

1999

Children's Reactions to Aggressive and Submissive Peers

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**Children's reactions to
aggressive and submissive peers.**

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26th November, 1999

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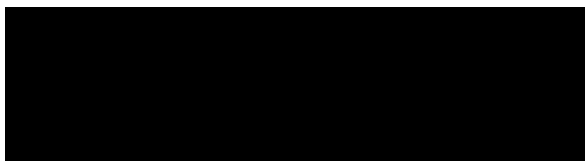
Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate children's attitudes towards aggressive and submissive peers. A 2 x 2 x 2 factorial design was used to test the hypotheses. The three between-subjects variables were (a) the label given to the target child (aggressive/submissive) in a vignette, (b) the nature of the behaviour displayed in a critical incident (aggressive/nonaggressive response) as described in a vignette, and (c) the sex of the participants. A sample of 169 Year 6 and 7 students was divided into four groups containing at least 20 girls and 20 boys. A survey was administered to measure the attitudes of the participants to the target child in the vignette. The attitude survey measured three dependent variables: (a) class context, (b) sport context, and (c) social context. The three dependent variables measured the extent to which students would like to interact with the target child in the three contexts. A significant main effect was found for label, with the participants indicating that they would prefer to interact with the target child labelled as being submissive than the target child labelled as being aggressive in the class context. A significant main effect was found for behaviour, with the participants indicating that they would prefer to interact with the target child who demonstrated nonaggressive behaviour during a critical incident than the target child who demonstrated aggressive behaviour during the critical incident in all three contexts. The results of the study suggest that early intervention by educators could prevent the negative outcomes resulting from children behaving aggressively in the school setting.

Declaration

I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief:

- (i) incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education;
- (ii) contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text;
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30/1/2000

Acknowledgements

The completion of this thesis has been achieved due to the continuing support of my supervisor, Dr Amanda Blackmore. The quality of guidance and direction provided by Dr Blackmore has been invaluable. The early assistance of Professor Peter Cole provided inspiration for this study, in addition to excellent instruction on how to plan and conduct a research study.

I would like to thank the Principals, staff and students of the participating schools for your accommodating approach to this study.

I have a great debt of gratitude to the members of my family for the encouragement that they have provided. To Andrew and Liam, at last I have finished! Andrew, thanks for helping me to reach my goals. To my mother and father, I thank you both for supporting me in every way possible.

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Introduction

Background

Aggression is a universal problem that has serious implications for all members of society. The violence that results from unrestrained aggression and anger causes much hardship and suffering. Violence shapes the lives and obsesses the thoughts of people who live within its realm. The use of aggression as a means of retaliation against a perceived threat is a common human behaviour. However, while aggression can be an appropriate means of self-protection, it is more often a destructive force that is directed outward, against others, or inward, against oneself.

There are many theories about whether aggression is an inherent disposition or a learned behaviour. While some investigators of human behaviour believe that aggression is an innate characteristic, others believe that it is a behaviour that is learned through observation and imitation. Most people learn to regulate their aggressive tendencies through experience and maturation, and through the discovery of more effective strategies for solving problems. However, cognitive, social and environmental factors determine whether a person makes the decision to resort to acts of aggression in a given situation.

Within Australian society the social constructs of masculinity support strength, toughness and independence. This is evident in the dimensions of the Australian lifestyle in which aggression is deemed acceptable. Success, whether on the sporting field, in the workplace, or in the school environment, requires competitiveness, and one must be aggressive in order to compete. Thus the roots of aggression and violence are embedded in the values held within society.

Within schools, aggression is an important issue. Children learn aggressive behaviour in the family context, through witnessing adults using aggression as a means of solving problems, and through the representation of violent stereotypes in the media. Aggressive behaviour that has been learned in the home is then generalised by the child to the school context, and directed toward other children and/or adults. The safety issues that are posed by aggressive behaviour in the school are of great concern. There is potential for serious physical harm to victims in addition to the acute psychological damage that can result from physical or verbal cruelty.

Recent research has uncovered the extent of bullying in schools. Bullying involves the recurrent maltreatment of victims in the form of physical violence, verbal harassment, or threatening gestures. The victims are left feeling fearful, depressed and socially isolated. Their mental and physical health is damaged as a result of maltreatment by their peers, as are their attitudes toward school. While school should be a safe haven for children from a violent world, it is often the cause of their greatest concern.

It is the responsibility of teachers and educational administrators to examine the issues surrounding bullying in schools. Bullies are likely to develop further behavioural problems such as social maladjustment and delinquency if they are not given opportunities to develop pro-social behaviours. As school is one of the main socialising agencies for children, students may form undesirable perceptions of normative behaviours in schools with a high incidence of aggressive behaviours. Schools face the arduous challenge of offsetting the destructive behaviour of students. In order to achieve this, specific information must be made available about the causes and consequences of bullying in schools.

Interpersonal relationships between students are affected by a number of factors, one of which is the reputation that students hold among their peers. Children who are known to be aggressive are at risk of social rejection among the more pro-social children in the peer group. Another determinant of peer preference is the behaviour demonstrated by children in the school setting. Children who behave aggressively toward their peers are likely to be avoided by the majority of other students, particularly those who have negative attitudes toward the use of violence, and positive attitudes toward supporting victims. The gender of children is also a factor in determining the attitude of peers toward aggressive students. Gender stereotypes of acceptable behaviour mean that girls and boys respond to aggression and submission in different ways. Finally, the context in which children interact affects their interpersonal relationships. Children who are interacting in an informal setting may interpret the behaviour of another child according to how appropriate they perceive the behaviour to be in that particular setting.

Purpose

The study will investigate the effects of (a) students' knowledge of a target child's past behavioural pattern, (b) the target child's behaviour in a critical situation, and (c) the sex of the students, on Year 6 and 7 students' attitudes towards a target child. The target child will be given one of two labels: aggressive or submissive. The behaviour demonstrated by the target child in a critical situation will be described in one of two ways: aggressive or nonaggressive. A survey will be used to establish the participants' preferences for interaction with the target child in (a) class contexts, (b) sport contexts, and (c) social contexts. Four vignettes will describe the target child's past behavioural pattern (or "label"). The vignettes will

also describe the target child's behaviour during an ambiguous incident involving his peers, in which he either retaliates in an aggressive manner, or responds with acceptance.

The study will also ascertain whether there are significant interactions between the independent variables. For example, children may respond differently to aggressive behaviour that is demonstrated by a child with an aggressive label than they would to aggressive behaviour that is demonstrated by a child with a submissive label. Girls may respond more positively than boys to a child labelled as submissive, and boys may respond more positively than girls to a child labelled as aggressive.

Significance

It is important that an understanding is gained of how bullying behaviour in the school context can impact on children's education and school life. This study will examine an issue of primary concern: how children's attitudes towards peers are affected by labels and behaviours related to bullying. The study will examine how a child who is known to be aggressive is viewed by his or her peers, in comparison to their view of a child who is known to be submissive. It will also examine how aggressive or nonaggressive behaviours displayed during an occurrence in the school setting influence the attitudes of peers towards a child. The examination of children's attitudes toward peers is important, as the development of positive relationships is crucial to a child's success and happiness in the school environment.

One negative outcome of bullying is peer rejection of both bullies and victims. The behavioural determinants of peer rejection are complex and often unpredictable. There appears to be very little research on the effects of labelling of

aggressive and submissive children. The present study will examine the effects of labelling on peer preference for interaction with aggressive or submissive children.

Recent research into the cause of childhood peer rejection has led to a distinction between children who are rejected due to excessive aggressiveness, and those who are rejected although they are not aggressive (Zakrinski & Coie, 1996). The proposed study will allow knowledge to be gained about specific issues relating to peer rejection. A comparison will be made between those children labelled aggressive and those labelled submissive (referred to as the target child). The influence of the nature of the behaviour displayed in a critical situation (aggressive/ nonaggressive) will be examined. Gender preferences for interaction in a group setting will also be examined in relation to the location of the group interaction (classroom based, games based or socially based). Thus information about the unique complexion of childhood peer relations will be assessed through this study.

Definitions of Terms

A number of terms that will be used in this thesis require definition. They are as follows:

Aggression: behaviour that intentionally results in personal physical or psychological injury, through verbal or physical domination and degradation by another person.

Bullying: the repeated physical or psychological domination of a smaller or weaker person by a more powerful person or group of people.

Submission: the act of yielding to the power of another person with acquiescence.

Labelling: describing a person using a word or a term to provide information about their general pattern of behaviour or characteristics.

Peer rejection: a negative response resulting in the exclusion of a child by a group that has members with similar characteristics or interests to the child.

Victim: a person who is made to suffer injury through the acts of another.

Bully: a person who uses threats, physical force, or cruelty to dominate a smaller or weaker person.

Overview of the Thesis

The first chapter of this thesis is a review of the literature relating to the problem of aggression and bullying in schools. The definitions of aggression and bullying are examined and broadened, and the theories behind these behaviours are discussed. The behaviours are then examined from a developmental perspective. The prevalence and location of bullying in schools, the influence of gender in these behaviours, and the characteristics of bullies and victims are then discussed. Student reactions to these behaviours are considered, focusing on the reactions of victims and the level of peer support for bullying within the school environment.

Finally the literature is linked to the present study, leading to the development of the hypotheses.

The second chapter describes the methodology used in the present study. It includes a description of the design, the selection of participants, and the instrument used for the study. The procedure for the administration of the survey is then discussed, followed by a discussion of the ethical considerations. The third chapter examines the results of the study. Tables summarising the MANOVA results are provided, in addition to graphs depicting the results for each of the dependent variables.

The final chapter consists of a discussion of the results. The first section considers the results in terms of each of the hypotheses, and how the results relate to the findings in the literature. The second section outlines the limitations of the study, and discusses possible implications for future research. The final section considers the implications for teachers and staff within the school environment.

Literature Review

Introduction

In recent decades, research has identified some of the causes and consequences of bullying in schools. This research has focused on the reasons why bullying occurs, on the characteristics of bullies and their victims, and on strategies for preventing the manifestation of aggression within the school environment. Rigby (1997) argued that studies on bullies and their victims have been limited through the exclusion of issues such as how children feel about bullying, and how they respond to this form of physical and emotional intimidation. The most desirable source of this information is children themselves, as they possess a unique insight into the intricacies of childhood peer relationships.

The findings on bullies, their victims, and peer reactions to these behaviours are discussed in this chapter. The literature has been divided into six themes, covering the development of aggression and bullying, factors related to these behaviours, incidence of bullying in schools, the influence of gender, characteristics of bullies and victims, and students' attitudes to bullying. Following a discussion on these six themes, the present study will be linked to the current literature. A conclusion offers a summary of the literature, followed by the research questions that have been derived from the literature.

Aggression and Bullying: Definitions and Development of Behaviours

Aggression

Aggression is an intended harmful behaviour directed against another being or object. Baron and Byrne (1987) defined aggression as being behaviour motivated by the goal of hurting or injuring another being who is compelled to avoid such treatment. An aggressive act is aimed at causing physical or psychological pain to the victim (Aronson, Wilson & Akert, 1998). Research has adopted injurious intent as being an essential aspect of aggression. Bandura (1973), however, asserted that most aggressive acts function to secure more than mere injury to the victim. Aggressors succeed in creating a diversity of results such as obtaining material resources, changing rules to meet their own needs, gaining control over others, eliminating adverse conditions and removing barriers to their personal goals and desires.

Aggression covers a wide range of human behaviours. Feelings of aggression may be manifested in verbal abuse, physical attack or threatening gesticulation (Walker, Colvin & Ramsey, 1995). All three of these hostile forms are potentially injurious to the victim.

Aggression has been distinguished in many different ways, dependent upon whether the researcher attempts to describe the concept in terms of the characteristics of the aggressive act or the motivations, instigations and goals behind this potentially damaging behaviour. For the purposes of this discussion, aggression is defined as a behaviour that intentionally results in personal physical or psychological injury, through verbal or physical domination and degradation by another person. The definition focuses on both the characteristics and the goal of

the act, referring to behaviours that inflict harm on another by intention, rather than accident. The hostile motivation behind aggression is implied in the definition adopted in this study.

Bullying

Bullying can be described as a sub-set of aggressive behaviour (Boulton & Underwood, 1992). Slee (1995) illustrated the relationship between bullying and aggression, characterising bullying as being an "identifiable form of aggression among children where the aim is to hurt, intimidate, dominate and exert power over another" (p. 71).

Rigby (1996) described bullying as being the recurrent physical or psychological oppression of a weaker person by a stronger person or group of people. Besag (1989) identified three predominant indicators which distinguished bullying from other aggressive behaviours: a power imbalance between bully and victim, recurrence, and its multi-faceted nature. The unequal power between bully and victim refers to both physical and psychological strength. Victims are weaker, often helpless in defending themselves (Olweus, 1993), with little capacity for stating their position in a confident manner (Rigby, 1996). Situations where conflict arises between two people of equal or similar power are not deemed to be bullying. Nor are isolated incidents of aggression between people considered to be bullying. Bullying is a repetitive behaviour that is directed at the victim over a period of time. It is multi-faceted in nature, meaning that a diversity of behaviours may be used by the bully to hurt another person. Bullies often possess a range of skills that are manipulated to serve this purpose, such as physical fighting skills, verbal taunting and ridiculing, and dominating others through the exploitation of their own

high status. Bullies are able to call upon their peers to provide the support and encouragement that perpetuates the behaviour (Rigby, 1996).

