

2009 Annual Meeting APHA, Philadelphia, PA, November 7-11, 2009

Misperceptions of Bullying Norms as a Risk Factor Associated with Violence among Middle School Students

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Presenter Disclosures

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The following personal financial relationships with commercial interests relevant to this presentation existed during the past 12 months:

No Relationships to Disclose

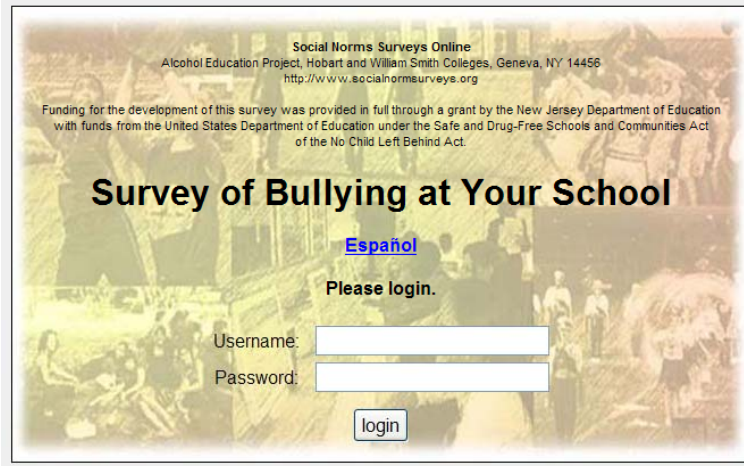
Abstract

Bullying among adolescents in many countries is a significant school and public health concern. Erroneous perceptions of bullying norms may be important risk factors for being a bully, victim, or bully/victim. Anonymous online surveys were conducted to assess the accuracy of perceived peer bullying norms among youth in 20 middle schools (grades 5 to 9) from 2006 to 2008 in New Jersey and New York (n= 10,668). The survey reveals attitudes about bullying, incidence levels of bullying behavior as reported by perpetrators and victims, and also assesses perceived norms among peers regarding these attitudes and bullying behaviors. Results from the analyses of eight types of bullying behavior show that while bullying is substantial, it is not the norm. The most common (and erroneous) perception, however, is that the majority engage in and support such behavior. Multilevel analysis reveals that perceptions of bullying behaviors are highly predictive of personal bullying behavior—more so than actual school norms. Pervasive misperceptions of bullying may contribute to engagement in bullying and help perpetuate victimization.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT: The authors wish to thank the staff of the Center for Addiction Studies, Rowan University, for their work enlisting New Jersey schools and coordinating local school participation in this research. Funding for the development of this survey was provided in full through a grant by the New Jersey Department of Education with funds from the United States Department of Education under the Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act of the No Child Left Behind Act.

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Web-based Survey Instrument



Social Norms Surveys Online
Alcohol Education Project, Hobart and William Smith Colleges, Geneva, NY 14456
<http://www.socialnormsurveys.org>

Funding for the development of this survey was provided in full through a grant by the New Jersey Department of Education with funds from the United States Department of Education under the Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act of the No Child Left Behind Act.

Survey of Bullying at Your School

[Español](#)

Please login.

Username:

Password:

<http://www.socialnormsurveys.org/bullying/>
(Enter test for username and password)

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School Characteristics

Number of Schools	19 NJ + 1 NYC area 9 conducted surveys multiple times 35 school cohorts surveyed
Percent on free lunch - mean (range)	23% (1% – 81%)
Percent White - mean (range)	59% (1% – 96%)
Percent Hispanic - mean (range)	16% (1% – 75%)
Percent Black - mean (range)	20% (0% – 47%)
Percent Asian - mean (range)	7% (0% – 41%)
Student/Teacher ratio - mean (range)	12 (8 – 18)

