nuclear members of peer groups that are composed of other popular youth. In contrast, victims have low levels of favorable social characteristics, have low status in the social system, and affiliate with peers who share their low status. Bully-victims tend to have the most problematic social characteristics and placement in the social system. They have few positive social competencies and significant social deficits, they tend to have highly elevated levels of peer rejection, and they tend to be social isolates or to affiliate with peers who are socially marginalized (Juvonen & Graham, 2014; Rodkin, 2011; Yang & Salmivalli, 2013).

The Placement of Students With Disabilities in the Social System

Many youth with disabilities experience social difficulties and relatively low levels of social competence (e.g., Nowicki, 2003; Siperstein, Parker, Bardon, & Widaman, 2007; Sterzing, Shattuck, Narendorf, Wagner, & Cooper, 2012). Compared with non-disabled classmates, students with disabilities are more likely to be disliked and to have peer acceptance problems (De Boer, Pijl, Post, & Minnaert, 2013; Frederickson & Furnham, 2004; Sale & Carey, 1995; Twyman et al., 2010). Furthermore, youth with disabilities tend to have lower levels of social network centrality, have elevated rates of social isolation, or affiliate with peers who are socially vulnerable and share their problematic social characteristics (Farmer, Leung, et al., 2011; Pearl et al., 1998; Twyman et al., 2010). Findings on the competencies and social placement of students with disabilities come together to suggest their interpersonal behaviors and social relations converge to increase their vulnerability for sustained involvement in peer victimization both as victims and bully-victims. Consistent with this view, several studies suggest social differences and marginalization in the peer system place youth with disabilities in the precarious position of being both architect and victim for involvement in peer victimization (Estell et al., 2009; Evans & Eder, 1993; Kokkinos & Antoniadou, 2013; Swearer et al., 2012).

Students With Disabilities' Risk for Involvement in Peer Victimization

National prevalence studies show that approximately 30% of youth in secondary school experience involvement in peer victimization as either a bully, victim, or bully-victim

(Blake, Lund, Zhou, Kwok, & Benz, 2012; Nansel et al., 2001; Turner, Vanderminden, Finkelhor, Hamby, & Shattuck, 2011). From a social-ecological perspective, a variety of interpersonal, behavioral, and social factors place the general population of youth at risk for involvement in the peer victimization process (Spriggs, Iannotti, Nansel, & Haynie, 2007).

Youth with disabilities share many of the same risk factors for involvement in peer victimization as the general population, but they experience higher rates of risk and involvement as compared with peers without disabilities (Estell et al., 2009; Farmer, Petrin, et al., 2012; Rose, Forber-Pratt, Espelage, & Aragon, 2013; Twyman et al., 2010). In a national sample of elementary and secondary students, parent-reports of their child being victimized by peers ranged from 24.5% to 34.1% for students with disabilities (Blake et al., 2012). Sterzing et al. (2012) found that 46.3% of youth with an autism spectrum disorder (ASD) were involved in bullying as a victim-only, with 14.8% involved as a bully-only and 8.9% as a bully-victim. Other studies have found that students with disabilities are twice as likely as non-disabled youth to be involved in bullying as a perpetrator or bully-victim (Rose & Espelage, 2012; Rose, Monda-Amaya, & Espelage, 2011). Yet, some research suggests that compared with students without disabilities, students with disabilities are more likely to be victims or bully-victims but not bullies (Farmer, Petrin, et al., 2012).

Although students with disabilities may be disproportionately at risk for involvement in peer victimization, the presence of a disability itself may not be a risk factor. Rather, factors that may accompany the disability, such as problems with social skills, communication difficulties, and/or internalizing and externalizing behaviors, may compromise their social status and further increase their risk for involvement as a victim or perpetrator (Bellini, Peters, Benner, & Hopf, 2007; Blake et al., 2012; Chen & Schwartz, 2012; Christensen, Fraynt, Neece, & Baker, 2012; Estell et al., 2009; Rose & Espelage, 2012; Rose et al., 2013; Turner et al., 2011).

