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Adaptive and Nonadaptive Help Seeking With Peer Harassment: An Integrative Perspective of Coping and Self-Regulation

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When harassed by peers, elementary school students often face a dilemma of whether to ask their teacher for help. Assistance may be useful, and perhaps necessary. However, there can be social costs; children generally are expected to resolve interpersonal conflicts on their own. Two theoretical perspectives (i.e., coping and self-regulation) provide a framework for conceptualizing *adaptive help seeking* as a strategy for dealing with peer harassment. A key feature of the strategy is the student's recognition that help is necessary to maintain safety. This article reviews research that supports this conceptualization. Studies focusing on students' perceptions of harassment and judgments about the necessity for help are integrated with developmental research on peer conflict and aggression. Adaptive help seeking is contrasted with two nonadaptive responses to harassment (i.e., seeking help when it is unnecessary and failure to seek help when it is necessary), developmental implications are discussed, and directions for research are suggested.

For classrooms to be conducive for learning, they must be safe and supportive of students' socioemotional well-being and adjustment (Adelman & Taylor, 1998; Roeser & Eccles, 2000). At elementary school, children have to cope with diverse social stressors, some of which are normative and others more serious and even dangerous. For example, interpersonal demands of forming and maintaining friendships and being accepted by the peer group can challenge children's self-esteem and cause emotional stress (Asher, Parkhurst, Hymel, & Williams, 1990; Parker & Asher, 1993). Although disagreements and arguments are common, when conflicts are accompanied by taunts, threats, physical aggression, and exclusion from social activities, children often experience anger, anxiety, sadness, and loneliness (Coie, 2004; Dodge, Coie, & Lynam, 2006). At an alarming frequency in recent years, children are bullied and victimized by peers, with serious consequences to the child's academic functioning as well as mental health and socioemotional development (American Psychological Association [APA], 1999; Masten & Braswell, 1991; Rigby, 2001). Without the social skills and psychological resources needed to meet certain challenges and threats,

elementary school children sometimes turn to their teacher for assistance.

This article focuses on students' help seeking in response to peer harassment. Because a teacher is not always present when harassment occurs, students may have to assess the level of danger and, if necessary, take responsibility for getting help. Many students, in many situations, are able to handle incidents on their own. However, there are times when even the most socially competent child needs assistance. For many, knowing when it is necessary to ask a teacher to intervene presents a dilemma (Newman, 2003, 2006). In situations where the teacher's expectation and the classroom norm is for children to resolve conflicts independently, unnecessary help seeking can carry with it personal and social costs (e.g., being perceived as weak, potential reprisal from the perpetrator). These costs are powerful inhibitors, and as a result, children often are reluctant to approach an adult for assistance. In situations where help is truly necessary, students run the risk of psychological and physical harm if they do not get help (e.g., Pellegrini, Bartini, & Brooks, 1999; Perry, Hodges & Egan, 2001). Although researchers have investigated a number of different ways in which children respond to peer harassment (see Boivin, Hymel, & Hodges, 2001; Smith, Shu, & Madsen, 2001), few studies have focused on help seeking.

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The purpose of this article is to examine the dilemma students often face if harassed at school: Is it appropriate to ask a teacher for help? Organized in three sections, the article provides a theoretical foundation for *adaptive help seeking*, synthesizes relevant research, and proposes direction for future research. In the first section, based on two theoretical perspectives (i.e., coping and self-regulation), I conceptualize help seeking as an adaptive strategy for dealing with peer harassment. A critical feature of the strategy is the student's recognition that help is necessary. The second section is a review of empirical research that supports this theoretical conceptualization. Studies focusing on students' perceptions of harassment and judgments about safety and necessity for help are integrated with the larger body of developmental research on peer conflict. In the third section of the article, I discuss conceptual issues regarding *adaptiveness*, in particular, contrasts between adaptive help seeking and two nonadaptive strategies (i.e., seeking help when it is unnecessary and not seeking help when it is necessary), developmental implications, and directions for future research.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON ADAPTIVE HELP SEEKING AND PEER HARASSMENT

Two related perspectives, coping and self-regulation, provide a common foundation for conceptualizing help seeking as an adaptive strategy for dealing with harassment. The following discussion is largely theoretical; it provides background for empirical research that is reviewed in the second section of the article.

Theoretical Perspective of Coping

General Background on Stress and Coping

Research on stress and coping in children has evolved from research with adults. Although there have been numerous definitions of *stress*, the most widely-cited is that of Lazarus and Folkman (1984): "Psychological stress involves a particular relationship between the person and the environment that is appraised by the person as taxing or exceeding his or her resources and endangering his or her well being" (p. 19). Because cognitive appraisal processes vary according to development, operationalizing *stress* in studies with children and adolescents has been difficult. A number of researchers have focused on the more objectively-measured construct *stressor* (i.e., a specific environmental event or condition that threatens one's physical or psychological well being; Grant et al., 2003). Stressors that children commonly encounter at school run the gamut from everyday hassles (e.g., academic pressure to perform and social pressure to have friends) to chronic conditions (e.g., excessive crowding and poorly trained teachers) to acute, traumatic events (e.g.,

violence perpetrated by a classmate; Band & Weisz, 1988; Compas, 1987; Rudolph & Hammen, 1999).

As with *stress*, researchers have defined and operationalized *coping* in diverse ways. Studies have identified different categories, types, dimensions, and functions of coping (see Compas, Connor-Smith, Saltzman, Thomsen, & Wadsworth, 2001; Lazarus, 2000; Skinner, Edge, Altman, & Sherwood, 2003; Zeidner & Endler, 1996). A number of these studies have focused on children (Boekaerts, 1996; Causey & Dubow, 1992; Connor-Smith, Compas, Wadsworth, Thomsen, & Saltzman, 2000; Fields & Prinz, 1997; Frydenberg, 1999; Ryan-Wenger, 1992). Broadly speaking, and as used in this article, coping refers to conscious, intentional efforts individuals use to regulate aspects of themselves (i.e., their emotion, cognition, behavior, physiology) or aspects of the environment in order to reduce stress. Widely recognized classifications of coping include problem-focused versus emotion-focused coping, primary-control versus secondary-control coping, engagement versus disengagement coping, approach versus avoidance coping, active versus passive coping, and cognitive versus behavioral coping. To integrate the vast literature and understand the structure of coping, Skinner et al. (2003) proposed a hierarchical classification system in which situation-specific observations of coping (i.e., *coping instances*) are organized into "lower order" categories (i.e., *strategies* or *ways of coping*), which, in turn, are organized into "higher order" categories (i.e., *families of strategies*).

