

Running Head: BULLYING AS A FORM OF COGNITIVE DISSONANCE

Bullying as a Form of Cognitive Dissonance

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## **Introduction**

Over the last decade there has been a great amount of concern focused around bullying behavior. Bullying occurs just about everywhere in society but is most prevalent in schools. Bullying has received a great amount of attention as researchers are finding mental health implications being experienced among the victims. Teachers, parents and educators are trying to enforce new policies and protective strategies to prevent bullying from occurring, however, their attempts are not always effective. As many as one-third of students say they have either bullied someone or been the target of bullying (Garrett, 2003). One way researchers could make some progress in bullying prevention is by understanding and applying the theories of cognitive dissonance to bullying behavior. When cognitive dissonance is present, there is a considerable psychological need within an individual to reduce it, which can be done in a number of different ways. Understanding cognitive dissonance could show to be an effective way to prevent future bullying both in and out of school settings.

## **Bullying Behavior**

Bullying is an aggressive behavior. It can take the form of words, actions or social exclusion that intentionally hurts or harms another person. Boys tend to be more physical when they bully, by pushing, shoving or injuring their victims whereas girls use more social isolation and gossip, although they too can be physical. Bullying can occur in groups or by an individual. In schools, bullying generally occurs when there is limited supervision, for example in the cafeteria or going to or from school. Bullying, although

commonly occurring during childhood to mid-adolescence, can be experienced at any age in any place (Sassu, 2006).

### *Prevalence of Bullying*

Some research shows that bullying is sometimes used as a strategy to establish authority and dominance among peer groups in school. Espelage and Holt (2001) examined four hundred and twenty-two students in a Midwestern school grades six to eight. They found that nearly fifteen percent of these students engaged in bullying behavior regularly. Bullying occurred more frequently among boys than girls. There was also a strong relationship between popularity and bullying as seventy-five percent of the sixth grade boys who engaged in frequent bullying behavior also labeled other bullies as their friends.

In one study (Espelage, Bosworth & Simon, 2000), eighty-five percent of the 558 students surveyed in a Midwestern United States school reported that they had engaged in bullying behavior in the previous thirty days. The students who reported their involvement in bullying behavior also stated they had been victimized too.

### *Impact of Bullying Behavior*

Bullying behavior has been taken more seriously in the recent decade. A few victims have committed suicide or retaliated by becoming involved in school shootings, but many more bully victims also experience psychological trauma. It is not uncommon for these individuals to experience post traumatic stress disorder, depression, increased aggression, stress and dissociation (Burrill, 2006). Other mental health implications were

found by Dake et al. (2003) in which anxiety, eating disorders and other health issues were prevalent among students who were bullied.

Substantial evidence also supports the idea that bullying has a strong impact on the mental health of both those who are bullied and the bullies themselves. Nansel et al. (2001) found that children who are bullied have poor psychosocial functioning as compared to students not involved in bullying. They found smoking, drinking and conduct problems were correlated with students who bully others. Mynard, Joseph and Alexander (2000) showed both bullies and victims of bullying were likely to have lower self esteem than non-bullies and non-victims. They also suffered from depression and were therefore at a greater risk of suicidal behavior.

The effect of bullying and being victimized can also impact a student's performance in the classroom. Dake, Price and Telljohann (2003) found bullies are more likely to have a lower academic achievement than students who were not involved in bullying. This finding was consistent with Garrett (2003) who showed that being victimized can lead to a decline in grades. Nansel, Overpeck, Pilla and Ruan (2001) found that students involved in bullying are less interested in school than students not involved in bullying. These individuals also experienced more feelings of loneliness and had poor relationships with their classmates.

Many different forms of intervention strategies have been set up in schools throughout Canada and the United States to deal with the problems of bullying. Parents, teachers and educators continue to work together to find effective programs that try to reduce the prevalence of bullying behavior for both present and future use. Patrizio (2006) tested whether fifth and sixth grade students found a bullying prevention program

to be effective in reducing such behavior. About half of the students found that the program had been effective since being implemented and also felt it was most effective during recess and lunch time.

