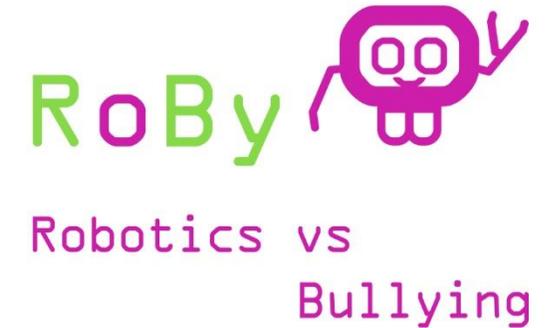




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Introduction to bullying and its psycho-social dynamics



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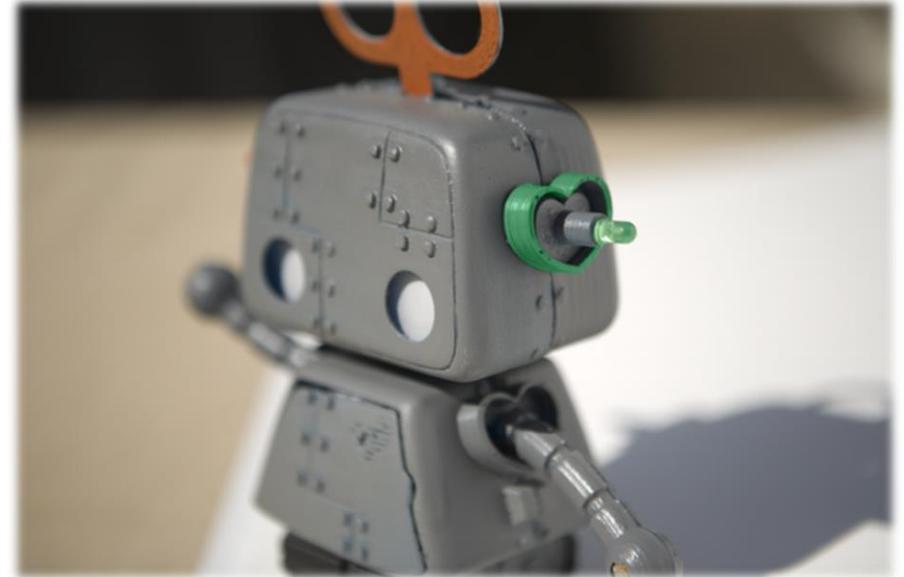
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1. Why facing bullying matters?



- James Dillon, principal of Lynnwood Elementary School in New York developed “The peaceful school bus program” in 2004, to prevent and reduce bullying which was implemented in other schools along the country.
- Dillon organised training courses where he asked participants **to choose the one group**, among **parents, students, school** and **community**, that they **believed most responsible for addressing** school violence and **bullying**.
- From a variety of answers received, all of them thought that **bullying prevention is always someone else’s responsibility**.



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“No one is to blame, yet everyone is responsible”

All we can work on preventing bullying and need
a culture change, which takes time



Why facing bullying matters?

Bullying has a significant negative **effect** on children's mental health, **quality of life** and academic achievement.

Children who are frequently bullied are nearly three times more likely to feel like an **outsider at school** and more than twice as likely to miss school as those who are not frequently bullied.

They have worse educational outcomes than their peers and are also more likely to leave formal education after finishing secondary school.



Data on the incidence of bullying worldwide

- **Affects one in three** students worldwide: A third of male and female students between the **ages of 8 and 24** (32%) have been psychologically **bullied by** their **peers** at school at least once in the last month and a similar proportion have been affected by physical violence.
- **Children** who are **perceived as different** in any way are **more likely to be bullied**.
- Physical appearance is the most common cause of bullying. The second most frequent reasons reported by students relate to race, nationality or colour.
- This report has been compiled from a wide range of qualitative and quantitative sources of information, including international surveys, a literature review, and case studies. In total, information from about 144 countries and regional territories is analyzed.

[1. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000366483](https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000366483)



2. A Socio-ecological Framework Approach

Research on known correlates and contributing factors in bullying/victimization within the individual, family, peer group, school and community has limited approaches. Therefore, researchers have argued for a social-ecological framework for understanding school bullying.

Bronfenbrenner (1979), in his Social Ecological Theory, conceptualizes **human development** as a bidirectional **interaction** between **individuals** and the multiple **systems** in which they operate: home, neighbourhood, school, community, and society.

