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Bouncing Back from Bullying: Resilience and Benefit-Finding in Victims of Bullying

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Bouncing Back from Bullying: Resilience and Benefit-Finding in Victims of Bullying

by

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A THESIS

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ABSTRACT

The present study investigates the role of resilience and benefit-finding in facilitating victims' "bouncing back" from school bullying. A sample of 200 students from the University of Calgary participated in the present study. Results indicate that trait-resilience significantly predicted victims' well-being, suggesting that resilience may partially explain why some victims of bullying successfully "bounce back." Additionally, trait-resilience significantly predicted victims' benefit-finding, indicating that benefit-finding may be a behaviour associated with resilience in the context of bullying. Lastly, results of a mediation model suggest that benefit-finding may partially explain why victims who are high in trait-resilience exhibit positive well-being following bullying experiences. Results also suggest a potential difference between finding some emotional benefit of bullying experiences versus developing behavioural resilience (i.e., coping strategies) through bullying experiences. Implications for the field of school bullying and resilience are discussed as well as potential impacts on the development of interventions are discussed.

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To anyone who has been affected by bullying.

To Jamie Hubley. Rest in peace.

“If you can't get rid of the skeleton in your closet, you'd best teach it to dance.”

- George Bernard Shaw

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

School bullying is a pervasive problem worldwide. In fact, the experience of bullying is so common that online media often refers to it as a “rite of passage” for school-aged children (Brown, 2006). Over the past few decades, academic, public, and media interest in school bullying has increased. As such, information regarding the prevalence and consequences of school bullying has become more widely recognized (Hawker & Boulton, 2000).

The many associations between school bullying and numerous negative developmental outcomes have been well-established in the literature (Hawker & Boulton, 2000). These negative outcomes include mood disturbances (Ttofi, Farrington, Lösel, & Loeber, 2011), psychotic symptoms (Schreier et al., 2009), psychosomatic problems (Gini & Pozzoli, 2009), poor academic achievement (Rothon, Head, Klineberg, & Stansfeld, 2011), and suicide (Kim & Leventhal, 2008). Studies have also indicated associations between persistent school bullying victimization and later antisocial behaviour and criminal offending (Farrington, Ttofi, & Lösel, 2011), including violent victim retaliation (Lodge & Frydenberg, 2005; Pace, Lowery & Lamme, 2004). Longitudinal and retrospective studies have established that some of these negative outcomes can be long-lasting (Arseneault, Bowes & Shakoor, 2010), sometimes persisting into adulthood (Adams & Lawrence, 2011) and can continue to negatively affect the well-being of victims long after the instigating experience.

As a natural reaction to the effects of bullying, parents, educators, policy-makers, and other allies have dedicated a substantial amount of resources to bullying prevention and intervention programs. Although the number of prevention and intervention programs being implemented worldwide is promising, the results of such programs are less inspiring. For example, a meta-analysis of 44 international, school-based bullying intervention programs

suggests that, on average, programs reduce bullying victimization by only about 17-20% and bullying behaviours by only 20-23% (Ttofi and Farrington, 2011). Although these figures may be statistically significant and promising to researchers, to the millions of victimized children worldwide and their families, the results are less encouraging.

A potential explanation for the lack of success of programs to reduce bullying victimization could be the focus of the research upon which these programs are based. Bullying research tends to adopt the negativistic perspective of the deficit-model. The deficit model focuses on the negative effects or “deficits” to target in remediation. Therefore, these programs focus on reducing or preventing negative behaviours or reactions to these behaviours.

In contrast to the common bullying literature, this thesis will adopt a strengths-based perspective. This viewpoint translates to strengths-based interventions which focus on promoting protective, resilience-based behaviours which protect and strengthen individuals. Adopting this perspective and developing strengths-based interventions is advantageous given the prevalence of bullying and the limited success of prevention programs. Programs that are intended to foster resilience and related behaviours will not only hopefully prepare students to face bullying, but also future challenging experiences beyond school.

The present study will examine, through a strengths-based perspective, the positive traits and behaviours of individuals who successfully recover or “bounce back” from their bullying experiences and manifest positive outcomes despite their negative experience. Despite the numerous studies identifying its many damaging outcomes, research suggests that some victims do not succumb to the negative consequences often associated with bullying. These individuals, who display positive developmental outcomes despite their exposure to bullying, have been referred to as “resilient” (Rutter, 2006). Despite limited knowledge of this encouraging group of

individuals, most bullying research focuses on the negative outcomes associated with bullying. With this negative focus, the concept of resilience in bullying victims has largely been largely under-researched (Rothson et al., 2011). As a result, little is known about the characteristics and behaviours of individuals who are able to “bounce back” from their bullying experiences (Sapouna & Wolke, 2013).

Research from the general trauma literature has illustrated that resilience in the face of adversity cannot only appear as resistance to negative outcomes, but as optimistic thinking (e.g., Fredrickson, Tugade, Waugh, & Larkin, 2003). This optimistic thinking can be described as finding the “silver lining” or, as the current study will suggest, benefit-finding. The process of benefit-finding may be associated with the well-being and successful rebounding of some bullying victims. In line with this thinking are results which suggest that some victims of adversity or trauma actually report positive outcomes of their negative experiences (e.g., Fredrickson et al., 2003; van Heugten, 2013). Despite these developments in the general trauma and workplace bullying literature, little is known about school bullying victims’ benefit-finding and the process of bouncing back from school-bullying. The present study fills this gap in the literature by examining victims of school bullying and exploring the relationship between school bullying experiences, resilience, and benefit-finding.

This study will serve to inform the general bullying and resilience literature and examine if benefit-finding is a behaviour associated with resilience and the process of “bouncing back” from bullying. If it is determined that finding benefit in bullying experiences is a behavioural indicator of resilience and well-being in victims of bullying, wide applications for intervention and the general study of resilience can be made. For example, identifying behavioural characteristics of resilience can assist researchers in further developing an operational definition

of the construct. In terms of the well-being of bullying victims, identifying behaviours which facilitate “bouncing back” and the display of resilience to adversity can help inform interventions. Specifically, positive thinking (e.g., benefit-finding) can be taught to individuals who are being victimized by bullies in school. The development of these behaviours may facilitate the development of resilience and resistance to negative outcomes.

Before introducing the present study, a review of the relevant literature will be presented to facilitate the reader’s understanding of the present work. The intended audience of the present document includes psychological and educational researchers and practitioners who may not have a thorough understanding of specific concepts and terms related to resilience and bullying. For this reason, a broad review of key concepts and prior research will give the reader a foundation to understand the subsequent chapters of this thesis. The forthcoming section will provide a broad review of the relevant literature and will introduce the concepts of bullying, resilience, and benefit-finding, which are central to the present study.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Bullying

2.1.1 Defining Bullying

One of the first documentations of bullying is thought to be written by Swedish physician Peter-Paul Heinemann in 1973. Heinemann used the Swedish term “mobbing” to refer to sudden group violence against an individual. The modern English word “mobbing” is thought to be based on this term and carries a similar definition (Smith et al, 2002). A comparable concept was also found in the German literature (Niedl, 1996). Prominent bullying researcher Dan Olweus (1978, 1993) also used the term “mobbing” in his early work but extended its definition to include systematic one-on-one attacks where the aggressor exhibits more power than the victim. The term “mobbing” evolved until Olweus (1978) used term “bullying” to describe repeated aggressive exchanges between peers, thus initiating the genesis of the since growing field of bullying research. Early examinations of bullying almost exclusively focused on what is currently termed “direct bullying,” namely physical aggression or direct verbal taunting. Later research expanded to regard the importance of what is now referred to as “indirect bullying.” Types of bullying and their definitions will be discussed later in the chapter.

Though several definitions of bullying have been proposed, Olweus’s definition is largely favoured in the bullying literature. Olweus (1999) defined bullying as the following:

“Bullying is thus characterized by the following three criteria: (1) it is aggressive behavior or intentional 'harmdoing' (2) which is carried out repeatedly and over time (3) in an interpersonal relationship characterized by an imbalance of power. One might add that the bullying behavior often occurs without apparent provocation.” (pp.10-11)

More succinct definitions characterize bullying as a form of repeated aggressive behaviour that causes victims to feel powerless or unable to protect themselves (Monks et al., 2009; Rigby, 2005). The reported feeling of powerlessness or inability to self-protect is what Olweus (1999) refers to as an imbalance of power. Within this imbalance, the bully is psychologically and/or physically more powerful than the victim (Nansel et al., 2001). The imbalance of power can be either actual or perceived by the victim and can be based on physical strength, social skill, and/or number of aggressors (Scheithauer, Hayer, Peterman, & Jugert, 2006). The imbalance of power between the bully and victim may be inherent to the act of bullying, such that “powerful” targets of bullying will not become victimized. In line with this thought is the Oxford Online Dictionary’s (Oxford University Press, 2014) definition of a victim, which states that a victim is “A person who has come to feel helpless and passive in the face of misfortune or ill-treatment.”

In general, bullying is described as the intentional, repetitive harming of an individual by his or her peers (Limber & Small, 2003; Olweus, 1996) which makes the victim feel unable to avoid or stop the victimization (i.e., helpless; Butler, Kift, & Campbell, 2009). Bullying can include physically, verbally, and socially aggressive acts (Sapouna & Wolke, 2013), or as Olweus (1999, p.11) more specifically states, "negative actions...carried out by physical contact, by words, or in other ways, such as making faces or mean gestures, and intentional exclusion from a group." For the purposes of the present study, Olweus’s (1999) popular definition of bullying is endorsed in which bullying is (1) intentional, (2) repeated, and (3) makes the victim feel powerless. This definition is selected for use in the present study due to the overwhelming preference for Olweus’s (1999) three part definition of bullying in the general bullying literature.

2.1.2 Types of bullying

Although the term bullying is most often associated with school-aged children, the concept of bullying extends beyond the school yard. For example, the term bullying has been used to describe nursing home residents' relationally aggressive behaviours toward fellow tenants (Mapes 2011). Bullying between siblings has also recently gained researchers' attention. Although sibling aggression is a common occurrence (Caspi, 2012), researchers have recently begun to consider repeated sibling aggression a form of bullying (Duncan, 1999; Menesini, Camodeca, & Nocentini, 2010). Bullying has even been observed to occur between adults in the workplace (Magnuson & Norem, 2009). Despite the ever expanding use of the term, most empirical research focuses on bullying between children and adolescents in school. The focus of the present study follows this trend and examines the effects of peer bullying in school.

There are three main types of school bullying that are typically described in literature: direct physical (e.g., hitting pushing, kicking), direct verbal (e.g., name-calling, threatening), and indirect bullying (rumor-spreading, excluding, gossiping; Wang, Iannotti, & Nansel, 2009). Cyber bullying is an emerging form of bullying and is a form of peer aggression which occurs through the use of technology such as text messages, emails, or social networking sites on personal computers or cell phones (Butler et al. 2009; Wang et al., 2009). Though cyber bullying is attracting increased research attention, it is not within the scope of the present study and will therefore not be directly addressed. Instead, the present study will focus on traditional bullying behaviours involving direct or indirect forms of aggression occurring at school.

Direct bullying involves face-to-face confrontation (Rivers & Smith, 1996). The majority of studies on bullying have focused on direct bullying (Scheithauer et al., 2006). Direct bullying is comprised of physical and direct verbal aggression. Physical bullying is

characterized by physical acts of aggression like hitting, punching, or pushing. Verbal bullying is characterized by direct spoken aggression, such as name calling and teasing (Bauman & Del Rio, 2006).

