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Publication Date
2018

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles

Calculated Costs: Cyberbystanders' Beliefs about Helpfulness

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Education

by

Leigh Smith Fauber

2018

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Calculated Costs: Cyberbystanders' Beliefs about Helpfulness

by

Leigh Smith Fauber

Doctor of Education

University of California, Los Angeles, 2018

Professor Kathryn M. Anderson, Co-Chair

Professor Mark P. Hansen, Co-Chair

Cyberbullying is a complex and challenging problem that affects nearly a quarter of school-aged students each year (Holfeld & Grabe, 2012; Patchin & Hinduja, 2015). Interventions aimed at decreasing the prevalence of bullying in schools have turned to whole-school approaches (Salmivalli, 2014). Through this whole-school lens, bystanders have become a key population for researchers to study, as most bullying incidents, including cyberbullying, have witnesses (Lenhart et al., 2011). These witnesses, or bystanders, have the power to intervene on behalf of the victim, and most bystanders report the desire to help, although most do not in fact intervene (Jones et al., 2015). What bystanders consider helpful in cases of bullying, however, is largely missing from the literature. This study aimed to close that gap by asking 20 middle-school cyberbystanders what they considered helpful in their online communities, as well as what factors may motivate them to be helpful (e.g., popularity, friendship, intensity of bullying). Each

middle-school cyberbystander (nine female, 11 male) participated in a one-on-one, semi-structured interview that lasted approximately 30-45 minutes. Interviews were digitally recorded, transcribed, and coded to explore the themes that emerged. For the students in this study, the most helpful action cyberbystanders could take was peer support. Peer support was defined as comforting victims, spending time with them, and listening to them. However, the most important factor in determining whether to help was how close the victim was to the bystander. The closer the victim was to the cyberbystander, the more likely the cyberbystander was to show support for the victim. The belief in peer support was extended only to close friends, not non-friends or strangers. One of the main reasons for this preference was that cyberbystanders did not believe they would know what to say or how to comfort someone outside of their immediate friend group. Another key finding was cyberbystanders' aversion to defending a victim, even if that victim was a friend. Defending was largely viewed as a public act, and as such, students had a heightened fear of peer backlash for posting messages of support in a group chat, which could result in the cyberbystander getting bullied.

The dissertation of Leigh Smith Fauber is approved.

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University of California, Los Angeles

2018

DEDICATION

For my wonderful husband, Scott, and our two amazing children, Nathan and Noa. I could not imagine going through this experience without your unwavering love and support. You are my inspiration now and always.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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PUBLICATIONS AND PRESENTATIONS

Fauber, L. (2018). *Stuck in the middle: Cyberbystanders' beliefs about helpfulness*. Poster presented at the 5th Annual Research & Inquiry Conference, The University of California, Los Angeles, California.

Fauber, L., & Morlok, M. (2015, April). *Playing around in the lab: Engaging students in science*. Poster presented at the Playful Learning Summit, Milken Community Schools, Los Angeles, CA.

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CHAPTER ONE

Students' academic success and peer-to-peer treatment are among two of the most pressing concerns for school administrators (Yeager & Dweck, 2012). The latter issue, in fact, has been shown to impact students' academic achievement (Juvonen, Wang, & Espinoza, 2011). Peer mistreatment becomes even more problematic when it migrates from the physical domain of the schoolyard to the cyber domain (Ockerman, Kramer, & Bruno, 2014). With little-to-no adult supervision and the increased ability to be anonymous, cyberbullying is a growing and complex phenomenon that schools across the country find challenging (Shariff & Hoff, 2007). Some schools address peer mistreatment through traditional anti-bullying programs that incorporate the cyber component of bullying. However an important target group—cyberbystanders—is often under-utilized in intervention efforts (Salmivalli, 2014). Understanding why and how cyberbystanders intervene is critical to the development of interventions that reduce peer mistreatment online (Cross & Walker, 2013; Dillon & Bushman, 2014). In order to better understand this important group, this dissertation will focus on cyberbystanders' experiences in witnessing bullying and peer mistreatment, specifically their beliefs about helpful behaviors and what may affect their intentions to be helpful to cybervictims.

Background of the Problem

Today's students live their social lives as much in the digital world as the real one. According to a recent Pew survey, 92% of teens (ages 13-17) report daily online activities, with nearly a quarter of those surveyed reporting constant online activities (Lenhart, 2015). For students, cyberspace provides freedom from adult supervision both at home and at school, but online communication differs from face-to-face communication in a number of ways. Photos, videos, and written posts, for instance, can be re-shared with others. Shared content is permanent

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and leaves a record. Verbal and non-verbal cues are absent and/or difficult to read, and the Internet is always on, always accessible (Kowalski, Guimetti, Schroeder, & Lattanner, 2014). These differences can increase the chances of cyberbullying and peer mistreatment (Pearson, Andersson, & Porath, 2005).

Like traditional bullying, cyberbullying can be identified by three characteristics: an intention to harm, a power imbalance, and repetition (Smith, del Barrio, & Tokunaga, 2013). However, unlike traditional bullying, cybervictims cannot easily escape their bully because online aggression can strike in any physical location such as home or school. Furthermore, the "potential for widespread public distribution" (Biegel, Kim, & Welner, 2016, p. 248), as well as the anonymity of the cyberbully, further exacerbate the power dynamic of online bullying, harassment and intimidation (Biegel et al., 2016; Smith et al., 2013).

Students on the receiving end of cyberbullying report "feelings of sadness, anxiety, and fear, and an inability to concentrate which affect[s] their grades" (Mishna, Cook, Gadalla, Daciuk, & Solomon, 2010, p. 363) and which may cause them to skip school or bring weapons for self-protection. Cyberbullying has also been cited in a number of student suicides (Biegel et al., 2016).

While cyberbullying is a worldwide phenomenon (Campbell, 2013; Nocentini, Calmaestra, Schultze-Krumbholz, Scheithauer, Ortega, & Menesini, 2010), statistics regarding its pervasiveness vary widely with reports of victimization ranging from 5.5% to 72% (Patchin & Hinduja, 2012). This discrepancy may reflect differences in how cyberbullying is defined and measured (Holfeld & Grabe, 2012; Newey & Magson, 2010; Tokunaga, 2010), as well as issues of self-reporting (Furlong, Sharkey, Felix, Tanigawa, & Green, 2010; Midgett, Doumas, Sears, Lundquist, & Hausheer, 2015). Among American youth, researchers typically find that 20-25%

of secondary students experience cyberbullying in their lifetime (Holfeld & Grabe, 2012; Mishna et al., 2010; Patchin & Hinduja, 2015), including a recent study of LAUSD students in grades 6-8 (Rice, Petering, Rhoades, Winetrobe, Goldbach, Plant, Montoya, & Kordic, 2014).

Anti-Cyberbullying Interventions

Prevention and intervention approaches to cyberbullying stem from traditional programs, some geared at whole-school interventions like the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (Olweus, 2005) and the Finnish program KiVa (Salmivalli, 2014), while others focus on schoolyard bully-victim dyads (Cowie, 2014; Slonje, Smith, & Frisén, 2013). The reliance on traditional models of bullying intervention to thwart cyberbullying behaviors could be linked to the relative newness of cyberbullying, as well as research that shows that cybervictims are also likely victims of traditional bullying (Pearce, Cross, Monks, Waters, & Falconer, 2011; Smith, Mahdavi, Carvalho, Fisher, Russell, & Tippett, 2008). However, the effectiveness of these programs to combat anti-social behaviors is still unclear.

For example, the KiVa bullying prevention program has received much attention for showing positive effects on students' interpersonal behaviors, especially for elementary school-aged Finnish children. These positive effects, however, have been shown to diminish with age, with older students (middle school and older) showing no decrease in bullying behaviors (Yeager, Fong, Lee, & Espelage, 2015). Furthermore, KiVa requires a substantial time investment for schools with a minimum of 20 hours to complete the full intervention at the elementary school level (Williford, Elledge, Boulton, DePaolis, Little, & Salmivalli, 2013).

The Role of Bystanders in Prevention and Intervention Efforts

Given that cyberbullying largely occurs in the context of social groups (DeSmet, Bastiaensens, Van Cleemput, Poels, Vandebosch, Cardon, & De Bourdeaudhuij, 2016; Jones,

Mitchell, & Turner, 2015; Mishna, Cook, Saini, Wu, & MacFadden, 2009), bystanders are an important group to consider in prevention and intervention efforts (Dillon & Bushman, 2015; Ferreira, Veiga Simão, Ferreira, Souza, & Francisco, 2016; Hinduja & Patchin, 2013; Patterson, Allan, & Cross, 2016; Salmivalli, 2014; Schacter, Greenberg, & Juvonen, 2016). A bystander is "any person, peer or adult, who becomes aware of the harassment and has an opportunity to help" (Jones et al., 2015, p. 2309). A key assumption that researchers make is that bullying prevention programs (traditional or cyber) that specifically address bystander interventions will increase helpful bystander behaviors, which will result in fewer incidents of bullying (Espelage, Green, & Polanin, 2012). While helpful bystander behaviors, including defending, have been shown to mitigate the impact on victims (Hamby, Weber, Grych, & Barnyard, 2016; Sainio, Veenstra, Huitsing, & Salmivalli, 2011), there is little measurable evidence of a decrease in bullying incidents in the literature, including Polanin, Espelage, and Pigott's (2012) meta-analysis.

Polanin et al. (2012) assessed the effectiveness of traditional whole-school bullying prevention programs on increasing helpful bystander behaviors. In this meta-analysis, 12 bullying prevention programs were analyzed. To be included in this meta-analysis, each program had to explicitly address bystander behaviors and each study had to use a treatment-control research design. In short, Polanin and his colleagues found positive effects in regards to students' desires to use intervention behaviors, although the majority of the studies (10 out of 12) did not measure students' actual behaviors. Furthermore, the proximity of the post-intervention measures to the intervention itself, which could affect the post-intervention effect, was not disclosed. As with most anti-bullying intervention efforts, the behavioral goal of these programs was largely

focused on increasing students' ability to use defending behaviors when witnessing peer mistreatment.

Even though Polanin et al. (2012) highlight the positive effects of these interventions, they acknowledge that the "best practice guidelines to promote effective bystander intervention behaviors remain undefined because research findings var[y] widely with regard to their implementation focuses and approaches" (p. 50). Yet it is essential for future research to understand when and why cyberbystanders intervene, as well as how to "increase the odds of cyber bystanders interven[tion]" (Cross & Walker, 2013, p. 287). Understanding bystanders' willingness to mitigate online peer mistreatment is particularly important because the majority of bystanders remain silent (Jones et al., 2015).

The Importance of the Bystander

Studies report that bullied victims told their parents less than ten percent of the time (Aricak, Siyahhan, Uzunhasanoglu, Saribeyoglu, & Ciplak, 2008; Slonje & Smith, 2008). There are several reasons for this behavior. Some youth feel that it is important to learn how to effectively manage their own problems while using communication technologies (Juvoven & Gross, 2008) while others feel their access to the internet may be limited if they alert parents. Instead of informing parents, many victims consult friends for support and advice (Aricak et al., 2008; Slonje & Smith, 2008). Therefore friends or bystanders are ideally placed to intervene during cyberbullying episodes and have the power to reduce future cyberbullying.

Although there are obvious benefits if bystanders are able to defend a victim, children who witness bullying do not seem to use their potential to stop it (Salmivalli, 2010). Most children report that they would support peers in hypothetical situations (Rigby & Johnson, 2006; Whitney & Smith, 1993), but a study of sixth and eighth graders in Finland (Salmivalli,

Lappalainen, & Lagerspetz, 1998) identified 17-20% of students as defenders, 20-29% as reinforcers or assisters to the bully, and 26-30% of students withdrew from the bullying situation and did not take sides allowing it to continue. This difference between what students say they would do in a bullying situation and their actual behavior illuminates a need to understand bystanders' beliefs about different types of help and what they are willing to do and for whom.

Reasons for Bystander Passivity

Research in bystander behaviors was initiated by the work of Darley and Latané (1968) who began examining socio-psychological factors that could explain why bystanders most often chose not to intervene, especially in cases where the bystander was a stranger to the victim. They proposed three key factors as potential deterrents to helpful intervention behaviors like defending. One factor is the *diffusion of responsibility* in which bystanders who see others present during an emergency situation will carry the belief that others will intervene, thus lowering the individual responsibility to help. Bystanders may also feel *evaluation apprehension*, a fear of social judgment or peer backlash if they intervene. Lastly, bystanders may embody *pluralistic ignorance*, the belief that a situation is not bad enough to intervene because other bystanders are not taking action.

What Is Helpful?

In the case of Darley and Latané's (1968) research, these situations involved strangers, which may or may not be the case in a school setting. Most cybervictims know their bullies (Agatston, Kowalski, & Limber, 2012; Cassidy, Jackson, & Brown, 2009; Tokunaga, 2010). If cyberbystanders are pulled into these digital threads, they likely have access or knowledge about the individuals involved. This access also means that, unlike strangers, there are different ways to show support, some hidden from view like private messages of support, rather than only

defending.

Helpful (Cyber)bystanders

Over time, studies have captured information on helpful bystanders. Students who show higher empathy or higher self-efficacy, for example, are more likely to defend, if they have the opportunity to do so (Barlińska, Szuster, & Winiewski, 2013; Nickerson, Mele, & Princiotta, 2008). Salmivalli (2010) consolidated information from several studies to create this composite: bystanders of traditional bullying who intervene tend to be females with strong anti-bullying attitudes, positive social status, high self-efficacy of defending, and cognitively skilled.

A few qualitative studies point to the importance of friendship. For example, Thornberg, Tenenbaum, Varjas, Meyers, Jungert, and Vanegas (2012) found bystanders' fear of social evaluation by friends as an important factor in the decision to intervene or not. If the bystander was a friend with the bully, the bystander was less likely to help, but if the bystander was close to the victim, then the bystander was more willing to help their friend. This finding is consistent with other research (Brody & Vangelisti, 2016; Levine & Crowther, 2008; Oh & Hazler, 2009; Patterson, Allan, & Cross, 2017) that found the role of friendship played an important part in bystander decision-making.

The Challenges Facing Cyberbystanders

According to Barlińska et al. (2013), bystanders are more likely to take positive action during an in-person confrontation, rather than online. This decreased intervention in the online domain suggests added challenges for cyberbystanders. One key challenge is that cyberbystanders may not witness the bullying incident in real time, and instead they may see messages well after the event has already occurred. The cyber domain also lowers context clues

like the victim's full reaction, which can lead cyberbystanders to believe that the online

exchange is not that bad (Darley & Latané, 1968; Kowalski et al., 2014).

A Conceptual Framework on Helpfulness

Perceptions of helpfulness have mostly been researched from the vantage point of the

victim and what the victim may find helpful or not helpful. One such study, the Youth Voice

Project (YVP), examined victims' beliefs about helpfulness, specifically related to self-actions,

peer actions, and adult actions (Davis & Nixon, 2014). The YVP researchers surveyed nearly

12,000 student victims, ranging from fifth to 12th grade, about their experiences with bullying or

peer mistreatment and how the actions of others may have helped them. Students assessed 14

peer actions, related to defending (e.g., told the person to stop), to support (e.g., listened to me),

to distraction (e.g., helped me get away from the bully or helped distract the bully), and to adults

(e.g., told an adult or helped victim tell an adult). For middle school students, the two most

helpful peer actions involved peer support, like listening to the friend and comforting them,

rather than publicly defending the victim.

The YVP generated a large volume of information from victims on the aforementioned

peer actions. Bystanders, whether they witness bullying directly or are told about it indirectly,

will be the ones to deliver those peer actions. As such, my study will build on these findings by

hearing from the bystanders about what they may perceive to be helpful or unhelpful about

defending a victim, supporting a victim, distracting the bully, and getting help from an adult.

While YVP did not distinguish between online and offline bullying, my study examined

helpfulness within an online context and how that context may shape bystanders' beliefs about

helping actions. These beliefs are extremely valuable in understanding the challenges and

opportunities of helping others online (Davis & Nixon, 2014).

Site Selection and Participants

In order to capture bystanders' experiences, I selected a study sample that has a greater chance of witnessing or participating in peer mistreatment: middle school students. Students in the middle grades are likely to report higher rates of bullying and being bullied (Bouhnik & Deshen, 2013; Cassidy et al., 2009; Graeff, 2014; Kowalski & Limber, 2007; Mishna et al., 2009; Wang, Iannotti, & Nansel, 2009), including cyberbullying (Q. Li, 2007; T. Li; Patchin & Hinduja, 2006). Some in the research community claim that this peak in bullying and relational issues during the middle school years is linked to students' greater reliance on peer groups in deciding how to behave in cases of peer mistreatment or bullying (Espelage et al., 2012; Schultz, Tabanico, & Rendon, 2008).

For this study, I used "purposeful selection" to study a middle school population that is similar to my own school site's population (Maxwell, 2013, p. 97). As a school administrator, one of my goals in conducting this study is to better understand the challenges and opportunities that cyber communities present in creating positive school cultures. Interviewing students with similar backgrounds and experiences as my students should provide more relevant information for me as an administrator. The chosen study site, Kehillah Academy (pseudonym), is a small, independent school community with access to mobile technologies like smartphones, iPads, and laptops, as well as access to the Internet and data sharing. Access is important because increased access to and engagement with technologies increases the likelihood that students will witness peer mistreatment (Park, Eun-Yeong, & Eun-Mee, 2014).

Overview of Research Design

My study builds on Cross and Walker's (2013) claim that interventions should encourage bystander positive support, as well as Davis and Nixon's (2014) insights regarding victim's

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beliefs about helpfulness. This exploratory qualitative research study answers the following questions:

1. According to middle school bystanders, what are helpful behaviors in online peer mistreatment situations, like bullying?

2. What factors do middle school bystanders consider when making the decision to use helpful online behaviors?

Data Collection Methods

For this study, I chose a semi-structured interview protocol design rather than a structured interview protocol to allow for more flexibility in where the students may want to take the conversation. Since these students are experts in their own experiences, I made room for the participants to guide the conversation. Certainly, there were fundamental questions we explored in the interview process, such as the hypothetical statements about general helpfulness, but flexibility allowed participants to discuss their unique experiences, not just their reactions to these hypothetical statements.

The interview protocol was pilot-tested with four ninth-grade students (two female and two male) during the fall of 2017. Their feedback helped shape the protocol, especially the second section on what types of peer mistreatment behaviors they had witnessed online. One-on-one interviews, not focus groups, were preferred, as this provided students with added protection from saying something among their peers that could result in social judgment or backlash. Each participant was interviewed only one time between December 2017 and March 2018. The interviews were held in private spaces, like a conference room or classroom, on the students' middle school campus, and each interview lasted 30-45 minutes.

Summary of Findings

The findings of this study indicate that bystanders may consider group affiliation when determining whether to help a victim of cyberbullying. Consequently, the most important factor these cyberbystanders discussed was who was involved, specifically their relationship with the victim. The findings indicate that the relationship with the victim matters more than the relationship with the bully, in terms of the intention to be helpful. Bystanders in this study overwhelmingly shied away from public defending, choosing private support for their friends as the most helpful type of action they could take.

Significance of Research

Anti-bullying research has generally focused on the victim's experience over the bystander's. To my knowledge, this study is unique in eliciting feedback regarding cyberbystanders' beliefs about helpfulness. Many studies, both qualitative and quantitative, have explored individual and situational factors that may contribute to active or passive bystanding (Bellmore, Ting-Lan, Ji-in, & Hughes, 2012; Pöyhönen, Juvonen, & Salmivalli, 2010; Salmivalli, 2010; Thornberg et al., 2012). This study adds to that literature by closing the gap between what we know about victims' and bystanders' beliefs regarding helpfulness.

