

**Bullying Education Matters:
The Use of Stories about Bullying to Influence Bullying Prevention
and Intervention Efforts with Youth Workers**

**Praxis Project Thesis: Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Bachelor of Arts — as part of the Community, Youth,
and Education Studies Major at Clark University**

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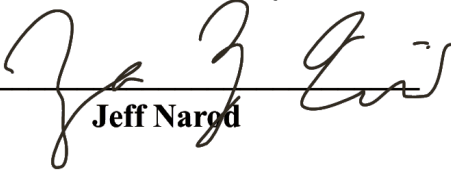
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Abstract

The goal of this project was to compile and analyze stories of bullying using an anonymous survey in order to create a resource for teachers and other adults supporting children involved in bullying. I used Social Dominance Theory to explain why bullying exists and Social Cognitive Theory to explain why bullying persists in today's world. Social Cognitive Theory is also used as an ideology for preventing or changing bullying behaviors in children. The outcome of the research was a bullying intervention workshop attended by individuals involved in youth work, as well as an additional document to be utilized by future intended youth workers. Both actions were influenced by the anonymous survey and literature that connects bullying to Social Cognitive Theory and Social Dominance Theory. My findings suggest the importance of bullying education for teachers and all students, appropriate consequences for perpetrators of bullying, safe spaces facilitated by adults, and care for the bullying-victim.

Key words: bullying, bullying intervention, bullying prevention, bullying-victim, cyberbullying, education, school, self-efficacy, Social Cognitive Theory, Social Dominance Theory, teacher, workshop, youth work.

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Introduction

Bullying intervention was not the initial focus for my research, but one conversation was all I needed to be certain that it is what my praxis project was meant to be about. I was in the car with my mother driving back to school from spring break in March 2024. As a college student studying education (me) and a parent who is incredibly passionate about educating children to become caring and thoughtful humans (my mother, in her words), we often find ourselves discussing our past experiences in education and what we would like to see change in education. A topic that comes up quite frequently is bullying and bullying intervention in schools, and this car ride was no exception. We spoke about two of my siblings' experiences, Lizzy and Allison¹, who were severely bullied in their schools, and how the teachers and administrations of their schools responded to the bullying. The two schools had vastly different responses.

Lizzy's encounter with bullying occurred in 10th grade: she was falsely accused by male classmates for helping students cheat, and they made fun of her for having a learning difference. The bullying culminated when the main perpetrator created a FaceBook group called "Lizzy's a Cunt" with her face as the group icon photo that other students in the grade slowly joined. Our parents called the principal and vice principal of the high school as soon as Lizzy shared with them what happened. The principal and vice principal dialed in the parent of the classmate who was appalled to learn what his son had done. The student was suspended for multiple weeks, was required to have meetings with the school psychologist, and wrote a letter to Lizzy apologizing for his actions. Him and Lizzy were never in the same class again, and Lizzy reported that the remainder of her high school career was unaffected by the incident because it was dealt with head-on by the administration, teachers, and parents.

¹ Lizzy and Allison have given their explicit permission for their experiences to be included in this essay and have read what is written about them.

Allison was bullied from grades fifth through eighth. Her classmates called her “weird” and referred to her as the “r” word², and, aside from judgemental glances, they treated her as though she was invisible. Our parents brought it to the attention of the school principal, administrators, and appropriate teachers, as they did for Lizzy. Allison’s teachers did their best to support her by treating her with kindness and coaching her on how to speak up and retain her confidence; the administration continuously ignored the situation, even when teachers approached them about it. Eventually, the school hosted a mandatory meeting for the parents of the grade in which a bullying expert discussed bullying and its impacts— a talk my mother refers to as “Bullying 101,” although it was not enough, since the bullying had been going on for quite some time at that point. The parents of the bullies were caught by complete surprise, proving that the administration truly had not taken any meaningful action against the bullying whatsoever, including contacting the parents of the bullies. The emotional wounds still remain within the victims.

Through the dichotomy of these two sequences of events and exploring them that day in the car with my mother, it became all the more obvious to me that adults hold so much potential for change in regard to bullying and all that spirals from it. I then reflected on what bullying intervention training I had received thus far as a student in the education program at Clark University, and therein lies the problem: I had not received anything yet to know what to do when I am met with the inevitable event, in which my student is being bullied by a peer or is the bully themselves, and neither had my classmates. This is education that I, my classmates, and all future students in education need. At that moment, I said verbatim, “I think I need to change my praxis project,” and I did. My project transformed into searching for a way that bullying

² I have chosen to refrain from using the term explicitly, as it is extremely derogatory. The medical term used today is “intellectual disability” (Special Olympics, 2024). As I am someone who does not have an intellectual disability, it is not my term to use casually or otherwise.

intervention training for up-and-coming teachers and youth workers can be included in Clark University's education program.

A 2011 study describes bullying as, “(1) the behaviour is intended to harm or disturb, (2) the behaviour occurs repeatedly over time, and (3) there is an imbalance of power, with a more powerful person or group attacking a less powerful one” (Sherrow, 2011, 1).³ Most definitions of bullying share descriptions that bullying includes harm, intention, power imbalance, and repetition (e.g., Mishna & van Wert, 2014). Bullying is more likely to happen when adults do not intervene, and thus education for bullying intervention must be available to classroom teachers, and teachers must be dedicated to bullying intervention.

The question guiding my research is: What actions can adults take that will mitigate bullying based on recommendations from individuals who have previously encountered bullying?

To address the research question, I created an anonymous survey for legal adults to reflect on their times in school from kindergarten through 12th grade and share what adults did or did not do that did or did not help in instances of bullying, as well as what they wish adults would have done. The survey was designed to collect people's lived experiences through stories, making my research qualitative, not quantitative. While I could have sought responses solely from teachers and other school personnel on what they perceive as helpful toward stopping bullying, I specifically wanted insight from those who experienced or witnessed bullying first hand to determine what was beneficial in preventing bullying and protecting them physically and mentally as victims of bullying and because what teachers determine as beneficial may be more correlated with what they found helpful for regaining students' focus after an instance of

³ A more in-depth description of bullying and comparative definitions of bullying is included in the conceptual framework and literature review.

bullying rather than what supported victims of bullying and encouraged changed behavior of bullies in their classes. The importance of stories as data— especially stories from people who have been more impacted by an issue— is suggested in my theory of change. I believe stories from those directly impacted by specific circumstances offer crucial knowledge that only they possess. Through learning and discussing stories, we can develop better understandings of one another leading to a more empathetic world.

I initially wanted to partner with Clark University's education department to develop a bullying education curriculum, but seeing as that would require lots of time and money that is not attainable in such a short time span, the new plan became for the education department I to host an annual bullying intervention training session in which tools derived from the survey I conducted would be shared and discussed with those in attendance. Due to conflicts of interest and scheduling, I collaborated with the Community, Youth, and Education Studies (CYES) major at Clark University which is a department within the education department. We hosted one bullying intervention training in March 2025 geared toward those currently working and planning to work directly with youth in the future that was open to any Clark University community member who wished to discuss and explore bullying and bullying intervention techniques in youth spaces. Through providing future teachers and youth workers with techniques to combat bullying and opportunities to discuss bullying prevention and intervention, the training offered discussion and tools for youth workers to be better equipped and feel more prepared to enter their classrooms and support their students as they otherwise would without the opportunity for training and discussion.

It is likely that the CYES major will no longer be present at Clark University in a few years, so instead of relying on the CYES department to host an annual workshop, I compiled a

living document for youth workers that is open to anyone with the link to the document. The document consists of the bullying intervention techniques I have gathered through literature and my own research and will ideally be shared with Clark University students studying education and youth work for years to come.

Positionality

Prior to beginning my research, I described my positionality as my entire identity outside of the project topic. I am an Ashkenazi Jewish, white, heterosexual, cisgender, middle-upper class woman who was raised in Modern Orthodox Judaism. There are several privileges I experience as a white, cisgender, heterosexual, middle-upper class person, and however grateful I am to be Jewish and a woman, I have encountered many struggles due to those specific parts of my identity; there is also privilege in being of Ashkenazi descent within the Jewish community. These are all bullet points of who I am, and while they are crucial to how I view and experience the world, for this project I focus on my positionality in correlation with bullying specifically.

My positionality in this project is quite multilayered due to my connections to the topic as an insider (witness to bullying and student of education) and an outsider (I do not share all identities with respondents and I was not present for their experiences).

I am a witness of bullying. I know how bullying affected my siblings, and each member of my immediate family remains deeply frustrated with the mishandling of the bullying Allison endured by her administration's complacency. If this were someone else's project, I would have filled the anonymous survey similarly to many other respondents: *My parents did everything they could. / My parents did everything they could; The administration did close to nothing. / The administration reacted appropriately and accordingly, and no further harm was done; I wish the administration would have listened. / I wish the teacher would have put a stop to the boys for*

turning my sister into a scapegoat; Share anything. Teachers need to know they can do better. / Share anything. Teachers need to know what works. I know what this project means to those it will impact because I know what it means to me.

A critical aspect of positionality is recognition of privilege. My parents are both native English speakers and they had a shared identity with most of the administrators as American, Ashkenazi, Jewish adults, and therefore did not experience any language or cultural barriers when communicating with either administration. The schools' populations were relatively small which heightened the likelihood that the administrations would be able to place proper focus on Lizzy and Allison. The administration at Lizzy's school practiced regular and open communication with parents— something relatively uncommon in administrations— so our parents were already familiar with the administration. Although my parents were full-time workers, they had the time and mental capacities to dedicate such a significant amount of time to the circumstances without fear of losing their jobs. Without these privileges, it would have been less likely that my parents would have been successful in their endeavors to bring awareness and change to the schools.

Simultaneously, I am an outsider. I hold personal experiences that do not belong to me through the anonymous surveys. Although I have my own personal connections as to why I am passionate about bullying education and advocacy for anti-bullying, centering survey respondents and their stories is central to my research and my philosophy for this project. I am dedicated to being respectful toward their stories because it would be disrespectful to them for me to assume shared identities and experiences in instances to which I truly have little to no connection.

In the action portion of my praxis, I am both an insider and an outsider. Just like the participants that attended the bullying intervention session, I too am actively learning new techniques I can use to combat bullying in my future classroom, and I will likely turn to the living document as guidance when needed. I describe this project as selfish in a positive way because, as someone who currently works and will continue to work with youth, *I* need this training for myself. *I* need to know how to reach my students beyond academics. *I* am a CYES major and on track to becoming a school teacher. I am aware that I hold influence over how my students will treat each other.

My epistemological stance is that reflection and dialogue with others promote great learning. I believe that knowledge can be life-changing, and the knowledge that is created through dialogue is no exception. Educators have a responsibility to host discussions with their students in effort to set them up to be well-informed, thoughtful individuals. Without honest and respectful conversation, we are stuck in our own views and deprived of gaining deeper understandings of new information. We cannot learn how we can do better in the future if we do not reflect and listen to others.

Theoretical Framework

Bullying (*noun*) occurs when physical, verbal, emotional, and or mental harm is intentionally done toward another person or people, and involves an explicit power imbalance (Farrington, 1993; Garrett, 2003; Sherrow, 2011; Mishna & van Wert, 2014; Connor et al., 2017).⁴ Examples of bullying include, but are not limited to, gossip, exclusion, threats, name calling, pushing, and property damage. The goal of the theoretical framework is not to identify what bullying is, but why it occurs.

⁴ An in-depth explanation of the definition of bullying is in the conceptual framework and literature review sections.

