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# Bullies and bystanders

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A Thesis  
entitled  
Bullies and Bystanders  
by  
Nina A. Beckford

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
Master of Education Degree in Educational Psychology

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August 2015

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An Abstract of  
Bullies and Bystanders

by

Nina A. Beckford

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
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Educational Psychology

The University of Toledo  
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Society is beginning to recognize and acknowledge the realities of student, peer-to-peer bullying. Researchers are now taking a closer look at all student roles involved in these situations. Bullying does not simply affect the target of the aggression, it also affects the student committing the acts of bullying as well as student bystanders. The main focus of this paper centers on student bystanders. Student bystanders to peer-to-peer bullying are examined to gain a better understanding of their roles and potential roles and contributions to the acts of bullying in a search for solutions to the problem of peer-to-peer bullying's effects on student bystanders. This paper explores how seeing aggressive acts of peer-to-peer bullying may affect student bystanders, what they do when they see bullying, and what adults could do to support them as bystanders in bullying situations.

*Keywords:* actions, aggression, aggressive acts, bully, bullying, bystanders, risks, roles, seeing, support, target, victim.

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## **Chapter One**

### **I. Introduction to Student Bystanders to Peer-to-Peer Bullying**

#### **A. The Effects of Student Peer-to-Peer Bullying on Student Bystanders**

According to the United States Center for Disease Control (CDC), acts of bullying are the number one acts of violence committed against youths today in the United States. The United States Department of Health and Human Services (2014) reports that in the United States 28% of students in grades 6-12 have experienced bullying compared to 20% of students in grades 9-12. They also report that 71% of youth self-report that they have observed bullying in their schools. Often times when student peer-to-peer bullying is being discussed, the focus of the discussion is on the individual committing the acts of bullying and the student being bullied with little attention being directed towards the student bystanders. In the context of this work, a student bystander to peer-to-peer bullying is a student who observes student peer-on-peer bullying. The student bystanders to peer-to-peer bullying are very important members in bullying situations. Although these student bystanders to peer-to-peer bullying are not necessarily the direct targets of the aggressive acts of bullying, they are possibly affected not only at the time the acts occur, but also later in their lives with the impact reaching into their adult futures.

#### **B. The Research Questions**

As both an educator and a parent, one of the topics I am most interested in studying is bullying in schools. Through reading literature and my past personal and professional experiences with friends, family members, and their students related to student peer-to-peer bullying in schools has made me want to learn more about the topic.

The research questions I am interested in exploring center around student bystanders to peer-to-peer bullying. My research questions were developed with an aim to gain more information about student bystanders to peer-to-peer seeing bullying in school, what they do when they see it, and how seeing it makes them feel. The questions are as follows.

1. Does being a student bystander to peer-to-peer bullying affect students' desire and motivation to attend school and learn while there? If so, how?
2. How do students bystanders to peer-to-peer bullying feel when they see bullying occur? What do they do when they see student peer-to-peer bullying?
3. What, if anything, can adults do to support student bystanders to peer-to-peer bullying?

### **C. Study Limitations**

1. A small sample size of twenty student participants was used in this research study to represent students in the age group of eight to eighteen. Another limitation is that the study relied on self-reports by student respondents. There is no way to ensure the truthfulness, accuracy, or completeness of statements and answers provided by student respondents. Student participants were not required to answer all questions asked during the interview. Although student participants appeared to be comfortable answering questions (as demonstrated by their steady tone of voice, steady voice patterns, and body language), not all student participants answered every question during the interviews. Most student participants verbally stated that they would like to skip a question they chose not to answer. At the end of each interview, any student participant who had

chosen to skip any questions was given the opportunity by the interviewer to answer any question(s) they had not already answered. All participants declined to do so.

## Chapter Two

### II. Bullying

#### A. Bullying Defined

Bullying is an act of aggression with both covert and overt delivery methods. Margaret Kohut who has been studying bullying in schools stated that “overt actions involve direct open attacks on the victim, while covert bullying may not be visible to others” (2007, p. 29). These acts of aggression not only affect the targets of the aggressive acts, but also have an effect on the student bystanders to these acts of bullying. Barbara Coloroso has also studied bullying in schools and she states that “no one is left untouched by a bullying episode” (2003, p. 65). Although these statistics may appear to be a grim reality for today’s youths, there is more power to the role of a student bystander to peer-to-peer bullying than implied by that simplified label. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) defines bullying as any unwanted aggressive behavior(s) by another youth or group of youths who are not siblings or current dating partners that involves an observed or perceived power imbalance and is repeated multiple times or is highly likely to be repeated. Bullying may inflict harm or distress on the targeted youth including physical, psychological, social, or educational harm. (Gladden, Vivolo, Hamburger, & Lumpkin, 2004

Many experts agree that the acts are intentional and must occur repeatedly over time to be considered bullying. The pattern of behavior continues despite the victim’s objections or distress. In his book on bullying in schools, Dan Olweus (1993) states “I define bullying or victimization in the following general way: A student is being bullied or victimized when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on

the part of one or more other students” (p. 9). He further defined the negative actions to be intentional attempts or success in injuring or causing discomfort to another person. In Kohut’s (2007) work on student peer-to-peer bullying she states that “bullying is harmful, humiliating, and victimizing behavior that causes emotional, social, and physical pain for another person” (p. 19). There are differences between a child being teased and being bullied. Bullying is not an isolated event as it is sometimes in the case of a child being teased. Teasing is short-lived, non-hostile in nature and is in essence good-natured. The intention is not to do harm, but to make both people involved laugh and have fun. There is no power imbalance, so participants can easily swap roles and the teasing usually stops when one participant becomes upset. This type of interaction, teasing, is enjoyed by both participants while the same is not true in a bullying situation. In such a case, the bully gets the enjoyment at the targeted student’s expense. In teasing there is an equal level of power between the participants and participation is usually voluntary. Kohut makes the point that teasing interactions are not intended to be mean-spirited and the participants want to maintain their friendship. Teasing can be a natural form of interaction among peers. But, bullying is different. Coloroso (2003) states “it does not matter if it is mild, moderate, or severe: bullying is not normal” (p. 40).

Bullying can be committed by one person or a group of people. It can also be done to one person or multiple individuals at the same time. Olweus states “in the context of school bullying, the target has usually been a single student” (1993, p. 9). Although aggressive acts of bullying more often happen to a single target, bullying is most often a group activity. Acts of bullying can be carried out as verbal/emotional, physical, and relational interfering actions.

## **B. Types of Bullying**

Girls use verbal/emotional bullying more often than boys. . According to Coloroso (2003), approximately 70% of bullying can be classified as verbal/emotional bullying. Some examples of verbal/emotional bullying are name calling, taunting, using racial slurs, gossiping about someone, and using remarks sexual in nature. More recent data on bullying in schools (United States Department of Education, 2013) found that 4.5 of the 6.8 million children who report being bullied at school during the 2010-11 school year reported that they were subjects of rumors, the largest type of bullying category reported. Some other examples of verbal/emotional bullying are name calling, taunting, using racial slurs, gossiping about someone, and using remarks sexual in nature. Mary Jo McGrath (2007), who has been studying bullying in schools, states that the purpose of this type of bullying is to cause harm to someone's self-concept. Coloroso states that as verbal bullying continues over a period of time, it can become a normalized behavior towards a bullied individual having the effect of de-humanizing him or her. The verbal abuse then has the potential of escalating to physical aggression.