For the purposes of this study, bullying and peer victimization will be used synonymously. The two terms will not encapsulate all behaviours inflicted by bullies on their victims, but will be used to describe a specific type of peer maltreatment: those overt forms of physical aggression that are likely to cause pain and injury. Thus bullying will describe a specific set of aggressive behaviours used to inflict harm on a peer.

Understanding aggression and bullying

There are many contrasting theories about whether aggression is an inherent disposition or a learned behaviour. Most social psychologists regard aggression as being a learned behaviour which is influenced by many environmental, social and cognitive factors (Baron & Byrne, 1987). In his comprehensive study on the nature of human aggression, Storr (1968) noted the generally accepted view among psycho-analysts that humans are potentially aggressive from birth. However Storr argued that it is the ways in which these universal characteristics are dealt with that differ from one person to the next according to circumstance and disposition.

Several biological determinants of aggression have been identified. According to Hunt (1993, in Walker, Colvin & Ramsey, 1995), five neurobiological types of aggression exist for humans. As an aggressive person rarely exhibits the attributes of only one pattern, the following patterns are described by Hunt as overlapping:

1. Aggression that results from over-arousal. This type of aggression is a result of heightened arousal or activity levels, and is not intended to inflict pain. Victims become randomly involved.

2. Impulsive aggression that occurs without any forewarning. Neurologically based, it is associated with extended passivity and irritability. Brief in duration, these behaviours are exacerbated by intense mood swings in the aggressor.
3. Affective aggression that results from intense feelings of rage or passion. Often seen in abused children, these violent outbursts are destructive to both aggressor and victim.
4. Predatory aggression that results from a thought disorder related to paranoia. Neutral social interactions are misinterpreted by the aggressor, resulting in well planned, revenge-based violent behaviour.
5. Instrumental aggression which involves using aggressive behaviours to maximise personal gain. Dominance and control through intimidation are the goals of this behaviour. Instrumental aggression is associated with a character disorder. Children and adolescents who display this behaviour often have unstable family backgrounds.

A relationship between high testosterone levels and aggressive behaviour has also been identified. This may partly explain the tendency for males to be more physically aggressive than females (McKnight & Sutton, 1994), with environmental and social influences such as stereotyping of gender roles also shaping behaviours. Bee (1997) asserted that higher incidence of physical aggression in men has been evident in all human societies and in all primates. This pattern is evident in Australian society, where men are ten times more likely than women to be charged with a violent offence (McKnight & Sutton, 1994). By adulthood, almost all violent crimes are committed by men, in addition to aggressive acts such as child abuse and domestic violence (Sanson, Prior, Smart & Oberklaid, 1993).

While several biological factors contributing to aggression have been identified, social learning theory suggests that aggressive behaviour is learned through observation and imitation. Supporters of this theory believe that humans are not born with a repertoire of aggressive responses. Children frequently adopt aggressive behaviours after observing adults and peers, and witnessing aggression being rewarded when used as a means of solving conflicts (Aronson, Wilson & Akert, 1998).

Social learning theory attributes aggression to a combination of complex factors, most of which have some kind of social instigation. Frustration is one common cause of aggression. When a person feels that he or she is being prevented from achieving a goal, the probability of an aggressive response is increased. Aggressive responses are also likely when a person is directly provoked by another, although this does not always ensure aggressive reciprocation. A major determinant of reciprocation is the perceived intentionality of the provocation (McKnight & Sutton, 1994).

One factor that has been conclusively linked to learned aggressive behaviour is the representation of violent stereotypes in the media. Television plays a significant role in children's socialization (Aronson, Wilson & Akert, 1998). Children become desensitized to aggression through exposure to violent television programs. Short-term studies have revealed that children demonstrate more aggressive behaviour immediately after viewing violent programs than they demonstrate after viewing non-violent programs (McKnight & Sutton, 1994). Bee (1997) described a long-term study conducted by Leonard Eron (1987) which revealed that the level of violence in television programs viewed by a child at the age of 8 is the most reliable predictor of the aggressiveness of that individual at 19.

Sanson and Di Muccio (1993) conducted an Australian study into the behavioural effects of watching violent cartoons and playing with thematically associated toys such as action figures. Sixty pre-school children in playgroups of five were observed after viewing either an aggressive or a neutral cartoon while playing with aggressive or neutral toys. The aggressive cartoon was an episode of "Voltron", depicting violent robotic characters at war with another galaxy. The aggressive toys were sets of "Voltron" action figures. The neutral cartoon was an episode of "Gummy Bears", featuring acts of friendship and harmless adventure, the neutral toys being "Gummy Bear" soft figures. Both sets of toys were chosen to allow for sharing and cooperative behaviour. The results supported the hypothesis that watching the aggressive cartoon, followed by playing with the related aggressive toys, would lead to greater incidence of aggressive acts and less prosocial behaviour than the neutral cartoon and toys would produce. An analysis of the data revealed a gender imbalance; boys ranked significantly higher on aggression than girls, and girls ranked higher on prosocial behaviour than boys. The ratio of aggressive to prosocial behaviour was 1:8 for girls, and 1:2 for boys. There was also a high level of variability in behaviours for individuals, with one likely determinant identified by the researchers being the nature of interactions with parents and caregivers. Some parents are more likely to develop critical viewing habits in their children through discussing content and themes. These analytical skills offset the modelling effect of violent stimuli that is experienced by some children.

Development and stability of aggression and bullying in children

Developmental models suggest three phases that delineate the early development of aggressive behaviour (Debaryshe & Fryxell, 1998). Behaviour problems usually surface first in family contexts. Family members, especially parents, play a crucial role in emotional socialization, providing models and direct instruction for recognising and regulating negative emotions. Parents act as emotional trainers, demonstrating solutions to problems that vary in quality and effectiveness. In ambiguous situations, infants look to parental reaction as a guide for their own behaviour. When parents express unregulated negative emotions, lower quality solutions are exposed to the child. Poor quality solutions are characteristic of children who show verbal and or physical aggression at home and school. The second phase begins when aggressive behaviour that has been learned in the home is generalised by the child to the school context. It is through interacting with other aggressive children in the school that children reach the third phase of the developmental trajectory. When aggressive children affiliate with deviant peers a gateway is provided into delinquent activities.

Differences in basic personality characteristics mean that some children are more likely than others to behave in an aggressive or impulsive manner (Rigby, 1996; Olweus, 1993). A fiery temperament is more conducive to the development of aggressive behaviours than a passive temperament. Family background and socio-cultural environment are the other major influences for young children. Children raised by parents who are consistent and responsive, especially during stressful events, are more likely to develop skills of emotional self-regulation. By contrast, excessive parental commands and punitive, inconsistent methods of discipline foster behavioural problems in children (Debaryshe & Fryxell, 1998). It

seems that violence in parents breeds violence in children (Olweus, 1993). A negative relationship with the primary caregiver, characterised by a lack of warmth and intimacy, contributes to a tendency toward the use of aggression as a means of solving problems.

Social information processing models provide insight into the cognitive processes behind children's decisions to react in aggressive or negative ways in response to feelings of anger or hostility. Crick and Dodge (1994, in DeBaryshe & Fryxell, 1998) developed a model consisting of the following steps: "(a) encoding social cues from the environment, (b) interpreting social information, (c) clarifying goals, (d) constructing possible responses, (e) making a decision, and (f) enacting that social behaviour" (p. 211). Skillful processing at each step results in competent social behaviour, whereas biased processing in instrumental conflict situations result in negative responses such as aggression. When devising possible responses to perceived provocation, boys place more value on the use of overt aggression than girls (Crick & Werner, 1998).

Boulton and Underwood (1992) conducted a two-part study into bullying problems among middle school children. In the first part of the study they gathered data about the extent of bully-victim problems in English middle school children, aged between 8 and 12 years. The researchers gained comprehensive information about the frequency and stability of bullying, age and sex differences, and children's responses to bullying. In the second part of the study the participants were asked to nominate who the bullies and victims were in their classroom. Each child who was named a bully by more than 40% of classmates, and as a victim by less than 25%, was classified a bully. The levels applied in reverse for the victim classification. The bullies and victims were interviewed individually, during which

they were asked a series of questions about their views on the reasons behind bullying and the results of this behaviour. When asked about why bullies target their victims the most common response from the bullies was that victims provoke bullies. The responses indicated that bullies see their behaviours as justified due to the perceived provocation of peers. This contrasts with research findings indicating that most victims are not provocative and have a negative attitude toward violence (Olweus, 1996). When asked how they thought the bullies felt after harassing their victims, the most common response was that the bully would feel good, happy, brilliant or clever, however it was mostly victims who gave this response. Bullies were more likely to say that they would feel big, strong, tough or hard. These findings support the social informational processing research (Crick & Werner, 1998), indicating that bullies are less able to interpret behaviours in an unbiased way. Bullies do not see themselves as perpetrators of unprovoked attacks, rather they view their responses to provocation as being justified, even though they are able to identify the negative consequences for their victims.

Early detection of aggressive tendencies is crucial in avoiding the long-term development of these behaviours. Bullying is a specific form of aggression, and its stability is dependent upon the characteristics of the child and the group to which he or she belongs. In this respect, bullying is different from aggression. Whereas bullying may depend on social and environmental factors, aggression (like intelligence) is constant over a period of years (Walker, Colvin & Ramsey, 1995; Hetherington & Parke, 1986). As bullies have a more positive attitude toward the use of aggression than other children, Olweus (1993) believed that bullying is a stable component of a more anti-social behaviour pattern that is predictive of future adjustment problems.

Childhood aggression is the best-known indicator of future social adjustment difficulties in young adults, resulting in the early exit of teenagers from school and a stronger inclination toward delinquency. This has been illustrated in recent longitudinal research (Walker, Colvin & Ramsey, 1995) which found that the arrest status of high-risk secondary school students could be predicted to 80% accuracy using a combination of measures of school adjustment in Grade 5. The measures used were (a) a 5-minute teacher assessment of the student's social skills, (b) two 20-minute observations of the student enacting negative-aggressive behaviour toward peers in the playground, and (c) the number of disciplinary visits to the principal's office recorded in the child's school record. These findings were supported in a similar long-term study (Olweus, 1996), indicating that as young adults, boys who were formerly characterised as bullies had a four-fold increase in the number of offences recorded on their criminal records.

Coie, Lochman, Terry and Hyman (1992) conducted a longitudinal study of African American students from middle school into adolescence in order to test whether early adolescent disorder can be predicted from childhood aggression and peer rejection. Peer, teacher and parent reports were collected over a three-year period and combined with individual interviews in order to assess the relationship between peer rejection, aggressiveness, and adjustment during early adolescence. Three sources of data on adjustment difficulties were employed, consisting of teacher ratings of adjustment at school, parent ratings of internalising and externalizing disorders, and interviews with each subject regarding drug and alcohol use, psychological problems, and conduct disorder. The findings indicated that high levels of aggression and peer rejection were strong indicators of problems with social adjustment in early adolescence. This was further illustrated in a study

by Crick (1996), who found that the behavioural patterns of children are indicative of their future risk status. High levels of aggressive behaviour and low levels of pro-social behaviour were identified as antecedents of future social maladjustment.

The Prevalence and Location of Bullying

Figures on the prevalence of bullying vary according to the method of data collection employed, the definitions of bullying used, and cultural differences (Tulloch, 1995). Olweus (1996) stated that large-scale surveying of Norwegian and Swedish students using the Bully/Victim questionnaire revealed that 15% of students between the ages of 7 and 16 were involved in problems associated with bullying. In an English study, Stephenson and Smith (1989, in Boulton & Underwood, 1992) found that 23% of children were involved as victims or bullies. Shelley (1985) found that almost 90% of primary and middle school children in the United States had been bullied "at some point in school" (in Walker, Colvin & Ramsey, 1995, p.189).

Australian studies have uncovered equally disturbing statistics on bullying in schools. Rigby and Slee (1991) cited behaviours such as hitting and kicking, verbal harassment, hostile gesturing, excluding peers, stealing others' possessions, and malicious gossiping, in their study to assess the nature and extent of bullying in Australian schools. The findings indicate that approximately half of the student population are occasionally involved in aspects of bullying at school, either as victims or bullies.

The literature suggests that approximately 50% of students experience bullying at some time during their school years, with other students likely to experience these conditions on a more regular basis. Rigby and Slee (1992) estimated that one child in six is involved in an episode of bullying each week, either as a bully or

victim. Studies undertaken in Western Australia (Zubrick, Silburn, Gurrin, Teoh, Shepherd, Carlton & Lawrence, 1997) revealed that 14% of students between the ages of 12 and 16 had been bullied in the previous 6 months.