There are two theoretical frameworks that guided my research for why bullying exists and how to prevent it: Social Dominance Theory (SDT) and Social Cognitive Theory⁵ (SCT). My initial intention was to only use SCT to explain why bullying remains such a prevalent issue today, as it is the theory that is most closely aligned with my own beliefs about behavior. Through conversation with Jie Park, I grew to understand that SCT alone does not clarify why bullying first happened or why it exists. Thus, to identify why bullying occurs and why it has continued through today, this project requires two separate theories that complement each other.

Social Dominance Theory (SDT) frames the root cause of bullying, stating “individuals organise themselves in social hierarchies. Aggressive behaviour can be used to maintain social hierarchy” (Connor et al., 2017, 439). In earlier civilizations, social dominance was required for survival due to a literal or perceived lack of resources such as food, water, and potential mates (Al-Jbouri et al., 2022). Humans as primates have utilized their ability to intimidate others through physical violence and verbal threats as a means to get what they want. And yet, this competitive nature persists to a toxic degree and humans still inflict bullying upon peers in order to maintain social dominance and social norms like our ancestors (Sherrow, 2011). The theory for why this is the case is because humans have inherited the trait seeks social dominance over hundreds of millenia (Choi et al., 2011; Sherrow, 2011; Connor et al., 2017; Dane et al., 2019; Garandean et al., 2020; Al-Jbouri, Dane, & Volk, 2022), suggesting that power imbalances are now a natural part of the human psyche. Despite humans having evolved an awareness that survival-of-the-fittest mentality is no longer needed, it remains a prominent aspect in societies today. This is manifested in social hierarchies in all parts of society, including in classrooms. Social hierarchies are present in social groups in that specific individuals possess greater

⁵ The original second framework I used is called Social Learning Theory (SLT), which is a breakoff theory of SCT. Due to a lack of research connecting SLT to bullying, I chose to use SCT.

amounts of power than others and intentionally use that power to dominate the environment for their own benefit. They may use their power to exclude peers or use threats of harm against peers. I struggle with the idea that social dominance is wired into humans because it suggests that there is little we can do to change that mindset since we now have the cognitive awareness to live in a more just world. Although SDT offers an explanation for why bullying came to be and used to be necessary, I refuse to believe that humans are incapable of social change from inheriting the social dominance trait. To reconcile this idea, I turned to Social Cognitive Theory to understand why we are still cruel to one another, specifically in childhood and adolescence, and what we can do about it.

Social Cognitive Theory (SCT), coined by Albert Bandura in 1986, provides an answer to this dilemma. SCT can be defined as, “the idea that much human learning and behavior occurs in social environments. By interacting with others, people acquire knowledge, skills, strategies, beliefs, and attitudes” (Schunk & Usher, 2019, 11). SCT highlights that the way in which a person behaves is rooted in the learned behaviors they have gathered in social settings (Weinhold, 2003; Wong & Xiao, 2013; Schunk & Usher, 2019). As a child develops, they acquire understanding of how to perform in diverse situations, otherwise known as learned behaviors. These behaviors may differ among individuals based on culture and personal background (Dane et al., 2019), such as refrain from interrupting a peer during discussion because this individual was raised in a society in which it is considered rude to interrupt. Some learned behaviors are an integral part of maintaining power imbalances in social settings, such as the concept, “Children should be seen and not heard,” which upholds generational hierarchies between adults and children. A person learns morals through observing how others act, followed by adopting, altering, or rejecting that practice for themselves (Schunk & Usher, 2019). SCT is

applicable to bullying because, in addition to social dominance– or bullying– being an inherited trait, bullying is also a learned behavior and is reinforced through the reactions and awards the bully receives (Weinhold, 2000). Just as SCT argues that bullying is learned, it claims that it can also be unlearned, as well as prevented, using moral awareness (Connor et al., 2017, 445). To do so requires holding conversations about bullying and bullies being held accountable for their actions.⁶

SDT and SCT are correlated because behaviors of social dominance that are no longer necessary are regularly practiced because they are reinforced by social reactions and benefits leading to learned (cognitive) social behaviors (Al-Jbouri et al., 2022). Bullying through the lenses of SDT and SCT determines that a person takes advantage of others through social dominance due to inherited behaviors and through intentionally seeking power over others to actively uphold their position. This is evident in grade schools in which certain clubs are often more admired than others, such as basketball or a math club; society in schools upholds that being an athlete is more socially favorable than participating in academic-based clubs and leads students to hold athletes in a higher regard than students with other interests. The reasons for why bullying occurs altogether and how it can be prevented, including bullying education and teaching children empathy, can be understood through these theories as separate entities and as complementary.

Many other theories exist as explanations for why bullying happens. Theories I have heard include the bully's family has a history of abuse that they have experienced themselves, the presence of mob-mentality in which people join others because they are influenced by social pressures, the bully themselves is self-conscious and has low self-esteem that leads them to wish the same feelings on others, the student is advanced academically and bullies because they are

⁶ This is elaborated on in the findings section.

bored in class, or they were previously in the position of being the bullying victim. A family member recently told me they believe the reason a person bullies is because they crave attention and the only way to stop the bullying is to ignore it. I chose to use SDT because other theories do not account for why the behavior began altogether and SCT because I perceive that these other theories can be included in SCT (e.g., a person who experiences abuse bullies others because causing harm against others or copying a larger group's behavior (mob mentality) is a learned behavior).

Conceptual Framework

There are certain terms used in this paper that are used in everyday language, but it is important to clarify their definitions in the context of this research.

Bullying⁷

- *Bullying* can look very different depending on the circumstance, but most definitions agree that there is intentional⁸ physical, verbal, mental, or emotional harm from an individual done to another individual that is unable to fully protect themselves due to power imbalances. *Bullying* constitutes as any form of intentional harm, physical or non-physical, inflicted upon an individual who is unable to protect themselves by another individual who would otherwise be considered a peer. This can include physical harassment (e.g. pushing against lockers), verbal harassment (e.g. name calling, mocking, threats), non-physical or non-verbal disturbances (e.g. stealing belongings, harsh glances), or indirect disturbances (e.g. spreading rumors).
- **Bully**

⁷ The definition of bullying is heavily expanded upon in the literature review.

⁸ Although most definitions of bullying include intention, it is unclear if intention is indeed required for actions to be considered bullying, since there still may be severe harm caused. This is further explored in the literature review.

- A *bully* is an individual who willingly performs bullying themselves or alongside others against another individual or multiple individuals. It is not limited to hierarchical status, as a core principle of bullying is the presence of power imbalance.

Bullying-victim/Victim

- A *bullying-victim* or *victim* is an individual who experiences bullying. I include both terms because both terms are used in the literature.

Bullying Intervention

- *Bullying Intervention* is action that is taken while bullying is happening to interrupt the bullying. This can also include further steps after the incident is interrupted, such as speaking with the bully or victim or anyone else involved in an effort to prevent any further bullying in the future.

Bullying Prevention

- *Bullying Prevention* is action that is taken before bullying has occurred to stop bullying before it can begin. This frequently looks like bullying prevention programs in which mandatory school assemblies and classes are held to educate students about bullying and what they can do to prevent it from happening in the future. There are mixed findings as to if bullying prevention programs are useful because they are frequently brought to schools after traumatic bullying events have already occurred. In order for bullying prevention to be truly preventive, action must be taken *before* bullying occurs and preferably as early as possible.

Adult

- *Adult* may seem like an unnecessary word to define, but it is important to me to emphasize what an adult means to me in the context of children. An adult is anyone of 18

years old or older that has any power, influence, or responsibility over children and on their learning. This can be a teacher, administrator, parent, counselor, program director, etc. For the purposes of this project, I would also identify a camp counselor or group leader as an adult even if they are under 18 years old because they are legally responsible for the children assigned to their group or bunk.

Child

- Any individual that is below the age of 18 or still in grade 12.

Youth Space

- A *youth space* is any environment that is officially designated as an environment for children to meet and have shared experiences. This can include local organizations that support a greater community, dance studios, religious environments, sports teams, and any other space that is specifically designed and designated for children.

Teacher Self-efficacy

- *Self-efficacy* is belief in one's capabilities. *Teacher self-efficacy* is a teacher's belief in their capabilities of being what they constitute as a good teacher (Fischer et al., 210).

These terms are relevant to Social Dominance Theory because they offer insight into categorizations within hierarchies, such as *Bully* versus *Victim* and *Adult* versus *Child*. The terms are relevant to Social Cognitive Theory through the inclusion of *Bullying prevention* and *Bullying intervention*, *Adult*, *Child*, *Youth spaces*, and *Teacher self-efficacy* because each plays a role in behavior reinforcement. Each of these terms are informative to shaping the understanding of the research and its connection to SDT and SCT.

Literature Review

Each of these articles entails aspects of each category listed. The categories are organized by theme and what information I found that was most relevant. I located these articles using Google Scholar and Clark University's online library, JSTOR. Terms and phrases I searched included *bullying education*, *bullying in schools*; *bullying prevention program*; *childhood bullying*; *social cognitive theory*; *social cognitive theory and bullying*; *social dominance theory*; *social dominance theory and bullying*; etc. I did not limit the articles to a location in which research was conducted, such as the United States, in order to gain a wider understanding of bullying and the theories SDT and SCT.

Defining Bullying

The first topic I searched for were definitions of bullying. Each piece of literature I read stated that bullying involves a power imbalance and intentionality in causing harm against someone else (Farrington, 1993; Garrett, 2003; Espelage et al., 2010; Mishna & van Wert, 2014; Byrne et al., 2016). A 2011 study defines power as, "the capacity to make others do what they would not otherwise do, the capacity to overcome resistance, and the means to achieve a person's social or interpersonal goals" (Tedeschi, 2001, as cited in Choi et al., 2011, 444). When one individual possesses more power and agency than another individual, there is a power imbalance present that places the individual with less influence at risk. There is some discussion about whether an action can be regarded as bullying if the bully unintentionally caused harm. Based on conversations I have had with peers, professors, and other academics, I am of the opinion that an individual is not required to be aware of the harm of their actions in order for their behavior to be regarded as bullying. Regardless of the bully's potential lack of awareness, their actions caused harm to the bullying-victim.

A 1993 article describes victims as “unpopular, lonely, rejected, anxious, depressed, unwilling to retaliate, and lacking in self-esteem” (Farrington, 1993, 381). I struggle with this description because it limits who constitutes a victim. While it is more likely for a bully to practice bullying behavior toward an individual who possesses these traits, it does not account for instances when power differences evolve to be even greater, leading to an individual to develop these trait: a victim of bullying may have initially been popular, had friends, been accepted, and experienced few instances of anxiety, but due to the bully taking advantage of their use of power over the victim, these characteristics may evolve within the victim over the course of the bullying. The victim may indeed be willing to retaliate, but due to an evolved feeling of certainty that they are powerless against the bully, they find themselves unable to retaliate. This is supported by a 2010 article which explains, “Victimization by peers has been linked to illnesses, [...]increased fear and anxiety, and suicidal ideation as well as to long-term internalizing difficulties including low self-esteem, anxiety, and depression” (Hawker & Boulton 2000; McDougall et al., 2009, as cited in Espelage et al., 2010, 38). The statement suggests that these characteristics are an effect of bullying and not necessarily a cause of inspiration for an individual to bully a peer.

An important distinction is made in a 2003 article between normal peer conflict and bullying: “Normal peer conflict is when two students of equal status and power get into an argument or a fight, but it’s more accidental, and not serious. In the bullying incident, you have a balance of power and the students are not friends” (Garrett, 2003, 9). It is possible that the intention behind this statement is that if an individual bullies their friend, it can be argued that they are not truly friends, since true friends are meant to carry equal status pertaining to power. It can also be argued, though, that it is the individuals themselves who get to decide who

constitutes as their friend. I disagree with the statement that a bully and victim cannot be friends because there indeed have been instances of bullying in which the bully and victim were friends, including reports from certain responses from the survey that I later discuss. I was initially unsure about whether the use of the phrase “balance of power” when discussing bullying was intended to be written as “imbalance of power,” but I assume that the intention is to recognize that there is meant to be a balance of power between the peers.