Coloroso (2003) makes the point that boys use physical aggression in bullying more often than girls. The Department of Education (2013) data on reported bullying in the 2010-11 school year support this finding. Physical bullying like pushing, shoving, or tripping was reported by about nine percent of boys but a bit less than seven percent of girls McGrath (2007) states that the use of physical aggression in bullying is seen as causing harm to someone or their property. Some other examples of physically aggressive acts include slapping, hitting, punching, kicking, choking, poking, twisting limbs (arms, legs) into painful positions, spitting on, destroying someone's clothing,

books, cellular telephones, and papers (such as homework) or other property. In the use of physical aggression, there is an imbalance of power between the bully (the individual committing the acts of aggression) and the bullied (or target of the aggression). This imbalance of power (difference in height, weight, intelligence, physical stamina, affiliation with a clique or a gang, higher social status among peers, or being of the opposite sex) limits the bullied individual's ability to defend him or herself. In Orpinas and Horne's (2006) studies on bullying prevention, they discuss the unintentional outcome of aggressive acts by students against other students. While bullies' aggressive actions are intentional, they may not consider how their actions could potentially affect the bullied person or others witnessing the situation. For instance these authors also suggest that bullies might not think about the possibility that the people they bully may cause physical harm to themselves such as intentionally cutting themselves or attempting/committing suicide. On the surface the targeted student may seem *okay* while returning to school repeatedly enduring bullying situations, but the damage occurring may not be clearly visible to others. Orpinas and Horne state "Repeated acts of aggression generate a deeper level of fear and intimidation than an isolated event" ( p. 15). Both the bully and the target of the aggressive acts know future acts of aggression are likely to occur. While these physical acts of aggression can cause harm to an individual, there is another form of bullying with the potential to hurt someone else without the use of physical contact; relational bullying.

Studies report conflicting findings on gender usage rates of relational bullying. According to Coloroso (2003), relational bullying is used more frequently by girls than boys. Because girls play in smaller groups and spend more time with their friends, this

form of bullying is used more frequently. According to Orpinas and Horne (2006), who have studied gender differences in school bullying, “these variations among study findings suggest that relational aggression may be influenced by other factors besides gender, such as the culture of the local school and community” (p. 20).

Bullying can sometimes be difficult to identify. According to Kohut (2007), in a comparative look at school bullying, friendship patterns are related to bullying. It is natural for groups of friends to have conflicts in their relationships. The problem becomes more than simple conflict among friends when a system of isolation, shunning, exclusion, and rejection is covertly in place. Kohut explains how covert bullying often occurs in relational bullying and is used to alienate and isolate an individual from their friends. One of the primary reasons for using this type of bullying is to destroy friendships. Some examples of this type of bullying include spreading rumors/telling lies, threatening to end friendships, isolation tactics (i.e. not letting someone sit with others in the school cafeteria), exclusion from participating in different forms of play during recess (i.e. excluding from group games on the playground), and not being invited to social events (birthday parties, sleep-overs, etc.) while all other members of a group of friends are invited to participate. These behaviors are indirect forms of socially aggressive acts.

### **C. Characteristics of Individuals Who Perpetrate Acts of Bullying**

Taking a closer look at the potential characteristics of the bully is needed to examine the aggressive acts of bullying. One such characteristic is social skills. Although many bullies believe people like them, they have difficulty developing



relationships with others. Their ability to demonstrate empathy towards others is often limited or non-existent. They often do not have the ability to see situations from someone else's perspective. They will often use others to get what they want. Their needs come first. They may feel powerful when performing aggressive acts of bullying and may take pleasure in dominating others. Often times the student committing the aggressive acts will blame others, will not take responsibility for their own actions, and sometimes will state false allegations towards their targets. They like attention and believe their targets are inferior to them. Many experts agree that the students committing acts of aggression do not have a set of definite, easily identifiable, or typical physical or social characteristics. Bullies have been described as having a broad variety of characteristics. Scaglione and Scaglione (2006) stated in their work on understanding bullies and bullying that bullies have high self-esteem, are popular with other students and teachers, and desire respect from peers. In his description of bullies, Dan Olweus makes the following point "some bully characteristics include aggressiveness towards peers and adults, a positive attitude towards violence and the use of violence, are impulsive, and enjoys hurting others" (1993, p. 35). Olweus further notes that bullies display an aggressive reaction pattern. This aggressive reaction pattern is influenced by negativity, lack of warmth, emotion, and involvement by their parents including permissiveness of the child's aggressive behaviors and the use of physical punishments. He notes that the child's temperament did have a small (less than the aforementioned elements) influence on the development of aggressive reaction patterns. Most experts agree that students committing these acts of aggression come in a wide variety of shapes,

sizes, socio-economic backgrounds, and have different levels of intelligence. Any one of the aforementioned characteristics can have an influence on their power.

#### **D. The Imbalance of Power**

The bully has the advantage of an imbalance of power. While the bully could be physically larger than the bullied student, this does not necessarily have to be the case for an imbalance of power to be present. According to Orpinas and Horne (2006) the bully may also experience an increase in the power imbalance if they believe in the use of aggression and the targeted individual does not. Being more attractive or more socially adept can also contribute to an imbalance of power in a bullying situation. Most children at some point in their childhood have experienced the roles of the individual committing acts of aggression on or towards another student, the target of the aggressive acts, and the bystander. Kohut (2007) states that bullies like crowds, enjoy showing how powerful they are over the victim and desire to publicly humiliate the victim. Bullies do not have one easily identifiable, common characteristic, but the one way to definitively identify a bully is by their behaviors. Their social interactions with peers can offer some insight into the aggressive patterns that they have learned to use with others.

#### **E. The School Community and Relationships**

School community relationships are complex in nature. “Bullies, victims, and bystanders have very complex interrelationships, one cannot exist alone” (Kohut, 2007, p. 119). Groups in schools often take the form of cliques. Cliques are small groups of friends, generally the same age and sex (during young adolescence) consisting of

approximately three to nine individuals. In their work on child development and education, McDevitt & Ormrod (2010) reports that cliques are typically an exclusive group; some individuals are members while other individuals are not admitted. Clique members often share the same interests, values, taste and abilities. If the friendship situation changes and an individual is no longer accepted by one clique, they may gain acceptance into another group. While changing groups is simply stated, this may not be easily accomplished by an individual experiencing relational bullying. The individual experiencing any of the different types of bullying is presented with many challenges to cope with the situation and may feel isolated and alone during such a time but they are not. Student bystanders to peer-to-peer bullying are often well aware of these types of bullying situations as they occur, but may not intervene and support the targeted student.

#### **F. The Student Bystander to Peer-to-Peer Bullying**

While attending school, students are exposed to peer-to-peer bullying. “It is estimated that seventy-five to eighty percent of school-age students are aware of, or directly witness bullying behavior but do nothing to stop it” (Kohut, 2007, p. 115). Student bystanders to these acts of aggression are also affected by these situations. According to Kohut “the bystanders of bullying are silent witnesses to the physical and emotional assaults upon their schoolmates” (p. 13). Few bystanders want to see these acts, but ultimately do not have a choice to do so because bullying often occurs where groups of students congregate. According to Olweus (1993) “most unwanted activities including bullying and antisocial or criminal behavior tend to take place when the parents

do not know what the child is doing, or when they or other adults are absent” (p. 40).

Olweus gives an expansive description of bystanders in his bullying work:

Followers/Henchmen do not start the bullying/do take an active role in the activities;

Supporters/Passive Bullies are supporters of the bully/do not actively participate in the activities;

Passive Supporters/Possible Bullies enjoy the bullying/do not show open support for the bully;

Disengaged Onlookers watch/do not take a stand against the aggressive behavior(s);

Possible Defenders do not like the bullying/do not try to help the target;

Defenders of the Target do not like the bullying/try to help the target.

