

# **Bullying in Schools and Its Relationship to Teaching, Student Body Composition and Achievement**

A Dissertation Proposal Presented to  
the Faculty of the Heller School for Social Policy and Management  
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By  
Mag. Lars Dietrich, M.A.

Among many factors, teaching and student body compositions in classrooms and in schools have been assumed to influence bullying and teasing behaviors among students, and high levels of bullying and teasing have been theorized to negatively impact student academic achievement. However, empirical evidence for these relationships remains scarce. The purpose of this dissertation is to add to the small body of empirical research that explores the relationships of teasing and bullying with teaching styles, student body compositions in classrooms and in schools, and student academic achievement.

The dissertation will consist of three papers. The first one investigates the relationship between student perceptions of malicious teasing and classroom-level factors, including teaching styles and student body compositions (i.e. race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, and academic skills). The second paper will explore whether student perceptions of bullying are predicted by school level teaching styles and student body compositions. The third paper will examine whether bullying and malicious teasing are related to factors that have been identified as determinants of academic achievement.

The studies' research design is cross-sectional, utilizing hierarchical linear modeling and multilevel structural equation modeling techniques to account for the four level structure of the Tripod dataset (identification information includes student, classroom, school and district levels). This dataset was chosen for two reasons. First, it contains detailed measurements of student, teacher, and school characteristics. Student level variables include bullying and teasing perceptions, socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, gender, and skills. On the classroom level, it includes teaching styles measurements referred to as the 7 Cs: Care, Confer, Captivate, Clarify, Consolidate, Challenge, and Control. School level variables include schools' tracking practices. Additionally, the three versions of the dataset provide a great amount statistical power, thanks to large sample sizes of 10,676, 132,619 and 220,070 observations, respectively.

The theoretical assumptions of the dissertation are based on Bronfenbrenner's social-ecological framework, which suggests the interconnectivity and mutual impact of the student, classroom, and school level on bullying and teasing behaviors of students. In addition, the balance of power theory suggests that classrooms and schools with steeper social status hierarchies have higher bullying and teasing levels among students, and the model of socialization theory assumes that teachers influence bullying and teasing behaviors as role models and caregivers. Research hypotheses were derived from these theoretical assumptions, which structure the three papers.

Previous research suggests that bullying and teasing are negatively related to academic achievement, that there is a significant relationship between teaching styles and bullying behaviors, and that bullying may be related to student body compositions. This dissertation will add additional detail to this literature. It will be the first study that investigates how the Tripod 7 Cs are related to bullying and teasing behavior. It will also add evidence to the partially contradictory literature that deals with the relationship between bullying and student body compositions, and examine how bullying and teasing are related to student characteristics and behaviors that are generally assumed to mediate or moderate academic achievement.

Dissertation Committee: Thomas M. Shapiro, Ph.D., Chair  
Lindsay Rosenfeld, S.D.  
Xiaodong Liu, Ed.D.  
Melissa Holt, Ph.D., Boston University  
Ronald F. Ferguson, Ph.D., Harvard University

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