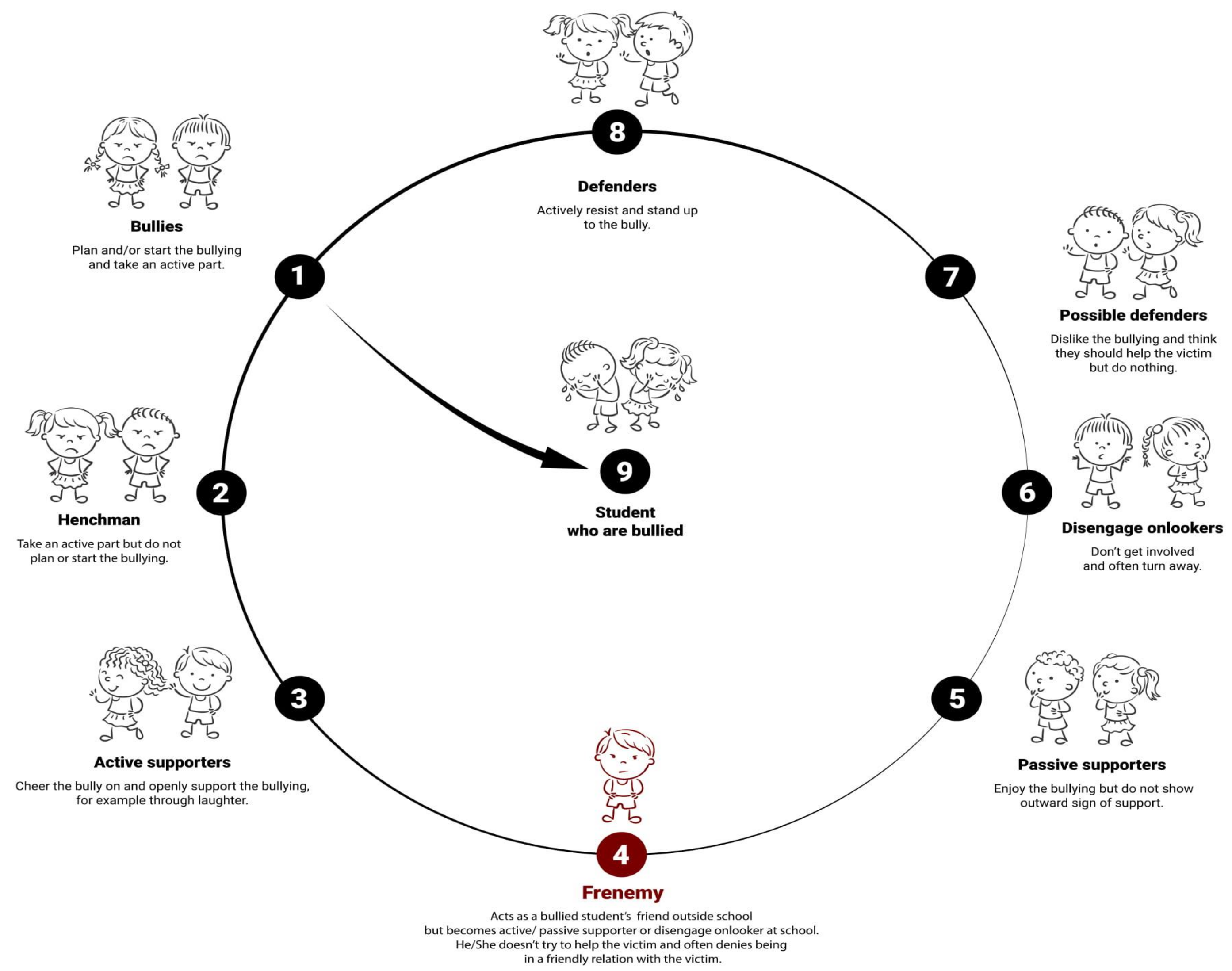


School Bullying - the classroom hierarchy and the bullying circle – case study

Design and Methods

Qualitative research design guided by **grounded theory methods** was chosen, as it focuses on interaction, meaning and interpretation of social processes. The study comprised two waves of data collection: observations of peer group in school and individual, semi-structured in-depth interviews with students (Charmaz, 2017).

Methods: The original sample consisted of 124 students (aged 14-15) in the first wave of the study and 49 in second. Data in the form of 49 interview transcripts and observation notes was analyzed by Nvivo11 using the techniques of the constructivist grounded theory.



Results

FREEMY – THE NEW ADDITION TO BULLYING CIRCLE

He/she acts as a bullied student's friend outside school but becomes active/passive supporter or disengage onlooker at school. He/she doesn't try to help the victim and often denies being in a friendly relation with the victim.

THE PERCEPTION OF NORMALITY

Normality provided security, as 'normal' students weren't in danger of being excluded and bullied: *"You've got to be normal to be OK. If you are normal, nobody will make fun of you. You won't give reasons to be laughed at."*

The idea of normality was shaped in contrast to the victimized students' behavior and appearance.

"If I were fat I would be bullied. But I am not. I am normal." "Normal people don't behave like that. We know the rules, we are normal." "I don't need to worry. I am normal."

Discussion

Fluidity of students roles in a bullying circle

Intervention styles during bullying situations are fluid. They are situated on a continuum around the aggressor-victim dyad.

Co-constructing differentness of targeted students. Oddness-related labels were created and implemented in the presentation of the class reality and justified bullying.

Well-earned normality provided security and protection from being bullied. Normality was constructed in opposition to the oddness of victims. Similar mechanisms of victimized students trapped in collective action were shown in the studies of Thornberg (2010). Also, Terasahjo and Salmivalli (2003) identified this process as 'the odd student repertoire' as the group maintained normative orders, executing what was normal. During this process, the victim is excluded and bullied.

Practical implications

The link between classroom status hierarchy and the occurrence of bullying implies that, if power imbalance among classmates is reduced, it might decrease bullying incidents. Research shows that teachers are able to influence status hierarchy in the classroom (Gest & Rodkin, 2011), although it may prove challenging as hierarchical relations are easy to memorize and get used to (Zitek & Tiedens, 2012). As Garandeau, Lee and Salmivalli (2014) suggest that it is necessary to raise awareness of the dangers connected with high status hierarchy, and motivate practitioners and educators to pay attention to school class management, in order to create an egalitarian context. It also seems reasonable to introduce educational program tools which would influence the hierarchy process before it becomes settled and permanent.



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