In the past few decades, research on indirect bullying such as relational aggression (e.g., Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Galen & Underwood, 1997) has increased. A primary distinction between the two main forms of aggression is that direct aggression involves direct confrontation and indirect bullying includes a third party (i.e., a peer group; Rivers & Smith, 1996). That is, indirect bullying involves harming the victim by damaging his or her social relationships. Behaviours associated with indirect aggression can include purposeful exclusion and gossiping (i.e., telling lies to isolate or damage an individual's reputation; Scheithauer et al., 2006).

Relational aggression is a form of indirect bullying characterized by interpersonally and psychologically aggressive acts such as verbal harassment, exclusion from activities or peer groups, name-calling, and initiating rumors (Camodeca & Goossens, 2005; Crick & Grotpeter 1995). Relational aggression is considered by some researchers to be the most damaging type of bullying to self-esteem, since adolescents' social self-perceptions are derived largely from their perceptions of the opinions of their peer group (e.g., Goodwin, 2002; Lunde, Frisen, & Hwang, 2006; Simmons, 2002; Vaillancourt, Hymel, & McDougall, 2003). The present study will examine bullying in general, including direct verbal, physical, and indirect relational bullying occurring in school.

2.1.3 Current Issues in Types of Bullying

The different types of bullying are not equally represented in schools. In an American study that surveyed over 7,000 middle to high school students, the majority of students report experiencing direct verbal bullying (53.6%). The second most frequent form of bullying

experienced was indirect relational bullying (51.4%). The fewest number of students reported direct physical bullying (20.8%; Wang et al., 2009). The lack of reporting of physical bullying could be due to the recent increase in awareness of bullying by school staff and other adults. Physical bullying may be more easily detected and subsequently interrupted or prevented.

In terms of gender representation in the different types of bullying, studies consistently show that males report more direct physical bullying than females (Bjorkqvist, Lagerspetz, & Kaukiainen, 1992; Card, Stucky, Sawalani, & Little, 2008; Rivers & Smith, 1996; Scheithauer et al., 2006; Wang et al., 2009). Results from previous research correspond with the notion that direct verbal bullying is experienced at similar frequencies by males and females (e.g., Bjorkqvist et al., 1992; Rivers & Smith, 1996; Scheithauer et al., 2006), but differing results have been reported for indirect relational and/or social aggression.

Indirect relational bullying is primarily associated with females (Coyne & Archer, 2005). Though a German study found that males and females reported similar levels of indirect bullying (Scheithauer et al., 2006), studies from the United Kingdom, United States, and Finland have suggested that females experienced more indirect bullying (Bjorkqvist et al., 1992; Powell & Jenson, 2010; Rivers & Smith, 1996; Wang et al., 2009). The reportedly advanced social and verbal skills of female students may allow them to manipulate and verbally attack their victims while humouring bystanders. This social prowess enables relationally aggressive females to go beyond physical aggression (Salmivalli, Lagerspetz, Bjorkqvist, Osterman, & Kaukiainen, 1996; Vaillancourt et al., 2003). Female students may also lack the physical strength to physically intimidate their targets and therefore must rely on their social skill. One theory proposes that high-status female students engage in relationally aggressive behavior through the use of their status among peers and other “positive” personal traits (Vaillancourt et al., 2003). Rivers and

Smith (1994) suggest that the use of relationally aggressive behavior depends upon a mature social network, but can be used by girls as young as eight years-old, peaking at age 11.

Examinations of age trends identify that bullying prevalence peaks during the late middle school to early secondary school years, primarily affecting adolescents aged 12 to 14. This is a very precarious time for students as they negotiate their positions in new social groups (Sapouna & Wolke, 2013). After the peak period in middle school (i.e., grades 6, 7, 8), experiences of bullying appear to decrease over time (Wang et al, 2009).

2.1.4 Bullying in the Context of Evolution and Animal Behaviour

Bullying behaviours are thought to be universal among the human species. A study involving a sample of 28 countries spanning North America and Europe discovered that not one country is without bullying behaviours (Due et al, 2005). A study examining the Mbuti peoples of Central Africa also identified behaviours consistent with modern conceptions of “bullying” (Turnbull, 1961); however cultural values must be considered when examining the behaviour of specific cultural groups. The universal nature of specific behavioral traits is important to understanding the evolution of human behaviour. Specifically, the more common a behaviour is within the human species, regardless of race, gender, ethnicity, country of origin, and other impacting variables, the more clearly it can be assumed that the behaviour is an important part of the human species’ evolutionary history. The presumed universal nature of bullying behaviours hints toward a long history of bullying within the human species. Unfortunately, despite extensive knowledge of early human fossil records, one cannot infer the behaviour of early humans. However, examinations of close evolutionary relatives such as baboons find frequent use of bullying-type behaviours, namely intimidation and aggression to modify the behaviours of peers or to obtain their resources (Seyfarth, 1976). Research completed by anthropologist Jane

Goodall (1986) found that male chimpanzees attempting to join a social grouping face continual “bullying.” Illustrations of social aggression in primates, combined with the presumed universal nature of these behaviours among the human species, suggest that bullying behaviours are deeply rooted within the evolutionary history of humans. Though enduring behaviours can remain rare throughout their history, bullying appears to be quite a prevalent phenomenon.

2.1.5 Prevalence of Bullying

Considerable variability exists between the prevalence figures reported in bullying studies. This variability could be due to several factors that are related to questionnaires and surveys. Specifically, data can be influenced by the time span being examined (e.g., last month, last year, ever at school), the frequency of the bullying being asked about (e.g., once a month, once a week), the definitions used (e.g., including or excluding direct forms, indirect forms, cyberbullying; Smith, 2013), individual perceptions and recollections of events, and other potential confounding variables. All of these issues, among others, make it difficult to compare prevalence rates across studies.

Despite the difficulty in determining overall prevalence rates for bullying, several researchers have attempted to obtain comprehensive prevalence rates by collapsing the rates of several studies. For example, Cook and colleagues (2010) performed a meta-analysis of quantitative bullying studies published worldwide from 1999 and 2006. Prevalence rates across studies were averaged and an overall bullying victimization rate of 23% was yielded. An additional study conducted by Craig and colleagues (2009) included a large multi-national survey of bullying experiences. This study generated a prevalence rate close to 13%. A study by Currie et al. (2012) obtained an even lower rate of 11% victimization in their survey of 38 countries. Given the results of these large-scale reports, it is clear how prevalence rates vary

across studies. Regardless of the numbers found in specific studies, it is well known that bullying is a large problem facing school-aged children.

2.1.5 Consequences of Bullying

Bullying victimization has been shown to be both physically and psychologically damaging. The many negative consequences of bullying have been well documented within populations from several different countries such as Canada, Australia, Ireland, Finland, Norway, Sweden, the United States, and England (Hawker & Boulton, 2000). These and other studies have reported that bullying during the school years can result in severe short- and long-term negative consequences. Bullying victimization can lead to a heightened risk of psychological side effects (Swearer, Song, Cary, Eagle, & Mickelson, 2001), such as embarrassment, loneliness, depression (Hawker and Boulton, 2000; Klomek et al., 2009; Sharp et al., 2000; Ttofi et al., 2011; Winsper, Lereya, Zanarini, & Wolke, 2012), anxiety, insecurity, self-blame (Boulton & Underwood, 1992; Graham & Juvonen, 1998), withdrawal, worry, and fear (Byrne, 1994), and poor self-esteem (Nation, Vieno, Perkins, & Massimo, 2008). Victims of bullying report being more emotionally distressed and socially marginalized than their nonvictimized peers (Juvonen, Graham, & Schuster, 2003).

Victims of bullying have also reported academic problems such as poor attachment to school and truancy (Brown & Taylor 2008, Rethon et al. 2010). Bullying victims have also been shown to perform more poorly in school (Andreou 2000, Brown & Taylor 2008, Schwartz, Chang, & Farver, 2001). Victims may also avoid school in order to avoid victimization (Peterson & Rigby 1999, Rethon et al. 2010), leading to further academic and psychological consequences such as social isolation and academic failure.

Serious and potentially life-threatening outcomes have also been reported by victims of bullying. These outcomes can include serious conduct problems, psychosis (Arseneault et al., 2009; Barker, Arseneault, Brendgen, Fontaine, & Maughan, 2008; Brunstein-Klomek, Sourander, & Gould, 2010; Schreier et al., 2009), suicidal ideation and suicide attempts (Klomek Marrocco, Klienmen, Schonfeld, & Gould, 2007; Skapinakis et al., 2011). In addition to potentially inflicting self harm, victims of bullying may also threaten the lives of others. Violent acts of victim retaliation such as school shootings have been reported (Lodge & Frydenberg, 2005; Pace, Lowery, & Lamme, 2004) and receive much attention from the media (Brank, Hoetger, & Hazen, 2012). Research shows that the 71% of perpetrators of violent victim retaliation, including those involved in the public shootings of Colorado, California, and Wisconsin, reported feeling bullied by others prior to the incidents (Lodge & Frydenberg, 2005; Pace, Lowery & Lamme, 2004). An additional, and less advertised, consequence of bullying for some victims is becoming bullies themselves and victimizing others (Adams & Lawrence, 2011).

The negative consequences of being bullied have been shown to persist into adulthood (Adams & Lawrence, 2011; Graham-Bermann, Cutler, Litzenberger, & Schwartz 1994). Results of a longitudinal study conducted by Olweus (1993) showed that young adults who were victims of bullying in childhood or adolescence experienced more symptoms of depression and lower self-esteem than their nonvictimized peers. Additionally, feelings of loneliness and isolation have been reported by college students who experienced bullying in the past. These individuals also discussed finding difficulty in making friends, feeling that no one will listen to them, and not knowing how to face negative criticism (Adams & Lawrence, 2011). In addition to long-lasting psychological effects of being bullied, research also shows that students who are victims

of bullying in junior high school and/or high school continue to be victimized in college (Adams & Lawrence, 2011).

So far, this chapter has provided a brief history of the term bullying, an introduction to common definitions of the term, a brief overview of the different types of bullying, and discussion of some general issues and trends in school bullying. In addition, a brief discussion of the many documented consequences of bullying was provided. Up to this point, the document has followed the tendency of most bullying research and has taken on a negativistic view of bullying by focusing on the negative and potentially long-lasting and life threatening outcomes of bullying. The remainder of the document will adopt a different perspective which focuses on positive outcomes. Through this strengths- or resilience-based perspective, the remainder of the document will focus on the population of bullying victims who partially circumvent the potentially damaging consequences of bullying victimization and, instead, manifest positive outcomes.

2.2 Bouncing Back from Bullying

Although relations between bullying and numerous negative consequences are consistently demonstrated, not all victims of bullying experience negative effects (e.g., Sapouna & Wolke, 2013). In fact, some victims of bullying can show positive developmental outcomes despite their exposure to bullying (Rutter, 2006). The present thesis defines the process of manifesting positive outcomes despite bullying experiences as “bouncing back.”

The term “bouncing back” has been employed elsewhere to refer to the process of recovering from some adversity or trauma (e.g., Gross, 2009; Tugade & Fredrickson, 2004). Though this process has been largely under researched in the school bullying literature, one study provides some results that suggest many adolescent victims of school bullying display

fewer symptoms of psychopathology and delinquent behaviours than their victimized counterparts (Sapouna & Wolke, 2013). In addition to this study, a study of workplace bullying also provides promising results. This study, which investigated workplace bullying among social workers demonstrated that most of the victimized employees not only experienced positive well-being following their experiences but actually reported positive outcomes of the experience. These positive outcomes included feeling stronger, more intelligent, more skilled, and more judicious (van Heugten, 2013). These individuals were considered to have successfully “bounced back” from their experiences.

