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An exploration of communication and bullying behavior

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An Exploration of Communication and Bullying Behavior

by

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Thesis

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Abstract

This communication study examined in-depth interviews, the situational perceptions and self-awareness of individuals who bullied in middle school and/or high school. Research statement one is what motivates an individual to engage in bullying behavior and/or become a bully. Research statement two is the bully's situational perceptions of bullying. Quantitative and qualitative research was implemented to set up the context and situation for underlying themes from the in-depth interviews. Results showed that children do not take responsibility for their bullying and will not stop unless forced to. Furthermore, the adults perceived parents and school officials to have an important role in teaching children about bullying because they did not realize the importance of their actions until they were significantly older.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Bullying is not a new phenomenon, and many generations have experienced and dealt with it in different ways. The once commonly accepted myths about bullying like "ignore it and it will go away" and "bullying is just a part of life" have been contradicted by recent news coverage of teens and young adults who commit suicide over bullying (Olweus, 2004, 2008). Through the use of agenda setting, the media have brought the prevalence of bullying to the world's attention and have shown the detrimental effects of ignoring the problem (Olweus, 2004, 2008). Bullying has taken on many forms (verbal, physical, relational, cyber) for years, resulting in different experiences for different people. Some targets have slight reactions to the bullying situations while others experience severely negative effects of bullying (extreme sadness or anger or decreased self-esteem), which may result in taking one's own life or the life of others as we have seen through the school shootings of Columbine High School and Virginia Tech (Price and Dalgleish, 2010; Bishop-Mills & Muckleroy-Carwile, 2009).

Most research done on bullying has been primarily related to psychology and sociology, and it is surprising that communication has not been studied. Communication is an essential area to study in regard to bullying because the most prevalent and harsh type of bullying is verbal bullying, and all forms of bullying and interactions are done verbally or nonverbally (Bishop-Mills & Muckleroy-Carwile, 2009). Verbal communication is most prevalent in face-to-face/traditional bullying, along with name calling or spreading rumors over the internet which can only be done through words. The physical and emotional consequences associated with bullying are all because of language and communication, making communication relevant in this research, although

it may not be addressed directly. There is much ambiguity when defining bullying and detecting when it happens, with teasing and bullying being confused. Due to this confusion some individuals think bullying *is* occurring when it is not, while others think bullying is *not* occurring when it is.

Previous research has confirmed the seriousness of bullying and suggested possible ways to help decrease it by focusing on the target to help ease the pain and deal with bullying. Victims tend to experience harsher consequences, but to gain a full understanding of why bullying occurs, we need to study the bully. Every singular person has a responsibility to decrease bullying whether he/she is the perpetrator, target, or bystander. There is research that explains why individuals bully, but it is not explicitly stated if that information came from bullies or individuals who observe bullying situations. Gaining the perspective of those who bullied in the past and an understanding of specifically why they bullied allow insights into how the bully perceives him/herself and the bullying situation, and is the focus of this research. In order to really decrease bullying, an understanding of the reasons, causes, and motivations behind bullying should be gained via the research in order to hold the bullies accountable for their actions, and figuring out the cause will decrease bullying more than fixing the effects (Olweus, 2004, 2008). Since it is unclear whether the previous information about reasons to bully and strategies to decrease bullying came from bullies, it is expected that participants will provide more specific information than what is already available.

<center>**Literature Review**</center>

One reason bullying is such a problem, with confusion about what works and what does not work, is the ambiguity of definitions or perceptions of what bullying is. A discussion of exactly what bullying is and what goes into it to have a better understanding of how kids and adults comprehend bullying situations will be in the following sections.

Teasing

Teasing is difficult to define because of the kinds of communicative acts ranging from harmless comments, sexual flirtation, unfulfilled mock promises, intentional annoyances, intentional jabs, insults, ridicule, playing, joking, and fun, which all fit under the category of teasing (Bishop-Mills & Muckleroy-Carwile, 2009). Kowalski (2000) defines teasing as an interpersonal behavior some people perceive to be fun or a matter of joking around, and other people view as cruel and a means of hurting someone's feelings (Kowalski, 2000). Teasing is a communicative act that challenges a target's sense of identity, instrumental goals, or the nature of the relationship between the participants, yet, by invoking play or humor, simultaneously provides alternative interpretations of the content (Bishop-Mills & Muckleroy-Carwile, 2009).Teasing has differing meanings resulting in differing perceptions among those who are teased. Kowalski concluded that individuals who teased perceived the event as more humorous and less damaging than the victims of the tease did (Kowalski, 2000).

Research done by Eisenberg (1986) indicates teasing may be functional, productive, and a positive communicative act (Bishop-Mills & Muckleroy-Carwile, 2009). Middle school students tease each other for numerous reasons such as demonstrating liking (flirting) and solidifying group membership (Bishop-Mills &

Muckleroy-Carwile, 2009). Beck et al. conducted a study in which college men and women experience the same kind of positive teasing in which they tease to solidify friendships, to cheer a friend up, and to have fun, while the least common reason to tease was to put someone down (Beck et al., 2007). Tragesser and Lippman (2005) suggest that if teasing of a negative nature occurs between friends, the tease should not be taken seriously because it is usually done to strengthen group bonds (Tragesser & Lippman, 2005).

Contrary to the studies suggesting that teasing has a positive impact, some researchers argue that teasing has a more negative meaning, which may be the starting point of bullying; the aggression is what links teasing and bullying (Olweus, 1993). School shooters from Columbine High School and Virginia Tech were teased and, as a result, took the lives of classmates and their own, which is why it is important to understand the relationship between teasing and bullying and take into consideration individuals' perceptions (Bishop-Mills & Muckleroy-Carwile, 2009).

Bullying Definitions

 Like teasing, bullying does not have a clear definition; however, it is easier to summarize. Olweus (1997) argues that someone is bullied when he/she is exposed over time and repeatedly to negative actions on the part of one or more students and that bullying is a systematic abuse of power and intends to inflict harm on an individual (Kiriakidis & Kavoura, 2010; Bishop-Mills & Muckleroy-Carwile, 2009; Limber & Small, 2003; Slonje & Smith, 2008; Atlas & Pepler, 1998; Olweus, 1993, 2004, 2008; Long & Alexander, 2010). Smith (1997) stated bullying is the systematic abuse of power-persistent and repeated actions which are intended to intimidate or hurt another person

including direct or indirect aggressive behavior, discrimination, and harassment (Kiriakidis & Kavoura, 2010).

Farrington argues that bullying consists of three types: physical (hitting, pushing, throwing), relational (social exclusion, spreading rumors, withholding friendship), and verbal (name-calling; Kiriakidis & Kavoura, 2010; Bishop-Mills & Muckleroy-Carwile, 2009; Slonje & Smith, 2008; Fekkes, Pijpers, & Verloove-Vanhorick, 2005). Previous research has concluded that verbal bullying is the most common type among face-to-face/traditional bullying interactions, which illustrates the importance communication has on interpersonal relationships (Bishop-Mills & Muckleroy-Carwile, 2009). A study conducted by Juvonen and Gross (2008) included seventeen children who were observed through naturalistic observation on bullying tendencies. Verbal aggression was reported 53% of the time, physical aggression was observed 30% of the time, and a combination of verbal and physical bullying behavior was reported 17% of the time (Juvenon & Gross, 2008). The results from a survey filled out by 2677 Dutch elementary school students suggested that 66.7% of bullying was name-calling, 52.9% was spreading rumors, 52.9 % consisted of making fun of others, 41.2% was not allowing others to participate in activities, 58.8% of bullying consisted of kicking and hitting, and 47.1% included hiding or taking away someone's belongings (Fekkes, Pijpers, & Verloove-Vanhorick, 2005).

