

# Forms of Fighting: A Micro-Social Analysis of Bullying and In-School Violence

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## **Abstract**

Current empirical research on youth bullying rarely asks students to describe their violent encounters. This practice conflates incidents of aggression that may actually have different forms and features. In this article I provide the results of a qualitative analysis of retrospective interviews with high school youth about their experiences of in-school violence. I test for and confirm the occurrence of five types of violence: bullying, scapegoating, peer-to-peer honour contests, group fights, and retaliatory violence. My testing method involves analyzing whether the social dynamics, such as offender–victim social status and the ratio of aggressors to victims, identified in theoretical work, occur empirically. I show that there is variability in the social dynamics that map onto the five types of violence, listed above. In ignoring these differences, violence prevention policy and practice runs the risk of prolonging student conflict.

*Keywords:* in-school violence, bullying, micro-social qualitative methods

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## Résumé

Les recherches empiriques actuelles sur l'intimidation se penchent rarement sur la façon dont les élèves décrivent les incidents de violence qu'ils ont vécus. Cette pratique amalgame des agressions qui ont peut-être en réalité des formes et des caractéristiques différentes. Dans cet article, je présente les résultats d'une analyse qualitative d'entrevues rétrospectives menées auprès de jeunes du secondaire au sujet de leurs expériences de la violence à l'école. Je teste et je confirme l'occurrence de cinq types de violence : intimidation, recherche de boucs émissaires, compétitions entre pairs pour défendre son honneur, batailles de groupe et violence motivée par la vengeance. Ma méthode de test consiste à analyser si la dynamique sociale, tels le statut social de l'agresseur et de la victime et le ratio agresseurs-victimes, identifiée dans des théories, est présente dans les faits. Ma recherche démontre une variation dans la dynamique sociale eu égard aux cinq types de violence énumérés plus haut. En faisant abstraction de ces différences, les politiques et pratiques en matière de prévention de la violence risquent de prolonger les conflits entre les élèves.

*Mots-clés* : violence à l'école, méthodes qualitatives microsociales

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## Introduction

We now know that the occurrence of in-school bullying behaviour is the highest among students in Grades 6–8, with physical violence decreasing in frequency as students grow up (Dake, Price, & Telljohann, 2003; Nansel et al., 2001). The use of verbal and psychological torment also tends to continue throughout their high school years (Dake et al., 2003), and can have devastating effects on students' social and emotional development (Gendron, Williams, & Guerra, 2011; Golmaryami et al., 2016; Haynie et al., 2001; Juvonen & Graham, 2014; MacMillan, 2001; Olweus, 1994, 1997, 2013). Bullying behaviour at any point in an individual's childhood or adolescence is linked to higher levels of psychiatric disorders, such as depression, anxiety, antisocial personality disorder, substance use, and suicidal tendencies (Copeland, Wolke, Angold, & Costello, 2013; Takizawa, Maughan, & Arseneault, 2014; Lereya, Copeland, Costello, & Wolke, 2015). Longitudinal studies have found that disorders resulting from bullying behaviour and victimization also tend to continue into adulthood (Bender & Lösel, 2011; Copeland et al., 2013; Ouellet-Morin et al., 2013; Sourander, 2010; Wolke, Copeland, Angold, & Costello, 2013). Youth violence is both a pervasive and persistent problem for school-age children.

Existing youth violence literature contains many different definitions of bullying violence (Cascardi, Brown, Iannarone, & Cardona, 2014; Howells, 2006; Modecki, Minchin, Harbaugh, Guerra, & Runions, 2014; Olweus, 2013; Smith, del Barrio, & Tokunaga, 2013). There is a general consensus that bullying behaviour consists of repeated aggressive acts on specific targets who cannot easily defend themselves (Olweus, 2010, 2013). Wolke, Dane and Marini (2014) also note that bullying violence is based on three key attributes: goal directed behaviour, a power imbalance, and victim harm. The inclusion of each of these attributes in the definition is supported by theory and strong empirical evidence (Lochman, Whidby, & FitzGerald, 2000; Olweus 2013; Pepler & Craig, 2009; Veenstra, Verlinden, Huitsing, Verhulst, & Tiemeier, 2013; Ybarra, Espelage, & Mitchell, 2014). Bullying violence is also a subset of school violence, which is defined as “student-on-student and student-on-teacher acts of physical harm” (Henry, 2000).

However, much of this research on bullying violence is psychological and quantitative in nature, and does not distinguish between other types of student violence (Bifulco, Schimmenti, Jacobs, Bunn, & Rusu, 2014; Cornell, 2011; Pergolizzi et al., 2009;

Sigurdson, Wallander, & Sund, 2014). Quantitative researchers often rely on survey methods that do not clearly distinguish bullying from other types of violence (Collins, 2008, 2009). As a result, bullying violence is often conflated with other forms of aggression (Collins, 2008, 2009). Although these studies are useful for determining the outcomes of peer aggression, they are limited in their ability to explain how students experience and enact different forms of violence at school. These studies infrequently ask participants to describe their violent encounters, and instead relate the number of times they believe they were affected by a given type of violent behaviour through self-report survey methods. This has the effect of not only glossing over the different types of violence that they engage in, but also the social dynamics involved in those different kinds of conflict.