His explanation describes the bullying behaviors in a social system. The target of the aggressive behavior(s) is surrounded by a variety of student peer bystanders or community members in the aforementioned roles. Student bystanders often do not start the aggression and have choices to contribute to the problem or be a part of the solution. For example, Olweus (1993) points out that some of the bystanders do not like the bullying (i.e. Possible Defenders of the target) but do not try to help the target while others do try to help (i.e. Defenders of the Target), again, indicating student bystanders have choices.

Although student bystanders may or may not consciously choose any one or more of these roles, they do have a choice to do so. Their decision to remain a bystander or to

become one of the other available roles may be influenced by the individual committing the acts of aggression.

Through each bullying experience the student bystander increases their tacit knowledge. The individual acting aggressively may begin to be seen as a model by student bystanders not only for the lack of punishment received, but also for being viewed as respected (or feared) by other students and for receiving monetary rewards (sometimes) for exploiting others. Fields, Kolbert, Crothers, and Hughes, who have studied relational bullying, state “when individuals in the immediate environment are reinforced for their behavior, an observing individual is more likely to emulate that behavior” (2009, p. 18). According to Olweus, when the bully-model is observed being rewarded for their behaviors, the bystander’s own inhibitions may be lowered towards acting aggressively. The bystander may thus be influenced by the bully and want to assert themselves in an aggressive manner termed “social contagion” (pp. 44-45). The student bystander gains real-life experience in bullying behavior and reward systems which have an influence on student bystanders’ decision to participate in bullying.

Groups of students serve as an audience for the bullying *performance*. “It is usually presumed that, because they watch in silence, they condone what they see” (Kohut, 2007, p. 13). The student behaving aggressively relies on the student bystander to get desired results. Student bystanders often unwittingly play a role in the bullying by simply being in the vicinity of the situation. Again, the student bystander acts as an audience for the student committing acts of aggression. They count on the bystander to either become involved in the bullying by joining in the aggressive act(s) or doing nothing to stop it. The student committing acts of aggression seeks the approval of other

students witnessing their aggressive actions and wants their target to be too afraid to tell an adult about the behavior. Inflicting a sense of terror into the target by systematically applying violence towards the target is a tactic used by the student acting aggressively to dominate his or her target while at the same time showing off to his or her audience. The student committing acts of aggression on others relies on student bystanders to view their often perceived superiority and dominance over their targets. Kohut states that the bystander's silence is taken as consent and/or approval by the bully. Even laughter at the target (encouraged by the student acting aggressively) can be viewed as approval from bystanders that can act as a source of reinforcement for the individual committing the aggressive acts. Because they are constantly rewarded for their aggressive behavior, the student committing acts of aggression continuously seeks peer approval and rewards from each experience. Even if the student bystander does not publicly object or intervene in bullying situations, most do not like or approve of the aggressive behavior and are remorseful for not helping others in those situations. Often times the student being targeted and experiencing aggressive acts has friends in school. Their friends do not like to see them getting hurt at the hands of a bully. It may be very difficult for a student bystander to peer-to-peer bullying to watch a friend being hurt. "Experts classify bullying as a form of chronic trauma". (McGrath, 2007, p. 18). Standing by and watching a friend experience bullying is not what a student bystander wants to do.

Adults can also have issues with helping others when they are bystanders to aggressive or emergency situations. Adults have been known to stand idly by without intervening when they knew that another person needed help. One well known example of this lack of action, termed the bystander effect, is the 1964 murder of Kitty Genevese

in New York. Miss Genevese was attacked over a thirty-minute period of time while a reported thirty-eight witnesses heard her cries for help. None of the witnesses intervened or called police on her behalf. So, the inaction of onlookers is not limited to youth or students.

One of the reasons student bystanders do not take action and remain silent during bullying situations is because they may not know what to do. The student bystander may look away, laugh, or leave the scene when bullying takes place. They may feel afraid for not only the victim, but for themselves as well. “Self-preservation is the most powerful human motivating force, even if that preservation comes with the price of seeing others suffer” (Kohut, 2007, p. 82). It may be easier for the student bystander to join in the acts of bullying as he/she begins to think the victim deserves it, had it coming, do not feel a need to stop it, or do not care what happens to the victim.

### **G. Are Student Bystanders Innocent?**

In her work on student bullying, Coloroso has looked at questions on bystander roles in bullying situations. She states “not to acknowledge bullying for what it is or to simply dismiss it is to be a complicit bystander” (2003, p. 163). The purpose of students attending school is to get an education. They are a part of a community designed to facilitate that process. Acts of student peer-to-peer bullying occurs in a variety of locations in schools such as classrooms, hallways, bathrooms, and the playground or recess area. The design of the school including the locations of classrooms, bathrooms, lunchrooms, and other student areas are generally out of students’ control. Those are all areas they must be in at some point in time during their school day. Student bystanders

cannot simply choose not to be in the areas in schools where bullying occurs. Further, “every individual should have the right to be spared oppression and repeated, intentional humiliation, in school as in society at large” (Olweus, 1993, p. 48). All students have a right to utilize areas in schools where bullying often takes place during their pursuit of an education without fear of being harmed. Although students do not have choices regarding being in the aforementioned areas, they do have some choices in their actions or inactions as student bystanders to bullying while in those areas during bullying situations.

The student bystander may make efforts to avoid the bully because of fear for their own safety, or of becoming the bully’s next victim. The student bystander is not only at risk of being victimized or retaliated against by the bully, but is also at risk for losing a friend (if the bully is their friend), experience a loss in their own social status (if they intervene they may be viewed as not being cool), be seen as a snitch among other students (if they tell an adult), or may lose the acceptance of their group of friends. Adults are sometimes viewed by students as a resource in bullying situations. “Students – both victims and bystanders want adults to intervene in bullying and harassment behavior” (McGrath, 2007, p. 22). According to the US Department of Education (2013) only about 40 percent of students who experience being bullied themselves notify an adult of what happened to them. Opportunities for intervention by adults in student bullying situations may decrease if adults are unaware of such situations and students are reluctant to communicate with adults, such as their parents, when help is needed. Olweus (1993) states that although students may have a desire for adults to intervene in bullying situations “...parents of students who are bullied, in particular, who bully others, are



relatively unaware of the problem and talk with their children about it only to a limited extent” (p. 21). A lack of communication between student bystanders and their parents leaves students without the skill-set needed to support others in bullying situations. Student bystanders simply may not know what to do and may fear if they do intervene, they may make the situation worse for the victim and themselves.

#### **H. What Student Bystanders Have Been Taught and Learned**

From a young age children are taught not to tattle on others. “There is an unwritten code among children when it comes to reporting another child’s transgressions. A child’s status in the group often depends on his ability to keep silent” (McGrath, 2007, p. 34). So when a student bystander observes a bullying situation, he may be naturally reluctant to tell an adult for fear of being called a *tattletale* and getting someone into trouble. The bystander’s choice to participate with a student committing acts of aggression may cause him/her to experience a decreased sense of their individual personal responsibility for their own actions. They may also experience a diffusion and dilution of their own responsibility expressed by their lowered feeling of guilt after the situation. “The self-confidence and self-respect of the bystanders are eroded as they wrestle with their fears about getting involved and with the knowledge that to do nothing is to abdicate their moral responsibility to their peer who is the target” (Coloroso, 2003, p. 63).