Olweus divides bullying into two categories, direct and indirect. Direct bullying consists of physical and verbal aspects of bullying such as hitting, name-calling, making insults, threatening, giving dirty looks, or intentionally damaging another individual's belongings, which tend to be done more by males (Olweus, 1993, 2004, 2008). Indirect

bullying consists mostly of relational aspects such as excluding individuals from a group, preventing someone from making friends, and spreading rumors, which tend to be done more by females (Olweus, 1993, 2004, 2008).

Teasing and bullying can be closely related while at the same time be two completely different concepts. Some individuals believe teasing is a form of bringing groups together, while others believe that teasing leads to bullying (Kowalski, 2000); everything depends on the situation and the perceptions of the bully and the target. What one person may find offensive, another person may find as humorous and fun in a nonthreatening way. Bullying tends to be more aggressive and blatant than teasing, and individuals often say they were teasing in order to avoid getting into trouble.

Sex Differences and Bullying

Poteat & DiGiovanni (2010) concluded that boys and girls use biased language, words that are considered offensive, prejudiced, and/or hurtful toward peers in order to bully an individual both when the bully is biased and when he/she is not. In other words, an individual does not have to be prejudiced toward an individual or group to use biased language. Boys use biased language to compete or challenge the masculinity of other boys, and girls use it to marginalize or leave an individual out of the group (Poteat & DiGiovanni, 2010). Boys are more likely to use physical aggression when bullying, and girls are more likely to use verbal bullying (Chapell et. al., 2006). Overall, boys are more likely to be involved in bullying situations than girls, and boys tend to bully and be bullied by boys but girls get bullied by both boys and girls (Olweus, 1993). In the survey given to the Dutch children, results showed that 70% of boys are bullied by boys, 44% of girls are bullied by boys, and 23% of girls are bullied by girls (Fekkes, Mijpers, &

Verloove-Vanhorick, 2005). Regardless of who bullies whom, males have been found to bully and be bullied more than females (Chapell et. al, 2006). This, however, may be because verbal and physical bullying are more obvious than the relational and indirect forms of bullying that girls engage in. Boys are more likely to admit to being a bully (23%) than girls (8%), which could also mean it is more obvious when boys bully, making it easier for girls to get away with it (Atlas & Peplar, 1998).

Prevalence of Bullying

The old problem of bullying is still common today and has been studied in many countries. In a study done in Norway in the late 1980s and the early 1990s, Olweus found that in a sample of 150,000 students, one out of seven children (15%) were involved in bullying with a degree of regularity as victim, bully, or both, while at least one out of twenty (5%) were involved in more serious bullying situations at least once a week (Olweus, 2004, 2008). In a similar study done in the United States, results were even more drastic. A study carried out with a national sample of more than 15,000 middle school students found that about 30% were involved in moderate or frequent bullying as victim, bully, or both. More specifically, a study done in rural South Carolina using more than 6,000 middle school students reported 23% of the students had been bullied, while 20% reported they had bullied another individual (Olweus, 2004). In 2004, middle school students reported the greatest frequency of bullying (42%), more than elementary school students (24%) or high school students (21%; Olweus, 2008). After surveying 2677 Dutch students, Fekkes, Pijpers, and Verloove-Vanhorick discovered that 60% of bullying interactions occur within the same age group, which means the bullying

interactions are more prevalent since the children interact with each other closely every day (Fekkes, Pijpers, & Verloove-Vanhorick, 2005).

Cyberbullying

All of these previous studies have focused on traditional bullying, which is done at school. Cyberbullying is a relatively new phenomena in which individuals intentionally and repeatedly insult to demean another with vulgar messages through the use of electronics like internet chat rooms, text messages, or blogs. (Olweus, 2004, 2008; Beale & Hall, 2007; Juvonen & Gross, 2008; Price & Dalgleish, 2010; Hinduja & Patchin, 2010). Some researchers feel cyberbullying is not a relevant enough problem to research because either the number of cyberbullied does not match the research on traditional bullying or it is almost impossible to actually define the term. Other researchers believe that although the estimates of online bullying experiences (9%-49%) are not as high as those of bullying incidences encountered at school (up to 70%), the steep increase in the past five years from the Youth Internet Safety Survey is alarming (Slonje & Smith, 2008; Price & Dalgleish, 2010). Individuals who are cyberbullied are more likely to experience suicide ideation than those who experience traditional bullying (Price & Dalgleish, 2010). The most prevalent form of cyberbullying is name-calling, making up 80% of incidences (Price & Dalgleish, 2010). Cyberbullying is also harsher than traditional bullying since the bully is able to say whatever he/she wants without any type of accountability by hiding behind a fake screen name, using someone else's computer, or saying he/she is someone else. Cyberbullies are able to bully their targets all day/night if they wish by sending the messages to a wider range of people, making it harder for the target to escape bullying situations.

Results of Bullying

It is important to understand what bullying is and how to help decrease it because teens and young adults commit suicide over it; experience extreme sadness and anger, which may result in school shootings and other forms of violence; and experience low self-esteem even years after the bullying (Price & Dalgleish, 2010).

Victims are not the only ones who suffer from the results of bullying. According to Olweus, 25% of bullies have a criminal record by the age of 30 if nothing is done to stop the behavior (Price & Dalgleish, 2010). As a result, there are ongoing economic and social costs for the community because of the crime done by bullies (Price & Dalgleish, 2010). Parents and educators have tried different strategies to help stop bullying or help the targets of bullying, but it is unknown as to how effective those strategies are. It is important for parents to have access to information so they can be effective with helping their children (Crisp & Humphrey, 2008). Previous research has confirmed the seriousness of bullying and its results with possible ways to help decrease bullying, but there has been little research that approaches the bully. Therefore, I proposed the following research statements:

RS 1: What motivates an individual to engage in bullying behavior and/or to become a bully.

RS 2: What are the bully's situational perceptions of the bullying.

Gaining the situational perceptions of the bullying and self-awareness of the bullying straight from the person doing the act will give us new insight into why an individual bullies and how to understand a bully. To gain a deeper understanding of bullying situations, instead of guessing what to do or not doing anything at all, we are

figuring out exactly what would stop the bully with information from the bully

him/herself.

Chapter 2: Method

Participants

From a voluntary sample, a total of seven individuals (4 males and 3 females) were interviewed who self-identified as being a bully in middle school and/or high school. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 28. Initially, participants were given the following definition of bullying when recruited for the study: bullying is the systematic abuse of power, persistent and repeated actions which are intended to intimidate or hurt another person including direct and indirect aggressive behavior, discrimination, and harassment (Kiriakidis & Kavoura, 2010). As it became difficult to find participants, the definition became more open-ended, and potential participants were just asked if they self-identified as a bully. This took away the negative connotation of bullying, and more individuals agreed to participate. Two participants identified as African American and five participants identified as Caucasian. A pilot study was conducted but later became part of the sample. The original sample goal was 10 participants, but it was difficult to recruit that many. Some individuals were too afraid that their name was going to be associated with the study even after being assured of complete confidentiality, while others mentioned they were too embarrassed to discuss their past behaviors as a bully.