Although the topic of recovery from adverse experiences is prevalent in the resilience literature (e.g., Ungar, 2013), the process of recovering from bullying remains largely under researched. As a result, little is known regarding the characteristics and behaviours of individuals who are able to “bounce back” from their school bullying experiences (Sapouna & Wolke, 2013). The process of recovering from adversity and experiencing positive outcomes, which can be referred to as “bouncing back,” is also commonly associated with resilience. In fact, resilience is frequently referred to as the ability to “bounce back” to the pre-trauma state (Walsh, 2002).

2.3 Resilience

Some individuals are protected or shielded from the negative consequences of experiencing adversity. One potential explanation for this resistance to negative outcomes is the presence of insulating or protective factors that buffer individuals from the deleterious effects of being victimized (Rigby, 2000). These protective factors combine to form what is referred to as resilience. Contrary to early reports of resilience, resilience is not a rare gift cultivated within a select few exceptional individuals. Instead, resilience is what Masten (2001) refers to as

“ordinary magic,” the interplay of factors which insulate individuals, thus protecting them from some of the harsh effects of adverse experience. Within this view, resilience can be considered a shield or bubble that protects the individual should they face a challenging and potentially damaging situation. Although resilience is a commonly studied construct, no clear operational definition of resilience exists (Herrman, et al., 2011).

Although there is no agreed upon operational definition of resilience, there is a general consensus in the literature that resilience is the manifestation of positive outcomes in spite of substantial adversity (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000), or “bouncing back” from adversity. More specifically, resilience is the ability to maintain or regain mental health and well-being despite experiencing hardship or trauma (Wald, Taylor, Asmundson, Jang, & Stapleton, 2006). The lack of operational definition of resilience can be due to the differing conceptualizations of resilience. There is disagreement in the literature regarding whether resilience is a personal trait or a dynamic process relying on the interactions between several social and interpersonal mechanisms (Herrman et al., 2011).

2.3.1 Resilience as a Process

Process-based conceptions of resilience suggest that resilience is less a reflection of an individual’s capacity to overcome adversity as it is the capacity of the individual’s informal and formal social networks to facilitate positive development (Obrist, Pfeiffer, & Henley, 2010; Ungar, 2011b). As would be expected, the function of social resources in shielding an individual from the effects adversity depends on optimal interactions between the individual and his or her environment (Ungar, 2008). Specifically, research suggests that resilience is observed when an individual engages in behaviors that help them to seek and obtain supportive resources (i.e., the interactive role of the individual and the accessibility of supportive environmental resources;

Ungar, 2011a). Roberts and Masten (2004) claimed that environmental and contextual factors play important roles in the development of personal resilience. In this view, resilience is a dynamic process (e.g., Luthar et al., 2000) in which personal and environmental factors interact to protect an individual from the effects of adversity.

The environmental factors which have been shown to be related to resilience include social support (peer and family), secure attachment to a parental figure, family stability, good parenting, and maternal mental health (Herrman et al, 2011). These factors are thought to interact with the individual in some way to create resilience. Block (2002) found that this process-based definition of resilience which combines the influence of environmental protective factors with factors that are intrinsic to the individual is not helpful in fully understanding how an individual adapts when faced with adversity. In line with this argument, the present work will adopt an alternative conceptualization of resilience that emphasizes the role of the individual.

2.3.2 Resilience as a Trait

Resilience is viewed by some researchers as a relatively stable personality trait characterized by the ability to bounce back from negative experiences and successfully adapt to the demands of daily life (Block & Block, 1980; Block & Kremen, 1996; Lazarus, 1993). In contrast to approaches to the study of resilience emphasizing the role of social mechanisms, the theoretical conceptualization of trait-resilience emphasizes intra-individual mechanisms facilitating good psychological functioning and adaptability (Block & Block, 1980; Klohen, 1996). Although the construct of trait-resilience has been criticized for overemphasizing the role of the individual (e.g., Ungar, 2013), studies employing this perspective and focusing on the role of personal agency in overcoming adversity are still prevalent (e.g., Fredrickson et al., 2003)

Trait-resilience (also known as “ego resilience”; Prince-Embury & Saklofske, 2013) refers to the personal qualities and skills that facilitate an individual’s healthy functioning and successful adaptation when faced with adversity (Connor & Davidson, 2003; Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000; Masten & Obradovic, 2006). Block and Block (1980) adopted this view and examined resilience through a psychoanalytic lens. The result of this exploration was the term ego-resilience (Block & Kremen, 1996). The construct of ego-resilience was developed in the context of personality development and has since received considerable research attention. Though criticized for overestimating the role of the individual (e.g., Ungar, 2013), the concept of ego-resilience has a good theoretical basis and has been used by researchers as a measure of resilience. Ego-resilience is proposed to be an enduring psychological construct characterizing human adaptability. It does not depend on risk or adversity, but is part of dealing with general, day-to-day challenges (Windle, Bennett, & Noyes, 2011) as well as substantial adversity.

According to Block & Block (1980), ego-resilience is the individual’s ability to adapt his or her level of ego-control in response to circumstances. It is presumed that as a result of this adaptability, ego-resilient individuals are more likely to be more self-confident and psychologically adjusted than those who are lower in ego-resilience (Block & Kremen, 1996). Block and Kremen (1996) suggest that ego-resilient individuals will behave in adaptive ways in response to difficult situations; whereas, individuals who are low in ego-resilience will behave in a maladaptive manner. In the context of bullying, individuals who are high in ego-resilience will behave in adaptive ways, such as avoiding their bullies; whereas, less ego-resilient individuals will behave in ways which will exacerbate the bullying, such as responding with high emotionality. This ability to adapt can be considered a self-protective resource, rendering individuals more resilient. It is presumed then that individuals who are high in resilience are

more likely to adapt positively to daily change as well as significant adversity, thus allowing them to manifest better than expected outcomes. Research in the field of trauma supports this theory of resilience as a protective factor against the negative effects of adversity.

The present study views resilience as separate from coping. Coping is often considered a process: what individuals *do* to deal with challenges (Rutter, 2007). Conversely, resilience is viewed as something that an individual *has*. When resilience is viewed as a process (e.g., Ungar, 2008, 2011b), the considerations of coping behaviours are introduced. Therefore, viewing resilience as a process crosses the border between resilience and coping. The present study is not directly concerned with the coping process or the behaviours which facilitate it. Instead, the present work focuses on the role of individual factors (e.g., trait resilience) in predicting positive outcomes following bullying experiences.

Given the present study's adoption of the trait- or ego-resilience viewpoint, the remainder of the document will use the term "resilience" to refer to this conceptual definition of the term. Additionally, the terms "ego-resilience" and "trait-resilience" will be used interchangeably. Individuals who have demonstrated resilience to adversity are considered to possess ego- or trait-resilience and are believed to be better prepared for challenging experience. The presumed role of this "preparedness" will be discussed later in the document.

2.3.3 Resilience in Adversity

Resilience is commonly examined in the general trauma literature as part of a strengths-based perspective on trauma and adversity. It has been suggested that resilience could be the key to explaining why some individuals are able to recover from traumatic experiences more successfully than others (e.g., Windle et al., 2011; White, Driver, & Warren, 2010). Resilience has been shown to be related to a range of psychological benefits in daily living and in times of

crisis (Fredrickson et al., 2003). For example, individuals who were high in resilience were more likely to experience positive emotions following the traumatic experience of the September 11th, 2001 terrorist attacks. These individuals also reported experiencing fewer depressive symptoms following the attacks (Fredrickson et al., 2003).

Previous research investigating resilience to child maltreatment found that 12–22% of participants who were abused as children manifested better than expected outcomes (Jaffee, Caspi, Moffitt, Polo-Tomás, & Taylor, 2007). Additionally, research has also shown that while approximately 60% of people who report experiencing significant emotional abuse in childhood later develop major depression as adults, 40% do not report such consequences (Chapman et al., 2004). In a longitudinal study investigating children’s resilience to early adversity, Herman (1992) discovered that one child out of 10 showed an unusual capacity to withstand an adverse early environment. Additionally, research in the area of physical and mental abuse suggests that some victims were to overcome some psychological effects and ultimately lead satisfying and productive lives (Bogar & Hulse-Killacky, 2006; Everall, Altrows, & Paulson, 2006; Grossman & Moore, 1994).

The role of resilience to trauma and early adversity has been well-documented, but unfortunately, the concept of resilience has been largely ignored in the bullying literature (Rothon et al., 2010). Most studies examining resilience’s role in bullying are fairly recent, considering the age of resilience research in general (e.g., Donnon, 2010; Sapouna & Wolke, 2013). Despite the limited literature, results support the role of resilience as a protective factor in the context of bullying. Specifically, Sapouna and Wolke (2013) demonstrated that some bullied adolescents displayed lower than expected levels of depression and delinquency. These victims manifested better than expected outcomes given their bullying experiences and were thus

considered to be “resilient.” A longitudinal study of bullied Scottish adolescents suggests that resilient victims experienced less post-bullying psychological distress, namely fewer symptoms of anxiety and depression (McVie, 2014). An examination of relational aggression among females demonstrated that resilience predicted victims’ formation of adult friendships following their bullying experiences (Donnon, 2010).

Research on bullied adolescents in India suggests that resilience mediates the relationship between bullying victimization and reduced self-efficacy. These results suggest that resilience protects victims of bullying from experiencing reduced self-efficacy as a result of their bullying experiences (Narayanan & Betts, 2014). These and other results suggest that resilience plays an important role in protecting victims of bullying and facilitates their healthy development.

The above section discussed resilience as a protective factor. Two primary conceptions of resilience were introduced: resilience as a process and resilience as a trait. It was discussed that resilience, somehow, assists individuals in overcoming traumatic, or other adverse, experiences including bullying. What has not been discussed is *how* bullying victims bounce back from their experiences. Researchers who view resilience as a process suggest that behaviours such as social support-seeking can facilitate the process. If resilience is viewed as a trait, what behaviours are associated with these traits that aide in the process of “bouncing back?” Are there behaviours that “resilient” victims engage in individually without the involvement of social resources? One such behaviour could be optimistic thinking. Consideration of the potential positive outcomes of adversity could evolve from resilience and may facilitate recovery. Specifically, this study proposes that benefit-finding is a behaviour that “resilient” victims commonly engage in to help them “bounce back” and heal from their bullying

experiences. The concept of benefit-finding will be introduced and further discussed in the upcoming section.

2.3 Benefit-Finding

Previous research suggests that not only do some victims of bullying successfully “bounce back” from their bullying experiences, but some report benefits of experiencing such adversity (van Heugten, 2013). A growing body of literature also examines positive growth through traumatic experiences other than bullying, including cancer (Cordova, Cunningham, Carlson, & Andrykowski, 2001; Tallman, Altmaier, & Garcia, 2007), heart attack (Affleck, Tennen, Croog, & Levine, 1987), sexual assault (Frazier, Conlon, & Glaser, 2001), and acts of terrorism (Fredrickson, Tugade, Waugh, & Larkin, 2003). Within this framework, stressful life experiences can provide an opportunity for personal growth. This concept relates to the well-known quote from Friedrich Nietzsche’s *Twilight of the Idols* (1889), “what does not destroy me, makes me stronger.” Several researchers from various disciplines have explored this concept, proposing numerous terms to describe the concept of personal growth through experiencing adversity.