A 2016 study performed in Ireland excludes “siblings or current dating partners” (Gladden et al., 2014, 7, as cited in Byrne et al., 2016, 404) from constituting as bullies in its definition of bullying, even if they have bully-like characteristics. I personally believe that anyone has the potential to bully, including bullying against family members and significant others. A significant difference between definitions of bullying is how adults versus students define bullying. The study found that when students were asked to describe what counts as bullying, it was rare for a participant to mention that the bully needs to be intentional in their mistreatment of others. The article goes on to signify that a person will respond to bullying depending on how they personally define bullying (Byrne et al., 2016, 405). Assuming this is true, when an adult overhears a student being mean to another student but they are aware that it is unintentional, I wonder if the adult would ignore the occurrence. This begs two questions: (1) does a person need to be aware that they are causing harm in order to be labeled as a bully? and (2) does the bully’s intentions and understanding of bullying matter more than the victim’s? In my opinion, the answer to both questions is no.

Although there is a claim that “A universal definition of cyberbullying does not exist” (Mishna & van Wert, 2014, 227), another article states, “cyberbullying can easily be defined as ‘bullying using an electronic medium’” (Dooley et al., 182, as cited in Eschenbeck, Hock &

Knauf, 2018, 2). Effects of cyberbullying can be drastic, as access to messaging on social media is quite easily shareable and accessible, as seen in Lizzy's case of cyberbullying. Like traditional bullying, cyberbullying may include but is not limited to online teasing, mocking, threats, gossip, exclusion, and unwanted sharing of personal information.

Social Cognitive Theory and Bullying

A 2019 article states, "A key point underlying social cognitive theory is that persons are motivated to develop a sense of agency for being able to largely control the important events in their lives" (Schunk & Usher, 2019, 22). SCT identifies the connections between modeling, motivation or agency, and behavior (Bandura & Walters, 1963), and emphasizes the impacts social environments have on learned behaviors. In compliance with SCT's definition, SCT connects to bullying as an individual uses their agency to perform bullying. SCT suggests that bullying is a learned behavior and involves reinforcement that the bully interprets as a push to continue the behavior, which may include rise in popularity. Reinforcement of bullying also includes failure to intervene in the bullying, as the bully perceives this as permission to continue the behavior (Eschenbeck et al., 2018). Similarly, a 2019 Swedish study explored the connection between moral engagement and disengagement, self-efficacy, and SCT. The study found that bullying behavior is more likely when an individual possesses a low level of empathy for others. A 2013 study from Hong Kong focused on college-aged individuals and the likelihood of bullying based on past experiences of bullying (Wong & Xiao, 2013). The study found motivation "to be the strongest predictor of cyber-bullying" (Wong & Xiao, 2013, 56) and individuals were more likely to practice cyberbullying when searching for attention or validation from peers. Two studies from 2000 and 2019 asked children directly in their studies why they think someone bullies (Weinhold, 2000; Mguye, 2019). The 2019 study was performed in South

Africa with eighth and ninth grade students, and the 2000 article was published in the United States. One child from the 2000 article said, “It’s cool. You get a lot of friends when you’re a bully” (Weinhold, 2000, 5). Students’ belief that bullying is “cool” is itself a learned behavior since it requires approval from peers and proves SCT’s connection to bullying. The remainder of explanations for bullying in these two articles correlate with learned mentalities and behaviors such as internalized biases and familial influences (Mguye, 2019, 8; Weinhold, 2000, 10-11).

A 2022 study focused on the social cognitive impacts on victims of bullying (Güroglu et al., 2022). It found that bullying-victims may become more sensitive, numb, or reactive as defense mechanisms against bullying. The study discovered, “The *prevention* [reactive] *hypothesis* was best supported in this review and stated that victims focus more on negative events or interpretations to be able to better prevent future negative experiences” (Güroglu et al., 2022, 305). SCT and bullying are connected in this article through prevention hypothesis, which is when the victim uses past negative experiences with bullying to influence how they react to or feel about bullying in the future.

Social Dominance Theory and Bullying

Social Dominance Theory focuses on the presence of social hierarchies throughout evolution through today (Sherrow, 2011; Connor et al., 2017; Dane et al., 2019; Garandean et al., 2020), as social dominance has been “used to maintain social hierarchy” (Levin et al., 2006, as cited in Connor et al., 2017, 439) in today’s world. A 2022 study connecting SDT and Social Learning Theory (SLT) posits, “children do not begin their learning with a blank slate” (Al-Jbouri et al., 2022, 2367). Due to the presence of social hierarchies throughout humanity’s existence, social dominance remains relevant in all social environments, namely schools.

Elementary school students in China were a part of a 2020 study that explored the connection between classroom hierarchy and bullying. The study states, “classroom status hierarchy may relate to higher benefits and lower costs for bullying behaviors” (Garandean et al., 2020). Larger class population sizes offer more opportunity for there to be a greater presence of hierarchy and the bully’s actions lead to “higher benefits” and “lower costs” because there are more people to support their status, as well as the teacher is less likely to notice the bullying. A 2011 study on white, suburban, middle-class, elementary school students discussed earlier connects SDT to social interdependence theory because it finds social dominance theory insufficient because it does not differentiate between positive and negative acts of power. Similar but slightly different from SDT, “Social interdependence theory posits that there is a dominance hierarchy only in competitive situations” (Choi et al., 2011, 443). The study found that students are more likely to use their position of power in the social hierarchy in a positive manner, such as encouraging quiet students to participate or encouraging peers to practice inclusion, when they classify benefits as being for the group than being for themselves. A comparative study from 2019 looks at personality traits and bullying in China and Canada. The study found that students who possess less humility for their actions are more likely to bully because they do not feel remorse for their actions. “Some relations differed across cultural contexts, in line with evolutionary and ecological perspectives [due to] costs and benefits afforded by the environmental (cultural) context” (Dane et al., 2019, 2415), but bullying was still prevalent in both countries, suggesting that bullying truly is universal, despite acts of dominance varying due to evolution that is based on location.

Guidance for Bullying Prevention and Intervention

According to a 2006 study, in order to thwart bullying, teachers must intervene. The research found only 4% of teachers are reported to have intervened at the time of the bullying (Beran, 2006, 122). It goes on to explain that a main reason for this is because, while teachers are taught how to teach academic material, they are rarely offered sufficient training for how to approach bullying. It argues that bullying intervention training should be included in the curricula that exist in university education programs. The article does not specify what should be taught in the bullying intervention curriculums, though. 16 years later, a 2022 article similarly states that even though much bullying happens away from teachers, teachers still fail to intervene when the bullying occurs in front of them (Huitsing et al., 2022, 124), further proving the necessity for teachers to grow in their self-efficacy to interrupt bullying. Another article's findings supported that teachers are more likely to intervene on bullying when they possess higher levels of self-efficacy (Fischer & Bilz, 2021). Unsurprisingly, it found that more veteran teachers expressed greater self-efficacy due to them having more years of experience in classrooms. Although experience comes with time, it proves the necessity to offer teachers a space to learn and share bullying intervention techniques that can be offered by experienced teachers.

A 2015 article describes the characteristics of what a successful anti-bullying program should be and highlights that a school must have "clear and consistent strategies" (Ansary et al., 2015, 31) for anti-bullying protocol. Otherwise, teachers will have varying methods as to how they approach their students who are involved in bullying. It reports that there should be required staff training and that it is important to not shame the bully, but ensure there are appropriate consequences for them to learn from their actions, although it does not share how a teacher might do so.

Unlike the 2006 and 2015 articles, an article from 2012 offers explicit steps for what a teacher can and should do to create a safe classroom environment. It specifically states the consequences of teachers refusing to involve themselves in bullying prevention, namely that it inexplicitly shows the bully they have permission to continue tormenting the victim (Morgan, 2012, 177). Although the 2006 and 2015 articles are adamant that teachers should receive bullying intervention training and be proactive in their schools to intercept bullying, the article also offers steps that teachers can take in the moment that bullying occurs. Another article from 2013 expresses that children must be taught to embrace any human and culture, so they will be less likely to bully others through increased empathy (Polanin & Vera, 2013). It argues that bullying can be prevented if students receive proper teaching about diversity and acceptance.

School-Wide Bullying Intervention Programs

There are two articles in particular that describe schools that took action to prevent bullying using school-wide anti-bullying programs. A 2014 article describes a program in which school counselors taught an anti-bullying curriculum to students by reading children's literature, hosting conversations with students to educate them about bullying, and providing teachers with a set of community standards, on which they updated parents regularly, based on a framework called Steps to React (STR) (McCormac, 2014, 1). The article offers teachers a clear set of instructions for how they should react to a bullying-victim and to a bully. Based on feedback from the students, it reported that the curriculum worked specifically for upper-elementary school grades. A middle school put on a production called *Bullybusters* in which students performed bullying incidents that may occur and what can be done about them, followed by a discussion (Gallo & Milsom, 2006). The article states that there was a "20% reduction in the number of bullying incidents at the middle school level" (Gallo & Milsom, 2006, 14) after

watching the play and having additional conversations about bullying in school settings. The article recommends that in addition to holding classwide conversations about bullying, teachers should offer bullying-victims social skills such as forming connections with peers (Gallo & Milsom, 2006, 17) and offer bullies social skills to help them learn empathy and self-control and label their emotions (Gallo & Milsom, 2006, 18). Both articles agree that a school requires shared, clear standards for how it views bullying and how to react to bullying to promote a more positive and coherent school community.

An article from 2005 studied the impacts on students of an anti-bullying program called Project Ploughshares Puppets for Peace (P4) that performed situations of bullying for students to explore and learn from. It researched how P4 impacted students after the program finished. It found that although students did not express that their perspectives on bullying changed, their comfortability with intervening in bullying had increased (Beran & Shapiro, 2005).

A bullying intervention program in Finland known as KiVa is utilized in several schools in Finland. The article studied schools that use KiVa and what occurred when the schools followed, adapted, or veered away from KiVa guidelines. KiVa focuses on both a confronting approach, being extremely direct with the bully about their actions, and a non-confronting approach that “aims to increase bullies’ empathy for their victim[...] without blaming the perpetrator(s)” (Johander et al., 2021, 300), as well as scheduling followup meetings with individuals involved to ensure the bullying has stopped. The study found that the schools that followed the KiVa guidelines more closely produced more successful outcomes.

A 2022 article that involved two public middle schools in the United States’ Northwest sought feedback from school personnel on a bullying intervention program geared toward bystanders called STAC (Stealing the Show, Turning it Over, Accompanying Others, and

Coaching Compassion) (Doumas et al., 2022, 492), which consisted of strategies people can use to interrupt bullying. Teachers were critical of Stealing the Show because students may interpret it as them “not taking bullying seriously” (Doumas et al., 2022, 497). STAC is useful in classrooms to educate students more prone to being bystanders of bullying, as bullying is more likely to persist when it is not called out.

Gaps in the Research

Due to bullying being such a significant and global dilemma, there is an ample amount of research that discusses what bullying is and why it exists, as well as anti-bullying programs schools can adopt, but it was exceedingly difficult to find articles which include specific instructions or guidelines that teachers can use when they are suddenly met with a bullying dilemma. I was only able to find one source that made an explicit direct connection between SDT and SCT in bullying (Al-Jbouri et al., 2022), despite the two being quite relevant to one another. Most importantly, aside from students reporting they feel safer when teachers actively interrupt bullying (Beran, 2006, 125), research is lacking students’ voices from sharing what specific actions teachers took that were helpful or not during bullying. Thus, I am grateful that my research will finally include individuals’ perspectives who have experienced bullying from all sides about what has been helpful to prevent bullying.