Participants were recruited through personal and social networks and word of mouth. The researcher put on Facebook that she was looking for participants who bullied during middle school and high school to be interviewed.

Specifically, the researcher stated:

> If you, or anyone you know, self -identify as someone who engaged in bullying
> behavior in middle school or high school, are between the ages of 18 and 30, and
> would like to participate in a 30-40 minute interview, please inbox me regarding
> your interest and we will talk further. DO NOT REPLY TO THIS POST.
> Anonymity will be protected throughout all areas of the study. My study has also
> been approved by the University's Human Subjects Review Board.

The researcher also asked multiple instructors to distribute the above information
to their classes. Other Facebook friends put the same post on their Facebook pages to
help spread the word. To protect confidentiality, potential participants were asked to
contact the researcher directly so the teacher or friend did not know they were
participating. Some participants were recruited from the researcher's Facebook post, but
none were recruited from other's Facebook posts.

Procedure and Instrumentation

Participants were given information about the general nature of the study and
asked to sign a consent form before interviews started. Special attention was given to the
fact that the study was completely confidential and the participant could stop at any time
without any negative consequences. Interviews took place in a quiet area at a large
Midwestern university and lasted 15-40 minutes. Questions during the interview
prompted narratives about bullying experiences, reasons behind the bullying and advice
for bullies, targets, parents, and schools as to how to decrease bullying. At the end of the
interview, participants were asked "Is there anything else you would like to share
regarding your bullying experiences or the understanding of why bullying happens?" The

end of the interview turned into more of a conversation further explaining thoughts, views, and experiences between the participant and researcher. The interview schedule is included in the appendix. Each interview was audio taped and transcribed verbatim by the researcher and pseudonyms are used to identify participants.

Data Analysis

A mixture of quantitative and qualitative data were collected for this study. During the interviews, demographic, situational, and psychographic questions were asked to set up the context of the motivation and perceptions the participants had. A categorical analysis was done by two trained graduate students on questions that could be categorized by specific answers to the questions. Sample questions were, "Have you been labeled a bully?" "Who did you bully?" "Was bullying socially acceptable during the time you bullied?" and "When did you stop?" Each person read the seven transcripts and tallied how many times each option to the question was brought up and underlined examples of each theme. Results were compared by the researcher and put into a table to illustrate frequency of themes.

The researcher conducted a thematic analysis by reading the transcripts to get familiar with the data as a whole and then re-read the transcripts multiple times to detect recurring themes and important but not recurring themes from open-ended questions. Sample questions were, "Tell me about a time when you think you bullied," "Why did you bully?" "What advice do you have for adolescents who bully?" and "What do you think schools could do to decrease bullying?" Recurring themes from narratives came from these types of questions, especially the advice. Underlying themes came from other questions like how the participants defined or framed bullying, the use of power and

intention, and to what they attributed the responsibility of bullying. In other words, did the participant take responsibility for the bullying behavior or did he or she put the responsibility on the target as if it were the target's fault they were bullied? These themes are said to be important because they provide an understanding as to how children view bullying situations. Because the information is coming from an adult, the big picture is reflected upon, rather than a child who may still be stuck in the moment.

Chapter 3: Results

Quantitative Data

Closed ended questions were asked during the interviews to set up the context

and give background information for figuring out the motivations and perceptions the

participants had about bullying. Due to the small number in the sample, conclusions are

preliminary and cannot be generalized. Instead, these data are used to show potential

trends and describe the sample rather than the general population of bullies. The tables

represent the questions from the in-depth interviews that correlate with each other and are

not represented in the order asked.

Table 1

Have You Been Labeled a Bully?

Responses	Quantity	Percentage
Yes	3	43%
No	3	43%
I don't know	1	14%

Note: Information corresponds with question number two in the structured interview
schedule.

Table 2

Do You Consider Yourself a Bully?

Responses	Quantity	Percentages
Yes	2	29%
No	4	57%

Note: Information corresponds with question number thirteen in the structured interview
schedule.

Tables 1 and 2 illustrate whether the participants were labeled bullies and

considered themselves bullies in adulthood. Many mentioned that they were, or probably

were, labeled a bully. The same number of participants mentioned they were not labeled a bully. When asked if the participants consider themselves bullies, the responses were split. One participant mentioned, "I guess, yeah. Yeah, cause it's kinda like being an alcoholic, really. I did it. There's no way of saying I didn't do it. I don't think I'm a bully anymore. I don't bully people anymore. But like I said, I will always be a bully." Others mentioned that they had bullying tendencies but do not bully people the same as in childhood by hitting or throwing people in dumpsters. Those who did not see themselves as bullies said it was because they are nice to people now or do not run people down, even if the person is disliked.

Table 3

Were There Bystanders? If so, What Did They Do?

Responses	Quantity	Percentage
Yes, laughed or joined in	3	43%
Yes, didn't do anything	4	57%
No bystanders	1	14%

Note: Information corresponds with question number six in the structured interview schedule.

Table 4

Was Bullying Socially Acceptable During The Time You Bullied?

Responses	Quantity	Percentage
Yes	3	57%
No	2	57%

Note: Information corresponds with question number five in the structured interview schedule.

An assumption to bullying is that children do it to get the attention of others. Tables 3 and 4 illustrate the social aspects of bullying. When participants were asked about bystanders, many mentioned that the bystanders did nothing or joined in. One

participant mentioned, "But there were also times where I did mean things by myself. Not

even showing off for anyone." Half of the participants stated that bullying was socially

acceptable, while the other half did not think it was socially acceptable. The same

participant mentioned, "Yes and no. Obviously a lot of kids do it and a lot of kids are

subjected to it, and it's not okay when you are being bullied but it is okay when you are

the bully...It was not acceptable in high school and it's just..inappropriate I think at that

age. It almost becomes harassment at that point."

Table 5

When Did You Bully?

Responses	Quantity	Percentage
Elementary School	3	43%
Middle School	5	72 %
High School	2	29%
After High School	2	29%

Note: Information corresponds with question number four in the structured interview
schedule.

Table 6

Who Did You Bully?

Responses	Quantity	Percentage
Peers stronger than me	4	57%
Peers weaker than me	4	57%
Adults	1	14%
Friends	4	57%

Note: Information corresponds with question number four in the structured interview
schedule.

Participants were asked when and who they bullied, and the results were sporadic.

Some participants mentioned that they bullied only once, while others mentioned

multiple bullying incidences occurring in more than one school (elementary and middle).

Table 6 illustrates who the bullies targeted. One participant mentioned it did not matter who he bullied, so his responses fit under all categories. Some participants mentioned bullying peers stronger than them, like football players. Others stated they bullied peers younger than them, which is the traditional situational viewpoint of bullying. Another participant mentioned, "I would even bully adults. Like I had teachers who seemed to be scared of students or intimidated by me because I had a mouth on me and didn't even want to deal with it because they couldn't even deal with it."

Table 7

Why Did You Bully?