There are broad differences in individual children's perceptions of the duration of bullying. Rigby and Slee (1991) asked children to recall the last time they were bullied, and how long it lasted. Variations between a day and half a year were apparent, with 30% of victims at one school in Adelaide reporting the duration of bullying being "more than half a year".

Bullying occurs in a number of environments, including the school playground, the classroom, and on the way to and from school. At school, most of the bullying occurs outside the classroom, where there is less supervision and surveillance than inside the classroom. However Rigby (1996) reported that in recent studies conducted in Adelaide a large number of students reported that they had "often" noticed bullying taking place within the classroom.

It is during recess and lunch time that most bullying occurs. Rigby (1996) found that over 90% of students report witnessing incidents of bullying during breaks between classes "often" or "sometimes". Bullying in the school yard tends to be more vicious and unrelenting than in the classroom, where it is often of a more subtle, unobtrusive nature.

The present study focuses on aggressive behaviour within the school environment. The study seeks to examine whether children involved in aggressive behaviour within the school as either bullies or victims are desirable to their peers in terms of social interaction during class, sport and social activities.

Bullying and Gender

Australian research (Tulloch 1995) into bullying in secondary schools indicated that according to information from bullies, more males (15%) than females (5%) bully their peers. Tulloch sought information about the specific type of bullying experienced by boys and girls. While boy victims reported being targeted with physical violence, threats and exclusion by male bullies, female victims indicated that they were subjected to being teased, having rumours spread about them, and being excluded by their peer group.

Figures on bullying in Western Australian schools (Zubrick, Silburn, Gurrin, Teoh, Shepherd, Carlton & Lawrence, 1997) also indicated that bullying behaviours were more prevalent among boys (8%) than girls (3%), although the researchers noted that bullying behaviours in boys are more visible and readily identified by teachers and peers.

A distinction is made by Crick and Grotpeter (1995) between the aggressive activity of males and females. Past research into childhood peer aggression has consistently revealed that boys have a tendency to harm others through verbal threats or physical aggression. These tendencies toward instrumental aggression are consistent with the types of goals that research has proven to be valued by boys in a peer-group situation; namely physical dominance and control. Thus bullying by boys is more likely to take the form of physical assault. In contrast, girls have a tendency to focus on issues surrounding their relationships and social interactions. Bee (1997) asserted that girls are more likely to express their anger and contempt through social aggression, with the goal being to undermine the victim's self-concept or damage his or her social status. Aggression among females is more likely to be relational in nature, taking the form of mental bullying such as ridicule,

exclusion, hostility and teasing (Crick, 1996). Besag (1989) differentiated between the motivations of male and female bullies. While males are driven by their desire for dominance, females bully to fulfill a need for reassurance.

In the present study, the focus will be on overt aggression, including physical acts such as hitting, kicking, pushing, verbal acts such as threatening, and violent gesturing that are of a threatening nature. As males are far more likely than females to demonstrate overt aggression toward peers, the present study examines the reactions of peers to overt aggression in boys.

Characteristics of Bullies

While the motivations and manifestations of bullying may vary, research has identified some characteristics that are found more often than not in bullies. Bullies are often physically stronger and bigger in stature than their peers (Rigby, 1996), they have a positive attitude to violence with little or no empathy for their victims (Olweus, 1996); and they are impulsive children who have a strong urge to dominate others. Rigby (1996) distinguished between different types of bullies: anxious bullies, calm bullies, and bullies who are often victims themselves. While some bullies work in groups when targeting a victim, others work alone.

The most distinctive characteristic of bullies is the aggression that they direct toward peers, and sometimes toward adults (Olweus, 1993). Bullies have an aggressive reaction pattern, responding in a diversity of contexts with aggressive behaviour, which is attributed to family characteristics and the temperament of the child (Olweus, 1996). As discussed previously, negative emotional tendencies in the primary caregiver may result in aggression and hostility in the child. If the parent is permissive of aggressive behaviours in the child, these behaviours are likely to increase and to be transferred to other settings. Parents who are coercive,

inconsistent and violent in their discipline style can expect increased aggression in their children. Finally, a fiery temperament means that a child is more likely than one with a quiet temperament to develop an aggressive reaction pattern, although this factor is not as powerful as family factors (Olweus, 1996). Thus, the nature of the home environment plays a key role in the development of aggressive behaviours. Aggressive children have a different perception of acceptable standards of behaviour in peer relations, perhaps because their parents have not taught them respect for rules and standards regarding behaviour toward others (Walker, Colvin & Ramsey, 1995).

The tendency to bully has been linked with feelings of depression in children. In his 1995 study into the relationship between peer victimization and depression in Australian primary school children, Slee sought to examine the psychological well-being of bullies. The study yielded a significant correlation between bullying and depression in males and females. The findings supported a previous study by Rigby and Slee (1992) in which bullies indicated feelings of unhappiness associated with school.

The W.A. Child Health Survey (Zubrick, Silburn, Gurrin, Teoh, Shepherd, Carlton & Lawrence, 1997) gathered information about bullying in schools from a number of sources. Information on students in primary and secondary schools was gathered through parent and teacher reports. In addition, students between the ages of 12 and 16 years completed adolescent self reports. The principals of all schools in the sample provided ratings of their schools in regard to the extent of bullying problems in their schools. The results indicated that 5% of all students had demonstrated bullying behaviours in the 6 months prior to reporting. Most of the bullies (78%) came from home environments where the parents' disciplinary styles

were non-encouraging, compared with 48% of non-bullying students. Bullying students most commonly identified with an inconsistent parenting style (53%), while non-bullying students identified with an encouraging parenting style. Rigby & Slee (1995) believe that for some bullies, negative events within the home environment may lower a child's sense of self-worth, making it necessary for the child to dominate weaker children in order to compensate for their own perceived inadequacies

The W.A. Child Health Survey (Zubrick, Silburn, Gurrin, Teoh, Shepherd, Carlton & Lawrence, 1997, p. 51) sought to compare the mental health of bullying and non-bullying students. The results are shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Percentages of Bullying and Non-bullying Students with Specific Behavioural Problems

Syndrome	Students who bullied	Students who did Not bully
Aggressive behaviour	44.9	2.4
Attention problems	35.6	6.1
Anxiety/depression	25.3	3.4
Withdrawn	15.2	2.3

The results of the survey indicated that students who were bullies displayed more aggressive behaviour than non-bullying students. They were also more likely to experience attention problems within the classroom than non-bullying students. Bullying students were also more likely to exhibit symptoms of poor psychological health such as anxiety and depression than students who did not bully.

Olweus (1996) refuted the belief, commonly held by psychologists and psychiatrists, that bullies have low self-esteem. Rigby and Slee (1992) found that bullies had average self-esteem, although their self-reports indicated that they were not as happy as most students and disliked school more than pro-social students. Zakrinskie and Coie (1996) suggested the reason why the self esteem of bullies is not low is because aggressive children are unable to recognise their negative peer status. Australian research on secondary students conducted by Rigby & Slee (1992) supported previous findings that bullies were not affected by negative perceptions of themselves and did not have low self-esteem. However, the results indicated that bullies were less likely than pro-social students to enjoy school, and that they associated a feeling of unhappiness with the school environment. This may be due to the negative attention that bullies receive from authority figures within the school environment as a result of their anti-social behaviour.

Characteristics of Victims

All children are potential targets of bullying, even those who are involved in bullying other children. Students are targeted for random reasons such as being atypical in appearance or ability. Those who dress differently, have unusual physical features or are introverted or timid are vulnerable targets of bullying. Other characteristics which make students stand out from the rest, such as an unusual name, or a heavy accent, may also result in them being targeted.

As a group, victims share a number of physical and behavioural characteristics which may be alluring to bullies. Victims are often smaller in size and stature and weaker than non-bullied children (Olweus, 1993); they are timid, unable to act assertively around their peers (Rigby, 1996); and are usually submissive (Besag,

1989). Victimized children may be anxious, lonely and isolated (Olweus, 1993); they withdraw from the peer group, often spending their time during lunch and recess alone or with younger children; and may not have any friends at school (Olweus, 1993). These passive qualities, in addition to a lack of support from peers, make victims seem defenseless against aggressive children.

Victims have a negative perception of themselves, and are aware of their low peer status. They may experience feelings of helplessness due to their situation, viewing themselves as being unattractive and stupid (Olweus, 1993). This poor self-image reinforces and perpetuates the maltreatment of victims, as their own perceived inability to defend themselves makes them more vulnerable to attack (Hodges & Perry, 1996). Victims of peer abuse may create a self-perpetuating cycle, in which harassment from their peers leads to the development of emotional problems. Emotional difficulties may invite further maltreatment from bullies. As the intensity and magnitude of the bullying behaviour increases, the victim experiences heightened levels of distress.

Hodges and Perry (1996) identified several family influences on the tendency toward victimization. Children who have an insecure bond to the caregiver, characterised by anxiety and resistance against separation, feel an acute need for the caregiver during novel situations. These children are often oversensitive and emotional, suffering from low self-esteem. Their attributes are transferred from the home to the school setting, signalling vulnerability to bullies.

Children with overprotective mothers who impede their exploration and independence, within and beyond the family, have a stronger tendency toward experiencing victimization (Hodges & Perry, 1996). This effect is mostly seen in boys. The overprotection is both a cause and a consequence of the peer harassment

(Olweus, 1993). Boys who are victimized by peers may have fathers who are physically and emotionally distant, and who are critical of their sons. Such fathers may provide an undesirable role model with whom the child does not identify (Hodges & Perry, 1996).

Variations in the characteristic behaviours of victims are evident in their responses to harassment by their peers. Victims demonstrate a variety of responses when targeted by bullies, although most victims have a negative attitude toward violence (Olweus, 1996). A study conducted by Salmivalli, Karhunen and Lagerspetz (1996) studied the reactions of victims to peer harassment. The aim of the research was to identify victim behaviours that either encouraged or diminished bullying. Of a group of 573 students, 67 were identified as victims of bullying through peer- and self-evaluations. Peer evaluations were then used to establish three categories of victim behavioural responses: counter-aggressiveness, nonchalance and helplessness. Counter-aggressive victims were those who responded to bullying by provoking the victim, and eliciting help from others, while employing aggression to force the bully to back down. Nonchalant victims acted as though the bullying did not affect them, and stayed calm. Helpless victims were submissive, becoming paralyzed with fear, unable to control emotional responses such as crying or running away. The different types of victims were also contrasted in regard to whether their peers perceived their typical responses as being provocative or constructive. Provocative responses would increase the incidence of harassment, while constructive responses had a discouraging effect. The research revealed that nonchalance was connected to peer-perceived constructiveness, while counteraggression and helplessness were linked to peer-perceived provocativeness. Victims' self-evaluations of the outcomes of their

responses supported this view. The researchers concluded that nonchalance is an effective strategy for dissuading bullying behaviours. Both counteraggression and helplessness are far less effective but frequently employed responses.

Helpless or submissive victims demonstrate passive responses to bullying behaviours, thus they are often unable to defend themselves against maltreatment. The submissive victim's inability to respond constructively to victimization perpetuates the negative attentions that he or she receives from peers. This cycle of maltreatment often results in further withdrawal from the social group, as the victim's self-esteem and psychological well-being are damaged (Rigby & Slee, 1992). The present study focuses on helpless or submissive victims of peer harassment.

Students' Reactions to Bullying

The victims

In several recent studies, students were asked to state how they felt after being bullied at school. Victims of bullying reported negative feelings about themselves and their situation (Boulton & Underwood, 1992; Rigby, 1997). Low self-esteem could be both cause and consequence of victimization. Victims perceive bullying as causing low self-esteem; more than 80% of participants in the Boulton and Underwood study stated that they felt better about themselves before they were bullied. These findings are consistent with a recent study into the effects of bullying for Western Australian school children, with 49% of victims scoring in the lowest third on self-esteem scales, compared to 31% of those students who were non-victims (Zubrick, Silburn, Gurrin, Teoh, Shepherd, Carlton & Lawrence, 1997).

Peer victimization is related to the overall mental health of victims. Victims are far more likely than bullies to have a serious mental health problem, the ratio being 13:1 (Zubrick, Silburn, Gurrin, Teoh, Shepherd, Carlton & Lawrence, 1997). Self-reported effects of bullying gathered by Rigby (1997) in South Australia included the following descriptions: headaches, sickness and vomiting, faintness and dizziness, and feeling worthless, depressed and suicidal. Rigby reported incidents of suicide resulting from peer victimization in Japan, England and Norway. Recent studies in Australia (Rigby, Slee, Martin & Cunningham, 1997, in Rigby, 1997) involving 1500 adolescents found that negative peer relationships at school contributed significantly to suicidal thoughts. A growing body of research into the antecedents of suicidal behaviour has linked a lack of social support to depression, which may provoke suicidal ideation (Harter & Marold, 1994). Lack of social support is manifested in social isolation and conflict between peers, the conditions which victimized children are forced to endure in the school environment.

