Chapter 8

General Conclusions and Discussion
Explaining, Assessing, and Preventing Persistent Victimization

Myriads of studies have focused on peer victimization of bullying in the past decennia. However, few of them have differentiated between victims who are bullied for a short period versus those who are targeted persistently for years. This differentiation is important, because persistent victimization has worse and longer-lasting consequences on health and status than being episodically targeted and can become increasingly difficult to stop (Barker, Arseneault, et al., 2008; Bowes et al., 2013; Kochenderfer-Ladd & Wardrop, 2001; Sheppard et al., 2016). To direct the development of interventions that can help persistent victims, it is important to understand how persistence can be explained (Part 1), assessed (Part 2) and prevented (Part 3). To this end, I used advanced and innovative analytical approaches and a new measure on victimization, and studied four datasets with information about victimization experienced among children and adolescents.

In Part 1, I presented three studies that aimed to expand the knowledge about characteristics and mechanisms that explain persistent victimization. In the first study (Chapter 2), I focused on persistence in the context of an anti-bullying intervention. I examined which characteristics explained why some children are persistently victimized despite participating in a universal anti-bullying intervention. In the second study (Chapter 3), I focused on a potentially vicious cycle of persistent victimization as affected by experiences beyond the school domain: I examined whether children’s victimization and problematic relationships with parents are bidirectionally related, and whether children’s maladjusted behaviors operate as gateways between these experiences in the school and home domain. In the third study (Chapter 4), I examined the role of being a member of a societal minority identity: whether lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) adolescents are at a higher risk for persistent victimization of bullying compared to heterosexual adolescents, and how this is associated with internalizing symptom development across LGB and heterosexual adolescents.

To move the field forward on persistent victimization and interventions that can stop it forward, I presented in Part 2 how victimization can be assessed more accurately. I examined whether an explicit assessment of each key characteristic of the bullying definition can improve the differentiation between victims of bullying and victims of other types of peer aggression. In doing so, I developed new questions to extend currently used self-report measures.
General Conclusions and Discussion

Last, Part 3 includes an empirical and a theoretical study, respectively, on preventing persistent victimization: I examined what tools can help students and teachers to prevent victimization from becoming persistent. First, I focused on victims’ belief systems that help to shape meaning of their experiences (implicit theories), and if and in what contexts those beliefs are related to associations between victimization and depressive symptoms. Last, I focused on teachers: I proposed a model for how network information about social relationships and adjustment in the peer group can help teachers to recognize and tackle bullying more systematically. In the following sections I discuss the main findings and scientific implications of the six studies, that are also summarized in Table 8.1. Next, I provide suggestions for further research and conclude with the practical implications of my findings.

Main Findings and Scientific Implications

Part I: Explaining persistent victimization

First, I focused on persistent victims following the implementation of an effective universal anti-bullying intervention. Until now, explanations of individual differences in intervention effects have been limited to sex (e.g., Kärnä et al., 2011) and grade (Yeager et al., 2015). There has been no research on individual differences in stability and change in victimization after the implementation of an intervention. I examined which characteristics predict persistence, focusing on characteristics that may impede children’s social interactions with peers and ability to recruit defenders, which could be needed to benefit from the intervention. To this end, I tested social standing, child characteristics, and parent-child relationships as possible predictors of persistent victimization during an effective anti-bullying intervention. I found that 3.6% of the children in schools that participated in the anti-bullying intervention were persistently victimized (20% of the initial victims), compared to 15.3% of the children who decreased in victimization over time (80% of the initial victims). Children were more likely to be persistently versus decreasingly victimized when they were more rejected by peers, more withdrawn and anxious, and reported more problematic parent-child relationships. These findings imply that universal interventions that target the entire peer group to tackle bullying are less effective for students who deviate most strongly from general social expectations. These children could be less able to recruit support from classmates; peers gain little affection and status from supporting a rejected child, rendering the anti-bullying strategy that focuses on creating supportive bonds somewhat less effective. More generally, Chapter 2 shows that intervention studies can benefit from a focus on heterogeneity in victimization development to identify subgroups that benefit less from interventions and what characterizes them, instead of only focusing on the effectiveness for the majority
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of students. I showed that latent trajectory analysis could be a valuable approach to identify such subgroups.