CHAPTER TWO

As students gain access to wireless technologies like smart phones and tablets, their ability to communicate with peers expands dramatically. While these new social networks can be supportive spaces, increased access can lead to greater exposure of unhealthy interactions, such as bullying (Park et al., 2014). In order to address the problem of bullying, its expansion into cyberspace, and the role of bystanders, I first highlight key differences between the physical (offline) and cyber (online) domains. Second, I explore the challenge schools face in mitigating the negative effects of bullying on student victims and on school culture. To that end, I examine the effectiveness of schoolwide anti-bullying programs and the role of bystanders in schools' efforts to reduce the prevalence of online bullying. Because bystanders bear witness to most cyberbullying incidents, their responses to these incidents could be a deciding factor in the outcome for the victim. For that reason, I uncover the types of actions bystanders are likely to take in offline and online domains, as well as the motivating factors that lead them to act. To frame the concept of bystanding, I review Latané and Darley's (1970) *bystander effect* theory and the psychosocial elements of bystander decision-making. However, the bystander effect theory emphasizes bystander passivity and does not articulate how bystanders are helpful, which is a focal point of this dissertation. To anchor the discussion on helpfulness, I will discuss the findings from Davis and Nixon's (2014) YVP, which illuminated helpfulness from the perspective of victims' experiences. This study extends those findings by capturing bystanders' beliefs about helpful online actions.

Online and Offline Bullying: Similarities and Differences

The term *bully* first entered the lexicon in the 1530s through Middle Dutch. At the time, *bully* referred to someone as a "brother or lover," but this meaning deteriorated in the next

century to include "harasser of the weak" (Harper, n.d., paras. 1-2). In its most basic form, bullying includes a bully (or instigator) and a victim, and this victim is typically weaker physically or emotionally in comparison to the bully. This difference in power, perceived or real, "distinguishes bullying from conflict" (Juvonen & Graham, 2014, p. 161).

Bullying can be housed within an online (cyber) domain or offline (traditional) domain, both of which use indirect and direct forms of bullying (Olweus, 1994). In direct bullying, the bully uses physical acts (e.g., punching, hitting, pushing) or verbal acts (e.g., name-calling or threats) against the selected victim. On the other hand, bullies who use indirect methods of bullying (e.g., social exclusion or rumor spreading) are more covert in attacking their victims (Donegan, 2012).

Besides the previously mentioned power imbalance, two other factors are commonly associated with bullying: intention to harm and repetition (Patchin & Hinduja, 2015; Smith et al., 2013). However, repetition may not be a necessary condition in bullying, since "a single traumatic incident can raise the expectation and fear of continued abuse" (Juvonen & Graham, 2014, p. 161). Repetition is also a challenge in determining whether cyberbullying has occurred. For example, a single derogatory picture or message may be reshared or reposted on various social media outlets. This single act, then, is repeated through the actions of online bystanders who propagate the message to others (Dooley, Pyżalski, & Cross, 2009).

Unique Characteristics of Cyberbullying

While many cyberbullying incidents are a continuation of face-to-face conflicts that arise on school campus (Mishna et al., 2009), there are distinguishing characteristics unique to cyberbullying, such as anonymity, scope, and permanence. Online bullying enables students to post hurtful messages while hiding behind an *anonymous user* label or a pseudonym, which

could increase the bully's social disinhibitions (Patchin & Hinduja, 2015). Even though the majority of cybervictims know their perpetrators, anonymity is a major concern of cyberbullying (Mishna et al., 2009). The act of posting anonymously gives bullies a certain degree of freedom to make hurtful statements about another person without much fear of being found out (Slonje et al., 2013). This lack of accountability of one's actions through anonymous posting has been linked to higher levels of antisocial behaviors. In one study, for example, more than half of anonymous messages were classified as "uncivil," as opposed to approximately 30% of online messages from known users (Santana, 2014 p. 27).

Digital content, whether it is publicly or privately shared, leaves a permanent record (Smith et al., 2008), and wide scope, spreading very quickly to others online (D'Antona, Kevorkian, & Russom, 2010; Juvonen & Graham, 2014; Patchin & Hinduja, 2006). The pervasiveness and permanence of these messages underscore victims' feelings that they can never truly escape their bully, and the reposting of hurtful messages or images often re-victimizes them (Smith et al., 2008).

Types of Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying can occur through a variety of media, but the forms it takes can be divided into the following distinct actions (Willard, 2006):

- *Flaming*: provoking another person online through abusive language and messages; this can be done directly to the person or indirectly through a group chat or direct messaging

- *Online Harassment*: threatening or harassing electronic messages sent repeatedly to a single person

- *Cyberstalking*: when a person is threatened to the point of credible harm

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- *Denigration (Put-Downs)*: posting hurtful messages or untrue statements about a person to other people or in a public online space.

- *Masquerade*: impersonating another person online and then sending messages as that person to other people in an effort to hurt the impersonated person's reputation.

- *Outing*: publicly sharing private messages in an attempt to embarrass the other person.

- *Exclusion*: Intentionally leaving someone out from an online group

One Taiwanese study examined the most commonly reported cyberbullying behaviors and found that threats or harassment were the most cited forms for both victims and bullies, followed by joking around and rumor spreading. In that same study, witnesses reported a different order of prevalence: joking around/making fun of another student, threats/harassment, and then rumor spreading (Huang & Chou, 2010). This difference in what bystanders perceive as problematic online behaviors could lead them to take different actions or no actions at all.

The Challenge for Schools

As the line between students' school lives and private lives are blurred through frequent online communication, schools are in a challenging position of investigating student conflicts that may start at school and continue online, or vice versa. One major impetus for schools to *do something* stems from a tidal wave of anti-bullying legislation that has swept the United States. This tidal wave is driven largely from public outcries to highly publicized news reports that connect chronic peer mistreatment with teen suicides or school shootings (Shariff & Hoff, 2007; Swearer, Martin, Brackett, & Palacios, 2016). Even though bully-induced teen suicides or school shootings are uncommon, some parents still pressure those with political power to exercise their power to stop bullying (Juvonen & Graham, 2014).

According to the Cyberbullying Research Center (as of May 2018), the United States has bullying laws in all 50 states, and state law in 49 states requires public school policies to include cyberbullying in their code of conduct. Only 14 states, including California, have written off-campus behaviors into their cyberbullying laws. This addition of off-campus behaviors provides schools with an avenue to intervene in off-campus disputes that occur online, but that negatively impact the students on campus. Unfortunately, state laws are not properly funded and do not clearly offer guidelines for how to implement policies and programs that meet the state's expectations (Swearer et al., 2016).

This lack of funding and guidelines leaves school administrators in a lurch, as they make financial and structural decisions regarding the type of anti-bullying program they should implement in order to address major issues of online anonymity, disappearing media (e.g., Snapchat), empathy, and bystander passivity. These issues are not easily overcome, but school administrators who do not address cyberbullying risk normalizing online peer aggression and bullying by taking a passive stance (Kowalski et al., 2014), which in turns creates the perception that the school, as a whole, is less safe (Gini, Pozzoli, Borghi, & Franzoni., 2008).

Traditional Approaches to Antibullying Interventions

Schoolwide antibullying programs present a variety of choices for school administrators. Some of these incorporate parent education, classroom-level curriculum, teacher trainings, school assemblies, and new policies and practices of dealing with bullying whether it happens offline or online.

As mentioned in Chapter One, antibullying efforts are rooted in traditionally constructed models like the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program. This prevention program, developed in Norway in the 1970s, was the first anti-bullying program to be longitudinally and systematically

tested (Olweus, 1994), and it continues to be one of the most used programs globally (Olweus, 2005). This school wide approach targets multiple levels of a school's structure – playground supervision, the establishment of antibullying classroom norms, and parent support (Donegan, 2012).

Another Scandinavian-based antibullying program that has gained momentum is KiVa, which like Olweus uses a whole-school approach, but targets bystanders specifically. Created in Finland in 2006, KiVa, an abbreviation of *Kiusaamista Vastaan* translated as *against bullying*, works to build students' knowledge regarding bullying situations, empathy for victims, and social skills for intervening (Williford et al., 2013). However, the effectiveness of these traditional approaches, like Olweus or KiVa, to minimize bullying is questionable (Yeager et al., 2015).

The Effectiveness of Traditional Approaches

One oft-cited meta-analysis, Ttofi and Farrington (2011), reviewed nearly 620 programs that worked to decrease bullying behaviors. Through their review, they found a "significant *positive* effect of grade level," meaning that their analysis showed that anti-bullying programs like Olweus and KiVa became more effective as students aged (Yeager et al., 2015, p. 37). This finding prompted Ttofi and Farrington to recommend that schools deliver programs for older students, middle school and above. This recommendation, though, stems from studying between-study effects, not within-study effects. Between-study comparisons will lump all students in a study to find the mean effect size (e.g., fourth through 12th grade would be shown as an effect size for eighth grade students). A major issue that arises from this type of analysis is that the effects of a particular antibullying program are not accurately measured over time to account for

potential developmental differences among student populations. Within-study comparisons, on the other hand, would more accurately account for these differences.

To account for age-related effects, Yeager et al. (2015) employed a three-tier statistical analysis on 19 previous studies of more than 350,000 American and European schools. They found modest effects for elementary-aged students, a significant decline in effectiveness between seventh and eighth grade, and by 10th grade, negative effects on antibullying behaviors. This decline in effectiveness has also been noted by non-experimental studies that measured student engagement in high-quality antibullying programs (e.g., Espelage, Low, Polanin, & Brown, 2013; Finkelhor, Vanderminden, Turner, Shattuck, & Hamby, 2014).

Effect on Bystanders

While Yeager examined the effect of antibullying programs on the prevalence of bullying rates, Polanin and his colleagues (2012) conducted a meta-analysis on how traditional bullying prevention programs increase helpful bystander behaviors. The criteria for inclusion in this analysis were: (a) the articles had to focus on bystander interventions, (b) each study had to have a control group and a treatment group, and (c) the study population could include only school-aged students in a K-12 setting. After running an analysis on the descriptive statistics presented in each study, Polanin et al. found that the treatment groups had a 20% increase in bystander intervention behaviors, compared with their control group peers. Like Ttofi and Farrington (2011), Polanin et al. found the greatest treatment effects for samples that included only high school students, indicating that older students may yield the best results for bystander-focused interventions. However, the study populations were lumped into two broad categories: K-8 and 9-12, making it unclear what role age may have played in the effectiveness of these bystander interventions.

Furthermore, while Polanin et al. (2012) claimed that the treatment increased bystander intervention behavior more than individuals in the control groups, this is a misleading claim because 10 of the 12 studies targeted intentions, not actual behaviors. It is also unknown when the post-intervention measures were taken. If taken closer to the intervention, then student responses would be expected to favor helpful bystander intentions. Also, strength of intention, which is a greater indicator of actual behavior (Ajzen, 1991), was not assessed.

Even with the dubious results from Polanin's (2012) meta-analysis and Yeager's (2015) critique that it is "not sufficient to 'age-up' existing materials" (p. 47), researchers consistently point to the importance of bystander behaviors as influential in the fight against online or offline bullying (Dillon & Bushman, 2015; Ferreira et al., 2016; Hinduja & Patchin, 2013; Patterson et al., 2016; Salmivalli 2014; Schacter et al., 2016).

The Importance of Bystanders in Intervention Efforts

Besides their prevalence in bullying incidents (Lenhart, Madden, Smith, Purcell, Zickuhr, & Rainie, 2011), there are many other reasons that make bystanders an important force to consider. First, bystanders are the "invisible engine in the cycle of bullying" (Twemlow, Fonagy, Sacco, Gies, & Hess, 2001, p. 167), and thus have the ability to stop peer harassment (Hawkins, Pepler, & Craig, 2001). Second, helpful bystanders can mitigate the negative impact of bullying on the victims by sending the signal that someone cares about them. (Hamby et al., 2016; Sainio et al., 2011). Third, bystanders' behaviors may be "easier to influence" through intervention efforts than the behaviors of bullies since bullies are the instigators in peer mistreatment situations (Salmivalli, 2010; p. 113). Fourth, bystanders have the potential to change group norms through the removal of social status for peers who bully: "If fewer children rewarded and

reinforced the bully . . . an important reward for bullying others would be lost" (Salmivalli, 2010, p. 117).

Hawkins et al. (2001) observed 58 primary school children (grades one through six) in their natural setting (i.e., a school playground) and noted that bystanders were present nearly 90% of the time and intervened close to 20% of the time. Of those interventions, the researchers observed that in approximately half of the bullying episodes, peers' defense of victims caused the bullying to stop within 10 seconds. This study suggests that defending is not highly prevalent, but could be effective in stopping the bullying behavior. Researchers who study bullying have typically categorized bystander behavior into distinctive roles, like defender, which will be discussed in the next section.

Bystander Roles

Bystanders can directly witness a bullying incident, or they can indirectly witness it through the recounting of the incident from others. In 1993, Olweus argued that offline bystanders existed in six broad categories: followers, passive supporters, supporters, onlookers, possible defenders, and actual defenders. A few years later, Salmivalli and her colleagues (1996) narrowed this list to four behavioral categories: assistants to the bully, reinforcers of the bully, outsiders who watch but do not aid the bully or help the victim, and defenders of the victim. Only one of these participant roles—the defender—uses helpful behaviors, such as running interference between the bully and victim, seeking help from an adult or trusted peer, or comforting the victim (Pöyhönen et al., 2012). These participant roles are based on traditional, in-person bullying, which may not be as consistent in an online context with more fluid roles. For example, a recent study found it challenging to label cyberbystander participation in any type of distinctive role due to the "contextual factors" of cyberbullying (DeSmet, Velderman, Poels,

Bastiaensens, Van Cleemput, Vandebosch, & De Bourdeaudhuij, 2014). Regardless, research has

shown that the most likely bystander response, whether offline or online, is passivity (Dillon &

Bushman, 2015; Van Cleemput, Vandebosch, & Pabian, 2014).

The Bystander Effect

Interest in bystander behaviors is rooted in the work of social psychologists Bibb Latané

and John M. Darley (1968), prompted by the murder of Kitty Genovese in 1964. As it was

initially reported in *The New York Times*, more than 30 witnesses saw moments of Kitty's rape

and murder or heard her cries for help, but the vast majority of those who recounted the events of

that night did not call the police or physically intervene in the attack (Levine, Cassidy, &

Brazier, 2002).

Following Genovese's death, Latané and Darley (1970) pioneered a branch of research

into bystander behaviors. They found the most consistent deterrent for helping was related to the

number of other bystanders who were present: an increase in the number of other bystanders was

found to correlate negatively with an individual's willingness to intervene (Latané & Nida,

1981). In line with this finding, socio-psychological factors were used to explain the decrease in

helpful bystanding. One such factor is the *diffusion of responsibility*, which implies that an

individual will feel a lower level of personal responsibility to help if others are also present.

Another factor is *evaluation apprehension*, in which bystanders fear social judgment by their

peers for intervening. Lastly, *pluralistic ignorance* also inhibits helpful bystanding when

bystanders see that others are also not intervening and conclude that the situation does not

require action (Latané & Darley, 1970).

The application of the bystander effect has been explored in the context of bullying and

cyberbullying, primarily with the diffusion of responsibility as a key focus of these

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investigations. However, there are some limitations to the bystander effect theory. First, the bystander effect theory explores the passivity of bystanders who are strangers to each other, to the bully, and to the victim. This is an unlikely scenario for most school-based social interactions, especially since most cybervictims know their cyberbullies (Cassidy et al., 2009). Second, it is unclear how the bystander effect theory, including the socio-psychological components of decision-making, apply to online behaviors, and it is the specific role of cyberbystanding that has not been thoroughly addressed in cyberbullying research (Allison & Bussey, 2016; DeSmet et al., 2014).

Factors that Affect (Cyber)bystander Decision-Making

Many studies have charted the characteristics of students who self-report helping others or who are peer nominated as being helpful. Those who do choose to intervene often show higher levels of empathy or self-efficacy (Barlińska et al., 2013; Nickerson et al., 2008). Salmivalli (2010) reports that bystanders of traditional bullying who intervene tend to be females with strong anti-bullying attitudes, positive social status, high self-efficacy of defending, and high cognitive skill. Similar findings were reported by Olenik-Shemish, Heiman, and Eden (2017). In this Israeli quantitative study, *active bystanders* tended to be older females with a solid social network and decreased levels of emotional loneliness than others in the sample. These types of factors (self-efficacy, cognitive skills, personal attitudes) are considered internal, while external factors include the context of the situation, like the bystander's social group and whether the target or bully is a friend, or the presence of other bystanders.

Recently, a few qualitative studies have delved into bystanders' stories of their online experiences. Two of these studies (Patterson et al., 2017; Thornberg et al., 2012) captured data on middle school populations. The researchers found bystander decision-making to rely on a mix

of internal factors and external factors, but with a greater emphasis on the external factors. Patterson et al. (2017) found that if the bullied victim was a friend, then there was a greater chance of the bystander helping. Relationships also help bystanders understand what is happening in a peer mistreatment situation because if things are unclear, then bystanders can contact friends to find out what is going on. However, many bystanders in this study discussed the challenges of misinterpreting online exchanges because of a lack of social cues and not knowing the victim or bully very well. This *not knowing* meant that bystanders were not unable to process whether the exchanges were friendly banter or bullying.

Thornberg and his colleagues (2012) explored the reasons that bystanders may choose to help a bullied victim as a way to conceptualize bystanders' motivations to be helpful. From their findings, these researchers created a conceptual framework of bystander motivation, which they parsed into the following discrete processes: interpretation of harm, emotional reactions, social evaluating, moral evaluating and intervention self-efficacy. First and foremost, students need to interpret the situation as harmful enough to intervene. If this line between friendly teasing and bullying is not crossed, according to the bystanders, then no intervention will happen. Students' emotional reactions also played a role in choosing to intervene. Emotional reactions that would encourage helping included empathy, while the fear of becoming the next victim inhibited helping. For social evaluating, Thornberg et al. found friendship impacted helping. In the case of the bystander's friendship with the bully, the bystander was less inclined to help; however, if the victim was the bystander's friend, there was an increased willingness for the bystander to intervene on behalf of his or her friend. For moral evaluating, bystanders considered what their moral obligations were. Those who held the moral belief that bullying was wrong showed an increase in bystander helpfulness. Conversely, bystanders who did not feel morally compelled to

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be individually responsible to intervene demonstrated *bystander irresponsibility* by walking away from a challenging situation. One of Thornberg's key findings that emerged related to social evaluation was the importance of friendship in the decision to intervene or not. This finding is consistent with other research (Brody & Vangelisti, 2016; Levine & Crowther, 2008; Oh & Hazler, 2009; Patterson et al., 2017) that found the role of friendship played an important role in bystander decision-making.

The Challenges Cyberbystanders Face

With the ability to hide behind their technologies or within their virtual playgrounds, cyberbystanders have the opportunity to use more strategic forms of defender behaviors like private messages of support, compared to offline bystanders. Nonetheless, cyberbystanders have been shown, at best, to be on par with offline bystanders' helpful behaviors (Machackova & Pfetsch, 2016), which is already low (Jones et al., 2015). At worst, simulated experiments have shown cyberbystanders are less likely to intervene than their offline counterparts (Barlińska et al., 2013). Perhaps cyberbystanders intervene less often because they fear their messages of support to the victim could be distributed publicly, resulting in a potential backlash from their peers. Cyberbystanders may also have an "acceptable" view of passivity, which could undermine their personal responsibility to intervene (DeSmet et al., 2014, p. 210). Bystanders who choose not to intervene have been shown to morally disengage through euphemistic labeling (e.g., calling bullying *teasing*), victim blaming, and diffusing their own responsibility to help. These processes are negatively associated with defending a cybervictim (Gini, 2006; Darley & Latané, 1968; Obermann, 2011).