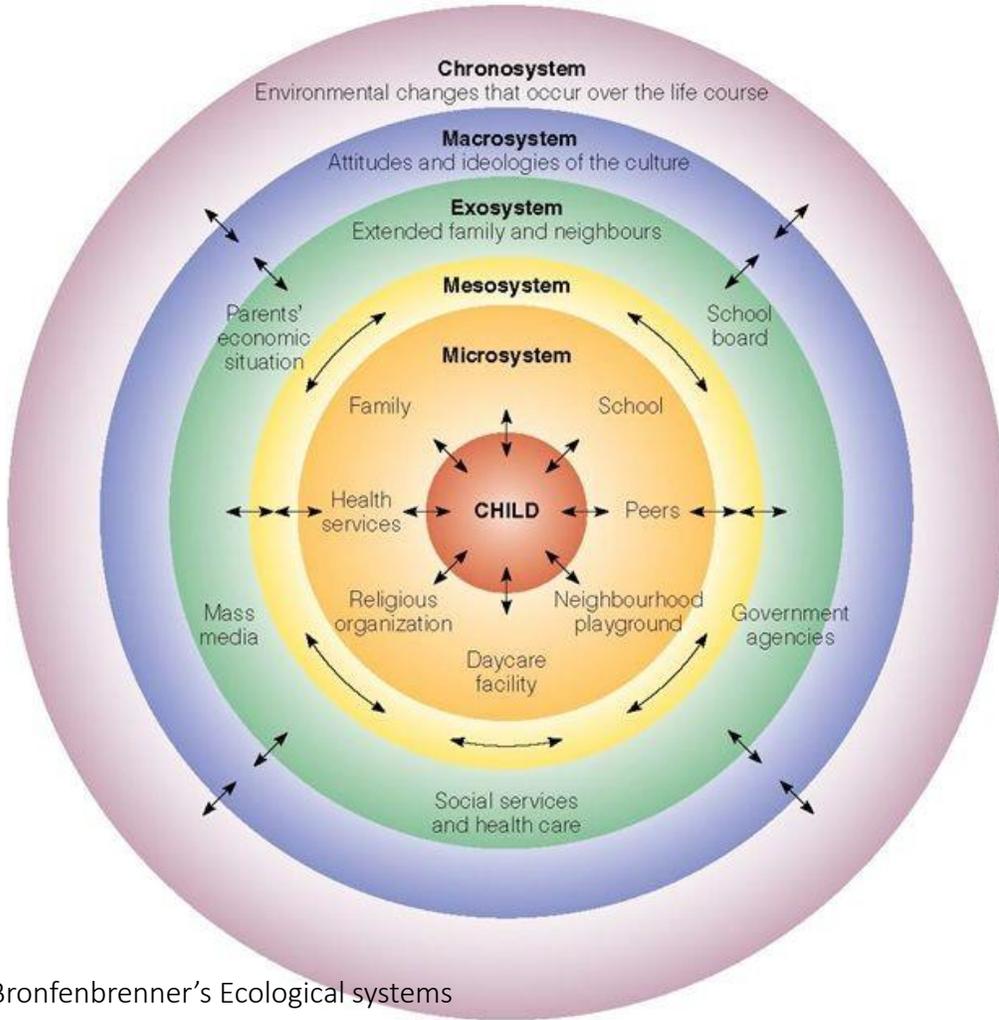
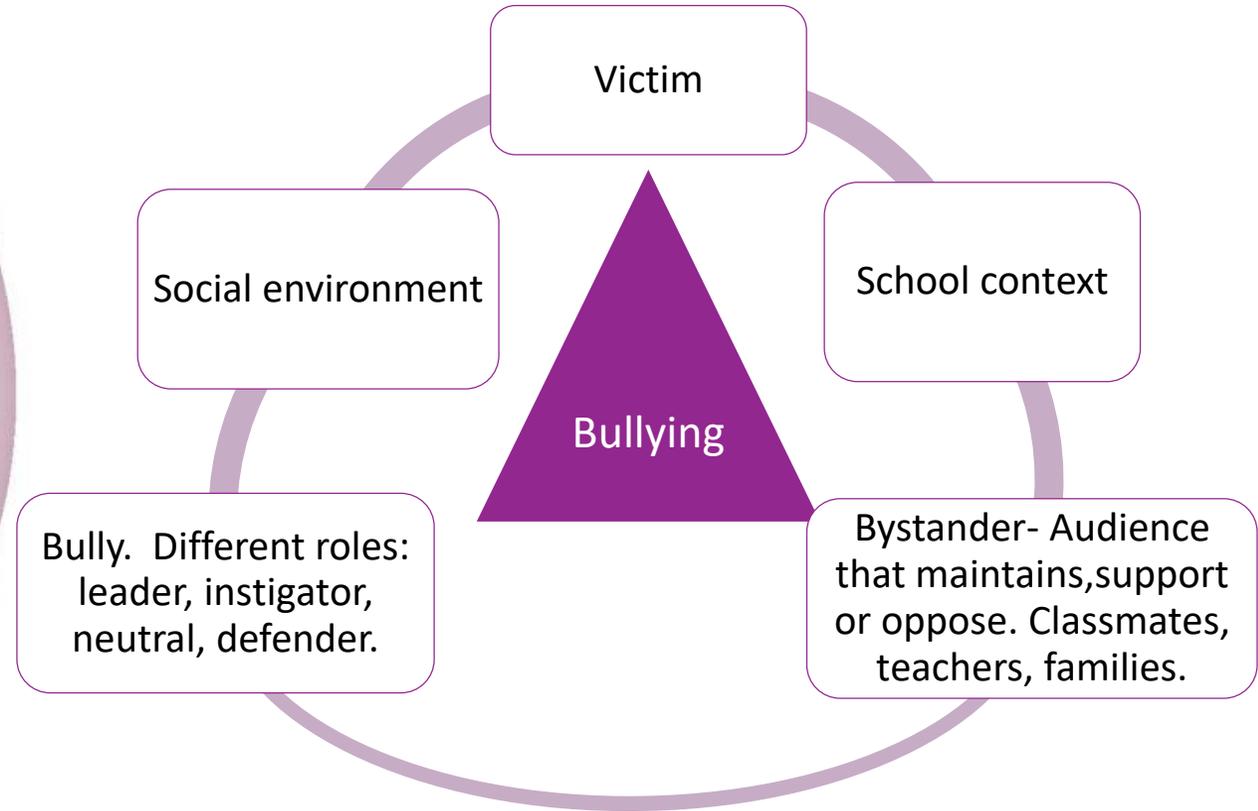