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School Characteristics

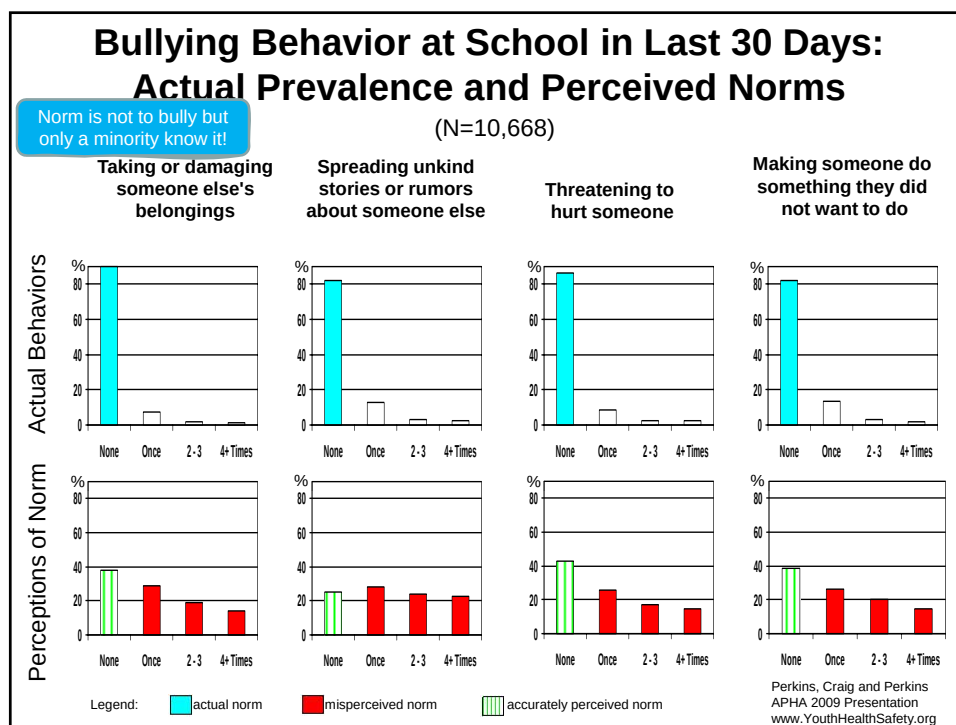
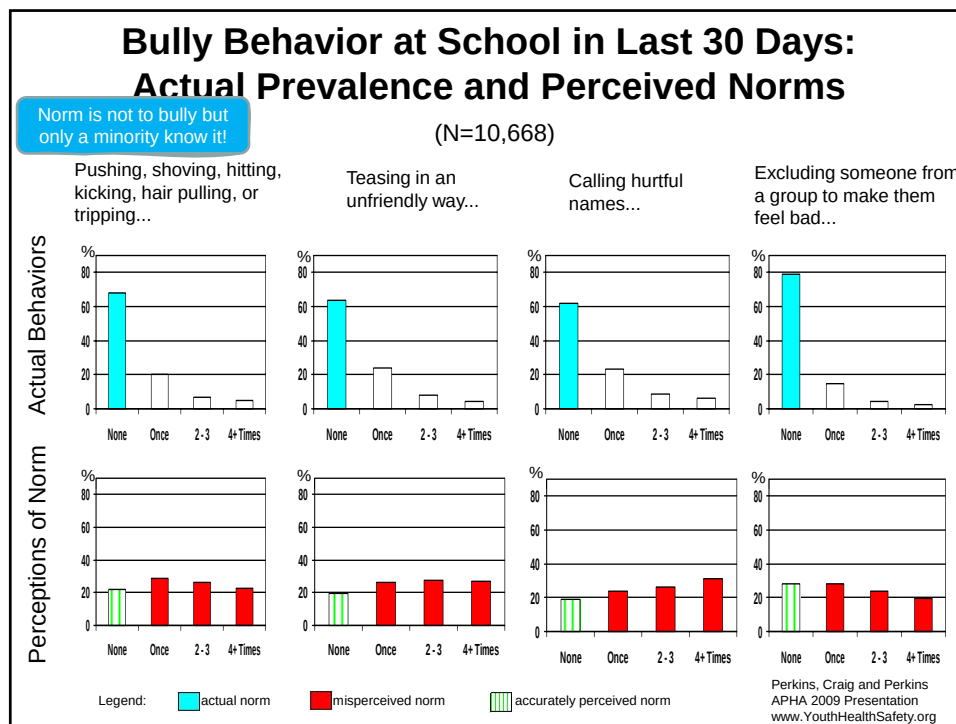
Middle School Grades	Number of Schools	Middle School Population Size Range
5-6	1	680
5-8	1	427
6-8	13	14 – 1221
7-8	4	121 – 764
7-9	1	947

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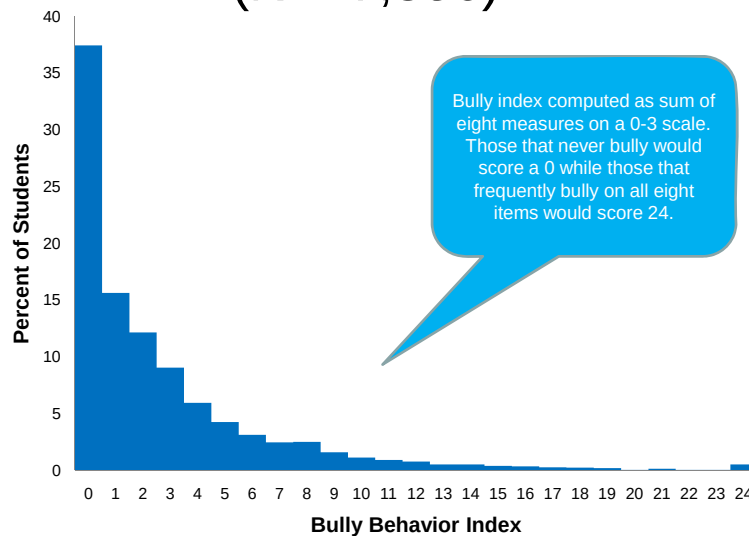
School Sample Demographics