The central role of the home environment that was found in Chapter 2 and in previous studies (Bowes et al., 2013; Brendgen et al., 2016; Nocentini, Fiorentini, Di Paola, & Menesini, 2019) was addressed in more detail in Chapter 3. How does the home environment contribute to persistent victimization? Theories about bidirectional processes (“spillover”) suggest that rejection in the school and home environment relate to each other bidirectionally through socially maladjusted behaviors (Parke & Ladd, 2016). Therefore, I investigated the bidirectional associations between rejection and warmth in parent–child relationships and peer victimization to elucidate the interplay between the two contexts and to understand potential pathways through child maladjustment. The results showed that greater parental rejection and lower parental warmth were bidirectionally related to greater peer victimization, and this was explained by children's maladjustment (social anxiety, depressive symptoms, conduct problems and bullying perpetration). This suggests that children could get caught in a vicious cycle of problems at school and at home. A scientific implication is that spillover processes seem relevant to understand how victimization interacts with experiences beyond the school context, and what factors operate as gateways between the school and family domain. On a methodological note, the CLPM with random intercepts is a relatively new analytical approach but seems fruitful to understand within-person processes that may result in a vicious cycle.

In Chapter 4, I examined the role of societal minority identity in predicting persistent victimization. Few studies on persistent victimization have focused on the role of structural characteristics such as being part of a minority group, but based on the minority stress framework (Meyer, 2003), I expected that particularly these youth are at risk to repeatedly experience victimization. Indeed, Chapter 4 showed that sexual minority (LGB) adolescents were at greater risk compared to heterosexual peers to be persistently victimized (relative to decreasingly or not victimized) across adolescence, and experienced slightly more anxiety related to such persistent victimization. These findings were based on adolescents’ self-reports, but parent-reports partly mirrored adolescents’ own observations. However, these parent-reports generally underestimated LGB adolescents’ problems. Overall, these findings raise awareness of the vulnerable position of minority adolescents such as LGB youth. It is likely that these youth chronically deviate from the norm and therefore have fewer others who share their plight and support them in dealing with victimization experiences. Notably, Chapter 4 was one of the first on sexual identity that used parent observations. Parents’ underestimations of LGB adolescents’ problems suggests that
parent-reports of LGB adolescents’ health may be especially valuable to inform us of the extent to which parents recognize their children’s problems, instead of valid sources of adjustment in this population (Goodman et al., 2010).

Together, these three studies suggest that adolescents who are persistently victimized often deviate from general or context-specific social expectations, in even stronger ways than their peers who are victimized for a short period. This can be because they behave socially maladjusted (referring to that they are anxious or withdrawn) or are rejected by many classmates, in a school context that puts emphasis on social interactions to build supportive bonds (Chapter 2), or because they have a (sexual) minority status (Chapter 4) and consistently have fewer similar others who share their plight. Moreover, adverse experiences beyond the school domain can make it difficult to change their maladjustment, and to escape from victimization (Chapters 2, 3) because they are bidirectionally related to victimization.

**Part 2: Assessment of persistent victimization**

In Part 2, I moved to a more methodological issue. In order to advance the research on victimization patterns and prevention of persistent victimization, it is crucial to have an accurate victimization measure that differentiates between victims of bullying and victims of the broader class of peer aggression (Jia & Mikami, 2018). However, currently used instruments do not explicitly assess experiences with each characteristic of the definition that differentiate between these groups (frequency, intensity, power imbalance, and goal-directedness; Volk, Dane, & Marini, 2014). They usually provide a definition of bullying and ask how often children were bullied. Indeed, in Chapter 5, I found that only 43.1% of the children who were classified as victims by the most common self-report questionnaire (Olweus’ Bully/Victim Questionnaire; Olweus, 1996) experienced all definition characteristics. This implies that providing children with a complex multi-component definition, and hoping that they will take this into account when responding to questions about how frequently this happened to them (ignoring the intensity, power imbalance, and goal-directedness) may not be the most valid approach when the main aim is to differentiate victimization of bullying from victimization of general aggression.

Adding new questions that explicitly addressed each key characteristic of the definition seemed to improve the differentiation between victims of bullying and victims of other peer aggression. Experiencing all definition characteristics was associated with emotional and social correlates that are conceptually more strongly related to victimization of bullying than of general peer aggression. I recommend researchers who aim to estimate the prevalence of victimization of bullying or to
evaluate anti-bullying interventions to add questions to questionnaires about each key characteristic of the bullying definition.