Micro-social qualitative researchers (Burt, Simmons, & Gibbon, 2012; Collins, 2008, 2009, 2013; Cooney, 2009; Klusemann, 2010; Simmons, Rajan, & McMahon, 2012; Weenink, 2014, 2015) note that, in addition to quantitative methods, social sciences researchers could better explain subtle behaviours by incorporating first-person accounts of a situation. By using a micro-social approach to studying youth violence, where researchers actually observe or ask individuals to recall a violent incident, they are better able to describe those types of actions and why they occur (Collins, 2009, 2008; Klusemann, 2010; Weenink, 2014, 2015). If micro-social investigation methods were to be more commonly used, one would have the potential to see that the dynamics involved in different types of interpersonal youth conflict can be very different (Collins, 2008). These types of in school violence may include intergroup fights, peer-to-peer honour contests, scapegoating, and bullying (Collins, 2008). Furthermore, differentiating types of school violence helps when it comes to intervening to redress the problems because this differentiation allows for a fuller contextualization of the dynamics of violent interactions.

This essay responds to this lacuna by using qualitative research methods to examine the contexts of school-based bullying and violence, specifically testing Randall Collins's (2008) classification of student aggression. Through in-depth interviews with current secondary school students, I attempt to better explain (1) the types of interpersonal violence that young people take part in at school, and (2) whether or not the types of violence that students describe resonate with the current violence literature. To gain a better understanding of these behaviours, I examine both the antagonistic and retaliatory violent actions of students involved in all types of interpersonal conflict. Considering both

perspectives will offer a richer account of students' use of in-school violence, hopefully one that resonates better with how young people understand those actions themselves.

### **Types of Interpersonal Youth Violence**

Collins's (2008) "Violence: A Micro Social Theory" notes that students engage in a number of different forms of aggressive behaviours while they are at school. Violent encounters such as peer-to-peer honour contests, intergroup fights, bullying, and scapegoating are all distinct forms of fighting that involve social dynamics that are different from one another. Although bullying violence often receives extensive coverage within the youth violence literature (Hong & Espelage, 2012; Kowalski, Giumetti, Schroeder, & Lattanner, 2014; Nielsen, Tangen, Idsoe, Matthiesen, & Magerøy, 2015; Saarento, Garandeau, & Salmivalli, 2015), the potential for other forms of interpersonal youth violence occurring should also be considered.

In instances of *peer-to-peer honour contests*, an altercation is coordinated between two individuals who are equally matched both in physical and social status (Collins, 2008; Krahe, 2013). Peer-to-peer honour contests' main premise is based on equal competition between peers. Although sometimes confused with bullying violence, this is not a form of bullying. Bullying involves differential status or rank between an attacker and his or her victim, where the victim is of lower social status than his or her attacker (Schäfer, Korn, Brodbeck, Wolke, & Schulz, 2005; Sentse, Kretschmer, & Salmivalli 2015; Sutton & Keogh, 2000). The point of honour contests is to maintain a social standing by beating someone of a relatively equal social standing. Responding to this form of violence as if it were bullying is to misapprehend the interactional dynamics, especially the power dynamics of two equal foes.

Conflict also occasionally occurs between groups of students, two rival cliques, or gangs (Estrada, Gilreath, Astor, & Benbenishty, 2014). Similar to honour contests, *intergroup fights* are horizontal social confrontations between two relatively socially equal groups and involve continual tit-for-tat attacks between members. Individuals who identify with a social group sometimes feel compelled to defend one another in ways similar to how they would defend themselves (Brake, 2013; Felson, 2009; Milner, 2004). A slight against a group of peers can be equal to a slight against a single individual, as both will

be interpreted as an attack against one's social standing. Once again, to describe this as bullying would be to misconstrue the group power dynamics that are at play.

*Scapegoating* is a form of interpersonal youth violence in which a single individual is victimized by a group of people (Collins, 2008). Scapegoating violence involves a level of group commitment that is not always feasible in all social situations. The victim of scapegoating can be an individual of high social ranking or a network isolate. It is not necessary for the victim of scapegoating violence to be less popular than their aggressors. For scapegoating groups, a victim must be someone whose ideology or situation stands in contrast with their own. That person is identified as posing a threat, and, in reaction, scapegoating violence aims to strengthen community solidarity by defending themselves against a perceived "other." Scapegoating is more likely to happen in tightly knit social communities where individual differences are most obvious.

*Bullying*, according to Collins (2008), is different from scapegoating violence because it involves conflict between only two people: the aggressor and the victim. Instead of conflict occurring on behalf of both individuals, this sort of aggression is top-down with a single victim receiving all of the torment. Bullies are often from higher social ranks than their victims, and their actions isolate their victims and themselves from others (Connell, Farrington, & Ireland, 2016; Collins, 2008; Sutton & Keogh, 2000). This is different from scapegoating violence, where the aggressive parties can be of either higher or lower social rank than the victim of that violence. Collins (2008) claims that many people who are part of different networks might use slights or social gossip against one another on a regular basis, but bullying violence is different because it continually targets a single individual over time.