Various terms have been applied to this concept of finding the "silver lining" in adverse experiences (Davis, Nolen-Hoeksema, & Larson, 1998). Such terms include adversarial growth (Linley & Joseph, 2004), benefit-finding (Affleck & Tennen, 1996), global meaning-making (Vickberg et al., 2001), stress-related growth (Park, Cohen, & Murch, 1996), perceived benefits (McMillen & Fisher, 1998), sense-making (Davis, Nolen-Hoeksema, & Larson, 1998) and thriving (O’Leary & Ickovics, 1995). These terms are often found in the coping literature. Two of the most commonly used terms to refer to the act of identifying positive outcomes of negative experiences are benefit-finding and meaning-making. Benefit-finding can be thought of as

finding the “silver lining” in a traumatic experience, while meaning-making is finding purpose in, or a reason for, the traumatic experience (O’Dougherty Wright, Crawford, & Sebastian, 2007). The term benefit-finding will be used in the present study to refer to identifying positive outcomes, or “benefits,” of bullying experiences.

Finding benefit from adverse experiences has been shown to contribute to the well-being of victims. Surveyed female survivors of childhood sexual abuse who had found benefit from their experience were found to have better psychological functioning than women who had not found benefit (O’Dougherty et al., 2007). Other studies demonstrate that benefit-finding is associated with more positive adjustment (McAdams, Reynolds, Lewis, Patten, & Bowman, 2001), greater well-being (Tavernier & Willoughby, 2012), physical and (Affleck et al., 1987) mental health (McMillen, Smith, & Fisher, 1997), improved relationships, appreciation for life, positive changes in self, spiritual or religious growth (Tallman et al., 2007), and mitigated negative effects of adverse life events (Taylor, 1983; 1989).

Though not directly, benefit-finding has also been associated with the Big Five personality traits (John & Srivastava, 1999). The Big Five personality traits are the factors yielded from the five factor model of personality (Costa & McCrae, 1992) and include openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism. Openness has been represented as intellect and neuroticism is has been represented as a lack of emotional stability (e.g., Saucier, 1994). Research has illustrated a relationship between extraversion, optimism, and cognitive restructuring (Carver & Connor-Smith, 2010). Since optimism and cognitive restructuring are hypothesized to be central to benefit-finding, extraversion may also be important to the process of finding benefits in negative experiences. Additionally, previous research indicates relationships between openness/intellect and cognitive flexibility (John & Srivastava 1999,

McCrae & John 1992), and openness/intellect and consideration of new perspectives (Carver & Connor-Smith, 2010). Perspective taking and cognitive flexibility are also important to the construct of benefit-finding, so it can be presumed that openness may also be related to benefit-finding.

Finding benefit in traumatic experiences is hypothesized to be an active ingredient of trait resilience. Fredrickson and colleagues (2003) refer to this process as experiencing positive emotions in their study of the effects of the September 11 terrorist attacks. In Fredrickson's (1998, 2000, 2001) broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions, positive emotions can broaden people's modes of thinking and thus improve their ways of coping with stress. Habitual broad-minded thinking, and subsequent positive coping, is considered to be a durable personal resource and a main facet of trait resilience that can be accessed to help individuals bounce back from a wide range of adversities (Fredrickson et al., 2003). A correlate of this broad-minded thinking is exploring the potential positive outcomes of a negative experience, in essence, benefit-finding.

A study examining the relationship between benefit-finding and resilience found that individuals who are high in resilience are more likely to report experiencing positive emotions in response to stressors, both in the laboratory and in daily life (Tugade & Fredrickson, 2004). This study also showed that resilient people report finding more positive meaning within daily life stressors and exhibit faster returns to their pre-stress state. This study illustrates the aforementioned connection between resilience and benefit-finding, such that resilient individuals employ benefit-finding strategies in response to stress and successfully and quickly "bounce back" from their experience. Alternatively, benefit-finding can be viewed as an outcome of resilience to adverse experience (e.g., Fredrickson et al., 2003).

Benefit-finding, especially when viewed as a strategic response to stress, is commonly associated with coping. In this context, benefit-finding is a characteristic of emotion-focused coping and occurs during the adverse experience as a means to recovery. The present study will not view benefit-finding as a part of the coping process, but as an outcome of resilience. Though the present study does not explicitly address coping, it may be that benefit-finding exists within the overlap between coping and resilience. Regardless of the unclear relationship between coping, benefit-finding, and resilience, the present study will examine benefit-finding as an outcome or product of resilience.

Fredrickson and colleagues (2003) examined the role of benefit-finding in explaining how resilient victims achieve positive well-being following traumatic events. The study employed mediation analyses to illustrate this relationship. Results of the mediation analysis indicated that identifying benefits and experiencing positive emotions in response to adversity fully accounted for the relationship between pre-trauma resilience and post-trauma psychological well-being and psychological resources (Fredrickson et al., 2003). In sum, benefit-finding is not only a behaviour employed by resilient individuals, but it *explains* the relationship between resilience and well-being such that resilient people are able to manifest positive outcomes *because* of their benefit-finding. The results of previous studies provide promising evidence of the relationship between resilience, benefit-finding, and well-being in the context of trauma and adversity. However, these associations have yet to be established in the context of school-bullying.

Though studies tend to view benefit-finding as one general construct, qualitative reports of the positive effects of bullying tend to follow a dichotomous trend. Specifically, victims tend to identify emotional and behavioural benefits to their experience (e.g., van Heugten, 2013).

Considering these emerging themes in benefit-finding, the present study will explore emotional and behavioural benefit-finding as two separate variables.

Critique of the Literature

The previous sections have briefly outlined the extant literature related to bullying, resilience, and benefit-finding. The present study adds to this research base and addresses a substantial deficiency in the study of resilience in bullying. Particularly, this thesis examines the potential positive outcomes of school bullying, which have been largely ignored.

The lack of discussion on positive outcomes of surviving bullying contradicts research suggesting that positive outcomes can emerge in the aftermath of other forms of adversity, such as childhood abuse (Anderson, 1997; Rutter, 2007), poverty (Garmezy, 1993), or emotionally challenging work (Horwitz, 1998). This substantial gap in the bullying literature is likely due to the ubiquitous nature of the deficit model in bullying research.

The deficit model in a negativistic perspective focusing on negative outcomes to be remediated (Boyden & Cooper, 2007). Demonstrating the damaging effects of bullying helps psychologists, social workers, and lawyers build cases for victim support and evoke changes in organizational policy and practice. However, an exclusively deficit-based focus inhibits learning about what can facilitate the development positive outcomes (van Heugten, 2013).

In contrast to the deficit-based perspective is resilience research. Resilience research adopts a strengths-based perspective and focuses on positive outcomes and investigates factors which facilitate the process of “bouncing back” and overcoming adversity (Howard et al., 1999). From a resilience-based perspective, examining how some victims of bullying can experience positive outcomes, whereby they are made stronger in by the survival of their bullying experience, can assist in developing programs to promote resilience to bullying. The aim of the

present study is to inform intervention and add a much needed strengths-based perspective to the bullying literature by adopting a resilience perspective and exploring the relationship between resilience, benefit-finding, and well-being in the context of bullying in order to illustrate the process of “bouncing back” from bullying.

CHAPTER 3: THE PRESENT STUDY

The purpose of the present study is to explore the relationship between resilience, benefit-finding, and well-being in the context of school bullying. Explorations of resilience and “bouncing back” from bullying are scarce. Even more neglected is the topic of benefit-finding in the context of bullying, particularly since previous studies in trauma demonstrate the importance of benefit-finding as a mediator of the relationship between resilience and post-trauma well-being.

Extant research in resilience and bullying typically views resilience as a process and takes into account the role of various social and environmental resources in helping bullying victims maintain well-being. These explorations over-emphasize the importance of social factors in resilience and tend to ignore the role of the individual. As a result of this focus, interventions to promote resilience neglect an important group of commonly bullied individuals, those who lack social resources.

In contrast to the majority of bullying research, the present adopts the trait-resilience perspective and focuses on the role of the individual in “bouncing back.” Specifically, the present study examines if individuals who are high in ego-resilience report more positive outcomes of their bullying experiences than individuals who are less ego-resilient. Additionally, the present study illustrates that ego-resilience predicts victims’ benefit-finding such that highly ego-resilient individuals are more likely to find benefit in their bullying experiences. Since previous qualitative explorations of the positive effects of bullying seem to follow a trend of either emotional (e.g., feeling stronger) or behavioural (e.g., learning how to behave) benefits (e.g., van Heugten, 2013), the present study will separate emotional and behavioural benefits to determine if different relationships exist between finding these benefits and personality,

resilience, and post-bullying well-being. For the purpose of the present study, emotional benefit-finding is conceptualized as a perceived gain in emotional strength. Behavioural benefit-finding is conceptualized as an identification of strategies or behaviours that help the individual face future challenges. It is hypothesized that resilience scores will predict the finding of both emotional and behavioural benefits.

Most importantly, the present exploration tests a mediation model that follows the work of Fredrickson and colleagues (2003). Specifically, the present work examines if benefit-finding fully or partially mediates the relationship between resilience and well-being in the context of school bullying. It is predicted that finding emotional and behavioural benefits will significantly partially mediate the relationship between resilience and well-being, therefore, partially explaining *how* resilient victims of bullying successfully “bounce back” from their bullying experiences.

The present study also explores the role of personality traits in predicting benefit-finding in response to bullying. The difference in the expression of personality traits between those who do and do not identify emotional and/or behavioural benefits of their bullying experiences is a central topic of this thesis. The two groups will also be compared in their levels of ego-resilience and subjective well-being in order to identify if benefit-finders are more or less resilient and/or satisfied with their lives.

The present study will test the following main research questions:

Research Question 1: *Do individuals who find emotional and/or behavioural benefit differ in personality, resilience, and/or well-being from those who do not?* In order to examine the characteristics of victims of bullying who “bounce back,” individuals who have and have not found benefit in their bullying experiences will be compared. Given previous research

illustrating the relationship between extraversion, optimism, and cognitive restructuring (Carver & Connor-Smith, 2010) it is anticipated that benefit-finders will be significantly higher in extraversion than non-benefit-finders (both emotional and behavioural). Similarly, consideration of previous research indicating relationships between openness/intellect, cognitive and emotional flexibility, openness to new experiences (John & Srivastava 1999, McCrae & John 1992), and consideration of new perspectives (Carver & Connor-Smith, 2010), it is expected that benefit-finders (both emotional and behavioural) will be significantly higher in openness than non-benefit-finders. Conversely, it is anticipated that benefit-finders will be significantly lower in emotional stability (neuroticism) than non-benefit-finders, given its associations with high stress response (e.g., Schneider, Rench, Lyons, & Riffle, 2010). Additionally, since previous research indicates that individuals who are high in resilience are more likely to report experiencing positive emotions in response to stressors (Tugade & Fredrickson, 2004), it is expected that benefit-finders will be significantly higher in resilience than non-benefit-finders. Benefit-finders are also expected to be higher in well-being than non-benefit-finders, given previous associations between benefit-finding and post-trauma well-being (Tavernier & Willoughby, 2012).