Through researching existing literature, I was better able to frame my project by having a deeper understanding of the research and literature that already exists. I use the literature discussed in this section to support my findings.

Methodology

My methodology for collecting data was via an anonymous survey using the survey website Qualtrics. The survey was completely voluntary. The data was used to collect techniques

for bullying intervention that worked for students connected to bullying to be included in a living document that offers guidance for teachers about how to combat bullying⁹ and a workshop that took place in March 2025.¹⁰ The criteria for being eligible to partake in the survey was that an individual must be a legal adult who attended school for any grades from kindergarten through twelfth. Additionally, respondents must have been a victim of bullying, a perpetrator of bullying, and/or a witness to bullying. I chose to use an anonymous survey as my methodology to ensure people are as comfortable as possible taking the survey without fear of being judged or discovered. Each question was open-response, excluding the second question¹¹. I explicitly opted for open-response answers to each question (excluding Question 2) because each bullying experience has details and emotions that a multiple choice format would not be able to capture. I wanted to offer individuals the opportunity to share however much they wanted about their stories, specify which parts they wished only for me to know for my own understanding, how adults' actions impacted them and their experiences following the incidents, and anything else they wished to share with me. I shared the survey with my praxis cohort, former CYES students, other students at Clark University, on my WhatsApp story, and with certain family members who shared the survey on their Instagram accounts. I did not limit who the survey could be sent to, although I requested that family members refrain from taking the survey themselves, as I know their experiences and thus their responses would no longer be anonymous.

I did not ask respondents for specific information about their identities including age, race, gender identity, financial status, or location during the time they described or currently. My reasoning for the survey questions being open-ended and not identity-based was because I

⁹ More details about the living document is located in the section Action: Living Document.

¹⁰ A detailed description of the workshop can be found in the section Action: Bullying Intervention Workshop.

¹¹ Survey questions can be found on the following page.

figured that whatever participants chose to share was the extent to which they were comfortable sharing, and I worried that requiring or requesting them to share specifics would result in them feeling discomfort while taking the survey and they would choose to opt out. I left it to them to disclose any aspects of their identities because I assumed they would share such things if they were comfortable and if it were relevant to their experience.

The anonymous survey qualitative questions were as follows:

1. How old were you and which grade were you in during the experience you are referencing? (If you were an adult during the time that the child was being bullied, please share how old the *child* was.)
2. How do you identify in the experience you are referencing?
 - a. I was bullied.
 - b. I bullied an individual/s.
 - c. I witnessed bullying.
3. Describe your experience.
4. What did adults do that you felt WAS helpful?
5. What did adults do that you felt was NOT helpful
6. What do you wish adults would have done?
7. Please write anything else you wish to share with me.

Before I published the anonymous survey, I participated in what is called a turn in the thesis course I was enrolled in for praxis. Each student in the course was required to have two turns, one per semester during the last two semesters of the course (the course lasts for three semesters in total). In the first semester, researchers were tasked to present a dilemma they had encountered during their project. The dilemma I presented was my worry that the respondents'

experiences would affect me to the point that it would impact my mental health and lead me to not emotionally center the respondents in my research. While collecting data, I was able to maintain a healthy distance between myself and the respondents' experiences.¹² One classmate shared an assumption that I had not taken into consideration the mental health of the survey participants after they had completed the survey. Inspired by the critique, I included a page in the survey that included resources for the participant including online therapy resources that take a variety of insurances and a YouTube playlist with yoga and meditation videos for anxiety, trauma, and overall mental health. The page followed the questions after the participant submitted their responses.¹³

Data Analysis

Although I use numbers and percentages to highlight certain data, there is an individual behind each number who was once a child. The bullying reported in the survey consisted of physical harassment, mocking, threats, exclusion, destruction of property, body shaming, slut shaming, and cyberbullying. With that in mind, the numerical data I have gathered is astonishing.

I received 21 responses to the survey. I first organized my data by age range and whether they identified as a bully, victim, or witness of bullying. Of the 21 responses, 15 were bullied, two were bullies, and four were witnesses of bullying. At the time of the bullying, 19% of the respondents were in elementary school, 24% were in middle school, 33% were in high school, and 19% reported they experienced bullying in more than one stage of schooling.

I used discourse analysis to analyze each survey response and sought evidence of SCT and SDT within the data, such as in a child's or adult's behavior or expressed emotions.

Although I am using discourse analysis to interpret my data, my analysis is subject to

¹² A reflection about conducting research is included in the Reflection section.

¹³ Refer to Appendix A for notes from Turn 1.

misunderstanding due to it being my interpretation. I initially analyzed the individual data using coding, but I found that it was not as generative as discourse analysis, as the meanings of certain words frequently mentioned in the surveys are quite dependent on context. For example, “teacher” was mentioned twenty-five times, but some respondents described their teachers as the bully rather than as having been a helpful adult.

Discourse analysis consists of five underlying principles and three lenses in effort to fully contextualize data in the way the respondent intended. The five principles of discourse analysis are situated meaning, social languages, intertextuality, figured worlds or cultural models, and “Big D” discourse. The three lenses of discourse analysis are social identity and positionality, cultural models and figured worlds, and asking what the speaker is trying to communicate. Social identity and positionality may include race, gender, religion, financial status, sexual orientation, familial role, professional position, personality traits, and anything else that may compose an individual and the implications their identity has on the circumstance. Each of these aspects in discourse analysis are interconnected.

There were various components I looked out for as I read through the data. I first noted if the respondent identified themselves as a bully, a witness to bullying, or a victim of bullying. I then read the experience described and identified any identities mentioned or hinted, what type of bullying occurred, and who performed the bullying. I noted power dynamics evident in the bullying and the relationships between power dynamics to the respondent’s social identity. I am unaware of several characteristics of the respondents, as the survey is completely anonymous and the questions do not ask participants to specify their identities. Some individuals chose to share if their experience was related to a specific identity such as their race or gender, but the majority did not. I noted any emotions mentioned, as well as the general tone of the response. I

highlighted explicit appreciations or criticisms respondents shared and reframed each of them to be recommendations adults can adopt when encountered with children involved in bullying. I looked for cultural models prevalent in the survey responses and found that the cultural models I identified were directly related to social hierarchy and power.

I use Respondent 5's (R5) response here to exhibit how I used discourse analysis to analyze my data according to individual responses:

R5 identified themselves as a victim of bullying, as they responded "I was bullied" to the third question of the survey. From that, I understand they viewed themselves as being in a less powerful position. I use the pronouns they/them/theirs because there is no clear indication as to how they identify their gender, thus counting out any hierarchies relating to gender. They listed instances of exclusion, cliques, mean comments, preconceived notions from teachers about their family, and trouble finding friends, despite having friends who treated them poorly. Situated meaning did not appear relevant in this response. Examples of social language present are the phrase, *put me down* and *use me as the punching bag*, as the meanings of those two phrases are not based on the literal words; R5 did not list physical harm as an example of bullying they experienced, so it is clear that they were not used as a literal punching bag. I was unable to find examples of intertextuality in R5's response. A cultural model present is that teachers were unhelpful *because they had conceptions of my family outside of me*, which is consistent with a common practice of teachers to associate students with the behavioral patterns of their siblings and their family's reputations. Big D Discourse is represented in how R5's teachers treated them based on learned behaviors associated with how to treat families with poor reputations and behaviors they have experienced of a student's family member, so they might treat a student solely as an extension of their family than as an individual. These insights clarify that R5 was a

victim of bullying who was also identified as a “loner” so to speak, and it would have been beneficial for them to have received support from adults in fostering positive friendships. R5 connects to SDT because their bullies made explicit efforts to exclude them and uphold their status in the social hierarchy and SCT as their loneliness developed into anxiety that led them to wanting to be homeschooled.

To identify findings from the data, I compared responses that have common recommendations for bullying intervention and actions that were taken by adults. The techniques included in the data could have been explicitly or implicitly suggested by respondents or determined by myself based on the experience recorded in the data.¹⁴

I present here an example of how I created categories of bullying intervention techniques and turned them into findings:

R2 wrote in Q6,¹⁵ *Most teachers designated their classrooms as “safe spaces,” and would address anything that happened during class.* The bullying prevention tool used here is having a classwide discussion. R9 wrote in Q8, *Acknowledged it and spoke to our classes about how to behave and how to be kind.* R9 would have found it useful for the teacher to have spoken to the whole class about appropriate behavior. Using those two responses, I was able to name the category, Educate the Full Class.

R8 wrote in response to Q6, *The teachers made some of the girls apologize but nothing else happened that I remember.* Although the teachers forced some of the bullies to apologize, Q6 did not recall that teachers took time to educate the bullies about the harm of their actions. R11 wrote in Q7, *The teacher took them to the principals office where he shouted at them and forced them to write apology notes.* Similar to R8, R11 reported that although the bullies were

¹⁴ See Appendix B for the categorization map of my findings.

¹⁵ Refer to the methodology section for survey questions.

disciplined for their actions, they were not adequately taught about the impacts of their actions. Based on R8's and R11's responses, I determined another bullying intervention technique, Educate the Bully.

I was able to declare a finding as Education from Educate the Full Class, Educate the Bully, and other techniques described in the Findings and Insights section, since all these particular techniques found are rooted in education.

I categorized my findings based on responses as such:

Education

Educate Adults

R10: (Q8) *Adults could've been more competent in their knowledge of student dynamics, and better understood how to talk to students that made us feel human instead of inept or wrong.*

Educate the Full Class

R2: (Q6) *Most teachers[...] would address anything that happened during class.*

R9: (Q8) *Acknowledged it and spoke to our classes about how to behave and how to be kind.*

R18: (Q8) *I wish the school would have taught more about why bullying is so bad instead of just saying it is something you shouldn't do*

Educate the Bully

R6: (Q7) *I found it unhelpful when the adults made me talk to the teacher about the issues I had with her.*

R8: (Q6) *The teachers made some of the girls apologize but nothing else happened that I remember.*

R11: (Q7) *The teacher took them to the principals office where he shouted at them and forced them to write apology notes*

R15: (Q7) *At beginning I reported the misbehavior of classmates to the head teacher and she slightly told them off but that's not helping at all*

Conversation as Education– Speak with All Involved

R3: (Q4) *The administration only talked to that one friend and they didn't give him any real consequences, he kept doing[...] until the rest of our friend group stopped[...]*

R16: (Q7) *Never had the conversations with others when they knew what was going on*
(Q8) *Had conversations*

Facilitate a Conversation between the Victim and Bully

R11: (Q8) *I wish they would have sat us all down together and facilitated a conversation about what happened*

Consequences

Implement Consequences

R3: (Q7) *The administration were not helpful, as when they intervened there were no consequences and the behavior continued for some time.*

R7: (Q8) *Intervened and punished the girls bullying*

Follow through on Consequences

R8: (Q7) *[...]when I tried advocating for myself in group projects and ne getting all the work they'd not really be so on top of doing anything*

R12: (Q6) *[...]the advisor I had for the club did take it serious when our posters were being torn down and she got us in to talk to the principal[...] After talking to him, we didn't have our club targeted again[...].*

Do Not Punish the Victim

R14: (Q7) *'Equal' punishments. I got whatever the bully got, because we both 'started it'.*

Safe Spaces

Classrooms as Safe Spaces

R2: (Q6) *Most teachers designated their classrooms as “safe spaces.” [...] Teachers also established affinity groups for students of color, LGBTQ+ students, etc.*

R6: (Q6) *I found it helpful that adults provided me an alternative safe space to complete my assignments for her class as needed.*

R16: (Q6) *Teacher gave a safe spot in her class room for me to hang out in during recess*

Trusted Adults

R5: (Q6) *my mom was always supportive of me, and there were a couple of my teachers in later middle school [...]*

R10: (Q6) *Talk to my counselor and social worker in the school about my stress and situations.*

Build Trusting Relationships with Students

R20: (Q8) *no one ever really [...] took the time to build a trusting relationship where I felt like I could talk to them about [...] challenges I was having not just academically [...]*

Caring for the Bullying-Victim

Check in with the Bullying-Victim

R12: (Q7) *[...]not checking in with me to see how the comments were really impacting me.*

R20: (Q8) *[...]just show more care and check in/take interest in knowing about how I’m feeling.*

Validate the Victim’s Experiences

R14: (Q8) *Listen. Be able to recognize genuine distress from petulance.*

Support the Victim in Building Confidence

R20: (Q6) *My parents helped instill confidence in myself and supported me in building a positive sense of self [...]*

No Victim-Blaming

R10: (Q7) *Yelling at me or telling me I was over reacting or putting too much attention to it with other kids.*

R14: (Q7) *'Equal' punishments. I got whatever the bully got, because we both 'started it'.*

R15: (Q6) *My parents didn't blamed me at all*

Findings sections are expanded on in the following section.