Adaptive Help Seeking: A Strategy for Coping

One particular family of coping strategies that researchers consistently have identified is seeking social support, or help seeking (Compas et al., 2001; Skinner et al., 2003). Included are two separate but related strategies: (a) seeking information (i.e., understanding, advice, or instrumental support for solving problems) and (b) seeking emotional support (i.e., closeness, comfort, or solace; Ayers, Sandler, West, & Roosa, 1996). The first strategy generally is thought of as problem focused (i.e., aimed at altering the stressor), whereas the second is emotion focused (i.e., aimed at regulating, reducing, or soothing emotional reactions to the stressor).

To conceptualize *adaptive help seeking*, it is useful to note several ways the term *adaptive* has been used in the general coping literature—referring to either a strategy's effectiveness (i.e., whether using the strategy has a successful outcome) or purpose (i.e., function, or the individual's goal in using the strategy; Compas et al., 2001; Holahan, Moos, & Schaefer, 1996; Lazarus, 1991, 2000; Skinner et al., 2003; Zeidner & Saklofske, 1996). In this article, adaptiveness refers to effectiveness. Adaptive help seeking is an action, namely, requesting information or emotional support, that maximizes the likelihood of two consequences: short-term, situation-specific stress reduction and long-term development of "healthy" intrapersonal and interpersonal

self-system resources (e.g., competence, self-reliance, self-efficacy, perceived control, and interpersonal trust) that are important particular resources for coping with future stressors (Connell & Wellborn, 1991; Skinner & Wellborn, 1994; White, 1974). By seeking information, individuals can resolve their immediate problem; in the process, they may learn about causes of stressful situations and possible strategies for resolving future problems on their own. Similarly, by seeking emotional support, individuals can reduce anxiety, anger, or fear; furthermore, they may gain insight, competence, and a sense of self-efficacy regarding emotional regulation. An important characteristic of adaptive help seeking involves *calibration*: When children restrict help seeking to situations with which they are unable to cope independently, their action is expected to maximize the likelihood of positive short- and long-term outcomes. That is, requests for help are likely to be adaptive if they are *necessary*.[1]

Of course, not all coping is adaptive. Nonadaptive, or maladaptive, coping fails to promote long-term development of healthy resources; in addition, it may (or may not)[2] lead to short-term stress reduction (Compas et al., 2001; Holahan, Moos, & Schaefer, 1996; Lazarus, 1991, 2000; Skinner et al., 2003; Zeidner & Saklofske, 1996). With regard to help seeking, two particular strategies are nonadaptive (i.e., *dependent help seeking* and *avoidance of help seeking*). Both can be characterized according to calibration. *Dependent help seeking* involves individuals requesting assistance unnecessarily, without having put sufficient effort into resolving the problem on their own. This strategy corresponds to a category of coping identified by Ayers et al. (1996), Connor-Smith et al. (2000), Ryan-Wenger (1992), Skinner et al. (2003), and Skinner and Wellborn (1994) as delegation (i.e., surrender to others of one's own responsibility). *Avoidance of help seeking* involves individuals failing to ask for assistance that is necessary and instead either passively doing nothing, actively avoiding potential help, or continuing to use another strategy that is ineffective. This corresponds to several coping categories: helplessness (i.e., passivity, relinquishment of control), escape (i.e., avoidance, flight, denial), and rigid perseveration (i.e., rumination, intrusive thoughts; Ayers et al., 1996; Connor-Smith et al., 2000; Ryan-Wenger, 1992; Skinner et al., 2003; Skinner & Wellborn, 1994). One can envision that certain instances of nonadaptive help seeking (i.e., both *dependent help seeking* and *avoidance of help seeking*) have consequences more adverse than failing to promote healthy resources and failing to reduce stress; they

may actually promote long-term development of "unhealthy" resources, or coping vulnerabilities (e.g., low self-efficacy, interpersonal hostility, losing sight of one's sense of control) and exacerbate stress (Skinner et al., 2003). One can reason that nonadaptive help seeking that has especially adverse consequences is likely to be characterized by especially poor calibration (i.e., requesting assistance that clearly is unnecessary or failing to request assistance that clearly is necessary).

Adaptive Help Seeking: A Context-Specific View of Coping

A context-specific variation of the coping perspective emphasizes what individuals are thinking, feeling, and doing "in the moment" (Boekaerts, 1996, 1999). This particular view of coping is useful in conceptualizing the *process* of adaptive help seeking.

How individuals appraise stress and stress reduction, how they judge whether help is necessary, and what one means by "healthy" or "unhealthy" resources (e.g., Healthy or unhealthy from whose perspective? According to what criteria?) are idiosyncratic and subjective (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Skinner et al., 2003). Confronting similar stressors, different children may cope very differently; indeed, the same child may cope differently at different times in response to similar stressors. According to a context-specific formulation of coping, a strategy's effectiveness is best determined in a "local" sense (i.e., in relation to how well students satisfy their own specific goals) rather than in a general, developmental sense (i.e., in relation to normative outcomes). Thus, effectiveness is dependent on the specific purpose a strategy serves, specifics of the individual (including his or her ability to implement the strategy), and specifics regarding the stressor and the context in which the stressor occurs. In sum, what is adaptive for one child in one instance may not be adaptive for another child, in other instances.

According to Boekaerts (1996, 1999), one's "internal environment," consisting of past social experiences, social expectancies, goals, emotionality, and the entire system of social-cognitive and affective-motivational resources, influences how individuals perceive and respond to stressors. Or, according to Crick and Dodge's (1994) social-information processing model, one's "personal mental state" influences the cognitive processes in which children engage when they confront peer conflict (i.e., encoding and interpreting immediate environmental and social cues, formulating a goal for resolving the conflict, generating and evaluating possible strategies for achieving the goal, and selecting and enacting a response).

To understand adaptive help seeking in the context of peer harassment, three components of one's internal environment are particularly important: mental representation of specific stressors, goals, and emotions. How one mentally represents (i.e., interprets) environmental and social cues surrounding the actual incident is crucial because it is the individual's

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[1] In addition to *necessity*, a self-regulative perspective, discussed subsequently, points to several other situational demands to which a request for help can potentially be calibrated.

[2] As an example of a strategy that might fail in the long term but succeed in the short, one can envision that staying home from school reduces a child's immediate stress caused by bullying but does not promote the development of social competence and interpersonal skills needed for future conflict resolution.

personal meaning (e.g., perceived severity) of the stressor that helps determine whether he or she thinks it is necessary to seek help. Stressors typically cause an imbalance in one's internal environment, and coping can be seen as an effort to adapt to the imbalance. Of the several types of imbalance that may occur as a result of harassment, goal frustration (i.e., an obstacle to goal attainment) is probably most typical. So, for example, being pushed around by another student might interfere with a child's desire for social status (e.g., being seen by peers as strong), social harmony, and safety. Asking a teacher for help is likely to be seen as effective if it results in a rebalancing of the goal system, with the child maintaining his or her peer status while remaining safe. Rebalancing can be difficult as obstacles to goal attainment typically evoke strong emotions that can bias children's mental representation of the stressor as well as their goals and selection and implementation of coping strategies (Boekaerts, 1996). Of course, it is not only one's internal environment that influences a strategy's effectiveness. Certain factors related to effectiveness are not controlled by the help seeker. Outcomes depend not just on characteristics and actions of the help seeker but also on the presence and helpfulness of others, most notably the teacher, as well as the presence and helpfulness (or possible interference) of friends and bystanders (see further discussion in a subsequent section of the article).