The student bystander turned participant may also begin to see the victim in a different way. In this context, “the victim is the person who is systematically and repeatedly harassed or used by the bully” (Orpinas & Horne, 2006, p. 20). Victims of

bullying can be classified as passive, provocative, and/or relational. Passive student targets of acts of aggression are singled out without provocation to the bully (possibly because of their passive or submissive behavior), while a provocative target may draw the attention of the bully because of his or her actions (hyperactivity, impulsivity, not staying on task/problems concentrating in class, etc.). Because the provocative target attracts the bully in no way implies it is his or her own fault they are targeted. They are simply classified as provocative because of the affect their behavior has on the bully. The relational target is often the target of covert bullying focused on intentionally inflicting harm, damage, and manipulation to their relationships. Relationships for students are an important part of growth and development. Students spend a majority of their awake time during the school year with other students and they want to be accepted by and have a place in a group. Friends and relationships are a big part of students' identities, so when relationships end, change, or are damaged at the hands of other students through peer-to-peer bullying, the damage felt by the target as well as bystanders can be harmful to the students' self-esteem. These situations may not be easy for students to deal with and they may experience an array of emotions at the time of the bullying and in the future.

The student bystander may experience a form of apathy as these aggressive situations occur. Repeated exposure to bullying over time may de-sensitize student bystanders to future acts of aggression. The student bystander is also at risk for committing acts of aggression towards other students in the future in an effort to model the behavior of bullies who appear to be strong and respected (or feared) by other students. Although they do not like or condone the aggressive actions, a lack of negative

consequences paired with status increases for the student acting aggressively may affect the student bystander's judgment. Student bystanders' unique perspectives expose them to experiences they may carry with them into the future.

The effects of bullying on student bystanders can last into their adult years. Student bystanders often grow up feeling guilty for not helping or stopping bullying. Again, they may also become desensitized to it and begin to believe it is "normal." Because more students witness bullying than those who do not witness it, bullying may become normalized and accepted. "From a bystander's perspective, many forms of aggression are the norm in schools rather than the exception" (Zins, Elias, & Maher, 2007, p. 164). When bullying behaviors become normalized in their life, they may pass those thoughts on to their own children repeating the cycle of desensitization and normalization. In their work on bullying Zins, Elias, and Maher (2007) report that "ironically, adolescents more than children or adults may be at highest risk for conformity to population norms" through peer pressure, violence may be normalized and violence may be not only supported, but also committed by normally non-violent youths (p. 165). Student bystanders may begin to experience changes in the way they view others in the world because of their bullying experiences.

Student bystanders may convince themselves that they simply do not care about the targeted student or their situation. Further, they may begin to perceive the target of the aggression in negative ways such as being worthless and valueless. According to Zins, Elias & Maher (2007) the combination of repeatedly being targeted and a decrease in the victim's value may contribute to lessening the chances that a bystander will support them in bullying situations.

Parents and others responsible for the care of children need to help children to understand at a young age the difference between tattling and telling on someone. One explanation could be that tattling will get someone into trouble, while telling will help get someone out of trouble. Olweus (1993) states "...telling an adult is not tattling. It demonstrates compassion for others" (p. 85). Telling on a peer takes great courage. Adults must demonstrate that when a child is courageous enough to share information on student peer-to-peer bullying it will be taken seriously. The adult should take steps to ensure the child knows that the information they have shared was heard by the adult and will be acted upon – immediately. The child should also be praised by the adult for their bravery in sharing information they may have been uncomfortable talking about. "The bystanders are rarely acknowledged for their involvement or recognized as the potent force they can be to stop the bullying" (Coloroso, 2003, p. 75). Families can play a pivotal role in stopping bullying. Healthy family relationships can strengthen student bystanders. Coloroso states that to help strengthen student bystanders, adults can foster moral independence in the child by having conversations with them regarding being responsible for their own actions, making good decisions, and teaching him/her to evaluate reasons on their own. When children experience good care, they learn how to care for others. According to Coloroso (2003) "parents develop for their children a network of support through six critical life messages given every day: I believe in you. I trust you. I know you can handle life situations. You are listened to. You are cared for. You are very important to me" (p. 92). Providing a nurturing environment where children have the concepts of their value and self-worth reinforced on a continuous basis can help children develop close, healthy family relationships. Close family relations can

help children develop optimism. Coloroso reports “optimistic kids view setbacks, mistakes, and negative social interactions as situations they can control or at least do something about, rather than be immobilized and victimized by them” (p. 92). Learning to interact with family members in a democratic fashion is another valuable skill for student bystanders. Gaining experience in problem solving and working towards solutions with others in a safe a loving environment (such as at home with family members) can be helpful to students in the social environment of school. Learning to compromise and having an understanding that things cannot always be done the way they want them to be done can teach a child to look at others’ needs and consider their feelings instead of just their own. With these skills, student bystanders may be willing to take action in bullying situations. They may also be better equipped to not only deal with seeing bullying situations, but may be motivated to offer assistance to the target of bullying versus simply standing by being affected by the situation.

Student bystanders may experience guilt stemming from their non-action in bullying situations. Their guilt increases each time they witness an act of bullying. The student bystander may not realize the impact bullying situations may have on them later in their lives. Kohut (2007) stated “diminished social skills, lack of self-confidence, a seething core of internal anger and a dark depression are ever-present barriers for the victim who suffered through years of bullying” (p. 36). Student bystanders to peer-to-peer bullying can experience depression as an adult as they attempt to live with the shame and guilt of not helping in bullying situations. Living in the same city or neighborhood where a former student bystander to bullying may see a formerly targeted classmate

could possibly evoke feelings of guilt and shame each time they interact or simply see them.

According to Kohut (2007) since one of the symptoms of clinical major depression is strong feelings of shame and guilt, a former bystander is a prime candidate for developing a mood illness in adulthood, along with a number of other behaviors that they view as personal failures (p. 37). Clinical depression may also be experienced because of their perceived lack of character. The chronic trauma experienced by student bystanders to peer-to-peer bullying may cause students to experience feelings of shame being presented in their futures in the forms of addictions, compulsions, anxiety, disconnections from others, and problems adapting to stress (McGrath, 2007, p. 18). As an adult, the former student bystander may also experience anger towards himself and the student who acted aggressively towards others and have difficulty forming and maintaining relationships in adulthood. They may also experience difficulty experiencing and expressing empathy towards others, may be desensitized towards anti-social behavior, and may behave antisocially themselves. Bystanders to bullying may also have a distorted view of personal responsibility and experience difficulty adhering to accepted societal behaviors. According to Kohut (2007) difficulty solving problems assertively, lack of negotiation skills, and difficulty communicating may be evident. Throughout their experiences, student bystanders to peer-to-peer bullying may develop a false sense of entitlement and a lack of tolerance for differences in others. In the future such a lack of tolerance for others could possible cause problems as they interact with others in society. Having issues of tolerance for others could have negative consequences in their academic life as well as their ability to financially support themselves in the

future as they continue to work through issues related to being a bystander to peer-to-peer bullying.

If student bystanders to peer-to-peer bullying decide to pursue higher education, there could possibly be long-term effects of witnessing bullying behaviors. They will likely be exposed to other students and educators with backgrounds and life experiences different from their own. They may be paired up in small work groups, both inside and outside of the classroom, for school assignments. They may experience difficulties in completing school tasks if they lack the social ability to work cohesively with others because of their differences. They may also miss out on opportunities for learning and personal growth if they are unwilling or simply unable to work with those different from themselves. This may also hold true for their work life. They may find themselves assigned to work teams with a diverse group of individuals based on the skill-sets required for a particular project. The former student bystander to peer-to-peer bullying may perform poorly at work because of issues related to accepting responsibility for their own actions. These negative consequences for bystanders to peer-to-peer bullying may seem hopeless, but all is not lost. The student bystander can make a difference in not only their own lives, but in the lives of others.