### **Cognitive Dissonance**

Bullies may be aware of the implications of their behavior; however, they may convince themselves that it is justified for a number of different reasons. Such self-deception often leads to an uncomfortable feeling known as cognitive dissonance. 'Cognitive dissonance is a psychologically uncomfortable feeling an individual experiences when there is a discrepancy between their attitude and behavior' (Galinsky, Stone & Cooper, pg 123, 2000). In many situations, there is a difference between how a person feels on the inside and how they react to a situation (Baron & Byrne, 2004). This could be applied to bullying in the sense that even though people may know bullying is wrong, they continue to bully in order to achieve a desired outcome, such as to gain attention, fit into a group or become popular. When cognitive dissonance is present, people may change the way they think or behave to make their attitudes and actions more consistent. In general, individuals do not like to be inconsistent and they feel uncomfortable when cognitive dissonance occurs. There is usually a strong motivation to change an attitude or behavior when individuals do or think something that is contrary to the way they truly feel they should (Baron & Byrne, 2004).

### *Reducing Cognitive Dissonance*

Cognitive dissonance is said to be reduced by either direct or indirect measures. Direct measures include changing an attitude or behavior so that they are in agreement with each other (Baron & Byrne, 2004). An example of this could be “I know bullying Johnny is wrong, but I continue to do so because other people do it too”. Another way to reduce dissonance directly can occur when something new is learned by the individual that supports the way they think or behave (Baron & Byrne, 2004). An example of this could be “I learned that Johnny comes from a cultural background that I do not like, therefore it is okay to make fun of him”. A third way to reduce cognitive dissonance directly would be to trivialize the matter and decide it is not important (Baron & Byrne, 2004). An example could be “I only pushed Johnny around one time; therefore it is not a big deal”. These direct strategies for reducing cognitive dissonance focus primarily on the inconsistencies between one’s attitude and behavior.

Cognitive dissonance can also be reduced by using indirect measures. This type of dissonance reduction usually involves the individual focusing on their positive personal attributes without actually changing their behavior (Stone, 2001). An example of this could be “I know I bully people, and I know it is wrong, but I still do well in school and athletics”. Generally speaking, individuals who use the indirect measure of dissonance reduction are not experiencing enough cognitive dissonance to feel like hypocrites, therefore there is little motivation to change their behavior (Stone, 2001).

### *Research on Cognitive Dissonance*

The original study done on cognitive dissonance was conducted by Festinger and Carlsmith (1957). The purpose of their study was to examine the change of personal

opinions participants had after being forced to say something contrary to their initial opinions. Seventy-one male students attending Stanford University were asked to complete a very boring task of putting spools onto a tray and taking them off continuously at their own speed for an hour. After they had completed the task, participants were asked to tell the upcoming participants about the experiment, and were told to mention that it was actually a very interesting task. Participants were offered either one or twenty dollars for their explanations. Results showed that the participants who were offered one dollar for their explanations were more likely to say the experiment was fun and interesting as opposed to the participants who were offered twenty dollars. The participants experienced cognitive dissonance because their lack of interest toward the original task was dissonant with the explanations they had to give to the upcoming participants. The participants who were given one dollar felt the strongest cognitive dissonance because they could not blame the money as a cause of their conflicting explanations. As a result, these participants changed their ideas about the original task to reduce their cognitive dissonance. Festinger and Carlsmith (1957) concluded that cognitive dissonance is a negative feeling that individuals have when attitudes conflict with their behavior.

Since Festinger and Carlsmith's findings, more research has been done to further understand cognitive dissonance. Sherman and Gorkin (1980) showed that when people accidentally act in a sexist way (and are not sexist people), they portray more anti-sexist attitudes towards people around them to prove to others they are not sexist people.