Findings and Insights

Research Question: What actions can adults take that will mitigate bullying based on recommendations from individuals who have previously encountered bullying?

There are four findings I found in my research: education, consequences, safe spaces, and caring for the bullying victim. Most of the 21 responses have overlap between these findings. Each of the findings are not meant to be mutually exclusive, as there are multiple tools that can and should be used when encountering bullying among children. Any severe spelling errors were edited, but grammatical errors are unchanged to maintain clarity and also remain true to the respondents' responses. Each respondent is assigned a number for clarity purposes to keep track of who says what. For example, R3 (Respondent 3) represents one person's responses throughout the section.

Education

Educate Adults

First and foremost, adults in education must be educated in proper bullying interventions (Beran, 2006), which is a crucial part in implementing practices associated with SCT. An assumption many people possess about teachers is that teachers are properly educated about taking notice of inappropriate behavior among students and how to handle bullying in their

classrooms and that they act accordingly. Several other people are under the assumption that this is frequently not the case, and education programs for teachers often focus solely or mainly on how to teach academics, but lack lessons for students of education in how to handle student dynamics and power imbalances among students in their classrooms. Academic spaces are not only academic, as they are also social spaces in which individuals have conversations beyond the material that is discussed, foster relationships, and determine with whom they would or would not like to be associated. As a student currently enrolled in my university's education program, I am yet to receive a thorough lesson in how to speak to students who are in conflict, despite having been in several elementary classroom settings.

R10 identifies as female and a person of color, and she was 15 years old during the time of the bullying. The instance of bullying described involved gender- and race- based bullying including mocking, shunning, and exclusion. Cultural models present in R10's response are social hierarchies of race and gender in which white people have greater privilege and power over people of color and cisgender men over all other sexes and genders. Her response suggests that she assumes she would not have been a target of bullying if she was a cisgender male and perceived as a heterosexual person. R10 cited that an adult yelled at her and claimed she was *overreacting*, signifying another cultural model of a social hierarchy in which teachers possess power over their students, and the teacher actively upholds their dominance in the social hierarchy by belittling R10's experience. R10 shared that she did have some support through her school's counselor and social worker who were helpful in guiding her through the stress of being bullied. In the survey question, *What do you wish adults would have done?*, R10 wrote that she wishes *Adults could've been more competent in their knowledge of student dynamics, and better understood how to talk to students*. Through the lens in discourse analysis that seeks to determine

what the speaker is trying to communicate, it appears that R10 does not believe her teacher attempted to educate themselves about better ways to manage student dynamics and bullying. While this may be true, it is likely that the teacher attended professional development meetings in which bullying intervention techniques were indeed taught but they chose not to follow the recommendations from the meetings. Big D Discourse is exhibited here through the teacher maintaining their social dominance in the academic social hierarchy that they believed was morally acceptable.

A 2006 article labels school bullying as the hidden curriculum in which educators and other school personnel must be properly trained to approach. Although the article was published approximately 20 years ago, the recommendations for teachers and school administrations can very well be applied to schools today. The article refers to individuals who are on their way to entering their way into the education field as “pre-service teachers” (Beran, 2006). It is recommended that pre-service teachers enroll in courses that discuss bullying and how to prevent it (Beran, 2006, 123). Resources and time may be limited, but several pieces of literature and free videos on the internet are available. Teachers should continue learning about bullying and bullying intervention techniques throughout their careers. Educators should be made aware of what resources in their school are available to them (Beran, 2006, 123), and administrations should support their teachers in seeking support and intervention for students involved in bullying (Beran, 2003, 124). Had the adult who yelled at R10 received proper education and/or adhered to the guidelines offered to them in how to respond to a student who reports bullying incidents, the student would likely have felt much safer in their classroom.

Educate the Full Class

As mentioned previously, teaching academic material is typically the main focus in classrooms, but children also learn social skills in school such as how to treat peers with respect and work through conflict. Thus, it is crucial to discuss the effects of bullying and what students can do about it with all students, not just the students directly involved with the bullying.

R2 attended a predominantly white institution (PWI) in which race, sexual orientation, and financial status were cited as main reasons for bullying. Using the lens of social identity and positionality in discourse analysis, R2's description about POCs' experiences with racism as separate from them, I have identified their racial identity as white. I was unable to determine their sexual orientation due to them leaving a description of their sexual identity as *perceived sexual orientation*. In response to, *What did adults do that was helpful?*, R2 wrote, *Most teachers[...] would address anything that happened during class*. Based on this response, education surrounding bullying was present in certain classrooms that likely provided greater understanding of bullying and opportunities for practicing sympathy for students, although the respondent did not report if the bullying ever halted. R2 also reported that the administration rarely took meaningful action against the bullying, maintaining the same academic and racial social hierarchies described in the previous category.

R9 identified themselves as a witness to bullying and referenced a *popularity hierarchy* in their response. They attended junior high school in the 1960s, a time that the respondent described adults being complacent in bullying prevention. R9 admits that although they tried not to influence others to shun certain classmates, they themselves were influenced and participated in excluding students that were considered less popular, exhibiting they willingly abided by the popularity hierarchy in their grade, but recognized that they could have chosen not to.

R18 was bullied in sixth grade. They did not reveal any identities, but they did express that they were mocked. Adults ignored the bullying, and as was discussed in the literature review, bullies interpret inaction from adults as permission to continue harmful behavior (Morgan, 2012; Eschenbeck et al., 2018), likely causing the bullying against R18 to have continued. The teasing eventually led to a severe decrease in R18's mental health, a common effect of bullying (Espelage et al., 2010), and they sought therapy. Ideally, the therapy assisted them in their social cognition that led them to develop struggles with mental health.

R9 and R18 both wished their teachers and schools would have discussed bullying and proper treatment of peers in class that would have likely decreased the mockings and exclusion they experienced, or at least would have increased students' awareness of their actions. Based on the discourse analysis lens regarding intentions in communication, this suggests that R9 and R18, similar to R2, believe that people who bully lack awareness of the impacts their actions have because they are not explicitly educated about what bullying is and how it affects individuals. Per the recommendations of a 2006 report discussed in the literature review¹⁶ about a schoolwide bullying intervention program that showcased a titled *Bullybusters*, schools and teachers should hold discussions for all students that are explicitly designated to discuss bullying, which will make meaningful impacts on students to deepen their awareness and understanding (Gallo & Milsom, 2006).

Educate the Bully

Speaking directly with the bully for them to understand the harm their actions cause is a crucial step in preventing further bullying. This is supported by the article that discusses the KiVa program that emphasizes the importance of educating the bully to increase empathy for

¹⁶ See page 25.

them to understand the victim's experiences (Johander et al., 2021).¹⁷ In survey responses R6, R11, and R20, participants referenced adults scolding bullies rather than explaining to them calmly their wrongdoings.

R11 was in second grade when their friends practiced social dominance and tricked them into a surprise that ended with their belongings damaged. They referred to the principal as having *shouted at them [the bullies] and forced them to write apology notes*, signifying a cultural model in which superiors revert to raised voices as a means to assert dominance and teach a lesson, so to speak. By using the term *forced*, it appears as though the bullies' apologies were insincere, as the principal's tone did not allow the children to fully grasp the gravity of their actions. R20 shared a similar experience when they were bullied by their friend and other peers for a disability and appearances, presenting the social hierarchy that relates to ability-status and a part of social dominance that relates to beauty standards. Values of beauty is especially a learned behavior because beauty standards have changed over time. R20 cited that adults brought the children involved in an instance of bullying into the hallway to scold them, *then forcing an apology that wasn't sincere*. R11's and R20's responses illustrated the cultural model and social hierarchy in which adults are disciplinarians over children and frequently use their position to reprimand in harsh ways that leave little room for the child to share or process what is being spoken at them. It seems that R11 and R20 personally hold that the bullies would have realized their wrongdoings, discontinued the bullying, and shared genuine apologies had the principal and teachers in both instances spoken to all involved in a calm yet firm tone, not just because they were told, but because they truly understood why.

Additionally, it is important for adults to know that it is adults' responsibility to educate the bully, not the victim's. R6, a 16-year-old at the time, cited an instance in which their teacher

¹⁷ See page 26.

was the bully. The teacher made hurtful comments relating to the student's disability, familial situation, and overall dislike of the student in front of other children. The teacher performed social dominance to secure her position of power with seemingly no reason. R6 wrote, *[...]adults made me talk to the teacher about the issues I had with her*. Based on the response, it seems that the adults may have assumed the respondent carried the emotional capacity and sophistication of understanding what transpired that would have enabled them to speak directly with the teacher (bully) without a mediator. This is an inappropriate presumption on the adults' part, considering the individual was still a child and there was a significant power dynamic in which the teacher held the upper hand. Placing responsibility to educate the bully on the bullying-victim, especially when the bullying-victim is a child, is harmful and irresponsible; it puts them in the position to discipline their bully as well as to give an explanation for why the actions were harmful when the victim likely would not have proper vocabulary or training to accurately describe the impact that was made.

Conversation as Education— Speak with All Involved

It is best to speak with all individuals involved in instances of bullying. This includes any individual who participates in the bullying and the victim or victims. In many cases, there is one bully who leads a group of others in bullying. Although many individuals who contribute to bullying are sometimes considered followers, they still partake in bullying the victim directly.

R3 identified themselves as having been a bully and specified that they followed a peer in bullying a classmate. This suggests that the respondent did not view themselves as a main perpetrator of the bullying and it seems that they did not feel a significant amount of guilt about having been a part of the bullying. Although the lead bully was spoken to by an adult, R3 recalls that none of the other participants were spoken to, and instead the respondent stated the bullying

stopped *due to [the bullying] getting older and us maturing (hopefully) than them intervening.*

The adult's choice to have only spoken with the lead bully represents a cultural model that only lead bullies should be spoken to even when there are other bullies involved, also pointing to Big D Discourse. R3's response heavily implies that they believe the bullying would have halted much sooner had everyone been involved in a conversation with an adult about the bullying.