The student bystander may eventually recognize that they do have choices. They can refuse to be a part of the student bystander group and make an effort to contribute to a solution to the problem of bullying. This can be done if the student bystander is willing to “take away the bully’s audience; empower bystanders in refusing to take part, silently watch, and not report bullying” (Coloroso, 2003, p. 14). The student bystander’s presence can be used as an instrument for change. They can be transformed from

someone simply seeing or knowing about bullying into a witness. Coloroso expressed the notion that “the role of bystander can be transformed into that of a witness: someone willing to stand up, speak out, and act against injustice” (p. 5). Student bystanders to peer-to-peer bullying can be taught to take on different roles in bullying situations with supports in place.

There are some things adults can do to support student bystanders. Careful selection of terms used to describe students can be helpful in these endeavors. For example, labeling a child a bully may send the message that he or she does not have the ability to change unacceptable behavior and will always be a bully. Of concern in these bullying situations is the child’s behavior, not their total person. Adults should take care not to label a child a victim when they are really the target of aggressive acts. The label of victim implies that the person is powerless in the situation. The individuals being targeted have choices and power in not only how they present themselves to others, but also in how they respond to others’ behavior towards them. Also, referring to students as bystanders places limitations on their abilities and infers that they are limited to being passive people with knowledge of bullying situations lacking the ability to act. The use of positive descriptive language is one way to support those involved in these bullying roles (student displaying aggressive behaviors, target of the aggressive behaviors, witness, defender, etc.) in an effort to discover solutions to the problem of student peer-to-peer bullying.

Coloroso (2003) states “what needs to be found is a social solution to this antisocial activity” (p. 40). The student bystander can make a difference in the power



level of the bully. She further postulates some steps to support and empower the student bystander:

1. Intervene immediately;
2. Create opportunities to do good. Helping others is good for their own happiness and self-esteem;
3. Nurture empathy by asking how would they feel;
4. Teach student bystanders age-appropriate friendships;
5. Provide constructive, pleasant, energizing activities;
6. Teach the child to will good for others with a focus on wanting others to be happy and successful.

Adults should not rely on students to report bullying situations or to keep each other safe.

### **I. Student Safety Responsibility**

All adults are responsible for students' safety and play a critical role in supporting student bystanders to peer-to-peer bullying. Forty-nine of the 50 United States have statutory prohibitions on bullying. Montana is the only state without such protections. These statutory prohibitions are in place to protect students (including student bystanders) from bullying. If students are not safeguarded against bullying, society may pay financially and in other ways. "...Bystanders may turn out to be victims with legitimate claims of illegal harassment if the environment is proved to be sufficiently hostile and intimidating so as to interfere with studying and learning" (McGrath, 2007, p.

35). School districts and their staffs can be charged with negligence opening up the possibility for monetary lawsuits based on not protecting students' rights to obtain an education and traumatic injury to student bystanders. McGrath states "in an environment of fear, discomfort, and powerlessness, student learning is often inhibited" (p. 36). Additionally, if the student bystander acts out anti-socially (as a youth or an adult), they could have legal issues such as incarceration resulting in a cost to taxpayers and perhaps injury to others in society.

Student bystanders to peer-to-peer bullying are a part of society. According to Orpinas and Horne (2006), "beyond the reduction of aggression, parents, psychologists, and school professionals need to increase the positive qualities of the environment in which children live and learn" (p. 3). Parents can ensure that the student's home environment is a safe place where they are not exposed to violence against others or themselves. Teachers and school psychologists can make efforts to be approachable and trustworthy to students in need of their help. Being a reliable and trustworthy adult is important in the support of student bystanders to peer-to-peer bullying. McGrath (2007) states "for students, a safe adult is someone who will take them seriously and take prompt action when told about peer harassment" (p. 22). Adult roles in peer-to-peer bullying are important. "Adults also need to provide opportunities for children to learn social skills that will help them establish both positive relationships with peers and adults and the academic skills they need to succeed in school" (Orpinas & Horne, 2006, p. 3). Many experts describe bullying and bystanders to bullying as social in nature. Sixty-percent of the time, acts of bullying stops within ten seconds of bystander intervention (Kidshelp Phone, 2014). Because of the up-close and unique perspective of the student bystander to

peer-to-peer bullying, the keys to supporting them as bystanders may lie in conversations with them. After all, they are the true experts often evident by years and years of real-life experiences in this area.

## **Chapter Three**

### **III. The Research Study and Methods**

#### **A. Questions About Bystanders to Peer-to-Peer Bullying**

Seeking answers to questions about student bystanders to peer-to-peer bullying during this research study was done by asking questions about observations of other students being bullied. Students who were actively involved in bullying either as bullies or victims were not asked to participate. Study participants were asked questions about seeing peer-to-peer bullying in school, what they do when they see it, and how seeing it makes them feel. They were also asked what adults could do to support them in reporting bullying to adults.

#### **B. The Study Participants**

Research participants for this study were recruited from the Canaan Outreach Center, a not-for-profit organization located and operated in urban Toledo, Ohio. The organization provides community outreach services with goals to develop and enhance self-esteem and leadership skills in low-income, inner-city youth by operating after-school and summer day camp programs for youth ages eight to eighteen. About two-thirds of the Canaan Outreach Center participants are boys, approximately half are age ten and under with the next largest group being between the ages of eleven and sixteen. All of the program participants attend a Toledo Public School, and less than one percent are non-African American.

As a Board of Director member of the Canaan Outreach Center, I have had an opportunity to meet and interact with many of the Outreach Center's participants and

their parents during program activities and events. I was interested in working with this group of youth because of the interactions I have observed between the Outreach Center's participants and with adults at the Outreach Center. Of particular interest to me is the way younger children initiate helping older children and adults, and the conversational interactions between participants. Older youth can often be seen initiating conversations and activities with younger children. A mutual respect is evident between the older and younger program participants.

Parents were engaged in conversations on the research project on several different days as the researcher shared information on the research study. Initially interactions with parents were verbally brief. Additional conversations were engaged in, often initiated by parents wanting more information on the study. Flyers with more information were also provided to parents showing interest in the study. Students and their parents from the Canaan Outreach Center between the ages of eight and eighteen were invited to participate in the voluntary study on student bystanders to peer-to-peer bullying. See Appendix A for additional participant demographic information.

### **C. The Instrument**

A set of pre-determined questions were developed by the researcher to answer the research questions. The questions posed to student participants solicited information from their perspectives as student bystanders to peer-to-peer bullying. The questions did not refer to them as participants in bullying, but were about their views as observers of other students being bullied. Student participants were asked to share information on what they did the last time they saw another student (not themselves) get bullied and their own interactions with adults when they saw another student get bullied. They were also

asked how they sometimes feel or what happens to them when they see another student get bullied. See Appendix B for a complete copy of the research study interview tool.

#### **D. The Research Questions**

1. Does being a student bystander to peer-to-peer bullying affect students' desire and motivation to attend school and learn while there? If so, how?
2. How do student bystanders to peer-to-peer bullying feel when they see bullying occur? What do they do when they see student peer-to-peer bullying?
3. What, if anything, could adults do to support student bystanders to peer-to-peer bullying?