Gilovich, Medvec and Chen (1995) showed the different levels of cognitive dissonance individuals felt after making a regrettable decision. A game show was set up

that had three boxes, one of which had a grand prize inside. If the participants chose the wrong box first (which won them a moderate prize) they had a 50% chance of getting the right box in their next choice. Participants could choose to select another box or to stay with their moderate prize. Researchers found that participants who chose to select another box experienced more regret than the participants who chose to stay with their moderate prize. The researchers concluded that participants who felt more regret experienced a higher level of cognitive dissonance because they could have avoided the error altogether.

### *Unpleasantness of Cognitive Dissonance*

Research does suggest that cognitive dissonance is an uncomfortable feeling for the individual experiencing it. Elliott and Devine (1994) asked participants in their experiment to write an essay arguing for or against tuition increase. Those who completed the essay arguing for tuition increase felt a strong feeling of cognitive dissonance afterwards because it was contrary to how they really felt.

Harmon-Jones (2000) asked people to write a response contrary to what they felt about a boring paragraph they were given to read. The first group of participants was asked to describe the boring paragraph as interesting. The second group was asked to describe the paragraph any way they chose, but they were told the researcher would appreciate if they had described it as interesting. Both groups were then told to throw their responses away before there were any consequences. The majority of participants in the second group described the paragraph as interesting. These participants experienced



more cognitive dissonance as their initial thoughts of the paragraph was that it was boring, but they responded based on the researchers' expectations.

### *Changing Attitudes through Cognitive Dissonance*

As previously noted, there are many occasions in everyday life where an individual does or says something contrary to what they truly feel. Social psychologists describe these situations as forced conformity. These situations arouse cognitive dissonance and an individual will feel pressure to make a change in their words or actions to be more consistent.

Most individuals know certain statements are true, such as smoking causes lung cancer or excessive sun exposure is harmful, and yet attitudes about these statements are not always translated to actions. Researchers are attempting to prove that cognitive dissonance can be used in promoting beneficial changes, and a growing amount of research suggests that it can. This seems to be especially true when individuals are reminded of how in past they have failed to behave in a consistent way. When individuals' levels of dissonance are really high, only reducing their dissonance directly would be effective.

Stone, Wiegand, Cooper and Aronson (1997) studied the situations in which individuals reduce cognitive dissonance and the type of strategy they prefer to use, either direct or indirect. One hundred and twelve participants were divided into four groups and were paid five dollars for their participation. In the first two groups, participants were encouraged to make arguments advocating the use of condoms. This was done in a video-recorded session. They were then given one of two questionnaires. One asked them to list

reasons why in the past they did not engage in safe sex. This personal response intended to create a high level of cognitive dissonance. The other asked them to list reasons why in the past others did not engage in safe sex. This general response was intended to create a lower level of cognitive dissonance. Participants in these two groups were then given an indirect means only of reducing their cognitive dissonance (making a donation to help the homeless). Participants in the other two groups were encouraged to make the same arguments advocating the use of condoms and were given one of the same two questionnaires. However, after completing the questionnaire, they were given a choice to reduce their dissonance either directly or indirectly (by purchasing condoms at a discounted price or by donating to help the homeless).

Of the participants who were given only an indirect means of reducing their dissonance, 83% who answered personally on the questionnaires (high dissonance) chose this method to reduce their dissonance. Of those who responded on the general questionnaire (low dissonance), 52% responded to the indirect means only option. This indicated that a higher level of dissonance produced a higher rate of reducing the dissonance even though the means were indirect. Further information was provided by the remaining two groups. Again, there was a higher level of reducing dissonance in the high dissonance group than in the low dissonance group. Moreover, they differed in how they chose to reduce it. Of those in the high dissonance group, 78% chose the direct means of reducing their dissonance when given the option whereas 13% chose the indirect means. Only 26% in the low dissonance group chose to reduce their dissonance directly when given the choice as opposed to the 48% who chose the indirect means.