Responses	Quantity	Percentage
Unhappy with self	1	14%
Target was annoying	2	29%
Fun/Mean	2	29%
Way they looked	2	29%
Entitlement/Get what I wanted	2	29%
Peer pressure/ To fit in	3	43 %
Feel powerful after feeling powerless	4	57%
I don't know why	1	14%

Note: Information corresponds with question number four in the structured interview schedule.

Table 8

When Did You Stop Bullying?

Responses	Quantity	Percentage
When I got into trouble	2	29%
When I became bullied	1	14%
Grew out of it	3	43%
Too easy/boring	1	14%

Note: Information corresponds with question number eight in the structured interview schedule.

Tables 7 and 8 provide information that directly relates to the research statements. Participants provided a wide range of reasons as to why they bullied, some of whom put the responsibility on themselves, while others put the responsibility on the target. During one interview, when specifically asked why he *chose* to bully, outside of the fact that the target was different, he could not give the researcher an answer. He mentioned he only bullied two individuals and, "If you look at all the things I went through when I was little, I wouldn't think that any of them would…drive me to do anything weird to anybody."

<h2 style="text-align:center">Qualitative Data</h2>

Bullying Defined and Framed

When participants were asked to describe a time in which they bullied, many of the incidents started because the target was different than the bully (i.e. fat, annoying, smelly), which is a recurring theme. Many of the same aspects, or types, of bullying found in different pieces of research was provided by the participants like physical (hitting, tripping, and putting kids in dumpsters), verbal (making fun of and talking about people), and relational (running away and not looking at people because he/she did not want to be someone's friend; Kiraiakidis & Kavoura, 2010; Bishop-Mills & Muckleroy-Carwile, 2009; Fekkes, Pijpers, & Verloove-Vanhorick, 2005). Since these types of bullying situations are common among other research, the two types that do not get much attention, cyberbullying and written/symbolic bullying, will be illustrated here, along with the components of the definition of bullying, power and intention, all of which were underlying themes.

Cyberbullying

Tammy discussed one of her bullying interactions was by petitioning against a girl in her grade for being a "bad friend." She mentioned,

In the 8th grade we did a petition with the whole school to get this girl, like out-casted from the whole school because she was a bad friend, I guess you would say, to everybody else. So, we signed and made a website back when AOL was high, and had everyone's name on it that petitioned against her for stealing clothes and boyfriends…It was during lunch, and everyone would make these little pieces of paper to petition against her, and then they would just be passed and people would sign them. So, I don't think everyone actually knew what was going on unless they were in the close group, but everyone who went along with it thought it was the right thing to do because nobody liked her. I thought it was wrong, but at the same time I wanted someone else to feel bad too so I just went along with it…Back when I was in 8th grade, all my friends hit puberty and stuff and started to get boobs and started their period and I had nothing, and all the boys in my home base class would always call me "A cup'" and "flat chested" and I was going to "end up looking like a boy." So I was bullied myself, and it made me not feel good, so I thought that when I bullied the other girl I kind of felt good that it wasn't me anymore, so I just kind of went with it.

This bullying took place at the end of the school year, around February or March, and lasted a few weeks until someone showed the website to a teacher. Tammy also discussed how she was best friends with the individual she bullied from 5th to 7th grade

until she met another girl who "started the whole petition and that's when everything happened."

When asked what factors made her feel that treating someone the way she did was okay, Tammy responded with, "I thought she was a bad friend so I thought she *did* deserve a punishment." The bullying stopped when the girls got suspended and were made to shut the website down and go to the target's house to apologize to her and her mother. Later, the target transferred to a different school. A few years after the bullying incident, Tammy mentioned that she and a group of friends ran into the target and talked and hung out like everything was fine. This was the only participant whose bullying consisted of any type of technology; however, other participants expressed their concern for the internet as a means of making bullying easier.

Written/Symbolic

Although this is not an actual form of bullying, one participant described an incident as such, while others provided examples that fit the category.

Nicole explained she bullied because people annoyed her, or bullied her first. She bullied multiple times throughout her childhood and said it may have started in preschool. When asked where she learned the behavior, she said "it came from my soul." She was an only child and had a hard time sharing and keeping friends because she was so mean and "grabby." Her behavior was never corrected or addressed which may have been why she engaged in the following behavior:

And then there was an example of nonverbal bullying that I would do. I would write mean notes to people sometimes about how much I hated them, and everything that was wrong with them in middle school. Like a lot of kids did that

to people…But that was pretty bad. And then I engaged in *vandalism* in 8th grade with one of my friends. It was her idea and I did it. She was way worse of a bully than me. And this kid was not a nerd. He was on the football team. That's another thing. I didn't bully nerds. I bullied football players. I actually *hated* them. On this guy's locker that we hated, he had a lazy eye, and we drew in permanent marker a picture of a Cyclopes, and we put "lazy eyed psycho," and it was on his locker all year (laughing).

This incidence is an example of things that are spread quickly to a large number of people, somewhat like cyberbullying, but without technology. It could be categorized under relational bullying; however, the goal of some of the incidents was not to out someone from a specific group; it was to just be mean to that individual.

Power

Power ties directly into why an individual bullies and is a significant element of the definition of bullying. Power was not specifically asked about in the interview, but parts of power emerged from the narratives. Charlie, who bullied two kids, felt like he experienced a physical reaction to the two individuals, so he had to do something about it.

Thinking back on it now, I could tell that, and this is a weird thing. I remember feeling like I could identify within my own mind and body that he was different? Like I think we knew, at least I knew, that he was different in some way. And I certainly never remember being the follower. I was always actually the leader of it. So it was never like oh everyone else is doing it so I'm going to do it too. It was kinda like *my* thing, like I actually wanted to pick on this kid…It was a pretty

visceral response that I had to both of these people. I was like…you're different
and I actually *feel* stronger than you. And I'm going to exploit that.

Tony bullied for the fun of it, and still has bullying tendencies as an adult. He
mentioned multiple times that he manipulated someone while bullying by stating, "I
would become close to somebody and I would use that as a means to get the full effect of
manipulating somebody." Similarly, this participant shared, "It was pretty simple, all I
had to do was keep stressing the fact that he started it and he punched me and I said, 'No,
I didn't want to,' and you know, I was just making it. I even put on a little voice and stuff
like that whenever I started to cry a little."

The examples provided were from participants who chose to be bullies because
they felt powerful from the beginning, with no outside influences.

On multiple occasions, the participants mentioned that he or she bullied to regain
power, to "feel powerful after feeling powerless." More specifically, these participants
were either unhappy with the way their lives were or bullied by others. However, not all
participants felt this way. Sarah said she bullied because of peer pressure. She felt that
since she was part of the group who started the bullying, if she would have said, "No,
why are we doing this, this is stupid, why are we being mean to her," then she would
have been bullied herself. This individual said she was a really nice person and did not
want to bully, but she felt power and peer pressure over her, which is why she did it.

Premeditation

Olweus describes someone as being bullied if he/she is exposed over time and
repeatedly to negative actions on the part of one or more students, is a systematic abuse
of power, and intends to inflict harm on an individual (Kiriakidis & Kavoura, 2010;

Bishop-Mills & Muckleroy-Carwile, 2009; Limber & Small, 2003; Slonje & Smith, 2008; Atlas & Popler, 1998; Olweus, 1993, 2004, 2008; Long & Alexander, 2010). Every narrative and example of bullying interactions provided in the interviews seemed like intentional or premeditated acts, but not all individuals mentioned that their bullying interactions were intentional at the time of bullying. A couple participants specifically stated the intent of their actions. For example, Tony mentioned,

> She cursed at me and, um, I remember my mom telling me that those words were not supposed to be used, and if my mom doesn't use them, why would she use them? So I planned it out…as soon as she got to the bridge where you go across to get to it, I started running as fast as I could and as soon as she got there, I was already next to her and I just punched her off the playscape.