Much of the current literature on bullying violence does not follow Collins's (2008) definition (Cascardi et al., 2014; Modecki et al., 2014; Olweus, 1992, 1994, 1997, 2013; Smith et al., 2013). Instead of only two individuals aggressing against one another, many of the current studies on bullying state that multiple people can aggress against a single bullying victim. The aim of this study is not to prove one theory wrong or another right. Instead, the aim of this study is to test for the occurrence of Collins's (2008) four typologies, and to better understand the dynamics of different forms of youth violence. My research further develops youth violence studies by empirically testing for the four types of violence identified by Collins (2008). This research considers the possibility that students engage in multiple forms of interpersonal youth violence while they are at

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school, and that they do not make clear distinctions between those different behaviours themselves. Through this research, I intend to highlight the experiences of students involved in each type of in-school violence.

## Methods

### Procedure

To gain access to the students I wrote to the executive director of a youth outreach organization. I also wrote to several supporting social workers within that organization, providing them with full documentation about the study. After meeting with the executive director and several support staff, and gaining administrative consent, I distributed recruitment information (brochures and posters) about the study throughout the centre. The recruitment brochures and posters provided information about the study aims, participant involvement, ethics approval, and my contact information. As participants contacted me to volunteer for the study, they were advised of the benefits and risks of their participation, and they individually provided informed consent for their participation. This research was approved by an Ontario University Research Ethics Board.

### Sample Population

Fifteen students between the ages of 16 and 19 volunteered to participate in this study (see Table 1; pseudonyms have replaced original names). The average age of student participants was 16. Most of the interviewed students were male, and 11 students attended the same high school as at least one of the other students. I conducted interviews with each student in which they were asked to recall a single previously resolved fight that they had witnessed or been a part of at school.<sup>1</sup> Interviews were focused on the recollection of actions and motivations during their in-school fights. Data of the sort used for this study may contain recall bias, which may pose a threat to validity. However, recall bias

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1 Students were asked to only describe incidents of in-school violence that had previously been resolved by school officials or police, as stipulated by an Ontario University Research Ethics Board.

is reduced when interviews are anchored in discrete events (Ghaziani, 2008). By asking students to recall a single violent incident that they had previously witnessed or been involved in, the threat of recall bias is minimized as much as possible.

Public secondary school students were recruited through a local at-risk youth outreach organization to provide firsthand accounts of their experiences with in-school violence. Although at-risk youth have a greater potential for engaging in violence than the regular population, this research is aimed only at explaining how students and their peers experience a single incident of in-school violence. Focusing this violence research on students who are considered at risk of dropping out of school is particularly important since a greater emphasis on intervention programming is often placed on this group of students.

**Table 1.** Descriptive statistics for student participants

Interview ID	Age	Name (Pseudonyms)	Gender	Secondary School
1	16	Carl	Male	Pineglenn
2	16	Jessica	Female	Douglas Smith
3	16	Jason	Male	Oxdale
4	19	Rob	Male	Lilly Smith
5	17	Tom	Male	Stablemount
6	16	Jeremy	Male	Oxdale
7	16	Allison	Female	Rosebrook
8	16	Amanda	Female	Gracepath
9	18	Kevin	Male	Pineglenn
10	16	Tyson	Male	Lilly Smith
11	16	Paul	Male	Douglas Smith
12	17	Andrew	Male	Woodlane
13	19	Bradley	Male	Gracepath
14	16	Scott	Male	Bishop Jones
15	16	Ben	Male	Douglas Smith

## Interview Protocol

I conducted face-to-face interviews with students using a 30-question structured interview schedule. Students were asked demographic questions about their age, gender, and



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school, such as “How old are you?” “What gender are you?” and “What school do you attend?” Students were then asked to consider a single incident of in-school violence that they had witnessed or been directly involved in and that had been previously resolved by school officials. I did this by asking students,

If you can, please think back to a fight that took place between students at your school. This can be a fight that you witnessed or were directly involved in. However, when you are describing this fight, do not use any of the students’ full names, to protect their identities. Also, this must be a fight that has already been resolved by the school or police. Please do not discuss a fight that has not been resolved or is in the process of being resolved. Can you think of a fight that happened at your school?

Once an incident was chosen, students were then asked to describe that altercation in their own words. Students were also asked to describe the types of violence that were used in that altercation and provide examples of (1) direct violence (defined as aggression that is used to cause direct harm to a victim, such as hitting, kicking, punching, etc.), and (2) indirect violence (defined as social or verbal aggression that is used to cause indirect harm to a victim, including name-calling or slanderous gossiping).