The researchers concluded from the results that the participants who advocated the video for safe sex and who were reminded of their past failure to follow their own advice were made to feel like hypocrites. They experienced a higher level of dissonance. Dissonance reduction was more necessary to them. The route they chose to dissonance reduction was dependent on what options were available to them. Participants who were experiencing high levels of dissonance would reduce their discomfort in some way, but if given an option of reducing their dissonance directly or indirectly, more participants would choose a direct means of reduction. Those with low levels were both less likely to reduce their cognitive dissonance and less likely to choose the direct option for reducing their dissonance.

### *Dissonance Reducing Conflict*

In society, behaviors are seen as a reflection in individuals' values and attitudes. There are many conflicting images and thoughts that children are bombarded with on a daily basis such as violence and sexuality. These images do not agree with many moral beliefs. Because of constant exposure, children change their attitudes and behaviors to match what they see around them. Funk and Elliott (1999) found this to be true. Their study focused on children and their perceptions of violence and found that youths exposed to violence behaved more violently. Millar and Millar (1996) found that direct experiences had more of an effect on individuals as opposed to indirect. These studies show that there is a strong correlation between behavior and attitudes or values.

### **Conclusion**

It is important to recognize that bullying is still a prevalent issue that needs to be dealt with, both in and out of school settings. Parents, teachers and researchers are struggling to understand how to eliminate bullying altogether. Research shows that children are mimicking behaviors they see in school settings and the media. Cognitive dissonance theories would suggest that individuals may know this type of behavior is wrong, but justify it because of the psychological discomfort they are feeling. Studies also show that when individuals have to publicly behave in one way, and are reminded of reasons why they failed to behave that way in past, there is a strong motivation to make a change. The research on cognitive dissonance suggests that if you can change some behaviors this way, you could also change bullying behaviors as well. This may prove to be a technique that could be applied in schools by teachers and other educators to make a better overall environment for the youth in the future.

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### Abstract

This study applied the theories of cognitive dissonance to bullying behavior. Cognitive dissonance is a state of discomfort caused by the discrepancy between an individual's attitude and behavior. When cognitive dissonance is experienced, there is a strong need to reduce the psychological discomfort either directly or indirectly. Undergraduate participants were instructed to produce a short anti-bullying presentation to be video recorded. Then they were asked to fill out a questionnaire which was expected to create either a low or high level of dissonance. Finally, they were given a choice of reducing dissonance either directly or indirectly. It was expected that, similar to Stone et al.'s study, high levels of cognitive dissonance would lead to greater attempts to reduce the dissonance and would lead to a preference for the use of direct methods over indirect methods. Results will be discussed.

Bullying is an aggressive behavior. It can take the form of words, actions or social exclusion that intentionally hurts or harms another person. Boys tend to be more physical when they bully, by pushing, shoving or injuring their victims, whereas girls use more social isolation and gossip, although they too can be physical. Bullying differs from teasing in that teasing is anticipated to be funny to both the teaser and the teased. Bullying can occur in groups or by an individual. Although commonly occurring during childhood to mid-adolescence, bullying can be experienced at any age in any place (Sassu, 2006).

Bullying behavior is something that has been taken more seriously in the past decade. Many bully victims experience psychological trauma; it is not uncommon for these individuals to experience post traumatic stress disorder, depression, increased aggression, stress and dissociation (Burrill, 2006). A few victims have retaliated by committing suicide or becoming involved in school shootings.

Some research shows that bullying is sometimes used as a strategy to establish authority and dominance among peer groups in school. Espelage and Holt (2001) examined four hundred and twenty-two students in a Midwestern middle school (grades six to eight). They found that nearly fifteen percent of these students engaged in bullying behavior regularly. Bullying occurred more frequently among boys than girls. There was also a strong relationship between popularity and bullying; 75% of the sixth grade boys who engaged in frequent bullying behavior also labeled other bullies as their friends.