**Part 3: Preventing persistent victimization**

The last part of the knowledge chain on persistent victimization regards its prevention: what can help victims to escape their situation? Answering this question is complex because the first part of this dissertation showed that there can be multiple pathways to persistence that are also contextually embedded. In Chapter 6, I focused on potential socio-cognitive factors that can help youth to escape from victimization by breaking the potentially vicious cycle between victimization and internalizing problems. Specifically, based on previous research on the promising role of individual belief systems – implicit theories – about the malleability of personal traits, I examined whether and in which contexts adolescents’ implicit theories can strengthen or weaken associations between victimization and depressive symptoms. The results showed, in support of previous research (Yeager et al., 2014; Yeager, Trzesniewski, et al., 2013), that adolescents who held an incremental theory (the belief that people can change) had fewer depressive symptoms related to victimization than their peers who endorsed an entity theory (the belief that people cannot change). However, this effect was only shown among youth who attended schools in which victimization was more common. This means that heterogeneity across schools should be considered when examining effects of (interventions that manipulate) socio-cognitive processes on the emotional correlates of victimization.

Second, I focused on teachers in preventing persistence. Teachers are usually the ones who implement anti-bullying strategies, but they do not always recognize victimization (Campbell et al., 2019; Haataja, Sainio, et al., 2015; Oldenburg et al., 2016). They will especially overlook those that appear to be at risk for persistence: withdrawn or anxious victims. Moreover, the responses that are needed can differ per situation; therefore, teachers should be encouraged to tailor their responses to the situation. In Chapter 7, I proposed that teachers benefit from network diagnostics: easily interpretable statistics of the social structure of the relationships in classrooms (bullying- and friendship relationships, social preference and reputation) based on students’ answers to a questionnaire (Gest et al., 2011). These diagnostics can be used to recognize victims or at-risk students earlier. Further, the information can help teachers to use more tailored interventions by analyzing the victim’s situation, and by targeting the relevant students in the peer group. To do so systematically, teachers can handle the information in five steps of the intervention cycle (identifying, understanding, explaining, taking actions, reflecting), which results in problem analyses and action plans for each victim. Although I could not yet empirically test
the effects of providing teachers with network diagnostics and a systematic five-step approach, Chapter 7 aimed to raise awareness of their potential and the need to investigate their use.

Table 8.1 Overview of Key Messages Per Topic

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main findings</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Part 1:</strong> Explanation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>What explains individual differences in victimization trajectories during a universal anti-bullying intervention? (Chapter 2)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· Being persistently victimized, compared to being decreasingly victimized, after the implementation of a universal anti-bullying intervention was predicted by experiencing greater internalizing symptoms (especially social anxiety), peer rejection, and lower-quality parent-child relationships (especially lower warmth)</td>
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<tr>
<td>· The most socially maladjusted children may benefit least from interventions that emphasize recruiting support in the peer group</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Can children get caught in a bidirectional pattern of negative parent-child relationships and peer victimization, and is this pattern mediated by maladjustment symptoms? (Chapter 3)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>· Children might get caught in a vicious cycle of peer victimization and problematic parent-child relationships: peer victimization was bidirectionally related to greater parental rejection and lower warmth, and this was explained by children’s maladjustment: social anxiety, depressive symptoms, conduct problems and bullying perpetration</td>
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<tr>
<td>· Spillover theory can help to explain persistent victimization as a result of experiences across domains that affect each other</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Are lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) adolescents at a higher risk for persistent victimization of bullying compared to heterosexual adolescents, and how is this associated with internalizing symptom development across LGB and heterosexual adolescents? (Chapter 4)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· Sexual minority (LGB) adolescents were at a higher risk compared to heterosexual peers to be persistently victimized (relative to escaping from victimization or not being victimized) and experienced slightly more anxiety related to such persistent victimization</td>
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<tr>
<td>· Being part of a societal minority (here: having an LGB identity) is a risk for not only being victimized but also being less able to escape such victimization over time. These minority youth are likely to experience victimization across contexts and ages because they chronically deviate from the norm.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Part 2:</strong> Assessment</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>To what extent does explicit assessment of each key characteristic of the bullying definition improve the differentiation between victims of bullying and victims of other types of peer aggression? (Chapter 5)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>· Most (56.9%) children who were classified as victims by the most commonly used self-report questionnaire (BVQ) did not experience all key characteristics of the bullying definition (repetition, intensity, power imbalance and goal-directedness). Those who experienced all key characteristics reported greater maladjustment on measures that are conceptually related to victimization of bullying, suggesting that the definition characteristics are valid indicators to differentiate between victims of bullying and of general aggression</td>
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<tr>
<td>· Researchers who aim to differentiate between victims of bullying and victims of general peer aggression, for diagnostic and prevention purposes, can further enrich self-report measurements of bullying victimization by adding few questions that assess key characteristics explicitly</td>
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</table>
Part 3: Prevention