Research Question 2: *Do personality traits significantly predict finding emotional and/or behavioural benefit?* Given the importance of personality traits in predicting behaviour, the role of personality traits in predicting benefit-finding is examined. It is expected that extraversion, given its associations with optimism, happiness, and cognitive restructuring (Carver & Connor-Smith, 2010), will significantly predict emotional and behavioural benefit-finding. Openness, with its associations with cognitive and emotional flexibility, openness to new experiences (John & Srivastava 1999, McCrae & John 1992), and consideration of new perspectives (Carver & Connor-Smith, 2010), will also significantly predict emotional and

behavioural benefit-finding. Conversely, it is anticipated that emotional stability (neuroticism) will significantly negatively predict emotional and behavioural benefit-finding, given its associations with high stress response (e.g., Schneider et al., 2010).

Research Question 3: *Does resilience significantly predict finding emotional and/or behavioural benefit?* This research question investigates if benefit-finding is as an outcome associated with resilient victims' "bouncing back." Specifically, the predictive relationship between resilience and benefit-finding has been demonstrated in other populations (e.g., Fredrickson et al., 2003; Tugade & Fredrickson, 2004), but has yet to be established in a sample of bullying victims. Considering these previous associations between resilience and benefit-finding, it is anticipated that resilience will significantly predict emotional and behavioural benefit-finding.

Research Question 4: *Does resilience significantly predict post-bullying well-being?* Previous research demonstrates a relationship between resilience and positive outcomes (e.g., well-being) in various samples such as victims terrorism (e.g., Fredrickson et al., 2003), child maltreatment (e.g., Jaffee, et al., 2007), emotional abuse (e.g., Chapman et al., 2004), and bullying victims (e.g., Donnon, 2010; McVie, 2014; Sapouna & Wolke, 2013). Given these previous associations, it is expected that resilience will significantly predict post-bullying well-being in the present sample of bullying victims.

Research Question 5: *Does finding emotional and/or behavioural benefit significantly predict post-bullying well-being?* Previous research in other populations suggests that benefit-finding is a predictor of better psychological functioning (O'Dougherty et al., 2007) positive adjustment (McAdams, Reynolds, Lewis, Patten, & Bowman, 2001), greater well-being (Tavernier & Willoughby, 2012), and mitigated negative effects of adverse life events (Taylor,

1983; 1989). These relationships have not been established in victims of bullying. Considering the results of previous research, it is hypothesized that emotional and behavioural benefit-finding significantly predicts well-being in the present sample.

Research Question 6: *Does finding emotional and/or behavioural benefit significantly mediate the relationship between resilience and post-bullying well-being?* Previous research conducted by Fredrickson and colleagues (2003) suggests that benefit-finding mediates the relationship between resilience and well-being in victims of trauma. This result suggests that benefit-finding partially explains why individuals who are high in resilience are able to “bounce back” from adverse experiences. The present study will explore this model in the context of school bullying. Considering the results of the Fredrickson et al (2003) study, it is anticipated that (emotional and behavioural) benefit-finding will significantly mediate the relationship between resilience and well-being in the present sample.

CHAPTER 4: METHOD

Participants

A convenience sample of 130 undergraduate and graduate students ($N= 130$; 28 males and 102 females; Mean age = 20.5) from the University of Calgary participated in the present study. Two-hundred respondents originally participated in the survey. Thirty-eight respondents were not included in the analysis because they had not experienced school bullying. Thirty participants were not included due to 1) not providing consent, or 2) choosing to leave the survey prior to completion. Two additional participants were excluded from the sample because their reported primary type of bullying experienced was either cyber bullying or sibling bullying, which are not forms of bullying *by peers in school* and are, therefore, not examined in the present study. A series of demographic questions were constructed in order to gather information about the participants such as gender, age, ethnicity, partnership status, sexual preference, student status, program year, degree program, and grade point average.

Measures

Bullying Experience

A yes-no dichotomous question (i.e., “Did you experience bullying in school?”) was asked in order to determine if participants experienced bullying in school. Questions regarding type of bullying were also asked to determine fit for the present study. Participants who reported bullying perpetrated by teachers or other school staff, family members, or via technology (i.e., cyberbullying) were excluded from the sample. Direct and indirect forms of bullying were not distinguished for the purposes of the analyses, since the negative consequences associated with the types of bullying tend to be similar (e.g., Hawker & Boulton, 2000).

Benefit-Finding

Two questions were constructed to address potential benefits of bullying experiences. One potential benefit addressed was a sense of emotional strength (i.e., “*Do you believe that being bullied has made you a stronger person?*”) The other addressed potential benefit involved the gaining of behavioural resilience or “tools” to combat future adversity (i.e., “*Do you believe that being bullied has helped prepare you to face challenges in the future?*”). Responses were recorded on a Likert-type scale from 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 4 (*Strongly Agree*).

Personality

In the present study, personality was measured using the Mini Markers (Saucier, 1994). This measure consists of 40 items and measures the Big Five factors of personality (i.e., extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability (neuroticism), openness/intellect; McCrae, 1992; Goldberg, 1992). Only the extraversion, openness/intellect, and emotional stability factors will be used in the analyses. The items are presented as an adjective with a 1 (*Extremely Inaccurate*) to 9 (*Extremely Accurate*) Likert-type rating scale. Items include adjectives such as “*bashful*,” “*bold*,” and “*moody*.” The respondents are asked to indicate how accurately each adjective represents their personality. Eight adjectives load on to each of the five factors. The respondents’ ratings were summed for each of the five traits. Higher scores indicate increased presence of that personality trait. The Mini Markers is reported to be psychometrically sound, with internal consistency coefficients ranging from .75 to .90 and acceptable criterion-related validity (Dwight, Cummings, & Glenar, 1998).

Ego Resilience

The Ego Resilience Scale by Block and Kremen (1996) was used as a measure of ego resilience. The Ego Resilience scale is a self-report measure containing 14 items. Responses are formatted in a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*Does not apply at all*) to 4 (*Applied very strongly*). Item responses were summed to create a total score. Total scores range from 0 (*Very Low Resilience Trait*) to 56 (*Very High Resiliency Trait*), and high scores indicate greater ego resilience. Items include statements such as “*I quickly get over and recover from being startled.*” The scale contains few colloquial terms which make it more appealing for use with a diverse population consisting of English-language-learners. Test-retest reliability coefficients are acceptable, ranging from .51 to .67. A good theoretical basis for item selection is reported and criterion-related validity and construct validity are considered to be within the acceptable range (Windle et al., 2011).

Well-Being

The Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) was used as a measure of subjective well-being. The SWLS consists of five items examining the respondent’s global judgment of life satisfaction, which is thought to converge highly with emotional well-being. The items are comprised of statements such as “*In most ways my life is close to ideal.*” Responses are recorded on a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 7 (*Strongly Agree*). Item responses are summed to create a total score. Higher scores indicate greater satisfaction with life. Test-retest reliability has been reported to be strong ($\alpha = .87$; Diener et al., 1985). Considerable evidence for the construct validity of the SWLS has been reported (e.g., Diener et al., 1985; Pavot et al., 1991).

Procedure

Recruitment

Ethics approval for the present study was obtained from the Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board at the University of Calgary in October of 2013. Recruitment began in late October of 2013. Recruitment inquiry emails were sent to professors and sessional instructors from various faculties. Following approval from course instructors, participants were recruited via classroom talks. Participants were invited to complete an online, anonymous survey hosted by SurveyMonkey.com. The survey contained 143 questions regarding demographics, bullying experiences, personality, ego resilience, self-efficacy, self-esteem, and emotional intelligence. Incentives were offered which included three \$25 gift cards to the University of Calgary Bookstore. Winners were selected by random draw. The majority of respondents completed the survey in November of 2013, with additional respondents participating in December of 2013 and January, February, and March of 2014.

Data Analysis

Data were imported into and analyzed using IBM SPSS Version 22.0. Thirty additional cases were deleted in a list wise manner due to greater than 20% of missing data. Of the remaining data, a total of three percent of data was missing and was subsequently filled using linear interpolation. Linear interpolation is a commonly used method for replacing missing data. It averages the last valid value before the missing data point and the first valid value after the missing data point to calculate and interpolate the missing value (Pelham, 2013). The sample distributions were assessed for normality by examining the skewness and kurtosis values. Outlying data points were identified using box plots and through examining standard scores for

data points above or below 3.25 or -3.25, respectively (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). No outlying data points were identified. The final data set used for the analyses consisted of 130 participants.

Group differences. *Independent sample t*-tests were conducted to examine the following research questions: (1) *Do victims who do and do not find emotional benefit differ significantly in: (a) personality, (b) ego-resilience, and (c) well-being?* (2) *Do victims who do and do not find behavioural benefit differ significantly in: (a) personality, (b) ego-resilience, and (c) well-being?* Levene's test for equality of variance was used to test the assumption of homogeneity of variances. A Bonferroni correction was used to adjust for multiple comparisons ($\alpha_B = \alpha/k$, where k equals the number of *t*-tests conducted).

$$\alpha_B = .05/5, \text{ therefore } \alpha_B = .01$$

The revised p value after the Bonferroni correction was applied is $p < .01$. In order to adjust for unequal groups, responses to the “*Do you believe being bullied has made you stronger?*” and “*Do you believe being bullied has made you more prepared to face future challenges?*” questions were collapsed. Specifically, the “*Strongly Agree*” and “*Agree*” responses were collapsed into one “*Agree*” group for each of the questions. The “*Strongly Disagree*” and “*Disagree*” responses were collapsed to form one “*Disagree*” group for each of the questions. Cohen's d was used as a measure of effect size. As a general rule of thumb, “small” effect size coefficients are around .20, “medium” effect sizes are around .50, and “large” effect sizes are around .80 (Cohen, 1988).

Regression analyses. Linear regression analyses were conducted to examine the following research questions: (1) *Do personality traits significantly predict emotional benefit-finding?*, (2) *Do personality traits significantly predict behavioural benefit-finding?*, (3) *Does ego-resilience significantly predict emotional benefit-finding?*, (4) *Does ego-resilience*

significantly predict behavioural benefit-finding?, (5) *Does ego-resilience predict well-being?*, (6) *Does emotional benefit-finding significantly predict well-being?*, and (7) *Does behavioural benefit-finding significantly predict well-being?* Predictor variables were entered into the regression equation in terms of highest to lowest correlation to the outcome variable.

Mediation. Mediation analyses were conducted to examine the following research questions: (1) *Does finding emotional benefit significantly mediate the relationship between ego-resilience and satisfaction with life?* and (2) *Does finding behavioural benefit significantly mediate the relationship between ego-resilience and satisfaction with life?* Specifically, path analyses were conducted using the Baron and Kenny approach (1986). Following this approach, three regression analyses were completed per mediation model to determine that (1) the predictor variable significantly predicts the outcome variable (i.e., ego-resilience scores significantly predict satisfaction with life scores; path *c*), (2) the predictor variable significantly predicts the mediator variable (i.e., ego-resilience significantly predicts benefit-finding; path *a*), and (3) the mediator variable significantly predicts the outcome variable (i.e., benefit-finding significantly predicts satisfaction with life scores; path *b*). Sobel's test (Sobel, 1982) was performed to determine if the effect of the mediator is significant. Specifically, Sobel's test determines if the relationship between the independent and dependent variables has been significantly reduced after inclusion of the mediator variable. The equation for Sobel's test is as follows:

$$z = \frac{(a)(b)}{\sqrt{(b^2)(se_a^2) + (a^2)(se_b^2)}}$$

Z scores greater than $z = 1.96$ indicate that the effect of the mediator is significant at $p < .05$ (Pelham, 2013).