In one study (Espelage, Bosworth & Simon, 2000), 85% of the 558 students surveyed in a Midwestern United States school reported that they had engaged in

bullying behavior in the previous thirty days. The students who reported their involvement in bullying behavior also stated they had been victimized too.

Many different forms of intervention strategies have been set up in schools throughout Canada and the United States to deal with the problems of bullying. Parents, teachers and educators continue to work together to find effective programs to reduce the prevalence of bullying behavior for both present and future use. Patrizio (2006) tested whether fifth and sixth grade students found a bullying prevention program to be effective in reducing bullying behavior. This program attempted to prevent bullying from occurring by encouraging students to engage in acceptable problem solving skills. About half of the students found that the program had been effective. Students felt it was most effective during recess and lunch time. In schools, bullying generally occurs when there is limited supervision, for example, in the cafeteria or going to or from school.

Bullies may be aware of the implications of their behavior. However, they may convince themselves that it is justified for a number of different reasons. Such self-deception often leads to an uncomfortable feeling known as cognitive dissonance. 'Cognitive dissonance is a psychologically uncomfortable feeling an individual experiences when there is a discrepancy between their attitude and behavior' (Galinsky, Stone & Cooper, pg 123, 2000). In many situations, there is a difference between how a person feels on the inside and how they react to a situation (Baron & Byrne, 2004). This could be applied to bullying in the sense that even though people may know bullying is wrong, they continue to bully in order to achieve a desired outcome, such as to gain attention, fit into a group or become popular. When cognitive dissonance is present, people may change the way they think or behave to make their attitudes and actions more

consistent. In general, individuals do not like to be inconsistent and they feel uncomfortable when cognitive dissonance occurs. There is usually a strong motivation to change an attitude or behavior when individuals do or think something that is contrary to the way they truly feel they should (Baron & Byrne, 2004).

Cognitive dissonance is said to be reduced by either direct or indirect measures. Direct measures include changing attitudes or behaviors so that they are in agreement with each other (Baron & Byrne, 2004). An example of this could be “I know bullying is wrong, but now I think bullying Johnny is alright because other people do it too”. Cognitive dissonance can also be directly reduced by learning something new that supports the way an individual thinks or behaves (Baron & Byrne, 2004). An example of this could be “I learned that Johnny belongs to a social group that I do not like, therefore it is okay to make fun of him”. A third way to reduce cognitive dissonance directly would be to trivialize the matter and decide it is not important (Baron & Byrne, 2004). An example could be “I only pushed Johnny around one time; therefore it is not a big deal”. These direct strategies for reducing cognitive dissonance focus primarily on reducing the inconsistencies between one’s attitude and behavior.

Cognitive dissonance can also be reduced by using indirect measures. This type of dissonance reduction usually involves focusing on one’s positive personal attributes without actually changing one’s behavior (Stone, 2001). An example of this could be “I know I bully people, and I know it is wrong, but I still do well in school and athletics”. Generally speaking, individuals who use the indirect measure of dissonance reduction are not experiencing enough cognitive dissonance to feel like hypocrites, therefore there is little motivation to change their behavior (Stone, 2001).

Stone, Wiegand, Cooper and Aronson (1997) studied the situations in which individuals reduce cognitive dissonance and the type of strategy they prefer to use, either direct or indirect. One hundred and twelve participants were divided into four groups and were paid five dollars for their participation. In the first two groups, participants were encouraged to make arguments advocating the use of condoms. This was done in a video-recorded session. They were then given one of two questionnaires. One asked them to list reasons why in the past they did not engage in safe sex. This condition (personal response) intended to create a high level of cognitive dissonance. The other asked them to list reasons why in the past others did not engage in safe sex. This condition (general response) was intended to create a lower level of cognitive dissonance. Participants in these two groups were then given an indirect means only of reducing their cognitive dissonance (making a donation to help the homeless). Participants in the other two groups were encouraged to make the same arguments advocating the use of condoms and were given one of the same two questionnaires. However, after completing the questionnaire, they were given a choice to reduce their dissonance either directly (by purchasing condoms at a discounted price) or indirectly (by donating to help the homeless).

