

*"Enjoy the Popcorn, says the title of this very informative book.
So sit back as you go over its tested ideas.
Soon it will feel as if you are conversing with a trusted friend,
who is giving you experienced advice for how your child
can skilfully manage a bullying problem."*

Lim Kam Ming, PPA(G)
Associate Professor and Associate Dean, National Institute of Education,
Nanyang Technological University;
President, Educational Research Association of Singapore;
Recipient, Award for Outstanding Contribution to Psychology in Singapore

*"Enjoy the Popcorn gives you witty, practical and refreshing
ideas like the imagery skills and Taiji talk for guiding your child
in handling any bullying situations."*

Alfred Tan
Chief Executive Officer, Singapore Children's Society

*"This coolheaded guidebook helps parents understand
why bullies act as they do, and it provides useful tactics
that children can learn to deal with bullying."*

Russell Hawkins
Professor, Department of Psychology, College of Healthcare Sciences,
Division of Tropical Health and Medicine, James Cook University

*"This lighthearted book on a serious subject offers
innovative tips on how to handle bullies. With down-to-earth
case illustrations, it is definitely an enlightening
resource for concerned parents."*

Esther Tan
Associate Professor and Head (retired), Psychological Studies Academic Group,
National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University;
Recipient, Award for Outstanding Contribution to Psychology in Singapore

*"Bullying can leave a long-term psychological scar on the
victim if it is not dealt with properly. This book delivers effective
solutions that add to our understanding of this critical issue."*

Lionel Lim
Consultant Psychiatrist, LP Clinic

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Lim Kok Kwang
Wong Mei Yin

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ENJOY THE POPCORN

Helping your child
RE-SCRIPT
THE BULLY HORROR SHOW

Lim Kok Kwang, PhD
Wong Mei Yin, DPsyCh (Clinical)

For Review Only

A graphic featuring the words "ENJOY THE POPCORN" in a large, outlined, bubbly font. The text is surrounded by several small, grey, textured circles of varying sizes, resembling popcorn kernels or dust particles, scattered around the letters.

ENJOY THE POPCORN

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RE-SCRIPT
THE BULLY HORROR SHOW**

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Wong Mei Yin, DPsych (Clinical)**

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*To our parents who have taught us
inner peace in the face of tragedy and given us
the fearless gifts of faith and foresight.*

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Preface to the Third Edition

Getting bullied is horrible! The victim feels intimidated, petrified or even powerless. When the bullying is prolonged, the victim can feel helpless and hopeless eventually. If your child is a victim, he knows how lousy it feels to be pushed around, rejected or ridiculed. This book is written for you. Good news: Your child can begin to change all that. He can not only understand why certain people act like the bully, but also discover a toolbox of skills for his own protection from the bully.

Real change begins with knowledge. Know the bully. Know his tiresomely predictable moves. Know oneself. Know countermoves that neutralise the impact of the bully's moves. This book expands your child's ability to see and do things with new skills that create new possibilities. With stronger emotional self-defence and problem-solving tactics, he can be safe and strong again. He can take back his power from the bully.

From the first edition of this book (*Bully-proof Your Child: Mind-body tactics for outsmarting the bully*), extensive counselling with children, adolescents, parents and caregivers as well as consultations with our mental health colleagues have given birth to this third edition with a fresh title. A thread that weaves through the three editions is that bullying is social performance. As terrifying as bullying often seems to be, it's really a display of behaviours that follow rigid rules as if the victim and the bully were locked in a prearranged drama and obligated to act out its fixed script. The stage could be the classroom, the playground or cyberspace. In truth, both the victim and the bully can free themselves from this repeated show by revising the scripts that

limit their beliefs about what they are able or unable to do. Helping the bully to change himself would be the topic for another book. Here a core strategy and its applications for the victim are drawn from the simple insight that “the supreme art of war is to subdue the enemy without even fighting” (from *The Art of War* by Sun Tzu). It’s more powerful for the victim to pursue an exciting life with supportive people and interesting goals than to keep on confronting the bully with a wish to change his habits. During a scary or boring part of a show, diverting our attention to our own tasty popcorn will weaken the impact of that annoying part of the show. When the bully tries to act out a bully show, your child can then watch it dispassionately or with amusement and respond creatively, while concentrating on how he can create more positive people, activities and goals in his life. Your child can enjoy the popcorn while re-scripting the bully horror show.