In any case, cyberbystanders are in a complex and ever-evolving role than a traditional offline bystander. Cyberbystanders, unlike offline bystanders, may not witness the bullying

incident as it unfolds, instead seeing the posted messages well after the event has already occurred. The geographical proximity of the cyberbystander to the bully, victim, or other bystanders is not required to witness an online bullying event, as a cyberbystander may be with other bystanders, the bully, the victim, or alone when something is posted online (Q. Li, Smith, & Cross, 2012). Researchers have also found cyberbystanders to have more dynamic and less solidified roles in online bullying than offline bullying (DeSmet et al., 2014; Van Cleemput et al., 2014). For example, in online bullying, a cyberbystander can privately support the victim, while at the same time reinforce the bully in order to maintain a perceived social status.

While there are opportunities for cyberbystanders to use helpful and supportive behaviors, it is still unclear what cyberbystanders perceive as helpful and whether their ideas of helpfulness align with victims' ideas of helpfulness. For a discussion of helpfulness, I review the work of the YVP.

A Conceptual Framework on Helpfulness

Any attempt to mitigate bullying behaviors begins with this premise: behaviors can change. As anti-bullying research shifts from bully-victim dyad approaches to whole-school approaches, the behavior researchers want to know more about is bystanding. Why do some bystanders intervene, while most appear to do nothing? In the cyber domain, which is largely hidden from adult supervision, correction of bullying behaviors or peer mistreatment relies on the young people engaged in those online communities. Bystanders who do intervene and show positive peer support can mitigate the negative impact of bullying for the victim (Hamby et al., 2016; Sainio et al., 2011). Thus it is important to explore this concept of helpfulness from both the victim and bystander's perspectives.

One study, Davis and Nixon's (2014) YVP, examined how adults and student peers can mitigate the impact of bullying or peer mistreatment on school-aged youth. This study, which focused on relational and physical mistreatment, separated student responses by gender and school division (elementary, middle, and high school). Researchers asked mistreated victims about the helpfulness of different peer actions, related to defending (e.g., told the person to stop), to support (e.g., listened to me), to distraction (e.g., helped me get away from the bully or helped distract the bully), and to adults (e.g., told an adult or helped victim tell an adult). Students who participated in the YVP selected from four possible responses to each peer action: "no one did this," "other students did this and things got worse," "other students did this and things didn't change," and "other students did this and things got better." Each peer action was given a "helpfulness score" based on the following criteria: 1 point if things got better, 0 points if nothing changed, and -1 point if things got worse. The breakdown of responses by middle school females and middle school males are shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Helpfulness of Peer Actions of Middle School Students (N = 1,615)

		Females (*N* = 806)	Males (*N* = 809)
Defending	Asked the person to stop being mean in a friendly way	.16	.09
	Told the person to stop in a mean or angry way	.06	.10
Peer Support	Spend time with me, sat with me, or hung out with me	.56	.38
	Talked to me at school to encourage me	.53	.41
	Called me at home to encourage me	.49	.24
	Listened to me	.41	.31
	Gave me advice about what I should do	.45	.27
Distraction	Helped me get away from situations where the behavior was going on	.50	.34
	Distracted the people who were treating me badly	.36	.28
Adult Support	Told an adult	.21	.20
	Helped me tell an adult	.50	.23

Note. Adapted from *Youth Voice Project*, by S. Davis and C. Nixon, 2014, Champaign, IL: Research Press. Copyright 2014 by the authors.

In comparison with female students, the male students' scores skewed lower in terms of the perceived helpfulness of peer actions. In fact the only action that scored marginally higher for males than females was "told the person to stop in a mean or angry way." For both male and female students, the two types of peer actions that victims believed to be most helpful involved support: "spend time with me, sat with me, or hung out with me" and "talked to me at school to encourage me."

For both male and female middle school students, the peer actions that were perceived as the least positive or helpful were related to active defending: "told the person to stop in a mean or angry way" and "asked the person to stop being mean to me in a friendly way." Even though researchers indicate that the best way to stop offline bullying behaviors to confront the bully directly (Hawkins et al., 2001; Salmivalli, Voeten, & Poskiparta, 2011), young people in this study did not find this method as helpful, perhaps because of residual peer backlash from social

groups or because direct confrontation does not have a lasting impact on stopping bullying behaviors.

With the dynamic nature of online roles among bullies, victims and bystanders (Dehue, 2013; DeSmet et al., 2014; Van Cleemput et al., 2014), as well as low estimates of active victim defending (Jones et al., 2015), there is likely overlap between victims' and bystanders' perceptions of helpfulness. However, little is known about what bystanders consider helpful behaviors off or online and whether such beliefs align with what victims consider helpful. A recent study, Sit and Schuller's (2018), examined sexual assault victim's disclosures to informal support providers, like family or friends. What they found was discrepancies between what support providers considered helpful actions and what victims considered helpful actions. For example, friends rated the action of assuring the victim that she or he was not to blame more favorably than victims rated it. In fact, victims believed that type of "assurance" was as helpful as "victim-blaming" and other "egocentric responses" (p. 1251). While this is only one study, it underscores the need to hear from victims, as well as bystanders' beliefs and motivations about helpful actions, which Thornberg et al. (2012) argues is "rare" in anti-bullying research (p. 248).

With both victims' and bystanders' self-reports that defending is not preferable to support, I expected that students in this study would also indicate a greater preference for support, especially private support, as opposed to distraction, defending, or talking to an adult. The study population, composed of middle school-aged students, would likely have a greater reliance on peer groups, rather than adults. In terms of the motivation to be helpful, there are internal and external factors that may motivate a bystander. A key motivator anticipated in this study is the role of friendship. Bystanders in this study, because of the smallness of their school community, which could create a greater sense of peer connectedness, as well as their middle-

school age, would likely feel a greater loyalty and motivation to their friend group, especially if they have a close friend who is bullied. Patterson et al. (2017) found the role of friendship played a heightened role in bystander intention to be helpful. One reason they suggest for this motivation is that friends typically communicate with their other friends online, especially in group chats. Therefore, bystanders are more likely to pay attention to what is said among their friends or to their friends, increasing the ability to witness and respond to peer mistreatment or bullying situations.

While the YVP mapped victims' perceptions of helpfulness on a large scale, incorporating 12,000 student voices, this study left some unanswered questions. The close-ended structure of their survey questions captured trends with experiences, but not the underlying reasons for what made those actions helpful or not. Why, for example, did most middle school students believe that peer support was helpful? What was helpful about it? Are there better or worse ways that peers can show their support? Additionally, students were informed to "click one option for each action" (Davis & Nixon, 2014, p. 9). It is likely that some students in this study were subjected to repeated attacks of bullying. However, there was no space for students to indicate all the types of peer actions that may have been taken on their behalf, limiting the responses to just one. In that regard, the answers to the responses have to be viewed through this more critical lens. One of the main questions left open from this survey, as mentioned above, is why some actions were viewed more helpful than others.

Conclusion

In order to maintain students' feelings of safety and inclusion, schools have an obligation to address peer mistreatment and bullying that occurs in cyber communities, regardless of students' actual geographical location when they post or receive messages. While there are many

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anti-bullying programs for schools to choose from, the effectiveness of these programs to decrease bullying has shown diminishing effects for adolescence in late middle school through high school (Kärnä et al., 2011; Yeager et al., 2015).

Because cyber communities are largely out of view from parents, teachers, and administrators, peer-to-peer interventions have become a key mechanism in shifting negative online interactions to more positive ones. However, there is much left to learn about what bystanders consider helpful and what factors may impact their desire to be helpful. My study seeks to close this gap, a gap that is especially problematic in light of intervention efforts to increase active bystanding (Cross & Walker, 2013). If researchers suggest that students should actively defend and *stand up to the bully*, but victims and bystanders find that level of defending to be unhelpful, then these types of anti-bullying interventions are less likely to be successful.

CHAPTER THREE

Students today have unprecedented access to their peers through electronic communications and social media platforms. These online communities may be places of support, but they can also be domains of mistreatment, including social exclusivity and rumor spreading. While most student bystanders choose passivity when witnessing peer mistreatment and bullying, there are some students who do publicly and privately support and defend peer victims. In order to understand why some students intervene while others do not, bystanders must be given the opportunity to discuss what they believe are helpful ways of intervening on behalf of a mistreated peer and what specific factors they consider when deciding to be helpful or not. This research should add to the existing literature on cyberbullying, which could help create more effective antibullying interventions, especially at the middle school level, a time when the effectiveness of well-researched programs begins to decline.

Research Questions

The research questions that guided this study were as follows:

1. According to middle school bystanders, what are helpful behaviors in online peer mistreatment situations, like bullying?

2. What factors do middle school bystanders consider when making the decision to use helpful online behaviors?

Cyber Research Methods: An Overview

Research on cyberbullying has largely been captured through self-reports based on quantitative surveys (Espinoza & Juvonen, 2013). Quantitative surveys are important in understanding the "numeric description of trends, attitudes, or opinions of a population by studying a sample of that population" (Creswell, 2014, p. 155), as well as correlational research

to determine the extent to which two variables are related. This preference for quantitative methods was found by Powell, Mihalas, Onwuegbuzie, Suldo, and Daley (2008), who did a review of mixed methods bullying research in the area of school psychology between the years 2000 and 2004. Of the 75 studies examined by the researchers, 12 mixed-methods approaches, seven qualitative studies, and 56 studies were quantitative. The dominance of quantitative methods in the realm of bullying research may have generated statistics on prevalence rates, for example, but it has left many questions unanswered regarding the *how* and *why* of bullying (Griffin & Gross, 2004; Torrance, 2000).

Beyond quantitative data, research on cyberbullying has also relied to a lesser degree on qualitative methods, predominantly interviews and focus groups, to provide a richer understanding of this phenomenon (Espinoza & Juvonen, 2013). These open-ended responses, in turn, can help researchers refine previously used survey measures to more accurately depict the evolution of online social constructs.

Research Design and Rationale

While quantitative methods still dominate the field of cyberbullying research, qualitative methods provide an opportunity to investigate less understood topics within this cyberbullying frame (Mishna & Van Wert, 2013). Qualitative methods give voice to individual attitudes and beliefs by providing space for participants to delve deeply into their own experiences (Barter & Renold, 2000; Spears & Kofoed, 2013). As a relatively new domain of bullying, cyberbullying research is a rich area for qualitative exploration. While researchers have begun to explore the experiences of cyberbystanders (Patterson et al., 2016; Thornberg et al., 2012), there is still much to learn from their online experiences, especially as researchers begin to see bystanders as a way to change the culture of online communities. In order for anti-bullying programs to be more

effective, we must first engage those involved, especially bystanders, and hear their stories, understand their challenges, and find opportunities to support them and a positive online culture (Davidson, Ridgway, Kidd, Topor, & Borg, 2008). This study sought to generate new knowledge and insight that contributes to the on-going model and theory building among cyber researchers.

For this study, I used a qualitative design to best understand the phenomenon of bystanding. In order to address my research questions, I conducted one-on-one semi-structured interviews to gather bystanders' stories of their experiences online. These stories and experiences helped unpack the decision-making process of bystander helpfulness.

Strategies of Inquiry

This section provides an overview of how the study site and population will be selected, as well as details regarding the data collection process.

Study Site and Population

In order to understand a witness or bystander's response, it was important to study a population with a greater chance of witnessing or participating in online peer mistreatment. Middle school-aged students are a prime area for research because they report higher rates of bullying and being bullied (Bouhnik & Deshen, 2013), including cyberbullying (Q. Li, 2007; Patchin & Hinduja, 2006). During middle school, students undergo an important development time with shifting social circles, the influence of puberty on physical and emotional changes, and the importance of peer group acceptance (Bouhnik & Deshen, 2013). The middle school years are a critical juncture for antibullying interventions, which have shown positive results in elementary schools (e.g., KiVa) but less effectiveness with older students (Kärnä et al., 2011).

For this study, I used what Maxwell (2013) calls a "purposeful selection" (p. 97) to study a middle school population that is similar to my own school site's population. To decrease the

potential for students to give more socially acceptable answers, this study was not conducted at my own school's middle school campus. One of my goals was to better understand the challenges my students face in navigating cyberspace, and working with students with similar backgrounds and experiences as my students provided more relevant information for me as an administrator. The study site is a small, independent school community with access to mobile technologies like smartphones, iPads, and laptops, as well as access to the Internet and data sharing. Access is important because increased access to and engagement with technologies increases the likelihood that students will witness peer mistreatment (Park et al., 2014).

In order to find a school similar to my own, I looked for criteria that included small private schools with one-to-one technology integration. I defined *small* as having a middle school population with fewer than 300 students. I generated a list of five potential school sites. In early to mid-October 2017, I emailed the heads of school for all five institutions to introduce myself, to introduce the purpose of the study, and to schedule a time to speak by phone. For two potential sites, the school personnel did not email me back, one site personnel emailed me back and said their school was not interested in being part of the study, and one site responded positively but canceled three consecutive phone meetings. For the fifth school site, Kehillah Academy, the Head of School emailed me back within a couple days and put me in touch with two middle school administrators. Within a week of that initial electronic exchange, I had a one-hour phone call with those two administrators to discuss the purpose of the study and the commitment that this work entailed from their community. Following this phone conference, the two administrators discussed the study's plan with the Head of School who made the final approval to participate in the study.

In early November, the school sent a letter of recruitment[1] regarding the study to their entire middle school community. This letter included a link for parents to completely "opt out" so that they and their children would not be contacted to participate in the study. Parents had two weeks to reply to this initial letter and opt out. In total, 11 parents responded to the "opt out" survey, removing their children from the potential pool of study participants.

From those that remained in the participant pool, the middle school director blindly selected eight male and eight female students for each of the three grades (sixth, seventh, and eighth), for a total of 48 participants. These 48 participants came from a total of 140 students, minus the 11 who opted out, bringing the total possible number of participants to 129. Because this study focused on general middle school experiences and not one particular gender or grade level, male and female students were equally recruited, and the recruitment for each grade level was equally distributed to help capture a range of experience levels in online communities.

Once the 48 students were selected, an administrative assistant created a Google sheet with each student's name, grade level, parent names, and parent emails. This Google sheet was then shared with me. Because students do not check school emails, there was no real alternative to communicate with them directly. Instead, I emailed each parent of the 48 potential participants a letter of introduction[2]. The letter included a link to a Google form in which parents could digitally sign that they gave permission for me to interview their child. From this initial mailing, I had parent permission to interview six middle school students. A week later, I sent a follow-up email to the 42 parents who had not responded, and five more parents provided permission for me to interview their children, for a total of 11 participants.

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[1] See Appendix A
[2] See Appendix B

As responses lagged, I requested for the middle school administrator to select six more middle school students to participate in the study, three female and three male, for grades seven and eight. These grades were under-represented in the early part of the study, as six of the first 11 interviews were with sixth-grade students. Once these names were drawn, the administrative assistant populated student and parent contact information, so that I could begin my emailing parents about their children participating in my study. From this expanded recruitment pool, as well as continuous efforts to contact parents from the original list, I was able to recruit nine more students for this study, for a total of 20 participants. The study participants' demographic information is shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Study Participant Demographic Information

Gender	Grade			Total
	6	7	8	
Female	3	3	3	9
Male	2	4	5	11
Total	5	7	8	20

Simultaneous with recruiting more participants through a series of follow-up emails, I began working with a middle school administrative assistant to schedule times to interview students during study hall hours. Study hall was at the end of the day, from approximately 2:30 to 3:30 PM, Monday through Thursday. I contacted students' parents with the date and time for the interview, and then I sent them a reminder two days prior to the interview. The administrative assistant booked the room for each interview, and she called each participant's study hall teacher the day of the interview, which was a great help. The teachers were able to remind students of their interview and send them to the appropriate room at the start of the study hall period. In

total, five interviews were rescheduled due to student absences or other issues, like test makeups or on-site school assemblies.

In addition to securing parent permission to interview each of the 20 participants, I provided students with an adolescent assent form and asked each student to verbally assent to participate in the study. All 20 students agreed to participate in this study.

Data Collection Methods

For this study, I chose a semi-structured interview protocol design, see Appendix E, rather than a structured interview protocol because the former allows for more flexibility in where the conversation goes, which allowed me to go where the student goes. There are fundamental questions that were explored in the interview process, such as the hypothetical statements about general helpfulness. For example, each interviewee was asked what they thought about statements like the following: "Some people believe that when you see something bad happen to another person online that you should defend that person; what do you think about that idea?" Having students respond to a set of common statements like that gives me the opportunity to see how students differ in their beliefs about helpfulness. Flexibility, though, was given to participants to account for their unique experiences, not just their reactions to hypothetical statements. The students are the experts in their online domain and some leeway should be given to them to explore areas of particular interest to them.

The interview protocol was developed to elicit students' online experiences, beginning with a simple warm-up question that asked students about their favorite type of social media and what they liked about it. For example, students who said their favorite social media app was Instagram were asked about their favorite Instagram post and how many followers they had. This opening question had two purposes: to have students feel more comfortable and talkative from

the beginning, and to let me know how engaged they were in these online communities, as a way for me to process their responses later in the interview. The rest of the interview largely focused on students' perceptions and beliefs about bystander helpfulness. Students were asked to recount moments of helpfulness they had witnessed online and what they believed was helpful about what they had witnessed. Students were also asked to assess the helpfulness of general actions like defending, supporting, telling adults, and distracting, and what they believed was helpful about those actions. The culmination of the interview asked students what they believe are some of the reasons most bystanders do not do anything when they see mistreatment or bullying behaviors.

The interview protocol was pilot-tested with four students in October of their ninth-grade year. These students, two male and two female, were just months removed from middle school and could provide some insight, especially in terms of how the questions were asked. One key change I made after the first two interviews was to change the first question of section two of the interview. The original question was open-ended and focused on whether students had ever seen anyone be mean to another student online. Because this question was unclear to students (i.e., how was I defining "mean"?), I changed this question to be close-ended. In this close-ended question, I asked students to review a list of seven cyberbullying actions, taken from Willard (2006), and put a checkmark next to the actions that they had personally seen and circle the action that they had seen the most. This checklist provided time for students to think about what they had seen, which primed them for subsequent questions. As I reviewed with the participant what they had marked and specifically what they had circled, I asked them which action they would like to speak more about, giving the participant more control in the conversation (Jenkins, Bloor, Fischer, Berney, & Neale, 2010).

After I had pilot-tested the interview protocol with these four ninth-grade students, I revised the interview protocol, and then I sent it to Dr. Cindy Kratzer and Dr. Kathryn Anderson-Levitt to review and provide feedback. Based on their feedback, I revised the interview protocol one last time before I began data collection.

Interviews took approximately 30-45 minutes and were conducted on site at Kehillah Academy's middle-school campus in a private setting. Fifteen out of the 20 interviews were conducted in a small conference room, two interviews were conducted in a teacher work area, two interviews were conducted in a private office, and one interview was conducted in a classroom. In each case, the only two people in the interview room were the study participant and me. The reason for conducting one-on-one interviews, not pairs or focus groups, was to provide some protection to those who participate, especially with the potential for sensitive topics to arise from students' stories and experiences. Stories, even without names of the individuals involved, have the chance of being recognized by other group participants. With an audience of peers, students may be less willing to share these stories for fear of backlash, since confidentiality would not be able to be secured.

Each participant was interviewed only one time between December 2017 and March 2018. Students who participated in the study were entered into a random drawing at the end of the study for a pair of one-day passes to Universal Studios Hollywood. All interviews were recorded on two Olympus Digital Voice Recorders (WS-822). Following the interviews, I transcribed the digital recordings verbatim into a Word document to be analyzed through multiple levels of coding in order to understand the themes and patterns that emerge.