Bullying reflects a power differential between those involved (Gladden et al., 2014). Youth with disabilities are at greater risk for peer victimization because they may be considered to be different from their peers and so, may be viewed as outsiders to the peer group (Rose, Swearer, & Espelage, 2012). For example, special education students with observable (i.e., speech language impairment, hearing impaired, intellectual disability) and behavioral (i.e., emotional/behavioral, other health impaired) disabilities are more likely to self-report being involved in peer victimization than students with non-observable disabilities (i.e., specific learning disabilities) and non-disabled students (Swearer et al., 2012). When discussing risks of becoming involved in bullying as a perpetrator, victim, or both, the social dynamics of the peer group and the social roles youth with disabilities play in that dynamic are important to consider along with the individual characteristics that act as risk factors (Gumpel & Sutherland, 2010).

Social Characteristics and Risk Factors of Youth Identified as Pure Bullies

Youth identified as pure bullies tend to have markedly different social characteristics from youth who are victims or bully-victims (Rodkin, 2011; Schwartz, 2000). Compared with victims and bully-victims, pure bullies have more positive social and behavioral characteristics, are dominant or influential in the social system, are perceived to be popular even though they are disliked by many peers, use bistrategic behaviors (e.g., both aggressive and prosocial strategies) to dominate peers, and associate with others who are also dominant and perceived to be popular by their classmates (Adler & Adler, 1996; Farmer et al., 2010; Olthof et al., 2011; Witvliet et al., 2010). Although students with disabilities are less likely to be pure bullies and more likely to be victims or bully-victims, youth with disabilities who are pure bullies tend to have higher levels of positive social characteristics and school bonding, and lower levels of school adjustment problems (Farmer, Petrin, et al., 2012). Furthermore, students with disabilities who affiliate with aggressive peers and with peers who are perceived to be popular by classmates tend to have the highest levels of being identified as bullies and are less likely to be victimized as compared with other students with disabilities (Estell et al., 2009). These findings suggest that youth with disabilities who are pure bullies may have social supports that both reinforce their involvement as bullies and protect them against victimization from classmates.

Social Characteristics and Risk Factors of Youth Identified as Pure Victims

Students identified as pure victims experience a range of risks including higher levels of internalizing behaviors, such as anxiety, depression, social withdrawal, and passivity (Hodges, Malone, & Perry, 1997; Juvonen & Graham, 2014). In addition, pure victims tend to have a variety of social risks including lower levels of social competencies and higher rates of social isolation or affiliations in small social networks with socially marginalized peers (Farmer et al., 2010; Nansel et al., 2001; Salmivalli, Huttunen, & Lagerspetz, 1997; Swearer et al., 2010). Students with disabilities who experience high levels of peer victimization have elevated rates of individual and social risk factors including depression and internalizing behavior problems (Estell et al., 2009; Maag & Reid, 2006; Mishna, 2003; Rose et al., 2013), social communication and social competence difficulties (e.g., Chen & Schwartz, 2012; Christensen et al., 2012; Farmer, Petrin, et al., 2012; Son et al., 2014;

Zablotsky, Bradshaw, Anderson, & Law, 2014), and experience social isolation or affiliate with peers who do not support or protect them from bullying (Estell et al., 2009; Turner et al., 2011). Students with disabilities who are social isolates are more likely to be bullied than those who associate with non-popular peers, who, in turn, are more likely to be bullied than those who associate with perceived popular peers (Estell et al., 2009).

Risk Factors for Involvement as a Bully-Victim

Youth involved in peer victimization both as perpetrators and victims experience the most significant risks at both the individual and social context levels. Bully-victims tend to have a range of social competence problems, have the highest risk of peer rejection, are socially isolated or affiliate with low status peers, and are generally socially scapegoated by their classmates (Farmer et al., 2010; Hanish & Guerra, 2004; Juvonen & Graham, 2014; Schwartz, 2000). The offshoot is these youth are not supported by peers in a productive way and respond to social problems in a manner that increases the likelihood they will be the target of victimization by peers (Rodkin, 2011). For example, bully-victims perpetrate significantly more physical and verbal bullying than pure bullies, and are more frequent targets of physical, verbal, indirect, and cyberbullying than students identified as pure victims (Yang & Salmivalli, 2013). This dynamic may be particularly problematic for youth with disabilities, as they struggle with developmentally appropriate social skills, and they may experience interpersonal relationship difficulties that lead to increased reactive aggression and emotion dysregulation (Evans & Eder, 1993; Rose & Espelage, 2012). Consequently, difficulty making friends appears to be a significant predictor of being a bully-victim for youth with disabilities (Zablotsky et al., 2014).