Theoretical Perspective of Self-Regulation

A self-regulatory perspective complements the coping perspective. Focusing on self-regulation provides further insight into the *process* of adaptive help seeking.

General Background on Self-Regulation

Self-regulation has been defined theoretically and operationalized empirically in diverse ways and in diverse domains (e.g., performance and satisfaction in organizations, physical health, addictive behavior, mental disorders, academic learning; see Boekaerts, Pintrich, & Zeidner, 2000; Carver & Scheier, 1998). Individuals self-regulate in situations that may or may not be stressful. In situations appraised as stressful, processes of self-regulation can be considered synonymously with coping (Compas et al., 2001). As used here, the term *self-regulation* refers to individuals' regulation, or control, of their thoughts, feelings, behavior, physiology, and environment for the purpose of attaining some goal. The self-regulatory process is dynamic; that is, the individual actively seeks feedback from an encounter with the environment and uses it to make adjustments to his or her current and future performance (Zimmerman, 2000). Self-regulation can be either volitional (i.e., intentional and effortful) or involuntary (i.e., automatic); the focus in this article is processes that are volitional (see Corno, 2001; Kuhl, 2000).

In the academic domain, self-regulation refers to students' active engagement in their own learning, based on self-understanding and self-control (Schunk & Zimmerman, 1994; Winne, 2001). Learners' actions are aimed at managing and directing their thoughts (e.g., self-monitoring, self-evaluation, goal setting), feelings (e.g., reducing boredom, soothing anxiety), behavior (e.g., choice and employment of strategies, time allocation for studying), physiology (e.g., taking a nap, drinking coffee to stay awake), and environment (e.g., self-reinforcement, elimination of noisy distractions).

Adaptive Help Seeking: A Strategy for Self-Regulation of Academic Difficulty

Numerous studies on help seeking have involved the academic domain (see Karabenick, 1998). Although academic difficulty and peer harassment are very different types of stressors (Grant et al., 2003; Newman, 2003), what is known about the help-seeking process in the one domain can inform an understanding in the other. In particular, in both domains, a key component of the process is discerning when help is necessary.

Traditionally, students who seek help with schoolwork have been characterized as needy and incompetent, whereas those who can accomplish tasks on their own without requiring help are mature and competent. Under certain conditions, however, help seeking can be a valuable self-regulative learning strategy (Butler, 2006; Nelson-Le Gall, 1981, 1985; Newman, 2000, 2002). Consistent with the coping perspective, *adaptive help seeking* refers to help seeking that maximizes the likelihood of short- and long-term consequences, in particular, resolution of immediate academic difficulties and development of knowledge, skills, and self-system resources that are important for future learning. Requests that are most likely to have these consequences are ones calibrated to specific situational demands. On encountering academic difficulty, the self-regulated learner carefully considers the following three decisions: (a) *necessity* of help (e.g., "Is the work so difficult that I can't solve it on my own?"), (b) *target* of the request (e.g., "Who is most likely to provide useful help?"), and (c) *content* of the request (e.g., "What exactly should I ask for?"). Decisions are transformed into actions that maximize the likelihood of positive outcomes. Note that necessity is the foundation on which the other two decisions rest.

To illustrate the three decisions and actions, consider a sixth-grader, Tom, in math class. Tom's requesting assistance is likely to be adaptive if (a) he has a realistic sense of the type of problem that often gives him trouble (in fact, he did poorly on these problems on the last quiz; in addition, he knows he tried his hardest to do the assignment on his own and now has become very frustrated), so he decides to get some help; (b) of the several available teacher's aides, he approaches the one who has been able to help him the most with math in the past (the others are more helpful in English and history class); and (c) he articulates a question that hones in on the specific aspect of the problem he cannot do while letting the

aide know what he has been able to figure out on his own (he knows he needs an explanation of how to set up the equation; he can draw the diagram and do the computation by himself).

Adaptive Help Seeking: A Strategy for Self-Regulation of Peer Harassment

This self-regulatory perspective on *academic difficulty* can serve as a template for thinking about how children respond to *peer harassment*. The adaptive help-seeking process can be conceptualized in two ways: with a focus on either calibration or components.

Help-seeking process from the perspective of calibration. Requests for help that are most likely to have positive consequences are ones that are well calibrated. Calibration involves the child carefully reflecting and acting on three decisions: (a) *necessity* of help (e.g., "How serious is the incident? Have I tried other strategies that have worked in the past? Could the situation turn violent?"), (b) *target* of the request (e.g., "Who is nearby and most likely to be available to help? . . . my teacher? . . . the hallway monitor? . . . a classmate? Who is least likely to make me feel bad about requesting help?"), and (c) *content* of the request (e.g., "Should I ask the teacher for advice on a strategy that I can use on my own [informational support seeking] . . . or just let her know how bad I feel? [emotional support seeking] . . . or ask if I can stay inside and not go out to the playground . . . or can I just assume the teacher will know what to do? How can I demonstrate to the teacher that I've tried my hardest to resolve the problem and am relying on her only as a last resort? Is it better if I go to the teacher when there aren't other kids around? . . . I don't want to look like a tattletale."). Responses that are most likely to have negative consequences are ones that are poorly calibrated to situational demands. This includes seeking help unnecessarily (i.e., *dependent help seeking*), failing to seek necessary help (i.e., *avoidance of help seeking*), and requesting help that may be necessary but is addressed to an individual who is not likely to help and is expressed in a nonoptimal way.

Help-seeking process from the perspective of components. The help-seeking process can also be thought of in a componential way, by specifying social-cognitive and affective-motivational subprocesses (or competencies, skills, resources) involved in making the three decisions (i.e., regarding *necessity*, *target*, and *content*) and transforming decisions into action. With regard to peer harassment, children must have the ability to accurately perceive features of the environment and infer intentions and capabilities of possible helpers. Children must have social and linguistic skills for communicating requests, social skills for maintaining friendships (i.e., so peers might help them), social and physical competencies needed for alternative strategies (e.g., assertiveness), and personal awareness that they have these

social-cognitive skills and competencies (i.e., self-efficacy). In addition, children must be motivated by particular goals (e.g., desire to resolve the conflict independently and thereby maintain status in the eyes of peers but, ultimately, desire to remain safe even if this requires asking an adult for assistance) and emotional states (e.g., feelings that allow them to tolerate and confront relatively minor incidents while knowing they can enlist help from an adult if necessary, and feelings that allow them to admit to others their limitations and that contribute to an interpersonal connection with a helper).