Students were also asked about the number of people involved in the altercation. These data were used to uncover the social dynamics that influence interpersonal youth violence. To supplement this information, students were asked to provide the number of victims and aggressors involved in an altercation. Once students provided that number, they were then asked to provide a physical description of the victims and aggressors. Students also gave descriptions of those individuals’ perceived social popularity, according to their own definitions, and whether or not the victims were more or less socially popular than the aggressors. These questions were used to evaluate the in-school social hierarchies that influence the different types of in-school violence (Milner, 2004; Moody & White, 2003).

Wanting to understand more directly the interactional dynamics of their violence, I asked students if social support from peers was provided to either the victim or the aggressor during the fight. I did this by asking students, “Did any individuals provide social support for the aggressor?” If students indicated that social support was provided, they were then asked to describe that behaviour. I intentionally allowed students to describe

their own interpretations of what social support meant to them. My hope was that this would allow me to gain a deeper appreciation for what social support means for high school students, and provide me with deeper insight into the different social dynamics involved in interpersonal youth violence. Answers to these questions were used to better understand how in-school social support networks influenced the dynamics of violent behaviour. At no time during the interview process were the types of violence, as elucidated by Collins (2008), explicitly named or described by myself.

## Data Analysis

The interview transcripts were uploaded to Atlas.ti data analysis software. Before analyzing the interviews, I developed deductive codes that identified key descriptive variables. At that time I also created codes that relate to the forms and types of violence outlined above—for example, “More Popular,” “Equal Popularity,” “Less Popular,” “Number of Aggressors,” and “Number of Victims.” I used these codes to identify the overall types of violence that the students described. This was done by coding the number of students involved in the violence, the popularity of the aggressor and the victim, and the types of assault that were used. These codes helped me coordinate my own findings with previous typologies.

Following the creation of deductive codes, I developed inductive codes that related to the observed patterns and explanations in the data (see Table 2). The inductive codes included the reasons students gave for fighting one another or if there was a weapon used. During the analysis I also created analytic memos as provisional assessments of the relevant patterns and relations in the data. These analytic memos were used to connect the different codes to themes that presented themselves.

**Table 2.** Table of Inductive and Deductive Codes

Name	Code Type	Definition	Example
Undifferentiated Conflict: Direct Violence	Deductive Code	Physical aggression that is used to directly cause physical harm to the victim.	Interviewer: “Okay. Can you describe the physical assault in this resolved incident?” Student: “Um, there was punching, hair pulling, and kicking.”

Name	Code Type	Definition	Example
Undifferentiated Conflict: Indirect Violence	Deductive Code	Social or verbal aggression that is used indirectly to cause harm to a victim. Indicators for indirect violence include name calling or slanderous gossiping against a single individual or group of people.	Interviewer: "Can you describe the verbal assault used in this previously resolved incident?" Student: "The other girl was calling her a fat bitch, 'you dirt,' 'ugly cow'... and that's about it."
Undifferentiated Conflict: Indirect Violence	Deductive Code	Social or verbal aggression that is used indirectly to cause harm to a victim. Indicators for indirect violence include name calling or slanderous gossiping against a single individual or group of people.	Interviewer: "Can you describe the verbal assault used in this previously resolved incident?" Student: "The other girl was calling her a fat bitch, 'you dirt,' 'ugly cow'...and that's about it."
Undifferentiated Conflict: Aggressor	Deductive Code	A single individual or group of individuals who are shown to have used direct or indirect violence against another single individual or group of individuals.	Student: "Yeah, well, I guess there was a new kid at the school, and this other kid was picking on him and calling him names."
Undifferentiated Conflict: Confronting Gossip	Inductive Code	A situation where an individual or group of individuals confronts another individual or group of individuals about the use of gossip, which contributed to the escalation of violence.	Student: "...I heard this kid was talking about me, so I came up to him and asked him, and he said he wasn't, so I slapped him, and he kicked me. Then I punched him."
Undifferentiated Conflict: More Popular	Deductive Code	The described social status of an individual or group of individuals where one is described as being more popular than the other in a violent altercation.	Interviewer: "Was the victim more or less socially popular than the aggressor?" Student: "Probably more, because nobody really like the kid who attacked him."
Undifferentiated Conflict: Equal Popularity	Deductive Code	The described social status of an individual or group of individuals where one is described as being of equal social status with the other in a violent altercation.	Student: "Yeah, they [the fighting students] were, like, equal socially."
Undifferentiated Conflict: Less Popular	Deductive Code	The described social status of an individual or group of individuals where one is described as being less popular than the other in a violent altercation.	Student: "The victim was nothing. He was a loser. He had nobody."

Name	Code Type	Definition	Example
Number of Aggressors	Deductive Code	The number of individuals identified as being the aggressive party in a violent altercation using direct or indirect violence.	Interviewer: "How many people were the aggressors?" Student: "I don't know. A lot. I didn't really count, so..." Interviewer: "Can you give me a ballpark figure?" Student: "About 15."
Number of Victims	Deductive Code	The number of individuals identified as being the victimized party in a violent altercation that involved direct or indirect violence.	Interviewer: "How many people would you say were the victims of that aggression?" Student: "Just one."