Image: Bronfenbrenner's Ecological systems

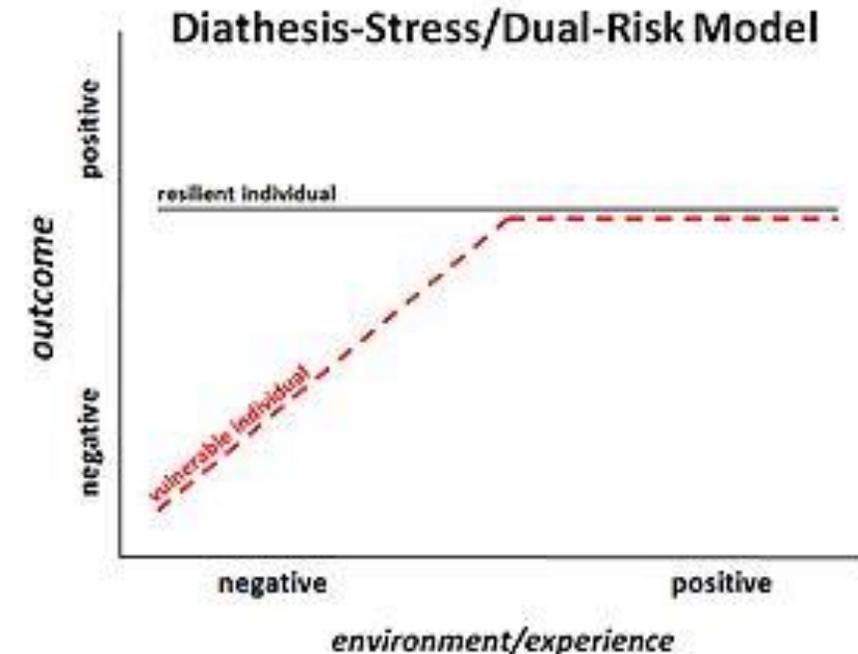




A Socio-ecological Framework Approach

Swearer (2015) recognizes the fluid, dynamic nature of involvement in bullying and the consequences as either victim, bully or both. He suggests a **social-ecological, diathesis–stress model** to understand its dynamic and impact.

A diathesis-stress model proposes that psychological disorders result from an interaction between inherent vulnerability and an environmental stressor.





A Socio-ecological Framework Approach

This model frames **bullying** as a **stressful life event** for both students who **bully** and those **victimized**.

It serves as a catalyst for a diathesis–stress connection between bullying, victimization and psychosocial difficulties.

To promote **healthier social relationships**, effective bullying prevention and intervention must account for **complexities** of human experience, addressing both individual characteristics and history of bullying, risk, **protective factors** and contexts in which it occurs.



3. Definition of bullying

The Council of Europe uses the following definition of bullying related exclusively to schools:

“Bullying is an unwanted, aggressive behaviour among school aged children that involves a real or perceived power imbalance. The behaviour is repeated, or has the potential to be repeated, over time.

Both kids who are bullied and who bully others may have serious, lasting problems. Bullying may include physical violence, sexual violence, threats, teasing, social exclusion or other psychological violence.”

<https://www.coe.int/en/web/children/bullying>

The film [“Beat Bullying”](#) demonstrates the harmful effects of bullying in a child-friendly manner and how education programmes can equip children with the necessary understanding and skills to stop bullying.



