

Social Achievement Goals, Bullying, and the Class Norm Effect

by

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1. PREFACE

Proudly I present to you my thesis “Social Achievement Goals, Bullying, and the Class Norm Effect”.

There are a number of people that I would like to thank here in particular. First of all René Veenstra. Thank you for inviting me to do my internship at the KiVa research group. René, Gijs, Miranda, Rozemarijn, Beau, and Femke, I can not imagine KiVa Netherlands not becoming a success.

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And last but not least, my father, Ton van Engen, who has always been so supportive of me during my studies, and warmly welcomed me at 'Het Fort', where I spend many hours studying.

Dear reader, I hope you read this thesis with as much pleasure as with which I have written it!

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2. ABSTRACT

This study tested whether social achievement goals are related to bullying. Multilevel analyses were used to test if such a relationship exists in a sample of 8,167 children in 392 elementary school classrooms. The analyses revealed that at the individual level, social development goals are negatively related to bullying. Demonstration-approach and demonstration-avoidance goals are positively related to bullying: children with these goals tend to bully more. At the class level a probullying classroom norm was found to be positively related to individual bullying behavior. In addition, a significant cross-level interaction effect was found for individual demonstration-approach goals and the classroom norm of bullying. The higher the class level of bullying, the more positive the relation between demonstration-approach goals and bullying. Theoretical and practical implications of the results are discussed in terms of directions for future research, and prevention of and intervention in bullying.

Keywords: Social Achievement Goals, Social Development, Demonstration-approach, Demonstration-avoidance, Bullying, Class Norm Effect

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3. INTRODUCTION

Bullying, defined as repeated aggression in which one or more persons intend to harm or disturb another person physically, verbally, or psychologically (Boulton & Underwood, 1992; Nansel et al., 2001; Olweus, 1993; Wolke, Woods, Stanford & Schulz, 2001) has received a great deal of international attention in the last few decades (Carerra, DePalma & Lameiras, 2011; Rigby & Smith, 2011; Smith, Cowie, Olafsson & Liefoghe, 2002). As a result it is known that boys are more likely to be bullies than girls (Goossens, Olthof & Dekker, 2006; Scholte, Engels, Overbeek, De Kemp & Haselager, 2007), and bullies and victims show poorer school adjustment (Nansel et al., 2001). Research in many countries has highlighted the prevalence of school bullying. In an analysis of a large-scale survey in 66 countries, it was found that on average 32 percent of students had been bullied at school at least once within the previous two months (Due & Holstein, 2008).

School bullying negatively affects the life of not only victims and bullies, but also of the rest of the class. Research found significant associations between bullying behavior and the physical, psychological, and social well-being of children (Dake, Price & Telljohann, 2003; Isaacs, Hodges & Salmivalli, 2008; Nansel et al., 2001). Victims often experience insecurity and various forms of psychosocial maladjustment, such as depression and anxiety (for meta-analyses, see Hawker & Boulton, 2003). Bullies tend to display a number of problem behaviors, including an increased likelihood of school problems, alcohol abuse, and delinquency (Kaltiala-Heino, Rimpelä, Rantanen & Rimpelä, 2000; Nansel et al., 2001). Not only the victims and bullies, who are directly involved, experience the negative consequences of bullying. Nishina and Juvonen (2005), for example, found evidence that the well-being of peers merely witnessing bullying attacks is negatively influenced as well. More recently, it was shown that in classrooms where some classmates were perceived as victims by many

peers, all children were on average more depressed and had lower self-esteem (Huitsing, Veenstra, Sainio & Salmivalli, 2010). It is therefore of utmost importance for better prevention and intervention measures to increase knowledge on the factors that influence bullying behavior.

Social Goals

Goals, or “objectives that a person strives to attain or avoid” (Emmons, 1996, p. 314), have often been found to play an important role in determining behavioral responses to social situations and general social adjustment (Ojanen, Grönroos & Salmivalli, 2005; Ryan & Shim, 2008). Bullying is generally regarded as complex behavior determined by status-related goals and actual status (Caravita & Cillessen, 2012), and is often seen as an instrumental and goal-oriented strategy to achieve prestige or power (Olweus, 1993; Vaillancourt et al., 2008). Although an individual motive, a quest for status is group-related. Status is an individual's relative standing in the peer hierarchy, and as it is the group that assigns status to its members, bullies are dependent on their peer group in the realization of their status goals (Keltner, Gruenfeld & Anderson, 2003; Salmivalli, 2010). What these descriptions imply is that when investigating bullying, both individual and group-level factors should be taken into account, as bullying clearly involves status-related group processes (Caravita & Cillessen, 2012). The correlation between status goals and bullying is particularly strong in (early) adolescence (Cillessen & Borch, 2006).