To ensure that my coding was reliable, I randomly selected a single<sup>2</sup> structured interview transcript using a random number generator. As principal investigator, and using the final coding scheme, I coded the interviews. Once the interviews were fully coded, I removed code labels. An independent coder was provided with the developed coding scheme, and they recoded each transcript. The proportional agreement was computed between coders by dividing the number of times each coder used an individual code in the same text by the number of times any coder used it in the transcript (Campbell, Quincy, Osserman, & Pedersen, 2013; Miles & Huberman, 1984). I followed Miles and Huberman (1984) in considering that inter-coder reliability for each theme that exceeds 70% indicates a strong coding scheme. For most codes, like "Aggressor," "More Popular," and "Less Popular," there was 100% inter-coder reliability. Codes "Victim" (74%), "Direct Violence" (75%), and "Indirect Violence" (72%) all demonstrated inter-coder reliability above 70%. The overall level of inter-coder reliability was 86.83%.

## Results

Four main categories of interpersonal youth violence emerged from the interview data, confirming the previous categorizations (Collins, 2008): bullying, scapegoating,

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<sup>2</sup> According to Campbell, Quincy, Osserman, and Pedersen (2013), coding in-depth interviews often involves many units of analysis. Unlike ethnographies, where a single interview/account is a single unit of analysis, a semi-structured interview can have units of text with multiple coded sections. This means that within a semi-structured interview, there are multiple units of analysis to be tested.

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peer-to-peer honour contests, and intergroup fights. These categories are indicated through consistencies for several of my deductive codes, such as the level of perceived popularity of both victims and aggressor, the number of individuals engaged in that aggressive behaviour, and the types of violence that were used. I have grouped the types of conflict according to the number of individuals involved. First, peer-to-peer honour contests and bullying violence involve conflict between two individuals. Intergroup fights and scapegoating violence involve multiple students aggressing against one another. Following the discussion of the four different types of violence exemplified in my interviews, I discuss a fifth corollary type of violence—retaliatory violence.

### **Peer-to-Peer Honour Contests and Bullying**

Students described several incidents that were consistent with cases of peer-to-peer honour contests and bullying. These two types of violence are discussed together because they both involve aggression between two individuals. They are different from intergroup fights and scapegoating violence because those types of violence contain differences in their social dynamics and numbers of individuals involved.

A number of the students described situations of violence that occurred between two equally matched individuals. For example, one student described a case of consistent aggression between two graffiti artists at his school:

They had been fighting back and forth for a while. Honestly, I think I heard it was over a tag [the basic writing of a graffiti artist's name]. Like, a graffiti tag. Because the one kid crossed the other kid...he crossed out the other kid's tag, and then bombed [to add one's own graffiti name after crossing out another artist's name] underneath it. Its just kind of a sign of "fuck you." So they were always doing things like that to each other before the fight I saw. (Jason, 16 years old, *pseudonyms used for student names*)

Jason commented that one student started the fight by crossing out his peer's graffiti markings and writing his own name below it. Crossing out someone's graffiti signature is called "bombing" and is considered disrespectful to the original artist. The two students were continually aggressing against one another through their artwork before their feud ended with a physical altercation. This aggression between two students was also more

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likely to occur if they were similar in size and popularity. Many students described this type of violence occurring between peers with a similar physicality:

One [student] was...he was bit over 5'5", he was a bigger guy. He had a nice build, but he wasn't anything major. Wasn't anything crazy... The other guy [was] a bit lankier, but taller. Had height on his side. (Jason, 16 years old)

Although sometimes the students in peer-to-peer honour contests are not exactly the same height or weight, interviewed students noted that they were usually physically capable of defending themselves.

Interviewer: "Was one student physically weaker than the other?"

Student: "No."

Interviewer: "Was one student picking on the other student more?"

Student: "No. Not really. The one kid was kinda smaller, but that was it. He could handle himself." (Jeremy, 17 years old)

In other instances, students described how peer pressure could lead to an aggressive behaviour between students:

Uh, he was giving me looks in the hallways and stuff, and people was saying that he was talking about me, and that he could punch me out and all this. So, I went to him and asked him. He said he wasn't...but, there was already a bunch of people chasing after me and shit, because they knew what was going on. And then I swung at him, and I threw him on the ground. (Rob, 19 years old)

Although Rob could move away from this confrontation, such an act would be read as weakness and could result in the removal of such a person from the group. In peer-to-peer honour contests, respect is earned by demonstrating one's willingness to defend his or her reputation at all costs. Thus, peer pressure is pivotal to influencing peer-to-peer honour contests. In fact, winning peer-to-peer honour contests may not only result in earning respect among classmates but might also help in gaining further popularity among other students, as noted by Jeremy:

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One was kind of less [socially popular]. But, he still had friends. Like, when the fight was over I went up and patted him on the back. People patted the other guy on the back too. Congratulated him and stuff. (Jeremy, 17 years old)

Jeremy noted that one of the students in a fight that he witnessed was slightly less popular than the other. However, he said that that student did have a group of friends who congratulated him after the fight. The students that were involved in peer-to-peer honour contests often had friends to lean on for social support, and that sometimes their own involvement in violence made them more popular. Jason also reiterated Jeremy's point:

One guy was very well known. It wasn't necessarily...he had haters and he had some people who somewhat liked him. The other guy had a lot of people that hated him. But, he still had friends. They were both pretty well known. And after the fight they got even more well-known. (Jason, 16 years old)

In this case, before the fight they both had peers that did not like either of them, but afterwards their popularity grew.