The Promotion of Supportive Peer Cultures for Students With Disabilities

Peer victimization affects a large number of students and is likely the most known form of school violence (Batsche, 2002). The majority of peer victimization incidents occur during school hours and typically take place in areas such as playgrounds, hallways, restrooms, and, perhaps somewhat less often, in classrooms (Atlas & Pepler, 1998; Bauman, 2008; Payne & Gottfredson, 2004). With the high prevalence of bullying, it is imperative that school personnel including special educators, general educators, school counselors, administrators, and other student support personnel understand the social dynamics that contribute to peer victimization and how these dynamics can be addressed at different levels of intervention within the school community (Farmer, Farmer, Estell, & Hutchins, 2007; Rodkin, 2011; Rose & Monda-Amaya, 2012). It is beyond the scope of this article to review all aspects of the intervention process. Rather, keeping with the person-in-context conceptual framework that guides this special issue, we briefly discuss intervention at the individual, classroom, and school levels. Furthermore, we recognize that interventions at these levels do not occur in isolation, and we also consider the service delivery implications of integrating peer victimization prevention and treatment efforts across students, classrooms, and the general school context. It should be noted that the term *level* here should not be confused with its use in three-tiered models of intervention (i.e., universal, selected, targeted). Rather, we expect that each of the tiers in such models can focus on the individual, classroom, or school levels.

Individual Focused Strategies

With individual focused strategies, the aim is to address the characteristics, skills, and perceptions/beliefs of students that may contribute to or protect against their involvement in the peer victimization process. This may include universal programs that train all students across the school in specific social skills, bullying prevention, or character education programs. The goal of such efforts is to help all students develop the interpersonal competencies, behaviors, and attitudes that reduce the likelihood of their involvement in peer victimization (e.g., Renshaw & Jimerson, 2012; Ross & Horner, 2014). Individual focused strategies may also involve selected approaches to work with smaller groups of students who have been identified as having elevated risks for involvement in peer victimization and who require more intensive intervention than universal strategies. For example, this may include training children who are at high risk in small friendship groups that focus on teaching and reinforcing productive social-emotional skills and behaviors (e.g., Nix, Bierman, Domitrovich, & Gill, 2013), using social stories in small groups of at-risk youth or involving them in extracurricular activities to promote their social competencies and status in the peer group (e.g., Rose & Monda-Amaya, 2012), or teaching relevant social competency skills to small groups of vulnerable youth (e.g., Meadan & Monda-Amaya, 2008). Furthermore, individual focused strategies may include individualized approaches that target the specific needs and experiences of students who are involved in peer victimization. Such approaches should involve assessing the interplay between students' social behaviors, roles, and interaction patterns that elicit and reinforce their involvement in the bullying process (see Farmer, Lane, et al., 2012; Rose & Monda-Amaya, 2012).

Classroom Focused Strategies

With classroom focused strategies, the goal is to create ecological contexts that promote students' egalitarian peer relationships and roles, and inhibit the emergence of hierarchical

social structures that contribute to peer victimization (Garandeau, Lee, & Salmivalli, 2014; Rodkin & Hodges, 2003). At the universal level, this may include creating classroom rules/routines to report bullying and training all students in the classroom in ways to respond to bullying situations when they are a bystander (Novick & Isaacs, 2010; Salmivalli, Voeten, & Poskiparta, 2011). Furthermore, teachers can act as an invisible hand and guide students' social opportunities and peer dynamics in ways that create a supportive classroom society that reduces or protects against bullying (see Farmer, Lines, & Hamm, 2011; Rodkin & Hodges, 2003). At the selected level, interventions may focus on youth monitoring and promoting the productive social engagement of students who are socially dominant leaders or socially vulnerable or isolated students who are at increased risk for involvement in peer victimization. At the targeted level, interventions may involve managing the behavior and influence of youth who are identified as bullies, providing youth who are victimized with opportunities to take on favorable roles and to establish positive relationships with productive peers, and reframing the social interactions and negative peer support for students who engage in coercive interchanges with each other (see Farmer, Lane, et al., 2012; Garandeau et al., 2014; Rose & Monda-Amaya, 2012).