Components of the help-seeking process do not necessarily operate sequentially. Affect and motivation are not independent, add-on components that always follow in a temporal fashion the social and cognitive. No doubt, certain goals and emotional states are needed to transform results of the decision making (i.e., regarding *necessity*, *target*, and *content*) into action (Newman, 2006). Goals and emotions also enter into the decision making—perhaps making a student feel that help is necessary when in fact it is not, or making a student feel that help is not necessary when in fact it is. In the context of a heated conflict, goals (e.g., desire to maintain friendship with a perpetrator, desire to "save face," desire to get revenge) and emotions (e.g., fear, anger, embarrassment) can influence a student's decisions and actions in unforeseen ways. As well, one can envision various competencies (e.g., social skills, physical prowess) influencing not only students' decisions about whether help is necessary and who is the best helper but also their goals (e.g., desire to not be pushed around) and emotions (e.g., fearlessness).

In sum, complementary views—coping and self-regulation—provide a theoretical foundation for conceptualizing adaptive help seeking. Several points of overlap between the two perspectives are particularly important. First, a definitional distinction between adaptive help seeking and nonadaptive alternative strategies (i.e., dependent help seeking and avoidance of help seeking) is based on expected consequences. Adaptive help seeking promotes the development of internal resources that make it easier for the individual to cope with stressors in the future, whereas the two nonadaptive strategies do not; further, adaptive help seeking maximizes the likelihood of a positive short-term outcome (i.e., reduction of immediate stress), whereas nonadaptive strategies may or may not do so. Second, requests for assistance that are most likely to be adaptive are ones that are calibrated to context-specific situational demands. Calibrated requests accommodate the seriousness of a conflict (i.e., they are necessary); in addition, they are addressed to someone who is likely to help and are worded and enacted in a way likely to produce what is needed. Third, a number of social-cognitive and affective-motivational component processes are involved in calibrating actions to situational demands. Among these are (a) interpretation (i.e., mental representation) of a stressor, (b) goals that individuals want their strategies to accomplish, and (c) emotions evoked by the stressor.

REVIEW OF RESEARCH ON HELP SEEKING AND PEER HARASSMENT

Research in which constructs are operationalized and measured and in which hypotheses are empirically tested is required to support the preceding conceptualization. Unfortunately, few studies have focused on the specific strategy, help seeking, in the specific context of peer harassment. In the following section, these studies are integrated with the larger body of developmental research on coping and peer conflict. The review, organized according to contextual and personal variables, provides insight into how children make decisions about, and act in response to, situational demands of peer harassment at school.

Contextual Variables Related to Help Seeking

What is it about incidents of peer conflict at school that contribute to help-seeking decisions and actions? Although appraisal of stressors is highly subjective and personal (Boekaerts, 1996; Grant et al., 2003; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), research findings support several generalizations about aspects of peer harassment that are salient to children. These include environmental cues from the incident and availability of support.

Environmental Cues

Type of incident.   When children are harassed, perhaps what is most immediately salient in a global sense is the type of incident. Researchers have defined peer harassment in different ways (see Espelage & Swearer, 2003; Juvonen & Graham, 2001; Olweus, 1978; Sullivan, 2000). In this article, I use the term to refer to hostile and unprovoked aggression in which there is an imbalance of power or strength between two children, a perpetrator and a victim; I restrict the related terms, bullying and victimization, to harassment that is chronic. The aggression can be verbal or physical, direct (i.e., overt) or indirect (i.e., covert), relational (i.e., use of relationships as a means of harming the victim) or nonrelational, and sexual (e.g., name calling, inappropriate touching, physical coercion) or nonsexual (see Craig, Pepler, Connolly, & Henderson, 2001; Crick, Nelson, Morales, Cullerton-Sen, Casas, & Hickman, 2001; Underwood, 2002). Although harassment is hostile (i.e., the perpetrator's major goal is to harm the victim), there may also be an instrumental motivation (i.e., the perpetrator's goal is to gain access to the victim's property, space, or privileges; Coie & Dodge, 1998). As expected, not all types of peer harassment are perceived the same. According to Newman and Murray (2005), when asked to compare the severity of three types of direct, nonrelational, nonsexual aggression (i.e., teasing, threats, physical aggression) in the classroom and on the playground, fourth- and fifth-graders consistently say threats and physical aggression are equally serious and provide equal justification for getting help from

a teacher. Different groups of students differed in their views about teasing; these findings are discussed in more detail in later sections of the article.

Peer conflicts that are common at elementary school and that typically are not considered harassment include struggles for personal control (e.g., children working in a group have opposing views about which problems to do first), conflicts over equal rights (e.g., two children approach the computer at the same time and both want to get on), and rights infractions (e.g., one child changes the TV channel without asking the other; Bernzweig, Eisenberg, & Fabes, 1993; Chung & Asher, 1996; Dodge et al., 2006; Hopmeyer & Asher, 1997). Of course, certain rights infractions (e.g., a child takes another's lunch money) can be the instrumental basis on which one child harasses another. According to Perrez and Reicherts (1992), an individual's perception of stressors is based on five salient characteristics: (a) severity of the stressor (i.e., intensity of emotional reaction), (b) likelihood the stressor is uncontrollable, (c) ambiguity (vs. clarity) of the stressor, (d) likelihood the stressor will reoccur, and (e) likelihood the stressful situation will not improve by itself. In general, the more an incident is perceived to be clearly hostile, unprovoked, and uncontrollable, the more it is considered dangerous; and the more clearly it is perceived to be dangerous, the more likely children believe it is appropriate to go to their teacher for assistance (Frijda, 1986; Graham & Juvonen, 2001). Perceptions of hostility and provocation are subjective, however. Oftentimes, conflicts at school are ambiguous whether a child has hostile intent (e.g., a child bumps into a peer and it is not clear whether the bump was accidental or intentional). What is intentional to some children (e.g., those who are aggressive) may be viewed as ambiguous or even harmless by others (Crick & Dodge, 1996; Graham, Hudley, & Williams, 1992). When hostilities become chronic, one would certainly expect children to perceive intentionality and hence feel that help seeking is warranted. But frequency of incidents is perceived differently by different children; some individuals habituate to stress and pain (Ladd & Ladd, 2001).