Approach to Data Analysis

As the data were collected from the interviews, I first transcribed each interview. As I transcribed each interview, I kept a separate digital document (analytic memo) where I housed of my initial thoughts or impressions of each participant's experiences online. In some cases, I spoke these thoughts into a digital recording device as I left the interview site. I then transcribed those spoken memos and inserted them into my running digital document to keep my thoughts from each interview in one place.

In the first 2 weeks of data collection, I had completed four interviews, at which point, I reread these transcripts all together and began to write about the totality of their experiences and preliminary themes in my running digital document. Since the interview was semi-structured, I was able to see what students were talking about and decided to add a few probing questions to dig into their experiences better.

At the halfway point of data collection, I had transcribed ten interviews. During one sitting, I methodically read hard copies of the 10 transcripts, as it is important to "touch the data" to transform the "abstract information into concrete data" (Graue & Walsh, 1998, p. 145). During this preliminary reading, I pre-coded my data by circling words or phrases that struck me as interesting, as well as underlining specific quotations that resonated with me (Boyatzis, 1998; Layder, 1998). However, I did not highlight anything as I wanted to rework the same hard copies of the transcripts with color coding during the second cycle of analysis. As I worked through the transcripts, I continued to write about my impressions of the data in a separate digital document.

After reading through first ten transcripts, reviewing my analytic memos, and examining my research questions, I created the following three structural categories: (a) factors that bystanders consider in deciding whether to intervene, (b) bystander challenges to action, and

(c) bystanders' beliefs about helpfulness. Within each category, I created preliminary codes, which I shared with my co-chairs for their feedback. After reviewing their feedback and questions, I reshaped the codes, which I used systematically to analyze my data. My first research question asks what students consider helpful in cases of online peer mistreatment, and for this question, the codes included magnitudes of what was considered "positive" or "negative" for the bystander, victim or bully.

Before re-reading each transcript, I assigned each code a unique color and then I went through each of the initial 10 transcripts twice. During the preliminary coding, I highlighted any quotation that related to each code. During the second cycle of coding, I highlighted any additional quotations that were missed, including double coding of quotations that matched more than one code, as well as wrote notes in the margins of the transcripts to note sub-codes that emerged from each code. The finalized version of my categories, codes and sub-codes are shown in Table 3.

For interviews 11-20, each interview was transcribed within a few days of the interview and coded, according to the table above. Once all transcripts had been coded, I created a Google sheet with two "sheets," one for each research question. The codes that related to each research question were written at the top of the spreadsheet, while the students' codes, explained in the subsequent section on confidentiality, and pseudonyms ran along the left margin of each sheet. Under each data code, quotations were inserted for each student, if a quotation was found that connected with the selected code. Quotations that supported each code were written in black type, while counter evidence was written in red type. After all data had been electronically entered, frequencies were tabulated. As Namey, Guest, Thairu, and Johnson (2008) suggest, frequencies for each code and sub-code were determined by the number of individual

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participants who discussed each code and sub-code, as opposed to tallying the number of times a

code or sub-code is mentioned in total.

Table 3

Categories and Codes for Data Analysis

Factors Considered	Challenges to Action	Beliefs About Helpfulness
Code: Closeness • Defend • Support	Code: Missing Information • Non-Friend • Online/Offline Entanglement	Code: Defend Victim Positive • Care / Not Alone • Right Thing Negative • Involvement • Take Away V's Voice
Code: Crossing the Line • Friendship • Personal • Frequency	Code: Evaluation Apprehension • Target • Associated with Victim	Code: Support Victim Positive • Care / Not Alone Negative • Involvement
Code: Popularity • Defend • Support		Code: Tell Adult Positive • Power to Stop Bully • Trusted Negative • Overreact
		Code: Distract Bully No Positive Findings Negative • Uncertainty in How to Distract • Delay Inevitable

Once frequencies were tabulated for codes and sub-codes, findings emerged, which will

be discussed in chapters four and five. To better understand these findings, evidence for each

code was printed separately with each quotation coded again for additional sub-themes to make

sure the original thoughts about codes and sub-codes matched with the final results. This

additional layer of coding was particularly helpful in unpacking what participants believed was

helpful or unhelpful about defending, peer support, adult help, and distraction.

Ethical Considerations

There are a few ethical considerations for this study, including maintaining each participant's confidentiality and upholding my obligation as a state-mandated reporter.

Confidentiality

As noted, these interviews were conducted in a private setting between me and one student. For my research, I collected very little information on each participant, which included the participant's grade in school (sixth, seventh, or eighth), their gender, and their parent consent forms. Each participant was given a study code. The study code had four digits: interview number (00-20), followed by grade level (6, 7, 8), followed by male (0) or female (1). Thus, a participant who was my eighth student to interview, who is in seventh grade and who is female would have a code: 0871. Study codes and student pseudonyms were kept as a document in "My Documents" on my laptop's hard drive, which is password protected.

The interview transcript contained only the study code and no other identifying information for the student. The study codes were not written on the parent consent form for the interview, since parents will give "verbal" consent through a Google form, which includes the parent's name and child's name. The list that is generated from the parent permission form will be kept in my UCLA Google Drive folder, which is a password protected. The interview transcripts, kept separate from the parent permission and study codes, were stored on my personal Google Drive folder, which is password protected. No identifiable information was written on the transcript, including the students' names.

State-Mandated Reporting

Another consideration is that I have an ethical responsibility to protect the children who participate in this study (Mishna, Antle, & Regehr, 2004). As an adult working with school-age

children, I am also a mandated reported of the State of California (per California Penal Code

Section 11165.7), and I am required by law to break confidentiality by reporting any incident to

the state that involves students who report being harmed by others or who are considering self-

harm. If any issues had arose during my 20 interviews, I would have worked with school

personnel to provide information about the reported incident and would have made a call to the

Department of Child and Family Services (DCFS), regardless of whether the school site

administrators want me to make the report or not.

In order to be transparent to students in my study, I made the disclaimer at the beginning

of the interview that confidentiality has its limits with mandated reporting. At the same time, I

was clear with students that this is a safe space, too, and students could withdraw from the

interview at any point for any reason. None of the interviews warranted any disclosure that

would break student confidentiality.

Credibility and Trustworthiness

The qualitative data collected during this study must reflect credibility and

trustworthiness, especially in terms of how the population was sampled, how the data were

collected, and how the data were analyzed.

Sampling and Distribution

A random selection of students from Kehillah Academy was invited to participate in the

study. This approach helped encourage varied experiences to a complex topic: online peer

mistreatment and online bystanding. At the same time, the stratified selection worked to maintain

an even distribution between genders (male/female) and grade level (sixth, seventh, and eighth

grades). As discussed earlier, 16 students, eight male and eight female, were selected from the

sixth grade to participate in the study, while the lower response rate from seventh- and eighth-

grade parents led to drawing a total of 22 students, 11 female and 11 male, in those two grades. If the middle school administrator had drawn eight sixth-grade males and seven sixth-grade females, he would discard any additional males that were randomly drawn in order to draw an eighth female participant. This selection process helped ensure that no gender or no one grade level was oversampled and, thus, overrepresented. Even with this safeguard, students and parents had to provide permission to participate, and more parents of male students and eighth-grade students submitted the appropriate documents to participate in the study.

Data Collection: Promotion of Honesty

In order to promote honesty in students' responses, there were a few things I worked to do. First, I selected a site where I had no work experience or previous employment and, thus, no recognized authority over the students I was interviewing, even though I was likely viewed as another adult to these students. To further downplay my role as an adult, I wore more casual clothing (e.g., t-shirts, blue jeans, and sneakers) introduced myself as "Leigh" and worked to elevate the middle school students to a position of expert through how I framed the interview and asked the questions.

Another way that I worked to push students' honesty in their answers was through iterative questioning. With multiple ways of asking about helpfulness and beliefs about helpfulness, I was able to circle back to a topic if a participant seemed to contradict himself or herself during the interview. By rephrasing questions or probing a topic that participants had contradicting answers to, I was able to gain greater richness and complexity to students' perspectives on peer mistreatment and bystanding. With these efforts, I believe I garnered more open and honest responses to the questions I asked.

Accuracy of Interview Responses

To capture their beliefs and ideas more accurately, I asked participants if I could record their interviews. In all cases, students agreed, and only one student went "off record" to stop the recording and talk for a moment. Then he turned the recorder back on to finish the interview. I then transcribed the recorded interviews verbatim to get an unbiased document of how each student participant interpreted helpfulness within an online context. This verbatim document increased the trustworthiness of my study to ensure that students' thoughts were recorded accurately. My own thoughts and beliefs about the interview transcripts were kept separately and provided space for me to process what each student participant said. These interview notes helped me think about ways to maintain the systematic process of the interview questions, while striving to ask more probing questions for future interviews as new ideas emerged.

The Process of Data Analysis

The process by which data were analyzed, which was discussed earlier in this chapter, articulates the extent to which the data were combed and re-combed for supporting evidence, as well as counter evidence or counter claims. For the supporting claims, I continuously checked the data to make sure there was alignment between what the claims were and the data. For the data, each student was represented under each category or claim. If the student did not mention the claim, their cell was left blank. Counter claims were distinguished in red font to make them stand out for me to find and use in my written analysis. As I wrote the analysis for each claim, I checked to make sure that I was not relying too heavily on any one participant, but instead, I worked to spread the evidence among all my participants so that every voice was heard and represented.

Summary

Understanding students' online behaviors, especially their willingness to engage in acts of helpfulness, is a key step in designing antibullying interventions that are effective at reducing bullying and increasing positive mechanisms of support. This study examines the concept of helpfulness and students' willingness to intervene in online cases of peer mistreatment. The findings and discussion will be examined in chapters four and five, respectively.

CHAPTER FOUR

"Sometimes people are saying like, 'Hey, whose side are you on? This side or the other side?' And I'm like, 'I'm not gonna take any side 'cause I'm not on any side 'cause it's just not right to do.'"

-Sixth Grade Female

Situated in a Southern California urban metropolis, Kehillah Academy is a small, religious pre-K-8 private school with a total enrollment of approximately 650 students, hailing from 35 zip codes and nearly 30 countries. The annual tuition to attend Kehillah Academy is $30,000 with a third of the student population receiving tuition assistance. The middle school, which includes students in grades six through eight, has approximately 135 total students, averaging 45 individuals per grade level. The middle school administrative team and faculty work with students to embrace the concept of helping others through local community service projects, in keeping with their vision to *repair the world*. When I asked one administrator about the type of work they do with anti-bullying education, he said that there were no formalized anti-bullying education programs, but that the school does address bullying behaviors with students, families, and teachers through one-on-one and small-group conversations.

Many students at Kehillah Academy discussed the high degree of familiarity among the student population, including their families, which reinforced the belief that this is a supportive and "close-knit community," as Saphira described it. This school also has an involved parent community that attends most school functions and donates generously to the school beyond the cost of tuition.

Based on these characteristics (small school community, religious school, supportive parent population), the students at Kehillah Academy should have many things to say regarding how students intervene and support one another. However, the findings suggest even these students who know every single student in their grade are greatly inhibited in helping students

outside their friend group. In fact, only four students acknowledged that they had seen any public online acts of helpfulness among students at their school. Students who participated in this study, though, were quite thoughtful and reflective about their beliefs regarding helpfulness and the potential hurdles they faced in being helpful in their online communities.

With each interview, I learned more about the complexities, opportunities, and challenges of students navigating in real and virtual spaces, especially for students in middle school. The findings presented in this chapter seek to answer the questions about what bystanders consider helpful in their online communities and what factors they consider when determining to be helpful. First, I will provide a brief overview of this study, including the study participants and their online experiences, and then I will examine the findings of the study and how they align with the study's overarching research questions.

Middle School Bystanders' Online Experiences

As one might expect, these middle school students had a wide range of experiences with technology. The breakdown of students by grade and sex are shown in Table 4, including their pseudonyms to protect their identities. Nineteen of the 20 students in this study had a smartphone, and 18 of those students reported daily use of their phones to communicate with their peers. While close to half of students engaged in social media apps like Snapchat and Instagram, the other half of students discussed parental restrictions that limited their access to just group chats, or "group texts" as some students called them. One female student with this restriction noted, however, that group texts are "where the drama is anyway," indicating that parental restrictions did not afford any extra protection from peer mistreatment or "drama."

Table 4

Student Pseudonyms by Grade and Sex

Pseudonym	Grade	Sex
Aaron	8	M
Abby	7	F
Adam	8	M
Alex	6	M
Brian	7	M
Bryn	8	F
Dustin	8	M
Holly	6	F
Jaden	8	M
Jake	6	M
Jared	7	M
Karen	7	F
Kristen	8	F
Lisa	8	F
Matt	6	M
Nomi	7	F
Saphira	6	F
Sally	6	F
Seth	8	M
Thomas	7	M

In order to ground the conversation in bystanders' experiences, each participant was first asked about their favorite social media to gauge the type of communication they preferred and how experienced they were with the communication. For example, a student who responded that they preferred Snapchat was also asked how many streaks[3] they currently had going and what their longest streak was. The lowest experience for Snapchat was reported by one student who currently had four streaks with the longest streak at just 10 days, while the highest experience a student reported included 34 streaks with the longest streak, confirmed after he checked his phone, at 118 days.

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[3] A streak (a.k.a., Snap streak) occurs when two people send each other a Snapchat within 24 hours.

From there, I asked students to examine a list of Willard's (2006) seven bullying actions, which breaks bullying into the following: flaming, online harassment, cyberstalking, denigration, masquerade, outing, and exclusion. Students were asked to mark any actions that they had personally witnessed online and to circle the action that they had witnessed the most. The definitions for each action had been rewritten and pilot-tested to be more kid-friendly[4], but participants were encouraged to ask questions if they did not understand what any of the definitions meant. Eighteen out of twenty participants had witnessed at least one form of online bullying, while one participant had not witnessed any bullying and one participant did not want to mark anything because she believed that every incident she had witnessed was a "joke." More on that later. From students' responses, Table 5 was generated.

Table 5

Students' First-Hand Experiences with Types of Bullying

	Sixth		Seventh		Eighth		
	F	M	F	M	F	M	Total
Types of Bullying	($n = 3$)	($n = 1$)	($n = 3$)	($n = 4$)	($n = 2$)	($n = 5$)	(all grades)
Flaming	3	1	2	0	1	3	10
Online Harassment	1	0	2	0	2	1	6
Cyberstalking	0	1	1	2	0	1	5
Denigration	3	0	2	3	2	3	13
Masquerade	0	0	1	1	1	0	3
Outing	1	1	2	1	2	1	8
Exclusion	3	0	3	3	2	5	16

There were three types of cyberbullying that half or more students reported seeing: flaming (10/20), denigration (13/20), and exclusion (16/20). In terms of exclusion, 11 students reported that exclusion was the one type of cyberbullying that they saw most often, as shown in Table 6. One of the complications with exclusion is that one group chat that is formed to plan a particular party or get-together, for example, continues to exclude those not included in the group

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[4] See Appendix G for updated version of Cyberbullying Actions.

chat until the event is over. This means that one action to exclude causes repetitious harm to those on the outside because of the continuous knowledge that they are being left out of the group. It becomes particularly painful for students when they see posts on social media about the event that they were excluded from, which adds to the pain of the experience. Every single female student marked "exclusion" as something they have seen, while 80% of male respondents marked exclusion. Table 6 shows the types of bullying students reported seeing the most.

Against this backdrop of what students witness in their online communities, I examine in the following section what bystanders believe about helpfulness when they see peer mistreatment.

Table 6

Bullying Prevalence by Type

Most Prevalent Type of Bullying	# of Students
Exclusion	11
Flaming	4
Denigration	3
Online Harassment	2

Cyberbystanders' Beliefs About Helpfulness

What bystanders consider helpful in their online communities is an important consideration of any anti-bullying program. Many qualitative studies that focused on online bystanders have explored bystanders' beliefs through online simulations or hypothetical vignettes. This study asked students about their personal stories in witnessing helpfulness online and what they believed to be helpful in those situations and for whom. Only four students reported that they had seen someone else help another person online. As such, the contents of this section rely heavily on their reactions to four ways to help, based on the work of Davis and Nixon's (2014) YVP, which includes defending the victim, distracting the bully, providing

support to the victim, and seeking help from an adult. Students were asked what they thought was potentially helpful or unhelpful about those actions. In general, participants believed that telling an adult was the way to get bullying to stop, that defending, especially publicly, was not doable, that distracting the bully was not very helpful to anyone, and that spending time with the victim was mostly beneficial to all involved. First, I discuss the specific findings related to adult helpfulness and support.

Adults: A Double-Edged Sword of Helpfulness

Participants in this study viewed adults more positively than negatively, but their view of adults was most like a double-edged sword. Of the 20 participants, 15 discussed the positive power of an adult to "take care of it," to resolve the issue between the bully and the victim. On the other hand, ten students discussed how adults can make bullying a "bigger deal," and students repeatedly discussed not wanting to escalate an issue by involving parents, or themselves, which will be discussed in another section. While students discussed adults in general, as well as teachers, administrators, and older siblings, most of the discussion (14/20) focused on the actions of parents. Most students asserted that they wanted to attempt to troubleshoot a bullying situation on their own, but they would include adults, most likely parents, if the content of the bullying went personal or the situation quickly escalated in terms of the content and the number of attacks.

The greatest benefit that participants' parents brought with them was the perceived power to stop the bullying (13/20). According to four students, one mechanism that adults could use to stop the bullying was punishment. For example, sixth-grader Saphira believes that "adults can make it better because I can't go up to a kid and say, 'Give me your laptop,' or something like that. I can't punish a kid because obviously I'm not their parent, but a parent can." As Saphira

indicates, the ability to remove a child's technology, to take away privileges or rewards, lies with the adults. A fellow sixth grader, Alex, echoed those sentiments: "The adult has more power. If you tell the adult, they can do something and more people will listen to an adult." One student, Sally, mentioned that she had gone to her assistant principal on a few occasions. From her experience, the bullying behaviors stopped, which she credited to her school administrator's intervention with the bully, and she felt protected from the situation because she received no peer backlash for having talked to the administration.

However, not all students felt positively about adult intervention. Jaden, an eighth grader, argued that parental power is limited to what the parents know, which is filtered by their children. Children, he continues, have "more power to other children" because "they usually know it before the parents do." The onus of pushing back against the bully begins first with the children who are caught in the action.

An added complication to parents' ability to handle the problem comes when a bystander alerts an adult about a situation that involves friends. Five students expressed concern about getting their friends in trouble or themselves by way of associating with friends who had done something wrong. One student, Sally, said that her biggest fear is breaking a friendship, even if she knew her friends were in the wrong:

> I don't wanna get any of my friends in trouble, even if [my friends] said that. I know it's the right thing, that [my friends] sometimes deserve to be in trouble, and I'm afraid that [my friends] could come back to me.

However, Sally, like many other female participants in this study, discussed the connection with their moms and the comfort that brought them in dealing with "girl drama" or other issues with friends. Some participants had built trust and an openness to talk with their mothers. This established connection helped these bystanders continue seeking help from parents, even with a

change in context from real-life to virtual-life problems. Young people who feel that they can openly communicate with their parents may continue to do so, perhaps to less extent, as they get older by virtue of a stronger peer influence in their lives. But the most adult-reliant bystanders were the ones who discussed their ability to talk with their parents about anything.