CHAPTER 5: RESULTS

Demographic Results

General demographics. Participants' demographic information is illustrated in Table 1. Twenty-eight males and 102 females comprised the current sample. Participants' ages ranged from 17 to 42 ($M= 20.5$; $SD= 4.002$). Several ethnicities were represented, including Caucasian (62%), East Asian (21%), European (9%), and West Asian (8%). The ethnicities represented were identified through participants' responses to an open-ended question regarding their ethnicity. The majority of students were in their first year of study (61%), with 14% reporting being in their second year, 13% in their third year, 8% in their fourth year, and 4% completing graduate studies. Degree program representation included Arts (35%), Science (25%), Education (17%), Business, (11%), Nursing (8%), Kinesiology (3%), and Engineering (1%).

Table 1. Participant Demographic Information

Variable	Category	<i>N</i>	%	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Age		--	--	20.50	4.002
Gender	Male	28	21.5	--	--
	Female	102	78.5	--	--
Ethnicity	Caucasian	81	62	--	--
	East Asian	27	21	--	--
	European	12	9	--	--
	West Asian	10	8	--	--
Year of Study		--	--	1.78	1.17
	1	80	61.5	--	--
	2	18	13.8	--	--
	3	17	13.1	--	--
	4	10	7.7	--	--
	5+	5	3.8	--	--
Degree Program	Arts	45	35	--	--
	Science	32	25	--	--
	Education	22	17	--	--
	Business	14	11	--	--
	Nursing	11	8	--	--
	Kinesiology	4	3	--	--
	Engineering	2	1	--	--

Bullying demographics. All of the sample participants reported being bullied in school by peers at some point in their academic careers. Participants' bullying demographic information is displayed in Table 2. The majority of bullying experiences were reported to occur during Junior High School (78%) and Elementary School (75%). High School was the third most common setting where bullying experiences occurred (45%), and the fewest bullying experiences were reported to occur in Post Graduate Schooling (e.g., university or college; 5%). Participants were permitted to indicate all of the settings in which they were bullied. More respondents reported being bullied in only one school setting (34%) than in two (31%) and three (32%) school settings. A small but relevant proportion of students were chronically bullied, that is, they were bullied in all four school settings (i.e., elementary school, junior high school, high school, post-graduate schooling; 2%). Three percent of respondents reported experiencing bullying at the time the survey was completed.

In terms of the severity of their bullying experiences, most respondents reported experiencing bullying that was in the mild to moderate range ("Slightly Severe," 32%; "Fairly Severe," 32%). The second most common severity of bullying experiences was in the "Quite Severe" range (17%). Fewer participants reported bullying which was "Not Severe at All" (15%) and the smallest group reported experiencing bullying which was "Very Severe" (4%).

Respondents were permitted to select all of the types of bullying that they experienced. Most of reports indicated experiences of indirect social/relational bullying (81%). The second most common type of bullying reported was direct verbal bullying (78%). Direct physical bullying (23%) was the least frequently reported type of bullying.

Table 2. Participants' Bullying Experiences

Variable	Category	<i>N</i>	%	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Type of Bullying	Direct Physical	30	23.1	--	--
	Direct Verbal	102	78.5	--	--
	Indirect Social	106	81.5	--	--
Setting	Elementary School	97	74.6	--	--
	Junior High School	102	78.5	--	--
	High School	58	44.6	--	--
	Post-Graduate	7	5.4	--	--
Number of Settings		--	--	2.03	.871
Severity of Bullying		--	--	2.63	1.05

Group Difference Analysis Results

Independent samples *t*-tests were conducted to determine if participants who reported finding benefit in their bullying experiences (i.e., “*Do you believe that being bullied has made you a stronger person?*” and “*Do you believe that being bullied has made you more prepared to face future challenges?*”) differed on the dependent variables: extraversion, openness, and emotional stability. With the adjusted *p* value of $p < .01$ resulting from the Bonferroni correction, the difference in extraversion scores for individuals who reported that being bullied made them stronger ($M = 45.76$; $SD = 11.86$) and those who did not ($M = 39.80$; $SD = 13.28$), approached significance $t(128) = 2.42$, $p = .017$. The groups did not significantly differ in emotional stability or openness. Participants who reported that bullying made them more prepared to face challenges in the future did not significantly differ from participants who did not agree with the statement in extraversion emotional stability or openness.

Independent samples *t*-tests were also conducted to determine if participants who reported finding benefit in their bullying experiences differed from those who did not in their ego-resilience scores. There was a significant difference in ego-resilience scores between participants who reported that being bullied made them stronger ($M = 43.77$; $SD = 6.07$) and those

who did not ($M= 38.52$; $SD= 6.08$), $t(128)= 4.30$, $p<.001$, Cohen’s $d= .87$. The difference in ego-resilience scores between participants who reported that being bullied made them more prepared to face future challenges ($M= 43.20$; $SD= 6.17$) and those who did not ($M= 39.79$; $SD= 6.91$) approached significance, $t(128)= 2.55$, $p= .012$), Cohen’s $d= .54$.

In order to examine if participants who reported finding benefit in their bullying experiences differed from those who did not in their satisfaction with life scores, independent samples t -tests were conducted. There was no significant difference between the satisfaction with life scores of participants who did and did not report that being bullied made them stronger ($p= .121$). Additionally, there was no significant difference between the satisfaction with life scores of participants who did and did not report that being bullied made them more prepared to face challenges in the future ($p= .345$). Results of the independent samples t -tests comparing participants who reported that being bullied made them stronger and those who did not are displayed in Table 3. Results of the independent samples t -tests comparing participants who reported that being bullied made them more prepared to face future challenges those who did not are displayed in Table 4.

Table 3. Independent Samples t -tests for “Made Stronger” Variable

Variable	t	df	SE	Sig.	Cohen’s d
Extraversion	2.42	128	2.46	.017	--
Openness	1.54	128	1.78	.200	--
Emotional stability	1.45	128	2.02	.149	--
Ego-resilience	4.30	128	1.22	.000**	0.87
Satisfaction with life	1.56	128	1.24	.121	--

Note. ** = $p< .001$.

Table 4. Independent Samples *t*-tests for “Face Challenges” Variable

Variable	<i>t</i>	df	SE	Sig.	Cohen’s <i>d</i>
Extraversion	1.165	128	2.62	.246	--
Openness	1.78	128	1.86	.077	--
Emotional stability	.798	128	2.13	.426	--
Ego-resilience	.982	128	1.34	.012	.521
Satisfaction with life	.147	128	1.30	.345	--

Regression Analysis Results

A multiple regression analysis was conducted to determine if extraversion, openness, and emotional stability traits significantly predicted participants’ belief that bullying made them stronger. The overall model was significant in predicting participants’ belief that bullying made them stronger $F(5, 129) = 3.602, p = .004$. However, the only significant predictor in the model was extraversion, accounting for approximately 32% of the variance accounted for by the model ($\beta = .324, p < .001$). The remainder of the predictors did not significantly predict belief that bullying made the participant stronger (emotional stability: $\beta = .042, p = .633$; openness: $\beta = .050, p = .575$). Results of the regression analysis are presented in Table 5.

An additional multiple regression analysis was conducted to determine if extraversion, openness, and emotional stability traits significantly predicted participants’ belief that bullying made them more prepared to face challenges. The overall model was not significant, $F(5, 129) = 1.45, p = .212$. The only significant predictor in the model was extraversion, accounting for approximately 18% of the variance accounted for by the model ($\beta = .183, p = .045$). The remainder of the predictors did not significantly predict belief that bullying made the participant more prepared to face challenges (emotional stability: $\beta = -.128, p = .165$; openness: $\beta = .051, p = .582$). Results of the regression analysis are presented in Table 6.

In order to examine if ego-resilience scores significantly predict participants' belief that being bullied made them stronger, a linear regression analysis was conducted. Results of the regression analysis suggests that ego-resilience scores significantly predict participants' belief that being bullied made them stronger $F(1, 129)=18.96, p < .001$, accounting for approximately 12% of the variance in belief scores (Adjusted $R^2 = .122$). The results of this analysis are presented in Table 5.

In order to examine if ego-resilience scores significantly predict participants' belief that being bullied made them more prepared to face future challenge, a linear regression analysis was conducted. Results of the regression analysis suggests that ego-resilience scores significantly predict participants' belief that being bullied made them more prepared to face future challenges ($F(1, 129)= 5.49, p = .021$, accounting for approximately 3% of the variance in belief scores (Adjusted $R^2 = .034$). Results of this regression analysis are presented in Table 6.

A linear regression analysis was conducted to examine if ego-resilience scores significantly predict participants' satisfaction with life scores. Results of the analysis suggest that ego-resilience scores significantly predict participants' satisfaction with life $F(1, 129) = 7.27, p = .008$ accounting for approximately 5% of the variance in satisfaction with life scores (Adjusted $R^2 = .046$). The results of this regression analysis are presented in Table 7.

In order to examine whether believing that being bullied made the respondents' stronger significantly predicts satisfaction with life, a linear regression analysis was conducted. Results of the regression analysis suggest that believing that being bullied made them stronger significantly predicted participants' satisfaction with life, $F(1, 129)= 8.27, p = .005$, accounting for approximately 5% of the variance in satisfaction with life scores (Adjusted $R^2 = .053$). A second linear regression analysis was conducted to determine if participants' belief that being

bullied made them more prepared to face challenges significantly predicted satisfaction with life scores. Results of the analysis showed that belief scores did not significantly predict participants' satisfaction with life scores, $F(1, 129) = 2.47, p = .118$. The results of these regression analyses are presented in Table 7.

Table 5. Predicting Participants' Belief that Being Bullied made them Stronger

Variable	R^2	β	Sig.	F	df	F sig.
Personality	.127	--	--	3.60	3, 129	.004**
Extraversion	--	.324	.000***	--	3, 129	--
Openness	--	.050	.575	--	3, 129	--
Emotional stability	--	.042	.633	--	3, 129	--
Ego-Resilience	.129	.359	.000***	18.96	1, 129	.000***

Note. ** = $p < .01$, *** = $p < .001$

Table 6. Predicting Belief that Being Bullied made them prepared to Face Challenges

Variable	R^2	β	Sig.	F	df	F sig.
Personality	.055	--	--	1.45	3, 129	.212
Extraversion	--	.183	.045*	--	3, 129	--
Openness	--	.051	.582	--	3, 129	--
Emotional stability	--	-.128	.165	--	3, 129	--
Ego-resilience	.041		.203	5.49	1, 219	.021*

Note. * = $p < .05$

Table 7. Predicting Victims' Well-Being

Variable	R^2	β	Sig.	F	df	F sig.
Ego-resilience	.054	.232	.008**	7.27	1, 129	.008**
Made Stronger	.061	.246	.005**	8.27	1, 129	.005**
Face Challenges	.019	.138	.118	2.47	1, 129	.118