School Climate Focused Strategies

Interventions that focus on the school climate center on school-wide practices and policies aimed at addressing the social culture across grade levels and that set the tone for how students, teachers, and the administration interact with each other to create an environment that promotes supportive relationships, a collective sense of school belonging, and structures and supports that protect against peer victimization (Wang, Berry, & Swearer, 2013). School climate approaches can span universal, selected, and targeted tiers of intervention and tend to fit within a School-Wide Positive Behavior Intervention Support (SWPBIS) framework (Bradshaw, 2013; Lewis, Jones, Horner, & Sugai, 2010; Ross & Horner, 2014). Effective strategies include climate assessments, concentrated monitoring of students who exhibit at-risk/bullying behaviors, school-wide curricula that address student awareness of victimization, school staff professional development, active inclusion of students in developing anti-bullying policy and monitoring bullying behaviors, and consistent data collection and progress reports on the school bullying environment (Rose & Monda-Amaya, 2012; Swearer et al., 2010). School administrators typically report responsibility for selecting school-wide anti-bullying programs, and "zero-tolerance" policies tend to be a prevalent approach (Lund, Blake, Ewing, & Banks, 2012). Implicit in the popularity of zero-tolerance practices is the view that schools prefer disciplining bullies with punitive consequences. Reflecting this view, teachers, counselors, and school psychologists appear to prefer punitive consequences for bullies and may be less knowledgeable about alternative strategies (Bauman, Rigby, & Hoppa, 2008; O'Malley, 2009). However, "zero-tolerance" policies may not teach students more effective skills or address the social dynamic factors that contribute to students' involvement (Reynolds et al., 2008; Rodkin, 2011).

Implications for Service Delivery

Bridging across these three levels, teachers vary in the approaches they use to address bullying. Many teachers report using strategies such as serious talks with students about bullying, contacting parents, and meeting with both bullies and victims to bring about resolutions (Bauman et al., 2008; Dake, Price, Telljohann, & Funk, 2004). Teachers who are transitioning to become school administrators recommend punishing bullies but also endorse counseling prior to the implementation of discipline (Bauman et al., 2008). Yet the evidence for many approaches endorsed by teachers to address students' behaviors may not be well established (Stormont, Reinke, & Herman, 2011). There is a need to ensure that the strategies teachers use to address students' involvement in peer victimization and associated problem behaviors build from evidence-based research (Reinke & Herman, 2002; Rose & Monda-Amaya, 2012). There is a related need to establish service delivery structures that provide teachers with resources, supports, and guidance necessary to address the management of classroom behavior and social dynamics that contribute to the peer victimization process (Farmer et al., 2014; Motoca et al., 2014; Woodbridge et al., 2014).

To our knowledge, there have not been any group-level, experimental clinical trials designed specifically to examine the impact of distinct interventions on the peer victimization involvement of students with disabilities. Evidence that is emerging in this area is typically generated from large-scale studies that are aimed at the general population and that include a sample of students with disabilities. Therefore, the suggestions listed below for intervention do not reflect a rigorous research evidence base for students with disabilities but rather are promising practices that have been identified in the literature on the prevention and treatment of peer victimization in the student population in general.

Several promising practices are embedded within a SWPBIS framework and may be used to help teachers promote a classroom and school climate that protects against peer victimization (Bradshaw, 2013; Wang et al., 2013). Classrooms should have clear policies, procedures, and structures to reduce confusion about behavioral expectations (Lewis et al., 2010; Ross & Horner, 2014). Components of policies/procedures about peer victimization include a definitive understanding of what bullying is and types of bullying (Bauman et al., 2008); concrete expectations about student

behavior, processes for reporting bullying, and positive reinforcement for desired behaviors; and global procedures all students should follow for reporting incidents of bullying in the classroom environment (Bradshaw, 2013; Rose & Monda-Amaya, 2012; Wang et al., 2013). Furthermore, classroom teachers can implement a social-skills curriculum that embeds desired social behaviors into their daily classroom routines. For example, a social-skills curriculum infused into daily academic lessons include role-playing, story sharing, and conflict resolution and character education as a regular part of behavioral expectations during structured group time (Meadan & Monda-Amaya, 2008; Rose & Monda-Amaya, 2012). Awareness training (e.g., understanding disabilities, cultural differences) can be a part of this curriculum (Baker & Donelly, 2001; Llewellyn, 2000; Rose & Monda-Amaya, 2012). Finally, teachers can implement strategies that allow for the development of student support networks where students can develop, learn, and practice self-help skills (Baker & Donelly, 2001; Llewellyn, 2000; Rose & Monda-Amaya, 2012).