Parents and caregivers who are concerned about the recent rise in cyberbullying can help the child reduce the impact from it with the principles and tactics in this book all the same. Cyberbullying is different from face-to-face bullying in that the act of bullying could be taken to a seemingly unsalvageable extent, e.g., threatening messages being circulated on the Internet for everyone to see constantly. Further, since the sources of such messages could be concealed and untraceable, the victim wouldn’t be able to ask the sources to remove those messages. This highlights the preventive importance of parents and caregivers keeping track of the child’s Internet activities (websites, online “friends” etc.) and providing limits or guidance with foresight. To deal with Internet bullying, the child can block the nasty communications, refuse to pass along any bullying messages and use the same ideas in this book to focus

on creating the life he desires which can then make those negative messages trivial and uninteresting.

For easy reading, this book uses “he” whenever a singular pronoun is called for and also the bully and the victim to refer to all bullies and all victims respectively. The creation of the third edition of this book reminds the co-authors about the tremendous blessings given to us. We especially thank all the children and teenagers who have shared with us successful strategies in managing the bully. YOU have inspired this book.

As peer influence is one of the most powerful forces on earth, we hope that our parent and caregiver readers will continue to extend help to your friends (parents and caregivers of the victim or the bully) with the tested, creative and practical strategies in this book.

Lim Kok Kwang & Wong Mei Yin

May 2016

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PART One



Detecting
The Bully Drama

Looking at bullying as dramatic acting helps us understand why bullying happens and how it works. For some, asking why may be an unnecessary question—“Why bother knowing why? Bullying is just wrong.” Well, when your child understands why the bully bullies, he will have the advantage of seeing through the threatening exterior into the real weaknesses of the bully. Part 1 of this book answers the “why” questions.

In the bully drama, the victim and the bully are not the only actors on stage (although in this book, we focus mainly on them). The other actors on stage may make matters worse for the victim or they may help the victim. Who are they? Briefly, they are...

The bystander who watches, tolerates, gossips about or indirectly encourages the bully show (e.g. a live, emotional show would be an entertaining distraction for the otherwise boring ride on the school bus).

The rescuer who comes in with a flowing cape to snatch the victim out of the jaws of the bully. This person has all the good intentions and effort but does not help the victim help himself. With time the victim becomes totally dependent on the rescuer and is unable to deal with the situation alone.

The punisher who takes it upon himself to punish the bully. This sometimes worsens the bully problem rather than solve it, because the punished and resentful bully comes back and takes it out on the victim again (more sneakily this time).

Bullying is not a trivial problem because it is often an extremely hurtful experience to the victim now and even after he becomes a grown-up. Many negative effects of bullying have been documented to be long-term consequences.

WHAT IS A DRAMA?

A drama has actors who play roles according to scripts written for these roles. In a drama, people generally act in fixed and predictable ways. It can take place on a stage in a theatre, on TV, in a movie at the cinema, or on a street where two people are enjoying a conversation with each other. There is more drama going on everywhere around us than we often realise.

What has this got to do with bullying? A lot actually, because every time we get together to do something (like talking, eating and playing a game), in short, to inter-act with someone else, we are engaging in a dramatic act! Like all dramas, social interaction involves actors, roles, scripts and so on.

A bully drama has the following parts:

- **Actors** (your child, his classmates or teachers)
- **Roles** (the bully or the victim)
- **Stage** (school or neighbourhood)
- **Scripts** (predictable ways for the bully or the victim to act)

Like all dramas, the bully drama has a predictable sequence of events: The bully is in a bad mood. The bully insults the victim. The victim goes away feeling angry and terrified. One event (the bully insulting the victim) leads to the next event (the victim with the familiar feelings) according to a more-of-the-same sequence.

The end of the road

Ann, a secondary school girl, had been silently suffering from bullying for many years. She gradually became more depressed. She felt helpless and hopeless and one day decided to escape from all of the bully traumas. She took an overdose of Panadol in her own bedroom. When her parents found her, they had to rush her to a hospital for stomach pumping to make sure she was safe.