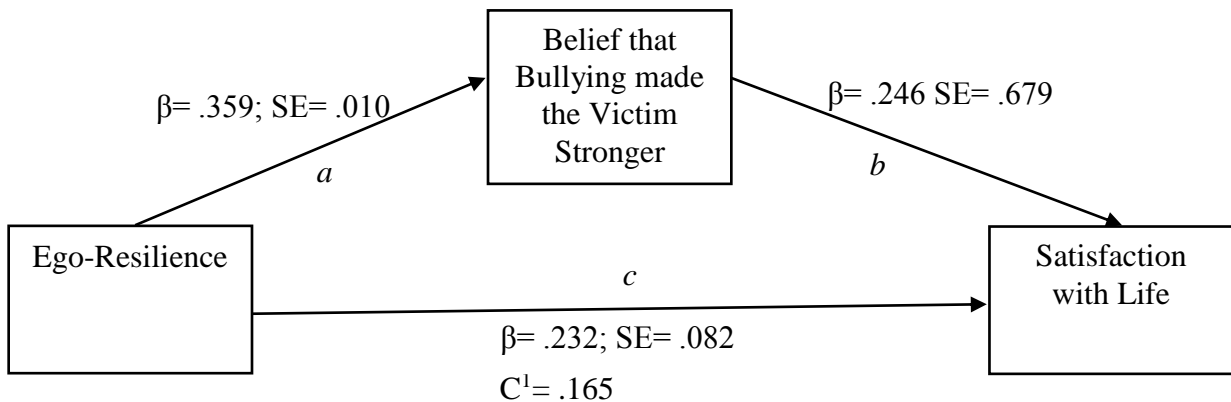
Note. ** = $p < .01$

Mediation Analysis Results

Mediation analyses were conducted to determine if benefit-finding significantly mediates the relationship between ego-resilience and satisfaction with life. Participants' belief that bullying made them stronger and was examined as a potential mediator. Results of the mediation

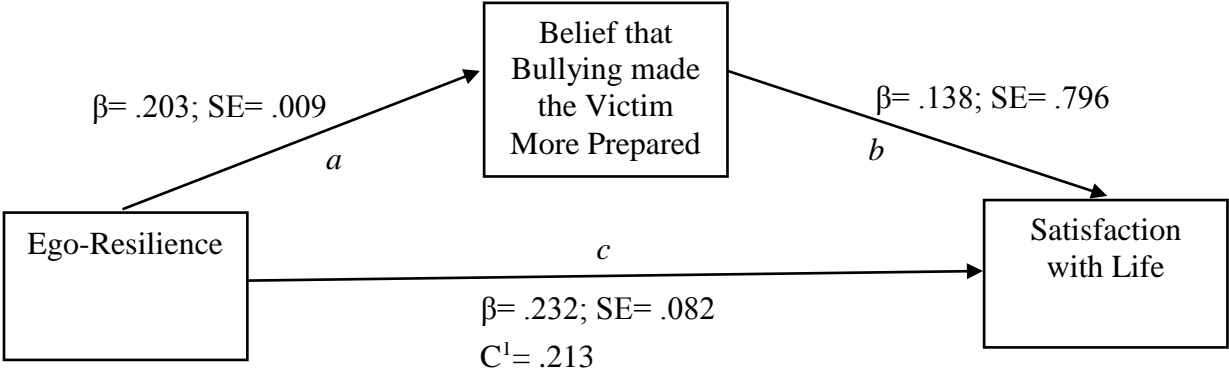
analysis suggest that participants' belief that being bullied made them stronger significantly partially mediated the relationship between ego-resilience and satisfaction with life ($z= 2.40, p < .05$). See Figure 1 for a graphical depiction of the mediation model. Standardized beta coefficients are reported, though the unstandardized beta weights are used in Sobel's test.

Figure 1. Graphic showing emotional benefit-finding as a mediator of the relationship between resilience and well-being.



A second mediation analysis was conducted to examine if participants' belief that being bullied made them more prepared to face challenges significantly mediated the relationship between ego-resilience and satisfaction with life. Results of the analysis suggest that belief that being bullied made them more prepared to face challenges does not significantly mediate the relationship between ego-resilience and satisfaction with life ($z= 1.302, p > .05$). See Figure 2 for a graphical depiction of the mediation model.

Figure 2. Graphic showing behavioural benefit-finding as a mediator of the relationship between resilience and well-being.



CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION

The purpose of the present study was to contribute to the resilience and bullying research by adopting a strengths-based perspective to bullying and examining the traits and behaviours associated with individuals who are able to “bounce back” from their school bullying experiences. Specifically, the present study provided an examination of the role of trait-resilience in bullying. Additionally, the present study examined the role of benefit-finding in bullying as a predictor of victims’ post-bullying well-being and a potential mediator of the relationship between resilience and well-being. These objectives were addressed by testing the following main research questions: (1) Do personality traits significantly predict finding emotional and/or behavioural benefit?, (2) Does resilience significantly predict finding and/or behavioural benefit?, (3) Does resilience significantly predict post-bullying well-being?, (4) Does finding emotional and/or behavioural benefit significantly predict post-bullying well-being?, and (5) Does finding emotional and/or behavioural benefit significantly mediate the relationship between resilience and post-bullying well-being? The results of the present study will be discussed in detail below.

Discussion of Results

The results of the present study suggest that extraversion, resilience, and benefit-finding all significantly contribute to the process of facilitating well-being in victims of bullying. In other words, extraversion, resilience, and benefit-finding all, in some way, assist victims of bullying in “bouncing back” from their negative bullying experiences. These variables, in part, explain why some victims of bullying successfully recover and find benefit in their bullying experiences while others experience long-lasting negative outcomes. A thorough discussion of the results will be presented below in sections based on the completed analyses.

Discussion of Group Difference Results

Results of the group difference analyses suggest that victims who find emotional and/or behavioural benefit in their bullying experiences significantly differ from those who did not find emotional benefit in ego-resilience. Specifically, the results indicate that individuals who find emotional benefit and/or behavioural are significantly higher in trait-resilience than those who do not find benefit.

Additionally, results indicate that individuals who find emotional benefit in their bullying experiences are significantly more extraverted than those who do not. This relationship between extraversion and emotional benefit-finding is concordant with previous research suggesting that extraverts are more inclined to be optimistic and happy, and engage in active problem-solving and cognitive restructuring (Carver & Connor-Smith, 2010). Individuals who found emotional benefit in their bullying experiences did not significantly differ from those who did not find emotional benefit in their expression of openness or emotional stability, suggesting that levels of openness and neuroticism do not significantly separate those who do and do not find emotional benefit. The non-significant difference in the groups is unexpected given previous research indicating an association between emotional stability (neuroticism) and high stress response (e.g., Schneider, Rench, Lyons, & Riffle, 2010). The non-significant difference between the groups in openness is surprising given previous studies suggesting relationships between openness, cognitive and emotional flexibility, and openness to new experiences (John & Srivastava, 1999; McCrae & John, 1992). These unexpected non-significant result could be due to sample bias, measurement error, or weaknesses in the previous studies. Overall, the group difference results for those who did and did not find behavioural benefit in their bullying

experiences suggest that the groups did not differ in their expression of extraversion, openness, or emotional stability.

In terms of the well-being of victims, those who found emotional benefit were significantly higher in well-being than those who did not. Interestingly, those who found behavioural benefit did not differ significantly from those who did not on their well-being scores. These results suggest that there is a difference between emotional and behavioural benefit-finding. This difference could be valid or due to measurement error and will be described in further detail below.

Discussion of Regression Results

The results of the regression analyses suggest that extraversion significantly predicts benefit-finding (both emotional and behavioural). This means that the more extraverted a person is, the more likely he or she is to find benefit in his or her bullying experiences. This relationship between extraversion and emotional benefit-finding is concordant with previous research suggesting that extraverts are more inclined to be optimistic and happy, and engage in active problem-solving and cognitive restructuring (Carver & Connor-Smith, 2010).

Openness and emotional stability were not significant predictors of either emotional or behavioural benefit-finding. These results are concordant with the group difference analysis results. The lack of association between openness and benefit-finding is surprising, given reported relationships between openness and emotional flexibility (John & Srivastava 1999, McCrae & John 1992) and consideration of new perspectives (Carver & Connor-Smith, 2010). The result suggesting that benefit-finding was not related to neuroticism is concordant with previous research suggesting that individuals who are high in neuroticism are more sensitive to threat and exhibit high stress response (e.g., Schneider et al., 2010). These unexpected non-

significant result could be due to bias within the sample, measurement error, or potentially weaknesses in the previous studies showing these relationships.

Results indicating a significant predictive relationship between trait-resilience and benefit-finding were yielded from the regression analysis. Specifically, the result shows that high trait-resilience significantly predicts belief that bullying made the individual stronger (i.e., emotional benefit) and/or more prepared for future challenges (i.e., behavioural benefit). In essence, the more trait-resilient a person is the more likely he or she is to find benefit in a bullying experience. The results suggesting that extraversion and trait-resilience are positively associated with finding both emotional and behavioural benefit indicate that individuals who are high in extraversion and trait resilience are naturally better prepared to deal with bullying experiences. In other words, these individuals are more likely to bounce back than those who are lower in extraversion and trait-resilience. Since extraversion and trait-resilience are thought to be relatively stable personality traits (Block & Block, 1980; Block & Kremen, 1996; Lazarus, 1993), it can be suggested that trait resilience also serves as an innate protective factor that facilitates the process of “bouncing back” from bullying.

Further evidence that trait-resilience is a protective factor that shields bullying victims from experiencing long-lasting negative consequences is the result indicating a significant predictive relationship between trait-resilience and well-being scores. Trait resilience scores significantly predicted well-being scores such that the more trait-resilience a person has, the more likely he or she is to experience positive well-being following their bullying experiences.

The results of the present study also indicate that finding emotional benefit in particular significantly predicts well-being scores. In other words, victims of bullying who believe being bullied made them stronger are more likely to experience positive well-being. Given this result,

it is suggested that emotional benefit-finding also serves some role in helping victims of bullying to “bounce back.”

Interestingly, the separation of emotional and behavioural benefits yielded results which suggest that finding emotional benefit in bullying experiences (e.g., believing that being bullied made the victim stronger) significantly contributes to victims’ well-being, but finding behavioural benefit (e.g., developing strategies which make the victim more prepared for future challenges) did not. This could be due to item construction (discussed below) or it could suggest an actual difference between victims’ being able to identify that being bullied, in some way, made them stronger versus actually developing behavioural strategies which will assist them in facing future challenges.

So far, the results of the present study suggest that resilience protects victims of bullying from negative consequences by positively predicting well-being scores. The results also show that resilience predicts victims’ finding of both emotional and behavioural benefit. It has also demonstrated that resilience predicts victims’ well-being scores. Additionally, victims’ emotional benefit-finding, in particular, predicts well-being scores. These results, when considered together, hint toward a significant mediation model whereby the relationship between resilience and well-being is at least partially explained by emotional benefit-finding.

Discussion of Mediation Results

The significant results from the mediation analysis suggest that emotional benefit-finding does indeed partially mediate that relationship between resilience and well-being. This result suggests that the process which facilitates trait-resilient victims in bouncing back from bullying and experiencing positive well-being is finding emotional benefit from their experience. From

this result, we can assume that some trait-resilient victims of bullying who successfully bounce back from their experience use emotional benefit-finding to assist in their recovery.

In line with the results indicating that finding behavioural benefit did not significantly predict well-being, the mediation analysis examining behavioural benefit-finding as a mediator was non-significant. This non-significant result suggests that finding behavioural benefit does not necessarily facilitate resilient victims' "bouncing back" from bullying.

Discussion of Overall Results

Overall, extraversion, trait-resilience, and benefit-finding all contribute to the well-being of bullying victims. Extraversion and trait-resilience, being innate and stable traits of personality, are suggested to facilitate the preparedness for bullying experiences. The association between these variables and benefit-finding suggest that extraverted and resilient victims are more likely to engage in this form of coping which involves broad-minded thinking, perspective-taking, and optimistic thinking. The most impactful result comes from the significant mediation analysis demonstrating that finding emotional benefit partially explains why some resilient victims experience more positive well-being following bullying experiences than others. These results could have far-reaching implications for the study of resilience and benefit-finding within the context of bullying. These potential implications will be discussed later in the document.