To achieve these goals, teachers need a structured framework such as SWPBIS to help guide their efforts and to promote consistency across classrooms and between school personnel (Bradshaw, 2013; Lewis et al., 2010). However, a structured framework needs to be complemented with other supports including consultation and coaching (Poduska & Kurki, 2014; Reinke et al., 2014). Compared with other school support professionals, teachers are more likely to witness bullying, to have students report bullying to them, and to be involved in bullying policies (Bradshaw et al., 2013). Furthermore, teachers report that they are more likely to feel effective in addressing peer victimization and bullying when they are supported by school administrators (Skinner, Babinksi, & Gifford, 2014). Teachers report that although they view intervening with aggression as within the purview of their responsibilities, they feel less competent at addressing students' social issues, and they view this as the responsibility of school counselors and school psychologists (Gest et al., 2014; Reinke, Stormont, Herman, Puri, & Goel, 2011).

School counselors and school psychologists tend to receive training on interventions to address students' social needs and other issues and approaches that pertain to the prevention and treatment of bullying (American School Counselor Association, 2003; Bauman et al., 2008; Lund et al., 2012). Strategies used by school counselors may look different than those of school psychologists, teachers, and administrators due to school counselors' mental health and advocacy professional identity (Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs [CACREP], 2009). School counselors can use strategies such as individual and group counseling, classroom guidance, psycho-educational learning groups, counselor-led mediation, and school-wide character education to address bullying. These strategies might include student conflict resolution through role-playing, peer mediation, and behavioral modeling (Lund et al., 2012). Strategies specific to victimization can include self-esteem building, support groups, and additional attention to bullying victims. Likewise, strategies specific to bullies can be used as well such as managing their social opportunities, tolerance groups, behavioral consequences, and if needed, referrals to mental health professionals (Bauman et al., 2008). Yet, due to the current pressure of high-stakes testing, administrators tend to utilize school counselors and school psychologists for psycho-educational assessment and testing preparation activities and are less likely to involve them in direct student support roles (Lund et al., 2012). There is clearly a need for dedicated professionals in schools who are responsible for helping teachers address the social dynamics of bullying and school violence, to guide and monitor bullying prevention programs, and to address the needs of specific students who are involved in peer victimization (Bauman, 2008; Cappella et al., 2012; Farmer et al., 2007).

Overview of the Special Issue and Considerations for Future Research

The articles in this special issue demonstrate the complexity of students with disabilities' risk for involvement in peer victimization. Although these studies provide evidence for a variety of strategies and supports that may help to reduce this risk, they also show that involvement in peer victimization is often resistant to intervention. The goals of this section are to (a) highlight key results of these articles with regard to the identification of risks and points of leverage for intervention, and (b) to consider implications for the establishment of a national research agenda to address ways to reduce the involvement and impact of peer victimization on the social development and educational outcomes of youth with disabilities.

The Current Articles

In the first article, O'Brennan and colleagues (in press) conducted a longitudinal study of elementary students' involvement in peer victimization and their social–emotional adjustment. This study examined the association between involvement in peer victimization and problems with concentration and emotion regulation in general versus special education in 37 elementary schools. Data were collected over five time points from third to fifth grade, and results suggest that special education students characterized as a bully-victim had higher concentration problems at baseline than other students, but their concentration problems decreased slightly by the end of the 4 years of the study. However, both general and special education students who were characterized as victims or bully-victims showed a decrease in concentration problems over the five time points but still had higher scores than their non-involved peers.

Students in special education were rated lower in emotion regulation than those never enrolled in special education, and special education students who were identified as victims showed lower emotion regulation scores than other youth at baseline. For peer victimization subtypes, students with any type of involvement had lower scores on emotion regulation at baseline than their non-involved peers.