Both male and female bystanders discussed parents' life experiences and education as assets when seeking help or advice. Many students (7/18) believed that adults could be a good resource in cases of online peer mistreatment because the adults, while maybe not technologically savvy, had been young once and had gone through middle school. This experience of growing up allows adults to empathize with their own children because "they know how it feels and so they know what to tell the child." Only three students mentioned concerns about the ability of adults to help because of their lack of experience in online communities. Saphira summed up these feelings: "Having gone through being humiliated on a group chat; that's different. So [the adults] can't really be in our shoes because they've never sort of been in that kind of experience."

On the other side of the sword, adults can complicate the situation and make it into a "bigger deal" for the students and families involved. For the ten students who mentioned the negative side of getting adults involved, "bigger deal" translates into more people knowing. The expressed concerns included "getting friends in trouble" (3/18), exaggerating the problem (2/18), and asking too many questions (2/18), and parent-to-parent interactions (4/18). Those who explicitly discussed parent-to-parent interactions argued that this was a key way of letting the situation get out of hand. While many students believed that adults could handle the bully, some students believed that adults, in particular parents, could make the situation bigger than it was. Jaden contended, "If I tell my parents that Joseph's getting bullied, then my mom's gonna

go tell his parent . . . and it could spread really fast." Because students "get embarrassed easily,"

Jaden went on to say that he feared also parents' questioning of other students, and that is

something he says his peers would not like. Students' embarrassment not only stems from more

people knowing about the incident, but it is also linked to the fear that others will know the

bystander told adults. If other students found out, two students noted, they would call the

bystander is a "tattletale" or a "snitch."

Because adults are mostly viewed as a double-edged sword, bystanders believed peer-to-

peer support was the most preferred and most helpful type of support in cases of bullying or

mistreatment. The next section reveals what is helpful about peer support and when peer support

is most beneficial.

The Positives of Peer Support

In general, bystanders discussed a heavy reliance on peers for help or guidance when

problems arose in their online communities, with the belief, as Saphira put it, "friends help

friends." This dependence likely stems from online communities being largely adult-free zones

for children. Like Saphira, Adam believes friends are more likely to understand how to help,

while parents or other adults may be challenged to know how to respond when they are told

about an online issue: "When your parents intervene, sometimes they go too far, like they really

don't understand what you need. Rather than like a friend, who might be in a similar situation

but like knows how to handle it." The students in this study believed that peer-to-peer support

was the most helpful action for bullied victims and the least hurtful for bystanders. However,

peer-to-peer support had certain restrictions in order to be the most helpful, according to

bystanders: ideally peer support is given to a friend, a concept that will be explored in depth

further in this chapter, and the support should be given privately through a text or in person.

Bystanders in this study had much to say about the benefits of private support, as opposed to public support. One of their main concerns, specifically about public support, was "making it a bigger deal," which was stated in almost those exact words by 12 participants. Involving more people publicly in group chats is more likely to escalate the situation and potentially make it worse for the victim by embarrassing him or her, as well as the bystander who is afraid of becoming part of the "action." For the victim, they could appear weak, as if they are getting "babied" by their friends. While only five students expressed this concern, Saphira's response signals that this is a widespread belief among bystanders: "A lot of kids don't like receiving that much help because they want to show other kids that they can take that insult and that they don't need someone else's help or someone else's reassurance." When the support, however, is provided through private texts or in-person one-on-one conversations, the victim does not have the same concerns of looking weak to a large group of peers. This private support also is beneficial to the bystander. According to Lisa, private support "shows that you really care and not just for the publicity of other people knowing that you care." A second added benefit is private support decreases bystanders' fear of peer backlash. For the five students who were concerned about getting involved in the action, which included peer backlash, their concerns were largely about group chats, which students feel are open and public. When asked if they would be as concerned about backlash if they sent private messages of support, three of the five students said they would not have the same concerns.

In terms of what peer support looks like between the bystander and victim, there are three main paths: dismissing the bullies attacks (5/20), reassuring the victim (4/20), reinforcing the self-worth of the victim (3/20). Bystanders stated they would downplay the power of the insult by speaking negatively about the bully. Matt said that he would tell his friend that the bully was

"just not nice" and that the victim "shouldn't care what that person thinks because nobody likes him anyway." Aaron focused on the victim by trying to prop him up: "I would tell this person that there's nothing wrong with you. There's nothing bad about them and they have friends." This reinforcement of close ties with other peers or friends leads to what bystanders consider to be helpful to the victim.

According to bystanders, the two most important ways that peer support helped the victim were that the victim would not feel alone (9/20) and the victim would be able to "process" what happened (5/20). Bystanders felt strongly that victims should be helped because it would give them some protection from feeling vulnerable and alone. As Bryn described it, bystanders are their friends' "safety pillows" because by listening and supporting the victim, he or she knows that someone is "going to be there for them, and that if anything else happens they can tell them." By supporting a friend, Karen believes what is helpful is that it shows "somebody saw it, somebody cares, somebody knows what's going on." In both Bryn and Karen's statements, it is also clear that their vision of peer support is not a one-time moment, but rather an ongoing system of support.

Spending time with the victim also helps the victim process things. For Thomas, he believed that peer support would allow "[the victim] can say what they're feeling, or say if that bothers them or not or something, and if it does, you could help them." While it is important to provide a supportive space for victims, two female bystanders noted that it is also important not to dwell on it, too. Kristen said it best:

> I mean it's good but at the same time then you just keep talking about it when you should be moving on. You're just revolving yourself around that negativity, then nothing happens unless you try to leave it in the past. But first you obviously have to resolve it.

As Kristen argues, part of the responsibility of peer support is to acknowledge the victim's experience and be that "safety pillow" that Bryn talked about, and at the same time, work to move the victim forward to a better place emotionally.

The Challenge of Defending

Defending was the most challenging and complex topic of helpfulness that bystanders discussed in their interviews. Students in this study articulated the belief that they had access to everyone and that there was not one person in their school that they did not know. Yet this added familiarity with others in their school community did not propel students to defend friends or other peers publicly.

When bystanders spoke about defending a victim, they acknowledged many benefits, including letting the victim know someone cares, which was the most recognized positive effect for defending (11/20), as shown in Table 7. Defending could also model for victims and other bystanders on how to defend, as well as let the bully know they had crossed the line. As Karen argued, "it's more of a sign that you did something wrong. When you're cyberbullying, you don't realize it. At least that's how it is in my grade."

While there were noted benefits to defending, there was great hesitation to publicly defend. Having sampled nearly 15% of the school's middle school population, I repeatedly heard students discuss their trepidation in overstepping their boundaries to get involved, especially publicly. Even though a few students (3/20) mentioned that they could send the bully a private message, telling him or her to stop, bystanders largely viewed defending as a public act, as expressed by their fear of social judgment. This social judgment also included anger from the victim for not letting him defend himself. Alex summarizes the wishy-washy nature of

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defending: "It is a negative and a positive, because you're not letting them speak for themselves but you're also standing up for them."

Another risk that bystanders quickly pointed out was the increased likelihood that they would become a victim from defending a victim. If the bystander publicly defends, Abby noted, the bully would likely see the bystander as a "worthy opponent" and the bully would start "going after you to see if you're going to stand up for yourself." Jaden agrees. He argues that "the hardest one, the hardest thing to do is defend publicly because you know you're gonna start being attacked, too. You just know. You know that there's like a 90% chance that they're gonna start hating you." Defending draws the attention to the bystander and puts him or her, as Lisa discussed, at the "center of it."

Table 7

Bystanders' Perceptions of Helpful and Unhelpful Consequences for Defending

Potentially Helpful	Potentially Unhelpful
The victim sees that someone cares. (11/20) Example: "I feel like it shows that people almost like care and that it shows that people will stick out their neck if someone's being bullied." -Saphira	The bully may turn his attacks on defender. (12/20) Example: "I feel like the bully would start hating me too, like why would you do this?" -Brian
The bystander feels good when they do the right thing and defend. (6/20) Example: "It makes me feel good as a person, like I've done my duty, that I've helped someone else." -Karen	Defending may take the victim's voice away to defend himself or herself. (8/20) Example: "I think they can think like, 'Oh, they all think I can't defend myself.' It could offend somebody like 'Oh, they think I'm weak." -Adam
Defending could model for the victim and bystanders how to respond to future attacks. (4/20) Example: "It also sets a role model, something for others to see and do in the future." -Bryn	Bystanders could face social judgment from their peers. (7/20) Example: "People could say, 'You should just stay back.' It's hard to stand up in front of people and actually speak your mind and say to someone that's wrong." -Bryn
Existing friendships are strengthened when bystanders defend friends. (3/20) Example: "You can trust them more, and they can also trust you." -Sally	Defending may harm friendship, especially if your friend is the bully. (4/20) Example: "Maybe some people will think you've changed or something happened. But even if you haven't, and you're just standing up for something you believe in." -Karen
Defending could help the bully know they crossed the line. (3/20) Example: "Maybe the bully or whatever doesn't think they are doing anything wrong." -Seth	The bully may increase attacks on the victim. (4/20) Example: "I think some kids, they just don't know how to handle it so they'll just keep saying those things [to the victim]." -Dustin
Defending could stop the bullying. (2/20) Example: "then it sort of stops it." -Thomas	

Publicly defending online also puts the bystander "on record." Several bystanders (5/20) spoke about this fear of being "on record" for their posts, even in group chats or private text messages, and this fear stemmed from the belief that adults could misread the situation and see their defending as being involved in the fight. For Sally, a sixth-grade student, she discussed on three occasions in her interview the fear that future colleges and high schools would know what she posted privately on Snapchat, Instagram, or group texts because she believed that schools

"keep track of that," and this led Sally to prefer speaking with people in person, rather than online, if she had an issue to resolve. For Aaron, the fear of going "on record" related to how the bully may try to get him in trouble for defending a victim: "All the bullies are gonna be like, 'Oh, that person wasn't defending; he was fighting us, too.' See, that's the problem with publicly defending a kid."

Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, only two bystanders claimed that defending could stop the bully, and one of those bystanders, Thomas, was fairly noncommittal: "If I step up, then it sort of stops it." As previously discussed in the section on the helpfulness of adults, 15 bystanders believed that an adult could make the bully stop. For Brian, he believes that the bully will just shut him down by "saying 'Shut up,' or something," and not hear what Brian is trying to say. Lisa believes that saying "stop" online really isn't enough to "make [the bully] stop" because, as Nomi argues, "they might not even listen to me if I try [to intervene]." Defending against a bully who is also popular makes it even more challenging, as Aaron notes: "If they're popular, they have a lot of friends, then they would not like me, they might not like me after for standing up for what's right."

The bystanders in this study made it clear that while there are positives to defending, including personally feeling good about standing up to a bully, the risks largely outweighed those benefits, leaving many bystanders to shirk the idea of publicly defending. To defend is to go against the bully. As discussed earlier, if this bully is not well known to the bystander, then it will reinforce the issues of missing information. If the bully is popular, then they may have a lot of friends who will go against the bystander, which puts the bystander in a tough position of being a social outcast. If the bully is a friend, then the bystander may risk damaging a friendship. For these three reasons -- the bully is popular, unknown, or a friend -- defending will continue to

be a large hurdle for bystanders, especially at a time of young adolescence when there is a growing importance on social networks, including what peers think.

The Barriers to Distraction

The final type of helpful action I asked students to consider was distraction. Based on the findings of the Youth Voice Project, middle school victims of bullying considered distraction to be more helpful than telling an adult or defending a victim, but less helpful than spending time with the victim comforting and listening to them (Davis & Nixon, 2014). With my participants, I told them that some people believe that, when you see someone mistreated online, you should distract the bully. I then asked them to consider what would be helpful or unhelpful about distraction. Overall, middle school bystanders in this study were unsure about how to distract and how effective distraction may be in slowing down or stopping the bully.

In nine out of the 20 interviews I conducted, students asked for clarification regarding what I meant by "distraction." One student, Bryn, could not wrap her head around the idea of distraction: "I don't know what kind of distraction. I don't get the distraction. I don't get it." Aaron felt the same way as Bryn, and pondered "how that would work, how, 'cause [the bully] could be really into the conversation of bullying the kid.

When asked about how they may distract the bully digitally, 12 out of the 20 interviewed students discussed distraction as a challenging option with little benefit to the victim or bystander. Thomas believed that distraction "wouldn't be the easiest thing because [the bully] can just go back and see what's going on and start back up where they were before." Thomas indicates that distraction online may be less helpful than in person because there is a running record of the conflict. As such, the bully's attention, even if momentarily shifted from the victim, can refocus on the conflict because the bully can re-read the posts and continue sending

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messages to the victim. However, Brian, along with six other participants, does believe that even though the distraction may not stop the bully, it may give "the victim some time to rest, sort of like gaining his health back. Like I play video games, when I go hide, I feel like I'm getting all my health back."

One student embraced the art of distraction and discussed it with some enthusiasm. Nomi asserted, "I do that, I do that a lot. . . . I create funny distractions, so at least someone gets a laugh out of it . . . I use an icebreaker, I don't know, like just try to break it up, like just try not to be so serious." When asked about icebreakers she has used, Nomi said she will say a joke or ask what people are having for dinner. Nomi also discussed how she and her "closest friends" will join together to distract, but Nomi did not discuss whether she would feel comfortable using distraction outside of people with whom she feels close. I then asked Nomi if her distraction techniques worked, and she said, "It sometimes works, sometimes not. When it's really serious, like it wouldn't really help. People would get a quick laugh about it, but then go back." Even though Nomi showed some comfort with using distraction, she also revealed that with more serious issues, that it would not be effective at stopping the bullying.

Like Nomi, the majority of middle school bystanders (14/20) believed that online distraction was not effective and could potentially make it worse for the victim and the bystander. When asked what was helpful about distraction, Jared, in fact, said, "Is it okay if I say actually nothing?" The most common reason for distraction not working was that it would not stop the bullying. Several bystanders believed that distraction would delay the inevitable, which could make the bully more angry and involve more people in the process, as Saphira noted when she said: "Not only are more people getting into the situation, but more people are getting hurt." Matt believed that distraction would have to be done repeatedly in the same bullying incident,

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which is an added burden for the bystander: "In the end, [the bully] will probably just keep doing it and the other person will probably just keep distracting the person again and again." Another potential issue that at least five bystanders were concerned about was turning the attention away from the victim and toward them. Adam noted that "unless you figure out like a way to distract [the bully] effectively where they just stop altogether, I think there are a lot of ways distraction would change the focus onto you." Adam's response indicates his lack of efficacy to distract and his belief that distraction would make it worse for him as a bystander.

Overall, these bystanders showed a lack of comfort in using online distraction techniques to help in peer mistreatment situations. This lack of comfort and uncertainty may stem from bystanders' not knowing specific techniques to use to distract; it may also be connected to bystanders' hesitation to defend publicly, which will be explored in more depth in the next section.

Factors Bystanders Consider Before Intervening

This study revealed three key findings related to what bystanders considered when deciding to intervene. The most important consideration was how close the bystander was to the victim with the stronger the tie to the victim, the more likely the bystander would help the victim. On the flip side, the lack of knowing the victim substantially decreased bystanders' purported willingness to help. In this same vein, bystanders discussed a lack of general knowledge regarding the situational factors like the people involved, what they were fighting about and why they were fighting. The less the bystanders understood about the situation, the lower the investment to intervene. And lastly, bystanders displayed a strong sense of social norms and social evaluation in terms of avoiding a potential backlash not only from the bully,

but also from peers, if they were to intervene in places that were considered by others not to be their "business." This section will elaborate on each of these three findings and sub-findings.

The Importance of Closeness in Bystander Decision-Making

Bystanders in this study spoke often about the role of friendship. Every participant noted the role of friendship or closeness with the vast majority (18/20) stating that it played a significant role in the dynamics of their online communities. Friends were consistently mentioned as the first people bystanders would turn to for guidance or support in their online communities, more often than they would turn to their parents or other adults. The single largest determining factor in bystander helpfulness for the students who participated in this study was, in fact, friendship. According to Abby, a bystander "really needs to know the people pretty well to figure out whether you intervene or you don't intervene." Dustin pushes this thought further and argues that "the person and your closeness will always matter the most" in terms of bystander interventions. The closer the bystander is to the victim, the more push the bystander feels to do something about it. This push to act was shown when students were asked about defending a victim, and 11 of the 20 participants, before they would answer, asked for clarification regarding whether they were friends with the victim.

As students deliberated on the role of friendship in their online communities, many discussed how "easy" it would be to help a friend who was the victim, how challenging it would be to go against a friend who is the bully, and how the fear of the unknown with non-friends eroded bystanders' willingness to help. In the sections that follow, I will unpack the intricacies of friendships and the influence that friendships, or lack thereof, play in bystanders' capacity to take positive actions.

Helping a victim-friend. Ninety percent of students in this study held the belief that friends were easier to help than non-friends, acquaintances with whom the bystander is not close. Bystanders offered several reasons for an increased desire and willingness to help friends, which all boil down to mutual trust and understanding (13/20).

Familiarity with your friends, knowing about them and their interests, helps build mutual trust and mutual understanding. This trust and understanding empowers bystanders to be supportive of victim-friends, in large part because friends are "known entities." As Karen put it, friends "know everything about you, everything you're going through."

This familiarity also leads bystanders (6/20) to believe they can comfort a victimized friend. Aaron, for example, said that he "would know more about his [friend's] life," which would lead him to "know how to help him." Nomi echoed that sentiment: "I can relate to my friend and try to cheer them up with something I know they love, or stuff to just get her mind off of it that I know we enjoy doing." Bystanders and their friends are, as Lisa said, past that "awkward stage of friendship," allowing bystanders to have a better perceived ability to help a victim with whom they are close.

When a bystander's friend is involved as the victim of online peer mistreatment, then there is a greater likelihood of that bystander intervening. Even for students who expressed low self-efficacy, like Adam, there was an acknowledgement that friends meant something important: "Like I would not do it if they're not close to me, but I would just have a higher chance of doing it if they were closer to me." The action of helping your friend, in turn, strengthens the friendship, a built-in reward for the bystander. After all, several bystanders (6/20) mentioned that if they help a friend, then that friend will help them in the future. Abby believes that comforting your friend during challenging times helps you "form bonds" through a shared

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bad experience, and from this bond, "you know they always have your back." In this way, friends offer a protective barrier for each other through mutual support. However, as easy as it may be for bystanders to support the victim-friends, it is equally challenging to hold their bully-friends accountable for their wrongdoings.

      The challenge of holding friends accountable. One of the challenges that bystanders expressed about their friends was when their friend was in the role of "bully." For the seven participants who discussed times when their friends had been in the wrong, the main concern was the potential damage to the friendship that would come from the bystander pushing back on a bully-friend. Jared discussed how hard it is to go against a friend that he has been with for a long time: "You've always been on the same side, and then all of a sudden, you're on different sides? That would be pretty awkward to adjust back onto the same side."

      But there is power in a friend's voice. As Abby notes, it is harder to dismiss criticism when that criticism comes from a friend, rather than someone that she didn't know well:

> When you are put off by someone you're not as close to you know you're not going to spend as much time with them. You can sort of disregard it as they don't know me; they don't know what I'm talking about.

Even though it is easier to hear criticism from a non-friend because it is easier to disregard, Karen argues that is exactly why holding friends accountable is important. Karen believes that with your friends it is "10 times harder to intervene, no matter what they're doing. But I think it's also 10 times more effective if you do." Dustin agrees. He said that his friends have influence over him, and he would be more willing to correct his actions if the criticism came from a friend: "If I posted something then one of my good friends said it was bad, I would take it down. If someone I didn't really know like told me to take it down, I wouldn't care." As challenging as it may be for bystanders to push back on friends who cross the line, the participants in this study

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indicate a greater willingness to hear the criticism and to take different actions when the feedback comes from a friend. The real challenge, though, is helping peers who are not your friends.