Can adolescents’ implicit theories affect associations between individual victimization and depressive symptoms, and does this depend on the average prevalence of victimization in their school? (Chapter 6)
- Implicit theories of personality affected associations between victimization and depressive symptoms in schools where victimization was more common
- The role of social context should be considered when examining effects of (interventions that target) socio-cognitive processes on the emotional correlates of victimization

What tools do teachers need to prevent persistent victimization? (Chapter 7)
- Teachers may benefit from network diagnostics to (1) recognize victims or at-risk students earlier and to (2) use more tailored interventions by analyzing the victim’s situation, and by targeting relevant students in the peer group
- To do so systematically, teachers could handle the information in five steps of the intervention cycle (identifying, understanding, explaining, taking actions, reflecting) that results in problem analyses and action plans for each victim

Directions for Future Research

Part I: Explaining persistent victimization

To comprehensively understand the processes that lead to persistence and to coordinate tailored interventions, more knowledge is needed about mechanisms that explain the effects of risk factors. For example, in several chapters I assumed that a lack of social support from peers, parents, or teachers explained why the risk factors (maladjustment, sexual identity, parent-child relationships) made youth vulnerable to be persistently bullied. However, this assumption is based on theory and previous research on victimization processes and the key role of recruiting support, but with the data available or the complexity of the research questions, I could not test this mechanism explicitly. Future research could therefore illuminate whether anxious, withdrawn, and rejected children benefit less from a universal anti-bullying program because they receive little support from fellow students (Chapter 2). Further, research might examine whether a lack of parental support for handling victimization experiences may partly explain why parent-child relationships accounted for victimization experiences (Chapter 3), or whether poorer social skills in children confounded the results because they relate to problems in both peer- and parent-child relationships. Finally, lack of support from peers, parents, and teachers could be tested as mechanism that explains why LGB youth are at greater risk for persistence.

In addition, biological and genetic factors could also be evaluated as possible risks or mechanisms in victimization patterns. Previous research on twins has found that genetic effects accounted for nearly half of the persistence in victimization during the transition from primary to secondary school (Bowes et al., 2013). In addition, cortisol
responses to stress have been associated with peer victimization, parenting and depressive symptoms (Brendgen et al., 2017) and might partly explain associations between these factors as found in Chapter 3. Thus, future research might also want to focus on the role of biological and genetic factors in explaining persistent victimization processes.

Finally, it is relevant to study how the patterns that I observed operate in other age groups. For example, parents played a key role for children in the upper grades of primary school (see Chapters 2 and 3), but what does spillover look like for adolescents? The structure and content of young people’s relationships with parents and peers change during adolescence (Parke & Ladd, 2016). For example, adolescents’ mood and behaviors are increasingly affected by peers instead of parents, and the power structures of the family shifts from unilateral authority to a more egalitarian relationship (Jang & Smith, 1997). Therefore, it is likely that adolescents’ behaviors affect their parents’ behaviors more so than the reverse. This has not been investigated yet with regard to victimization; previous studies showed associations between parent-child relationships and victimization but this research was mostly cross-sectional.

Several predictors of persistence that I examined may predict persistent victimization across contexts, whereas others may be more context-specific. The impact of children’s parent–child relationships is likely unrelated to the particular school context and could therefore also predict persistent victimization across contexts. Similarly, maladjustment symptoms such as anxiety or depressive symptoms resulting from previous victimization could invite victimization in a new context. In support of this, previous research showed that maladjustment symptoms and family characteristics at age five predicted chronic victimization across primary and secondary school (Bowes et al., 2013), and that increased depressive symptoms after experiences of victimization in school predicted continued victimization in the workplace (Brendgen & Poulin, 2017). In addition, sexual minority adolescents will deviate from the norm in most environments, and thus might sexual minority identity be a predictor across contexts (Chapter 4). In our sample, the classroom composition changed between measurements and the findings could thus somewhat reflect persistence across peer group contexts (but within the same school).