> While talking about his bullying interactions in general, Tony explained, "It just got to the point where I was at home creating new ways to mess with people." During a fight, Tony stated that the target got suspended for two days and Tony did not get anything because he made it seem like the other kid started it, when Tony really started it. "I wasn't really too worried about it, but it was just getting boring, that was the main reason. It was just too easy."

> Charlie described the invitation he made a kid he invited to his birthday party.
> I even remember making his invitation on the brown construction paper because that was the color, you know. Like eww *brown* paper who wants that? So I made his invitation brown because I didn't have anything else to do with the *brown,* and I didn't want to give him a good color…When we got to my party at Ceaserland, some of my friends were like, why did you invite him? And I said well because

you invited him to yours, and he was like, well my mom made me invite him to mine. And I was like, oh. Well, if I would have known that, I never would have invited him to mine.

Although these incidences showed intent and clearly decreased the status of the target, the participants provided examples as to how they felt about intent. Charlie mentioned, "But as a kid, not that you can't make the right choice; you often don't think about you know, analyze the choice or have the experience with the other choice. You feel that and you just act on it." This participant contradicts himself by stating, "There was this one kid and, like I said, I was like the ring leader and I made it my thing where like I'm gonna…this kid is bothering me and I gonna…I'm gonna mess him up." This participant made it sound like kids' bullying behaviors are not intentional. They do not know any better, but then said that he *wanted* to mess a kid up.

Attribution of Responsibility

When the participants were asked why they bullied, many put the responsibility anywhere else but themselves.

Responsibility on target. Many participants mentioned they bullied because the target was different in some way. Charlie stated he bullied a boy in elementary school because he was gay and chubby, but he bullied a boy in middle school because, "I felt something different toward him too but it wasn't because he was gay or whatever, it was cause he just...*looked* weird and *seemed* weird…like really weird." Nicole mentioned she bullied excessively, and the main reasons were because someone irritated her or "was a spaz."

I had a trampoline in my yard in middle school and we would jump on it with the neighborhood kids. I think this kid was jealous because he wanted to come over, but he was a total spaz, and he would yell stuff and ride his bike back and forth. So one day, I saw his bike and I stole it and threw it in the woods (laughing) so he couldn't ride his bike by. That didn't work so I just made fun of him all the time. I got in trouble for that. He told my mom, but I also bullied him on the bus and I would trip him when he walked by and stuff…There was this girl who would pee her pants all the time so I called her "pee pants." I would say stuff to her and purposefully not look at her and push her chair away when she had to sit by me in class. I was really mean about it.

A common attribute for bullies was picking on fat people and making them cry. Tammy mentioned she did it because the target was a "bad friend." In all of these cases, the bully could have left the target alone, and if anything, just ignored him or her instead of explicitly acting in a harmful manner.

Responsibility on adults. Some participants mentioned they bullied because teachers, or other school officials, were not paying attention. Tammy explained, "In 4th grade we didn't have a teacher really because she was sick, so we had subs all year. So we never really had a teacher who knew us all year who could say, you know, stop it." Sarah stated she continued to bully because her parents did not discipline her, "Because I wasn't in trouble for it really. It was just free license." Chad was bullied by his stepfather. Although he did not like the way his stepfather treated him, as he grew up, he said he naturally began acting like him because that is what he knew.

My stepfather bullied me basically. Abused mentally, physically, and bullied in

another way. So, I took that from him even though I didn't want to be like him, I

took that from him because he was around me since I was 3. So, when I went

outside the house I would catch myself talking and acting like him toward people.

I realized I didn't even like it when he did it to me so why am I doing it to others?

So, I mean, it starts at home also. People don't want to admit it, but it does start at

home.

This shows the impact that parents have and the perceptions children have of their

parents. Parents instill values or behaviors even if it was not intentionally taught.

Responsibility of other bullies. An overwhelming majority of participants

mentioned they bullied because someone else bullied them. Specifically, a common

response was lashing out to get acceptance from others. Chad explained, "Sometimes

bullies are getting bullied…and nine times out of ten they are going through the same

thing…they are probably just trying to reach out to somebody." Tammy mentioned she

cyberbullied because she wanted someone else to feel how she felt after getting bullied.

Sarah stated, "It was defensive bullying instead of offensive in most cases…I think most

kids have been in both positions and that was certainly the case for me."

Taking responsibility. Although many participants put the responsibility on the

target, others took full responsibility. Others provided a mixture of attributing the

responsibility and taking responsibility. These data are important because participants

said they did not realize they were bullies at the time of bullying, but looking back on the

experiences, that was exactly what was happening. Charlie mentioned, "It was never like

oh everyone else is picking on him so I'm going to do it too. It was kinda like *my* thing,

like I wanted to actually pick on this kid, I'm not like you know. I didn't think about it like that at the time. I just thought it was fun at the time." Tony stated, "It was fun for me, you know, it was like an *activity*." On the other hand, Matt stated,

> I was unhappy with myself. I was unhappy with my life and what I was doing, so making someone feel worse about theirs made me feel a little better. Most people bully just to feel powerful, and I think to make someone feel lower than them so they can keep going. That's why I did it.

Sarah stated, "But also there were times when I did mean things by myself. Not even showing off for anyone…bullying came from my soul.. I was just mean." This was the same person who mentioned that the majority of her bullying was defensive instead of offensive, contradicting herself.

Perceptions of the Bully

Since the sample population was individuals who self-identified as being a bully, the participants were asked what advice they had for adolescents who bully. This provided some insightful information of how the individuals perceive bullies and bullying situations. There were many commonalities in this area. The majority of participants either said there is no point in bullying or just not to do it. Another common piece of advice was to put yourself in the other person's shoes, and think about how you would feel if someone were to bully you. In a discussion with Chad, the researcher asked, "For those who try to put themselves in the other person's shoes and can't because they do not fully understand the experiences the targets are going through, what advice would you have for the bully then? Chad replied with,

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I would say they need a little bit of that experience, being bullied. Not going to school, ok, and getting bullied, but take them somewhere where they have no choice but to be bullied. They are in a situation where they can't control it. And maybe they will see then, this is too much for me. Because everyone has a breaking point. I think bullies need to have that breaking point…I bullied because I was lashing out. I wanted acceptance from others.

Sarah, who bullied because of peer pressure, perceives bullies to be unaware of the harm they are doing.

Just look at what you are doing because I honestly didn't realize how badly this was hurting someone until it had been some time afterward. I certainly didn't intend to make this girl feel terrible. I was just going along with my friends. So I wasn't thinking about how she felt, ever. I don't think kids would bully if they truly thought they were hurting someone. I think kids just do it to fit in and they don't realize how bad they are making someone feel.