In the second study, Sullivan and colleagues (in press) evaluated the impact of the Second Step program (Committee for Children, 2008) on the school adjustment of students with disabilities and their non-disabled peers. Using a cluster–randomized control design, this study examined the effects of Second Step on teacher- and student-rated aggression and peer victimization, and teacher-rated emotion regulation for students in 28 classrooms within three public middle schools. Students were assessed over four time points beginning in the fall of sixth grade and continuing through the spring of seventh grade. Although there were no main effects of the intervention for any of the outcome measures, subgroup analyses examining potential moderating effects of gender and disability status found that teachers reported greater decreases in relational victimization for students with disabilities in the intervention group and increases for students with disabilities in the control group. Students without disabilities in the intervention group reported greater decreases in overt aggression from pretest to the fall of seventh grade. Disability status did not moderate the effects of the intervention on emotion regulation. The study also found significant moderation effects of gender on overt aggression such that boys in the intervention group have smaller increases in overt aggression than those in the control group at spring of sixth grade, and intervention condition girls showed greater decreases in relational aggression at fall of seventh grade.

The third article in this special issue examined the impact of the Second Step program on students with disabilities' involvement in peer victimization. As part of a broader randomized control trial, Espelage and colleagues (2015) hypothesized that the Second Step components of direct instruction in the areas of self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, problem solving, and relationship management would serve as a vehicle to reduce bullying, victimization, and fighting over time for students with disabilities. This article reports on a subsample of 11 middle schools in the broader evaluation study that reported on the special education status of participants. In this 3-year longitudinal study, teachers implemented 41 lessons across a sixth- to eighth-grade curriculum that focused on social-emotional learning skills, including empathy, bully prevention, communication skills, emotion regulation, and problem-solving skills. Linear growth models indicated a significant intervention effect for bully perpetration; compared with students in the control condition, intervention students' bullying perpetration scale scores significantly decreased across the four waves of the 3-year study. However, in contrast to the original hypothesis, the intervention group did not report lower levels of victimization when compared with their peers in the control condition.

In the final study, Chen and colleagues (in press) examined peer victimization in two ways. First, students' involvement was determined from teacher and peer reports of "bullied by peers" and "bullies peers" to identify four distinct subtypes: victims, bullies, bully-victims, and not involved. Second, patterns of involvement across spring of fifth grade to fall and spring of sixth grade were identified from these subtypes and were characterized as stable involved, stable not involved, and changing. Data were collected in 36 rural schools across 11 states as part of a cluster-randomized trial evaluation of a program designed to promote supportive classroom contexts during the transition into early adolescence (Farmer et al., 2013). Nearly three quarters of students with disabilities were involved in peer victimization, and they were more likely to be nominated as victims and bully-victims as compared with students without disabilities. In contrast, the majority of academically gifted students were not involved. Students with disabilities, but not academically gifted students, had more stable involvement in peer victimization. Furthermore, social marginalization differentiated peer victimization stability. Although youth with disabilities and academically gifted students in the full sample were more likely than non-disabled students to perceive that peers encouraged others to bully them, academically gifted students and those with disabilities in Supporting Early Adolescent Learning and Social Success (SEALS) schools were less likely to perceive that classmates encouraged bullying.

Toward a National Program of Research on Disability and Peer Victimization

Building from prior research on peer victimization and the bullying involvement of students with disabilities, the findings of the current studies suggest that this issue should be a national priority for educational and social development research. Youth with disabilities are highly vulnerable for being involved in peer victimization as victims and as bully-victims, compared with other subgroups (e.g., general education students, academically gifted students). Furthermore, students with disabilities appear to be more likely to have problematic interpersonal characteristics and to experience social difficulties that may contribute to their sustained involvement in peer victimization across the school year and from 1 school year to the next. Although efforts to address peer victimization and bullying in all youth warrant national concern, the emerging data on the peer victimization involvement of students with disabilities are alarming and suggest that there is a need for a systematic research agenda that brings together leaders in special education, disability policy

studies, peer victimization research, and prevention and developmental sciences. Specifically, there is an urgent need to identify risks and resilience factors specific to students with disabilities. Also, there is a need to clarify how involvement in peer victimization is related to the educational and developmental pathways of students with disabilities from childhood to adulthood. Furthermore, this basic research should both help guide and be informed by rigorous intervention development and evaluation studies that focus specifically on the prevention and treatment of peer victimization involvement of students with disabilities.