R16 dealt with exclusion at age 13 for unspecified reasons, and wrote that adults *Never had the conversations with others when they knew what was going on* and wish that adults did. Based on this response, R16 seems to hold the belief that their social experiences would have improved if adults had spoken with the classmates who excluded them. R16's response to what would have been helpful, *Had conversations* suggests that they believe change could have come from multiple conversations, as *conversations* is in plural form. In my own experiences as a witness to bullying in the position of a student and a teacher, teachers often have a single conversation with those involved and do not return to the conversation unless another case of bullying occurs. It is important to have many conversations to check in with those involved about how they are behaving and whether they still need to change their behavior in order for the bullying to truly come to a halt (Johander et al., 2021).

Facilitate a Conversation between the Victim and Bully

It may be beneficial to hold a conversation between the victim and the bully facilitated by an adult. Under the section titled *Educate the Bully* in this chapter, I described why it is unacceptable to place responsibility on a bullying victim to speak with their bully about what conspired. It may appear that this is in contradiction with facilitating a conversation between a bullying victim and bully, but it is acceptable only if the victim has explicitly expressed they are comfortable speaking with the bully and there is at least one adult mediator present at all times.

As previously referenced, R11 described an occurrence in which their principal yelled at a group of bullies. The respondent described their experience as an eight-year-old when their group of friends secretly threw their belongings into the garbage and drew on their artwork. The respondent's experience of bullying from their friends disputes the article which states friends cannot be bullies to each other (Garrett, 2003). R11 expressed, *I wish they would have sat us all down together and facilitated a conversation about what happened.* A cultural model exists in which teachers act without having conversed with the students directly involved. I argue that it would be beneficial for adults to consult their students when they decide on what action to take, rather than choosing for them what would be best, as their decision may impact the student's general comfortability level in that environment. Considering the perpetrators were in second grade, it is possible they did not possess proper awareness of the consequences of their actions. This is why education about one's actions may be more appropriate than shame to assist students in their growth of awareness (Ansary et al., 2015). Having a facilitated conversation in which all those involved with the experience are present and the victim may express themselves could help the bullies better understand why their actions were not okay and potentially allow for a more peaceful coexistence between the victim and bully.

Consequences

At least five respondents explicitly stated that they believe consequences would have been beneficial in preventing further bullying. It is important to me to distinguish the difference between consequence and punishment. *Punishment* is defined as, "suffering, pain, or loss that serves as retribution," and *consequence* is defined as, "something produced by a cause or necessarily following from a set of conditions" (Merriam-Webster). The purpose of punishment is to inflict harm as a means of correcting any misbehavior from happening in the future. The

definition of consequence clarifies that there is logic to the discipline that is being enacted. In social settings, there is a general consensus that certain actions are or are not acceptable for reasons such as safety (e.g., do not run on a pool deck) or common decency (e.g., wash your dishes after you are finished eating on them). In both instances mentioned, there will likely be consequences imposed in hopes that the behavior will improve moving forward. In the pool deck example, if the individual continues to run, they may be asked to leave that section of the property for their own safety and for others' safety. In the example about cleaning after oneself, if the instance were to involve a child, it would make more sense for a consequence to be that they are not allowed to move onto another activity until they have washed their dishes, rather than they must clean the entire house; the first reaction is a logical consequence, while the second reaction is less reasonable. In instances of bullying, consequences given to children should be logical, thoughtful, and directly related to the bullying. An example of consequence versus punishment in a case of bullying exists with how Lizzy's bully was dealt. As I discussed in the introduction of the essay, Lizzy's bully was suspended from school for several weeks, had mandated meetings with the school psychologist, wrote a letter of apology directly to Lizzy, and the two were never assigned to be in the same class again. In my opinion, there are clear examples of consequences and punishments utilized in this sample: the bully's suspension qualifies as a punishment because it was presumably for the bully to feel the "loss [of school and being with friends] that [served] as retribution" (Merriam-Webster), and suspensions and expulsions do not offer opportunities to learn from one's mistakes in the same way that meetings with professionals do.. The regularly scheduled meetings with the psychologist qualify as a consequence because the purpose was not for the bully to suffer, but rather to understand his mistakes so he can continue through life as a kinder and more empathetic human, which included

writing an apology to Lizzy expressing his regret of his actions and recognition of how he should have treated Lizzy. In this section, I discuss the importance of implementation of logical consequences through the lens of respondents' reflections on the consequences that were or were not implemented during the time of bullying in their stories.

Implement Consequences

A part of the KiVa program is to explicitly tell the bully of the behavior that is expected of them and the consequences that will follow if they continue the bullying behavior, and those consequences must be implemented should the behavior not change (Johander et al., 2021). Respondents R3 and R7 cited that, even when adults interrupted a moment of bullying, there were no consequences for the bullies, and thus the bullying persisted. R3¹⁸ was aware of this: *The administration only talked to that one friend and they didn't give him any real consequences*, and thus the bullying continued for some time. R3 appears to be conscientious that the group of bullies would have stopped if greater action were taken than a mere one-off comment or something of the like.

R7 was a seventh grade student at the time of their bullying experience. They identify themselves as a victim of bullying who encountered cyberbullying, severe exclusion, and bullying in hallways, although they did not specify what was done to them in hallways. A cultural model seems to exist in R7's response regarding the stereotype that females are more nurturing and males are more dismissive. R7 recorded that those who were helpful to them were their mother, guidance counselor, the school nurse, and their former English teacher; each role listed has a stereotype that these roles are more feminine. Those R7 listed in the category as unhelpful were their father and the principal of their school—two roles that are stereotyped to be assertive and

¹⁸ Refer to page 43 for a description of R3's response and implications under the *Findings and Insights: Education: Conversation as Education—Speak with All Involved* section.

dominant. R7 did not specify what in particular was done or not done by those who were helpful and those who were not, although they did share that they wished adults had *Intervened and punished the girls*. This is a particularly fascinating response to me due to their use of the word *punished*. I am unaware of what the respondent's intent was with the use of the term *punished*, but I speculate that they wanted their bullies to feel as poorly as their bullies caused them to feel, regardless if they were aware of this want or not. It is clear though that, despite them wishing for the bullies to have received a punishment for their actions, the respondent's underlying desire was for something to have been done by adults for the bullies to understand and feel remorse for their actions.

I recently visited a fourth grade classroom in which many students have behavioral issues including physical violence as reactions to frustration. The teacher began to use a behavior chart for one student in particular, which thus far has been successful. When the student achieves certain accomplishments that were compiled by the teacher, such as remaining focused on his work and not engaging with classmates whose intentions are to stir up trouble, he receives checkmarks on his behavior chart. When the behavior chart is completed, the student will receive a prize for his efforts and growth in keeping himself grounded when he could have chosen to enter into a physical or verbal fight. I include this example here because it can be used with students who practice bullying by using positive reinforcement to retrain the child on how to behave in a more mindful manner. R3's and R7's responses and the example of the behavior chart signify that one-off comments are oftentimes not enough to put an end to inappropriate behavior and consequences may be needed to ensure changes to the behavior.

Follow through on Consequences

Apart from implementing consequences is follow through, as consequences are pointless if they are not enforced. R8 referred to a time in fifth grade when they were excluded and later teased for their body representing social dominance practices used to establish superiority over those considered to have a less favorable body. They were burdened with completing class projects on their own, despite the projects being group assignments. Although the bullies apologized to them per direction of adults, R8 wrote, *[...]when I tried advocating for myself in group projects and [...]getting all the work they'd not really be so on top of doing anything*. Due to the teachers' inaction, R8 seems to have perceived their teachers as lazy and complacent. It appears that R8 assumes their teachers did not take additional steps outside of the classroom to educate those who participated in the bullying. R8's assumption initially raised a question for me regarding if it would have been appropriate for them to be informed of the actions taken toward the bullies so they are aware that there are efforts being done. I arrived at the conclusion that it may be useful for a bullying-victim to have the knowledge that something is being done to help with the bullying, but not reveal what the action is itself. In the chance that there was something extra being done, it evidently did not work because R8 still reported there was continued bullying. An appropriate action that may have been helpful is for the teacher to have informed all students of their responsibilities when participating in a group project, including assisting with research, speaking to fellow group members with respect, and leaving space for others to participate, and what would happen if a student were to not adhere to those responsibilities, such as a lower grade or being assigned to do the project independently; if the teacher noticed or was made aware that a student was not acting respectfully with peers, the teacher should speak with the student individually to review the expectations and offer the student a second chance to improve their performance (Johander et al., 2021). If the student implements no changes, then

the teacher should follow through on what they said would happen if a student were to not act responsibly while in a group.

R12 identified themselves as female and experienced bullying throughout grades four through twelve for their involvement in gaming and being considered a nerd. The cultural model of societally approved interests is highly present in this example. More stereotypically acceptable hobby may have been basketball or other types of sports, but not gaming because that is frequently not what people associate as “cool” (although “cool” is a very subjective term, which further proves the existence of this cultural model in R12’s description). R12 described mocking and club posters being ripped from walls, and, like other responses, R12 wrote that adults were unhelpful when they relied on *saying “stop it”* to stop the bullying. They did highlight, though, that their advisor scheduled for them to speak with the school principal, and *After talking to him, we didn’t have our club targeted again luckily*. Presumably, the principal did or said something to convince the bully or bullies to stop behaving cruelly toward the individual and any others who were affected, although that action is unknown to the respondent, but R12’s response reveals the relief they felt when the torment was put to a halt. From this, it is clear that follow through on consequences is just as needed as implementing consequences for there to be a noticeable difference in bullying behavior.¹⁹

Do Not Punish the Victim

This is a particularly important point that I did not think was necessary to mention until I read R14’s response. R14 reported they experienced most types of bullying to assert dominance including *Property stolen, isolation, insults, rumors* and some physical violence. I was shocked to have read that R14 received *‘Equal’ punishments. I got whatever the bully got, because we both ‘started it’*. It felt disheartening that a teacher acted this way, but I am aware of a cultural

¹⁹ This only applies if consequences are deemed necessary, which is dependent on the circumstance.

model in which all who are involved in a fight are deemed responsible. Whether the teacher took the bullying seriously or not is unknown, but R14 is clear that they firmly believed this was deeply unfair toward them. At this point, I am unsure if consequences are necessary in instances when the bullying-victim fights back verbally or physically. Assuming they do not, a victim of bullying should not be punished. It does not make sense for an individual to be penalized for being harmed.

Safe Spaces

I have yet to meet a teacher, youth worker, or guardian who is passionate about children's sense of safety and does not want their environment to function as a safe space for children. Ensuring a safe space is an active practice; one cannot expect to create a meaningful community of children without doing something to build it. A safe space is an environment in which individuals are comfortable with being their authentic selves without fear of judgement or othering (Merriam-Webster). It is up to each youth worker how they choose to establish their classroom or office as a safe space. In this section, I highlight examples of how adults were successful in creating safe spaces for children.

Classrooms as Safe Spaces

Developing a stronger sense of classroom community lessens the likelihood of bullying occurring in the classroom (Hymel et al., 2019). How does a teacher make their classroom a safe space for students? R2, R6, and R16 offer insight based on their personal experiences.

The bullying at the high school that R2 attended encountered racism, queerphobia, and financial discrimination, as described in the section *Education: Educate the Full Class*.²⁰ The Big D Discourse in R2's response was that bullies who were white, heterosexual, and cisgender used

²⁰ Refer to page 40 for a description of R2's response in the *Findings and Insights: Education: Educate the Full Class* section.

their identities as grounds for permission to bully and exclude peers who were students of color and a part of the LGBTQ+ community. While the bullying took place, *Most teachers designated their classrooms as “safe spaces.” [...] Teachers also established affinity groups for students of color, LGBTQ+ students, etc.* R2 highlighted that teachers told their students that their classroom was a safe space for them, resulting in R2 feeling comfortable in these classrooms. It seems, though, that R2 held an assumption that the affinity spaces established were beneficial and progressive for whom those affinity groups were intended.