Most of this advice is not specific in giving examples as to help stop bullying. A couple participants perceived bullying as just a kid thing, and since it has been happening for so long, it is almost impossible to stop. More specifically, Charlie explained,

I've thought about it a lot over the years because I don't really particularly feel bad about what I did. I'm not sure why I don't feel bad. I don't know what that means. But I almost feel like there is nothing you can do about it because you put kids, um. There are areas of the country where you know, virtually nobody gets bullied because there are numbers, everything is a numbers thing. But I think there is just almost nothing you can do about it. There are things you can do to

educate people about it and get kids to not do it. But, I feel like it's always going

to be like I said. That's why I tried to put in there that there was a pretty visceral

response that I had with both of these people. So it was like an animal thing I

guess. Because lions, when they see something that's different, they eat it. They

don't just disregard it like oh, that guy's different. They just get rid of it…We

come from there too…We have the power of reason though, which is why if you

bully at this age, that is just weird. But as a kid, not that you can't make the right

choice, you often don't think about and analyze the choice you made. You just

feel that and you act on it.

This may be why the advice and perceptions of the bully were so broad and

general. Since the participants grew out of it, they believe all other children will too.

Perceptions of Parents

Research suggests that parents do not talk to their children about bullying either

because they do not know how or are unaware of the child's bullying behavior. This

section provides insight into how the bullies perceive the parents in bullying situations.

Open communication. Many participants mentioned that parents do not talk to

children about bullying or use strong enough words. Specifically, Charlie mentioned,

My parents didn't know that I ever picked on anybody. Why would they know

that? I didn't come home and *brag* about it. I don't think it's a subject that kids

really, um, get talked to about from their parents, so maybe it's something that

you should actually bring up.

Tony mentioned that parents should be careful about the advice they give a child

because the child will take it literally. He stated the following:

My father told me that everybody is just a small part of your life and you won't

see them, like you know, growing up 30-40 years from now, you're not going to

see this person, so that saying is what motivated me to bully people because I was

like, "Well if I'm not going to see them then what's the point in having them as

friends, shoot."

Being a strong role model was mentioned in a couple interviews, also.

Specifically, Nicole stated,

I don't know if I have any advice for the parents because I kind of think it might

be the parent's fault as to why their kids bully? Maybe they raised their kids in a

way that promotes bullying or would make them think it is okay to be nasty. So I

guess be a strong role model and try to instill values in the kid and make them

empathetic toward other human beings.

Her parents talked strongly about people and validated her behavior by agreeing

that it was gross when a kid came to school and peed or pooped his/her pants. She said

there would "be a rift between what they say and what they do" and the people she

bullied were the people her parents said things about.

Two participants mentioned that parents should not act like their child is the best,

and believe it when someone tells him or her that his or her child bullied at school.

Tammy shared,

Talk to your kids about it and realize that what you say and do have a bigger

impact than anyone else. And if you ignore it and say well, if you get into a fight

or if they say this, then just hit them. I don't think that is right and parents now

just think their kid is number one and their kid doesn't do anything bad. They

grow up learning that and they think that it is okay that they are number one and they just do bad and say whatever they want.

When Tammy did something bad she was always afraid because she knew she would get into trouble by her parents, especially her dad. Her boyfriend says his dad is his best friend and role model, but when he did something bad as a child, he knew he would get into trouble. This participant also showed the researcher a picture that put the above statement into perspective. In 1969, parents and teachers demanded that the *kid* explain their bad grades. In 2009, kids and parents are demanding that the *teacher* explain the bad grades. Not doing anything about bullying situations gives kids a sense of entitlement that has been expressed in many of the interviews, because the child thinks he or she can do whatever and get away with it. Matt mentioned that if the bullying does not stop, the parents should take the flaws out of the child just to let him/her know that he or she are just as human as the person he or she is bullying. This is not meant to hurt the child, but to put things into perspective.

Perceptions of Targets

This section is useful because the bully is expressing what the target could have done to stop a younger version of him/herself, and explains how bullies target and perceive potential victims. Although the responsibility should not fall directly on the target of bullying, research is heavily engaged in the role of the target. The difference in this study is that the information is coming from the source of the bullying. Some participants mentioned to fight back somehow. According to Chad,

Bullies prey on the weak…If they would have defended themselves or whatever, maybe I would have stopped or felt a little compassion for their feelings, but they

never stood up for themselves, so…Verbally is always good. You don't have to

fight physically unless you get backed into a corner.

Charlie suggested the opposite about victims, saying:

You have to fight back. Even if you have to hurt somebody, like really hurt them

a lot…You gotta turn the pressure onto somebody else before you take your own

life and hopefully you hurt somebody enough that they realize like oh...maybe

this kid's not as weak as I thought, or whatever…Words don't work for bullies

like, "oh, oh please stop bullying me." That doesn't work, you know.

 Nicole stated,

My advice would be to stand up for yourself, but that leads to bullying behavior

by the targets so I think it would be contextual. Maybe…try to be assertive and

not aggressive and…don't tell on the bully right away unless it gets to be super

inappropriate behavior, but do get an adult involved if it continues.

This feedback is important to note because it contradicts and gives insight on the

definition of bullying. Nicole contradicted herself because she said not to tell on the bully

right away, but to tell an adult about the situation. She also said that if the target stood up

for him/herself, it would lead to bullying behavior. Bullying happens when there is an

intent to harm someone and it happens repeatedly. If an individual is defending

him/herself, and it only happens once right after the bullying interaction, the individual is

not bullying, he or she is defending him/herself.

Perceptions of Schools

There is a saying, "It takes a village to raise a child." Nowadays, with both

parents working or single parents, some individuals feel that parents expect the schools to

not only teach a child the standard subjects, but also teach about being a moral and ethical human being. While this is close to impossible with too many students in a class, limited budgets, and so on, most bullying happens at school, so the school does have a role in decreasing it.

Many participants mentioned that teachers and other school officials should have open communication talking to children about what bullying is and confronting the issue instead of punishing the bully. Chad said,

> People sometimes look at bullies like they have a problem and instead of talking to them and seeing what the problem is and stuff like that, they are probably just trying to reach out to somebody. You know, just talking to them and communicating with them. It's just a communication thing. And people don't realize that. They just write them off because they are a bully. And that would make a bully lash out also because they are constantly asking for help and they aren't getting that help, and that is going to destroy them when they get older.

Tammy explained that being suspended does not do anything for kids.

> When kids get in a fight at school they suspend both kids because they can't pick a side or whatever. That's not helping him like being bullied. That's not helping him on the inside like I'm being bullied so I'm just going to get into trouble anyway so why don't I just do it back to him…Schools need to have ISS (in school suspension) rather than OSS (out of school suspension) because kids don't want to go to school anyway. Even if the parents make them go to bed early, get up early, and do chores, they still don't have to go to school…If they have ISS, they still have to go to school, do their homework, and eat lunch there. It's like a

jail cell which is a little bit more of a punishment. Like they actually feel like they are in trouble and if they get into trouble in the real world, that is what it would feel like.

Almost all participants mentioned there should be some kind of class or seminar for students and/or parents, so everyone is on the same page, and there is accountability. Charlie mentioned that he went to a Catholic school and "Without any guidance as to understanding that some people may be different, kids don't have coping skills or conflict skills which is why they bully…I think because if you teach kids responsibility, then you get less of the Columbine things." Nicole stated that the bullies need to feel they have support too. "They could be doing it because they need more attention, so basically, *adults* in general need to pay attention more to be better leaders instead of passively leading." This statement validates the quote, "It takes a village to raise a child" and everybody has a role in decreasing bullying.