Location.   The location of incidents enters into students' assessment of stress and need for help. Students typically are aware of dangerous locations at school, for example, where there is little adult supervision and monitoring. Hallways, bathrooms, and cafeterias are considered "unowned places" on many school campuses (Astor, Meyer, & Behre, 1999; Craig & Pepler, 1997; Olweus, 1993). Threats on the playground are seen as more serious than threats in the classroom (Newman & Murray, 2005). Presumably, on the playground, students sense they are "on their own," whereas in the classroom, the teacher is expected to take care of problems (Meyer, Astor, & Behre, 2004). Being alone, without adults or friends present, makes it more acceptable—both in the eyes of peers as well as teachers—for children to seek help.

Students assess environmental cues for danger according to classroom norms. Children seem to know when they are expected to take care of problems by themselves and when it is appropriate to rely on friends or a teacher. If they are harassed in front of classmates, children typically are concerned that going for help makes them appear weak; it detracts from an appearance of being "tough" (Newman, 2003). In addition to inhibition attributed to the presence of onlookers, peers sometimes "egg on" perpetrators and make it even more difficult for a child to go to an adult for assistance (Salmivalli, 2001). If classmates are available to help but do not intervene (either spontaneously or after being asked), one can imagine a child feeling abandoned and particularly vulnerable. Worse yet, in the event a presumed friend is the perpetrator, for example, in incidents involving verbal aggression (e.g., teasing, name calling) or relational aggression (e.g., rumors, gossiping, social exclusion), the victim may feel especially violated, angry, and hurt. At the same time, however, the child may be motivated to resolve the conflict and preserve the friendship without going to the teacher (see Whitesell & Harter, 1996).

Availability of Support

Teachers. Help seeking at school is a social transaction with the teacher. Teachers and students may not have similar views about harassment. Believing that social support is unavailable increases students' stress (Newman & Murray, 2005). Anxiety, fear, and anger as well as apathy are likely to be allayed by a positive student–teacher relationship, in particular, one characterized by teachers' involvement, sense of caring, and shared sensitivity regarding safety (e.g., when environmental cues unambiguously signal danger; see Birch & Ladd, 1996; Meyer et al., 2004; Patrick, Anderman, & Ryan, 2002).

To the extent teachers have negative perceptions of students who come to them for help, these perceptions potentially are reflected in behavior toward individuals who, in fact, may have an especially difficult time with peer interaction. One can envision that if teachers believe a particular child is teased because of behaviors under his or her control (e.g., showing off) or if they think the child is tattling, they may feel unsympathetic and look unfavorably on a request for help. Ignoring a child's request may exacerbate anxiety—or alternatively lead to feelings of shame and perhaps constructively serve to modify the child's behavior. On the other hand, if they believe a child is teased because of uncontrollable causes (e.g., physical disability) that make it hard for him or her to handle the situation, caring teachers no doubt will be understanding of requests for help (see Graham & Juvonen, 2001; Weiner, 1995). In fact, they may use such an occasion to help the child learn other coping strategies and to instruct the perpetrator (and perhaps the whole class) about dangerous consequences of harassment (APA, 1999). As with students' help seeking, it can be argued that teachers'

help giving should be calibrated to students' needs. One can envision a caring teacher being overly protective of certain children in situations they should handle on their own (Birch & Ladd, 1998).

Friends. Children's friends can play an important role in the help-seeking process. Under most conditions—except for those truly dangerous—it is preferable for students to handle peer conflicts on their own or to count on friends (Furman & Buhrmester, 1992; Rubin, Bukowski, & Parker, 2006). Friends can contribute to a sense of safety and provide children an important buffer from potential victimization (Hodges, Boivin, Vitaro, & Bukowski, 1999; Kochenderfer & Ladd, 1997). Friends are especially important in situations where bystanders encourage a perpetrator (Salmivalli, 2001).

In addition to direct help and support, friends contribute to a child's reputation among peers. Children high in perceived popularity (i.e., those with a reputation of being popular; Cillessen & Mayeux, 2004; Parkhurst & Hopmeyer, 1998) generally are thought to be "tough" and not easy to push around, whereas children low in perceived popularity are thought to be "weak" (Rodkin, Farmer, Pearl, & Van Acker, 2000). Children seen as popular tend to believe teasing is less serious than threats or physical aggression, whereas children seen as unpopular believe teasing is just as serious. Nevertheless, when asked how they cope with teasing, children high as well as low in perceived popularity express reluctance to seek help. Children perceived as unpopular are more likely than others to attribute their reluctance to fear of retribution (Newman & Murray, 2005). Not seeking help in situations they think are serious reveals the dilemma in which certain children find themselves. Those perceived as not having friends are aware that asking for help is "not a cool thing to do," and moreover, they may be fearful that it will backfire, get them in trouble, and erode further what their peers think of them (see Graham & Juvonen, 2001; Perry, Williard, & Perry, 1990).

Personal Variables Related to Help Seeking

What personal characteristics account for how children perceive and respond to peer conflict? Research points to children's competencies, goals, emotions, grade level, and gender.

Competencies

Help-seeking decisions and actions depend on social-cognitive competencies. More socially competent children (i.e., individuals with social understanding, social effectiveness, and social skills; Saarni, Campos, Camras, & Witherington, 2006; Thompson, 2006) typically possess a larger repertoire of strategies for dealing with peer conflict and are able to adapt more flexibly to stressors (Brenner & Salovey, 1997). They probably have greater tolerance for

relatively minor incidents because they know they can handle many problems on their own. Children with social competence tend to resolve struggles for personal control and conflicts over equal rights with prosocial strategies such as assertiveness, whereas children lacking social competence are more likely to depend on help from adults (Hartup, 1996; Putallaz & Sheppard, 1992; Rubin & Rose-Krasnor, 1992). Of importance, however, when assertiveness fails to resolve a conflict and they feel they have been "pushed far enough," socially competent children view help seeking as a reasonable backup strategy. They tend to have an accurate sense of their personal strengths as well as weaknesses (Harter, 2006) and a realistic sense of perceived control—allowing them to discern which types of conflict they can control and not control (Skinner & Wellborn, 1994). With a sense of self-efficacy regarding their ability to resolve many conflicts without needing assistance, it is likely that competent children are not so worried about how peers perceive them if they do, in fact, need assistance (cf. Erdley & Asher, 1996; Hopmeyer & Asher, 1997).

When children encounter harassment, it is likely that physical as well as social-cognitive competencies influence help seeking. Children who are able—and confident in their ability—to protect themselves are less likely to need the teacher's assistance. At lower but not upper elementary grades, children with relatively poor self-perceptions of physical ability tend to cope with harassment by giving in to bullies (Newman, Murray, & Lussier, 2001). By acquiescing, individuals who already feel somewhat vulnerable and unsure how to respond may increase the likelihood that they will be victimized and become even more vulnerable in the future (see Perry et al., 2001).