R16 wrote, *Teacher gave a safe spot in her class room for me to hang out in during recess.*²¹ The respondent's teacher offering a safe space in their classroom is noteworthy, as they chose not to reveal further details about their identity or the specific occurrences in their experience and it signifies the impact classrooms as safe spaces can have on a student who is struggling by allowing them to feel a sense of safety. Teachers explicitly telling their students that their classroom is a safe space creates an environment in which students can feel comfortable when they otherwise would feel nervous to let down their guard.

Trusted Adults

Through the anonymous survey, although most individuals did not explicitly state having a trusted adult would have been beneficial for them, it became apparent that individuals either benefitted or would have benefitted from having a trusted adult they could turn to during times of distress. R5 experienced bullying throughout elementary and middle school that manifested in exclusion, mean comments, and preconceived notions from teachers about their family.²² Despite most teachers not having been supportive, *my mom was always supportive of me, and there were a couple of my teachers in later middle school.* As discussed earlier, a cultural model that is

²¹ Refer to page 44 for a description of R16's response in the *Findings and Insights: Education: Conversation as Education— Speak with All Involved* section.

²² Refer to page 33 for a description of R5's response in the data analysis section.

present in R5's response is teachers' assumptions that students have the same personality traits as their families and thus teachers may depend on what they learned about a student's background to influence how they might treat students. R5 appears to make an effort to show they lacked support from adults, except for very few, but even one supportive adult makes a positive difference for a student who is struggling. One response from R5 caught my attention: *i didn't feel like i had many teachers i truly enjoyed having until high school*. This raises a question that is: does one need to enjoy having a teacher for a class in order to feel supported by them or comfortable talking to them? Personally, I am more likely to trust my teachers when they explicitly or implicitly express they are present for their students, and less so if I thoroughly enjoy attending their class. R10 considered their school counselor and school social worker to have been their trusted adults because they felt comfortable discussing delicate topics regarding bullying with them. Being a trusted adult for children supports the connection between SCT and bullying because during times when students' reactions to a victim may influence them to cower and develop low self-esteem, a trusted adult can do the opposite and encourage them to maintain confidence in themselves.

Build Trusting Relationships with Students

Related to being a trusted adult is actively building trusting relationships. While SDT teaches that social dominance is an inherited trait that encourages humans to explicitly not trust others to maintain social dominance (Sherrow, 2011), actively creating meaningful connections to foster healthy relationships works against SDT. R20 expressed their wish that adults [...] *took the time to build a trusting relationship where I felt like I could talk to them about [...] challenges I was having [...] socially and emotionally*.²³ This presents an additional cultural model that

²³ Refer to page 42 for a description of R20's response in the *Findings and Insights: Education: Educate the Bully* section.

positions schools as only being academic spaces and not social spaces. There is an additional response that supports building trusting relationships with students, but I am not at liberty to share the details of their response per their request. The most I can share is they identified as the parents of a child who experienced severe bullying, and they worked to be an adult their child could trust. As evidenced by R20, this attitude can be harmful because it risks students experiencing distance in social settings, which in turn hurts their confidence and comfort in these spaces.

Caring for the Bullying-Victim

Caring for the bullying-victim was an unexpected finding for me. Typically, I think of bullying intervention as interrupting the actual bullying, but through reading the responses from the anonymous survey, I discovered that caring for the bullying-victim is just as an important part of bullying intervention as other actions.

Check in with the Bullying-Victim

Checking in with the victim of bullying is the most prominent response within the overall finding. R12²⁴ and R20²⁵ both expressed they wish adults would have approached them with care to gauge how they are doing. R12 shared they were bothered by adults *[...]not checking in with me to see how the comments were really impacting me* was unhelpful. It seems that R12 attempted to express through their response that while certain adults were helpful in stopping any future bullying, she herself may have felt forgotten and as though her teachers did not care to check in on her as an individual who was impacted by bullying. Like R12, R20 also wished adults *[...]just show more care and check in[...] about how I'm feeling*. They went on to write, *In*

²⁴ Refer to page 50 for a description of R12's response in the *Findings and Insights: Consequences: Follow through on Consequences* section.

²⁵ Refer to page 42 for a description of R20's response in the *Findings and Insights: Caring for the Bullying-Victim: Check in with the Bullying-Victim* section.

school it often felt like teachers only addressed things that were interrupting the class but no one ever really checked in on me. R20 exuded feelings of neglect and that adults did not care about them personally because they did not appear to show it. The two responses exhibit that simply asking a child how they are holding up makes a meaningful difference for the child to feel seen.

Validate the Victim's Experiences

A crucial part in bullying education is validating the victim's experiences (Doumas et al., 2022). R14 did not give details about the circumstances of the bullying they encountered, but they did reference most types of bullying. In response to what they wish adults would have done, they wrote, *Listen. Be able to recognize genuine distress from petulance.* It appears that R14 felt that the adults connected to the bullying were not nearly as receptive as they should have been, thus causing the respondent to have felt unseen. This appears to have led R14 to carry an assumption that the bullying done to them would have stopped had adults paid heed to the reality that was their experiences of bullying. Validating a victim's experience results in them feeling heard and potentially less negative side effects from bullying (Espelage et al., 2010).

Support the Victim in Building Confidence

Although there is only one respondent who explicitly stated that adults working to instill confidence in them was beneficial, it is an important lesson to take away. R20 wrote, *My parents helped instill confidence in myself and supported me in building a positive sense of self.*²⁶ Whereas in other cases of bullying, victims may revert to shyness and anxiety (Espelage et al., 2010), R20 cited that working with their parents on their confidence helped to prevent those traits from evolving. Confidence in oneself is related to self-efficacy, as it supports the individual's belief in themselves that although they are experiencing extremely difficult

²⁶ Refer to page 42 for a description of R20's response in the *Findings and Insights: Caring for the Bullying-Victim: Check in with the Bullying-Victim* section.

circumstances, they have the ability to remain confident and focused on being themselves and putting effort into relationships that do matter (Fischer et al., 2021).

No Victim-Blaming

Possibly the most important part of caring for the victim is not blaming the victim, otherwise known as victim-blaming. R14²⁷ recalled they received “*Equal punishments*” to the bully. There is a potential cultural model in which teachers may sometimes hold all those involved in bullying responsible when it is simply inaccurate to assume so. Oppositely, R15 recalled, *My parents didn’t blame me at all*, which likely helped the individual in feeling supported by their parents. R15 described their experience of a teacher imposing *excessive punishments* on them simply for disliking them as a student. After the respondent reported the teacher’s behavior to their parents, the parents contacted the school and the bullying done by the teacher stopped, presenting a possible social hierarchy in which parents trump teachers. R15’s response supports that bullies are more likely to enact bullying when they believe they will not be stopped, but they might if they are held accountable (Doumas et al., 2022). Whether or not an adult blames a victim for the bullying they endured makes a large impact on how they will view themselves going forward, so it is vital for adults to not impose blame on bullying-victims.

Context

When deciding my action for praxis, I was aware that I had to be realistic about what resources would be available and what practical changes would be attainable. By no means am I able to end bullying throughout the world, let alone in Massachusetts—let alone in Worcester!—in the span of three short semesters. I wanted to create something that could make a change *now*, yet be a constant work in progress. I thought, what better place to start than within Clark

²⁷ Refer to page 50 for a description of R14’s response in the *Findings and Insights: Consequences: Do Not Punish the Victim* section.

University's education department where I already have strong connections and is just as passionate about student advocacy as I am?

Clark University is a private research university located in Worcester, Massachusetts. It has a student population of approximately 3,800 and is considered a predominantly white institution (PWI) with students of color representing 26% of the student population, and 57.4% of students are considered female. University majors for a bachelor's degree that directly correlate with education are Community, Youth, and Education Studies (CYES), Education (minor), and Psychology, as well as subjects studied specifically for teaching the specific subject such as majors in history, math, science, and language; master's programs in education and relevant to youth work at Clark University are Community, Development, and Planning (CDP), Master's in Teaching (MAT); the university offers doctorate programs in Transformative Education (Ed.D.) and Psychology (Ph.D.) and a graduate certificate in Educational Leadership, and more (Clark University).

My short-term goal was to begin the process of introducing bullying intervention education in the university's education department's master's program, but my dream is for bullying intervention education to be integrated in the education program. Community, Youth, and Education Studies (CYES) majors typically plan to either obtain a Master's in Teaching (MAT) or a Master's in Community Development Planning (CDP), which often entails overseeing interpersonal relationships that can easily lead to bullying and conflict. Thus, it seemed more logical for my project to be implemented through CYES.

Through discussions with Jie Park, one of the leaders of the CYES department and my advisor, we agreed a voluntary bullying intervention training session during my final semester at Clark University would be the best route. The session took place on March 20, 2025 on campus

and it was open to any member of the Clark community. Jie Park and I agreed that the training would be open to members beyond students majoring in CYES and university students interested in education because bullying is by no means exclusive to educational spaces, and everyone can benefit from having tools handy when they find themselves in the face of an uncomfortable power dynamic.²⁸

I initially hoped that I would be able to get future bullying intervention workshops implemented in years to come, but no praxis students from the other cohorts are doing projects about bullying, and it is likely that the CYES major will be disseminated in the coming years. Thus, I made a Google Doc of the tools I gathered that will be accessible to anyone with the link. The Google Doc will ideally be offered to all CYES, MAT, CDP, and any other students intending on working with youth, and to student organizations that focus on education including Student Education Association of Massachusetts (SEAM) at Clark University and SPLASH. The document is not meant to be a to-do list, but rather a source that viewers can utilize and convert to be appropriate to their and their students' needs because each child and bullying circumstance is unique.²⁹

Action: Bullying Intervention Workshop

From the birth of this project, I envisioned a bullying intervention workshop as an integral part of the action, whether it would be included in a course unit or as an independent workshop. Due to time constraints and CYES potentially no longer being offered as a major at Clark University in another few years, the latter option was chosen for me.

²⁸ My philosophy and lesson plan for the workshop, which were heavily influenced by my findings, is described in the methodology section.

²⁹ My philosophy for how I organized the living document can be found in the Action: Living Document section.

For my second turn, I shared a dilemma I was having with my peers that was I felt lost in how I should conduct the workshop. I had researched articles and videos that may be of help, but I faced much difficulty in finding articles that included examples and guidance for how to run an anti-bullying workshop. The videos I discovered of past bullying education seminars and workshops were very few and posted at least ten years ago, and the leader stood at the front of the room telling attendees what bullying is and how to stop it, but there was little to no interaction or discussion with the attendees represented in any of the videos I watched. My teaching philosophy is that learning is meant to be interactive, so the format of the workshops I found would not work for me. I asked for my classmates to share any ideas they had for me to use to format the workshop.³⁰ Feedback I received and utilized to heavily influence the workshop format included to frame the workshop to be reflective specifically for attendees, prepare discussion questions, structure the workshop like our own class that we take turns in a circle offering insights, incorporate storytelling into the workshop, and offer a framework for people to follow when speaking.

I was very clear throughout planning and running the workshop that attendees would not be required or asked to share their own experiences with bullying and whatever they chose to share was entirely up to them. I decided to not include stories from my data because I would have to be certain that none of the attendees participated in the survey. I planned for the workshop format to run as follows: Share a scenario of bullying I have encountered as a teacher or counselor and what I did to intervene, leave a few moments for attendees to reflect, offer attendees to share and discuss what they did and did not approve of in my approach, I share a possible to solution for the bullying based on my research findings. I was worried that I would run out of topics to discuss, so I composed a brief lesson plan:

³⁰ Refer to Appendix C for my notes taken during turn 2.