Definition of bullying

Bullying is a unique, complex form of interpersonal aggression, which takes many forms, serves different functions and is demonstrated in varying relationship patterns. It is not just a dyadic problem between a bully and victim, but a group phenomenon, occurring in a social context in which factors promote, maintain, or suppress such behaviour

(Jones et al. 2009) (Forsberg 2014)



Definition of bullying

Bullying is a mistreatment between equals, repeated over time, with the intention of causing harm and in which the victim is in a situation of inferiority with respect to the aggressor or aggressors.

That is, for it to be bullying it must be:

- ✓ Recurring over time (the behavior is **repeated**)
- ✓ **Intentional** (It has the aim of harming, hurting, intimidating, humiliating, excluding, isolating, discriminating against or oppressing)
- ✓ There must be an **imbalance in the relationship** (the victim has less physical or mental strength)



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Definition of bullying

You can watch some examples in the following link:

<https://youtu.be/9v7eQVzvyl8>



4. The roles

In bullying we find **three** types of subjects **involved**:

Children and youngsters can observe bullying (**bystanders**), experience it (**victims**) and perpetrate this across different situations and/or over time (**bullies**).

Rather than bullies and victims associating with separate peer groups and contact between them mainly involving bullying behaviour, research suggests that it is part of a **continuum of interpersonal relationships** that exist within the peer group, where individuals may assume different roles at different times (Wey & Jonson-Reid, 2011).



The roles

The **focus on the wider peer group** has shifted attention **away from** the bully-victim **dyad** and recognized behaviour as **complex**. Salmivalli et al (1996) positioned bullying as collective social action.

Research into participant roles that children adopt has shown 'moderate' stability in these over time, indicating consistency, but also movement between roles, as explained by Salmivalli et al (1996).

Among youth involved in bullying, Swearer (2015) found that frequent **victims and perpetrators** were the **least stable subgroups** and students assumed different roles in bullying across school years.



The roles

Across contexts, a **student may be victimized** by classmates **at school** but **bully siblings at home**.

Students are influenced by peers and may engage in bullying as a way of establishing **allegiance to the group**, or because of **pressure from fellows** who are more powerful (Rigby, 2004).

Engaging in bullying and playing a role in the peer group establishes identity through membership.

Experiments involving them being assigned as members of a set, where particular norms (out-group like or dislike, being kind or unkind to others) are manipulated. How **altering in-group norms affects bullying intentions and responses** is very well explained in Jones et al. (2009). Exploring these results shows the powerful influence of groups and encourages reflection on the role of peers in bullying incidents and responses



The bully



According to Arroyave (2012), they are dominant, impulsive and **easily react to conflict**, by interpreting **meaningless things**, as aggressive. Merino (2008) also observed that participating as an aggressor in situations of abuse allowed predicting a **low perception of academic competence** on the part of the student himself and obtaining low grades.

His/her behaviour may arise as a response to **low levels** of self-esteem and empathy **or too elevated levels** of anxiety, depression, or anger.

The **difficulty in adjusting** to school and academic failure are other elements that may contribute to their aggressive behaviour. Moreover, some of them might use **bullying as a way to gain social status** among peers.



The victim

The **victim** tends to be less physically strong, may belong to ethnic or social minorities, has low self-esteem.

However, Díaz-Aguado, Martínez Arias and Martín Babarro (2013) point out that the characteristics of the victims of bullying are changing, **leaving to focus on individual psychological deficiencies to explain them in relation to the context** in which they occur.

The bulk of research suggests that they are vulnerable or otherwise different in some dimension that is of importance to most peers.





The victim

Considering this aspect of the bullying dynamic, the **starting point of the behaviour** is the perceived diversity or lack of ability of others.

Being a victim is not just the result of individual characteristics, but is influenced by multiple relationships with peers, families, teachers, neighbors and interactions with societal influences (e.g., media, technology).

Secondary school students who experienced bullying by peers have talked about '**double victimization**' with their victim role constantly reconfirmed through treatment of peers (external victimization) and internalization of a victim image by the individual (internal victimization).

In an interview study, based on qualitative research, students explained how they assumed **a victim identity** and acted accordingly through changes in behaviour, including self-doubt, distrusting others and self-blaming. Some became resigned to their role and to expect it



The bystanders



The **bystanders** identify victims and aggressors, some of them even show a complacent attitude towards inequity while others are indifferent, tolerating these unfair situations.

The presence of bystanders gives a deeper meaning to the act.