Slee (1995) conducted a study into the relationship between peer victimization and depression in Australian primary school students. A sample of 353 students (165 girls, 188 boys) from a state school in Adelaide completed a series of questionnaires dealing with peer relationships and psychological health. The mean age of the participants was 10.3 years. All students answered the Peer Relations Questionnaire (Rigby & Slee, 1992), consisting of 20 statements covering three areas of study: tendency to bully other children, tendency to be victimized by other children, and tendency to be prosocial. All students completed a Depression Self Rating Scale (Birleson, 1981), an 18 item scale measuring depression in 7- to 13-year-old children. The participants also answered a series of questions relating to the frequency and duration of their personal bullying experiences at school. The

research revealed a strong relationship between the tendency to be victimized, and the tendency toward depression. More depressive symptomatology was evident in those students who reported being victimized on most days.

Rigby (1999) conducted a long-term study to establish whether poor health is characteristic of children who are repeatedly victimized by peers in secondary school. A sample of 402 students completed questions that included measures of peer victimization, psychological and physical health. The respondents were assessed at two points in time: in the first 2 years of schooling, and in the last 2 years of schooling. In the younger sample, a positive correlation was found between peer victimization and relatively poor physical and psychological health. It seems that as students grow older, they become less vulnerable to the effects of bullying due to a maturation effect over time. However, results for students who were stable victims during the study period indicated that being bullied in the first 2 years of schooling correlated positively with low health status in the last 2 years of schooling.

Maladjustment at school has been identified as a negative outcome for the victims of bullying. Victimized children experience feelings of loneliness and isolation at school (Slee & Rigby, 1994) and often have few friends (Rigby, 1997). This lack of social support means that victims are at an increased risk of being physically or mentally damaged. In addition to missing out on the protection that peers offer, friendless victims are not able to enjoy the benefits of developing and maintaining supportive relationships with their peers. This lack of social training may result in long-term problems in regard to relationship difficulties (Hodges & Perry, 1996). Other effects on school adjustment have been identified, including the propensity for victims to want to avoid school. High levels of absenteeism have

been noted in victims' school records (Kochendorfer & Ladd, 1996). It is estimated that 160,000 American school children miss school each day for fear of being bullied (Lee, 1993, in Walker, Colvin & Ramsey, 1995). An Australian study showed that 1 in 5 boys, and 1 in 4 girls had not attended school at least once in their lives due to the fear of being bullied (Rigby, 1997). This was replicated in Western Australian studies, showing that the median number of absent days per year for victims was 13.1 days, compared with 10.4 days for non-victims (Zubrick, Silburn, Gurrin, Teoh, Shepherd, Carlton & Lawrence, 1997). The outcomes of absenteeism and negative effects on school adjustment may explain the low academic performance of many victims. In Western Australia, studies have shown that 44% of victims were likely to perform at a low rate of academic competence, as opposed to 15% of non-victims (Zubrick, et al, 1997).

Attitudes of students to bullying

Bullying thrives in an atmosphere where it is tolerated and not openly discouraged (Besag, 1989). Most Australian students, however, have a negative attitude toward bullying (Rigby, 1996; Tulloch, 1995), and are supportive towards victims (Slee, 1995), although there is evidence of children rejecting other children who let themselves be pushed around. There is also an element of approval regarding calling children names, as well as acceptance of other forms of verbal harassment. Slee concluded that although most children believed that bullying was unacceptable, a small proportion believed that bullying of weaker children was justified.

Tulloch (1995) conducted a study in Australian secondary schools to examine differences in males' and females' attitudes toward school violence. The sample

consisted of 837 Year 8 students (419 males and 418 females). The study looked at the influence of stereotyping of appropriate gender behaviours on boys' rejection of weakness, and on victims' reluctance to seek help from peers or adults. The students completed questionnaires relating to their bullying experiences and peer relationship questionnaires that measured attitudes to victims and bullies, and perceptions of their peer status and social competence. Discrepancies in the reported incidence of bullying were evident in the results: while few boys admitted to bullying girls, a high proportion of female victims reported being victimized by boys. The number of boys admitting to being bullied by girls was low compared to the female bullies' self reports of how often they bullied boys. These discrepancies led to the conclusion that certain behaviours may be interpreted differently by boys and girls. Whereas boys may view some behaviours as being harmless and fun, girls may interpret these behaviours as being a form of harassment. Tulloch suggested that gender differences in perceptions of appropriate cross-gender interactions result in under-reporting of bullying incidents. Boys may be reluctant to admit to directing physical aggression toward females as physical violence against males is more accepted within society than violence against females. Boys are not likely to admit to being bullied by girls for similar reasons. Attitudes toward bullying by the opposite sex are directly related to social constructs of masculinity and femininity.

Tulloch (1995) found that students' attitudes toward bullying were a function of their status in terms of bullying. Those students identified as bullies were more likely to have a positive attitude toward school violence and to rejecting weaker children. Victims had a negative attitude toward aggression, as did students who were not involved in bullying. While bullies indicated positive attitudes toward

self-reliance, victims endorsed interdependence. A distinction was evident between genders in terms of their willingness to reject victims; females were found to be much more supportive of both male and female victims than were their male counterparts.

Although the majority of children seem to be supportive of victims, their attitudes toward the victims of bullying change over time. Slee (1993) found that support for victims diminished in children of both genders from Years 4 to 10. Slee attributed this to the fact that schools may unwittingly act so as to perpetuate the stereotypical male values that are evident in broader society, such as aggressive competitiveness. This inhibits the development of empathy in boys and reinforces stereotypical masculine values such as dominance and control. In contrast to Slee's findings, Salmivalli, Lappalainen & Lagerspetz (1998) found in a Finnish study that female support for victims is highly stable, as opposed to the instability of male support for victims.

Research has shown that some aggressive children are accepted by their peers, while others are rejected (Bierman, Smoot & Aumiller, 1993), illustrating the complexity of the behavioural determinants of peer rejection. Students who display atypical behaviours, such as aggression or social withdrawal, are more likely to be rejected by their peers than students who demonstrate normative behaviours. When a child's behaviour is not typically characteristic of the peer group setting, the child is more likely to be rejected by peers than a child who behaves in a manner that peers perceive as being appropriate for that setting. Thus the level of acceptance given to a child by his or her peer group appears to be influenced by the social context in which the behaviour takes place, as well as by the child's behaviour.

A recent study into the relation between behaviour problems and peer preference sought to determine the extent to which peers' interpretations of behaviours were influenced by the social context in which the behaviour took place (Stormshak, Bierman, Bruschi, Dodge & Coie, 1999). A sample of 2895 children in 134 classrooms across the U.S.A. participated in the study. The children were all in the first year of primary school. The measures consisted of teacher ratings of aggression, inattention, withdrawal and social competence. The participants took part in sociometric interviews in which they provided behavioural nominations of their peers. The information gathered through teacher and peer ratings was combined for all items, excluding measures of withdrawal (teacher ratings were used in isolation for this item, as the age of the participants meant that they were unable to rate peers' withdrawn behaviours). To determine the regularity of behaviours within social contexts, median scores of behaviour were calculated for each classroom, with the result being the score for that item. Individual behaviour problems and peer preference scores were assessed in terms of the level of the problem behaviour in the particular classroom. The findings supported the theory that peer preference for children who demonstrated behavioural problems were related to peer group norms in different contexts. In classrooms where the level of aggression was high, the negative effects of aggression on peer preference for interaction were lower than they were for classrooms with low levels of aggression. This effect was more pronounced for boys; male aggression was positively correlated with peer preference in classrooms high on the aggression rating. Low levels of aggression in females did not affect their peers' preferences for interaction. This is most likely due to the fact that at a societal level, aggression in girls is not a normative behaviour.

Cairns, Cairns, Neckerman, Gest & Gapiery (1988) found that although aggressive students fail to achieve broad-based acceptance by their peers, this does not equate to complete social rejection. Through an examination of the social networks of aggressive children, the authors found that highly aggressive subjects were as likely as nonaggressive children to have a stable circle of friends. However, the members of the aggressive children's circles of friends had similar propensities for engaging in aggressive behaviours. One explanation for this is that aggressive students who have been rejected by their nonaggressive peers are forced into coalitions of deviant peers because their range of social options have been restricted. The authors also observed that aggressive students tended to group together due to the attraction of being with people like themselves.

Peer rejection of children involved in bullying exacerbates the problems faced by children who already experience difficulties in their social relationships at school. A recent study by Zakrinski and Coie (1996) compared aggressive-rejected and nonaggressive-rejected children's perceptions of their rejection by peers. The authors found that the two distinct groups experienced their rejection in different ways. Nonaggressive rejected children, defined as high either on submissiveness or social isolation and shyness were more likely to describe feelings of loneliness, and to have lower self-esteem than the aggressive-rejected children. The hypothesis that aggressive-rejected children were not aware of their social status was supported, with the study revealing that the aggressive-rejected children were more unrealistic in the assessment of their social status than were the nonaggressive-rejected children. Thus nonaggressive-rejected children may be more likely than nonaggressive children to refer themselves for help with their peer relationships. The social insensitivity demonstrated by the aggressive-rejected children in the

study indicated why aggressive-rejected children are not likely to be motivated to change their negative behaviours.

The seriousness of peer rejection is demonstrated in a growing body of research revealing that peer rejection in the primary school years is a consistent predictor of emotional disturbances or behaviour problems in later childhood, adolescence, and adult life (Cairns, Cairns, Neckerman, Gest & Garipey, 1988; Bee, 1997), however, the nature and quality of peer relationships may change over time as children gradually improve the ability to interact effectively with their peers. Bee (1997) described how most children, over time, move toward more altruistic behaviours and away from overt expressions of anger and aggression, although there are enormous variations in children's acquisition of these skills and in their resulting peer acceptance.

The present study seeks to examine peers' attitudes and responses to aggressive behaviour within the school setting. In addition to this, the study seeks to assess whether peers' preferences for interaction with an aggressive or submissive child are affected by the provision of information about the past pattern of behaviour demonstrated by that child. This is discussed in the following section.

Labelling

A label describes the nature of a pattern of behaviour. It characterises the actions and interactions that have been generalised to a person due to their repetition. Dodge (1980) found that peer reactions to aggression are influenced by knowledge of past patterns of behaviour. A child's reputation influences the attributions made by peers to that child's behaviour. If a child is known to be aggressive, a negative outcome of an ambiguous situation will be interpreted by his peers as being the

result of the child's hostile intention. Peers, expecting the past pattern of behaviour to continue, use their understanding of a child's label to explain the intentions behind negative behaviours. Over time the negative results of being labelled increase as peers lose their trust of children who are known to be aggressive. The study by Dodge provided supportive evidence for the existence of a cyclical relationship between label and aggressive behaviour. Aggressive children are more likely to attribute hostile intent to a peer in an ambiguous situation as they have a general image of peers as being antagonistic. Thus the aggressive child may retaliate with aggressive behaviour toward a peer, justifying the response because he or she believes that the peer instigated the aggressive behaviour. The child who caused the ambiguous negative outcome becomes the victim as the aggressive child responds by using physical or verbal aggression. This destructive behaviour reinforces the aggressive child's negative reputation among his peers, resulting in a self-perpetuating cycle where hostile attributions lead to supplementary aggressive behaviour and further peer rejection. Thus the defensive behaviours employed by the aggressive child are maintained and substantiated.

It is uncertain whether a labelling effect exists for victims of bullying. Salmivalli, Lappalainen and Lagerspetz (1998) researched the impact of a change in social environment on the stability of victimization. The study assessed whether victimized children who were given a fresh start in a new school or class were as likely to be victimized in their new environment. The results indicated that even though peers may not know of a child's previous tendencies toward victimization, the victimization had a strong tendency to continue.

The present study seeks to assess whether providing peers with information about the past behavioural patterns of aggressive and submissive children

influences their preferences for interaction with those children. It examines the relationship between label and peer rejection, assessing whether providing students with information about a child's previous pattern of behaviour influences the level of peer rejection or acceptance experienced by that child.

The Present Study

This study will examine how peers react to aggressive and submissive children. The level of peer preference for these children will be assessed through the administration of an attitude survey. Four randomly assigned groups of at least 40 Year 6 and 7 students will be given information about the label of a target child (aggressive/submissive), and the behaviour demonstrated by that child during a critical incident in the school setting (aggressive/nonaggressive). The influence of the sex of the participants on preference for interaction with the target child will also be assessed.

The literature has shown that peers' attitudes toward aggressive and submissive peers are influenced by a number of factors. Not all bullies and victims are rejected by their peers. The reviewed literature indicates that the reputation of a child influences children's reactions to their behaviour. In the present study, this factor is referred to as the "label" of the target child. "Label" is the first independent variable. The target child has been labelled as being either aggressive (demonstrating the aggressive behaviours of a bully) or submissive (demonstrating the submissive behaviours of a victim) toward his peers. The study is expected to replicate the finding that children's reactions to aggressive peers are influenced by their knowledge of the child's past patterns of behaviour. The study will also

examine whether there is a labelling effect for submissive children who are bullied by their peers.