Of the participants who were given only an indirect means of reducing their dissonance, 83% who answered personally on the questionnaires (high dissonance) chose this method to reduce their dissonance. Of those who responded on the general questionnaire (low dissonance), 52% responded to the indirect means option. However, the results differed greatly for the participants who were given a choice of direct or indirect means of dissonance reduction. Of those who responded personally on the questionnaires, 78% chose the direct means of reducing their dissonance when given the

option whereas 13% chose the indirect means. Only 26% who responded on the general questionnaire chose to reduce their dissonance directly when given the choice as opposed to the 48% who chose the indirect means.

The researchers concluded from the results that the participants who advocated the video for safe sex and who were reminded of their past failure to follow their own advice were made to feel like hypocrites. They experienced a high level of dissonance. Dissonance reduction was more necessary to them. The route they chose to dissonance reduction was dependent on what options were available to them. Most participants who were experiencing high levels of dissonance would reduce their discomfort in some way, but if given an option of reducing their dissonance directly or indirectly, more participants would choose a direct means of reduction. Those with low levels were less likely to both reduce their cognitive dissonance than the high level group and to choose the direct option for reducing their dissonance.

I predicted that using cognitive dissonance to promote a prosocial change in behavior would also be successful when applied to bullying behavior. The general procedures used in the Stone et al. (1997) study were applied to bullying behavior. Participants were required to present a short anti-bullying campaign in front a video camera and later complete one of two questionnaires. One questionnaire (personal) asked questions about what bullying behaviors *they* may have engaged in previously. This was intended to create high levels cognitive dissonance. The other questionnaire (general) asked questions of what bullying behavior they may have seen or heard of *others* engaging in previously. This was intended to create lower levels of cognitive dissonance. Subjects were then given either an indirect method only, or a choice of direct or indirect

means to deal with the dissonance. The design was a 2x3 factorial design; one independent variable was level of cognitive dissonance (high vs. low vs. none), which was manipulated by the response on the questionnaire (personal vs. general). The second independent variable was the method of response available to reduce dissonance (indirect only or choice).

Based on the Stone et al. (1997) study, participants who are given the personal questionnaire were expected to experience a higher level of dissonance as indicated by a higher level of dissonance reduction than the other participants and to have a preference for a direct means of reducing their dissonance. Those participants who are given the general questionnaire are expected to have a lower level of dissonance and not have a preference for the direct means of reducing their dissonance.

## **Method**

### *Participants*

Students enrolled at Algoma University College were asked whether they would be willing to volunteer to participate. They were 18 to 24 years of age, as bullying can occur at any age. Male and female participants were included as bullying is engaged in by both genders.

### *Materials and Apparatus*

Two different questionnaires asked participants about their own or others' involvement in bullying behavior in past. The content of the questionnaires were the same, with the exception of the instructions at the top of the page. Questionnaire A asked participants about the bullying behaviors *they* may have engaged in previously. Questionnaire B asked general questions of the participant about the bullying behaviors they may have

seen or heard of *others* engaging in previously. Each questionnaire included 25 types of usual bullying behaviors such as kicking, name calling or making fun of others. The respondents were instructed to put a check beside each statement that applied. There were also blank spaces provided at the bottom of the page for participants to list other possible bullying behaviors.

A Guttman scale measured the degree to which the individual would be willing to participate in a Mothers Against Drunk Driving organization. A corresponding scale measured the same interest in being involved in an anti-bullying campaign. The items included signing a petition, making a \$1.00 donation, making a \$3.00 donation, attending a seminar, going door-to-door and presenting about a campaign at an elementary school.