If they participate in the harassment this leads to the exclusion of the victim, but **if they defend** them it is **likely** that the **aggressions will disappear.**



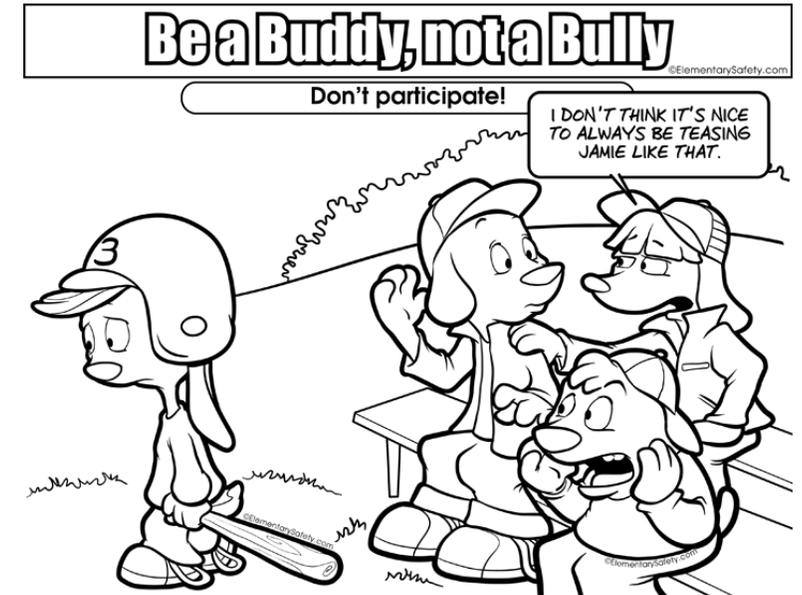
The bystanders

Studies of child behaviour during incidents show that **bullying** is situated and collective, **involving** the whole **group**.

It involves more individuals than the child being bullied and the bully, as **most incidents occur in social situations** with witnesses.

In their research, Salmivalli et al. (1996) identified 4 '**participant roles**' occupied by bullying **bystanders**.

- 'Assistants' join bullies and engage in bullying behaviour ('ganging up').
- 'Reinforcers' encourage the bully by watching, laughing and providing positive feedback.
- 'Outsiders' move away from situations and withdraw, whereas
- 'Defenders' intervene to support the victim.