General Discussion

The results of the present study provide additional support for the idea of "bouncing back" by indicating that some victims of bullying who are high in resilience not only experience positive well-being following their bullying experiences, but some identify benefits of being bullied. Although these results are positive and encouraging, it is important to note the many

years of literature identifying various negative outcomes of bullying victimization. While the role of the present study is to adopt a strengths-based perspective and highlight the potential positive aspects of bullying victimization, it is not the intention of the present work to minimize the potentially harmful and possibly life-threatening effects of bullying victimization. Though previous research has not yet identified the exact relationship between bullying, resilience, benefit-finding, and post-bullying well-being, it is presumed that the experience of positive outcomes of bullying rely on a delicate interaction between resilience, frequency and severity of bullying, emotional and mental-health vulnerabilities, and environmental mechanisms. The results of the present study, though encouraging, are a small piece of a much larger puzzle which must be investigated further.

Another topic to be discussed is the potential difference between emotional and behavioural benefit-finding as outcomes of bullying. Given the potential limitations of the present study, which will be discussed later in the document, and the lack of extant literature on benefit-finding in bullying, it is not known whether emotional and behavioural benefit-finding are separate constructs. The results of the present study indicate that there is a difference between finding emotional benefit and behavioural benefit. In essence, there may be a difference between an individual stating that being bullied made them feel stronger in some unidentified way versus actually identifying behavioural strategies which will assist him or her in facing future challenges. This lack of clarity will be further considered in the discussion of directions for future research.

Implications

The results of the present study could have far-reaching implications for how the researchers, educators, policy makers, and the public view bullying and its effects. Specifically,

the results of the present work could influence the field of resilience and bullying research, the development and implementation of intervention programs, and the public image of bullying and other adverse experiences. This study appears to support the saying “what doesn’t kill you makes you stronger” and suggests that certain traits and associated behaviours may not only partially avoid the negative outcomes associated with bullying and other challenging experiences, but may actually result in identifying benefits from these experiences.

Although negative health consequences are undoubtedly worthy of research and public attention, findings from the present study suggest that attention should also be paid to potential positive effects of adverse experience. This resilience-based perspective can inform intervention programs. Specifically, identifying the protective factors which facilitate “bouncing back” can help to develop programs with the goal to increase these positive traits as opposed to the current trend in intervention, which is to attempt to remediate existing problems. Targeting positive traits is a more proactive approach which may lead to the circumvention of negative outcomes altogether as opposed to waiting for them to negatively impact victims’ lives and then attempting to combat them.

Avoiding the negative mental and physical health consequences often associated with school bullying may also lessen the burden of the health care system by reducing the number of child and adolescent patients requiring medical and mental health services. Most importantly, promoting resilience to bullying and encouraging optimistic thinking may help to avoid victims’ expression of depressive symptoms. As a result, the number of bullying-related attempted and successful suicides may decline, therefore saving young lives.

Interventions which arise from the results of the present study and similar research will aim to increase personal resilience and the expression of associated behaviours such as benefit-

finding. The instruction of broad-minded, optimistic thinking and potential benefit-finding could help students who are being victimized adopt a new perspective of the experience. Additionally, identifying the potential benefits of school bullying and making these benefits public may reduce the perpetration of bullying. Specifically, bullies who attempt to weaken their victim emotionally or socially may reconsider their behaviours if they are aware that bullying may not have a negative effect on the desired victim. Additionally, proactive resilience-based interventions may in some way prepare students for bullying. Since bullying is such a common problem, and since intervention programs appear to have limited positive effect, perhaps “preparation” programs should be implemented alongside prevention and intervention programs.

The results of the present study, which indicate that some victims identify benefits of their bullying experiences and subsequently develop positive well-being, can be extended to different types of adverse experience. These results provide evidence of how people can recover from traumatic or adverse experiences. This increase in knowledge can lead to new avenues for research and can have applications in the treatment of mental disorders such as post-traumatic stress disorder. Assisting victims of trauma in finding benefit or meaning in their experiences could help them to reframe their experience and subsequently recover more quickly.

The present study also helps to pave a new pathway for bullying research which follows a strengths-based perspective. This study is unique in its exploration of potential positive outcomes of school bullying, a topic which is rarely discussed. Even more, the present study examined benefit-finding in a populations of school bullying victims, which had not yet been examined. In sum, the present work can have large implications in the way school bullying is researched. Overall, the results of the present study can be far-reaching, impacting the field of

bullying research, the development of intervention programs, and even how school bullying is viewed by society.

Strengths and Limitations of the Present Study

In addition to its potential impact, the present study has much strength. One of the main strengths of the present study is its individuality. Not only are resilience-based bullying studies a clear minority among the general bullying literature, but school bullying studies focusing on the role of benefit-finding currently do not exist in the literature. Additionally, the present study is unique in that it introduces the first mediation model which includes trait-resilience and well-being and examines benefit-finding as a mediator.

The present study is also innovative in that it takes into account retrospective qualitative reports of the positive effects of bullying and separates benefit-finding into two distinct but related types: finding emotional benefit and finding behavioural benefit. The disparate mediation results may indicate that finding emotional and behavioural benefit may be separate outcomes. Specifically, some victims of bullying may identify an emotional benefit of their bullying experience (e.g., becoming mentally stronger) but may not identify a behavioural benefit (e.g., learned behavioural coping strategies). The opposite may also be true. Because little is known of benefit-finding the context of school bullying, conclusions regarding potential differences in the types of benefits found in school bullying experiences should be made with caution. Future studies should expand on the present results and further explore differences within the types of benefits found in bullying experiences.

An additional strength of the present study is the large and relatively diverse sample. Firstly, the present sample of 130 participants is the relatively large sample size. A sample of this size allows for greater generalizability of the findings. An additional strength which

increases the generalizability of the results is the relative diversity of the sample. The present sample consisted of individuals from four general ethnic groups, with Caucasian individuals comprising just slightly over half of the sample. The sample also consisted of participants who represented each of the four years of undergraduate training and well as graduate studies. Additionally, participants represented seven faculties, with no overwhelming majority. Each of these attributes lead to greater generalizability of the findings.

In addition to its strengths, the present study is not without limitations. Therefore, the results of the present study should be interpreted with the consideration of these limitations. One main limitation of the present study is that the data were yielded exclusively by retrospective self-reports. Relying on retrospective self-reports allows for questions regarding the reliability of the information being obtained may lead to participants' misremembering events.

Additionally, participants may report that they are now able to find benefit in their bullying experiences, but with a large latency between the bullying experience and participation in the study, it is unknown whether this benefit-finding is a function of time and/or misremembering details of the event. However, if benefit-finding is a function of hindsight, retrospective reports may actually be more appropriate for this type of study.

An additional limitation is the convenience sample comprised solely of students from the University of Calgary. This potentially homogenous sample lessens the generalizability of the results. Additionally, the majority of the respondents are female, which can mean that the results may not be generalizable to males. The convenience sample may also lead to potentially biased results since the population of university students may be more or less resilient or optimistic than the general population. Specifically, participants may be more likely to respond to the survey if they feel a personal connection to it (e.g., they have a unique bullying experience).

Limitations may also exist within the item construction. Specifically, the potential constructs of emotional and behavioural benefit-finding are measured using single items. Reliance on these single items could neglect other aspects of the constructs and decrease the reliability of the findings. Future work should more fully explore these construct and develop more comprehensive modes of measurement.

Despite its limitations, the present study uniquely contributes to the bullying literature and explores new avenues for the interpretation of bullying outcomes. Given its innovative nature, the present study gives rise to many new questions and creates new directions for future research.

Directions for Future Research

The results of the present study could be expanded in many ways. One direction for future research is to examine participants' bullying experiences in terms of type of bullying, setting in which it was experienced (e.g., elementary school versus high school), severity of the experience, and whether the bullying was chronic or brief. The results of this exploration would provide more specific information on the potential positive outcomes of bullying. Conversely, results of this exploration could provide further evidence for grouping bullying experiences together. Additionally, the examination of potential gender differences in benefit-finding and resilience would be advantageous for the understanding of benefit-finding and the role of personality and resilience in bullying.

Future research should also examine benefit-finding at the qualitative level to determine if themes emerge in the types of benefits bullying victims obtain from their experiences. Narratives regarding victims' benefit-finding experiences could also provide information regarding the influence of time. It would be particularly beneficial to the understanding of the

“bouncing back” process to investigate when benefit-finding occurs. For example, do victims who are actively being bullied attempt to find benefit in their experiences (i.e., is benefit-finding a part of *coping* with bullying?) or do they search for benefits after the experience (i.e., is benefit-finding a part of *recovering* from bullying?). This exploration would also help researchers to understand if benefit-finding is a benefit of hindsight (i.e., is benefit-finding a *result* of successful recovery?).

Further examinations of the relationship between benefit-finding, resilience, and coping should also occur. Firstly, an examination of the similarities and differences between resilience and coping is necessary in order to understand the role of each construct in the context of bullying. Secondly, because benefit-finding has been shown to be related to both coping and resilience, explorations of the exact relationship between these three variables should be conducted. It is possible that benefit-finding as a result of resilience and benefit-finding as a part of coping are two separate variables. The specific behaviours associated with benefit-finding may help to make this relationship more clear.

Additional variables should also be examined in order to determine their role in the process of “bouncing back” from bullying. Specifically, the role of self-efficacy in “bouncing back” should be investigated in order to better understand the role of the individual in the process of recovering from bullying. Additionally, behaviours associated with “bouncing back” should be examined. The identification of specific strategies used to recover from bullying experiences could help to inform interventions by providing target behaviours to teach to bullying victims.

The aforementioned directions for future research could help to build upon the results of the present study and continue to broaden the perspective of bullying research. An increase in strengths-based bullying research could help to change the habit of bullying researchers and shift

the general viewpoint of the field to include a more positivistic and proactive perspective. Future research can also assist researchers, practitioners, educators, policy-makers, and the general public in understanding why some victims of bullying successfully “bounce back” from their bullying experiences.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

The present thesis aimed to fill a gap in the literature by investigating bullying from a strengths-based perspective. Specifically, the present study investigated the roles of resilience and benefit-finding in facilitating victims' "bouncing back" from school bullying. Results indicate that trait-resilience serves as a protective factor in school bullying and facilitates the experience of positive outcomes. Additionally, benefit-finding, particularly believing that being bullied made the victim stronger, is suggested to assist in the process of "bouncing back" from bullying. Finding benefit in bullying experiences may explain why "resilient" victims of bullying experience more positive outcomes than their less resilient peers.

The present study deviates from the general bullying literature by exploring the potential positive outcomes of school bullying. Examining bullying from this strengths-based perspective can help to inform intervention programs which focus on building resilience to bullying. Specifically, the present study may inform interventions by identifying a potential behaviour associated with bullying victims' recovery (i.e., benefit-finding). The results of the present thesis open a new avenue for research which views school bullying from a resilience-based perspective. Future research which follows this perspective can help to change how school bullying is viewed and combated. With a new perspective on bullying, children may experience less bullying victimization and/or may develop more positive outcomes, thus limiting the experience of the potentially harmful and life-threatening effects of school bullying.

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