Number of Respondents	10,668
Sample Sizes - mean (range)	305 (10 – 799)
Cohort Response Rate - mean (range)	54% (11% – 91%)
Males / Females - %	48% / 52%
Grade Levels	
5-6	36%
7	32%
8-9	32%
Age – mean (range)	12.6 (9 – 16)
Geographic Area	
Suburban	52%
Urban/suburban	38%
Rural	10%
Race	
American Indian/Alaskan Native	2%
Asian	12%
Black/African American	6%
Hispanic/Latino	8%
White/Caucasian	61%
Other	11%

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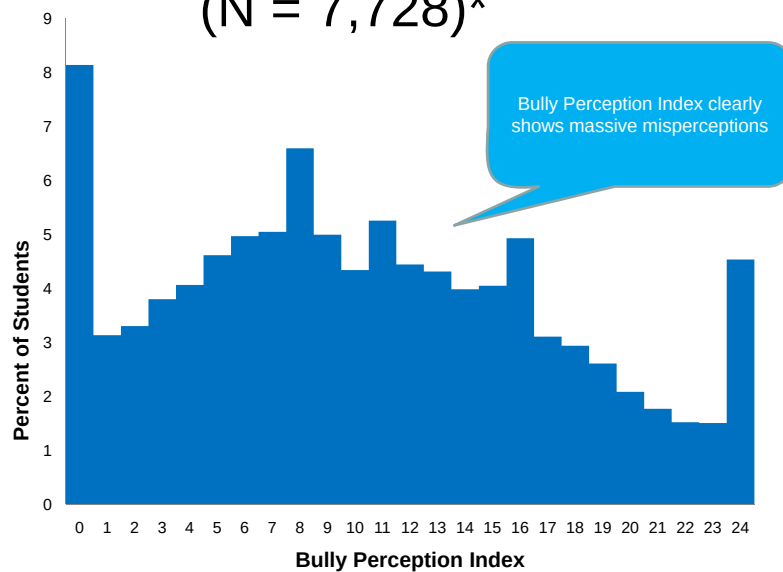
Distribution of Bully Behavior Index (N = 7,856)*



*Includes only schools where at least 50% of students responded overall from the grades surveyed.

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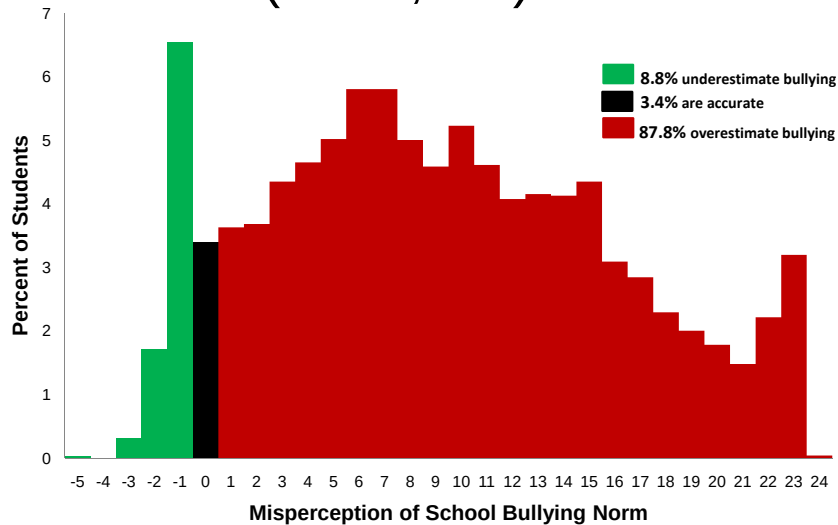
Distribution of Bully Perception Index (N = 7,728)*



*Includes only schools where at least 50% of students responded overall from the grades surveyed.

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Distribution of Bullying Misperception (N = 7,728)*



*Includes only schools where at least 50% of students responded overall from the grades surveyed.

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Standardized regression coefficients predicting bullying behavior in the last 30 days (N=7,247^a)

Independent Variables	Standardized Coefficient (Beta)
Perception of bullying (index)	.42 *
Actual bullying norm at school (index median)	.08 *
Gender (male vs. female)	.10 *
Age	.09 *
Race (white vs minority)	-.05 *
School population size	.00 ns
Race (% white at school)	.02 ns
Students with free lunch (%)	.01 ns
Student/teacher ratio at school	-.02 ns

Perception of bullying is strongest predictor of whether an individual will bully!