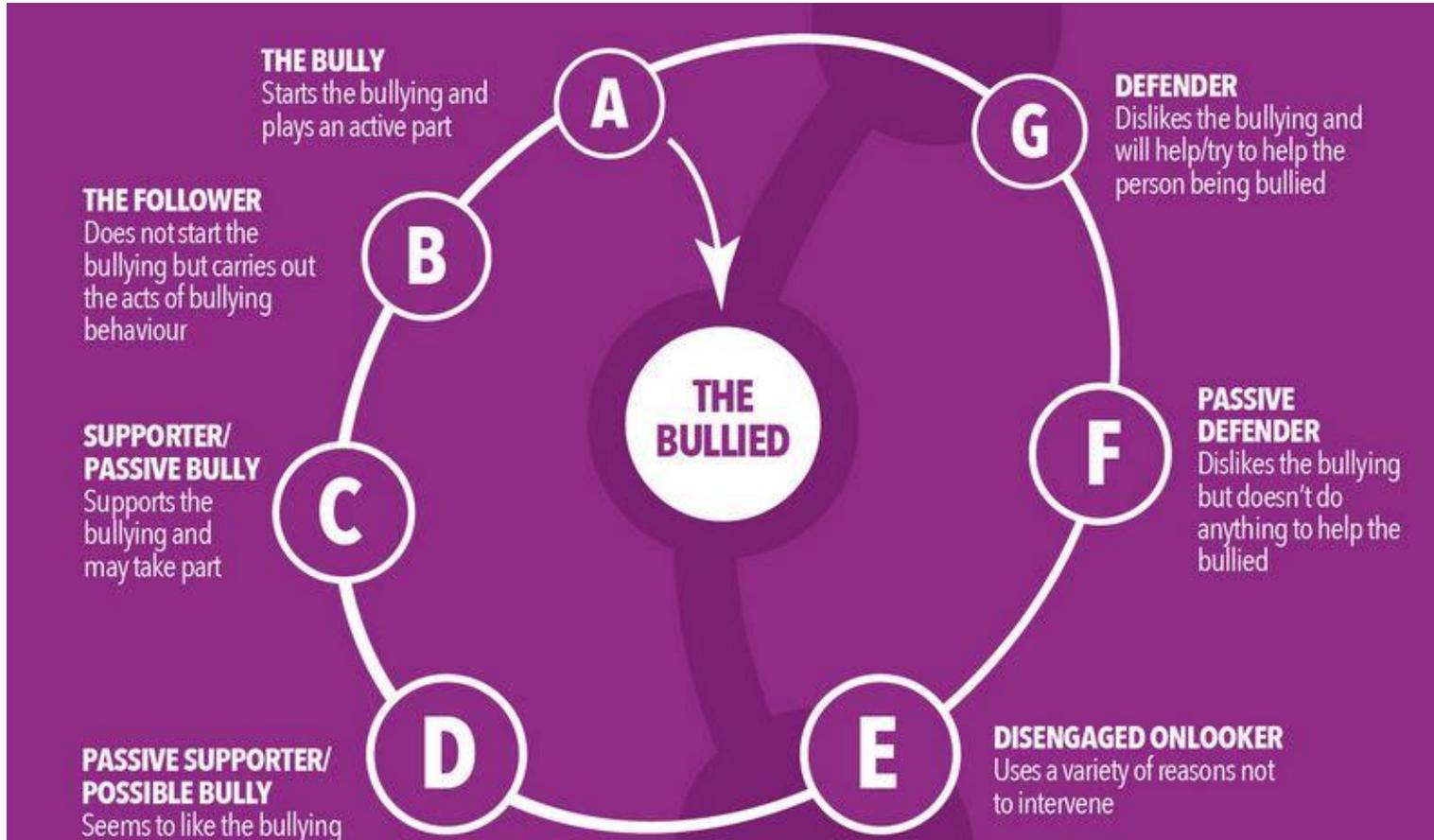


The bystanders

According to Hoffman (2020) **bystanders suffer a moral conflict regarding how to act.** In this way we can find different attitudes:

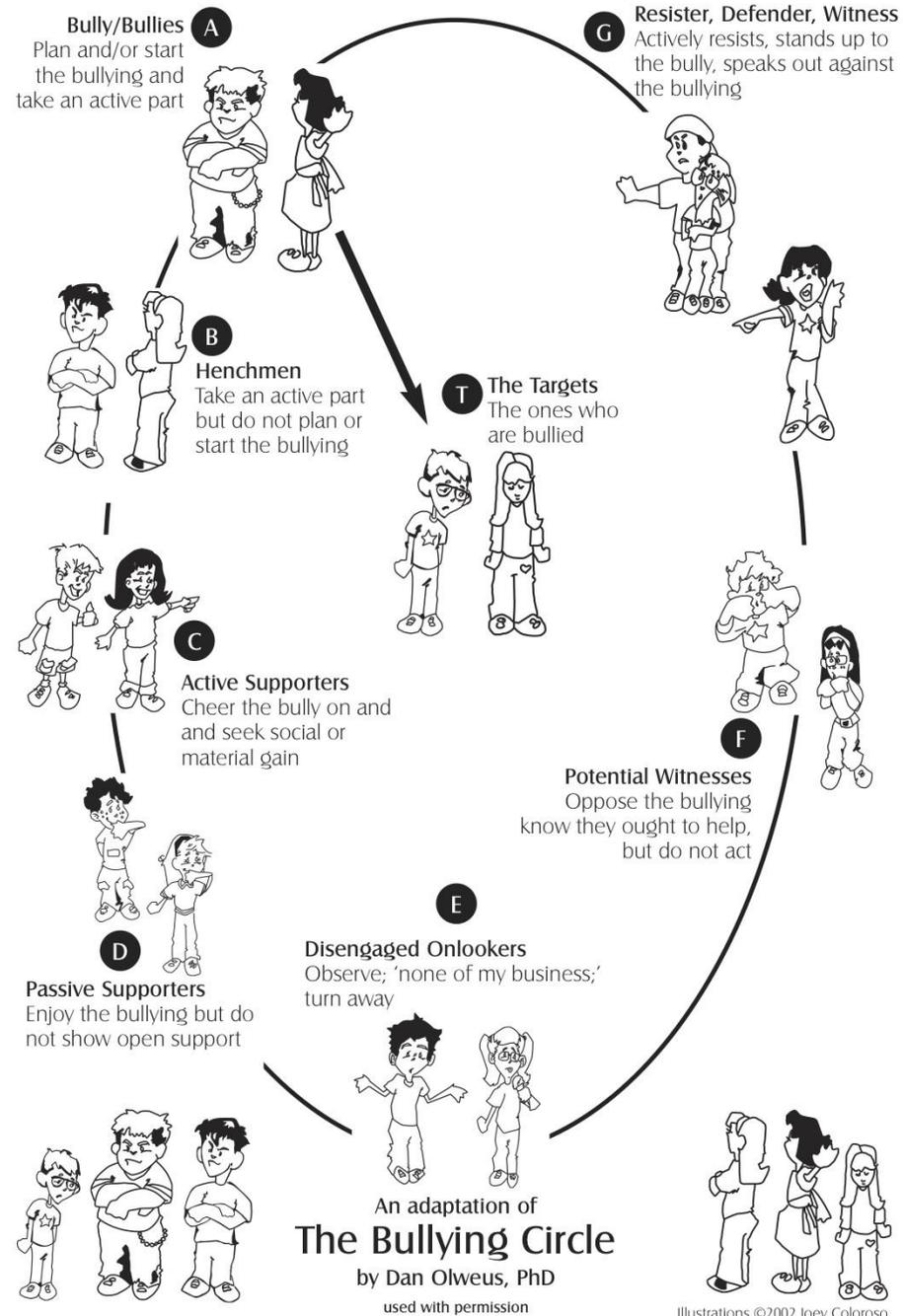
- Helpers: support the victim support with a prosocial behavior and cooperate with the victim.
- Instigators: they are consenting and can laugh or incite the bully
- Spectators: they only watch; they have an indifferent attitude, they are passive-avoidant and amoral observers.