Affective-Motivational Processes

Goals.   In the context of many types of peer conflict, goals play an important role as mediators between initial encoding of environmental cues and eventual selection and execution of strategies (Crick & Dodge, 1994; Erdley & Asher, 1996; Lochman, Wayland, & White, 1993; Rose & Asher, 1999). What goals motivate students to seek help from a teacher? Most typically, children want simply to end the conflict and "get things back to normal." Other goals as well motivate help seeking—for example, revenge. At lower elementary grades, students who want to "get even" with a perpetrator often call on their teacher, whereas students at upper elementary grades are more likely to aggressively take things into their own hands (Newman et al., 2001). A related question is, What goals motivate students' reluctance to seek help? For most children, it is important to not look weak. But to some, reluctance is motivated by a desire to stay friends with the perpetrator (Newman & Murray, 2005). Unpopular children may want to maintain a friendship with a bully because they are lonely or perhaps because they want to transform their self-image from victim to victimizer (Boivin

et al., 2001; Salmivalli, 2001; Schwartz, Dodge, Petit, & Bates, 1997). Of course, not seeking help when it is truly necessary can backfire; if viewed as submissive, victims may be harassed even more severely (Perry et al., 2001).

Goals are not static; they change as the dynamic of an incident changes. Although students initially may be motivated by the desire to end a conflict, if the perpetrator persists and the incident becomes more serious, children are likely to reassess their goals (Troop-Gordon & Asher, 2005). Adaptive goal modification is evident when an individual shows flexibility, adjusting goals and strategies in a graduated sequence (cf. adaptive help seeking). For instance, students might initially find it important to appear tough in front of bystanders; however, if the situation escalates, perhaps now their goal is safety. In contrast, nonadaptive goal modification is evident when individuals rigidly adhere to a goal. Wanting attention from their teacher, they might seek help when, in fact, their initial goal of resolving the conflict has already been achieved (cf. dependent help seeking). Or, in a serious situation, they might fail to seek help when their initial goal of appearing tough has been thwarted (cf. avoidance of help seeking).

Individuals typically strive simultaneously for more than one goal. Certain combinations of goals are supportive of one another, whereas certain others can interfere (Dodge, Asher, & Parkhurst, 1989). According to Boekaerts (1996, 1999), multiple goals are organized in a hierarchy, including higher level goals (e.g., values), mid-level goals, and lower level goals (e.g., situation-specific scripts). To illustrate, imagine two boys who arrive at a new school on the first day of class; they share higher level goals ("social harmony"). Each student encounters a bully. One boy's mid-level coping goal and coping script are "remain in charge" and "be assertive," respectively. The second boy's mid-level coping goal and script are "avoid conflict" and "get the bully in trouble with the teacher," respectively. What may be effective at one level of a goal hierarchy may not be effective at another level. The second boy, who goes to the teacher for help to get revenge, may succeed in his mid- and lower level goals but may be setting in motion a perception that he is socially incompetent—leading over time to peer rejection and less chance of achieving the higher-level goal of social harmony.

Emotions.   Aggressive acts typically evoke anxiety, fear, and anger (Berkowitz, 1993; Boivin et al., 2001). Strong emotions are likely to influence students' perceptions of severity (Perez & Reicherts, 1992) as well as their goals and choice of strategies (Crick & Dodge, 1994; Fridja, 1986). The role of emotions in the help-seeking process no doubt is dynamic—evident not only at the beginning of an incident but also as it unfolds, when initial strategies fail (Boekaerts, 1996).

Adaptive help seeking requires mature regulation of emotions (see Eisenberg, Fabes, & Guthrie, 1997). When they encounter a conflict, students ideally are able to contain their feelings as they consider how to respond. One can envision

dysregulated fear leading certain children to seek help when it objectively would seem to be unnecessary. Similarly, in ambiguous situations that are actually unintentional, impulsive anger can be responsible for inappropriate judgments of hostility and attempts at retribution (Astor, 1998; Graham et al., 1992). When they are able to successfully regulate their emotions, students are more likely to have options of using different strategies and, accordingly, restrict help seeking to "truly" dangerous situations (see Garber & Dodge, 1991; Murphy & Eisenberg, 1996; Whitesell & Harter, 1996; Whitesell, Robinson, & Harter, 1993). Even if they accurately read environmental cues and recognize danger, children require a strong inner strength to counteract anxiety about what peers think of them if they need help from an adult. Based on findings regarding inhibitions in the academic domain, one would expect a child with low self-esteem to be especially reluctant to go for help if the child feels that his or her ego is "on the line" (Nadler, 1998). The importance of mature emotion regulation is probably most evident in situations where peers encourage bullies (Salmivalli, 2001) and during adolescence, when students are especially concerned about how others perceive them (Espelage & Holt, 2001; Rubin et al., 2006; Ryan, 2001).

Grade Level

With development, children generally have improved social-cognitive competencies that can help them cope with harassment. Given developmental findings regarding cognitive monitoring (Flavell, 1979; Paris & Newman, 1990), one can expect that as children become better at recognizing danger in their surroundings, it is easier for them to know when help is necessary and when it is not. Older children are better able to cope independently with many interpersonal hassles without relying on adults for either informational or emotional support. They have an increasingly large repertoire of strategies—both problem focused (e.g., verbal assertiveness, discussion and negotiation, sharing, compromise) and emotion focused (e.g., distancing oneself from conflict; Eisenberg, 2006; Putallaz & Sheppard, 1992; Sullivan, 2000). With age, children are better able to distinguish controllable and uncontrollable stressors and to match particular coping strategies to particular stressors (Altshuler & Ruble, 1989; Brenner & Salovey, 1997; Fields & Prinz, 1997). They are more realistic about their own limitations and needs (Harter, 2006), more cognizant of who can be counted on to help (Furman & Burmester, 1992), and better at making social decisions (Jacobs & Potenza, 1991; Spivack & Shure, 1982).

At the same time that developing competencies generally make it easier for children to cope with peer conflict, there are changes in the school environment associated with an increased incidence of harassment. Realities of personal safety become increasingly salient as sexually maturing, early adolescents transition to middle school (Craig et al., 2001; Pellegrini, 2002). With a decrease in teachers' personal involvement and an increase in the importance of the peer group for socialization (Bukowski & Sippola, 2001; Eccles & Midgley, 1989), students' concerns about bystanders are probably heightened. Implicit sanctions against help seeking may become especially powerful because of the public nature—and sometimes, spectacle—of fights (Salmivalli, 2001). Over time, children have different, cumulative histories of encounters with bullies; different experiences of successfully or unsuccessfully resolving conflicts on their own; and different levels of tolerance for when they have been "pushed far enough" (Newman, 2003).