There are a number of examples throughout the interviews where the fights described by students resembled the peer-to-peer honour contest category described by Collins (2008). There were also cases of violence between two students that were not so evenly matched. These cases fall in line with Collins's (2008) bullying typology. Cases of bullying are similar to peer-to-peer honour contests, because they involve conflict between two students. However, bullying violence is exceptional because it involves continual aggression from one student toward a weaker peer. These victims might be considered weaker because they are new to the school, or because they have fewer friends. What is important is that Collins's (2008) bullying victims are often unable to defend themselves against their bully.

This guy would always chirp this one kid. Would tell him he was a faggot, all of that dumb shit. That he was a bitch, because he had no friends. All that stuff, like, you know what I'm saying? He was fucking with him. Making him more down about himself. (Amanda, 17 years old)

These types of victims were easy targets for violence because of their isolation from the other students in their school. New students and those with fewer friends have weaker

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support networks to draw on for help. As a result, the aggressive behaviour from a bully could last longer because the victim lacked someone to defend him or her. Carl was another student who talked about a bullying victim who didn't have any friends because he was new to the school.

Yeah well, I guess he [the victim] was like a new kid at school or something. He was kind of weird and didn't have any friends. And this other kid was like picking on him all the time... Told him he was gonna smash him out and stuff. (Carl, 16 years old)

Bullying victims are isolated from peers because they have characteristics that set them apart from others. Other students might be reluctant to provide support for bullying victims out of fear that they will also suffer abuse. For example, Amanda explained that a bully continually attacked another student in her grade for more than a year. During that time the other students in her classes never intervened in the torment. That type of violence can further isolate students.

This one-sided type of aggression from bullies might also be prolonged by their perceived advantage in social rank and physicality. In my recorded cases of in-school bullying, the aggressors were described as being bigger and more popular than their victims:

He was kind of a bulky guy. He wanted to look tough in front of people and he would fuck with kids that couldn't protect themselves. (Carl, 16 years old)

Carl described the bully that he witnessed as being bulky or very muscular, while the other bully that Amanda described was supported by some students, despite being known for saying mean things about the victim.

But you know, there was always like a crowd of kids behind the one kid. You know what I'm sayin'? The kid running his mouth on the other one. When he did something to the one kid, he would sometimes get props from his friends. (Amanda, 16 years old)

Physical strength combined with more social support for the bully, leaves little room for victims to stand up for themselves. And, in these ways, bullying violence is different from peer-to-peer honour contests. When students described peer-to-peer honour contests they had a difficult time distinguishing a victim because both parties had equally aggressed



against one another. Students who described bullying violence, on the other hand, had an easy time distinguishing the victim. They said they were smaller, weaker, and much less popular than the bully. All of the cases of violence between two unequally matched students share characteristics that fall in line with bullying violence typology outlined by Collins (2008).

### **Scapegoating and Intergroup Fights**

Students also described fights between peers that involved more than two people. The fights in this portion of the discussion involve multiple aggressive parties, and most closely resemble scapegoating and intergroup fight typologies. Both scapegoating and group fights included a number of aggressive people, but scapegoating violence involves only a single victim. For example, in one described case, 15 students physically and verbally attacked a single victim online and at school:

Before the fight they [the group of aggressive students] were talking to him [victim] on Facebook. His mom had died, so they were talking about his mom and making fun of him and stuff... He was just walking past them later when one yelled out at him and they all jumped him. (Bradley, 19 years old)

Bradley said that the altercation began on Facebook when two students started making fun of another student for the recent death of his mother. A number of their friends also began posting similar abusive comments on the victim's Facebook wall. After a day or two of posting hostile Facebook messages, the aggressive students began making claims that they would physically attack the victim. The witness to that violence noted that when the aggressive students did finally confront their victim they quickly overpowered him:

It all happened really fast. Like, one kid hit him and as he was backing up another kid hit him another way. So he got bounced around by being punched and then he fell to the ground and got stomped a bunch of times, got back up, and got a knee in the face, and fell back down again. (Bradley, 19 years old)

The group of aggressive students attacked their victim and punched him. He was bumped around from person to person and fell to the ground, where he remained while the students continued to assault him. Severe physical injury might be likely to occur in cases

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of scapegoating violence, like this one, due to the greater number of aggressive students taking part.