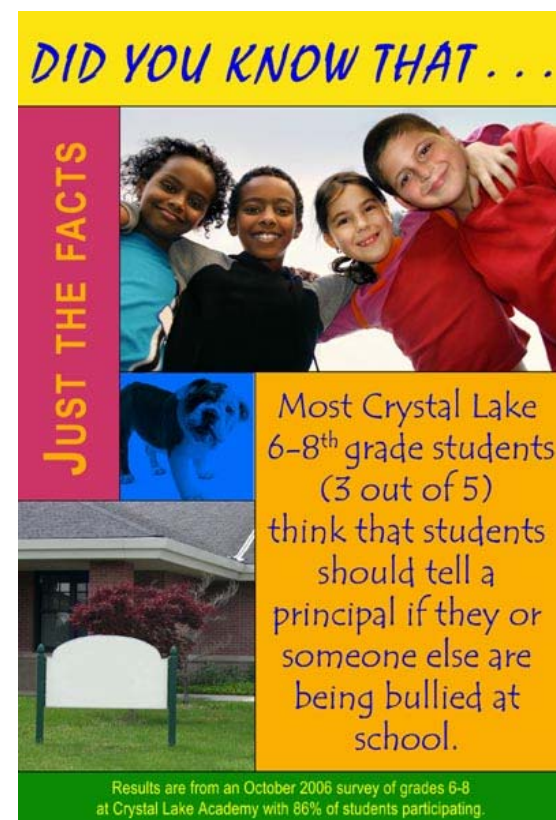
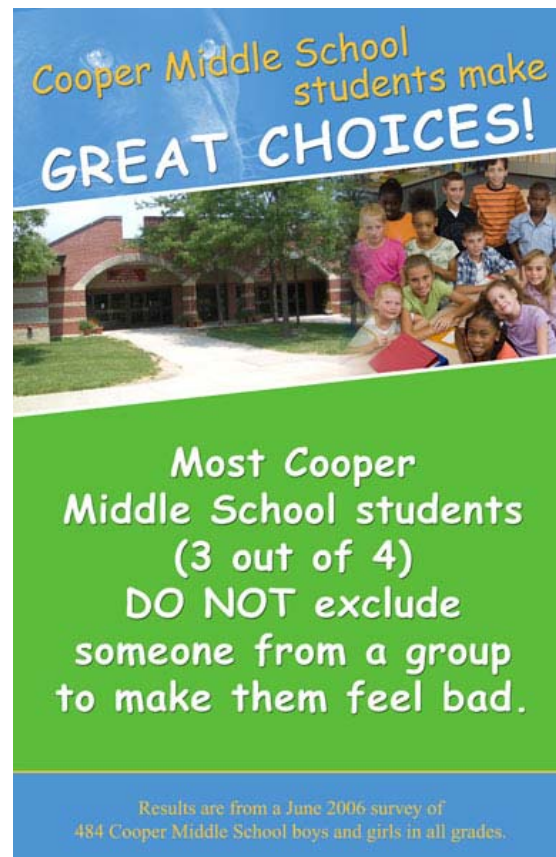
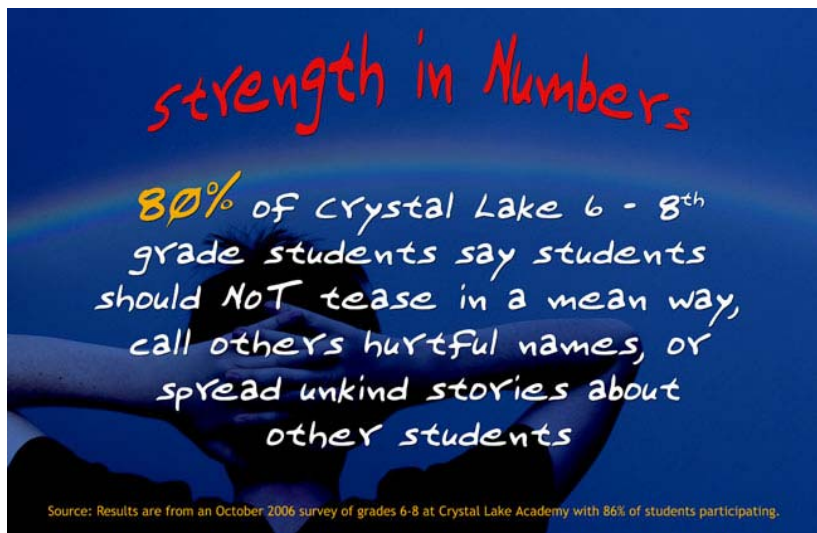
^aIncludes only schools where at least 50% of students responded overall from the grades surveyed.

*Coefficient is significant at $p < .001$.

^{ns} Coefficient is not significant, $p > .05$.

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Middle School Social Norms Posters



(school names have been changed)

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