In addition to label, the reviewed literature indicates that the nature of behaviour that is directed by a child toward peers, influences peer attitude toward the child. The present study examines the effect of the behaviour of a child during a critical incident in the school grounds. "Behaviour" is the second independent variable in the present study. While "label" provides background knowledge of the target child's expected behaviour, "behaviour" describes the target child's behaviour during peer interaction in an ambiguous situation, when the target child is bumped hard by another child while standing in a line. The target child's reaction to being bumped is either aggressive, retaliating by pushing the child to the ground, or nonaggressive, responding with a smile. This reflects the findings of the reviewed literature, which described how aggressive children demonstrate aggressive responses to perceived provocation. Nonaggressive children are less likely than aggressive children to attribute hostile intent to their peers, thus they are more likely to remain calm during ambiguous situations.

The third independent variable is the sex of the participant. The literature suggests that boys have a more positive attitude toward aggression than girls. Conversely, girls have a more positive attitude toward victims than boys. This fits with standards of acceptable gender behaviours that are embedded in societal expectations. If correct, then it is expected that boys will respond more positively than girls to a target child who demonstrates aggressive behaviour, and respond less positively than girls to a target child who demonstrates submissive behaviours. It is expected that the same gender effect will apply for the variable of label. Boys will

respond more positively to a target child with an aggressive reputation, and less positively to a target child with a submissive reputation.

The literature suggests that the context in which the behaviour takes place is an important determinant of peer reactions to the behaviour. In contexts where aggression is a normative behaviour, the aggressive child is likely to be viewed in more positive terms than he or she would be in a less aggressive classroom. The present study examines the effect of label, behaviour, and the sex of the participants in three contexts in which peer interaction takes place. The willingness of the participants to interact with the target child will be assessed for situations within the classroom context, for situations in a sports context, and for social situations outside of school.

The classroom context refers to situations within the classroom that are common experiences for students. The situations are of a structured nature, such as teacher-directed group work. The activities given as examples in the study questionnaire include participation in reading groups, maths groups, science groups, and art groups. The group activities were chosen as they require interaction and cooperation by the group members.

The sports context refers to sports activities within or outside of school that demand participation in a team situation. Sporting activities selected for inclusion in the vignette included membership of a basketball team, a softball team, a hockey team, or a volleyball team. The sports were selected due to the tendency for involvement by both boys and girls.

The social context refers to situations in which social interaction takes place outside of school. In the social context peers interact in pairs or groups with children whose behaviour is acceptable on a social level. Activities selected for

inclusion in the questionnaire for this context include going to the movies, going to an amusement arcade, going to the city, or going to the beach.

Conclusion

The present study seeks to examine several salient factors relating to the problem of bullying in schools. The literature has illustrated the extent of this insidious problem within the school environment, and the resulting long-term effects on social and health aspects for children. It is important that specific knowledge is gained about how aggression in schools affects dimensions of children's educational experience, such as their attitude toward peers, and their level of happiness at school.

Hypotheses

This study aims to explore the links between peer rejection of aggressive and submissive school children and the contexts in which these behaviours are deemed desirable or undesirable by peers. The study is designed to determine whether there is any variation between peer preference for interaction with aggressive and submissive students in class, sporting and social situations. The influence of the sex of the participants will also be examined.

The following hypotheses have been developed based on the literature review, and will be examined in the present study:

1. There will be a significant three way (label x behaviour x sex) interaction for
(a) class context, (b) sport context and (c) social context.

2. There will be a significant label by sex interaction for (a) class context, (b) sport context and (c) social context.
3. There will be a significant behaviour by sex interaction for (a) class context, (b) sport context and (c) social context.
4. There will be a significant label by behaviour interaction for (a) class context, (b) sport context and (c) social context.
5. There will be a significant difference in students' attitudes towards a peer who is labelled as aggressive compared with a peer who is labelled as submissive in terms of (a) class context, (b) sport context and (c) social context.
6. There will be a significant difference in students' attitudes toward a peer who displays aggressive behaviour compared with a nonaggressive peer in terms of (a) class context, (b) sport context and (c) social context.
7. There will be a significant difference between boys' and girls' attitudes toward a peer in terms of (a) class context, (b) sport context and (c) social context.

Method

Design

A sample of Year 6 and 7 students were randomly selected from two primary schools to participate in this study. The students were divided into four groups consisting of at least 40 students. The four groups were divided into sub-groups based on gender. Each of the four groups was given a vignette describing a male student's behaviour in a typical school setting in which an ambiguous situation involving students arose. Four vignettes described variations on the past pattern of behaviour demonstrated by the male student toward his peers: aggressive or submissive. This variable is referred to as the label. The vignettes also described the behaviour demonstrated by the male student in that specific situation: an aggressive or non-aggressive response to an accidental push in the back from another student.

A 2 x 2 x 2 factorial design was used to test the hypotheses. The three independent variables were: (a) the label given to the target child (aggressive/submissive) in the vignette, (b) the nature of the behaviour displayed in a critical incident (aggressive/nonaggressive response) as described in the vignette, and (c) the sex of the participants. All were between-subjects variables. A fourth factor in the study was the school that the participant attended; School A or B. It was unknown whether there would be a significant difference between the data collected in the two schools. There were three dependent variables: the participants' preferences for in-class interaction, their preferences for interaction during sporting activities, and their preferences for interaction in social situations outside of school. There were at least 20 subjects in each cell of the design, as evident in Table 1.

Table 1

Design of the Study

<u>Behaviour</u>	<u>Label</u>	
	Aggressive	Submissive
Aggressive		
Males	21	22
Females	20	22
Nonaggressive		
Males	21	22
Females	20	21

Participants

Two schools in the Perth metropolitan area were selected for the study. School A is located in the western suburbs of Perth, and has a population of approximately 200 students. School B is located in the northern suburbs, and has a population of approximately 600 students. The two schools were chosen due to the willingness of staff to participate in this study, rather than being selected due to their particular features. Both schools enrol students from varying cultural backgrounds.

The Year 6 and 7 students within the schools completed one of four specially designed questionnaires which are included in Appendix B. The children were between 10 and 13 years of age, the mean age being 11 years 4 months. The total number of participating students was 169, consisting of 29 male and 26 female students from School A, and 57 male and 57 female students from School B. Table 2 shows the mean age and standard deviation for the participants in each cell.

Table 2

Mean Age and Standard Deviation for the Participants in Each Cell

Behaviour	Label			
	Aggressive		Submissive	
	Mean (years; months)	SD (months)	Age Mean (years; months)	SD (months)
Aggressive				
Males	11; 4	8	11; 4	7
Females	11; 3	7	11; 4	8
Nonaggressive				
Males	11; 5	6	11; 6	8
Females	11; 3	8	11; 3	7

Instrument

In order to assess children's reactions to their aggressive and submissive peers a standard vignette was written about a boy called "Tom" (see Appendix B). In the vignette Tom, the target child, was described as being a goodlooking boy who performed well in both school work and sport. He was also described as being friendly to the male and female students that he liked. These characteristics were given to Tom in order to make him appealing to the participants in terms of peer relations.

The standard vignette was then varied in two ways, firstly in terms of the independent variable of "label". Tom was given one of two labels: aggressive or submissive. This was done through mention of how the children in Tom's class described him in terms of bullying behaviour; either as a bully (aggressive label) or as the victim of other bullying children (submissive label).

Secondly, the standard vignette was varied in terms of the independent variable "behaviour". Tom's behaviour was described as being either aggressive or nonaggressive. The behaviour referred to Tom's response during a critical incident with his peers. The standard vignette described a situation in which Tom was lined up with the rest of his class. In the story another child bumped into Tom while he was standing in the line. Tom's response was either to react aggressively, pushing the other boy onto the ground and hurting him, or to react nonaggressively, smiling at the boy and not retaliating.

The inclusion of the two independent variables (label, behaviour) produced the four variations on the standard vignette which were used in the study. The target child maintained consistent personality features over the four vignettes. Only his label and behaviour in the critical situation differed.

In the first vignette, Tom was labelled as being aggressive toward his peers. In the critical incident he responded in an aggressive manner toward the other student. This vignette was as follows:

Tom is a boy at a school in Perth. Tom is goodlooking and does well at his school work. Tom is good at sport, and is usually friendly to the boys and girls that he likes. The children in Tom's class say that he is a bully, as he sometimes punches the other children and pushes them around. One day last week, Tom was lined up with the rest of his class. One of the other boys bumped hard into Tom. Then Tom pushed the boy hard onto the ground and hurt him.

In the second vignette, Tom was labelled as being aggressive toward his peers. In the critical incident he responded in a nonaggressive manner toward the other student. This vignette was as follows:

Tom is a boy at a school in Perth. Tom is goodlooking and does well at his school work. Tom is good at sport, and is usually friendly to the boys and girls that he likes. The children in Tom's class say that he is a bully, as he sometimes punches the other children and pushes them around. One day last week, Tom was lined up with the rest of his class. One of the other boys bumped hard into Tom. Then Tom smiled, but did not push or hurt the other boy.

In the third vignette, Tom was labelled as being submissive toward his peers. In the critical incident he responded in an aggressive manner toward the other student. This vignette was as follows:

Tom is a boy at a school in Perth. Tom is goodlooking and does well at his school work. Tom is good at sport, and is usually friendly to the boys and girls that he likes. The children in Tom's class say that he sometimes lets the bullies punch him and push him around. One day last week, Tom was lined up with the rest of his class. One of the other boys bumped hard into Tom. Then Tom pushed the boy hard onto the ground and hurt him.

In the fourth vignette, Tom was labelled as being submissive toward his peers. In the critical incident he responded in a nonaggressive manner toward the other student. This vignette was as follows:

Tom is a boy at a school in Perth. Tom is goodlooking and does well at his school work. Tom is good at sport, and is usually friendly to the boys and girls that he likes. The children in Tom's class say that he sometimes lets the bullies punch him and push him around. One day last week, Tom was lined up with the rest of his class. One of the other boys bumped hard into Tom. Then Tom smiled, but did not push or hurt the other boy.

All four vignettes were followed by the same standard questionnaire. The 12 questions included in the questionnaire formed three categories: class-based situations, sports-based situations, and social situations outside the school. The class-based situations focused on structured contact that was likely to have been initiated by the teacher, such as participation in a reading group. The sports-based situations focused on structured sports activities in the school or local community, such as membership of a basketball team. The social situations focused on leisure activities initiated by the students outside of school time, such as going to the movies or the beach. The categories were chosen to cover the three broad contexts in which students interact.

The questions were written in a statement form, for example "I would like to be in a reading group with Tom". The participants responded to these statements by placing a mark on a six-point Likert scale. The range of responses indicated the participants' willingness to interact in the specified situation on a scale between 'not at all' (1) and 'very much' (6), as shown in Figure 1.

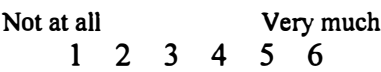


Figure 1. Likert scale used in the questionnaire.

A sample questionnaire was designed for the purpose of familiarising the participants with the structure of the response sheet and the Likert scale. This consisted of a short vignette that was followed by two statements about the target child. The vignette given to the participants for this purpose was as follows:

Jack is a boy at a school in Perth. Jack is good at sport, and is usually friendly to the boys and girls that he likes. One day last week, Jack was lined up with the rest of the class. One of the other boys bumped into Jack. Jack did not push or hurt him.

The vignette was followed by the 2 questions, which the participants were to respond to using the six-point Likert scale. Administration of the sample questionnaire gave the researcher the opportunity to ensure that all participants understood the procedure. The researcher did not use the data from the sample questionnaire as part of the present study. The sample questionnaire is shown in Appendix A.

Piloting of the questionnaire was carried out on a group of 50 students from a randomly selected Perth northern metropolitan school, which was not one of the schools included in the main study. However, the pilot school was similar to the research schools in terms of function and cultural mix. The students were in Years 6 and 7. For the purposes of the pilot study, the second vignette was selected to initiate a response from the participants over the 12 questions. Cronbach's Coefficient

Alpha was calculated on the pilot study data to establish the questionnaire's reliability (see Table 3). A 'total questionnaire' reliability coefficient of .86 indicated high internal consistency for this questionnaire. All other reliability coefficients were satisfactory for the type of test used. No amendments were made to the questionnaire, apart from the inclusion of a date of birth box so that the age of the students could be monitored, ensuring a consistent mean age between cells (see Table 2). The questionnaire used in the main study is shown in Appendix B, along with the four vignettes used in the study.