Because this type of violence involves a single victim being aggressed against by a group of students for a prolonged period of time, students often claimed that it was actually bullying violence. For example, one student described her situation:

The victim was just me. Because it was all over a painting at the beginning of the year. I was pretty much getting bullied for getting a better mark on it. So, on that one day they held me down so I couldn't hit them. I got my butt kicked. (Jessica, 16 years old)

Her peers attacked her because she was a new student at the school and had received a higher grade on the first art project of the year. For the next two months the other students verbally harassed her until they physically attacked her in an empty classroom. Although students talked about this type of violence as if it were bullying violence, it is scapegoating violence that involves multiple students aggressing against a single victim. According to Collins (2008), bullying only occurs between one aggressive student and a single victim. What is key in these descriptions is that the physical and social dynamics involved in those two types of violence are different, but students do not make those distinctions themselves.

Students also described intergroup fights differently from other forms of in-school violence. They were explained as coordinated incidents of violence between two large groups of peers. For example, one student described a case of group fighting between his peers:

This one group was mad at this other group because someone in it owed them money. I think for drugs or something. But, they came up to this group and were like, "Give us our money back." And then they started yelling at each other and pushing and punching each other. (Kevin, 18 years old)

Because the money owed by another group's member had not been paid back in a timely fashion, the lenders confronted their opposing group for repayment. The opposing group's members physically and socially supported their friends when they were confronted. In another described case of violence occurring between two groups of students, the peers provided equal support for their members:

This one group had [a] beef with the other for a while and they had different turf at school. One day someone from the one group bumped into someone from the other one. The one guy chirped the other and they all started yelling back and forth, and before you know it they were throwing punches. (Paul, 18 years old)

This in-school group fighting is similar to Collins's (2008) descriptions of the intergroup fights typology. Both incidents involved a number of students who were mutually aggressive with one another, and defended each other similar to how they would defend themselves if they were individually attacked.

Each of my recorded interviews demonstrates a type of violence that is similar to one of the types of violence outlined by Collins (2008). The social and physical dynamics demonstrated by interviewed students' fall in line with his previous descriptions of in-school violence. In some instances, bullying victims would physically retaliate against their aggressor. Collins's (2008) own research gives little weight to the actions of the victim, and the types of violence described by these students alternately match or contradict Collins's typologies. If we consider the retaliatory behaviours of scapegoating and bullying victims, there may be an additional type of violence that was not accounted for.

### **Retaliatory Violence**

In addition to these four types of violence, my research notes a fifth. Most of Collins's (2008) descriptions focus on the aggression of the individual who started the fight. Little emphasis is placed on the retaliatory violence used by the victims of bullying or scapegoating violence. Individuals who have low social status in closed social environments, like public high schools, have few legitimate means for demonstrating their worth (Gendron et al., 2011). One outlet that they do have is to use violence in defense of physical, verbal, or social attacks. A victim's use of violence for self-defence might not always be successful. However, that type of interaction is important to consider as a potential corollary of bullying or scapegoating violence.

One third of the interviewed students mentioned what I call retaliatory violence. Retaliatory violence is a reactionary form of aggression from a weaker victim toward one or more stronger aggressors. Previous definitions for youth violence focused heavily on the antagonistic behaviour of aggressive students, giving little weight to a victim's

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response. Examples of retaliatory violence demonstrate the necessity for examining violence from different perspectives.

In situations of bullying violence, some victims attempt to balance their unequal social conflict through external help. As explained by one student:

Like, my friend had a little brother who was in a younger grade, and this guy in our grade would pick on him and stuff... The next day he [the older brother of the victim] found out about it and got mad. And so, he walked up to him [the bully] at lunch and just punched him. (Scott, 16 years old)

The bully continually attacked the younger student for months without his older sibling's awareness. The younger sibling was less popular among his peers and didn't have friends that were willing to help him. Frustrated with his inability to defend himself, the younger brother mentioned the violence to his older brother who intervened and confronted the bully. Because the victim was unable to end the violence himself, he sought out someone that was not only stronger but also obliged to help him because they were family.

In another incident, a victim of bullying violence attempted to protect himself by bringing a weapon to school. A student described that situation as follows:

So, the kid got scared, grabbed a knife and came to school the next day. When he seen the other kid [the bully] coming up to him, he thought he was gonna get beat up, so he pulled the knife. (Tyson, 16 years old)

The bullying victim had been tormented by his peer for months, and didn't see it ending anytime soon. He didn't think that he could physically defend himself without a weapon because he was socially and physically weaker than the bully, so he brandished a knife against his attacker. In a similar case, the victim of bullying violence at another school grabbed a skateboard and swung it at his aggressor's head after school (Ben, 16 years old). These students used weapons to scare their peers and potentially reduce their torment. The use of weapons also evened the playing field between the two students. A weapon modified the dynamics between the attacker and the victim, giving the victim more power in that situation.