Barriers of friendship to helping others. By cultivating strong connections within their friend groups, bystanders have a much lower desire to help "non-friends," as well as strangers. These "non-friends" represent the unknown to bystanders, and bystanders in this study (16/20) expressed a strong aversion to getting involved with less familiar peers in online mistreatment situations. This opposition to helpfulness was compounded by bystanders' fear about helping someone who may not be well liked or may be in the wrong, and their fear of knowing how to help someone with whom they are not close. Jaden's viewpoint encapsulates the overwhelming majority of students who question why anyone would help someone they did not know: "You don't know why you're helping basically. Maybe they're right and it's the right thing, but honestly, there's no reason to help. You don't really know why you're helping this person because you don't know about them."

Helping those outside their friend group poses a perceived high-risk, low-reward situation for bystanders. There are several risks that bystanders noted about non-friends, but the two most common hurdles to helping included a lack of clarity regarding this non-friend's reputation and, by extension, whether this non-friend was actually in the wrong. As Sally claims, you don't know "if they're actually faking it or not," which hinders the willingness to help. Aaron maintains that helping a victim indicates that the victim did "nothing wrong." If Aaron were to comfort a less familiar victim, he would be signaling that the victim is right, which is harder to do if the bystander does not feel like he or she knows the victim very well.

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A fear bystanders (4/20) have is that their reputation stands to be damaged through associating with this lesser known peer. Alex says, "If it's someone you don't know, you don't know if they're even a good person." Bystander believe that others will judge them for associating with this "other" peer and then there will be a lot of "hate," as six participants called it, that will come their way. And hate, Brian says, is "not something you want." In fact, only Matt noted anything positive about helping a non-friend when he said, "At least you know it's the right thing to do. You can feel good about that."

One of the beliefs that bystanders held onto was friends should help friends first. This strongly held belief, which was expressed by the ninety percent of participants who claimed it was easier to help friends than non-friends, led bystanders (5/20) to assume that non-friends will get support from their own friend group. Bryn summarizes this belief well: "I think they always want someone who was their friend to help them first because I feel like I don't know that much even about that person yet to go in and say, 'I know this.'" This assumption that friends will help each other is also linked with bystanders' worry that they will not know how to comfort a non-friend.

Even though there is a great reluctance to standing up for or comforting a non-friend, Jared, a self-proclaimed bullying victim, believes that it is more powerful for the non-friend when you do stand up and take action. When he was getting victimized last year, there was one person that he didn't know very well who stood up for him, and it was a powerful moment for him: "I barely even know this guy, and, wow, he stood up for me. That made me happy." Even so, Jared himself, like most others in this study, expressed apprehension at helping non-friends, but for reasons others did not express: "I don't want to be bullied, especially as a recipient of

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bullying. It's terrible, and I really don't want to be bullied again. Maybe standing up might get me bullied again."

Friendships create "in groups" that embrace certain group norms, including in-group teasing or "roasting" and "out groups" that represent "the other" or "the unknown." This sense of the unknown played into bystanders' beliefs about whether they could or should help those with whom they are not close. In the next section, I will examine the challenges of missing information, not only regarding who is involved, but also regarding what is being discussed and why the victim is getting bullied.

Information Processing: The Who, What, and Why of Bystanding

With digital technologies, students are connected to their peers locally and globally in unprecedented ways. Information can be easily accessed and shared among social groups, allowing students to feel a greater sense of connectedness by virtue of "knowing" what is happening with their close friend group. Information, to students, appears to be a comfort, while the lack of information presents a challenge, especially in the sense of bystander intervention. One of the findings of this study relates to importance of information for online helpfulness. The less information bystanders have, the less willing they are to intervene. Fourteen of the 20 participants in this study explicitly discussed the issue of missing information as a hindrance to helping. The information that students process in order to decide whether to intervene lies in who is involved, what is happening, and why it is happening. This processing is the "who, what, why" of bystanding.

The who. The biggest hindrance to helpfulness, as was previously discussed, is the "who." If the victim is not the bystander's close friend, then there is a really low chance that the bystanders in this study would defend or support the victim, although there is still a chance that

they may alert an adult to help. Why is the "who" part of the "missing information" for bystanders? One of the key points the bystanders made in terms of why they were so willing to help their friends, as opposed to non-friends or stranger, was this idea of familiarity. Bystanders have confidence in knowing their friends and, as Alex put it, knowing "how they act." On the other hand, Jaden discussed the dilemma of not knowing the bully or victim well, which made it hard for him to know who was right or who started it:

> I may not wanna be involved with someone I don't know as well as someone I know really well 'cause I know who they are, and I know . . . not what they think, but I know how their life is, what's going on.

Karen claims that not knowing would lead her to be silent about a bullying situation: "If it's just some random kid in your class that you don't really know, then you can't say anything about it because you don't know anything about it." The lack of knowledge for non-friends' personality, character, motivations, etc., limits bystanders desire to be helpful with relatively unknown victims or to push back against a bully.

Sometimes, though, bystanders do have information related to the "who," but that information, related to either the bully or the victim's own popularity or likeability, continues to hinder the bystander's desire to intervene. In terms of the victim, Jaden argues, "It matters about the person who's being hurt. It matters if they're popular or nice. That's the sad part. It's not a good thing, but it's the truth." Jaden went on to explain that a victim who is more popular or perceived as "nice" would have a greater chance of having someone come to his or her defense. Likewise, Dustin recounted a moment where a friend of his posted something mean on Instagram about a girl who Dustin described as "the kindest, nicest girl." He and his friends immediately texted his friend to take down the post because "it was just rude and [the victim] didn't deserve it." On the flip side, a victim with a low social rank or who was perceived, as Abby put it, as

"annoying" or "not well liked" was less likely to receive help from bystanders. Saphira, along with a couple other participants, discussed how the bully's reputation also played into it. For Saphira, if the bully is known as a "class clown," then it is easier for her to ignore the behavior because it is just "Jack being Jack." The implication here is that reputations may become locked over time, and the self-efficacy to intervene and push back on someone who is making fun of others becomes lower.

   Popularity: "It only matters if it matters." For the first several interviews, popularity was not something that bystanders said mattered or something they considered when thinking about intervening. However, during the final stretch of interviews, participants spoke about popularity in depth and how popularity may influence their decision to intervene. As Abby stated, "Popularity is the bane of every child's middle school existence." Popular people were viewed as those with "a lot of people behind them," as Lisa said. She continued, "[People] stand up for them because they're popular, and they want to be next to them." Defending someone who was popular could put the bystander in a position of favorability with those viewed with more social status, making it a more attractive and easier option for bystanders to defend someone who is seen as popular. Aaron views popular kids as "the bullies cause they think they can do what they want, and people are scared to stand up to them." Saphira agrees with Aaron when she states that popular kids have a "big voice," which causes others to "think [popular kids] have more of an opinion." To go against a popular bully is to get "hate on you." Kristen says, "If they're popular, then they can get people to say, 'Oh, this person went against what I said. They're a bad person. They're bad friends. Don't be friends with them.'" Popular people have the perceived ability to separate peers from the rest of the group if those peers choose to go against what the popular people say. But as Karen declares, "It only matters if you care so much about what other people

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think of you, about the popular kids, about the non-popular kids." For nearly half of the students interviewed, they claimed that it made no difference for them in terms of their likelihood of helping a friend. In fact, Jared asserts that he needs only his friends: "If it came to a point where I would stand up for a popular person or stand up for my friends? Definitely my friends. I care more about my friends than popularity."

The what. One of the complications in bystander interventions is knowing what is happening. As Holly described, there are parts of conversations that happen in group chats, private messages, and in person, leading bystanders to feel that they have a disjointed or incomplete narrative of the situation. Dustin, for example, says that he "would watch for a little bit, just to see what's, like, the full story. And then [he'd] ask one of [his] friends what happened." Thomas also feels that it would be helpful to talk to a friend to find out more information about what's going on because "if it starts at a point where you just know there's something missing in it." Both Dustin and Thomas express a reliance on friends to fill in the missing information, which may be helpful in understanding what is going on, but neither participant, nor the other eight students who mentioned the "what," said that this "knowing" would lead them to take action. It simply moved them a bit more in the direction of helpfulness, as Abby argued: "You don't want to step in before you know what's happening."

Content severity. While bystanders discussed having incomplete information, which hindered their willingness to intervene, other bystanders discussed "the what" that they did see, which boiled down to the perceived severity of the online exchange. Severity, according to these bystanders, was judged on how personal it was (12/20), how repetitious it was (6/20), how the victim responded (4/20) and tone (1/20).

The personal nature of attacks focused mostly on what bystanders perceived as outside of the control of the victim: family (10/20) and medical condition/disability (4/20). Since bystanders do not choose their families, bringing up family, especially mothers (4/20), sends a signal that the message is less playful and more harmful. For example, Nomi provided this hypothetical scenario:

> If it had something to do with what's going on in my family that someone might have told her, and then she were to come up to me and be like, "Ha, ha, ha, I heard this, and ha ha, your brother and your mom and . . .", then I wouldn't really feel comfortable.

Holly agrees and believes that if someone were to call her "ugly or something, then that's more stupidness . . . whereas if it's, 'your mom is ugly' or 'your grandma's an idiot' or something," then that would cross a line. While Matt agrees with Holly and Nomi's assertion that family is off limits, he does disagree that personal attacks, like calling "you horrible, ugly, or something like that," do not matter.

Repetition, for these bystanders, was described as "continuous," "excessive," and "nonstop." Aaron captures this well: "If everyone picks on that one person, and they constantly hear the same mean things nonstop, like you never let it go, they could get really offended because they could think that you're serious." This repetitive action alerts the victim that a line has been crossed, and the bystander may interpret this as a line having been crossed, especially based on the victim's response. As Abby and Lisa note, they are less likely to intervene as bystanders if they see the victim respond harshly back, making it a more equal situation. Lisa asserted:

> I guess as long as it's just kind of one person doing it to the other one - the other person not doing it back, then it is crossing the line. But if they're just doing it to each other and doing it back then I think that's just how they are.

For Abby, if the victim stops responding or leaves the group chat, then she would "know [the victim] was hurt by it." Believing the victim was hurt, Abby would feel a "stronger obligation" to help or to find someone who could help.

Tone was less important for these bystanders, as tone can be misinterpreted online. This was one of the challenges bystanders discussed regarding intervening online or in person. In person was considered easier for most (18/20) with one person saying that neither was easy and one person saying that it is easier to just "type words" in response to something. Of the 18 bystanders who discussed the challenges of intervening online, the main concern related to how your message would get interpreted. As Aaron noted, "It's hard to get your point across 'cause when you're just texting, you're not really using emotion. It's hard to understand what your point is." Case in point: Brian was the only bystander who specifically mentioned using "tone" to determine the severity of an exchange. Brian believed that when someone texted in "all caps," then that showed something bad, "like they're screaming in real life." But to Lisa, she and her friends sometimes "just leave the caps lock on accidentally and just be typing very boring things."

The why. Another part of the dilemma of "missing information" is the bystander's need to know "why" something was happening. Bystanders' need to understand why signals the need to attribute blame to the bully or the victim. Is the bully out of control and targeting a helpless victim, or did the victim do something to deserve "the hate" from the bully? With the four students who mentioned the idea of understanding "why," each one signaled more toward victim blaming than thinking the bully had done something wrong. For example, Alex said that he would need to "learn their story. Learn why they were picked on and bullied." Likewise, Jared said he fears "missing some key components." When asked what he considers "key

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components," Jared said, "Definitely why [the bully] is mad, the victim's feelings, who's getting bullied, and what did the victim do to make him angry." The belief that Jared expresses is that the victim likely did something to make the bully angry enough to pick on him. The belief that the victim deserved to be bullied is likely to decrease bystander helpfulness even more. As Seth noted, "maybe [the victim] started it or engaged first. Maybe they're in the wrong. So I don't know cause I could be standing up for the wrong person or do the wrong thing."

Even with understanding the who, the what and the why, it is still unclear what information would really push bystanders to action, besides witnessing a friend getting victimized online. The gathering of information also takes time, which means there is the possibility that the bystander finally feels ready to intervene and the situation has blown over. One of the biggest hindrances to helping, which will be discussed in the next section, is the fear of peer backlash.

The Fear of Peer Backlash

The most negative factor for bystander helpfulness was a fear of peer backlash. Peer backlash included the potential for peers to disapprove of a bystander's actions and the increased chance of the bystander becoming a bullied victim. Every single participant (20/20) indicated that they were concerned about backlash, especially the possible impact on their in-group friendships and general perception in the school community. Of the helpful actions—defending, peer support, adult help, or distraction—defending was the action that was most concerning for bystanders in terms of backlash, especially because students perceived defending as a public act that put them against the bully. This public defense could draw the ire of the victim, bully and friends, which was something bystanders stated they wanted to avoid. In this section, I will examine bystanders' fears of peer judgment with the victim, the bully and their friends; the role

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of exclusion in driving the fear of backlash; and potential ways to decrease this fear among bystanders.

One of bystanders' concerns, as mentioned, is overstepping their role as friends and not allowing victims to have their own voice (8/20). Bystanders suggest that victims may feel weak if someone comes to their defense, which may lead the victim and bystander to an argument. Holly believes that "if you think [your friend] can do it themselves, then let them do it themselves." That decision can be tricky and a couple participants in this study discussed how they were on the receiving end of blame for intervening for a friend. Bryn recounted an incident in which she and a friend had an argument about it. She remembers her friend saying, "I can do this on my own. I don't need you stepping in like that."

Friendship, a major finding of this study, comes back into play in terms of peer backlash, especially when the bully is a friend. One of the concerns that Sally discussed was this feeling of needing to do the right thing, but the fear that doing the right thing could ruin a friendship: "I'm afraid [my friend] could come back to me . . . that's like my biggest fear, 'cause I don't wanna break a friendship." Bryn echoed those fears, believing that her friend would not "trust her" anymore, which would "put a line between you and them." Things get even more complicated when a bystander gets caught in between two friends who are fighting each other, something that Saphira says she's struggled with:

> If I protect the person who's getting that text message, it's saying, "I don't believe what the attacker is saying." Then if I comfort the person who sent the text message, then I'm saying that I'm believing what they're saying and that I'm taking one person's side and not the other.

Lisa agrees and says that she no longer gets in between friends who are bullying each other because if she defends one of her friends, then she "might get in a fight with the other friend."

Bystanders who may intervene have concerns that their friends will judge them for their actions and may exclude them from their group. From the beginning of this chapter, exclusion was reported as the most self-reported type of cyberbullying that these bystanders had witnessed. The perceived prevalence of exclusion may heighten the fear of peer backlash. Several students mentioned exclusion when they discussed their concerns about intervening. One student believed that if his friends did not like the victim, then they may begin to not like him and exclude him. Likewise, Kristen said she has seen the "silent treatment," a type of exclusion, as a retaliation against helpfulness: "I know people, they give each other the silent treatment, I don't know. Then if I say something, they'll start giving me the silent treatment . . . I don't do that but I see that a lot." Others spoke about the potential damage to their reputations from helping a victim because the bystander might become indefinitely linked with the victim. This is something that sixth grader, Jake, discussed:

> Maybe some other people would think bad things of you because you're saying . . . let's say someone said that person had cooties, and you're going and sitting with them. Maybe that would give you a bad reputation, like you have cooties, too.

The consequences of this fear of peer backlash is a decreased intention to be helpful, especially in defending. When seeing "drama" happen in one of her group chats, Saphira said that she "didn't want to get in their business, didn't want to be judged by all those people." Similarly, Seth witnessed his good friends on a group chat gang up on one person and did not "want to say anything against that" for fear that his friends would start making fun of him. However, there may be a way to increase helpfulness and decrease the fear of peer backlash. Four participants in this study discussed the increased likelihood of intervening if they saw a peer positively intervene first. Aaron was one of the students who would find it easier to join in helping, rather than be the one to start the helping. Aaron said, "If someone else went first to help the kid that's getting bullied, I would probably help them, too, more likely help them, too."

As the bystanders in this study reveal, there are many challenges and opportunities in cases of online peer mistreatment. In the final section of chapter four, I discuss what bystanders believe are the main reasons they hold themselves back from being more helpful online.

Why Bystanders Do Nothing

For the bystanders in this study, I began noticing the way that they spoke about bullying, based on the words they used in the stories they told me. "Joking" was the most common way that bullying was described (10/20), followed by "teasing" (5/20), "drama" (4/20), "dissing" (3/20), and "roasting" (2/20). These less harsh words allowed bystanders to downplay the severity and impact of bullying in their online communities. Dustin, for example, said that he and his group will "just joke":

> Like if I'm Asian or Mexican, we'll be like, "Oh, we know why you play Uno . . . to steal all the green cards, like that." We'll just make a racist joke and everyone will start laughing, even the person.

This example indicates that jokes are okay, even racist ones, because they are "just jokes" and the victim laughed. If bystanders view these exchanges as "normal" or "okay," then their desire to intervene will be lowered.

Near the end of each interview, I told students that bystanders typically do nothing when they see something, like a peer being mistreated online. Then I asked them to think about some reasons bystanders do not take action. Students provided between one and four stated reasons for passivity, which were coded and put into two "buckets": individual responses and group pressures, as shown in Table 8. Under individual responses were two reasons: (a) students lacked confidence (10/20) to intervene and (b) students lacked investment in the intervention (8/20). For group pressures, the main reason for not getting involved was the fear of peer backlash (15/20).

Table 8

Sample Responses for Bystander Passivity

Individual Responses		Group Pressures
Lack of Confidence	Lack of Investment	Peer Backlash
- Not able to "change very much" "Too shy" "Too scared" "He's not hearing you" - No one "to back you up" "Can't find enough power in themselves" "Hard to know what to say"	"Just don't care" "None of my business" "Don't want to get involved" "Don't know the bully" - Don't know the victim" "Don't want to deal with all of that stuff"	"Don't want their friends to be mad at them" - Others can "get really mad at you" "Don't want to be attacked" "Don't want blame turned on them"

Of the 15 participants who were asked whether they believed bystanding was positive, negative, or neutral, four believed it to be negative or "mostly negative," while 11 asserted that it was neutral. This neutrality was viewed as bad for the victim, but good for the bystander, and in the minds of these bystanders, that canceled everything out. The bystander does not get involved and potentially bullied, even if the victim continues to get bullied. This neutral view of bystanding, as with bystanders' euphemistic labeling of bullying as "jokes," provides students with the belief that it is okay to "opt out" of helping others, underscoring bystanders' irresponsibility to intervene. Table 8 indicates a general feeling among bystanders in this study that they are not empowered to intervene and they do not feel compelled to invest in an intervention, especially if it involves someone with whom they are not close.

Summary

Participants in this study revealed a strong preference for private support, as opposed to public defending. This preference for support was also tied to bystanders' desire to help victims who were their friends. Friends, according to these bystanders, are supposed to help friends,

which can strengthen the bonds between the two. Friendship can also inhibit the desire to help victims who are outside of bystanders' friend groups. While bystanders discussed a desire to try to handle issues on their own, they would enlist the help of adults, mainly parents, if situations became too much to handle. In Chapter Five, I will discuss these findings in greater depth, as well as their significance to the research literature on bystanding.

CHAPTER FIVE

The findings of this study both support and extend what is understood about cyberbystanders' thinking processes as they consider the type of action they could take to help in an online peer mistreatment situation. In this study, students were asked open-ended questions, which included recounting times when they have seen helpfulness, as well as their beliefs about specific actions: supporting or defending a victim, telling an adult, or distracting the bully. From my conversations with these middle school bystanders, it became clear that the individual decision is compounded by particular situational factors that can mitigate and amplify each other, creating a complex set of challenges for bystanders.