Table 3

Category Reliability Coefficients Obtained in the Pilot Study

	Alpha
Class	.82
Sport	.85
Social	.92
Total Questionnaire	.86

Procedure

The study questionnaire was administered on a whole-class basis in six classes within the two schools. The testing was held in the participants' usual classrooms during class time. Fifteen minutes were spent in each of the six classrooms, with the experimental conditions being standardised through a set procedure and script. Before she distributed the questionnaires, the researcher led a brief class discussion about the nature of the study. The researcher described the study as being about

friendships in upper primary schools, the purpose being to investigate the characteristics of those children with whom others liked to interact. This simplification of the focus of the study aimed to avoid leading the participants toward a negative line of thinking about the child described in the vignettes. If the study was described by the researcher as being about bullying and aggression in schools, the participants would most likely have developed a negative perception of the target child before reading the vignette. The researcher gave the participants the opportunity to ask questions about the nature of the study, and found that the majority of the questions related to the reasons for conducting the study, and how the data would be collated.

Once the participants' queries had been addressed, the sample questionnaires were distributed. The researcher explained that the sample questionnaires were for the purpose of providing practice for the study questionnaires, and that the data from the sample questionnaires would not be included as part of the study. The researcher then asked the participants to read the vignette twice. When the participants had done this, they were then instructed to read the questions. The researcher then answered any questions about the vignette, the questions, and the six-point scale. The participants were then required to answer the two questions.

The study questionnaires were then handed out to the male and female participants in a way that ensured equal distribution of the four vignettes across the genders. All participants received one of the four vignettes. As with the sample questionnaires, the students were required to read through the vignettes twice before responding to the statements. No time limit was set for the completion of the questionnaires. Upon completion, the participants were asked to ensure that they had filled in their sex and date of birth, in addition to having answered all 12 questions.

Ethical Considerations

It was not anticipated that participation in the study would have any adverse effects for the participants. The vignettes were written so as not to be threatening or confronting to their readers.

Anonymity for the participants was maintained throughout the study. The participants noted their gender and date of birth on the questionnaire sheet, but did not give their names. The two schools involved in the study were not identified.

Results

This chapter reports the results obtained from the data collection. The objective was to ascertain how the label given to a child (aggressive/submissive), and the behaviour of that child during one specific incident (aggressive/nonaggressive), determines the level of peer acceptance or rejection of that child. The sex of the peer who was making the judgement was also to be examined to see if this influenced the acceptance of the child's label and behaviour.

To address the research hypotheses a MANOVA was conducted for the three dependent variables (class context, sport context, social context). The dependent variables referred to the contexts in which the participants might interact with the boy in the vignette. The class context focused on structured classroom contact such as participation in a reading group. The sport context focused on structured sports activities in the school or local community, such as membership of a basketball team. The social context focused on leisure activities with other students outside of school time, such as going to the movies. The categories were chosen to cover the three broad contexts in which students interact.

The three independent variables referred to the label given to the target child (aggressive/submissive), which described his dominant behaviour; the behaviour demonstrated by the target child in a critical incident (aggressive/nonaggressive); and the sex of the participant. The fourth variable referred to the school that the participant attended; School A or B. A MANOVA was conducted for the three dependent variables together (class, sport, social). The alpha level for all analyses was set at .05.

Multivariate Analysis

To assess differences in children's acceptance or rejection of peers a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted for the dependent variables. The MANOVA had four between-subjects independent variables (sex, label, behaviour, school) and three dependent variables (class, sport, social). The results of the MANOVA are shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Results of Multivariate Analysis

	F (1,161)	P
Sex	0.38	.77
Label	7.05	.00
Behaviour	3.40	.02
School	2.49	.06
Sex x Label	1.51	.21
Sex x Behaviour	1.75	.16
Sex x School	0.98	.40
Label x Behaviour	0.82	.49
Label x School	1.44	.23
Behaviour x School	1.96	.12
Sex x Label x Behaviour	1.04	.37
Sex x Label x School	0.42	.74
Sex x Behaviour x School	0.99	.40
Label x Behaviour x School	0.20	.90
Sex x Label x Behaviour x School	1.18	.32

The analysis of between-subjects effects yielded a significant main effect of behaviour, $F(1,161) = 11.31, p < .05$ in which the participants indicated a preference for interacting with the nonaggressive target child. A significant main effect of label was also revealed, $F(1,161) = 7.57, p < .05$ in which the participants indicated a preference for interacting with the target child who was labelled as being submissive. The variable of school did not yield a significant main effect or any significant interactions, and has therefore been excluded from the remaining univariate analyses.

Univariate Analyses

The MANOVA then yielded results for each of the dependent variables separately. These will be described in turn.

Class context

Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics for the class context, and Table 3 shows the MANOVA results for this dependent variable.

Table 2

Means and Standard Deviations for Attitude Scores in the Class Context

Sex	Label	Behaviour	Mean	SD
Male	Submissive	Nonaggressive	4.60	0.60
		Aggressive	4.14	0.97
	Aggressive	Nonaggressive	3.70	1.03
		Aggressive	2.99	1.15
Female	Submissive	Nonaggressive	4.21	0.94
		Aggressive	3.65	1.13
	Aggressive	Nonaggressive	3.95	0.88
		Aggressive	3.20	1.20
Total	Submissive	Nonaggressive	4.41	0.78
		Aggressive	3.90	1.07
	Aggressive	Nonaggressive	3.82	0.96
		Aggressive	3.10	1.17

Table 3

MANOVA Results for the Dependent Variable of Class Context

	Df	F (1,161)	P
Sex	1	0.41	.52
Label	1	20.21	.00
Behaviour	1	16.22	.00
Sex x Label	1	4.74	.03
Sex x Behaviour	1	0.07	.79
Label x Behaviour	1	0.49	.48
Sex x Label x Behaviour	1	0.01	.92

The univariate analysis for the class context yielded significant main effects for the variables of label and behaviour $F(1,161) = 20.21, p < .05$, and behaviour, $F(1,161) = 16.22, p < .05$. The participants indicated a preference for interaction in the class context with the target child who was labelled as submissive over the target child who was labelled as aggressive. The target child who demonstrated nonaggressive behaviour during the critical incident was preferred in this context to the aggressively behaved target child. A significant two-way interaction was yielded for the variables of sex and label, $F(1,161) = 4.74, p < .05$. However, since this was not significant in the original multivariate analysis, it is disregarded here. Figure 1 shows the overall (sex combined) mean attitude scores in the class context for the independent variables of label and behaviour.

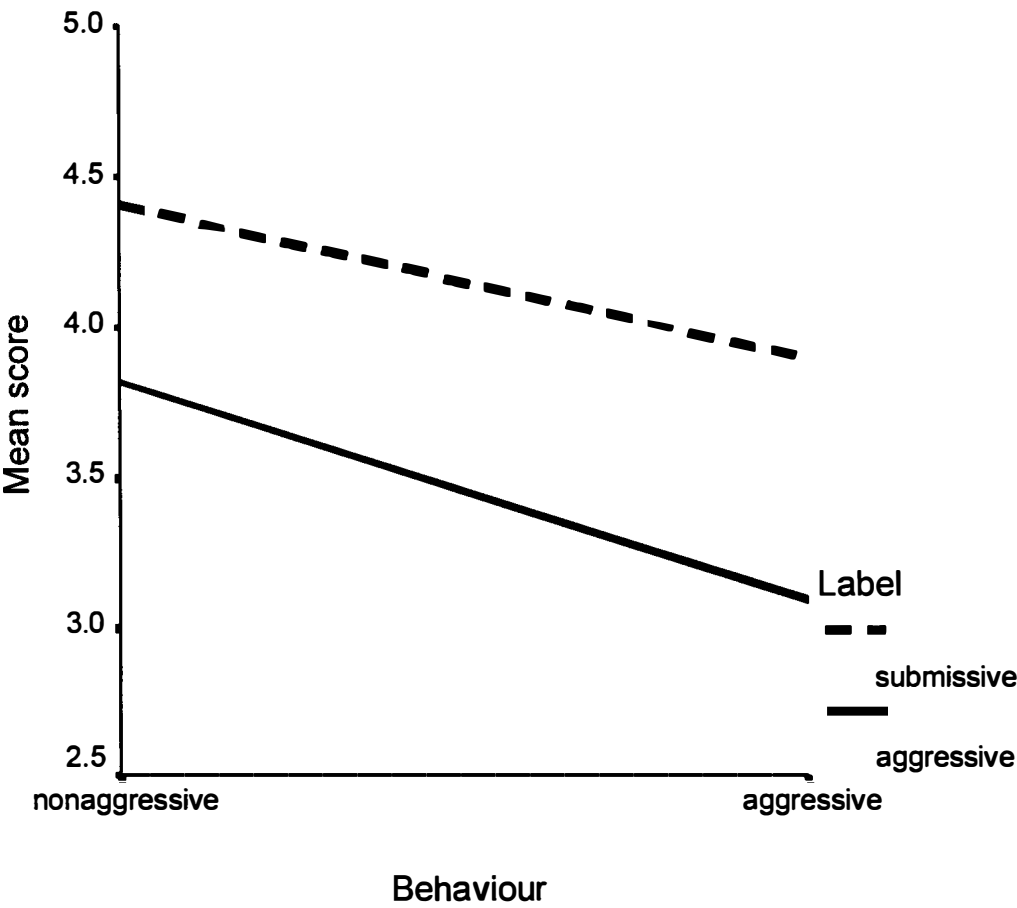


Figure 1. Mean attitude scores in the class context for aggressive and nonaggressive behaviour and for submissive and aggressive labels.

As evident in Figure 1, for the class context the participants responded more positively to the child with the submissive label than they did for the child with the aggressive label. The negative attitude toward the child who demonstrated aggressive behaviour during the critical incident is also evident in Figure 1.

Sport context

Table 4 shows the descriptive statistics for the sport context, and Table 5 shows the MANOVA results for this dependent variable.

Table 4

Means and Standard Deviations for the Attitude Scores for the Sport Context

Sex	Label	Behaviour	Mean	SD
Male	Submissive	Nonaggressive	4.13	1.06
		Aggressive	3.76	1.56
	Aggressive	Nonaggressive	3.35	1.36
		Aggressive	3.54	1.52
Female	Submissive	Nonaggressive	4.06	1.43
		Aggressive	3.16	1.52
	Aggressive	Nonaggressive	4.08	1.07
		Aggressive	3.26	1.12
Total	Submissive	Nonaggressive	4.09	1.24
		Aggressive	3.46	1.55
	Aggressive	Nonaggressive	3.70	1.27
		Aggressive	3.40	1.32

Table 5

MANOVA Results for the Dependent Variable of Sport Context

	Df	F (1,161)	P
Sex	1	0.06	.80
Label	1	1.14	.29
Behaviour	1	5.17	.02
Sex x Label	1	1.84	.18
Sex x Behaviour	1	3.45	.06
Label x Behaviour	1	0.60	.44
Sex x Label x Behaviour	1	0.32	.57

The univariate analysis for the sport context yielded a significant main effect for the variable of behaviour, $F (1,161) = 5.17, p<.05$. The participants indicated a preference for interacting with the target child who displayed nonaggressive behaviour during the critical incident over the target child who behaved in an aggressive manner. Figure 2 shows the overall (sex combined) mean attitude scores in the sport context for the independent variables of label and behaviour.

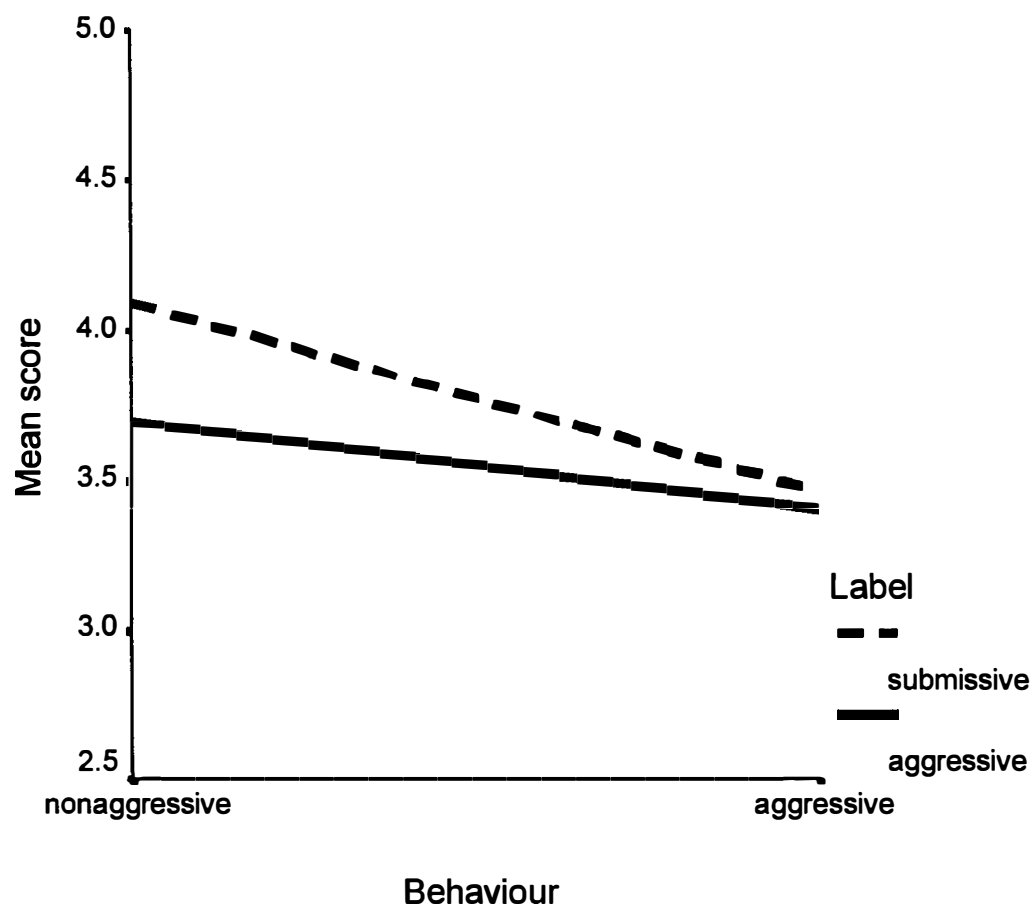


Figure 2. Mean attitude scores in the sport context for aggressive and nonaggressive behaviour and for submissive and aggressive labels.

