



Book Review

Losey, B. 2011. *Bullying, Suicide, and Homicide: Understanding, Assessing, and Preventing Threats to Self and Others for Victims of Bullying*. New York, NY: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group. Paperback \$34.95; xi + 159 pp. + accompanying CD

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Bullying was once considered unavoidable and often viewed simply as a common part of growing up. With some suicides and homicides now linked to bullying, however, we have witnessed a paradigm shift requiring new resources and attitudes. Losey illuminates this critical social problem in his book entitled *Bullying, Suicide, and Homicide: Understanding, Assessing, and Preventing Threats to Self and Others for Victims of Bullying*. Readers will be struck by the powerful image on the front cover which speaks volumes about bullying and its trivialization in this society.

Losey notes that unlike many writers who avoid labeling, he intentionally uses the terms ‘bully’ and ‘victim’ because bullying is victimization. Losey illustrates painfully this point in the first chapter with a description of a sixteen year old girl who committed suicide to escape bullying at school. It was her death that served as the catalyst for Losey to write *Bullying, Suicide, and Homicide*. The young girl’s tragic and untimely death illuminated gaps in the prevention and intervention system at her

school: 1) personnel were not adequately trained to assess bullying, and 2) the relationship between bullying and suicide and/or other mental health issues was also not properly understood. Losey outlines a three-tiered process for addressing mental health issues for children experiencing bullying and possible victimization-related suicidal or homicidal ideation. His approach includes the following three stages: screen, assess, and mediate—easily remembered by the acronym SAM.

Before educating readers about prevention and intervention, Losey aptly provides a contextual framework for bullying - he focuses on understanding its nature, its impact, and important risk factors related to bullying and possible by-products such as suicide and school violence. For example, chapter two entitled “Effective School Prevention” is framed around the social construct that behavior can be seen as a function of a person’s interaction with his or her environment. It is this ecological model that serves as a foundation for Losey’s work.

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The next chapter entitled “Inconspicuous Partners” explores the idea that bullying may be a precursor to suicide and homicide. Losey challenges the notion that bullying is “typical childhood behavior and even a part of growing up” and makes a compelling argument that the intentionality and harm of bullying should be viewed no differently than the legislative language that defines child abuse. Chapter 3 enlightens readers on the lasting effects of victimization including a look at why suicide is sometimes the choice for children and adolescents who see no other escape from relentless bullying.

In chapter 4, entitled “Factors That Increase Risk for Victims of Bullying” Losey explores “specific risk factors that increase the likelihood of someone attempting suicide or violence. (p. 33)” These are organized across five domains of bullying; cognitive; mental health; social context; and family context.

Chapters 5-7 outline the three stages previously mentioned (i.e., screen, assess, and mediate) with one chapter devoted to each stage. This introduces the reader to Losey’s “Bullying Lethality Screening Tool” which he co-created with his colleague Susan Graham. The tool is designed to “identify ‘red flags’ for bullying, depression, isolation, suicide, and school violence” and is a welcomed addition to anyone’s clinical toolbox.

The chapters entitled “Assess” and “Mediate” include useful tables that enhance the subject matter. Losey informs the reader about these important stages and chooses language that is easily read and engaging. The final chapter “Practical Application of The Bullying Lethality Identification System” is the capstone where Losey applies

the content of preceding chapters to two actual clients. This bridges the gap between theory and practice, clearly increasing the book purchaser’s return on investment.

Losey contends that his book will allow readers to better understand how bullying impacts one’s sense of self, will educate readers about the value of incorporating an ecological approach into prevention and intervention efforts, and will familiarize readers about important features of screening and assessment tools to more effectively intervene with victims of bullying. These assertions are supported throughout the well-designed chapters that clearly expound on the relationship between bullying, suicide, and homicide. The content is well organized, cogent yet sensitive, and all tools and forms created by Losey are presented as appendices and contained in a convenient accompanying CD.

Although seemingly marketed to mental health professionals and school personnel, this book may also be suitable for undergraduate and graduate students training to work with children and adolescents. Considered an academic book, *Bullying, Suicide, and Homicide* could also benefit countless parents and families who are ill-equipped to identify and understand a social problem everyone has a responsibility to address. Losey’s *Bullying, Suicide, and Homicide* is a respectable and valuable contribution to the field and undoubtedly will inspire readers to direct their energies to reducing the devastating impact of bullying behavior on our youth.