#### **E. Conducting the Interviews**

Oral interviews were conducted with student participants using the pre-determined questions on the research instrument. All participants and their guardians were informed in writing and verbally that their participation in the study was completely voluntary prior to beginning the interviews. Student participants and their guardians were also informed that participants were not required to answer each question (at the student's discretion). Written permission for voluntary participation was obtained from both the participant and their guardian prior to engaging the student in the study. The study interviews took place at the Aurora Gonzalez Community Believe Center in Toledo, Ohio during a Canaan Outreach Center basketball activity. Outreach Center participants and their parents were interacting with other students and parents on site. Many of the Outreach Center's participants and parents congregated in a large room in the Believe Center. The room contained seven, eight-foot long tables and chairs. As

parents and students talked, their voices created a dull roar of voices and laughter. Students were walking around and eating snacks. The air smelled of freshly popped buttery popcorn and pizza.

The study interviewer had an opportunity to speak with parents and students both collectively and individually and to answer any questions they had about the study. Student participants were interviewed individually in a private area away from other students in a conference type room. The student and the interviewer sat directly across from each other at a blue, metal, picnic style table with attached bench style seats. In some cases, a parent remained present during the interview and sat next to the student at the table.

The oral interviews took approximately fifteen minutes to conduct including sharing information on the study and instructions given to the student. Student participants and their guardians were also informed that their answers would be kept confidential. All participants were asked the same set of questions in the same order.

## Chapter Four

### IV. Study Results and Data Analysis

#### A. The Study Results

All of the study participants are classified by the researcher as African-American (self-reporting of this demographic was not requested) and attend a Toledo Public school – as self-reported during general conversations. Student participants ranged in age from eight to 18. There were fourteen male and six female participants in the research study. The only age not represented was the age of seventeen. Only the sixth, seventh, and ninth grades were not represented by student participants. The Canaan Outreach Center usually has more male than female participants with a variety of ages represented between eight and eighteen. In the oral interviews, student participants were asked if they had seen another student get bullied this school year. The school year had been in session for approximately seven months. Fifty-five percent of these students reported that they had seen another student (not themselves) get bullied this school year while 44% reported not having seen another student (not themselves) get bullied this school year. Younger students (aged ten and younger) reported bullying more often than older students. Because more students witness bullying than those who do not witness it, bullying may become normalized and accepted. Over time the older bystanders may have become desensitized to seeing bullying and may begin to believe it is “normal.” “From a bystander’s perspective, many forms of aggression are the norm in schools rather than the exception” (Zins, Elias, & Maher, 2007, p. 164). Of the student participants reporting having seen another student get bullied this school year, 82% reported seeing bullying occur once or more a day and 18% reported seeing bullying



occur once or more a week. There was no indication by respondents that seeing acts of bullying in school was viewed by them as unusual.

When student participants were asked to think about the last time they saw another student (not themselves) get bullied and to tell the interviewer what they did, younger student participants responded that they performed the same actions in bullying situations as older students such as telling an adult, engaging the bully, and engaging and supporting the targeted student(s). Forty percent reported that they told a teacher or the principal. Eighty-six percent of the student bystanders reporting that they told a teacher or the principal were males between the ages of eight and sixteen. Twenty-five percent of the student respondents reportedly engaged the bully verbally and expressed their disapproval of the bullying behavior. Eighty percent of those students were males between the ages of ten and fifteen years old. Fifteen percent of student respondents stated that they engaged and supported the target with words of support and encouragement to move away from the situation. Girls displayed *caring intervention* strategies more often than boys, while boys' interventions were more direct in the forms of directly engaging the bully or telling an adult. The female students involved in this type of bullying reaction were aged eight to sixteen. Another action student bystanders to peer-to-peer bullying took was to get support from another student bystander. Five percent of the student respondents said they got support from another student bystander to help stop the bullying situation. All of these student bystanders were male. Support to the target was given in the form of both student bystanders verbally engaging the target. By talking to the target, both student bystanders were able to get the target away from the bullying situation. Five percent (all male students) of bystanders reported their action as

doing “nothing” the last time they saw another student being bullied while 10% did not respond to the question. None of the female participants reported *doing nothing* as their reaction. In a follow-up question, student participants were asked did they tell an adult. Fifty-five percent of the student participants reported that they told an adult while 15% did not tell an adult. One student participant shared that they did not tell an adult because “they felt they took care of it” on their own while another participant stated “I didn’t know if it would help.”

None of the student participants gave suggestions or ideas about what would help them to tell an adult when they were asked what would help them to tell an adult when they saw another student (not themselves) getting bullied. Of the responses received, 35% did state that they would tell an adult such as a teacher, principal or other adult. One student stood out to me during the interviews, particularly when asked this question. She was a twelve year old female. She was dressed in blue jeans and wore a pink and white long sleeved shirt with a large, blue glittered star across the front. Her hair was parted down the middle, with one pony tail on each side of her head. She also wore a headband (a lighter shade of blue), and blue eyeglasses. She carried a small, brown purse which she wore across her body at the shoulder. Her conversation with me throughout the interview was what I would describe as straight forward. As she sat with a straight posture across from me during the interview, she maintained almost constant eye contact with me while answering questions. She answered questions with a steady, clearly audible tone of voice. When she was asked *what would help you to tell an adult when you see another student (not you) getting bullied*, she responded “just keep it straight with the teacher; just don’t sugarcoat it!” She then flashed a large smile across her face. I

could see confidence in her eyes as she answered the question offering me advise on how to help another student in need.

Twenty-five percent of the participant respondents simply stated that they wanted to help the person being bullied. Comments were shared such as they wanted to “help the other person to get help and not get bullied again,” “don’t want the other person to get hurt,” and “want to help them not get hurt.” Additionally, student bystanders also reported they wanted to “stick up for them.” Five percent of participant respondents reported that having an anonymous bullying report available for use by students was helpful to them in reporting bullying to an adult. Not having a teacher around made it hard for student bystanders to report bullying was also reported by 5% of the participants.

Student participants were asked if their school has a way for them to tell an adult if they see another student (not themselves) being bullied and if so, is there a way to tell an adult without telling the adult their name. Eighty-five percent of the student respondents reported that their school does have a way for them to do so, while 10% reported their school does not have a way for them to tell an adult if they see another student being bullied. Eighty-percent of the student respondents reporting there is a way to report the bullying to an adult, also stated that there is a way for them to report bullying without giving their name. Although this anonymous reporting system is in place in schools as reported by respondents, 40% verbally told an adult in person the last time they saw another student (not themselves) being bullied without regard for remaining anonymous.

When student participants were polled about how they sometimes feel or what happens to them when they see another student getting bullied using the pre-determined

list on the study instrument, the respondents reported a wide variety of both physical and emotional difficulties related to seeing another student being bullied. Sixty percent of respondents reported not wanting to eat, feeling unsafe, and like they did not want to be with friends. Fifty-five percent reported having bad dreams about what they saw, and 45% wanted to eat more than usual. Thirty-five percent of student respondents also reported feeling angry, worried, having trouble paying attention in class, and having trouble sleeping or wanting to sleep more than usual. Having a feeling of not knowing what to do was reported by 35% of student respondents. Feeling powerless, feeling bad for the person being bullied, tired – low energy, feeling like they did not want to go to school, and their heart beating faster was reported by 25% of student respondents. Twenty percent of student respondents reported feeling afraid, while feeling sick, such as having a headache or stomach ache, was reported by 15% of respondents. Five percent reported feeling sad, lonely, and nervous. Both male and female student bystanders to peer-to-peer bullying reported experiencing emotional or physical feelings (change in appetite, bad dreams, feeling unsafe, anger, worry, trouble paying attention in class and trouble sleeping, etc.) related to seeing another student (not themselves) being bullied.