When children are younger (elementary school age) status goals are not that important yet (Pellegrini, 2002; Sijtsema, Veenstra, Lindenberg & Salmivalli, 2009). Therefore, next to status goals, other social goals might help to explain bullying behavior of elementary school children. Interesting here is the approach by Ryan and Shim (2006, 2008): the social achievement goal approach. This approach is different from the more typical content approach

to social goals that is mostly concerned with which social outcomes individuals pursue and the identification of categories of goals that characterize what individuals want (Grant & Dweck, 2003; Pintrich, 2000; Wentzel, 2000). The achievement goal approach focuses more on capturing key distinctions in individuals' general *orientations* toward relationships and social competence, which has implications for their beliefs, behavior, and overall social functioning (Ryan & Shim, 2006). The achievement goal approach does not necessarily compete with a content approach, but instead provides a new angle, thereby complementing and expanding our current understanding of individuals' strivings and functioning in the social domain, including their involvement in bullying. In the present study it will be investigated whether children's social achievement goals can be linked to their bullying behavior. If such a connection can be found, this provides support for the desirability of developing an improved model of bullying in which both the content approach (focusing on outcomes) and the achievement goal approach (focusing on orientation) are represented.

Ryan and Shim (2006) conceptualized three dimensions of social achievement, namely social development, social demonstration-approach, and social demonstration-avoidance. The first dimension, social development, is concerned with developing social competence with peers. This goal focuses on learning new things, growth, and improvement (Ryan & Shim, 2008). To successfully reach this goal one has to improve social skills, deepen the quality of relationships, and develop social life in general. The second and third dimension of social achievement are concerned with social demonstration, where the focus is on the appearance of the self, in particular in relationships with others (Ryan & Shim, 2006, 2008). The first social demonstration goal is the demonstration-approach goal, which focuses on demonstrating social competence and receiving positive judgments of peers. The second social demonstration goal is the demonstration-avoidance goal. Within this dimension the focus is on avoiding possible negative outcomes. Children with demonstration-avoidance goals seek

ways to avoid attention or embarrassment (Rudolph, Abaied, Flynn, Sugimara & Agoston, 2011); they are afraid to do something that could result in negative judgments from peers (Ryan & Shim, 2006).

Social development goals are linked to more positive perceptions of social relationships, more prosocial behavior and less aggression. Bullying, generally regarded as a subtype of aggressive behavior (Olweus, 1993), is therefore expected to be negatively linked to children's social development goals. Previous studies show that focusing on friendship and positive relationships in a class can help reduce the rate of bullying in the group (Boulton, Trueman, Chau, Whiteland & Amatya, 1999), and enhance empathic and moral values among children (Hoffman, 2000). Recently, Rudolph and colleagues (2011) established that children with social development goals engage in more constructive responses to bullying. These findings provide support for the hypothesis that children high on social development goals not only have more adaptive responses to bullying by others, but also bully less themselves.

Demonstration-approach goals conceptually overlap with the agentic goal from Locke's (2000) model of interpersonal goals, that is aimed at achieving power, status, or influence in relationships. Agentic goals have been found to be positively related to (proactive) aggression and negatively associated with prosocial behavior (Ojanen et al., 2005; Salmivalli, Ojanen, Haanpää & Peets, 2005). A similar pattern is expected for demonstration-approach goals, in that children high on demonstration-approach goals are more likely to show negative behavior. In their study on children's social goal orientation and responses to peer aggression, Rudolph and colleagues (2011) indeed found that demonstration-approach goals predicted more negative peer perceptions and less prosocial behavior. It is therefore expected that demonstration-approach goals result in more antisocial behavior, including bullying. We hypothesize that the more importance children assign to approach goals, the more they are likely to bully.

Demonstration-avoidance goals lead to negative beliefs and behaviors, and hinder the formation of positive peer relationships (Ryan & Shim, 2006). Children high on these goals want to avoid being viewed as foolish or a loser (Rudolph et al., 2011). We hypothesize that avoidance goals are positively associated with bullying. However, there is also evidence that some children with demonstration-avoidance goals prefer withdrawal from social situations, as that is safer and satisfies the goal of avoiding possible negative outcomes (Ryan & Shim, 2008). These children try to avoid participation in social interactions, including bullying. Therefore, we expect the positive relation between demonstration-avoidance goals and bullying to be weaker than the positive relation between demonstration-approach goals and bullying.

Classroom Norms

Individual-level characteristics, such as one's social achievement goals, or gender, play an important role when trying to explain bullying behavior. But to fully understand bullying, group-level factors should also be taken into account, as bullying involves complex associations with others (Salmivalli, 2010). The large body of literature on peer influence shows that peers play important, and sometimes even critical roles in children's lives (for a review, see Deater-Deckard, 2001). Whether a child bullies or not, is thus likely to be dependent on the child's peers, their attitudes, opinions, and behavior. Previous research shows that this is indeed the case; placing bullying in the group context helps us to better understand an individual's involvement in bullying. Espelage, Holt, and Henkel (2003), for example, found that for middle school students bullying within the peer group is predictive of individual bullying. Furthermore, it has been shown that children from the same peer network behave in similar ways in bullying situations (Huitsing & Veenstra, 2012; Salmivalli, Huttunen & Lagerspetz, 1997). Because it has been established that bullying takes place

mainly in groups from the same school classes (Smith & Brain, 2000; Wolke et al., 2001), in the context of this study peer influence will be interpreted as the influence of the (bullying behavior of the) other children in the class. Taking the above findings into account, the second question that will be investigated in the present study is whether the hypothesized relationships between individual social achievement goals and bullying are moderated by the classroom norm of bullying.

In the broadest sense, norms are codes of conduct that prescribe behaviors that members of a group can enact. Prior research has examined the impact of both descriptive norms, estimates of the frequency of a behavior within a group, and injunctive norms, estimates of normative beliefs about the appropriateness or acceptance of the behavior, on aggression in social contexts (Cialdini, Kallgren & Reno, 1991; Henry et al., 2000; Scholte, Sentse & Granic, 2010). In the present study, we focus on the descriptive classroom norm of bullying. Descriptive norms refer to individuals' beliefs about how widespread certain behavior is, and provide information about the strength of the norm. The greater the prevalence of behavior, the greater the likelihood that individuals will believe that engaging in the behavior is normative and legitimate (Ang, Ong, Lim & Lim, 2010; Rimal & Real, 2003). Bullying incidence has been found to increase when endorsed by a peer group and regarded as a group norm (Duffy & Nesdale, 2008). We therefore hypothesize the descriptive classroom norm of bullying, i.e. the average bullying behavior in the class, to be positively related to individual bullying. In addition, we hypothesize the classroom norm of bullying to moderate the relationship between social achievement goals and bullying. We thus expect the association between individual social achievement goals and bullying to be dependent on the average bullying behavior in the class.

First, we expect that children high on social development goals, who thus value positive relationships with peers and who have a natural tendency not to bully, are negatively

affected by the bullying behavior of their classmates, and as a result are more likely to bully themselves if a probullying classroom norm exists. In other words, we expect the negative relation between social development goals and bullying to become weaker in classes where the mean level of bullying is high.

Second, we hypothesize the positive relationship between demonstration-approach goals and bullying to become stronger in classes where bullying is the norm. In classes with a probullying classroom norm, children high on demonstration-approach goals see bullying as legitimate behavior to obtain their goals. Children with demonstration-approach goals in general are more likely to bully, and we expect that in classes where the mean level of bullying is high, this tendency becomes even more pronounced.

Finally, we expect that for children high on demonstration-avoidance goals, thus striving to avoid negative judgments from peers (Ryan & Shim, 2006), bullying behavior will be strongly affected by what appears to be the class norm. In classes with a high level of bullying, we expect children high on demonstration-avoidance goals to bully more. This hypothesis is in accordance with the line of reasoning expressed by Compas and colleagues (2001) who argued that because avoidance goals involve a concern about negative feedback, peer aggression (i.e., a high class level of aggression) could trigger involuntary rather than planned responses. Children with avoidance goals may not initiate bullying, but engage in it because they do not want to act differently than the rest of the class, in order to avoid becoming a victim themselves.

The Present Study

In sum, in the present study we will investigate whether children's social achievement goals are related to their bullying behavior. We expect social development goals to be negatively related to bullying, and demonstration-approach and demonstration-avoidance

goals to be positively related to bullying. We also hypothesize the classroom behavioral norm of bullying (i.e., the average bullying behavior in the class) to be positively associated with individual bullying. In addition, it will be investigated whether the hypothesized relationships between social achievement goals and bullying are moderated by the classroom norm of bullying. The overall aim of this study is to assess whether social achievement goals might help explain why some children bully and others not.

4. DATA AND METHOD

Participants

Data stem from the Dutch KiVa antibullying intervention program, an originally Finnish program, that is currently introduced and experimentally tested in the Netherlands. KiVa enjoys a multifaceted theoretical background and is based on the idea that bullying is a group phenomenon. The program involves both universal and indicated actions to prevent the emergence of new cases of bullying and to stop ongoing bullying. Finnish evaluation studies provide clear evidence of the effectiveness of KiVa (for more information on the KiVa program, see Kärnä et al., 2011; Salmivalli, Kärnä & Poskiparta, 2011). The data used in the present study stem from the first wave (the pre-test), collected in May 2012 at 99 elementary schools¹. All schools involved in the project volunteered to do so. In total 8.760 students participated, of which approximately 50 percent were girls. The students were in grades 4 to 7, with their age between 7 and 12 years. On average, 22 children per classroom filled in the questionnaire. We selected only those classes in which at least 10 children participated in the study, resulting in a total of 8.167 participating students from 392 school classes.

Procedure

Internet-based questionnaires were filled out by students during regular school hours. Only the students whose parents provided consent, participated. They were assured that their answers would remain strictly confidential and would not be disclosed to, for example, teachers or parents. The process of filling out the questionnaires was administered by teachers, who received detailed instructions prior to the data collection.

¹ It should be noted here that the dataset used in this study is a preliminary one. Therefore, some variables that should be incorporated from a theoretical point of view, are not yet available and therefore ignored in the statistical analyses.

Students were asked a wide variety of questions, including questions on their well-being at school and friendships with other students. There were also a number of bully-related questions asked. Before these questions were asked, children watched a movie in which it was explained what bullying constitutes. Different examples of bullying were given, and it was emphasized that the intentional and repetitive nature, and the imbalance of power between bullies and victims distinguish bullying from teasing (Olweus, 1993).

Measures

Bullying

To assess bullying at the individual level, the 11 questions regarding self-reported bullying from the Olweus bully/victim questionnaire (BVQ) were used (Olweus, 1996). Students were asked how often they bullied others in the past couple of months. Answer categories ranged from 'It did not happen' (score of 1) to 'Several times per week' (score of 5). The scores on these items were combined and a mean score was computed (Cronbach's alpha 0,89).

The class level of bullying was based on the mean level of bullying in each class. The mean scores of all students were combined and divided by the total number of students in the class in order to account for differences in class size.

Social Achievement Goals

In order to measure the social achievement goals of students the scales as suggested by Rudolph et al. (2011) were used.

Social development goals. The original scale for social development goals consists of eight items, however, in the present study only the six items that loaded highest on the factor 'social development goals' (in the analyses performed by Rudolph et al.) were used. Children had to indicate on a five-point Likert scale whether six statements (such as 'I try to figure out

what makes a good friend' and 'One of my main goals is to get to know other kids better') were applicable to them or not. The scores on these six items were combined and a mean score was calculated (Cronbach's alpha 0,80). A higher score indicates that a child assigns more importance to social development goals.

Demonstration-approach goals. To measure children's demonstration-approach goals, the scores on five items, including 'It is important to me that other kids think I am popular' and 'My goal is to show other kids how much everyone likes me', were combined (Cronbach's alpha 0,81), and a mean score was calculated.

Demonstration-avoidance goals. The same procedure as described above was followed for the demonstration-avoidance goals. Children's mean score on seven items concerning demonstration-avoidance ('My main goal is to make sure I don't look like a loser' and 'When I am around other kids, I don't want to be made fun of) was calculated (Cronbach's alpha 0,75). Again a high score indicates that a child thinks the goal is more important.

Analytical Strategy

Multilevel analyses were used to account for the violation of non-independence of observations caused by the nested structure of the data when examining individual (students) and group (class) effects together in one model. In this study the dependent variable was bullying at the individual level. The independent variables social development, demonstration-approach and demonstration-avoidance goals, and gender (entered as a dummy variable in the analyses, with 0 = girl; 1 = boy) were also measured at the individual level. The class level of bullying was measured at the group level. We have centered all variables around their grand mean before they entered the multilevel prediction, that is for every participant the grand mean was subtracted from the raw scores. Cross-level interactions between individual social achievement goals and the class level of bullying were added to the

model to examine the moderating effect of the classroom norm of bullying on the hypothesized relationships between individual social achievement goals and self-reported bullying.

The analyses were conducted in different steps. In the first model the effect of individual social achievement goals on bullying, while controlling for gender, was examined. In the second model we examined to what extent this relationship was affected by the class level of bullying, and whether, in the third model, a moderating effect via the interaction between the individual social achievement goals and the class level of bullying could be detected. We first conducted these analyses for all three social achievement goals separately. In the final model the three goals were entered in the model simultaneously to examine the unique effect of each goal. Significant interactions were followed up with simple slope analyses to further clarify the relationship.

5. RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 shows the means and standard deviations of all variables used in this study for girls and boys separately, as well as for the total sample. As compared to girls, for boys the means of demonstration-approach goals and bullying were somewhat higher and the mean of demonstration-avoidance goals was somewhat lower. No significant differences were found for social development goals.

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Girls (<i>n</i> = 4.111)		Boys (<i>n</i> = 4.056)		Difference		Total (<i>n</i> = 8.167)	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	<i>t</i>	Mean	SD
Social Development	3,61	0,91	3,59	0,95	0,02	0,97	3,60	0,93
Demonstration-approach	2,59	1,01	2,93	1,08	-0,34	-14,75*	2,76	1,06
Demonstration-avoidance	2,97	0,96	2,87	0,96	0,10	4,52*	2,92	0,96
Bullying	1,17	0,40	1,27	0,40	-0,10	-9,71*	1,22	0,45
Class Level Bullying							1,22	0,14

Note. These are the means and standard deviations of the raw scores of social achievement goals and bullying. In the multilevel analyses grand mean centered variables are used.

* $p < 0,01$

The results of the correlational analyses are displayed in Table 2, for boys and girls separately. In light of the hypotheses the most important correlations are discussed. As expected, demonstration-approach goals are positively related to bullying. No significant correlation between social development and demonstration-avoidance goals and bullying were found. Furthermore, demonstration-approach and demonstration-avoidance goals are

positively correlated. Somewhat more surprising is the positive correlation between social development and demonstration-approach goals. The class level of bullying is positively correlated with both social development and demonstration-approach goals, and individual bullying. All correlations between the variables under study were comparable in strength, direction, and significance for boys and girls.

Table 2 Correlations between Main Variables

	1	2	3	4	5
1. Social Development		0,28*	0,24*	0,01	0,05*
2. Demonstration-approach	0,34*		0,25*	0,15*	0,16*
3. Demonstration-avoidance	0,28*	0,26*		0,04	- 0,01
4. Bullying	0,02	0,17*	0,04		0,31*
5. Class Level Bullying	0,07*	0,17*	0,00	0,32*	

Note. The correlations for girls are reported above the diagonal, and the correlations for boys below the diagonal.

* $p < 0,01$

Multilevel Analyses

In Table 3 the parameter estimates, standard errors, and t values for the multilevel models are shown. Only the results of the models with individual- and class-level variables, and cross-level interactions (model 3) are presented. All parameter estimates reported are the coefficients while controlling for all other explanatory variables in the model.

Individual-level effects. In the multilevel model for social achievement goals and bullying, predictors on the individual level were the three social achievement goals and

Table 3 Results of Multilevel Regression Analyses for Individual Bullying

	Social Development Goals			Demonstration-approach Goals			Demonstration-avoidance Goals			Final Model		
	<i>b</i>	SE	<i>t</i>	<i>b</i>	SE	<i>t</i>	<i>b</i>	SE	<i>T</i>	<i>B</i>	SE	<i>t</i>
Intercept	-0,048	0,007	-7,256**	-0,043	0,007	-6,404**	-0,049	0,007	-7,354**	-0,042	0,007	-6,289**
Gender (1 = boy)	0,096	0,009	10,181**	0,079	0,009	8,346**	0,098	0,009	10,344**	0,078	0,010	8,183**
Social Development (SD)	-0,002	0,005	-0,383							-0,024	0,007	-6,289**
Demonstration-approach (DAP)				0,048	0,005	10,687**				0,053	0,005	10,975**
Demonstration-avoidance (DAV)							0,017	0,005	3,435*	0,008	0,005	1,628
Class Level Bullying (CLB)	1,002	0,034	29,650**	0,918	0,034	26,757**	1,004	0,034	29,822**	0,921	0,034	26,797**
SD x CLB	0,023	0,036	0,621							-0,069	0,040	-1,731
DA P x CLB				0,134	0,030	4,415**				0,154	0,033	4,656**
DAV x CLB							0,046	0,035	1,315	0,012	0,037	0,313
Deviance	9.196			9.059			9.182			9.036		
Decrease Deviance	702** (<i>df</i> =2)			662** (<i>df</i> =2)			704** (<i>df</i> =2)			671** (<i>df</i> =4)		

Note. Only models 3 (with individual- and class-level variables and cross-level interactions) are reported here. Decrease in deviance indicates whether or not the model fits the data better than the former model (model 3 as compared to model 1 and 2). The decrease in deviance has approximately a chi-square distribution with the degrees of freedom equal to the difference in the number of parameters of the models.

* $p < 0,01$; ** $p < 0,001$

gender. In the model with only social development goals as the independent variable, no significant (first column of Table 3) relation between social development goals and bullying was found. In the final model, where we entered the three achievement goals simultaneously, we did find such a relation ($b = -0,024$; $p < 0,001$). These findings were in line with the first hypothesis of this study: social development goals are negatively related to bullying. Also demonstration-approach goals were related to bullying in the expected direction ($b = 0,048$; $p < 0,001$): children high on demonstration-approach goals tend to bully more than children without these goals. Similarly, demonstration-avoidance goals were positively associated with bullying ($b = 0,017$; $p < 0,01$). However, in the final model with all three achievement goals, this relation failed to reach significance. Gender was found to be significantly related to bullying, in that boys bully more than girls ($p < 0,001$).

Classroom-level effects. To test for the effect of the classroom norm of bullying on individual bullying, the class level of bullying and the cross-level interactions between this classroom mean and individual social achievement goals were added. In all three separate models for the social achievement goals (first three columns of Table 3), the class level of bullying was positively related to individual bullying. Of all the explanatory variables taken into account in this study, the class level of bullying seems the most strongly associated with individual bullying. The higher the class level of bullying, the more individual children tend to bully ($b = 0,921$; $p < 0,001$ for the final model; last column of Table 3).

Next to that, we found a significant cross-level interaction effect between individual demonstration-approach goals and the class level of bullying. These results indicate that the classroom norm of bullying moderates the relation between demonstration-approach goals and bullying, meaning that the relation between demonstration-approach goals and bullying at the individual level differs by classroom. To interpret this cross-level interaction-effect we calculated the simple slopes (see Figure 1). The calculations were based on the parameter

estimates from the final model of Table 3. Figure 1 shows that in classes where bullying is the norm (high class-level of bullying), demonstration-approach goals were more strongly related to individual bullying ($b = 0,075$; $p < 0,001$) than in classes with a low class-level of bullying ($b = 0,032$; $p < 0,001$). No evidence was found for the hypotheses that the classroom norm of bullying moderates the relation between social development goals and demonstration-avoidance goals and bullying. In other words, the negative relation between social development goals and bullying, and the positive relation between demonstration-avoidance goals and bullying were not dependent on the average level of bullying in the class.

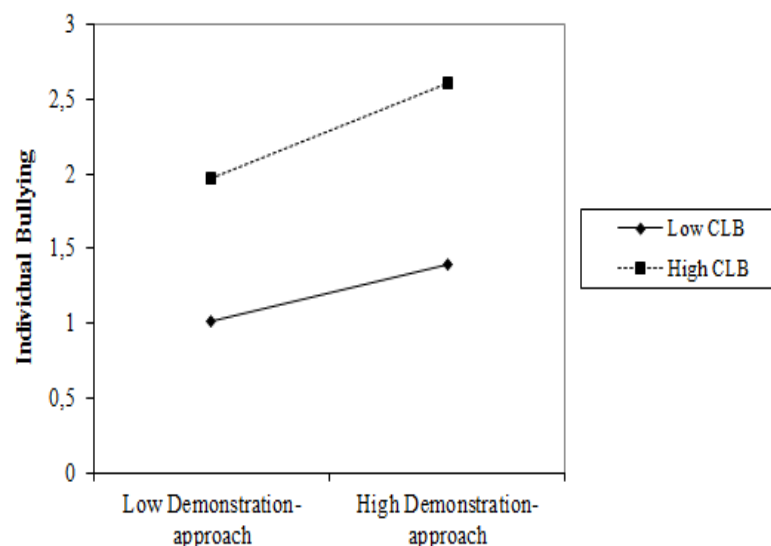


Figure 1 Graphical presentation of the interaction of individual demonstration-approach goals and the classroom norm of bullying in relation to individual bullying.

To determine the model fit we calculated the decrease in deviance of the models with group-level variables as compared to the (nested) models with only individual-level variables. A significant decrease in deviance indicates a significant improvement of the model. The models in which the classroom norm of bullying was taken into account, improved significantly compared to the models with only individual social achievement goals for all three separate models and the final model (see last two rows Table 3).

6. DISCUSSION

Social Achievement Goals and Bullying

The starting point of this study was the finding of Rudolph et al. (2011) that children's social goal orientation predict their responses to peer aggression. Children with social development goals showed more adaptive responses to peer aggression, whereas children with demonstration goals showed more negative responses to bullying. In the present study it was investigated whether social achievement goals were, next to contributing to the understanding of responses to bullying, also helpful in explaining actual bullying behavior. Multilevel analyses revealed that at the individual level, social achievement goals were indeed related to bullying.

As expected and consistent with the results of the study of Rudolph and colleagues (2011), social development goals were negatively related to bullying. Children high on social development goals, who want to develop and retain positive relationships with peers, bully less than children without these goals. Demonstration-approach goals were also associated with bullying in the expected direction: children high on these goals, who strive to demonstrate their social competence and receive positive judgments of peers (Ryan & Shim, 2006), bully more than children that do not have these goals. Demonstration-avoidance goals were positively related to bullying as well. As expected, this relation was less pronounced than for demonstration-approach goals and bullying.

It is interesting to note here that the negative relation between social development goals and bullying was only statistically significant when looked at in combination with the two demonstration goals (as we did in the final model, where we entered the three achievement goals simultaneously). For the positive relation between demonstration-avoidance goals and bullying the opposite was true; a statistically significant relation was

found only in the separate model of demonstration-avoidance goals and bullying. When looked at in combination with the other two social achievement goals, the positive relation became non-significant. What these findings suggest is that in future studies of social achievement goals and bullying the possible interactions between the three goals should not be neglected. It could be, for example, that children high on both demonstration-approach and social development goals bully less than children high on demonstration-approach goals and low on social development goals. Future research might do well test the different combinations of social achievement goals, and the relation between these interactions and bullying behavior.

Traditionally, in the field of social goals, of central focus is the content approach which is mostly concerned with which outcomes individuals try to pursue. According to the content approach individuals behave in a certain way because they want to obtain certain outcomes (Ryan & Shim, 2006). Previous research has highlighted the various goals one can strive for in social situations, such as affiliation (Sanderson, Rahm, Beigbeder & Metts, 2005), fun (Wentzel, 2000), and revenge (Rose & Asher, 1999). Within the context of bullying, status goals have found to be particularly important (Sijtsema et al., 2009).

The results of the present study suggest that also the achievement goal approach is of relevance when trying to explain children's bullying behavior. For all three dimensions of social achievement a link with bullying was found. Social achievement goals give information on children's orientation to social competence, and provide insight into which social outcomes will make them feel socially competent. Individuals have different social goal orientations, and therefore different outcomes will make them feel socially competent (Ryan & Shim, 2008). To obtain these outcomes and feel socially competent, one behaves in a way that makes it more likely that these outcomes will be achieved. The mechanism described here not only explains why social goal orientation is related to bullying behavior, but also provides an

answer to the question why such a relation exist; namely that the social outcomes individuals try to pursue mediate the relationship between their social achievement goals and bullying behavior.

The positive relation found in the present study between demonstration-approach goals and bullying can also be explained in the light of the combined content (focusing on outcomes) and achievement goal (focusing on orientation) approach. Children high on demonstration-approach goals will feel socially competent and successful when they obtain outcomes such as status or popularity (cf. Sijtsema et al., 2009), and are therefore more likely to bully. Combining the content and achievement goal approach thus makes sense from both a theoretical and practical point of view.

Classroom Norm of Bullying

Next to investigating the relationship between social achievement goals and bullying at the individual level, we also addressed group-level factors. In line with our expectations and the results of previous research (Espelage et al., 2003; Kärnä, Salmivalli, Poskiparta & Voeten, 2008), we found that the classroom norm of bullying is positively associated with individual bullying behavior. This finding implies that children, when it comes to bullying, are strongly affected by their classmates and the bullying climate in the class. The finding that the classroom norm of bullying is associated with individual bullying behavior appears especially relevant for children with demonstration-approach goals. Children with these goals highly value the positive judgments of their peers (Ryan & Shim, 2006), and are therefore more likely to be influenced by the bullying behavior of their peers. The findings of this study provide support for this line of reasoning, as it was found that in classrooms where the average level of bullying was high the positive relationship between demonstration-approach goals and bullying was stronger as compared to classes where the average level of bullying

was low. The probullying classroom norm makes it more likely children high on demonstration-approach goals will perceive bullying as legitimate behavior to receive positive feedback, attain social prestige, and a good reputation compared to others (Ryan & Shim, 2008).

In her 2010 review of the literature on the group involvement in bullying, Salmivalli noted that in the context of bullying it should be remembered that peers can exert positive influence on children as well. Children who believe that their friends expect them to support victims are more willing to intervene in bullying situations (Rigby & Johnson, 2006), and it has been found that defenders of victims often form cliques with other defenders (Salmivalli et al., 1997). Positive peer influence in the context of bullying has received far less attention than negative peer influence (or, as Salmivalli (2010, page 116) stated it, “has so far been ignored”). Therefore, future research should try to address this issue, for example by investigating the effect of the class level of defending behavior or social development goals.

The reason that we chose the classroom as the context in the present study is because previous research revealed that bullying takes place mainly in groups from the same school classes (Smith & Brain, 2000). However, as schools can differ in their bullying climate too, future research might do well to include the school as a third level in the analyses. The KiVa antibullying program not only tries to change the bullying climate in the class, but also strives to change the bullying climate at the school level. Whether KiVa is able to achieve such changes and what the effect of these changes might be, can be estimated when school level variables are also incorporated in the multilevel models.

Strengths and Limitations

Children's social goal orientation and its effect on bullying behavior is a relatively new field of research, that recently received considerable attention (Caravita & Cillessen, 2012;

Ojanen et al., 2005; Rudolph et al., 2011). The results found in the present study are in line with the findings of these studies, and provide further evidence for the usefulness of social achievement goals when trying to explain and understand better bullying behavior. Social achievement goals have been shown to be related to both bullying and responses to bullying. A next step could be to investigate whether social achievement goals are also associated with victimization. The data used in the present study stem from a rich, large population-based sample of primary school children (N=8.167), which makes the generalizability of the results found plausible.

Despite these strengths, there are some limitations that should be taken into account when reviewing the results of the current study. First, the results are based on cross-sectional data. Therefore, we formulated the results in a ‘conservative’ way, such as that demonstration-approach goals are positively related to bullying, and the individual level of bullying is associated with the class level of bullying. We do not speak of social achievement goals as predictors of bullying, and no conclusions can be made about causality. Fortunately, due to the longitudinal design of the KiVa study, this issue of causality could be addressed in the near future.

Another limitation of this study lies in the fact that a preliminary dataset is used. As a result, not all information that would be interesting to incorporate in the analyses from a theoretical point of view, was available yet. Dijkstra, Lindenberg, and Veenstra (2008), for example, found evidence that it is rather the behavior of popular students (the popularity norm) than the behavior of all peers (the class norm) that influences the behavior of individual students in the class. This finding could be applicable to the relationships investigated in the present study; namely that the relationship between individual social achievement goals and bullying is mainly influenced by the bullying behavior of popular students.

To conclude, results of the present study show that for primary school children social achievement goals are related to bullying. In addition, it was found that the bullying behavior of children is strongly affected by the bullying behavior of their classmates. This seems to be especially so for children high on demonstration-approach goals. These findings suggest that bullying interventions should try to shift children's priorities away from demonstrating to developing their social competence, and that children should be encouraged to view their relationships as a subject of change and improvement (Rudolph et al., 2011). The KiVa program, that is targeted at all students in school and that is trying to influence the classroom norms regarding bullying, offers an unique opportunity to study possible developments in children's social achievements goals, and the effects of these changes on their bullying behavior, over time.

7. REFERENCES

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