As evident in Figure 2, the participants indicated a preference for interaction in a sports team with the target child who displayed nonaggressive behaviour in the critical incident over the aggressively behaved child. In contrast with the class context, the sport context shows no significant difference between the results for the two labels; aggressive and submissive.

Social Context

Table 6 shows the descriptive statistics for the social context, and Table 7 shows the MANOVA results for this dependent variable.

Table 6

Means and Standard Deviations for the Attitude Scores in the Social Context

Sex	Label	Behaviour	Mean	SD
Male	Submissive	Nonaggressive	3.76	1.20
		Aggressive	3.70	1.42
	Aggressive	Nonaggressive	3.45	1.21
		Aggressive	2.96	1.18
Female	Submissive	Nonaggressive	3.67	1.59
		Aggressive	2.92	1.37
	Aggressive	Nonaggressive	3.38	1.60
		Aggressive	2.89	1.30
Total	Submissive	Nonaggressive	3.72	1.39
		Aggressive	3.31	1.43
	Aggressive	Nonaggressive	3.41	1.40
		Aggressive	2.93	1.23

Table 7

MANOVA Results for the Dependent Variable of Social Context

	Df	F (1,161)	P
Sex	1	1.51	.22
Label	1	2.67	.10
Behaviour	1	4.48	.03
Sex x Label	1	0.74	.39
Sex x Behaviour	1	0.67	.41
Label x Behaviour	1	0.04	.84
Sex x Label x Behaviour	1	0.67	.41

The univariate analysis for the social context yielded a significant main effect for the variable of behaviour, $F(1,161) = 4.47, p < .05$. The participants indicated a preference for interacting in a social situation with the target child who displayed nonaggressive behaviour during the critical incident over the target child who behaved in an aggressive manner during the same incident. Figure 3 shows the overall (sex combined) mean attitude scores in the social context for the independent variables of label and behaviour.

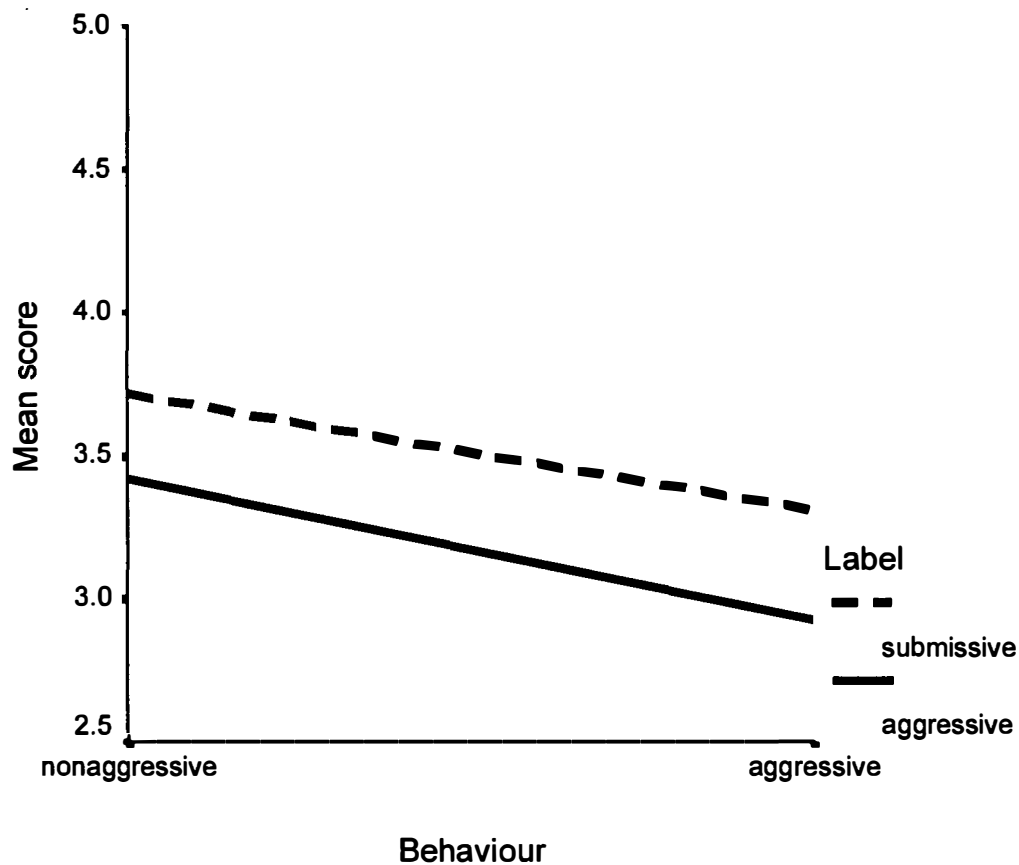


Figure 3. Mean attitude scores in the social context for aggressive and nonaggressive behaviour and submissive and aggressive labels.

Figure 3 illustrates the participants' preference for interaction in a social context with the target child who displayed nonaggressive behaviour during the critical incident over the aggressively behaved child. The results for this context in terms of behaviour were similar to the results yielded for the sport context. Unlike the results for the class context, for sport and social situations there was no significant difference between the participants' responses to the two labels.

Summary of Results

The data analysis did not yield any significant three- or two-way interactions for the dependent variables (class context, sport context, social context). A main effect was found for the independent variable of "label". The original multivariate analysis revealed a significant difference between the participants attitudes for the two labels. However the univariate analyses for the three dependent variables (class context, sport context, social context) indicated that the effect of label was significant for the class context, but not for the sport or social contexts. A main effect was also found for the independent variable of "behaviour". The univariate analyses revealed that the effect of label was significant for all three dependent variables. There was no significant difference between the responses of the male and female participants.

Discussion

This chapter is a discussion of the results of the study. The first section will interpret the results in terms of each of the hypotheses, and how they relate to the reviewed literature. It will include discussion of other issues that arose in the study. The second section will outline practical implications for the school and the classroom. The third section will describe the limitations of the study, and possible directions for future research. Finally, a conclusion will analyse the study topic in light of the findings of the present study.

Discussion of the Hypotheses

In this study, 169 students from two urban primary schools in Western Australia were randomly selected, and each student was randomly assigned to one of four groups. There were at least 20 males and 20 females in each group. Each of the four groups was given a two-page survey consisting of a vignette describing the behaviour of a target student, followed by a questionnaire that determined their attitude toward the target student. The four vignettes varied in terms of the description of the target child's behaviour in a specific incident, and in terms of the background knowledge provided about the child's label resulting from his regular pattern of behaviour. The results were analysed to ascertain whether the participants' attitudes toward the target student were influenced by: (a) the label given to the target child, (b) the behaviour demonstrated by the target child in a critical incident, or (c) the sex of the participant. The three independent variables were analysed in terms of each of the dependent variables: (a) class context, (b) sport context, and (c) social context. The results will be examined in terms of each of the seven hypotheses presented.

Hypotheses

The first hypothesis stated that there would be a significant three-way interaction (label by behaviour by sex) for (a) class context, (b) sport context, and (c) social context. The three-way interaction was not significant for the class, sport or social contexts.

The second hypothesis stated that there would be a significant two-way interaction (label by sex) for (a) class context, (b) sport context, and (c) social context. The MANOVA results for the class context yielded a significant interaction between label and sex, however since this was not significant in the original multivariate analysis, it is disregarded.

The third hypothesis stated that there would be a significant two-way interaction (behaviour by sex) for (a) class context, (b) sport context and (c) social context. The MANOVA did not yield a significant two-way interaction.

The fourth hypothesis stated that there would be a significant two-way interaction (label by behaviour) for (a) class context, (b) sport context, and (c) social context. The results were not significant.

The fifth hypothesis stated that there would be a significant difference in students' attitudes towards a peer who is labelled as aggressive compared with a peer who is labelled as submissive for (a) class context, (b) sport context, and (c) social context. The results supported the hypothesis that the label of the target child would influence the attitudes of peers. This will be discussed further under the next sub-heading in this section.

The sixth hypothesis stated that there would be a significant difference in students' attitudes toward a peer who displays aggressive behaviour compared with a nonaggressive peer in terms of (a) class context, (b) sport context, and (c) social

context. This hypothesis was supported by a significant result. The influence of behaviour on peers' attitudes will be discussed further in the following sections.

The seventh hypothesis stated that there would be a significant difference between boys' and girls' attitudes toward a peer in terms of (a) class context, (b) sport context and (c) social context. The MANOVA results did not indicate a significant difference between the attitudes of boys and girls toward the target child. As there was not a significant difference between the responses of boys and girls for any of the dependent variables (class, sport, or social context), the results for the genders were combined to produce an overall picture of the participants' attitudes toward the target child. The unexpected results for the variable of sex will be discussed in the following sections.

Influence of label on students' attitudes toward peers

The fifth hypothesis stated that there would be a significant difference in students' attitudes towards a peer who is labelled as aggressive compared with a peer who is labelled as submissive in terms of (a) class context, (b) sport context and (c) social context. The results of the multi-variate analysis support this hypothesis, revealing that overall the participants had a more positive attitude toward the target child who was labelled as submissive than they had toward the target child who was labelled as aggressive. This is in keeping with research by Dodge (1980), who found that when children are assessing a peer's aggressive behaviour, they use their knowledge of that child's past pattern of behaviour to explain his or her negative actions. This knowledge of past behaviour equates to a reputation that a child is given by his or her peers. If a child has a reputation for being aggressive, other children are likely to interpret the child's behaviour as being hostile. Children may

consider a child to be untrustworthy if they have an understanding that the child is often aggressive toward other children. They may find it stressful to be around the child knowing that he or she is volatile and could become violent.

In terms of the effects of the submissive label, it appears that knowing that a child has a tendency toward passive behaviour means that the student poses less of a threat than is posed by an aggressive child. The characteristics of the submissive child that were described in the vignettes reflect the attributes of the typical victim of bullying. A child who lets bullies "punch him and push him around" will rarely resort to acts of aggression toward other children (Rigby, 1996). Victims are predominately unassertive, withdrawn and quiet. These passive characteristics are less attractive to peers than the characteristics held by more confident and outgoing students (Rigby & Slee, 1992). The present study however shows that the characteristics of a child with a submissive label are more attractive to children than the characteristics of a child with an aggressive label.

The influence of label was not stable for all three dependent variables. In addition to a multi-variate analysis, the independent variables were examined in terms of each of the dependent variables (class, sport and social contexts). The results of the analyses indicate that the influence of label was significant for the class context, but not for the sport or social contexts. These results are interesting as they imply that a child's past pattern of behaviour does not influence how peers feel about interacting with the child in the sport or social contexts. It is possible that in a class context, peers perceive a submissive child to be more desirable to work with than an aggressive child because the focus in the classroom is on academic pursuits rather than on socialising. The quiet and obedient attributes of a submissive child fit the behavioural requirements of the typical classroom, and may match the qualities that

students value in a group member. This is in contrast to the attributes of an aggressive child, who is more likely to be disruptive in class and group-work situations.

The significance of label for the class context may be explained further in the light of recent research (Stormshak, Bierman, Bruschi, Dodge & Coie, 1999). The authors found a relationship between behavioural problems and peer preference in different classroom contexts. The behavioural problems addressed in the study were aggression and withdrawal. It was predicted that peer preference would be dependent on the similarities between the person being assessed, and the normative behaviours of the peer group who were making the assessment. The results confirmed the authors' prediction. For children who are members of a class that is high in normative rates of aggression, the negative impact of aggression on peer preference is low when compared to the results for less aggressive classes. The same effects were seen for withdrawal. It seems that withdrawal did not predict low peer status in contexts where high levels of withdrawal were common.