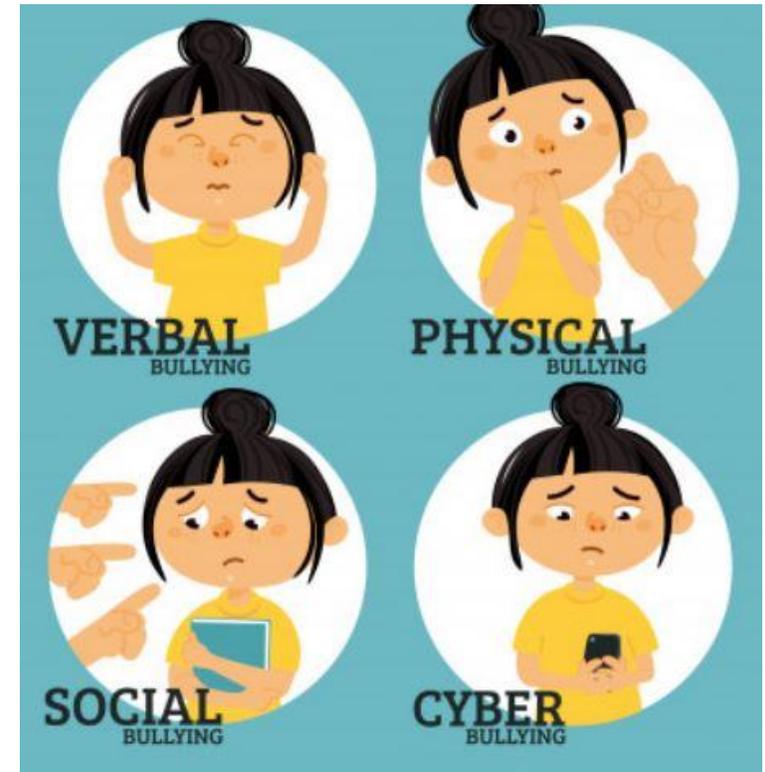
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5. Types of bullying according to UNESCO

- Physical:
 - Direct: Pushing, hitting, threatening, physical harassment...
 - Indirect: Stealing, breaking, hiding objects or belongings...
- Psychological:
 - Verbal abuse.
 - Social and psychological exclusion.
 - Emotional abuse
 - Intimidation
- Sexual: includes both the attempt and the accomplishment of sexual acts without consent, unwanted contact and sexual harassment.