Even within this complexity, bystanders in this study articulated similar beliefs about helpfulness and the factors that would motivate them to be helpful. The majority of bystanders in this study, for example, believed that supporting a victim privately, not defending publicly, was their most helpful option to the victim and to themselves as the bystander. Secondarily, adults were the second-best option to peer support, as adults were trustworthy and could give support and advice to the bystander. In terms of motivation to intervene, the most consistently mentioned factor was the closeness of the victim to the bystander. The closer the relationship with the victim, the more likely the bystander would help the bullied victim.

In this chapter, I summarize the study's main findings and their contribution and significance to the larger body of literature on cyberbystanders. As I reflect on the study's importance, I will also note the strengths and limitations inherent in the study's design. Next, I will provide my recommendations for future research, as well as practical considerations for school personnel who seek to support their students in both real and virtual spaces. Finally, I will discuss the ways in which I plan to disseminate my findings to others.

Summary of Findings

While some anti-bullying researchers have examined individual factors, like empathy, self-efficacy, and pro-social tendencies (DeSmet et al., 2014; Thornberg et al., 2012), the findings of this study indicate that bystanders may be more likely to consider group affiliation and other situational factors when determining whether to help a victim of cyberbullying. Consequently, the most important factor these cyberbystanders discussed was who was involved, specifically whether they know the bully or the victim. In this summary, I first address the importance of "the who," specifically the support that comes from close friendship and the barriers friendship poses to helping non-friends. Second, I examine the value of adults in helping students navigate their online worlds and maintaining consequences for students who bully others. Lastly, I ponder the role of defending in anti-bullying efforts, as these bystanders reported a strong aversion to public defending.

Unpacking "The Who"

The overriding situational factor that bystanders consider is the "who." If students know the victim, then they are more likely to continue investing in the situation to find out the "what" and the "why." This finding supports previous quantitative (Brody & Vangelisti, 2016; Huang & Chou, 2010; Machackova, Cerna, Sevcikova, Dedkova, & Daneback, 2013; Van Cleemput et al., 2014) and qualitative findings (Patterson et al., 2017) on cyberbullying that found bystanders had an increased intention to help victims who were their friends. The bystanders in this study made clear that friendship with the victim was their first consideration in deciding to help. If the victim is unknown or someone not well liked in the community, then the investment in learning more about an ongoing situation declines and the likelihood of a student intervening is slim to none. Several students—Abby, Bryn, Sally, Holly, and Thomas—signaled that they would intervene

for a non-friend by telling an adult, if the situation got "really bad." However, no one suggested that they would try to comfort an unknown victim or defend him or her publicly.

In terms of the closeness with the bully, bystanders expressed the challenge of going against any bully, whether a stranger, non-friend or friend. This perceived challenge indicates that the relationship with the bully has a much lower impact on bystanders' positive decision making, compared with the relationship with the victim. Some studies have suggested that the relationship with the bully is likely to have a negative impact on helping with an increase in reinforcing the bullying behaviors (Bastiaensens, S., Vandebosch, H., Poels, K., Van Cleemput, K., DeSmet, A., De Bourdeaudhuij, I., 2014). This study, which focused on the role of participants as bystanders, cannot confirm those findings, as I did not ask participants whether they ever joined the bully, and the participants did not openly admit to such actions through the course of the interviews.

While close friendships may provide protection against "outside forces" like peer-to-peer mistreatment, they may also inhibit helping between bystanders and non-friend peers. Students who reported close friendships discussed the ability to talk with a friend about relational issues and that friends "have your back." To this point, one student suggested that bullies do not attack people with a lot of friends because the friends would fight back. However, those students who discussed the power of their friend group to help also assumed that most kids had similar levels of support. That belief was stated as a reason not to intervene for a non-friend, as the victim would likely want his or her friends to help. This passing of the responsibility to others is in line with Darley and Latané's (1968) bystander effect, specifically the diffusion of responsibility. As mentioned in Chapter Two, Darley and Latané found that an increase in the number of bystanders resulted in a decrease in bystander intervention, as bystanders believed others would

help. In this study and with an online context, the diffusion of responsibility played out a bit differently, but was still present. Bystanders "diffused" their personal responsibility by assuming that non-friend victims would have close friends to support them. While that assumption may be true in many cases, studies have shown that bullied victims have fewer friend supports than peers with extensive social networks (Boulton, Trueman, Chau, Whitehand, & Amatya, 1999; Hodges, Boivin, Vitaro, & Bukowski, 1999; Salmivalli, Lagerspetz, Björkqvist, Österman, & Kaukiainen, 1996).

Another situational driver of bystander helpfulness is exclusion. Exclusion was the highest reported type of cyberbullying from students in this study. Whether their self-reports are accurate or not cannot be known, but the more important piece of this self-report is that exclusion *feels* pervasive. As several students noted, a one-time party, for example, that excludes a student can create multiple moments of exclusion for him or her, as others discuss the plans for the event in-person or online. Exclusion is a palpable force in these students' online communities, driving the need to support friends and dissociate from non-friends. As students said themselves, if they go against their friends or associate with a victim by helping them, then they risk social exclusion from their own friend group. Friends, in particular social referents within a group, may use the fear of social exclusion as a method of peer backlash to reinforce group norms. Seth alluded to this, recounting a friend who had been excluded from a group chat, which was designed to plan a social outing. I asked Seth if he thought that the friend had been intentionally excluded, and he said that he had because he had been mean to other group members earlier. Seth also admitted that he had been excluded, too, when he had been mean to the group, and he had to "make nice" with his friends again to get back into group chats.

The Preference for Peer Support, Not Defending

The majority of bystanders in this study believed the most helpful type of action in mistreatment situations, for themselves and the victim, was peer support, which included comforting the victim through listening to the victim's story. This preference is aligned with a previous study that found peer support to be the highest rated bystander behavior in terms of self-efficacy (DeSmet et al., 2014). Because bystanders in this study consistently referred to the victim as their friend, several students mentioned that supporting a victimized friend was a way to strengthen an existing friendship. As previously noted, friendship provides a protective buffer against peer mistreatment, and peer support appears to be a mechanism that reinforces pre-existing bonds among peers.

Peer support, however, was consistently discussed as a private conversation, such as a phone call to the friend, a text message, or an in-person check-in. With a level of privacy, bystanders could maintain their own self-preservation, as they considered how their own actions of defense would negatively impact themselves. While there are limited qualitative studies that focus on cyberbystanders, only one study—Patterson et al. (2017)—was found to discuss this issue of privacy in online peer support. The findings of this study indicate that there was a push for privacy or one-on-one conversations with in-person or traditional bullying, but that same preference was not found among bystanders in the online domain.

Supporting a peer rendered few negative consequences for the bystander. Only four out of 20 students feared that they would become involved in the action, and that fear was in the context of public support through group chats. There was a limited cost to the bystander for providing private support and much to gain in terms of friendship. However, as previously

discussed, this type of peer support was not openly extended to non-friends because these non-friend victims were assumed to have their own social network of support.

While peer support was viewed as a private act, defending was viewed as a public act. As such, bystanders were disinclined to "go on record" in group chats, where nearly all of the reported incidents of peer mistreatment happened. A couple students mentioned that they *could* defend by sending the bully a private text, but this option was only offered as a suggestion, not endorsed by these bystanders. There are two other noteworthy challenges to public defending. First, students complained that it was really hard to get a message across because of the lack of cues to understand the true meaning of what someone posted. Lisa, for example, argued that saying "stop" online just isn't enough to do anything. Second, Lisa's feelings suggest that bystanders had a much lower self-efficacy in addressing the bully, as opposed to helping the victim-friend. Only two of the 20 students in this study said that defending could stop the bully, whereas thirteen bystanders believed that the adults had the power to stop. If bystanders do not believe defending could help stop the bully, then why would they attempt an action they believe will fail? Some may argue that defending shows the victim that someone cares, which could still be a positive effect for the victim, even if the bully does not stop. While these bystanders do believe that showing the victim someone cares is a good thing, they would prefer to show their care through various private forms of support, rather than defending. For bystanders, defending had the most negative responses, which included a fear that the bystander would become a victim (12/20), the bystander could face social judgment from peers (7/20), the bystander could damage a friendship, especially if the bully is a friend (4/20), and the bystander could get in trouble with adults through their involvement (3/20).

The Power and the Pitfalls of Adult Intervention

In this study, bystanders had a mostly favorable view of involving adults in cases of online peer mistreatment, even though some bystanders suggested that adults could make the situation "a bigger deal." Research shows that as students get older, their reliance on family and their parents decreases as the influence of peers and peer groups increases (Bukowski, Pizzamiglio, & Newcomb, & Hoza, 1996; Juvonen & Galván, 2008). What this study indicates is that these middle school students may be stuck in the transition from being family-reliant to peer-reliant, with nearly half of bystanders reporting a heavy reliance on their parents for help and nearly half of the bystanders reporting concerns with involving their parents and an acknowledgement that parents can escalate the conflict.

One of the main arguments that students consistently mentioned was the ability of parents to do something about the bullying, to make it stop. This belief in adult-facilitated intervention is likely driven from the context of the school and parent community. With very involved parents, students are more likely to seek help from an adult because they may be used to adults offering them help and support, making this dependence on adults unique to Kehillah Academy. Students mentioned that they most often tell their parents (as opposed to other adults), and the process from there was that parents would talk to other parents to get advice or perspective on the problem, and then either help their child navigate the situation or speak to the school, if the consensus of the parents was that the problem was significant. This school is a small community (under 150 students in middle school) and that helps create a "family feel." In a community such as this, it is not too surprising that students access help more often from the adults in their lives, including their parents.

Adults were especially useful when a situation became "out of control" and beyond the level of peer-resolution efforts. Graeff (2014) found similar responses in his study on cyberbystanders. In his study, students were given two vignettes to discuss, one of which focused on a bullying situation involving another person's race and religion. This vignette elicited more responses for adult help with 10 out of the 29 participants suggesting that they would tell an adult. Similar to this study, Graeff found that bystanders also preferred speaking to their mothers over other adults.

Even though parents were seen as generally helpful in this study, research has shown a decreased willingness of students to access help from parents with issues that involve online communication. Why? Children tend to view their parents as digital outsiders who have limited knowledge about social media platforms (Redden & Way, 2017). In other studies, this perception of limited knowledge inhibited students from reaching out to their parents for guidance. For example, Huang and Chou (2010) found that junior high Taiwanese students did not report cyberbullying incidents to parents because they believed that such reporting was useless and could possibly get them in trouble. While the majority of students in this study did not discuss those same sentiments, a few bystanders believed that their intervention to stop the bully could lead adults to believe they were involved in the bullying, resulting in disciplinary action.

Students in this study knew they could go to an adult, and three said that they had told school personnel about online bullying they had witnessed. One student, Sally, said that she had done that several times. However, bystanders also believed that friends were the first ones from whom they would likely seek help, even though parents were an important resource when incidents escalated beyond the intervention power of students. The push for peer support above adult intervention is supported by Patterson et al.'s (2017) study in which bystanders believed

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adults could "do something really drastic-like," but that adults should be involved if the bystander or victim is significantly impacted "because they have the power to talk to the other parents and discuss this with school" (p. 375).

Significance of Findings

There were a few aspects of this research that made important contributions to the field of cyberbullying research, specifically the role of bystanders in intervention efforts. These contributions work to close the research gap between what victims and bystanders consider helpful in online communities.

Anti-bullying research tends to emphasize the victim's beliefs about helpfulness and the victim's online experiences. To my knowledge, this study is the first of its kind to elicit feedback regarding cyberbystanders' beliefs about online helpfulness. Many studies, both qualitative and quantitative, have explored individual and situational factors that may contribute to active or passive bystanding (Bellmore et al., 2012; Pöyhönen, Juvonen, & Salmivalli, 2012; Salmivalli, 2010; Thornberg et al., 2012). Yet from this previous research, it is not clear what cyberbystanders believe about helpfulness. Helpfulness has been emphasized from the lens of the victim, but this study helps close the gap between what we know about victims' and bystanders' beliefs about helpfulness.

One of the main issues that arose from this study is bystanders' reluctance to publicly intervene online, even for a friend. When presented with the option to intervene online or in person, all but one participant in this study chose "in person." This important finding indicates a need to rethink the way bystanders are used in anti-bullying interventions and what methods of help they are encouraged to use when witness to online peer mistreatment. Byers (2016) asserts that anti-bullying interventions tend to privilege public defending over other forms of positive

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intervention. Since the majority of individuals involved in cyberbullying incidents are

bystanders, more consideration should be taken to address the gap between "what ought to be"

and "what is." If bystanders believe that online public defending, even in peer-based group chats,

is something to be avoided, then anti-bullying interventions will continue to fall short of their

goals. Online communication is riddled with problems that can exacerbate online peer

mistreatment and inhibit positive active bystanding. One of the main challenges, as noted

previously, is the lack of verbal and non-verbal cues and the permanence of messages that are

posted to individuals or groups (Barlińska et al., 2013; Kowalski et al., 2014; Machackova et al.,

2013; Pearson et al., 2005).

This study also contributed to the larger research on bullying by asking bystanders

whether they believed passive bystanding was positive, negative, or neutral. The majority of

bystanders in this study considered passive bystanding as a neutral action, a few believed it to be

negative or mostly negative, and no one believed that it was positive. Even though few saw

passive bystanding as helpful to the victim (i.e., helping could make the victim look weak), most

believed passive bystanding was hurtful to the victim, but was helpful to the bystander. These

negative and positive reactions seemed to counteract each other in the minds of these bystanders,

making their overall belief neutral. If behaviors are often extensions of individual beliefs,

compounded by group norms, then these "neutral" bystanders will be more likely to remain

passive during future bullying incidents.

While cyberbullying studies rely mostly on quantitative methods, this study contributed

to the knowledge about bystanders' decision-making process, confirming the most recent

findings of Patterson et al.'s (2017) qualitative study on factors bystanders consider before

intervening. Cross and Walker (2013) believed that it is important for research to delve into these

details regarding "how" and "why" bystanders choose to intervene. These qualitative studies

provide rich data for researchers to use when they design interventions, as well as school

administrators to use in determining how best to funnel school-allocated funds to programs.

<p align="center">**Recommendations for School Personnel**</p>

As school communities work to mitigate issues of peer mistreatment to improve their

students' educational experience, there should be an effort not only to empower bystanders, but

adults, as well. Parents, teachers, staff, and administrators all play a role in creating a community

culture. Bystanders are consistently in the day-to-day action, and therefore, they could use

support and guidance from their peers and the adults in their lives for how to create healthy

relationships with others who inhabit their virtual world. In this section, I will discuss the

possibility of using peer leaders to reinforce positive norms, and then I will examine the

important influence of adults in creating structures, systems, and expectations for acceptable

behaviors.

Peer leaders is an idea that has been put forward in the research literature on bullying

(e.g., Paluck, Shepherd, & Aronow, 2016), and this study indicates the importance of not only

getting students involved as peer leaders, but also to make sure that those peer leaders represent

various pockets of the school's population. As one student noted, "Why would I listen to

someone who's not my friend? I don't care what they think, so if they tell me to do something or

tell me I'm wrong, then I'll just tell them to 'go away.'" A purposeful student group, or what

Paluck et al. (2016) refers to as *social referents*, can tap into a greater social capital among the

larger student population, which could make a difference. Researchers have suggested that

longer lasting programs are likely to reap the greatest benefits as behavior change takes time and

reinforcement. For example, Smith (2004) argues that "bullying is an ongoing problem, so a

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'one-off' effort over a term or year without continuation will have little or no lasting impact"
(p. 101). This notion of longevity supports the purpose of peer leaders who can consistently
support positive norms over time and within that space (in the moment). For example, the
majority of the bystander-focused anti-bullying interventions discussed in Polanin et al.'s 2012
meta-analysis showed non-significant long-term effects for bystanders in the intervention groups
versus the control groups. This finding includes the well-respected KiVa program that showed
increased self-efficacy for defending and bystander support early in the intervention, but not by
the third wave of the intervention (Kärnä, Voeten, Little, Poskiparta, Alanen, & Salmivalli,
2011).

In Polanin et al.'s (2012) meta-analysis, the 11 anti-bullying interventions were largely
driven by adult leaders or facilitators with an emphasis on in-person, traditional bullying. In what
ways could peer leadership, even at the elementary level, help reinforce positive norms of
helping? How might this reinforcement of norms help students remember and acknowledge the
expected appropriate behaviors? In terms of online communities, these spaces are typically
hidden from adults, which makes adult leadership less likely to happen and less likely to be
effective, especially since some studies have shown children's perceptions of adult knowledge
about technology is limited (Redden & Way, 2017). This perceived gap between adult leaders
and student groups could cause young people to ignore interventions that are created and
implemented by adults only. Peer leadership is an important next step in creating positive school
supports that may influence helpfulness among students.

With all that said, the burden of responsibility does not lie with bystanders only. Adults
should be engaged in maintaining and reinforcing positive supports and norms of students while
they are physically on school grounds. Through this supervisory role, faculty, staff and

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administrators can not only model the behaviors they expect to see in the classroom and open areas like playgrounds, but they can also acknowledge students who show positive peer supports at school. The more positive that can be recognized, the more likely this positive effect will translate into life outside of school, including online. In order to maximize the potential for change, schools should do the following:

Recommendation #1

In order to address the problem of cyberbullying, school personnel should know their student population and what challenges students are facing in their online communities. Specifically, what are their students' normative beliefs about helping behaviors, how do their students engage with others in their online communities, what types of peer support do students consider helpful, and what are their students willing to do in different online context with both public and private mechanisms of support? This information is important, so that school personnel can reinforce positive helping behaviors, like peer support, and work to improve negative behaviors of reinforcing the bully or not helping at all.

Recommendation #2

With the help of student input, school personnel should create clear behavioral expectations, reporting procedures for adult or peer help, systems for tracking incidents of peer mistreatment, and ways to elicit student feedback through on-going conversations, especially with peer leaders, if schools develop programs specifically with peer leadership roles. As students indicated in this study, adults, including school personnel, are an avenue of support for bystanders. Some students like Abby knew where to go for help: "I would first go to my parents . . . then maybe they could give me advice." Not all students share her confidence, even though all bystanders need to know whom they can go to for help. Students must be educated in how they

can report issues to school personnel and how school personnel will follow up on their report. By extension, all faculty, staff and administrators must be educated in reporting procedures and school-wide systems, so that they can be helpful to students who may seek their guidance.

Recommendation #3

Work to build more points of connectivity among students and between school personnel and students. Research has shown that students who make strong connections to their school community are not as likely to miss school or become bullies (Schapps, 2003; Wilson & Elliott, 2003). Students in this study indicated the importance of peer support in dealing with issues of bullying, as well as the assumption that non-friends or strangers would have friends to rely on for support. However, research indicates that bullied victims tend to be more isolated than other peers of the same backgrounds (Boulton et al., 1999; Hodges et al., 1999; Salmivalli et al., 1996). Some practices that have been shown to increase student connectedness are mentorship programs, advisory programs, service learning projects, innovative and relevant teaching, and high academic expectations for all students (National Research Council and the Institute of Medicine, 2004).

Recommendation #4

A very real challenge for schools is how to handle student reporting of online bullying. For some school administrators, it may be challenging to know where their responsibility for the safety and well-being of their students ends when students are intricately connected virtually. For others, there may be a desire to make sure an issue is "bullying" before anything becomes actionable. However, this study indicates that students need adult support from school and home. School personnel should not be reluctant to mitigate issues of peer mistreatment (or bullying) that students report to them. They should actively listen, provide guidance, and follow-up as

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necessary with other community members to maintain the expectations of a positive school culture. Dismissing incidents as not big enough to deal with is a passive position, which can undermine students' sense of safety and well-being (Gini et al., 2008; Kowalski et al., 2014).