In the present study, the situational effect may explain the significance of label for the class context. The participants in the study may be members of classes in which aggressive behaviour is not common, leading to their rejection of children who they know have tendencies toward aggressive behaviour. It is possible that the participants identified with the submissive child more than they identified with the aggressive child, in terms of finding the past behaviour of the submissive child compatible with the climate of their own classrooms. The questionnaire stated that the target child would be coming to the participants' school, thus the participants would have answered the questions by imagining the target child interacting in their present classroom environment.

In the present study, the attitudes of the participants toward the target child for the sport context were not significantly influenced by the target child's label. In terms of the research by Stormshak, Bierman, Bruschi, Dodge and Coie (1999), the situational effect may explain the results for the sport context. In the sport context one would expect to find a higher level of aggression than is evident in a class context for reasons to do with the rules and competitive nature of the game. In most sports an element of aggression in a competitor is equated with a favourable performance. Thus the aggressive label had less of a negative impact on the participants' perceptions of the target child than for the class context. The situational effect may also explain why label did not have a significant effect for the social context. The social situations cited in the questionnaire (visiting the beach, movies, city or an amusement arcade) involved children going on outings in groups. If there was a lack of parental supervision on such outings, which was implied in the questionnaire, the level of aggression would most likely be higher than that seen in the classroom. This fits with the research of Rigby (1996), who found that the high level of surveillance by classroom teachers means that most bullying occurs outside of the class.

Influence of behaviour on students' attitudes toward peers

The sixth hypothesis stated that there would be a significant difference in students' attitudes toward a peer who displayed aggressive behaviour compared with a nonaggressive peer in terms of (a) class context, (b) sport context and (c) social context. The hypothesis was supported for all three dependent variables. The aggressive and nonaggressive behaviours described in the vignettes related to a specific incident during which the target child was standing in line with other

students. The vignettes described how one of the other students bumped the target child in a "hard" manner. The way in which the target child responded was either aggressive or nonaggressive. The aggressive target child retaliated in a violent manner toward his peer, pushing him onto the ground. The nonaggressive target child responded in a peaceful manner by smiling at his peer and not retaliating. Thus the description of behaviour related to a single isolated incident. The description of the target child's behaviour during the critical incident had a more stable effect than the effect seen for the target child's label. The results indicate that for all three independent variables, there was a significant difference between preferences for interaction with the aggressive and the nonaggressive target child. The univariate analyses revealed that for all three contexts the participants had a more positive attitude toward the nonaggressive child than they had toward the aggressive child.

The significant results for behaviour in all three contexts may be explained in the light of research by Tulloch (1995), who found that most students have a negative attitude toward bullying. Students who resort to acts of physical aggression during interaction with their peers are at risk of being rejected by their peers. The results of the present study indicate that aggressive behaviour results in peer rejection in all contexts.

The participants indicated that they would prefer to work in the classroom with a nonaggressive child than an aggressive child. The activities that were given in the survey for the class context including reading groups, maths groups, science groups and art groups. As discussed in regard to the results for the variable of label, children who demonstrate aggressive behaviour may be seen by their peers to possess attributes which may cause them to be disruptive in the classroom.

Aggressive children may be less appealing to work with in a group situation than are nonaggressive children. The characteristics of aggressive children, such as their dominating nature (Rigby, 1996) and fiery temperament (Olweus, 1996) may make working with aggressive students in group situations a difficult task. The fact that aggressive children are more likely than nonaggressive children to display attention problems (Zubrick, Silburn, Gurrin, Teoh, Shepherd, Carlton & Lawrence, 1997) creates further difficulties for students working with aggressive children in group situations in the classroom.

The results revealed that as for the class context, for the sport and social contexts the participants had a less positive attitude toward the aggressive child than they had toward the nonaggressive child. Olweus (1993) described how the urge to dominate others, combined with a positive attitude toward the use of violence, meant that bullies responded with aggression in a diversity of contexts. As the majority of children have a negative attitude toward violence (Slee, 1995) it seems obvious why they would attempt to avoid associating in any context with children who behave aggressively. The unpredictable behaviour of children with an aggressive reaction pattern can have a strong negative impact on the school climate.

The present study reveals that students' negative reactions to aggressive behaviour extend beyond the school setting. The different perceptions that aggressive children have about acceptable standards of behaviour in peer relations (Walker, Colvin & Ramsey, 1995) mean that they are also rejected by their peers in settings outside of the school environment if they have behaved aggressively at school.

The effects of the behaviour of the target child are partly in opposition to the effects of the label of the target child, in that the effects of behaviour were

significant across the three contexts, whereas the effects of label were only significant in the class context. An explanation for the stability of results for the behaviour compared to the results for the label is that the effect could be due to the nature of the questionnaire given to the participants. While the label described past patterns of behaviour, the behaviour described a specific incident in detail. It is possible that the description of the aggressive behaviour created a more vivid image of the target child than was created by the description of the label. Thus the participants had a strong negative reaction to the violent behaviour of the aggressive target child as they were able to visualise the incident. This was reflected in the stable results across the three contexts.

Further issues raised in the present study

An unexpected result of the present study that warrants attention is the similarity of the responses given by the male and female participants. The seventh hypothesis stated that there would be a significant difference between boys' and girls' attitudes in terms of the three dependent variables (class context, sport context, social context). This hypothesis was not supported by the results of the study.

The findings were in opposition to the results of previous research. As described in the reviewed literature, past research has shown that girls and boys have varying attitudes toward the victims of aggression. Tulloch (1995) found that girls were more supportive of the victims of bullying than boys, and less rejecting of weak children. In the present study there was no significant difference between the responses of boys and girls, indicating that their attitudes toward the target child followed similar patterns. This may be due to the fact that the target child was male. Tulloch describes how reactions to aggression are based on stereotypical gender

norms. As the target child was a boy who demonstrated overtly aggressive behaviour, which is predominately perpetrated by males (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995), the gender of the participants may have been inconsequential as a result of the nature of the aggression displayed by the target child.

Practical Implications

Overall, the findings of the present study have implications for all school staff and educational administrators. The results have clearly shown that aggressive children are rejected by their peers. The peer rejection is not of a differential nature in that it applies to both the classroom, the school and outside environments. A child who displays aggressive behaviour within the school environment is likely to be rejected when students are choosing friends to socialise with outside of school. Thus negative behaviours have implications for much wider contexts than those in which they are demonstrated.

Early intervention may be necessary to prevent aggressive tendencies in young children developing into serious behavioural problems in adolescence. The present study has shown that within the class context, the influence of a label is significant in determining peer acceptance or rejection. Children need to be made aware of the negative view that prosocial children have towards the use of violence and aggression. Rather than simply teaching children social skills, an integrated approach would be more effective. Teachers need to involve families and other peers in this process. Aggressive children should be exposed to prosocial behaviours within the school environment. For aggressive-rejected children the opportunities for learning through peer modelling by pro-social children become limited, because pro-social children try to avoid interacting with children who display anti-social

tendencies (Coie, Lochman, Terry & Hyman, 1992). Teachers need to facilitate peer modelling so that anti-social children become aware of more normative behaviours. In this way aggressive children may be prevented from following the path that leads from aggression to early adolescent disorder and delinquency.

The benefits of participating in classroom activities that promote cooperation and collaboration between peers should be made clear to aggressive children. The fact that aggressive children are often the products of social problems within the family context (Debaryshe & Fryxell, 1998) means that a humanistic approach within the classroom could offset some of the negative effects of the home environment. Teachers should aim to establish effective relationships within the classroom environment. They need to be aware of the networks of social relationships within their classrooms, so that those children who are at risk of peer rejection are identified early.

Limitations and Implications for Future Research

This study was conducted using convenience sampling of urban pre-adolescent children in the late 1990s. The sample may not be representative of the national or state population as the socio-economic status of the sample was fairly high. However the ethnic groups within the sample were diverse, which is representative of the ethnic diversity in the state and national populations. Further research in this area could assess the attitudes of students within private single-sex schools. It would be of benefit to compare the attitudes of students in single-sex schools with those of students in co-educational settings. It is possible that different gender norms would exist in varied settings due to the presence or absence of the genders.

The present study had a gender bias, as it studied reactions to aggressive behaviour in males and not females. As the vignettes described the labels and behaviours of a male student, the extent to which the findings might generalise to females remains unclear. It would be worthwhile to repeat the study using a female target child in addition to the male target child. It would then be possible to examine how children would react to overt aggression in a female. As children's reactions to aggression are based on normative standards, it would be interesting to see whether females are viewed in a more negative light than males because the behaviours are less acceptable when demonstrated by a female.

The present study was limited due to the focus on overt aggression. This is mostly perpetrated by males. It may be illuminating to assess how children react to peers who are labelled as being bullies, as in the present study, but who employ relational aggression to exert power over other children. Further studies could assess whether or not the presence of a label had the same effect for relational aggression as was seen in the present study for overt aggression.

The methodology used in the present study relied on students providing measures of their attitudes toward a fictitious character. Thus their responses may not be indicative of how they would react in an extant situation. Further study may benefit from the employment of direct observation in assessing how children react to their aggressive and submissive peers.

Conclusion

The purpose of the present study was to establish the extent to which peer preference for interaction with an aggressive or a submissive child is affected by the label of the child, and by the behaviour demonstrated by the child in a peer group situation. The results revealed that in the classroom the influence of an aggressive label has a negative effect compared to the influence of a submissive label. The negative influence of a child's aggressive behaviour is evident in lower peer preference for interaction with the child in class, sport and social contexts. Thus children who have an aggressive reputation, or who are witnessed by peers committing aggressive acts, are at risk of rejection by their peers. These findings have important implications for the policies and practices that are implemented by educators in schools. It is important that educators work towards reducing the incidence of bullying in schools. The high incidence of family breakdown places greater responsibility on educators in terms of providing positive socialising agencies for children. Children are exposed to aggression in many facets of their lives. In the school context children should be shown positive ways of relating to other people. Those children who exhibit early warning signs of potential bully or victim status need early intervention by school staff. The long-term effects of personal involvement in bullying, whether as bully or victim, have been documented in the literature review. Teachers who are aware of the peer relationships within their classroom will have useful insight that may help to divert children from this dangerous path.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Sample Vignette and Questionnaire

Jack is a boy at a school in Perth. Jack is good at sport, and is usually friendly to the boys that he likes. One day last week, Jack was lined up with the rest of his class. One of the other boys bumped into Jack. Jack did not push or hurt him.

Next week Jack may be leaving school and coming to join your class. Read the questions below and answer each one.

- | | Not at all | | | | | Very much |
|---|------------|---|---|---|---|-----------|
| 1. I would like to be in a reading group with Jack. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 2. I would like to be in a sports team with Jack. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |

Appendix B: Study Vignettes and Questionnaire

Vignette 1

Tom is a boy at a school in Perth. Tom is goodlooking and does well at his school work. Tom is good at sport, and is usually friendly to the boys and girls that he likes. The children in Tom's class say that he is a bully, as he sometimes punches the other children and pushes them around. One day last week, Tom was lined up with the rest of his class. One of the other boys bumped hard into Tom. Then Tom pushed the boy hard onto the ground and hurt him.

Vignette 2

Tom is a boy at a school in Perth. Tom is goodlooking and does well at his school work. Tom is good at sport, and is usually friendly to the boys and girls that he likes. The children in Tom's class say that he is a bully, as he sometimes punches the other children and pushes them around. One day last week, Tom was lined up with the rest of his class. One of the other boys bumped hard into Tom. Then Tom smiled, but did not push or hurt the other boy.

Vignette 3

Tom is a boy at a school in Perth. Tom is goodlooking and does well at his school work. Tom is good at sport, and is usually friendly to the boys and girls that he likes. The children in Tom's class say that he sometimes lets the bullies punch him and push him around. One day last week, Tom was lined up with the rest of his class. One of the other boys bumped hard into Tom. Then Tom pushed the boy hard onto the ground and hurt him.

Vignette 4

Tom is a boy at a school in Perth. Tom is goodlooking and does well at his school work. Tom is good at sport, and is usually friendly to the boys that he likes. The children in Tom's class say that he sometimes lets the bullies punch him and push him around. One day last week, Tom was lined up with the rest of his class. One of the other boys bumped hard into Tom. Then Tom smiled, but did not push or hurt the other boy.

Study Questionnaire

This week Tom moved to a house near your school. He may be coming to join your class. Read the questions below and answer each one. Then answer the questions on the back of the page.

- | | Not at all | | | | | Very much |
|--|------------|---|---|---|---|-----------|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 1. I would like to be in a reading group with Tom. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 2. I would like to be in a maths group with Tom. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 3. I would like to be in a science group with Tom. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 4. I would like to be in an art group with Tom. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 5. I would like to be in a basketball team with Tom. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 6. I would like to be in a softball team with Tom. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 7. I would like to be in a hockey team with Tom. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 8. I would like to be in a volleyball team with Tom. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 9. I would like to go to the movies with Tom. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 10. I would like to go to Timezone with Tom. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 11. I would like to go to the city with Tom. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 12. I would like to go to the beach with Tom. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |