Bullying Prevention as a Social Justice Issue:
Implications With Asian American Elementary School Students

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ABSTRACT: This study examined Asian American elementary students’ experience with victimization. Data were collected from 313 fourth and fifth graders from an ethnically diverse elementary school in southern California. Most participants self-identified as Asian/Asian American and spoke an Asian language at home. Results indicated that Asian American students did not differ from non–Asian American peers on the frequency of victimization. However, respect for diversity was a significant predictor for victimization for Asian American students, but not for non–Asian American students. Furthermore, a larger percentage of the Asian American students attributed the reasons for their victimization to cultural differences, including language, the model minority myth, physical appearance, and poor performance in sports compared to non–Asian American students. Results suggest that discrimination is a salient factor contributing to Asian American students’ experience with victimization. Implications focus on how school psychologists can be advocates for victims and design school-based bullying prevention programs.

Public schools in the United States are becoming more and more diverse. Currently, nearly 30% of all students in public schools are foreign born or have foreign-born parents (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013). Asian Americans comprise the fastest growing immigrant group, and are a heterogeneous group in the United States, currently constituting 5.4% of the total population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). The number of children of Asian immigrants entering the U.S. education system has also increased drastically. It is projected that by 2024, there will be more than 3 million Asian/Pacific Islander (hereinafter referred to as Asian American) students enrolled in the U.S. public school system, representing 6% of the school-aged population (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015).

Despite the substantial growth of Asian American students in U.S. schools and the high prevalence rates of school bullying, little research has focused on the school-bullying experiences of Asian American students, especially among elementary-aged students (for an exception see Shea, Wang, Shi,
This lack of research on Asian American students may be related to the “model minority” stereotype, which assumes that Asian American students are academically successful, high achieving, and, hence, are doing well. However, in reality, Asian American students often encounter discrimination, peer victimization, negative school climates, pressure to conform to racial stereotypes, and relatively high rates of mental health difficulties (Koo, Peguero, & Shekarkhar, 2012; Rosenbloom & Way, 2004; Wang & Atwal, 2015; Zhou, Peverly, Xin, Huang, & Wang, 2003). As a result, studies that focus on the unique challenges related to peer victimization for Asian American students are greatly needed. Furthermore, because Asian Americans are a heterogeneous group and Asian American students from different countries may have different experiences at school, it is important to disaggregate data and examine the differences within Asian ethnic groups. In addition, within the field of school psychology, few researchers have discussed bullying prevention for Asian American students as a social justice issue.

The current article aims to fill these gaps in the literature and research by presenting quantitative and qualitative data on Asian American elementary students’ experiences with bullying and school climate (e.g., racial climate), as well as reasons students attributed to their bullying. Specific strategies to promote social justice and prevent bullying for Asian American students will be discussed.

BULLYING PREVENTION AS A SOCIAL JUSTICE ISSUE

School psychologists have identified promoting nondiscriminatory practices as an important component of the definition of social justice (Shriberg et al., 2008; Shriberg, Wynne, Briggs, Bartucci, & Lombardo, 2011). However, educational inequities along racial and ethnic lines still exist. For example, a large proportion of students of color have experienced discrimination in schools (Sirin et al., 2015). While African American and Latino American students have reported more discrimination from adults (e.g., teachers), Asian American students have reported more discrimination from peers possibly due to the model minority belief and perceived favoritism by teachers (Benner & Graham, 2013; Rosenbloom & Way, 2004). Additionally, researchers have suggested that both recent immigrants and U.S.-born Asian American students’ experiences with peer victimization often relate to discrimination (Kim, Wang, Deng, Alvarez, & Li, 2011; Qin, Way, & Rana, 2008; Rosenbloom & Way, 2004).

However, few studies have focused on the discrimination and peer victimization experiences among Asian American elementary students. Within the limited research, Asian American students have reported higher levels of peer victimization, as well as racial or peer ethnic victimization, than students of other ethnic backgrounds (Fisher, Wallace, & Fenton, 2000; Hoglund & Hosan, 2013; Larochette, Murphy, & Craig, 2010; Rosenbloom & Way, 2004). Discrimination and peer victimization among Asian American students warrant more research, because both negatively contribute to psychological well-being (e.g., depression; Benner & Graham, 2013; Kim et al., 2011; Wang & Atwal, 2015). We contend that peer victimization among Asian American students is a social justice issue, and that school psychologists should take actions against bullying to promote social justice.

Various theories have attempted to explain why ethnic minorities, such as Asian Americans, are discriminated against based on their ethnicity. Two such theories include the similarity hypothesis and the perpetual foreigner stereotype. The similarity hypothesis suggests that “individuals ‘like’ others that are perceived to be similar to themselves” and “predicts that less acculturated individuals may encounter more discrimination” (Goto, Gee, & Takeuchi, 2002, p. 213). The perpetual foreigner stereotype has been defined as the stereotypical belief that ethnic minority members in the United States are foreigners and will always be seen as the “other” (Tuan, 1998). For example, Devos and Banaji (2005) found that African Americans and Asian Americans are associated less with being “American” than White Americans. Both the similarity hypothesis and perpetual foreigner stereotype posit that ethnic minorities are discriminated against due to their being different from the ethnic majority, which increases their likelihood of being discriminated against or bullied. Those differences may include, but are not limited to, physical appearance (e.g., skin color, size), language (accents, pronunciation of names), and perceived
strengths (e.g., model minority myth) and weaknesses (e.g., not good at sports) (Kim et al., 2011; Qin et al., 2008). Although these perceived differences from the ethnic majority have been noted and linked to adolescents’ experience of discrimination (Kim et al., 2011; Qin et al., 2008), few studies have examined how they may be related to Asian American elementary school students’ attribution of the reasons related to bullying.

**SCHOOL CLIMATE AND VICTIMIZATION/DISCRIMINATION**

School climate has been defined as “the milieu created by interactions among and between adults and students and individuals' beliefs and attitudes (e.g., feelings about school, approval/disapproval of bullying)” (Wang, Berry, & Swearer, 2013, p. 297). Theories (e.g., social disorganization theory and social control theory) have suggested that bullying and delinquent behaviors are discouraged when social organizations and control/supervision (as part of a positive school climate) are present at school (Espelage & Swearer, 2009; Wang et al., 2013). Previous research has suggested that when students perceive a positive school climate and better sense of belonging to school, they tend to have better social–emotional outcomes (including less bullying and discrimination). For example, a positive school climate (including positive student–teacher relationships, sense of belonging) has been found to protect students (including Asian American students) from victimization (Connell, El Sayed, Reingle Gonzalez, & Schell-Busey, 2015). Alternatively, a negative school climate (e.g., negative student–teacher relations, student–student relations) has been found to predict discrimination (Bellmore, Nishina, You, & Ma, 2012; Wang & Atwal, 2015). Specific school climate factors, such as teacher–student relations, respect for diversity, and clarity of expectations, have been found to predict lower peer victimization, while teacher use of punitive techniques were related to more victimization (Wang, Atwal, Couch, & Rodriguez, 2015; Yang, Bear, Boyer, & Hearn, 2014). However, other researchers have found that individual factors such as race and gender, instead of school-level factors related to climate (e.g., school safety, support, cohesion), predicted racial victimization (Larochette et al., 2010).

To examine the relationship between Asian American elementary students’ experiences with victimization and perceptions of school climate, we asked the following research questions:

- Do Asian American students experience more bullying than their non–Asian American peers?
- What school climate factors contribute to Asian American students’ experience with bullying? Are those factors similar or different for non–Asian American students?
- What are the reasons Asian American and non–Asian American students attributed to their bullying?

**METHOD**

Data were collected from 313 (52.1% male) fourth (n = 162, 52.3%) and fifth (n = 148, 47.1%) graders (three students did not report their grade level) (age mean = 10.03, SD = 0.73, range = 9–12) from an ethnically diverse elementary school in southern California, where Asians constitute the largest ethnic group. Based on the data from 2014 to 2015 School Accountability Report Card on the school district website, 978 students were enrolled in this school, including 8.3% students in special education, 40.4% qualifying for English language learner support, and 28.2% qualifying for free or reduced price lunch. With respect to ethnicity, the students were 3.9% African American, 53.9% Asian, 4.3% Filipino, 17.1% Hispanic/Latino, 0.8% Pacific Islander, 14.9% Caucasian, and 5.1% multiracial. In the current sample, 170 (54.3%) of the participants self-identified as Asian/Asian American, 23 (7.3%) identified as White/Caucasian, 29 (9.3%) identified as Hispanic/Latino, 5 (1.6%) identified as Native American, 13 (4.2%) identified as African American, 3 (1.0%) identified as biracial, 60 (19.2%) identified as other, and 10 (3.2%) students did not report their race/ethnicity. We did not collect specific data on the country of origin or generation status for Asian American students, but data on languages spoken at home were collected. Among Asian American students, 148 (87.6%) of them spoke at least one Asian language at home, suggesting that they...
might be recent immigrants, and 22 (12.9%) were native English speakers who only spoke English at home. We inferred the countries of origin/ethnicities of the Asian American students based on the languages spoken at home. Most Asian American students in the sample were Indian (45; 26.7%), Korean (31; 18.2%), Japanese (21; 12.4%), Chinese (14; 8.3%), Filipino (12; 7.1%), and Indian/Sri Lankan (12; 7.1%). See Table 1 for more detail.

### Table 1. Home Languages and Countries of Origin for Asian American Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Home Language</th>
<th>Country of Origin (Inferred Based on the Home Language)</th>
<th>Frequency (%) by Language</th>
<th>Frequency (%) by country</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bangla/Bengali</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>1 (0.6)</td>
<td>45 (26.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindi</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>12 (7.1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marthi</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>4 (2.4)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telugu</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>16 (9.4)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindi, Kannada, Telugu</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>1 (0.6)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oriya</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>1 (0.6)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindi, Punjabi</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>2 (1.2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kannada</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>3 (1.8)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telugu, Hindi</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>3 (1.8)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urdu, Telugu</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>1 (0.6)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bengali, Hindi</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>1 (0.6)</td>
<td>45 (26.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korean</td>
<td>South or North Korea</td>
<td>31 (18.2)</td>
<td>31 (18.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japanese</td>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>21 (12.4)</td>
<td>21 (12.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>12 (7.1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taiwanese, Chinese</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>1 (0.6)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cantonese</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>1 (0.6)</td>
<td>14 (8.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tamil, Telugu</td>
<td>India/Sri Lanka</td>
<td>1 (0.6)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tamil</td>
<td>India/Sri Lanka</td>
<td>11 (6.5)</td>
<td>12 (7.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Filipino</td>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>6 (3.5)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tagalog</td>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>5 (2.9)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tagalog, Chinese</td>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>1 (0.6)</td>
<td>12 (7.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urdu</td>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>4 (2.4)</td>
<td>4 (2.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japanese, Korean&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Japan/South or North Korean</td>
<td>2 (1.2)</td>
<td>2 (1.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sri Lankan</td>
<td>Sri Lanka</td>
<td>1 (0.6)</td>
<td>1 (0.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandarin, Cantonese, Korean&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>China/South or North Korea</td>
<td>1 (0.6)</td>
<td>1 (0.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indonesian</td>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>1 (0.6)</td>
<td>1 (0.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thai</td>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>1 (0.6)</td>
<td>1 (0.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pashto</td>
<td>Pakistan/Afghanistan</td>
<td>1 (0.6)</td>
<td>1 (0.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persian/ Farsi</td>
<td>Iran</td>
<td>1 (0.6)</td>
<td>1 (0.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burmese</td>
<td>Myanmar</td>
<td>1 (0.6)</td>
<td>1 (0.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English only</td>
<td>Possibly U.S.-born Asian</td>
<td>22 (12.9)</td>
<td>22 (12.9)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>a</sup>Multiethnic
**Measures**

Data were collected from students’ self-report through an online anonymous survey. A passive consent method was used. Parents were notified about this study and were given 1 week to decide if they wished to opt their child out of the study. All students provided assent and completed the online survey during regular class time on a normal school day. In addition to questions on demographic information and questionnaires on bullying/victimization and school climate, students were also asked to elaborate on why they thought they were bullied.

The Verbal and Physical Bullying Scale–Victimization (VPBS-V; Swearer, Turner, Givens, & Pollack, 2008) is an 11-item scale that assesses both verbal/relational (7 items; sample item: “called me names”) and physical victimization (4 items; sample item: “pushed me”). All items are scored on a 5-point Likert-type scale (never happened to always happened) with higher scores indicating more frequent peer victimization. Two previous studies have demonstrated high internal consistency (α = .67–.87; Swearer et al., 2008; Radliff, Wang, & Swearer, 2016). The internal consistency in this study was .73, .84, and .86, respectively, for physical victimization, verbal/relational victimization, and the whole scale.

The Verbal and Physical Bullying Scale–Perpetration (VPBS-P; Swearer et al., 2008; Radliff et al., 2015) is an 11-item scale assessing physical and verbal/relational bullying perpetration using items parallel to the VPBS-V. All items are scored on a 5-point Likert-type scale (never happened to always happens) with higher scores indicating more frequent bullying. One previous study has suggested good internal consistency reliability for the VPBS-P (α = .78) and good validity as evidenced by the significant correlation with office referral data (Radliff et al., 2016). In the current study, the internal consistency was .82, .88, and .92, respectively, for physical perpetration, verbal/relational perpetration, and the whole scale.

Six subscales from the Delaware School Climate Surveys (Bear & Yang, 2011) were used to measure school climate, including teacher–student relations (5 items; sample item: “teachers care about their students”), respect for diversity (5 items; sample item: “teachers treat students of all races with respect”), clarity of expectations (4 items; sample item: “rules in this school are made clear to students”), teacher use of positive behavioral techniques (4 items; sample item: “students are praised often”), teacher use of punitive techniques (4 items; sample item: “students are punished a lot”), and teacher use of social–emotional learning techniques (5 items; sample item: “students are taught how to solve conflicts with others”). Students were asked to rate their feelings about their school (Instruction: “This survey is about how you feel about your school this year. Please read each statement and mark the response that best shows how much you agree.”) on a 4-point Likert-type scale (disagree a lot to agree a lot). Previous studies have shown good construct validity and high reliability for these subscales (α = .70 to .81) for elementary school students (Bear & Yang, 2011). In the current study, the internal consistency α was .76 for teacher–student relations, .76 for respect for diversity, .76 for clarity of expectation, .66 for teacher use of positive behavioral techniques, .58 for teacher use of punitive techniques, and .79 for teacher use of social–emotional learning techniques.

**Data Analysis**

Here, *t*-test and ANOVA were used to compare different groups and subgroups on their experience with bullying/victimization. Correlation and regression analyses were used to examine the relationship between bullying/victimization and school climate factors for Asian American students and their non–Asian American peers. For the qualitative data on reasons for being bullied, two researchers (first and third authors) coded the data following the coding process in grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Harry, Sturges, & Klingner, 2005). Because the goal of the study was not to develop a theory out of these data, but rather to identify the distinct themes about the specific reasons that Asian American and non–Asian American students attributed to their bullying, no further theme interrelating or theory development was conducted. Specifically, we applied a three-step coding procedure. First, we read
students’ answers multiple times, and identified descriptive codes based on these data. For example, statements of “bullied for my last name,” “some made fun of my last name,” and “it was funny for them [because] of my name” were summarized under the descriptive code of “names/last names.” This step corresponds to open coding in the grounded theory approach, and the majority of the descriptive codes were the original phrases of the students’ answers and were in vivo codes. Then, the descriptive codes were further summarized to form subtheme and theme codes based on the conceptual commonalities. For example, “names/last names” and “having accents” were summarized to form the subtheme code of “language differences.” Subthemes, such as “language differences,” “physical appearance,” and “model minority myth” were summarized to form the theme code of “cultural differences.”

Last, researchers used the coding schemes developed from the previous two steps to code whether or not students made references to these subthemes. If a specific subtheme was mentioned, it was coded “1”; if not, a code of “0” was entered. Thus, only the existence (yes or no) of the theme or subtheme was coded. To ensure reliability in coding during this last step, both researchers first coded all of these data independently, and then discussed their coding thoroughly until they reached an agreement. The initial intercoder agreement was between 89.2 and 100% for different subthemes. In addition, researchers reflected their assumptions, thoughts, and reactions during coding, and then discussed them thoroughly to reduce biases in their interpretation of the data.

RESULTS

Results indicated that Asian American students did not differ from their non–Asian American peers on the frequency of total victimization, physical, or verbal/relational victimization or bullying perpetration ($t = 1.47, 0.13, 1.93, 1.35, 1.20, 1.40; p = .14, .90, .06, .16, .23, .18$, respectively). Also, $t$-tests also indicated that Asian American students who were native English speakers ($n = 22$) and Asian American students who spoke at least one Asian language at home ($n = 148$) did not differ on their experience with bullying and victimization nor their perceptions of school climate factors. ANOVA was used to compare the seven largest Asian American subgroups (Indian, Korean, Japanese, Chinese, Filipino, Indian/Sri Lankan, and Asian American students who were native English speakers) on their experience with victimization and perpetration and no group differences were identified.

Several school climate factors significantly correlated with total victimization and verbal/relational victimization for the whole sample, including Teacher–Student Relations ($r = -.16, -.20; p = .004, .001$, respectively), Clarity of Expectations ($r = -.15, -.17; p = .009, .004$, respectively), Teachers’ Use of Punitive Techniques ($r = .16, .13; p = .006, .02$, respectively), and Respect for Diversity ($r = -.16, -.17; p = .005, .004$, respectively). Teachers’ Use of Punitive Techniques also correlated with physical victimization ($r = .18; p = .002$). Similarly, Teacher–Student Relations also correlated with verbal/relational bullying perpetration ($r = -.12; p = .04$). Teachers’ Use of Punitive Techniques correlated with total, verbal/relational, and physical perpetration ($r = .26, .26, .21$, respectively; $p < .001$). Respect for Diversity correlated with total and verbal/relational perpetration ($r = -.15, -.17; p = .009, .003$, respectively). The patterns were slightly different for Asian American and non–Asian American students. Clarity of Expectations, Teacher–Student Relations, and Teachers’ Use of Punitive Techniques had more significant correlations with victimization/perpetration for non–Asian American students than Asian American students. Respect for Diversity only correlated with victimization for Asian American students but not for non–Asian American students (Table 2).

Regression analyses confirmed that after controlling for grade level and gender, Respect for Diversity was a significant predictor for victimization for the whole sample ($\beta = -.17, p = .004$), as well as for Asian American students ($\beta = -.21, p = .007$), but not for non–Asian American students ($\beta = -.13, p = .16$) (Table 3).

Furthermore, based on the coding from the qualitative data, a large percentage (37.50%) of the Asian American students who were bullied attributed the reasons for their victimization to cultural differences,
including language (e.g., having accents, the pronunciation of the last names; 9.72%), physical appearance (e.g., skin color, different facial features; 13.89%), the model minority myth (e.g., better academic performance; 6.94%), and poor performance in sports (6.94%). Among non–Asian American students, only 4.3% attributed bullying to language differences, 2.1% to poor performance in sports, and 0% attributed to better academic performance. Other non–cultural-specific reasons for bullying for Asian American students included general statements of being different from others (e.g., personality, 16.67%), not liked by peers/unpopular (16.67%), previous conflict (11.11%), being new or younger (11.11%), and low ability (6.94%). Other non–cultural-specific reasons for bullying for non–Asian American students included not liked by peers/unpopular (25.53%), height and weight differences (e.g., short, fat; 19.1%), previous conflict (14.89%), being nice (8.51%), being weak (6.38%), general statements of being different (4.26%), better performance in sports (4.26%), financial reasons (4.26%), and low ability (2.13%).

**DISCUSSION**

Few studies have focused on Asian American elementary students’ experiences with peer victimization. Results from our study suggest that discrimination is a salient factor contributing to Asian American
students’ experience with victimization, and that a positive school racial climate (e.g., respect for diversity) can protect Asian American students from peer victimization. In addition, consistent with the similarity hypothesis and perpetual foreigner stereotype which posit that ethnic minorities are discriminated against due to their being different from the ethnic majority, we found that a larger percentage (37.5%) of the Asian American students attributed the reasons for their victimization to cultural differences, including language differences, physical appearance, the model minority myth, and poor performance in sports, compared to non–Asian American students (6.4%). Other reasons for bullying appear to be universal to Asian and non–Asian American students, including low popularity, low ability, being different in general, and previous conflict. School psychologists should take these universal as well as cultural-specific factors (e.g., language differences, model minority myth) into consideration when designing effective bullying intervention programs for Asian American and non–Asian American students. In general, our findings are consistent with previous research suggesting that peer victimization is related to racial discrimination for Asian American students, and that cultural differences (e.g., language and the model minority myth) contribute to Asian American students’ experience with peer victimization (Hoglund & Hosan, 2013; Kim et al., 2011; Qin et al., 2008; Rosenbloom & Way, 2004). Researchers have challenged the model minority myth by pointing out that such “labeling impedes rather than facilitates access to various opportunities and also results in discrimination and societal indifference regarding the needs of Asian Americans” (Wong & Halgin, 2006, p. 38). Considering the different risk factors/reasons associated with bullying for Asian American students as compared to their non–Asian American peers, we, together with previous researchers (Hong et al., 2014; Shea et al., 2016), argue that generic bullying prevention programs are likely to fail to meet Asian American students’ needs. In order to help Asian American students cope with bullying and protect their access to education, school psychologists need to consider the unique risk factors and reasons for bullying for Asian American students (e.g., language and cultural differences, model minority myth as identified in our study), encourage racial and social justice at school, and use evidence-based and culturally responsive prevention and intervention strategies for school-wide bullying prevention.

In addition to racial climate, several other school climate factors also significantly correlated with peer victimization and bullying perpetration, including Student–Teacher Relations, Clarity of Expectations, and Teachers’ Use of Punitive Techniques. This is also consistent with some previous research identifying the link between school climate factors and victimization/discrimination (Bellmore et al., 2012; Wang & Atwal, 2015). Furthermore, for non–Asian American students, Student–Teacher Relations,
Teachers’ Use of Punitive Techniques, and Clarity of Expectations appear to correlate with their experience with perpetration and victimization more than for Asian American students. It is possible that for Asian American students, respect toward adults and compliance toward school rules were emphasized more at home, and, as a result, Student–Teacher Relations and Teachers’ Use of Punitive Techniques are less important for their behavior regulation (e.g. perpetration). School psychologists should also consider these school climate factors when designing school based bullying interventions for both Asian and non–Asian American students.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Some limitations in this study may affect its generalizability. First, data were collected from one school in southern California where Asian American students constitute the numerical racial majority, and most of the Asian American students spoke an Asian language at home. The results may be different if data were collected from a school where Asian American students are the numerical minority or from Asian American students whose first language is English. Second, although we attempted to disaggregate data and examine the differences within Asian ethnic groups, we did not directly collect data on the specific ethnicities or generation status because we felt it may be difficult for elementary-aged students to report on these. We could only infer the ethnicities based on home language, which may have prevented our getting the most accurate data. Future studies should directly ask about specific ethnicities and generation status, and also collect those data from parents to gain a better understanding of the within-group difference among Asian American students. Third, only cross-sectional data were collected, and we cannot infer any causality from the data. Longitudinal research can help to identify whether racial climate and other school climate factors predict later bullying/victimization. Furthermore, we measured general bullying/victimization, instead of directly asking about racial/peer ethnic bullying. We also did not ask students if they were bullied by peers from the same racial/ethnic background or by peers from different racial/ethnic backgrounds, and whether the reasons for bullying differ. In addition, the two subscales Teacher Use of Punitive Techniques and Teacher Use Positive Behavioral Techniques in the Delaware School Climate Survey had low internal consistency (.66 and .58), and results from those subscales should be interpreted with caution. Last, there are several limitations in the qualitative data analyses. Because the qualitative data were collected from students’ answers to a single question, the data were not rich, and we were not able to ask follow-up questions. We also were not able to conduct “member checking” to see if participants agreed with the themes and subthemes derived from the analysis because the survey was anonymous. Future studies may consider using focus groups or interviews to gain an in-depth understanding of the reasons that students attribute to the bullying from Asian American and non–Asian American peers separately, conduct member checking, and use researchers’ self-reflection consistently to reduce biases in data analysis. Despite these limitations, the current study sheds some light on the unique link between perceived racial climate and peer victimization among Asian American students and highlights the importance to consider social justice when designing bullying prevention programs.

IMPLICATIONS FOR SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGY PRACTICE

U.S. schools are becoming more and more diverse. However, discrimination within the school system is a persistent problem facing many students today. School psychologists’ role as advocates for social justice and for the needs and rights of all students in education has been well documented in the literature (e.g., Rogers, 2008) and in the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) Principles for Professional Ethics (NASP, 2010). Our study highlights the importance of considering social justice when examining Asian American elementary school students’ experiences with bullying. We suggest that school psychologists consider the following when designing bullying prevention programs to ensure social justice for Asian American students.
Raise awareness and use political savvy to navigate the system. Singh, Urbano, Haston, and McMahan (2010) have identified raising awareness and using political savvy as two important strategies for social justice change. Research has documented that teachers’ beliefs in the model minority myth prevented their identifying Asian American students who were struggling in school (Lee, 1994). In addition, Asian American students’ mental health needs were less likely to be met compared to Latino American students due to gatekeepers (e.g., teachers) not referring Asian American students for the school-based mental health services they needed (Guo, Kataoka, Bear, & Lau, 2014). Because the model minority myth impedes Asian American students’ access to resources and services at school, school psychologists need to help school staff become aware of their unconscious bias and positive and negative stereotypes toward Asian American students (e.g., “All Asian American students are good at math.” “Asian American students are usually doing fine otherwise they will say something/ask me for help.”), and realize the negative consequences related to these stereotypes and bias (e.g., limited and unequal access to services at school for Asian American students). Education, professional development, and conversations between school staff are good ways for school psychologists to raise awareness regarding Asian American students’ struggles and to dispute the model minority myth. In addition, professional development training can educate staff on identifying signs of bullying and mental health challenges and on the impact of acculturative stress (e.g., language difficulties) on Asian American children and families.

In order for any school-wide reform to be successful, more than 80% of teachers and staff must buy-in to the effort. Getting support from administrators and other school staff requires political savvy, which is defined as “knowing when and how to intervene” (Singh et al., 2010, p. 139). For example, it is important to connect the bullying prevention efforts with other school initiatives (e.g., positive behavioral interventions and supports) to get buy-in from school administrators. In addition, to assure buy-in from school staff, a bullying prevention committee should be coordinated by a representative group of staff who can mobilize other staff (Swearer, Espelage, & Napolitano, 2009).

Use data for advocacy. School psychologists can coordinate/conduct school-wide bullying assessment and use data to raise awareness and design interventions. Data from one’s own school are likely to be more convincing/relevant and thus increase buy-in among school staff compared to research conducted from other states/schools. School psychologists can use these data to reveal the negative consequences of bullying on students’ academic, social, and emotional well-being; identify and increase supervision at the bullying hot spots; and design specific components of the prevention programs (Swearer et al., 2009). For example, based on the identified relationship between school climate factors and bullying from the data collected at a particular school, school administrators and psychologists can promote positive school climate, such as developing simple and clear rules about bullying; making the rules clear to all students; promoting positive student–teacher relations; and encouraging teachers to use positive instead of punitive strategies. School psychologists can train teachers to reinforce the school rules by following up with positive and negative consequences consistently so that all students know that any types of bullying (physical, verbal, relational) are not accepted at school. If bullying is more likely to occur at certain locations based on the data collected, then school psychologists can encourage teachers to remind students about behavior expectations before transitions to these locations/activities (e.g., recess, lunch, bathroom).

Educate others about the school psychologists’ role as advocates for social justice and engage other colleagues in advocacy activities. School psychologists should share initiatives on social justice and bullying prevention with administrators, teachers, parents, and students in the school community so that they are aware of the school psychologist’s advocacy role (Singh et al., 2010). School psychologists should also engage other colleagues to support and join the advocacy activities (Shriberg et al., 2008). Good relationships and establishing allies will also benefit school psychologists’ effectiveness of advocating for Asian American students. For instance, some staff may prioritize physical bullying whereas relational bullying may be overlooked. However, our results suggest that many Asian American students experienced verbal/reational as well as physical bullying. It is important for school...
psychologists to collaborate with administrators to examine the school safety policies and reconsider what constitutes bullying and encourage school staff to intervene on both types of bullying.

**Work collaboratively with parents.** Shriberg et al. (2008) identified providing information to families about rights and resources and helping them access the resources at school as one of the ways for school psychologists to advocate for social justice. For Asian American families, especially recent immigrants who are struggling with acculturative stress and financial difficulties, teachers and school staff need to be aware of those struggles and possible misunderstandings owing to cultural differences. For example, immigrant parents may not be able to attend the school events because of their long working hours, limited language abilities, and unfamiliarity with the school culture, and not because they do not care about their child’s education. Some Asian American parents may prefer to elicit teachers’ support to resolve bullying problems (because they view teachers as the authority), instead of being actively involved in problem solving, which may be misinterpreted as not involved by some teachers (Shea et al., 2016). Understanding these cultural differences and being flexible to overcome them (e.g., schedule parent–teacher conferences at convenient times for parents, check for understanding/misunderstanding) will help teachers ensure immigrant families have equal access to the resources schools have to offer.

**Promote diversity and acceptance.** The similarity hypothesis and the perpetual foreigner stereotype suggest that ethnic minorities are discriminated against owing to their being perceived as different from the ethnic majority, and minorities are associated less with being American than White Americans (Devos & Banaji, 2005; Goto et al., 2002; Tuan, 1998). Consistent with these theories, many Asian American students in our study attributed bullying to their ethnic or cultural differences (e.g., language difficulties, skin color, model minority myth), and perceived racial climate predicted Asian American students’ experience with victimization at school. In response to those cultural-specific reasons for bullying, school psychologists and teachers should engage all students in a discussion about what constitutes being American and how to interpret cultural differences. In addition, staff should put forth efforts in promoting a sense of cultural acceptance and an appreciation of different norms among all students in order to reduce bullying and discrimination at school. Riehl (2000) has identified three tasks for administrators to make schools inclusive for diverse students: foster new meanings about diversity, promote inclusive practices within schools, and build connections between schools and communities. When group differences (e.g., race, gender, disability status, different hobbies, talents, and interests) are accepted and celebrated, students are more likely to perceive a positive school climate and better sense of belonging to school, which promotes better adjustment. In addition, teachers should use teachable moments to talk about diversity, popularity/peer pressure, and acceptance of individual differences (e.g., “I was not good at sports as a child.”). Furthermore, school staff can invite parents to be involved at school by sharing and celebrating their culture (e.g., Lunar New Year celebration, traditional Asian music). These activities can build connections between school and communities and promote cultural pride and an appreciation for cultural traditions among ethnic minority students, which can help them cope with discrimination and bullying (Shea et al., 2016).

**Teach students self-advocacy skills and other skills to cope with bullying.** As stated by Singh et al. (2010), self-advocacy skills are part of a self-sustaining social justice tool for students. Research shows that many Asian American students were too afraid to report bullying and harassment to the authorities at school (Rosenbloom & Way, 2004). In our study, some students also expressed dissatisfaction that teachers did not do anything to stop bullying at school. As a result, it is important for school psychologists to teach Asian American students self-advocacy skills and problem-solving skills so that they learn how to cope with bullying and navigate other difficult situations (e.g., discrimination in the community). In addition, it is important to integrate social–emotional and behavioral intervention efforts within academic instruction and embed bullying prevention efforts into the regular classroom curriculum (Swearer et al., 2009). For example, as a Tier 1 prevention, school psychologists can implement bullying prevention lessons for all students. Alternatively, school psychologists can train teachers to use children’s literature during regular language arts instruction to discuss bullying, teach social emotional skills (e.g., emotional awareness, emotional regulation) and other strategies to cope with bullying (such
as talking it out, using humor, and seeking help), and encourage positive bystander behavior among all students. Such classroom-wide programs have been found to be effective in promoting social–emotional skills and positive bystander behavior among elementary school students (e.g., Bullying Literature Project; Wang, Couch, Rodriguez, & Lee, 2015). For students who continue to struggle with skill use, as a Tier 2 intervention, school psychologists can organize small groups to help the victims explore feelings related to bullying and practice specific self-advocacy and social skills. When necessary, individualized interventions and mental health support as a Tier 3 intervention should also be considered.

CONCLUSION

As one of the very few studies on Asian American elementary students’ experience with bullying and school climate, results from our study suggest that discrimination is a salient factor contributing to Asian American students’ experience with victimization and that a positive school racial climate can protect Asian American students from peer victimization. School psychologists need to use data to promote awareness; promote diversity and acceptance; teach students self-advocacy skills; and use political savvy to involve administrators, school staff, and parents to promote social justice for Asian American students who experience bullying.

RESOURCES

For more information on this topic, readers are encouraged to visit these websites:

• http://education.com/topic/school-bullying: In this special edition of Education.com, researchers from around the world provide summaries of their research on bullying in user-friendly languages to provide readers with insight into current understanding of bullying and practical suggestions.
• http://www.pacer.org/bullying; PACER’s National Bullying Prevention Center provides bullying prevention resources for parents, schools, teens, and youth, including educational toolkits and activities for students.
• http://sites.ed.gov/aapi/aapi-bullying; This website, managed by White House Initiative on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, lists resources for bullying prevention and fact sheets about civil rights protections in different Asian languages.
• http://www.stopbullying.gov; This website, managed by U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, provides various resources on bullying prevention as well as online courses and continuing education opportunities about bullying prevention.

REFERENCES


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