Recommendation #5

Involve parents as partners in creating negative views of bullying. Bastiaensens et al. (2014) found that bystanders who believed their parents had a positive view of bullying were more likely to report reinforcing behaviors by joining the bully. Parents provide an important context for normative beliefs and behaviors. Any school-wide approach to increasing positive school climate and decreasing the prevalence of bullying must include parents in the conversation. Parents can be given information about a school's anti-bullying policies and processes for reporting peer mistreatment, how their students are using technology to connect with others, and what students find helpful or unhelpful about getting parents involved. This feedback can help parents be better support systems for their children, especially considering that students in this study indicated that parents were the main adults they went to for help.

In the next section, I will discuss some of the study's limitations, as well as intentional efforts to elicit students' real beliefs and ideas regarding cyberbystanding.

Study Limitations

This study reiterates the findings of other researchers, especially a very recent publication by Patterson et al. (2017) that found friendship to be a main consideration for bystanders. Because this study is aligned with much of the previous research on cyberbystanders, the findings highlight a *dependability* or *consistency* that underscores this study's reliability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Even with these strengths, there are limitations that should be noted.

One of the oft-cited limitations of qualitative research is the inability to generalize findings to a broader population. This study included the convenient stratified selection of students from a purposeful research site. As such, these findings are not generalizable beyond my research site. However, I do not view a lack of generalizability as a limitation or loss for the purpose of this study, which was to give voice and meaning to bystanders' online experiences, a phenomenon which remains relatively amorphous to the adult world looking in from the outside. This study was able to capture the richness of these bystanders' online interactions and the challenges that those exchanges pose every day.

As previously mentioned, most cyberbullying research relies on self-reported information (Espinoza & Juvonen, 2013), and this study is no different. While self-reporting is a potential limitation, I could not see firsthand these bystanders' various online interactions and, instead, had to rely on their willingness to discuss information accurately, regarding stories of online helpfulness and peer conflict. As Midgett et al. (2015) asserts, research that relies on self-reporting may be "distorted" from the true reality of the participants, in large part due to social desirability (p. 497). However, students openly shared their strong inhibition against publicly defending, as well as their lack of understanding about how distracting a bully would work. These forthright responses suggest that students were willing to provide responses that might not be expected if there were substantial bias due to social desirability. Furthermore, to help address issues of inaccuracy, I circled back to potential contradictions that students indicated in their interviews. This iterative process helped me tease out whether there was an actual contradiction, a situational difference, or a more nuanced understanding of the bystanders' beliefs.

Recommendations for Future Research

As the field of cyberbullying research continues to expand, more qualitative research should be conducted to understand the unique challenges of being an online bystander. Jones et al. (2015) suggested researchers continue to explore what cybervictims find helpful. Simultaneous with this work, researchers should continue to expand our understanding of what cyberbystanders consider helpful and what types of helpful actions they are most willing to do. Since bystanders are finding themselves central to anti-bullying interventions, it would be good to know more about their beliefs in helping friends, non-friends and strangers, in various online contexts.

Paluck and her colleagues' (2016) noteworthy study on peer leadership and its effect on changing school culture underscores the importance of investigating the ways in which these types of programs are best designed and implemented in school communities. Paluck et al.'s findings, which showed a decrease in peer bullying and a decrease in positive norms of bullying, were for middle school populations. In my own study, several middle school students believed they would be more likely to help publicly if they saw someone, perhaps a friend, intervene first. More research should be done to examine the potential impact of peer leadership programs on school culture with different age groups, from elementary schools to college. Additionally, qualitative research should be conducted to elicit peer leader feedback in order to understand the challenges of this type of leadership and ways to create better adult-to-student and peer-to-peer support structures.

Conclusion

In this study, the relationships of the bystanders with the bully and victims, as well as the intensity of online bullying exchanges, are two of the main factors cyberbystanders considered when thinking about whether they would intervene. These two factors appear to be weighed simultaneously, as opposed to distinct incremental steps, but friendship trumps everything. Based on the findings of this study, I synthesized the real norms expressed by my participants to show how these bystanders navigated their online terrain:

- Look out for yourself and your friends.

- Supporting a friend privately is preferable to public defending or telling an adult.

- Investigate "why" only if friends are involved; do not gather information about non-friends and strangers.

- Tell an adult if things are really bad.

This study illuminates some of the challenges with cyberbystander intervention, from not wanting to "go on record" by publicly defending to feeling like there is not enough information to propel the bystander to intervene. However, there is much that schools can do to be intentional in their work with students, as outlined in the recommendations section. In particular, peer leadership programs offer inroads to creating a greater presence in virtual communities that lack adult oversight. With student-vetted policies, structures and systems, schools can greatly improve the health and well-being of their communities.

Appendix A

Study Recruitment Letter

Dear Families,

Educational researchers typically find that 20% - 25% of American secondary students experience cyberbullying in their lifetime, including a recent study of LAUSD students in grades 6-8. Given that cyberbullying largely occurs in the context of social groups, bystanders represent a critical party to consider in prevention and intervention strategies. Understanding bystanders' willingness to mitigate online peer mistreatment is particularly important because the majority of bystanders remain silent.

To that end, we are happy to announce our participation in a UCLA study on online bystander helpfulness. This study aims to understand the conditions under which middle school cyberbystanders, students who see negative or mean behaviors online, use helpful behaviors to intervene and what bystanders consider helpful in cases of online peer mistreatment or bullying.

We believe that our school's participation in this study will provide greater insight into students' ideas about helpfulness and how to foster those positive mechanisms of support online. While we hope that you will support this important work by "opting in" with your own parental consent, participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you wish for your child not to participate, please follow the link **HERE** to "opt out" of the study.

If you do not opt out by November 15, your child's name will be put in a random drawing to be selected for the study. If selected, the UCLA researcher will send a communication to your child and you, asking for parental consent for your child to participate in the study. You may still decline to participate at this or any point during the study. However, if you provide consent to participate and your child agrees to participate, then the UCLA researcher will invite your child to a one-on-one interview, which will last 30-45 minutes and will be scheduled on our school campus.

Thank you for your time and consideration, and we look forward to our continued work with you and your children to build safe and meaningful online communities.

Appendix B

Parent Permission Letter

Dear (Parent Name),

Your child has been randomly selected to participate in a UCLA study on online bystander helpfulness. This study aims to understand the conditions under which middle school cyberbystanders, students who see negative or mean behaviors online, use helpful behaviors to intervene and what bystanders consider helpful in cases of online peer mistreatment or bullying.

Participation in this study is <u>completely voluntary</u>. If you would like to give permission for your child to participate in this study, then please click HERE. You will be directed to a parent permission form[5] that provides a more detailed overview, including sample interview questions. At the end of that form, you will be asked to provide parental permission by clicking a final box. Please note that you and your child may withdraw from the study at any point, regardless of whether you have provided permission to participate.

Thank you for your time and consideration!

Sincerely,

Leigh Fauber

University of California, Los Angeles

lfauber@g.ucla.edu

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[5] Please see Appendix C for the Parent Permission Form

Parent Permission for Minor to Participate in Research

TITLE: Calculated Costs: Cyberbystanders' Beliefs about Helpfulness

Leigh Fauber, Dr. Kathryn Anderson-Levitt and Dr. Mark Hanson from the Graduate School of Education and Information Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) are conducting a research study.

Your child was randomly selected as a possible participant in this study because your child is a middle school student at Chaparral School, one of the school sites selected for participation in this research. Your child's participation in this research study is voluntary.

Why is this study being done?
To better understand middle school cyberbystanders' beliefs about helpfulness in online peer mistreatment situations, as well as the factors they consider when deciding to use these helpful online behaviors.

What will happen if my child takes part in this research study?
If you agree to allow your child to participate in this study, we would ask him/her to participate in a one-on-one interview at your child's school site. This interview will focus on understanding your child's experiences as an online bystander, what he/she may believe is helpful to others, and what factors may motivate him or her to act or not when confronted with peer-to-peer meanness or hurtfulness. Here are a few example questions that will be asked in this interview:
1. Most bystanders who see something mean happen online say they did not do anything helpful. What do you think are some reasons for that?
2. Sometimes it is challenging as a bystander to know if a situation crossed the line from friendly teasing to bullying. What in your mind crosses the line?
3. Some believe that if you see something bad happen to another person online, then you should tell an adult. What do you think about that idea? How might that be helpful? How might that make things worse?

How long will my child be in the research study?
Participation will take be one interview that lasts 30-45 minutes.

Are there any potential risks or discomforts that my child can expect from this study?
There are no anticipated risks or discomforts for children who participate in this study.

Are there any potential benefits to my child if he or she participates?
Your child will not directly benefit from his/her participation in the research. However, future researchers and school administrators will learn from your child's, as well as other middle school children's experiences as online bystanders. The goal of this study is to understand the mechanisms of positive support or helpfulness that students use online, and it is the hope that this

research will produce tangible ways for school personnel to reinforce the ways of helpfulness with their students.

Will information about my child's participation be kept confidential?
The researcher will not collect any personally identifiable information (beyond your child's grade level and gender) at the time of the interview. Your nor your child's name will be associated with any interview documents or transcripts. Any information that is obtained in connection with this study will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained by giving a code for the interview transcript that is not linked to any personally identifiable information for your child.

What are my and my child's rights if he or she takes part in this study?
- You can choose whether or not you want your child to be in this study, and you may withdraw your permission and discontinue your child's participation at any time.
- Whatever decision you make, there will be no penalty to you or your child, and no loss of benefits to which you or your child were otherwise entitled.
- Your child may refuse to answer any questions that he/she does not want to answer and still remain in the study.

Who can I contact if I have questions about this study?

 Leigh Fauber, Primary Investigator
 lfauber@g.ucla.edu
 Dr. Kathryn Anderson-Levitt, Faculty Sponsor
 kandersonlevitt@ucla.edu
 Dr. Mark Hansen, Faculty Sponsor
 markhansen@ucla.edu

- **UCLA Office of the Human Research Protection Program (OHRPP):**
  If you have questions about your rights as a research subject, or you have concerns or suggestions and you want to talk to someone other than the researchers, you may contact the UCLA OHRPP by phone: (310) 206-2040; by email: participants@research.ucla.edu or by mail: Box 951406, Los Angeles, CA 90095-1406.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

SIGNATURE OF PARENT OR LEGAL GUARDIAN

_____

  Name of Child

_____

  Name of Parent or Legal Guardian

Please confirm that you give your child permission to participate in this study, by clicking the box below.

☐

Thank you!

Appendix D

Sample Study Participation Confirmation Letter

Dear (Parent Name),

Thank you for giving your permission for (child's name) to participate in this UCLA study. I would like to interview her/him on **DATE** from **2:40-3:20 PM** at Chaparral School. Please let me know if this works with (child's name) schedule for that afternoon.

Best,

Leigh Fauber
Graduate Researcher
University of California, Los Angeles
lfauber@g.ucla.edu

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

Research Questions
1. According to middle school bystanders, what are helpful behaviors in online peer mistreatment situations, like bullying?
2. What factors do middle school bystanders consider when making the decision to use helpful online behaviors?

Interviewer: Leigh S. Fauber

Interviewees: middle school students from independent schools in Los Angeles

Goal of the Interview: To better understand middle school cyberbystanders' perceptions of helpfulness in online peer mistreatment situations, as well as the factors they consider when deciding to use these helpful online behaviors.

Introduction to Interview
Thank you for participating in this interview. My name is Leigh and I am a graduate student at UCLA. Our interview today will take about 30-45 minutes. Please know that everything you discuss with me during this interview is confidential. However, if you tell me that you are being harmed by others or if you are thinking about harming yourself, then I have to tell a helpful adult about that. Does that make sense?

With your permission, I would like to digitally record our interview so that I can make sure to capture your ideas and thoughts accurately. After I transcribe the interview, I will delete this audio-recording. If there are any points during the interview where you would like for me to stop recording, then please let me know, and I will turn off the recorder. Also you may end your this interview at any time.

Before we begin, would you please read this (youth assent form[6]) and tell me if you would like to continue to the interview portion. The purpose of this interview is for me to understand your experiences online. I am interested in how you or your friends react to both positive and negative chats that you may see while you are on social media. Even though I am on social media with my friends, how I use social media, what I see on social media, and the challenges I may face online are likely different from your experiences. I'm here to learn from you as the expert.

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[6] See Appendix F for the Youth Assent Form

<center>**INTERVIEW GUIDELINES**</center>

A. *Participant Background*
The background information section will provide information about the student's grade level and their favorite social media platforms.

TURN ON THE RECORDER!
1. What grade are you in?
2. Which is your favorite -- Snapchat, Instagram, Group Chats, or Facebook?
    a. Why is ---- your favorite?
        i. If Snapchat,
            1. How many streaks do you have going?
            2. What is the longest streak you have going?
        ii. If Instagram,
            1. How many followers do you have?
            2. What is your favorite Instagram pic?
        iii. If Group Chats,
            1. Right now, how many group chats do you belong to?
            2. How often do you message people in group chats?
        iv. If Facebook,
            1. Do you post on FB or do you use it mostly to DM people?

B. *Bystander Experiences*
1. While many students say that their online experiences are mostly good or positive, there are times when things happen that aren't so good or positive. <u>Could you read over these actions and put a check next to the actions that you have seen on social media?</u>[7] (Give student time to answer. Then ask to circle the one that they see the most.)
    a. So the most common one you've seen is --------.
        1. **Describe** that for me.
        2. Why do you think that happened to Y (victim)?
        3. Do you know if other people saw what happened? (how many?)
            a. What did most people do?
            b. Did anyone step in to **help**?
        4. How often do you see things like this? Every day? Every week? Every month?
        5. What is it like to see things like that?
        6. How does it make you feel?

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[7] See Appendix G for List of Cyberbullying Actions

C. *Beliefs about Helpfulness*

1. Can you think of a time when someone **helped** another kid who was teased online?
    a. If yes, without giving names, can you **tell me what happened**?
        i. Do you think that helped the kid?
            1. How did it help?
            2. What was good about it?
    b. If no, go to question #2.

2. Some believe that if you see something bad happen to another person, then you should **stand up and defend that person**. What do you think about that idea?
    a. Probe: How might be helpful?
    b. Probe: How might that make things worse?

3. Some believe that one of the most helpful things is to **spend time with that person and talk with them**. What do you think about that idea?
    a. Probe: How might be helpful?
    b. Probe: How might that make things worse?

4. Some believe that if you see something bad happen to another person, then you should **tell an adult**. What do you think about that idea?
    a. Probe: How might be helpful?
    b. Probe: How might that make things worse?

5. Some believe that one of the most helpful things is to **distract the people who were treating them badly**. What do you think about that idea?
    a. Probe: How might be helpful?
    b. Probe: How might that make things worse?

D. *Bystander Decision-Making*
1. Most bystanders who see something mean happen online say that they did not do anything helpful (which we have already said include things like . . .). <u>What do you think are some reasons for that?</u>
    a. Does it depend on what was posted (how mean it was)?
    b. Does it depend on who is involved?
        i. closeness
        ii. popularity

2. Can you think of a time when you wanted to help a friend online but you didn't?
    a. If yes:
        i. What do you think stopped you?
        ii. What, if anything, might have helped you to act?
    b. If no:
        i. What would be a situation where you might want to help, but it would be hard to do that?

3. Sometimes it is challenging as a bystander to know if a situation crossed the line from friendly teasing to bullying. What in your mind crosses the line?
    a. What could you do to help in that type of situation?
    b. How willing would you be to help?
    c. How do you think that would change things for that student?

4. **Is there anything we didn't talk about that you would like to discuss?**

<u>Conclusion to Interview</u>:
- Thank you!
- Counseling services provided --
- Entered in raffle for drawing (announced in March)

Adolescent Assent to Participate in Research

TITLE: Calculated Costs: Cyberbystanders' Beliefs about Helpfulness

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by Leigh Fauber, Dr. Kathryn Anderson-Levitt and Dr. Mark Hanson from the Graduate School of Education and Information Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you are a middle school student who attends an independent school. Your participation in this research study is voluntary.

Why is this study being done?

To better understand your beliefs about helpfulness in online peer mistreatment situations, as well as the factors you or your peers consider when deciding to use these helpful online behaviors.

What will happen if I take part in this research study?

Please talk this over with your parents before you decide whether or not to participate. We will also ask your parents to give their permission for you to take part in this study. But even if your parents say "yes" you can still decide not to do this.

If you volunteer to participate in this study, the researcher will ask you to do the following:

If you agree to participate in this study, you will have a one-on-one interview at your school. This interview will focus on understanding your experiences as an online bystander, what you may believe is helpful to others, and what factors may motivate you to act or not when confronted with peer-to-peer meanness or hurtfulness

How long will I be in the research study?
Participation will take be one interview that lasts 30-45 minutes.

Are there any potential risks or discomforts that I can expect from this study?
There are no anticipated risks or discomforts for students who participate in this study.

Are there any potential benefits if I participate?
You will not directly benefit from your participation in the research. However, future researchers and school administrators will learn from your experiences as online bystanders.

Will I receive any payment if I participate in this study?
You will not receive any direct payment for your participation in this study; however, there will be a raffle in the early spring for a pair of tickets to Universal Studios. Should you participate in the study or wish to be included in this raffle, your name will be entered into this random drawing.

Will information about me and my participation be kept confidential?
The researcher will not collect any personally identifiable information (beyond your grade level and gender) at the time of the interview. Your name will be linked with any interview documents or transcripts. Any information from this study will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained by giving a code for the interview transcript that is not linked to any personally identifiable information for your child.

Withdrawal of participation by the investigator
The investigator may withdraw you from participating in this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so. If, for example, you have not witnessed any negative interactions through your social media accounts or group chats, then you may have to drop out, even if you would like to continue. The investigator will make the decision and let you know if it is not possible for you to continue.

What are my rights if I take part in this study?
You may withdraw your assent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty or loss of benefits to which you were otherwise entitled.
You can choose whether or not you want to be in this study. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may leave the study at any time without consequences of any kind. You are not waiving any of your legal rights if you choose to be in this research study. You may refuse to answer any questions that you do not want to answer and still remain in the study.

Who can answer questions I might have about this study?
In the event of a research related injury, please immediately contact one of the researchers listed below. If you have any questions, comments or concerns about the research, you can talk to the one of the researchers. Please contact
>   **Ms. Leigh Fauber, Principal Investigator**
>   lfauber@g.ucla.edu
>   205-534-0359
>   **Dr. Kathryn Anderson-Levitt, Faculty Sponsor**
>   kandersonlevitt@ucla.edu
>   **Dr. Mark Hansen, Faculty Sponsor**
>   markhansen@ucla.edu

If you have questions about your rights as a research subject, or you have concerns or suggestions and you want to talk to someone other than the researchers, you may contact the UCLA OHRPP by phone: (310) 206-2040; by email: participants@research.ucla.edu or by mail: Box 951406, Los Angeles, CA 90095-1406.
I understand the procedures described above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

Appendix G

List of Cyberbullying Actions

☐ *Flaming*: online fights using angry and harsh language.

☐ *Online Harassment*: repeatedly sending offensive, rude or insulting messages.

☐ *Cyberstalking*: when a person is threatened to the point of possible harm and may be afraid for his or her safety.

☐ *Denigration (Put-Downs)*: "dissing" someone online; sending or posting cruel gossip or rumors about a person to damage reputation or friendships.

☐ *Masquerade*: pretending to be another person online and then sending messages as that person to hurt that person's reputation.

☐ *Outing*: publicly sharing someone's secrets or embarrassing information online.

☐ *Exclusion*: Intentionally leaving someone out from an online group, like a group chat, buddy list or game.

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