Chapter 4: Discussion

The purpose of this study was to gain the perspective of adults who bullied in the past, to reflect on their bullying experiences, and provide a deeper understanding into why bullying happens. This strategy was efficient because the participants were able to provide insight into aspects of bullying situations that children would not realize. The quantitative and qualitative data work together aiding in the understanding of bullying behavior.

Quantitative Data

The quantitative data provided important results setting up the context in which a child bullies, and the background for the motivations and perceptions the participants had about themselves, and others involved in bullying. Since this sample was so small, conclusions are tentative and cannot be generalized. From the data in the first two tables, individuals perceive themselves differently from how others perceive an individual. Those who thought they were still bullies had bullying tendencies and took the responsibility of bullying as a child. Those who did not think they were still bullies believe they have changed or bullied because of peer pressure. Although the tables illustrate more than half of bullying situations include bystanders and social acceptability, many participants also bullied *with* others. When describing bullying situations, participants used "we" often which suggests there is social influence in bullying situations, for this sample. Not only are children doing it to get approval from outsiders, they are doing it to get approval from friends. This study provided evidence that most bullying situations happen in middle school which is consistent with the research (Olweus, 2008). However, it does not matter if a child is stronger than most, weaker than

most, or friends with a bully; he or she is susceptible to becoming bullied. Nicole

mentioned that she targeted adults, but adults tend to get bullied because there are no

boundaries between child and adult. Since children spend so much time at school and at

home, parents, teachers, and principals should come together to teach children what is

right from wrong and the consequences of bullying (Long & Alexander, 2010). Parents

do not feel supported by others in the children's lives, so many feel helpless. One adult

voice will not stop bullying. Adults need to feel and be supported, just like the children

need to feel and be supported before they are comfortable standing up to bullies. The

participants provided a wide array of reasons as to why he or she bullied, mostly putting

the responsibility on the target. This may be because bullying is looked negatively upon,

so why would children or adults want to admit they did something wrong or negative?

This was evident when individuals were declining participation in the study because they

were embarrassed about their behavior. Approximately half of the participants stopped

bullying because they grew out of it, or it got boring. Many participants did not have

adult intervention so they were able to stop whenever they wished. Overall, the

quantitative research provided insight into the specific reasons as to why an individual

bullies.

<div align="center">**Qualitative Data**</div>

The qualitative data provided important insight into the underlying reasons as to

why someone bullies and how a bully perceives bullying situations.

Feelings

A couple participants felt regretful about their bullying experiences and had

difficulty talking about their bullying behaviors with the researcher, while others did not

feel badly at all. Many participants were also victims of bullying and had to overcome both aspects of bullying situations. This is consistent with the research in which approximately 30% of middle school students are involved in moderate or frequent bullying as either the victim, bully, or both (Olweus, 2004).

Validation/Attributing Responsibility

Many participants validated their bullying behaviors, both explicitly and implicitly, mostly by attributing the responsibility onto the target or adults. Charlie stated the target was messing with his girlfriend. That validated his bullying behavior because the target asked for it. If there were no consequences to the bullying, the behavior was validated because he or she could get away with it in the case of Nicole, Charlie, and Tony. If someone bullied the bully, that validated the individual to become a bully him/herself, and give the bully what he/she deserved in the case of Chad, Tony, Nicole, and Tammy. Although these are not acceptable reasons to bully someone, children use them. As an adult, we can say that we know better or tell kids to "put yourself in the other person's shoes," but children need some kind of foundation, some kind of communication skills or social skills to be able to deal with difficult situations like bullying or someone who is different. Most children are not going to learn on their own that what they are doing really hurts another person until later in life. Children are not born with coping skills; they acquire them over time through learning from others and personal experience, which may be a reason why children validate bullying behavior. With the prevalence of bullying, the data seem to suggest that children and young adults, whether they are the bully, target, or bystander, need to learn more positive social habits from adults rather than learning from personal experience and trying to figure it out on their own.

Parents' Role

There are a variety of reasons why parents do not intervene in bullying situations, but the literature suggests that children who bully come from backgrounds of low maternal and paternal involvement, authoritarian parents who condone fighting back, divorced families, and families who lack warmth, structure, and cohesion (Holt, Kantor, & Finkelhor, 2008). Parents are also more likely to talk to their children about *being* bullied than bullying others (Holt, Kantor, & Finkelhor, 2008). Many of the participants in this study perceive parents not as open as they should be and ask parents to talk to children about bullying instead of pretending it does not exist. A recurring theme in the interviews was that parents do not believe others when they find out their child has bullied. It seems as though it is just as difficult to talk about bullying as it is sex and drugs, and it is difficult to accept the fact that a child has engaged in any of these behaviors. Many parents feel guilty, angry, and powerless for not intervening and protecting their children because they do not know how (Crisp & Humphrey, 2008). Through the perceptions of the bully, the data suggest that parents do not always have to know the right way to talk to their child. Caring about what is really going on and letting the child know how dangerous his/her actions can be is usually all children want and need. It may save the child negative feelings about the bullying situations in the long run, as well.

Bullies Need Help

Targets are not the only ones who need help. The primary focus of most research seems to suggest the opposite. As expressed in the transcripts and examples, bullies need help, maybe even more so than targets. Nicole shared that the reason she stopped bullying was because she got a knife put to her neck by someone who she thought was smaller than her. She was at the movie theater with a friend when she overheard a group of girls say that her friend must never eat because she was skinny. When Nicole and her friend got into the theater to sit down for the movie, they started throwing popcorn at the girls for being mean.

> They turned around and we had a little altercation because I told them not to talk about my friend because I see her eat all the time and we are about to eat popcorn. The girl grabbed me by the neck and a big crowd was all around. It was 1998 so I had this choker on and she had her hand on my neck, or what I thought was her hand. Everyone was freaking out and I was laughing like "what are you going to do to me." When the usher came to break it up everyone was staring and I didn't know why. She had a knife to my neck and if I didn't have my choker on, she could have cut me…I quit thinking I was so hard when I found out that no, I really wasn't and some people will surprise you and will do way worse things to you like punch you in the face or pull a knife on you.

She started to become so bullied that she had to switch schools. Before she switched, she said that she stopped retaliating against the bullying when she realized that the only people who were still nice to her were the individuals she would have bullied otherwise.

Chad shared that he probably would have either been dead or in jail if it were not for the people he had in his life when he got older. He specifically mentioned, "A lot of bullies bully because of the faults that they have. Insecurities. When I bullied, it was like a high related to drugs. It felt good and it was like therapy but afterward I felt guilty." If nothing is done to help stop bullies, there is a 25% chance they will have a criminal record by the age of 30 (Price & Dalgleish, 2010). How can we help these kids who are hurting so badly? The ones who *are* the bad guy? Who is *perceived* as the bad guy? This research helps answer that question because all of the information came from the bully and the perceptions he or she had of the situations he or she were in, or strategies that would have possibly helped him or her not be a bully as a child. The fact that some participants felt regretful about their bullying behavior and some declined the interview illustrates that some bullies carry with them negative feelings about bullying, as do targets.