Gender

Across a wide age range (i.e., preschool through high school), girls and boys tend to approach peer conflict differently. Girls are more likely than boys to have goals and use coping strategies that are considered prosocial, constructive, and sometimes avoidant. Boys, on the other hand, are more likely to have goals and use strategies that are controlling, coercive, and sometimes hostile and vengeful (Miller, Danaher, & Forbes, 1986; Murphy & Eisenberg, 1996; Seiffge-Krenke, 1995; Shantz & Hartup, 1992).

Girls and boys tend to have different experiences and concerns regarding risks and, accordingly, have different views about help seeking at school. If harassed, boys generally encounter direct, verbal, physical, and nonrelational aggression, whereas girls encounter indirect and relational aggression (see Crick et al., 2001; Underwood, 2002). Boys seem to take name calling more in stride than girls; it is less a violation or threat to friendship (Whitesell & Harter, 1996). Girls are more concerned than boys of being harassed when they are alone; boys are more concerned than girls that help seeking can lead to hassles from the teacher and reprisals from the perpetrator (Newman et al., 2001; see also Astor et al., 1999). If they are harassed, boys are more likely than girls to try to protect themselves by being assertive or aggressive (Kochenderfer-Ladd & Skinner, 2002), whereas, starting in the upper elementary grades, girls are more likely than boys to ask their teacher for assistance (Newman et al., 2001).

In sum, research has shown that when peer harassment evokes strong anger, fear, and anxiety and is perceived unambiguously as hostile, recurrent, uncontrollable, and unchangeable (i.e., without intervention), elementary school students generally feel it is appropriate to go to their teacher for assistance in resolving the conflict. Incidents likely to evoke such feelings and perceptions include threats and acts of physical aggression—in particular, ones that occur in locations where there is no adult supervision and no support from friends (i.e., when the victim is alone). Views about harassment and help seeking vary according to several personal characteristics of students. For example, older (vs. younger) children typically are better able to recognize danger. Boys and girls differ in how they perceive certain features of peer harassment; they also differ in goals and strategy use.

Perceptions are likely to vary according to the child's past history in dealing with conflict. Some students perceive seemingly mild incidents to be dangerous, whereas others perceive seemingly dangerous incidents to be innocuous. Ideally, children can accurately read environmental cues, assess potential risk, and decide appropriately whether to go to their teacher for help or handle the situation on their own. However, individuals who lack certain social-cognitive and physical competencies, who are perceived by classmates as unpopular, and who have difficulty regulating emotions often assess and respond to harassment in ways that adversely influence their peer relations and socialization.

CONCLUSIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Based on two theoretical perspectives (i.e., coping and self-regulation), help seeking can be conceptualized as an adaptive strategy for dealing with peer harassment. This conceptualization of a specific strategy (i.e., help seeking) for a specific stressor (i.e., peer harassment) is situated in the broader theory and body of research on coping, which deals with a large catalogue of strategies and a wide variety of stressors. It is also situated in the broader theory and body of research on self-regulation, in particular, that which emphasizes strategic process. From both perspectives, adaptive help seeking and nonadaptive alternative strategies (i.e., dependent help seeking and avoidance of help seeking) are defined according to expected likelihood of short- and long-term outcomes (i.e., stress reduction and development of healthy intra- and interpersonal self-system resources that support an individual's future efforts for dealing with peer harassment). When requests for assistance fit situational demands of the conflict, help seeking is most likely to be adaptive; when requests do not fit, it is most likely to be nonadaptive. Whether relying on notions of calibration and decision making or component skills and subprocesses, key elements of adaptive help seeking can be specified, including realistic assessment of when help is necessary, ability to choose and enact a good strategy (and, if help seeking is the choice, to decide on a good helper and communicate exactly what is needed), ability to regulate emotions, and ability to modify goals if one confronts obstacles to resolving conflict.

Further research is needed to advance our understanding of adaptive help seeking in the context of peer harassment. Studies should involve specific criteria for adaptiveness (e.g., short- and long-term outcomes, rebalancing of one's goal system). In this final section, I discuss two particular conceptual issues of interest: reasons why children respond as they do to specific stressors, and developmental change in children's responses.

Calibration of Response to Specific Stressors

Calibration to situational demands is a useful guide for describing what adaptive help seeking "looks like." According to a self-regulatory perspective, there are three criteria for calibration (i.e., *necessity, target,* and *content*). To date, researchers have not investigated how students calibrate action to *target.* Empirical examination at elementary school is constrained by the fact that, whether in the classroom or on the playground, there often is only one teacher in charge at the location where an incident of harassment occurs. Still, children may have opportunities to seek out other adults such as school counselors, vice principals, or friends. The role of *content* has been examined in the academic domain where studies have demonstrated important features of "good" requests for informational assistance but not in the peer harassment domain. Academic help seeking that is explicit, precise, and polite (i.e., that captures the teacher's attention and helps him or her diagnose students' specific problems and efficiently provide assistance) is predictive of students' subsequent academic performance (see Nelson-Le Gall, 1981, 1985; Newman, 2000, 2002). It is reasonable to expect comparable findings regarding help seeking in the context of harassment.

This article has focused on how children calibrate action to *necessity.* The question of whether one can ever accurately identify a "true" state of necessity, or need, is conceptually and methodologically complex. Perceptions of necessity are idiosyncratic and subjective (e.g., Necessary from whose perspective? According to a relatively objective standard such as the peer group, or according to one's personal past performance?). Although a good deal of this article has focused on children seeking help when it is necessary, accurate calibration also involves *not* seeking help when it is *not* necessary. Of course, nonaction (i.e., not seeking help) cannot be measured, and therefore one can never be sure what a student is "really doing." Socially competent children cope with peer harassment with a host of presumably adaptive strategies other than help seeking (e.g., assertiveness, negotiation, distancing; Skinner et al., 2003). Ideally, children are flexible, choosing strategies that match the specific situation (Brenner & Salovey, 1997).

Two nonadaptive strategies (i.e., dependent help seeking and avoidance of help seeking) involve poor calibration of action to *necessity.* In both cases, poor calibration may be attributed to personal and perhaps misguided beliefs, feelings, or goals. Why might children go to their teacher for help prematurely when they can, in fact, handle an incident on their own? Perhaps they make an inaccurate assessment that help is necessary; that is, they mistakenly believe they cannot handle the conflict independently. However, in spite of an accurate assessment that help is not necessary, children may still ask for assistance because certain feelings interfere with their judgment. For example, they may lack confidence and feel like they cannot handle the problem; they may feel vulnerable, with anxiety and fear overriding other cognitive and affective processes. Perhaps these feelings are so strong that children do not even stop to consider that help may be unnecessary. An expedient desire to delegate responsibility may prevent students from considering the causes of harassment.