Traumatic blow of bullying

Roy, an introverted boy in primary school, fantasised about killing himself. A bully picked on him in school almost every day, calling him names, punching his back and even once pinning his head under a washbasin in the canteen. Roy became frightened of going to school, especially when the bully threatened to beat him up if he reported what happened.

His parents found out about this only after they discovered that he was swallowing toothpaste to make himself sick so that he didn't have to go to school. They reported this to the school principal, who then had the bully suspended, but only for a day. In the end, Roy's parents felt that the only solution was to transfer him to another school.

Physical symptoms from bullying

Manny (age 8) was forced to give half her pocket money to the class bully. Since the bully passed around a note in class telling others that she cheated in a test and to stop talking to this cheater, Manny was isolated and shunned. This bullying continued for almost a year until she developed frequent stomachaches and her grades just plummeted. The consultation with a paediatrician eventually revealed that she was being bullied. Both Manny and the bully then received counselling in school.



A MATTER OF ACTING

We all know what acting is. It is actually a “let’s pretend” game, but much more well-rehearsed and accepted as real by the actors and the audience. We also know how an actor goes about playing his part. He follows a script with detailed directions like the words he has to say, how sarcastically or provocatively he has to say them, the non-verbal gestures and cues to look out for from people around him and so on. Shakespeare says it best in *As you like it*: “All the world’s a stage, and all the men and women merely players. They have their exits and their entrances, and one man in his time plays many parts.”

1.1 What are Scripts?

Scripts instruct us on what to do, what to feel and what to think when we are in different scenarios, like actors in a show. We have many different scripts stored away in our minds, ready to be used when we try to cope with both expected and surprising situations. We are all actors playing different parts, depending on the script that we are following at a particular time and place.

Notice how you speak to your child, your friends, or strangers. How are they different? We surely do not say the same things in the same ways to our friends as to strangers. Do we behave in the same way? In fact, we may appear like different persons altogether,

depending on the place and people we are with at a particular time.

How do we manage so many different personas? Well, we are actors, remember? We express ourselves differently on stage depending on the scripts we are holding at that point. So, when we are in the play called “hanging out with friends”, we behave like a friend. We listen to what our friends have to say and laugh along with their jokes or comfort them when they are down. We do not ask them for pocket money. This is not part of the role of “the friend”. Once we exit this stage (and move on to another), we drop this role and take on another role. It is like a person putting on make up, a mask and a costume for each occasion that involves him. The real *self* is camouflaged by all that constant acting.

So, what does this mean? It means that your child is not only a student or, for the same reason, the victim or the bully. Your child’s behaviour and experience depend on the role and script that he is following at that point. It is ultimately up to him which roles he chooses.

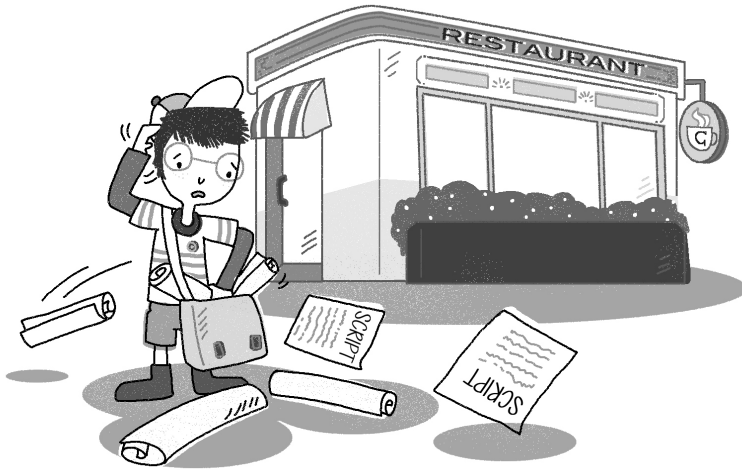
1.2 How Do Scripts Direct Our Acting?

We are actors following scripts when we are with other people. It is just that we have rehearsed these scripts so well that we act out their instructions without noticing it. Here are some examples of common scripts that society has prepared for us.

When we go to a fast food place like MacDonald’s, a certain script immediately kicks into action. It efficiently directs us to walk to the counter, look at the menu on the wall, place our order with the cashier in the uniform, make our payment and then wait to collect our order.