However, peer-reported predictors may be more context-specific. Peer rejection was a predictor of persistent victimization in primary school (Chapter 2) but this rejection could relate to the specific peer group. When adolescents go to a new (secondary) school, they may select an environment that provides a better personal fit. Overall,
future research could thus examine heterogeneity in the predictors of persistence within versus between contexts.

**Part 2: Assessment of persistent victimization**

The findings in Chapter 5 were a first step toward more accurate assessment of victimization for those who aim to differentiate between victims of bullying and general aggression. However, more research is needed to determine the optimal way to do this. Future research with even larger sample sizes can test whether (1) children’s self-reported experiences of intensity can be associated with maladjustment correlates such as internalizing problems (depressive symptoms, social anxiety, low self-esteem), (2) latent profiles can be distinguished based on experiences of key characteristics, (3) and whether the findings may differ across age or grade groups or (4) between offline and online victimization (Corcoran et al., 2015). Moreover, future research can examine the predictive validity of assessing each key characteristic explicitly. Such research is crucial because without accurate victimization measures, is it impossible to understand victimization patterns and to evaluate interventions accurately.

**Part 3: Prevention of persistent victimization**

The heterogeneity in pathways to persistent victimization and contextual influences calls for more research on effects of tailored anti-bullying strategies for specific students, teachers or classrooms. First, research is needed that evaluates which strategies are effective to help children who show the characteristics found in Chapter 2, thus who benefit less from a universal anti-bullying intervention. For example, is the Support Group Approach (explained in Chapter 7) that aims to provide marginalized students with more support particularly effective for the at-risk (anxious, withdrawn and rejected) victims? Moreover, research that examines such intervention effects can benefit from a focus on contextual heterogeneity, thus differences in intervention effects across schools. For example, it is possible that individual socio-cognitive interventions have stronger effects in classrooms or schools that provide peer resources to sustain the effects of the intervention (suggested in Chapter 6).

Last, shifting to a focus on teachers, Chapter 7 aimed to raise awareness that more knowledge is needed on the value of network diagnostics to preventing persistent victimization. Future research can examine effects of the systematic use of network diagnostics on teachers’ recognition and tailored responses to bullying, and on classroom reductions in bullying and victimization. Such research can also evaluate teacher- or school-specific effects of network diagnostics. Altogether, it seems to be the right moment for intervention research to shift from a focus to effects for the
entire population to effects for different subgroups in which they may be more or less effective, and why.

**Practical Implications**

Based on the findings in this dissertation I can provide several suggestions for tailored strategies that could help to prevent and tackle persistent victimization. In doing so, I build on existing effective interventions and think about ways to make them effective for a larger number of children and adolescents. The structure of school-based anti-bullying interventions can be considered a three-tier pyramid (Farmer et al., 2007); see Figure 8.1. The lowest tier provides support for the majority of the children and covers universal interventions that aim to prevent victimization. Most universal anti-bullying interventions, such as the KiVa intervention, operate at this tier and can solve most bullying incidents. However, students who are not helped by interventions at the lowest tier benefit from more tailored approaches at the middle tier. Last, some cases will still need to be solved with additional services, even performed by professionals outside of the school context (upper tier). My suggestions below mostly focus on the middle tier. Which strategies can stimulate identification and social integration of youth who are at risk for persistence, thus anxious, rejected or withdrawn children, (sexual) minority youth and children with a problematic family context?

![Figure 8.1. Three-Tier Intervention Pyramid](image)
Earlier recognition and intervention
My first obvious but central suggestion is that prevention of persistent victimization starts with earlier recognition and intervention for victims, to avoid a vicious cycle. My dissertation showed that the persistent victims, who do not benefit from the implementation of an anti-bullying intervention, are students that are least visible to teachers: withdrawn, anxious children who are rejected by many others. In Chapter 7, I argued that a first step toward helping them is by making them visible to teachers using network diagnostics based on self- and peer-reports of students. Moreover, teachers should handle these diagnostics in a systematic way, by making an individual problem analysis of each serious victimization case. This could help them to respond in a more tailored way to what is needed in the specific situation. Nevertheless, I am aware that the empirical evidence on the use of network diagnostics has not yet focused on tackling bullying; therefore, I make this suggestion with caution.