## Chapter Five

### V. Conclusions and Discussion of Study Findings

#### A. Conclusions and Discussion

Student bystanders to peer-to-peer bullying were more often than not willing to inject themselves into bullying situations in some manner. They were willing to engage the bully directly, engage the target in a supportive manner both with words and their actions to move the target away from the bullying situation, or tell an adult. They did not simply stand by, watch, or go away as indicted by some literature. They often displayed courage by their engagement of the bully and targeted students. Especially noteworthy were student bystander self-reports that they wanted to help, even though they sometimes did not know what to do. Gathering more information from the student bystander's perspective on what may be helpful to them in coping with their feelings about being a bystander to bullying could prove helpful in supporting them during these situations. Student bystanders to peer-to-peer bullying wanted to do good and to help other students without being told to do so.

Many student bystanders to peer-to-peer bullying were intrinsically motivated to help others without displaying regard for their own safety at that time or in the future. Their comments were focused on their concern for the individual being bullied, not about themselves. Insight into their courageous acts in helping other students may be useful to other student bystanders to bullying. None of the student participants named or discussed a specific idea, other than an anonymous bullying report available in school, on what could be done to help them to report bullying they saw. It was not clear during this research

study if the student respondents were not comfortable sharing their ideas, did not have any ideas to offer, or simply did not understand the question as presented to them.

Having bad dreams about what they saw, having trouble sleeping and/or wanting to sleep more could make the student feel tired, sleepy, have decreased amounts of energy, or have difficulties concentrating in school. Difficulty paying attention in class after seeing another student get bullied could take a bystander's focus away from the materials they are supposed to be learning while in class. Being pre-occupied by thoughts of the acts of bullying they saw could cause the student bystander to miss important information being taught. If they are not learning all the information they are expected to learn in classroom lessons (also expected to be applied and practiced at home), they could experience a drop in their grades.

Physical symptoms such as having headaches could also interfere with their ability to complete educational tasks as well as their attendance records. If they are not in school, they cannot be taught or learn information being presented by their teacher(s) thus increasing the risk that they will fall behind in their learning at that time and as they get older and continue going forward through the school system. Struggles with their grades could cause a decrease in self-confidence and act as discouragement to their efforts and motivation towards learning. Students often learn from each other. If the student bystander to peer-to-peer bullying lacks the ability to work with other students, they may miss out on opportunities to learn from others in their age-group. If other students in their class are excelling in learning, the student bystander may feel like a failure in school.

School may be seen as unsafe and not a fun place for learning by student bystanders to peer-to-peer bullying and they may have reduced opportunities for learning in school. If they do not want to attend school or stay at home, have trouble concentrating while there, or are focused on bullying situations they have seen, they could possibly miss out on getting the most out of their educational experience and perform poorly. Educators and the public are well aware of the national crisis of high dropout rates in most major cities in the country. Witnessing bullying in schools is perhaps one other risk factor for dropping out of school that has not been considered. Because of increased experiences of feeling like a failure (because of poor performance in school), the student bystander to peer-to-peer bullying may decide to drop out of school, not complete high school and decide not to pursue higher education or other skills training. Their educational attainment and skills training will be influential in their qualifications for jobs as an adult. They may have to take lower paying positions with less desirable fringe benefits because they do not qualify for higher paying positions. Feelings of failure and guilt over not helping or doing more to help targets of bullying could possibly be carried with the student into their adult years.

Eighty-two percent of student respondents reported seeing bullying occur every day this school year alone. Repeatedly seeing another student get bullied over time lessens the likelihood that the student bystander will be helpful (intervene or tell an adult). As the bystander gets older, they may experience difficulties related to having a lack of empathy for others. An unwillingness or inability to help others, including people in their own family, could adversely affect familial relationships. Stressed family relationships could lead to the student's isolation and lack of social supports for dealing

with difficult life situations and experiences. Efforts to cope with difficult or stressful life experiences without socially acceptable behaviors could manifest in the form of anger, aggression, and violence. If the student bystander to peer-to-peer bullying causes physical harm or destruction to another person or their property, they could be subject to criminal and/or civil charges in their youth, or as an adult. A criminal record could limit the friendships they can make or maintain.

Student bystanders to peer-to-peer bullying may experience difficulties forming and maintaining relationships. This could interfere in their enjoyment of time being spent with friends they do have. Spending time with friends helps students develop both social and communication skills they will need in the future. Their ability to develop leadership skills which could be useful now and into their futures could be negatively affected. Opportunities to develop these social skills will be reduced because of negative experiences related to being a student bystander to peer-to-peer bullying.

Student bystanders to peer-to-peer bullying experience repeated trauma each time they see another student being bullied which may eventually normalize the behavior in the bystander's mind. Kohut (2007) stated "diminished social skills, lack of self-confidence, a seething core of internal anger and a dark depression are ever-present barriers for the victim who suffered through years of bullying" (p. 36). Over time, the student bystander may develop a lack of tolerance for others and experience challenges in the workplace as an adult. Some of the challenges they may face in the workplace when faced with working with others with different backgrounds and life experiences could include the inability get along with others and the inability to view others opinions and contributions as valuable. Difficulties working as a team member to meet job



expectations based on experiences of seeing group encounters as stressful may cause the individual to have issues remaining employed. A lack of steady employment will have an impact on the individual's ability to support themselves which could possibly develop into a need for social supports and programs to live.

Not having supporting adults willing to take student bystander to peer-to-peer bullying reports of bullying seriously (listen, acknowledge, thank, and act upon) could possibly lead to issues with trust for those responsible for keeping society safe. For example, if students do not develop trust for authority figures, such as teachers, principals and other adults in school, they may begin to develop a distrust for others such as the court system, children advocacy agencies and staff, and police which could be problematic not only when needing help (they may be reluctant to seek help or support), but also when interacting with them as well. The foundation for a distrust for authority could possibly be laid through peer-to-peer bullying and bystander situations because of adult actions or lack thereof.

Student bystanders to peer-to-peer bullying may also have lowered inhibitions related to violence. If they are unable to maintain relationships with neighbors in non-violent ways, they may experience difficulties in maintaining stable housing. Innocent community members could possibly be hurt at the hands of student bystanders to peer-to-peer bullying because they may not have developed the social skills to deal with others in non-violent ways. Acts of violence towards others could cause the individual to be put in jail (at a cost to the community) and have a criminal record. Having a criminal record could also limit the individual's ability to obtain gainful employment to support themselves once released if sentenced to serve time in jail. The student bystander to

peer-to-peer bullying may exhibit bullying behavior as they get older. As an adult they could potentially bully or even abuse their own children requiring interventions from social agencies. By modeling, they could even pass bullying behaviors on to their own children creating a cycle of anti-social behavior.

Depression and other emotional illnesses may manifest in the form of addictions. Society will likely be negatively affected by an individual abusing drugs, alcohol or displaying other self-abusive behaviors. “In the adult world, bystanders pay the price by rarely living up to their potential and choosing convenient decisions rather than healthy and socially accepted decisions (Kohut, 2007, p. 58).” Increased medical costs for the treatment of conditions related to feelings they have from being a bystander to peer-to-peer bullying will add to healthcare systems already experiencing increases in costs. If the individual is unemployed or underemployed, society may have to contribute to or pay for their healthcare.

One theme that was repeatedly shared by student respondents was their degree of reliance on adults in schools for support as bystanders to peer-to-peer bullying situations. Although they also relied on other student bystanders, they relied heavily on the support and availability of teachers, principals, and other adults while in school. Adult’s presence and availability was important in the support of the student bystanders’ decisions to report bullying situations. Often student bystanders to peer-to-peer bullying want to have frank and open communications with adults such as teachers and principals as stated by one of the student study participants when she said “just keep it straight with the teacher; just don’t sugarcoat it!”