### **Procedure**

#### *Presentations*

Participants were given a list of the negative effects bullying can have on individuals of any age. Two thirds of the participants were paired with another participant in groups of two or three and given approximately 5-10 minutes to prepare a short presentation for an anti-bullying campaign. These participants were then asked to give a structured presentation approximately 1-2 minutes in duration in another room where they would be video recorded. Each person was required to discuss why bullying is a problem and the negative effects it can have on individuals of all ages. Participants were informed before the presentation that it would not count for grades but that certain recordings might be used in an elementary classroom to promote anti-bullying behavior. Participants were encouraged to combine efforts in the presentation where each person would be given an



opportunity to present. It was important to the experiment to ensure that each subject had a chance to participate in the presentation as it would raise discomfort levels during the subject's questionnaire completion.

#### *Dissonance Manipulation*

Because dissonance is stronger when there are few reasons for engaging in behavior contradictory to the attitude, it was assumed that the participants who responded personally would be unable to explain their actions to themselves and should therefore be willing to make some sort of change after the questionnaire was completed. Following the completion of their presentations, subjects were asked to fill out one of two questionnaires which were randomly distributed among the participants. The questionnaires were given out to increase participants' cognitive dissonance. Participant presentations were meant to escalate feelings and the questionnaires were intended to point out the behaviors that are contrary to their feelings, which should make the subjects feel pressure to change their attitudes so they are more consistent with what was said in their presentation. Participants who responded to the personal questionnaire were expected to feel a high level of cognitive dissonance as opposed to those who answered the general questionnaire.

#### *Dissonance Reduction through Guttman Scales*

After the questionnaires were completed, the participants were then given a means of reducing their cognitive dissonance. Half were given an indirect means only and the other half were given a choice of indirect or direct means to reduce their dissonance by completing a scale, which was stapled to the questionnaire. The indirect means only was a Guttman scale which presented a range of options from low to high involvement in a

Mothers Against Drunk Driving campaign. Participants who were given a choice of indirect or direct means to reducing their dissonance were given both this scale (indirect) and another scale (direct) which had seven options ranging low to high involvement in an anti-bullying campaign. The written instructions on the page with the choice between indirect and direct means instructed the participants to complete the scale which reflected the cause they would prefer to endorse. The questionnaires also debriefed participants by stating the video taped presentation would not be used beyond the experiment. A set of control participants were also used to distinguish whether individuals were responding to the Guttman scales as a result of cognitive dissonance, or by their own decision. These individuals were given only the bullying information and the Guttman scale (indirect or direct) to complete in the same setting as the other participants. Direct reaction to subject's dissonance was considered to be the score on the Guttman scale for the anti-bullying campaign. Indirect reaction to the subject's dissonance was the score on the Guttman scale for the Mothers Against Drunk Driving organization. The length in total for the experiment to take place was approximately fifteen to twenty minutes.

### **Results**

A 2X3 factorial design was used for this experiment. The outcome is as presented:

**Distribution of Participants**

	<b>High Dissonance (focus on yourself)</b>	<b>Low Dissonance (focus on others)</b>	<b>No Dissonance (Control Group)</b>
<b><u>Indirect Only</u></b> (MADD)	8	7	8
<b><u>Choice</u></b>  <b>Indirect</b> (MADD) <b>OR</b>	1	5	3
<b>Direct</b> (anti-bullying)	9	5	7

**Figure 1:** *Number of participants with medium to high participation levels on the Guttman Scales*

Results indicated that of the participants who were given the indirect only means of reducing their dissonance, most chose the option at a moderate to high level. Only a few chose the option at a low level or not at all and were therefore excluded from the results. Using a Chi-square test a score of 0 was found, showing no statistical significance among participants who were given the indirect only option. The indirect only group showed a ceiling effect which was possibly due to the lack of sensitivity of the Guttman scale. Many participants skipped over the option of going door-to-door, so quite possibly the scale was not a good representation of a gradual increase in participation.

A Chi-square test found a score of 4 in the high and low dissonance group given a choice of reduction options, which was statistically significant at the 0.05 level. The results showed a similar finding as compared the study by Stone et al. (1997). As expected, most people in the high dissonance group chose to reduce their dissonance directly at a moderate to high level. This differed greatly from the low dissonance group

where half the participants chose either option at a moderate to high level.