Schools' Role

Parents are the most important influence and source of knowledge for a child; however, children spend a significant amount of time at school, so teachers and principals have an impact on how a child behaves. Although schools are busy teaching students English, Math, and Science and keeping the students safe, if bullying happens, the students are *not* safe. While explaining switching schools because she got bullied, Nicole mentioned, "Not everyone who gets bullied can just say to their parents that I want to go to a private school now. And that takes bullying out of the equation. Bullying is not tolerated there." This begs a serious question of why is bullying "tolerated" at some schools and how can it be minimized? The participants believed the schools can help

teach about bullying and the consequences of it through a class. It is important to build a

supportive school environment in which school administrators build a sense of

community in the school by providing support between adults and peers as a way to

diffuse social isolation (Cartland et. al, 2003). If the students know what bullying is and

when it happens, there is more accountability for the bully and unacceptability for the act.

Some students do it just to do it or because they can. Others do it because they are being

bullied themselves, so it is a vicious cycle of negative feelings and actions that an

individual needs to make a conscious effort to break, as mentioned by Chad. When

parents and teachers can be on the same page with teaching the components that go into

bullying situations, bad feelings will be diffused more easily. Manipulation will be

diffused more easily. Having a sense of entitlement in treating someone however you

want and having power over somebody will be diffused more easily. Bystanders will be

more empowered and feel more comfortable standing up for targets.

Data Integration

When bullies validate or justify why they treated someone badly, if the bully

knows what is going on, it does not become an excuse anymore. It becomes a choice that

children make. Just because they are children does not mean they cannot make the right

choice implementing the golden rule: treat others as you would like to be treated. It was

apparent that the adults who reflected on their bullying experiences did not realize the

consequences of what they did until well after the bullying ended. These data were

beneficial for this sample because the adults were able to provide information that

children could not since they had a different perspective on it. When asked to explain

stories as to why they bullied, participants seemed to provide the way they saw

themselves at the time of bullying, putting the responsibility on the target, or lashing out because they were bullied themselves. When asked to provide advice for those involved in the bullying situations, participants provided information that was introspective that would help stop children who are the way he or she used to be.

Teasing Versus Bullying

When reflecting on bullying situations, as children, the participants thought the bullying was just teasing because it was fun and was unaware of the consequences. This illustrates the importance the relationship between teasing and bullying. Teasing is closely related to bullying, but is not always perceived as bullying, or too often perceived as bullying. In order for bullying to occur, there must be an imbalance of power and strength (Olweus, 1993; Milsom & Gallo, 2006; Long & Alexander, 2010). When bullying is on television or movies, the scene of a big kid taking someone's lunch money or pounding a student into the mud are captured as bullying situations, but it seems as though bullying is changing. Many participants bullied peers who were stronger than him or her. Nowhere in the research does it say that the one with the lower status or power may overcome those with the higher power and status, and the participants illustrated that. These conclusions are strictly based on this sample. It seems as though no matter how strong or powerful an individual may be, if he or she gives to someone smaller, the underdog will take it and do just as much damage as the one who is physically stronger.

Although what he or she does is mean, the bully has consequences that affect the rest of society. Since parents and educators have tried to implement resources for children, it is unknown as to how beneficial they really are. The quantitative and qualitative research provided important insight and worked together to gain a better

understanding as to specifically why an individual bullies and what the bully was looking for as a child. All participants remembered their bullying situations as clearly as targets of bullying do, which illustrates the importance of the events in the bully's life as well. Some information in the quantitative data overlapped with the qualitative data, such as the social acceptability of bullying and the perceptions the participants had of bullies and targets of bullying. Why a participant bullied and when they stopped overlapped with the attributing accountability and the role of adults and schools. These two types of data suggested that accountability is key when confronting bullying situations. Based on the participants' responses, if the children knew that bullying was absolutely not acceptable at school or at home, it would help decrease some bullying situations, but we do not know if this is actually the case. Nicole suggested, "It's not just the external messages that are important. We need to figure out what messages they are getting from the environment to make them get those thoughts and act on them." Overall, this is the question that the quantitative and qualitative data attempted to answer. The responses, conclusions, and advice given in this study cannot be generalized because of the small sample size. However, it gives a foundation to start from when confronting bullying situations.

Limitations

Similar to other studies, there are certain limitations to the current study. Despite the assurances of confidentiality, it was difficult to get individuals to feel comfortable participating in the study. Reasons like "I do not want my name on anything" and "I don't feel comfortable" were given to those recruiting participants. This may be because individuals were ashamed or embarrassed of their bullying interactions. There was also

no direct incentive for participating in the study. The reason for that was to protect confidentiality in case someone did not want an instructor or friend to know he or she was participating. Due to the lack of participants, the interviews were limited to geographic region. All participants came from the Detroit area. The results were skewed because of the small sample size since everyone is brought up a different way and have different perceptions of what bullying is.

Due to the nature of the questions, many participants were nervous about talking about their bullying experiences. As the interview went on, participants seemed to remember more information and fill in holes of the stories. Because of this, pertinent information may have been lost during the interviews.

Future Research Directions

For the future, it would be interesting to make a connection between victims and bullies to figure out if they had the same stories and experiences. Many bullies feel victimized in some way, which is one reason to bully. If what Chad said, "Nine times out of ten they (bullies and targets) are going through the same thing," children do not have to be enemies. They can come together because of their similarities rather than separate because of their differences.

Another helpful piece of research would be to compile exact strategies as to *how* to talk to children about bullying or specifically *what* schools should be teaching about bullying. It is easy to say that adults need to talk to children about bullying and may have every intention of doing so, but few adults actually know how to do it. The data suggest that bullying is compared to a high related to drugs/alcoholism, and talking to kids about bullying could be just as difficult as talking to kids about sex or drugs.

Conclusions

The type of bullying and reasons for bullying are situational. There were many contradictions in the interviews, but that may have been because the participants were going back and forth between childhood and adulthood perspectives. There is a negative connotation to bullying, but through the bully's perceptions, too often nothing is done about the behavior. Based on these perceptions, the data seem to suggest that the bullies do not own their behavior and will not stop unless they are forced to.

Gruner's (1997) superiority theory rests on the assumption that humor always involves gaining superiority over others, while Alexander (1986) proposed that humor is a form of ostracism in which it is used to elevate the status of the joke teller and reduce the status of the target of the joke (Tragesser & Lippman, 2005). These definitions are what separates teasing from bullying and is incorporated with the fact that all participants gained some kind of power or status over another or said that what they were doing was just for fun. This was another way to cover up the behavior and not take responsibility for the consequences that may arise. All of the participants seemed to have a good idea of what bullying was but underestimated the consequences or results of it when talking about themselves as children. Perhaps those who bullied to fit in or because of peer pressure and stopped as soon as they got into trouble were not strong enough offenders of bullying to really give much insight into why a child chooses to bully as the repeat offenders, but every child is susceptible to being a bully, whether he/she wants to be or not. This is illustrated by Poteat and DiGiovanni (2010) in which individuals use biased language to bully, whether the individual is prejudiced or not. There may be other factors as to why an individual bullies, not just that they are biased toward an individual or

group. Based on the interviews, the data seem to suggest that children do not have a high

level of self-awareness when it comes to bullying since many did not realize the

consequences of their actions until they got older. No matter the intention, those who

bully still hurt.

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