Ongoing educational efforts in the school system for all staff (bus drivers, lunchroom staff, hall monitors, etc.), not just teachers and principals, on protocols for how to respond to bullying situations (such as immediate actions) they see and/or are reported to them by others is important in efforts to stop bullying and support student bystanders. By gaining input from staff, other than teachers and principals, on what they see and how they currently respond can be helpful in identifying bullying situations and supporting all students involved, including bystanders.

Educating adults on what bullying is and what it is not, including terminology such as labels, is also important. Society as a whole must take care in the use of labels for students. The label bystander denotes someone without action, but the student bystanders to peer-to-peer bullying in this study were willing, and often did take action. Labeling a student a bully suggests that the individual is not only a bully, but that they do not have the potential to change their behaviors. It is the individual's actions that are in question, not their entire person. The label victim suggests that the student being aggressively targeted is powerless and without choice. The target of the aggression does have a voice and can be active in the choice not to be treated unjustly. They may need the support of others such as adults to do so, but they are not helpless or hopeless as the label implies.

While it is not the sole responsibility of the students to keep other students safe, by working together and with supports from adults, student bystanders to peer-to-peer bullying could play a vital role in efforts to make schools a safe place for all students. Society can play a role in irradiating bullying in schools. One way to do this is by all adults being supportive to all students, not just the ones they know personally. Adults

can acknowledge good and helpful behaviors in youth when it is observed not only in schools, but in the community and homes as well.

Family supports can help students develop optimism for stressful social situations such as bullying. They can help the student to learn problem solving skills from each experience as well as learn how to have more control over their experiences. Simply talking with student bystanders to peer-to-peer bullying and letting them express their feelings to adults can help the student get out some of the frustrations they may be feeling related to being a bystander to bullying instead of carrying anger and ill feelings into their future. Being a bystander to peer-to-peer bullying can be a positive role for youth in schools. Their role as a bystander could be transformed into a voice for others in the form of an active witness. When bystanders to peer-to-peer bullying are supported by adults, they have the power to change not only single situations, but an entire culture as well.

## **B. Where Do We Go From Here?**

This topic is important not only because of the affects peer-to-peer bullying has on student bystanders, but also the affects it has on society as a whole. We do not know what long-term effects student bystanders to peer-to-peer will experience, but others suggest they could possibly experience depression and other emotional issues. According to Kohut (2007) one of the symptoms of clinical major depression is strong feelings of shame and guilt possibly making a former bystander to peer-to-peer bullying is a prime candidate for developing a mood illness in adulthood (p. 37). Clinical depression may also be experienced because of a perceived lack of character by student bystanders to

peer-to-peer bullying. The chronic trauma experienced by student bystanders to peer-to-peer bullying may cause students to experience feelings of shame being presented in their futures in the forms of addictions, compulsions, anxiety, disconnections from others, and problems adapting to stress (McGrath, 2007, p. 18). Current literature and the results of this research study suggest a need for additional study of student bystanders to peer-to-peer bullying to learn more about how to better support them not only in reporting peer-to-peer bullying, but also how to support them through their feelings after they see bullying.

Additionally, research from parents and other family members' perspectives on their interactions with student bystanders to peer-to-peer bullying could be helpful in not only helping family members identify a student experiencing difficulties related to being a bystander to peer-to-peer bullying, but could also be a platform for educating parents on how to be another trusted adult in the ongoing efforts to end bullying in schools. Student participants did not mention or discuss any parent, guardian, or other family member support related to the experiences of being a student bystander to bullying.

More research is also needed on why some student bystanders report peer-to-peer bullying acts to adults while others do not and why some student bystanders are comfortable providing support to targets while others are not. Some other unanswered question remain after the completion of this research study:

1. What is behind student bystanders' acts of courage when they intervene in bullying situations? Are they simply motivated by wanting to keep another student from getting hurt or have they been taught or learned some value in their homes related to helping others?

2. Do student bystanders' families have an influence on bystanders' reporting of peer-to-peer bullying? If so, what are the influences?

Peer-to-peer bullying is a community problem. It is not just the problem of the students behaving aggressively, the targeted individuals, or the student bystanders. The effects on student bystanders to peer-to-peer bullying could not only negatively affect students at the time the bullying occurs, but could also have long-lasting effects well into their adult lives. Those effects could also cross over into the lives of their children and other family members' lives, the lives of others in their community, and the economy. Adults must work together, as one community, to support student bystanders to peer-to-peer bullying and search for solutions to this social problem until it no longer exists.

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**Appendix A**

**Student Peer-to-Peer Bullying and Bystanders Study  
Participant Demographics**

<b>PARTICIPANT NUMBER</b>	<b>AGE</b>	<b>GRADE</b>	<b>SEX</b>
1	15	10	FEMALE
2	18	12	MALE
3	12	6	FEMALE
4	12	6	FEMALE
5	10	4	MALE
6	8	3	FEMALE
7	11	6	MALE
8	16	10	MALE
9	13	8	MALE
10	14	8	MALE
11	12	6	MALE
12	13	8	MALE
13	10	4	MALE
14	9	3	MALE
15	10	4	MALE
16	10	4	MALE
17	8	3	MALE
18	9	4	MALE
19	16	11	FEMALE
20	16	11	FEMALE

## Appendix B

### Student Witnesses of Peer Bullying

#### Survey

What grade in school are you in now? \_\_\_\_\_ How old are you? \_\_\_\_\_  
I am a: Boy  Girl

Bullying is when one student does things on purpose and over and over to hurt another student. Some examples of bullying are hitting, kicking, punching, pinching, pulling hair, destroying someone's property like their books, papers, clothes, phones, name calling, spreading rumors, keeping someone from joining in with others in a group. Doing any one of these things over and over to another student is bullying.

**Please only think about this school year when answering questions.**

This school year, have you seen another student (not you) get bullied? Yes  No   
If Yes, how often: Once or more a day   
Once or more a week   
Once or more a month

Think about the last time you saw another student (not you) get bullied, what did you do? \_\_\_\_\_

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Did you tell an adult? Yes  No

If you *did not* tell an adult, why not? \_\_\_\_\_

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What would help you to tell an adult when you see another student (not you) getting bullied?

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Check all the boxes that describe how you sometimes feel or what happens to you when you see another student (not you) get bullied.

- |                                            |                                                                              |                                                      |
|--------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Angry             | <input type="checkbox"/> Like You Don't Know What to Do                      | <input type="checkbox"/> Tired – Low Energy          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sad               | <input type="checkbox"/> My Heart Beats Faster                               | <input type="checkbox"/> Want to Eat More Than Usual |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Afraid            | <input type="checkbox"/> Feel Bad for the Student Being Bullied              |                                                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lonely            | <input type="checkbox"/> Feel Sick – Headache, Stomach Ache                  |                                                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Nervous           | <input type="checkbox"/> Like You Don't Want to Go to School                 |                                                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Don't Want to Eat | <input type="checkbox"/> Like You Don't Want to Be with Friends              |                                                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Powerless         | <input type="checkbox"/> Have Trouble Paying Attention in Class              |                                                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Unsafe            | <input type="checkbox"/> Have Trouble Sleeping/Want to Sleep More Than Usual |                                                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Worried           | <input type="checkbox"/> Have Bad Dreams About What You Saw                  |                                                      |

Does your school have a way for you to tell an adult if you see another student (not you) being bullied?

Yes  No

If Yes, at your school is there a way to tell an adult if you see another student (not you) get bullied without telling the adult your name? Yes  No

**Those are all the questions I have. Thank you very much for your help with this survey.**

For Office Use Only: Guardian Consent Obtained Y / N      Survey No.: \_\_\_\_\_  
Child Assent Obtained Y / N