As we indicated in the introduction, this review focused on students with disabilities in general and not on specific special education classifications, developmental periods, and school or classroom contexts. Although there have been a few studies that have examined these variables, there is a need for carefully constructed studies that are designed specifically to explore how student characteristics, classroom contexts, and developmental factors operate together to protect against or contribute to the peer victimization involvement of students with disabilities. For example, it seems reasonable to compare the peer victimization involvement of students with disabilities who are identified for different special education classifications. However, there is considerable variability in how different districts and states identify students. Thus, students who are identified for services for a specific classification in one district might be identified for a different classification in another district. Studies that use school record data to compare the peer victimization involvement of different disability categories may be relying on a false sense of precision and may muddy the knowledge base that serves as the foundation for developing and evaluating interventions. We propose that dedicated research is needed to examine how interpersonal characteristics, classroom/school contexts, and involvement in peer victimization of students with disabilities are related to each other over time. Such research should make it possible to identify how contextual and developmental processes can be leveraged to support interventions for students with disabilities who have specific characteristics that mediate or moderate their risk for involvement in peer victimization.

Likewise, we propose that research to address the peer victimization involvement of students with disabilities should not be conducted in isolation from other initiatives in special education. Rather, there is a need to link research on the reduction of peer victimization with other programs that focus on student behavior and the school social climate including Positive Behavior Intervention Support (PBIS) programs and classroom management programs (Farmer et al., 2014; Lewis et al., 2010; Ross & Horner, 2014). As demonstrated by the collective work in this special issue, there is a need for research that brings together individual-oriented strategies with context-oriented approaches. Such research should include merging universal behavior support and classroom management programs with universal bullying prevention and social-skills programs such as Second Step that are designed to affect the social adaption of all youth within the school context. However, such research must go beyond universal strategies and include multitiered efforts (i.e., universal, selected, targeted) that situate peer victimization involvement interventions for students with disabilities within a comprehensive framework that focuses on the student in the peer context and are aimed at bringing the skills and characteristics of the student in alignment with a supportive social ecology.

Furthermore, it is necessary to recognize that research aimed at addressing the peer victimization involvement of students with disabilities must go beyond the creation and evaluation of evidence-based practices. As we outline at the beginning of this introduction, the problem of peer victimization should be addressed as a person-in-context issue and involves the highly dynamic interchange between the developmental characteristics and opportunities of individual students and the various social ecologies in which they are embedded (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000; Cairns & Cairns, 1994; Rodkin, 2011; Swearer et al., 2010). This means that addressing the issue of peer victimization involvement of students with disabilities requires service delivery frameworks and professional supports that can be proactive and responsive to unique aspects of individual students and contexts. To do this, there is a need for an emphasis on service delivery both in terms of the provision of direct services for students and consultation supports and professional development for teachers (Farmer et al., 2007; Farmer, Lane, et al., 2012). School counselors, special educators, school psychologists, and other intervention support specialists may play a pivotal role in the reduction of peer victimization. These specialists can monitor individual students' social and emotional adaptation as well as the bullying climate at both the classroom and school levels, and they can provide direct services to students as well as act as a consultative resource to teachers (Lund et al., 2012; Motoca et al., 2014; Poduska & Kurki, 2014; Reinke et al., 2014; Woodbridge et al., 2014). As the field struggles with issues in the implementation and sustainability of evidence-based practices, it is necessary to understand that teachers cannot address students' peer victimization alone, and they need a range of services and supports to help them address the social needs of youth with disabilities who are vulnerable for involvement in the bullying process.

In conclusion, the articles in this special issue build from previous research to highlight the urgency and complexity in addressing the peer victimization involvement of youth with disabilities. The current work along with prior studies demonstrates that the peer victimization involvement of students with disabilities should be a national priority for education and social development research. Students with disabilities are highly vulnerable for involvement in peer victimization

as victims and as bully-victims. Furthermore, compared with other subgroups (e.g., general education students, academically gifted students), students with disabilities appear to be more likely to have problematic interpersonal characteristics and to experience social difficulties that sustain their involvement in peer victimization across the school year and from one year to the next. Although efforts to address peer victimization and bullying in all youth warrant national concern, the emerging data on the peer victimization involvement of students with disabilities are alarming and suggest that there is a need for a systematic research agenda that bridges basic science, intervention development, and efficacy research to identify prevention and intervention leverage points as well as effective practices to reduce involvement in peer victimization and to ameliorate the impact of such involvement when it does occur.

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