Targeting individual processes in universal interventions
Second, I recommend universal anti-bullying interventions to complement their focus on the peer group with approaches that target individual processes, such as implicit theories or coping skills. The internalizing problems that are part of a vicious cycle of persistent victimization can be reduced by more individual approaches that help them to mentally handle their socially adverse experiences. An approach that can be effective for adolescents is an intervention that stimulates young people to develop more flexible beliefs about the ability to change personal characteristics. Hence, this intervention may also help to guard withdrawn or anxious victims against becoming even more withdrawn after victimization experiences. However, it is possible that such interventions are mainly effective in schools or classrooms where victims are surrounded by fellow victims that can provide support (as suggested in Chapter 6).

Awareness of the vulnerable position of minority youth
Third, more attention is needed for the vulnerable position of minority groups such as youth with an LGB identity, but possibly also ethnic minorities or youth with disabilities. Focusing on LGB adolescents in this dissertation, these youth could for example benefit from implementation of Gay-Straight Alliances in schools to provide peer networks for LGB youth and their allies (Russell et al., 2009). In addition, training of primary or secondary school personnel about ways to intervene in harassment of minority youth might help to prevent victimization from becoming persistent (Espelage et al., 2019). These programs and policies might already be effective at an age at which adolescents have not disclosed their sexual orientation to others, because victimization based on sexual orientation and gender nonconformity begins
as early as primary school (GLSEN & Harris Interactive, 2012; Martin-Storey & Fish, 2018).

**Parental components in anti-bullying programs**

Fourth, the studies in this dissertation support previous calls for more attention to the family domain in current anti-bullying programs (Y. Huang, Espelage, Polanin, & Hong, 2019; Nocentini et al., 2019). Problems in parent-child relationships predicted persistent victimization (Chapter 2) or maladjustment that in turn predicted victimization (Chapter 3). How can anti-bullying programs consider experiences in the family domain? Figure 8.2 visualizes the interplay between parents, children and the school in tackling victimization. Most universal anti-bullying interventions focus on positive school-child relationships (right side of the triangle). Less attention is paid, however, to the bond between school and parents (left side of the triangle), while this relationship can help parents and teachers to better understand the social causes of students’ behavior. Fortunately, there are modules that aim to improve this school-parent relationship (Huang et al., 2019); for example, a recent intervention that targeted this relationship showed promising results in cooperation and alignment between parents and teachers (Van Niejenhuis, Huitsing, & Veenstra, 2019). It seems relevant to integrate such modules in universal anti-bullying programs. Last, the relationship between parents and children (bottom of the triangle) is often not well integrated in universal anti-bullying interventions. An intervention that strengthens school-parent relationships as described above can help schools to observe signals of problems in the parent-child relationship. It would then be helpful if anti-bullying interventions also provide school staff with tools to recognize students’ or parents’ behaviors as signals of possible problems at home. In some cases, the problem will need to be solved with the help of external resources such as parent coaching.
Conclusion

With this dissertation, I aimed to contribute to knowledge about persistent victimization, which is needed to guide tailored interventions for persistent victims of bullying. The need for these interventions is becoming increasingly urgent: the worldwide increase in the implementation of effective universal anti-bullying programs has improved the well-being of many young people, but exacerbated the plight of the few remaining victims. This dissertation offers insights that can be used to better explain, assess, and prevent persistent victimization. Based on these insights, I conclude that persistent victims are in need for more tailored support that helps them to socially integrate in the peer group. This means that interventions need to provide school professionals with tools to earlier recognize victims, make a more thorough problem analysis of the particular situation, and tackle it systematically by focusing on the victims’ position in the peer group, individual processes, and the role of family context. Researchers can aid intervention developers by testing heterogeneous effects of different strategies across subgroups of victims instead of the entire victim population, and across social contexts, and by examining mechanisms that account for these effects. The impressive efforts that academics and social professionals have taken in the past decennia to help most victims can now be extended to the more challenging, small group of victims that also deserve an enjoyable and safe school period. Investing in this critical life phase will also have long-term pay-offs, because it sets the stage for healthy development into well-adjusted adults.
General Conclusions and Discussion