If we go to an expensive restaurant, a different script will jump into place. We expect and usually receive a courteous greeting from an attendant at the entrance, and we are directed to our seats where a

menu is shown to us. We then place our order and wait for the dishes to be served. This script also tells us that we can expect the food to be relatively tastier and more costly. If we used the MacDonald's script in this restaurant, we would look embarrassingly foolish.



Here is another example. Even in a simple conversation with someone, we follow a script. A basic rule of the script is not to talk when the other person is talking. When that person slows down or stops momentarily, we may then say what has been on our mind to say. If we do not comply with such a wait-for-our-turn rule, a pleasant conversation would be quite impossible.

1.3 Why Do We Make and Keep Scripts?

We generally stick to scripts for two reasons. The first one is that it makes interactions with other people predictable, familiar and therefore comfortable. The second reason is that because there is a script for us to follow, we do not have to worry too much about whether

the other person has misunderstood us. The scripted guidelines help us to conveniently exchange more information in less time.

1.3.1 Certainty

It feels good when we can be certain about things. Conversely, we are uneasy when things do not go according to our plans or when we cannot see what is going to happen. It is like the typical movie scene where someone has to decide which wire to cut in order to stop the bomb from going off. We generally do not like it when we do not know the outcome. That is why we follow a script.

Imagine your child getting into something unfamiliar. Maybe it is a new school or first date with a potential boyfriend or girlfriend. How would he feel in such a situation? He would probably feel somewhat confused and anxious, not fully knowing what to do. He cannot be sure about the expected ways to behave. In short, he is not certain about the script designed for this new situation. A script gives us instructions for getting our needs met in particular situations. These instructions give us a sense of certainty, control and comfort.

1.3.2 Efficiency

When we follow a script, we do not have to constantly wonder about what to say and what to do. We typically do not appreciate how scripts are useful in making our interactions with others smooth and easy.

When your child is in school, he has a school script to follow. When the bell goes off at the end of the recess, he knows that he ought to rush back to class. The school-bell script tells him that “when the recess bell rings once, you should start making your way back to class. If you fail to do so, there will probably be unpleasant consequences.” Without having to think about it, he speedily gets back to class before the teacher does.

1.4 Where Do Scripts Come From?

The answer is simple: We learn them or we make them up. When we come to a new situation, we become very alert and watch how other people are behaving. We learn the standard behaviours for a certain situation, such as the subculture of a new school. Maybe it is one where it is cool to have boyfriends and girlfriends or where students are expected to work very hard. We learn all of this by watching, listening to and interacting with others in our immediate environment.

Beyond these, we make up new scripts. Of course, we create new scripts for ourselves based on information we get inside and outside of our immediate environment. From accessing the Internet or reading magazines, your child also gains new ideas and may find role models in some individuals, who are to him, worth emulating. Everyone has an imaginative side and can develop new behaviour, abilities and habits (such as how to successfully relinquish the role of the victim) when he is inspired to do so.



1.5 Stuck With Scripts?

The basic point is that we all behave according to the scripts that our daily lives have imprinted inside our minds. Sometimes, we get stuck with a script even when an ongoing situation says that it is no

longer the best one to follow. This is because we do not know how to get out of it, and this can be frustrating and painful. We may also lack information on other scripts to follow.

In the bully drama, there are bully scripts and victim scripts. These scripts indicate to the bully and the victim how their acts can complement each other. If your child gets stuck in the victim's script, he might feel that it is impossible to act in alternative ways. This is because changing one's own scripts brings on uncertainty, and uncertainty is often frightening. He might then settle with the familiar torture of being the victim rather than trying out a new and liberating act. There are also times when we feel that we cannot abandon the victim's role because we simply do not have any alternative scripts to follow instead. So we might stick to the only one we know—the victim's script. It is important to accept the responsibility of choosing between perpetuating scripts that keep us helpless and creating with knowledge and imagination those that stimulate us toward growth and freedom.

Key Points

- Scripts direct our behaviour.
- Scripts vary for different situations.
- Scripts make it easier for us to interact with each other.
- Scripts maintain cyclical acts between the victim and the bully.

For Review Only

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