When the results from the control group were compared to the other groups given the choice option, there was a much different interpretation of the data. The control group showed a preference for the direct option, but not as strong as the high dissonance group. The results from a Chi-square test found a score of 4, which was not statistically significant. However, the results seemed to show there was already some cognitive dissonance towards bullying among the participants in the control group, even though they were not manipulated to experience any cognitive dissonance. These participants already showed a preference for the direct option. When participants were manipulated to feel a high level of cognitive dissonance by focusing on their own behavior, it raised their dissonance and increased their desire to use the direct option. However, when participants were manipulated to feel a low level of cognitive dissonance by focusing on other people's behavior, results suggest that it may have actually lowered their dissonance. Participants felt even less cognitive dissonance than the control group. The participants in the low dissonance group were less likely to make a direct change in their behavior.

### **Discussion**

Participants in this study were manipulated to feel different levels of cognitive dissonance and were then given different options to reduce their dissonance. Their options included an indirect only option (participation in Mothers Against Drunk Driving) or a choice between the same indirect option or a direct option (participation in an anti-bullying campaign). Similar results were found in this study as compared to Stone et al. (1997). Participants who had focused on their own behavior were more likely to

reduce their dissonance directly by participating in the anti-bullying campaign when given the option. These subjects' dissonance levels were much higher than the participants in the low dissonance group who focused on others' behavior. The low dissonance group was less likely to reduce their dissonance directly when given the option. Exactly half of these participants chose the direct option. Having a choice of dissonance reduction increased their attempts to reduce their dissonance directly in the high dissonance and control groups. The findings from the high and low dissonance groups who were given a choice of dissonance reduction agree with the findings of Stone et al. (1997). Individuals can make beneficial changes in their behavior when they present a desired behavior and are then reminded of how they did not act in such a way previously.

When individuals focus on their own behavior, they are more likely to make a direct change. However, when individuals focus on others' behavior instead of their own, it reduces the probability that they will make a direct change in their behavior because it may actually lower their dissonance altogether. In this study, individuals who presented the negative impacts on bullying and were then made aware of *their* engagement in bullying in past, were very likely to participate in the anti-bullying campaign. The findings from this study suggest that in order to have bullies make a prosocial change, they must reflect on themselves and their own inconsistencies between their attitudes and behavior. When a high level of cognitive dissonance occurs, bullies may be more likely to reduce their dissonance directly. This could mean that bullies may make a beneficial change in their behavior by potentially reducing their engagement in future bullying episodes.

### Acknowledgements

Wow, it feels so weird to be writing a page that I KNOW won't actually be edited!!! It is so exciting! I think I owe my first HUGE thank you to Dave Brodbeck, my favorite professor/advisor. Dave, I honestly don't know where I would be right now without you... You have stuck by me through the good and the bad this year, and I honestly couldn't thank you enough for everything that you have helped me through. I owe you so much because you believed I could get through this course even at times when I thought it was over for me. Thank you; you're a great teacher and friend.

I would also like to thank Cheryl Reed-Elder for reading my sloppy proposals time after time, and giving me the opportunity to hand in new and revised papers. You are a great teacher, and your patience and guidance is extremely appreciated.

Of course I have to also give kudos to my parents for listening to my endless complaints and frustrations over the phone. Thank you!!! If I didn't get the chance to vent, I would have probably exploded!!!! I guess that's what parents are for!!!

Last, but not least, I know I owe a big thanks to Eric Morris. You are the best boyfriend, and the most tolerant one, that I could ever imagine. You have listened to my daily complaints, and I know I have bored you on at least a hundred occasions with a topic that I'm sure you still don't understand... but I love you for listening. Thank you for being there for me, you helped me get through this year more than you know.

It has been a crazy year with a lot of ups and downs, but I GOT THROUGH IT and I am officially DONE! ☺

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