Other types of bullying



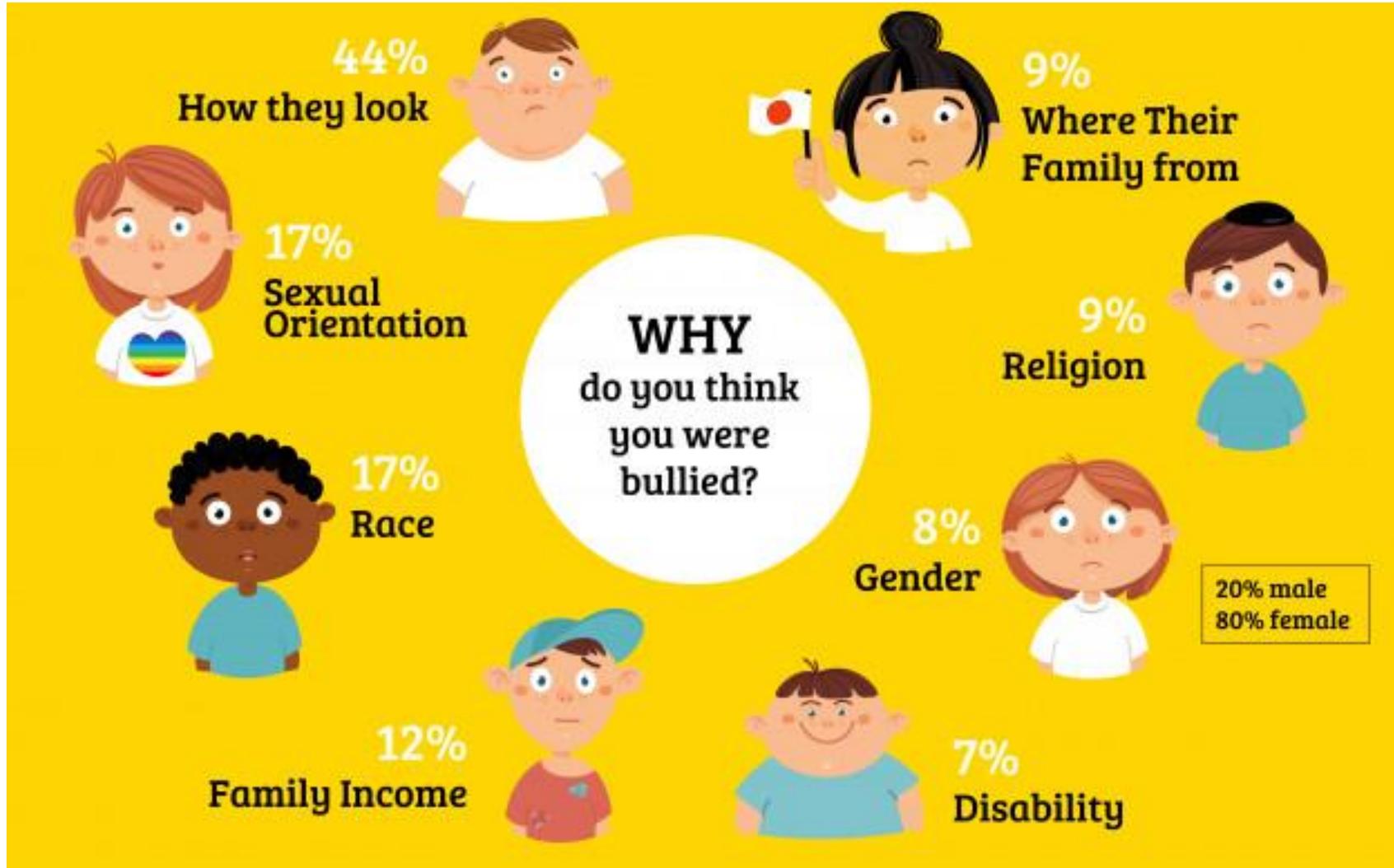
- Racist Bullying: When the abuse is due to ethnicity or origins..
- Homophobic Bullying: When it refers to sexual orientation.
- Cyberbullying: Harassing a person or group through computers, mobiles, tablets, consoles and any other type of telematic technology.



Bullying at school

- It starts in the early years, but peaks between 9-14 years old and decreases throughout adolescence.
- It is generated by a student generally supported in a group, or by a group against a defenseless victim
- It is hidden from the teachers

Link to watch the following video: <https://youtu.be/ovja5uA1JZg>





6. Risk factors that may induce to be a bully (Shetgiri, 2013)

- Younger age of the child.
- Male gender.
- Presence of depression, mental health problems, developmental / emotional or behavioral problems.
- Low academic results.
- Use of substances.
- Exposure to domestic violence or child abuse.
- High levels of aggressiveness in childhood.



Risk factors that increase victimization by bullying

(Shetgiri, 2013)

- Be physically weaker
- Low self-esteem
- Negative self-perception
- Little social skills
- Internalizing behaviors (depression, anxiety)
- Insecure mother-child attachment
- Overprotective mothers
- Intrusiva or coercitive parenting
- Having suffered infant abuse



Risk factors associated with parents and family (Shetgiri, 2013)

- Parental use of corporal punishment.
- Poor family-child communication.
- Mental health disorders.
- Anger of parents towards their children.
- Parents report that the child is too upset.
- Lack of parental monitoring.
- High conflictive family.



Risk factors at the school and community level (Shetgiri, 2013)

- Poor relationships with their peers.
- Negative influence of peers.
- Living in an unsafe neighborhood.



Characteristics frequently observed in adolescents who initiate and direct bullying (Díaz-Aguado M. 2006)

- Greater identification with the **social model** based on **dominance** and **submission**.
- **Difficulty** putting themselves in the shoes of others and **lack of empathy**
- A series of concepts closely related to bullying are strongly identified, such as snitch and coward, frustration and **insufficient alternative skills to violence**.
- **Difficulty** on meeting standards and poor relationships with teachers and other authority figures.
- **Low** capacity for **self-criticism** and **absence of guilt** for the bullying.
- Apparently, they use **bullying as a destructive way** to gain prominence and compensate for previous exclusions or failures
- Impulsiveness, low tolerance to frustration.



7. Effects and consequences of bullying

Bullying **has personal consequences** for all those involved, both when it occurs and **in the short and long term**. Therefore, the approach to this problem must be done from a whole, systemic and multidisciplinary point of view.

- The victims suffer **anxiety** and **anguish**, **deterioration** of **self-esteem** and self-concept and difficulties in their personal relationships.
- Bullies learn to **establish bonds** of dominance and submission that will **affect** their **socio-personal** and **moral development**.
- The bystanders present feelings of **fear** and **guilt** and there may be a **reinforcement** of selfish positions and **desensitization** to the **suffering of others**, preventing them from developing the necessary empathy to function in society.



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