If only they gave themselves a chance, they might realize that they could, in fact, cope with many problems on their own. Given the likely importance of this sort of self-reflection and experience for the development of internal resources such as competencies and perceived competencies, this would be an unfortunate outcome.

Why might students fail to seek help when, in fact, it is necessary? Perhaps they make an inaccurate assessment that help is not necessary; that is, they mistakenly believe they can handle an incident on their own. In spite of an accurate assessment that help is necessary, they may lack social skills and self-confidence needed to approach someone for help. They may be overly concerned about how others perceive them; revealing their limitations elicits anxiety. It is possible they feel frightened or even paralyzed into inaction, remaining passive beyond the point of safety. They simply may not care to get assistance; failure may seem so inevitable that they ask themselves, "Why should I even try to get help?" Under pressure from peers to look tough and to mask their limitations, students may feel brave and foolhardy, actively avoid helpers, and instead engage in risky and aggressive behavior that escalates hostility. Rather than remaining passive or trying to escape, students sometimes fail to carefully monitor that they are in trouble; they keep their "head in the sand," perseverating with dead-end strategies that do not resolve their problem. Avoidance of help seeking may well prevent students from confronting their limitations, considering the causes of harassment, and learning about the benefits of relying on others for assistance.

In other words, researchers must examine perceptions of necessity within the constraints of imprecise differentiation among constructs such as *knowing, believing,* and *feeling.* Understanding underlying causes of nonadaptive coping— both explanations for why students unwisely employ certain strategies and why they fail to employ others—requires greater attention to the interplay of cognitive, affective, and motivational variables (see Forgas, 2000; Lazarus, 1991; Pekrun, Goetz, Titz, & Perry, 2002). More generally, understanding nonadaptive coping requires a systematic, componential analysis of processes involved in strategy use. Especially when students are at risk of using potentially destructive coping strategies (e.g., use of drugs and alcohol), it is imperative for researchers and educators involved in interventions to understand complexities in the help-seeking process (see Matthews & Wells, 1996; Zeidner & Saklofske, 1996).

Developmental Change in Students' Response to Stressors

Possible Developmental Trajectories

Grade differences in students' response to harassment naturally evoke questions about developmental trajectory: "How did children whose actions are poorly calibrated become who they are?" and "What are their likely outcomes?"

Although investigators have not addressed these questions directly, findings discussed in preceding sections of the article allow the following speculation (and direction for future longitudinal research).

Among children as young as kindergartners and first graders, individuals who are withdrawn and asocial often are overly dependent on their teacher. According to Birch and Ladd (1998), children sometimes use their teacher as a shield to protect themselves from having to deal with normative peer interactions in the classroom, and this can have negative ramifications for peer relations. Although it can be argued that all students find themselves in a dilemma when it comes to weighing costs and benefits of seeking help, uncertainty and anxiety may be especially problematic for young children who already have a history of being teased and socially isolated. They probably are concerned about further social exclusion from their peer group. If they go to their teacher for help, they run the risk of being labeled a "tattle-tale," alienating themselves from the teacher and incurring reprisal from the perpetrator (Kochenderfer & Ladd, 1997). Yet when they try to handle seemingly minor incidents on their own, for example, with verbal or physical assertiveness but are awkward and unsuccessful, this can backfire, reinforcing a negative image among their peers and leading to further socioemotional problems (Boivin et al., 2001; Schuster, 2001; Smith et al., 2001). If overdependence on the teacher and harassment continue, children may internalize taunts and blame themselves for the cause of harassment and their inability to make it cease (Graham & Juvonen, 2001). This can lead to withdrawal, loneliness, and low self-esteem. In turn, the child may respond to continuing harassment with maladaptive strategies that perpetuate a sense of helplessness (Asher et al., 1990; Ladd & Ladd, 2001).

At some point—perhaps around the transition from lower to upper elementary grades—if they find themselves in dangerous situations for which they truly need assistance, children may decide the costs of help seeking are too great. They may become submissive. Children with poor self-perceptions of physical ability are particularly at risk of acquiescing to acts of hostility (Newman et al., 2001) and perhaps being seen as *withdrawn-rejected* (Dodge et al., 2006). If repeatedly victimized without resolving the problem on their own and without getting help, children may lash out at their tormentors and overreact in ways that escalate violence and lead them to be seen as *aggressive-rejected* (Dodge et al., 2006). The prognosis is poor for both withdrawn-rejected and aggressive-rejected children. Submissiveness and aggressiveness often lead to further victimization and increasingly serious problems with socioemotional adjustment (Boulton, 1999; Perry et al., 2001; Rigby, 2001; Schwartz et al., 1997).

Mediators and Moderators

In this article, adaptive help seeking, dependent help seeking, and avoidance of help seeking have been conceptualized

as coping and self-regulatory strategies. As such, they theoretically function as *mediators* of a relationship between stressors (i.e., incidents of harassment) and various outcomes (e.g., socioemotional adjustment or maladjustment). Mediator variables specify a mechanism by which (i.e., how? or why?) an independent variable influences a dependent variable (Baron & Kenny, 1986). Over time, adaptive and nonadaptive help seeking may become fairly stable individual-difference characteristics (i.e., coping styles) of children. These patterns of behavior may then function as *moderators* of a relationship between harassment and adjustment (or maladjustment). Moderator variables specify conditions under which (i.e., when? or for whom?) a relationship between an independent and dependent variable takes on a different direction or strength (Baron & Kenny, 1986).

Conceptualized as a moderator, help seeking can be seen as a resilience or risk factor. To the extent an individual can be characterized as an "adaptive help seeker," his or her coping style may provide a buffer against stress; development of healthy resources provides protection against future, adverse consequences. To the extent another individual can be characterized as a "nonadaptive help seeker," his or her coping style may fail to provide protection against future, adverse consequences. Having developed coping vulnerabilities, the "nonadaptive help seeker" may be especially at risk of socioemotional difficulty and symptoms of psychopathology (e.g., anxiety, somatic illness, depression, and conduct disorder; see Grant et al., 2003; Luthar, Burback, Cicchetti, & Weisz, 1997).

My hope is that this article generates interest in pursuing future research on help seeking in the context of peer harassment. This is just one of a variety of coping or self-regulative strategies from which schoolchildren can potentially benefit (see Merrell, Gueldner, Ross, & Isava, in press). Whether it is appropriate to ask for assistance or instead to implement another strategy when one is harassed is a dilemma for many children. There can be serious social and personal costs associated with taking the wrong action. A better understanding of how (or why) and when (or for whom) help seeking can support children's socioemotional development promises to provide direction for intervention research and programmatic efforts aimed at helping students develop the skills and competencies required for adaptive coping.

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