In a case of scapegoating violence, the victim also described using extreme or "dirty" fighting against her aggressors. The victim was held down by several of her peers while other students attacked her. To retaliate, she bit several of them. She explained that

biting was not often used by students because it was seen as “fighting dirty,” but when faced with impossible odds for defending herself it became an option (Jessica, 16 years old). Similar to soliciting help or using a weapon, “fighting dirty” or fighting outside of the perceived normative rules for aggressive behaviour demonstrates the victim’s attempt to regain control of her situation.

Retaliatory violence is different from a bully’s violent behaviour because the actions of the victim are not prolonged. If the retaliatory violence is successful or unsuccessful at staving off future violence, the victim does not continue the aggression. The aim of retaliatory violence is to end the prolonged torment. Continuation of that violence is the opposite intention of the victim when they use external means for protection.

Understanding the social dynamics that influence the different types of violence that are used by students in schools is extremely important. Students engage in a number of violent behaviours beyond bullying. Appreciating those different dynamics is important for intervening and preventing violence in schools.

## **Limitations**

The aim of this research has been to examine the manifestations of the four types of interpersonal violence put forward by Collins (2008). Through structured interviews, students were asked to recall a specific incident of in-school violence that they had witnessed or been a part of that had been previously resolved. The students’ recollections of violence demonstrate that they have the potential to engage in many different types of interpersonal conflict beyond bullying while at school. This research finds evidence for the occurrence of four types of interpersonal violence, similar to those outlined by Collins (2008). Not only do students participate in bullying, where one individual engages in top-down aggression toward a weaker victim, but they also take part in peer-to-peer honour contests, intergroup fights, and scapegoating violence. Each of these additional types of violence involves very different social dynamics between students, and are infrequently discussed in the current youth violence literature. These findings fill a gap in previous youth violence research, where much of the focus remains on bullying violence.

Collins’s (2008) own research argues that scapegoating, peer-to-peer honour contests, and intergroup fights are different from bullying violence. Peer-to-peer honour

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contests involve individuals who are of equal social or physical standing aggressing against one another. Scapegoating violence and intergroup fights both involve violence enacted between multiple groups of individuals toward a single victim or group. Although scapegoating violence bears similarities to bullying violence, Collins (2008) contends that they are different because scapegoating involves multiple students aggressing against a single victim. These distinctions are contrary to many of the descriptions of bullying in the current youth violence literature (Olweus, 1992, 1994, 1997, 2013; Smith et al., 2013). However, the definitional differences described by Collins (2008) and his peers for bullying violence are not a focal point for this article. Instead, this research aims to better explain the interpersonal dynamics that are involved in different types of conflict in order to garner a deeper appreciation for the ways that students use and sustain violence.

In addition to these four types of violence, this research demonstrates that students take part in a corollary form of violence used by bullying and scapegoating victims: retaliatory violence. Retaliatory violence was overlooked in Collins's (2008) own research, and is an important type of aggression to consider when analyzing in-school violence. Although retaliatory violence is not always effective at ending abuse, it does highlight patterns of social inequality between peers that might sustain certain types of violence.

It is important for researchers, policy makers, and school administrators alike to recognise that students engage in many different forms of violence at school, and that the social dynamics involved in those behaviours differ. Creating effective violence intervention and prevention methods is reliant on understanding the interpersonal dynamics that sustain each type of violence. Although there is no single program that has been found to eliminate bullying and school violence, the Scandinavian Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (and duplicate programs) have received a considerable amount of positive recognition. These programs focus on changing the social dynamics and norms within a school, and are some of the most effective bullying intervention programs to date (Ttofi & Farrington, 2011). Research has also demonstrated that including a variety of stakeholders and clearly defining the problem that needs to be addressed has also been successful in violence prevention (Orpinas & Horne, 2006). The Canadian PREVNet (Promoting Relationships and Eliminating Violence Network) programming is a successful intervention initiative that operates through its collaboration with university, government, and community partners aimed at providing assessment tools, policy, and advocacy about bullying (Craig & Pepler, 2007). These types of intervention methods work because they

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consider the different social dynamics involved in interpersonal youth violence. Considering these results, future research that is aimed at better understanding the social dynamics that provoke and sustain violence would be valuable.

While these analyses provide important new evidence for understanding the violent behaviours that can exist in schools, additional questions emerge: What are the social and physical factors that influence the longevity of each type of violence? What social and environmental factors of schools influence the different types of violence that students engage in? What violence intervention methods are most effective for disrupting bullying, retaliatory violence, scapegoating, peer-to-peer honour contests and intergroup fighting in Canadian schools? To develop a more nuanced understanding of the interpersonal dynamics that influence different types of violence in school, future research should combine the stories of multiple individuals involved in a single case of interpersonal youth violence. This research could be strengthened by also including video analysis of fights that occur in schools. Many public elementary and high schools have security cameras recording their hallways and playgrounds. Being able to analyze those materials in conjunction with student accounts of in-school violence would add a valuable element to the youth violence literature. More micro-social analyses of the types of violence that students engage in, especially involving multiple interviews of students who were involved in a single act of aggression, would allow researchers to triangulate stories and gain a deeper understanding of the dynamics involved in each account.

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