1. Introductions

- a. Share name, pronouns, prior experience with bullying education and intervention, and why you chose to attend the workshop.
- b. Disclaim: no one is required to share anything personal and you may excuse yourself whenever necessary.
- c. Introduce the format of the workshop.

2. Scenarios

- a. Offer my own experiences in which I intervened in bullying.
- b. Ask attendees to reflect and then share their thoughts on what they would do the same and differently.

3. Share findings from research.

4. Ask attendees if there is anything they would like to discuss.

5. Reflection time

- a. Attendees are offered ten minutes to silently reflect on what they learned, agreed or disagreed with, and anything else they would like to reflect on.

6. Ask attendees to share their takeaways from the workshop and what they would recommend for a future workshop.

The training was attended by four people in addition to Jie Park and myself, including a graduate student who is a parent and three undergraduate students who each have worked or are currently working with youth. During the session, I, with Jie Park's guidance, led a discussion for approximately 90 minutes. I offered one example of bullying I encountered that involved two young girls, a six-year-old and a nine-year-old: the six-year-old mocked the nine-year-old only having one dollar in her wallet, but the six-year-old was unaware of how her actions caused the

nine-year-old to feel. I spoke with them individually and after it was evident the six-year-old understood the impact of her comments, I told her it was time to apologize. She was very reluctant even though she said aloud that she did feel bad for how she caused the nine-year-old to feel. I told her that it is understandable that she felt nervous to say sorry, but it is a skill that everyone needs to have. As soon as she said the words, "I'm sorry," and the nine-year-old accepted the apology and left to go back to the rest of the group, she broke down in tears. I asked attendees to silently reflect for a moment and then share how they would have approached the same instance. I received approval for my decisions in how I chose to respond to the incident, but a larger conversation was born from the sharing. The next 45 minutes were dedicated to discussion about bullying as a phenomenon and what counts as bullying. One attendee commented that the behavior needs to repeat to be counted as bullying, and although I initially shared the story because I did believe it sufficed as bullying, I ultimately agreed. I did offer back that had I not intervened, the comments made by the six-year-old may have persisted against the nine-year-old or other children, turning the behavior into bullying. By the end of the workshop, I was in a rush to share the findings I gathered from my data so attendees would leave the workshop with some techniques.

After the workshop ended, I felt self-conscious that so few people showed, despite my efforts to advertise the event. It is likely that more people would have come had I begun advertising much earlier. Jie Park offered comforting insight that everyone who attended was meant to be there and the conversations that happened were meant to happen. Though I hoped multiple people would come to the event, I lost sight that even one person in attendance will inevitably make a meaningful difference in their life and the children's lives they encounter. Based on the feedback I received from attendees during and after the workshop, the event was

beneficial for broadening understanding of what bullying is and for offering individuals involved in caring for youth a space to discuss bullying.

Action: Living Document

Although creating a living document was not in my initial vision for the product of my project, I am grateful that it will exist for any teacher, youth worker, parent, etc. to use when they are in need of a resource. A living document is a document that is not finished and is prone to edits over time. As I continue to gather more skills and knowledge about reliable methods for bullying prevention and intervention, I can and will add to the document that exists in Google Docs. I set the document to accept comments, not edits, from those who do not have ownership of the document because it would otherwise be at risk of including sentiments unrelated to bullying as the link to the document is shareable and viewable by anyone. As of now, the only person with editing rights is myself, but I plan to add certain professors and students of education as editors.

All tools included in the living document are the categories of findings from my research. There are three columns in the document: *What Can I Do?*, *Why Is This Beneficial To Me?*, and *Why Is This Beneficial To My Students?*

What Can I Do? highlights the specific recommendation an adult can use in an instance of bullying that is pulled directly from my findings. *Why Is This Beneficial To Me?* identifies why it matters for the adult to do the action and the direct impact it will have on them. *Why Is This Beneficial To My Students?* describes why the action will matter to the students and what impact it will have on them because they are who the action is for.

I present here an example of a row from the living document:

What Can I Do?	Why Is This Beneficial To Me?	Why Is This Beneficial To My Students?
-----------------------	--------------------------------------	---

Educate yourself!	The more you know about bullying and bullying intervention, the better prepared you will be to care for your students! Resources can be scarce, so the internet is your friend. Try looking up articles and YouTube videos that are grounded in research from recent years.	It is <i>your</i> responsibility to be educated in how to care for students who are engaged with or impacted by bullying. Your students deserve a teacher that knows their stuff and is prepared to intervene in bullying properly.
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The document is meant to be a guide for teachers to refer to, not to follow directly. Every circumstance of bullying is different, as is every student and every teacher.³¹

Implications and Conclusions

Social Dominance Theory (SDT) and Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) framed the research for this project. SDT posits that humans have an inherited trait due to evolution that causes us to use social dominance to obtain scarce resources (Choi et al., 2011; Sherrow, 2011; Connor et al., 2017; Dane et al., 2019; Pan et al., 2020; Dane et al., 2022). In instances of bullying, perceived scarce resources today may be popularity and number of friends. The result of maintaining traits associated with SDT today is sustaining a social hierarchy that is no longer necessary. SCT argues that behaviors are learned through modeling and motivation (Schunk & Usher, 2019; Hymel et al., 2019; Kellij et al., 2022). Studies connect SCT to bullying to explain why bullies perform bullying behavior and the response is that it is due to perceived rewards of bullying behavior such as gaining popularity (Weinhold, 2000; Wong & Xiao, 2013; Eschenbeck, Hock, & Knauf, 2018; Hymel, Thornberg, & Wänström, 2019, Schunk & Usher, 2019; Güroglu et al., 2022; Mguye, 2024). SDT and SCT complement one another to identify the connections between bullying and its place in the modern world (Al-Jbouri et al., 2022). The literature and findings

³¹ Refer to Appendix E for the link to the living document and the example shown.

suggest bullying occurs because although humans adopt behavior through lived social experiences, humans already possess traits of social dominance due to evolution.

I performed research using an anonymous survey to ask those who have past experiences with bullying about adults' roles in the circumstances they describe. The findings for best methods to prevent and interrupt bullying included education, consequences, safe spaces, and caring for the bullying-victim. I used the findings from the data to influence a bullying intervention workshop that occurred in March 2025 and I created a living document of each tool I gathered from the data for teachers to use as a guide in their own classrooms that is available to anyone who has access to the Google Doc link. I will continue to add to the living document as I discover more bullying intervention techniques.

Further research would ideally include more connections between SDT and SCT as complementary theories for bullying. Although the project specifically sought insight from those involved in bullying, specifically those who were children at the time, more research should be conducted about techniques adults have found useful in their classrooms that is based on evidence from research and student behavior.

Reflection

This project has also remained one that is for all adults involved in educational spaces.

Upon reflection on myself, I am more of an agent for social change than I first thought. When I began the praxis course, I planned to inherit a previous CYES student's praxis project because I viewed praxis as another course I had to pass in order to graduate. But once I realized I wanted to pivot my project to be about bullying education, my praxis became a passion project. During my first turn in the praxis course, I was forced to take a hard look in the mirror and ask myself if I was doing all I could to center the survey respondents. While I believed I was, my

classmate's recommendation to include resources at the end of the survey for respondents changed my perspective in how I approached the respondents and pushed me to have more empathy and gratitude toward them for their willingness to share such personal stories.

While I conducted my research, I acquired some key takeaways. (1) Further proving the need for bullying education for educators, teachers are much less equipped for bullying intervention than I had hoped, although I was not surprised. (2) Teachers need the support of other teachers to learn how they can combat bullying in their classrooms. In my experience, leaning on colleagues is a common practice in education, and it should be continued for newer teachers to develop their self-efficacy which will help them feel confident as a leader in their classroom earlier on. (3) In order for bullying prevention to work, teachers must be open to growth. Research on bullying has evolved in dramatic and subtle ways over the course of the last several decades, and teachers need to evolve with the research findings. (4) Bullying is not a controlled occurrence and it impacts everyone. This includes the lead bully, the bully's followers, the bullying-victim, bystanders, teachers, parents, siblings, etc.

Going into my research, I felt so worried that I would lose myself in the research due to the heavy emotions present in the survey responses, but I was successfully able to center the respondents throughout the research process and maintain an appropriate emotional distance. I wondered if it would have been useful for me to ask survey participants to share their gender, sexual orientation, current age, country of origin, and race. I am sure that this information would have offered me more insights as to certain responses, such as clarifying if the bullying that was done was specifically about the individual's identity or identities. Despite this question, I am confident in my decision to not ask these questions specifically because the open-response format allowed respondents to share about their identities to the extent with which they feel

comfortable. If the bully or bullies credited their reasons for bullying to the victim's identity, I am sure that the respondent would specify so.

It was amazing to see my research come together through writing this thesis. Reading respondents' stories and connecting takeaways from them was eye-opening. I did not believe I would be one of the CYES students who continues to work on their praxis project past completion, but through the exploration of my research, I am excited to continue adding to and reflecting on my work.

This project has been and always will be about children and encouraging teachers and myself to do what we can for children to lead and live thoughtful, kind, peaceful, considerate, engaged, wonderful lives. I firmly believe that through bullying education, prevention, and interventions based in educating children on empathy, there is hope that bullying will no longer be a terrible presence in everyday lives. In the meantime, I am grateful that this project has offered my tools as the first steps to getting there.

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Appendix

Appendix A

Turn 1 Notes

9/13 Turn Taking - Feedback/Thoughts from the Class

~~Prompts~~ Clarifying Questions

Prompts

- 1) Meg - anticipating negative + internalizing
- Noah - becoming overwhelmed w/ ppl's trauma
- Kianna - take a toll on mental health
- Megyn - balance involvement w/ trauma + healthy distance
- Sarah - balance sympathy/empathy + protecting self
- Jennie - might come w/ emotional trauma
- Nadia - take a toll on m.h. through analyzing
- Zoe - how to analyze w/o internalizing
- Siobhan - doesn't want to risk passion
- Zayda - recognizing strength but may not be good
- Nora - basically the same
- Mai - properly prepare my emotions
- Nani - wanting healthy separation
- Liam - basically the same
- Rory - project will be intense ^{not necessarily passionate} _{about stories of bullying}
- Jie - } → protecting peace, anticipation, balance, protect, connect, healthy separation, internalize, mindful

2) Meg - centering self, mental health tolls of participants ^{not considered}

- Noah - done work that's intense + similar
- Kianna - assumes the stories I'll get + negative will happen
- Megyn - intends to continue reflecting on positionality
- Sarah - try empathize it will effect
- Jennie - has past experiences
- Nadia - make bias towards responses
- Zoe - bias + retraumatizing
- Siobhan - might miss things w/o bias
- Zayda - been in situations w/ empath. + negative effect
- Nora - negative toll on m.h.
- Mai - expecting traumatic responses
- Nani - wanting to protect self
- Liam - staying connected to project vs. protecting ^{passionate about project, not about stories of bullying}
- Rory -
- Jie - separation is desirable + healthy

3) Meg - how to address some distress

- Noah - will it create a
- Kianna - what response anticipating
- Megyn - how does desire for separation affect project
- Sarah - is creating separation b/won better ^(researcher + participants)
- Jennie - when does s/e become neg.
- Nadia - how does preventing emos effect project
- Zoe - what is overarching goal of project
- Siobhan - what emotions are raised when I anticipate
- Zayda - how to include feeling in final write up
- Nora - can this be done w/o personal toll
- Mai - what happens to participants after survey
- Nani - when does neg. turn pos.

3) idea: give resources @ end of survey
 - Give messages at end expressing thanks + Symptom... maybe in beginning?

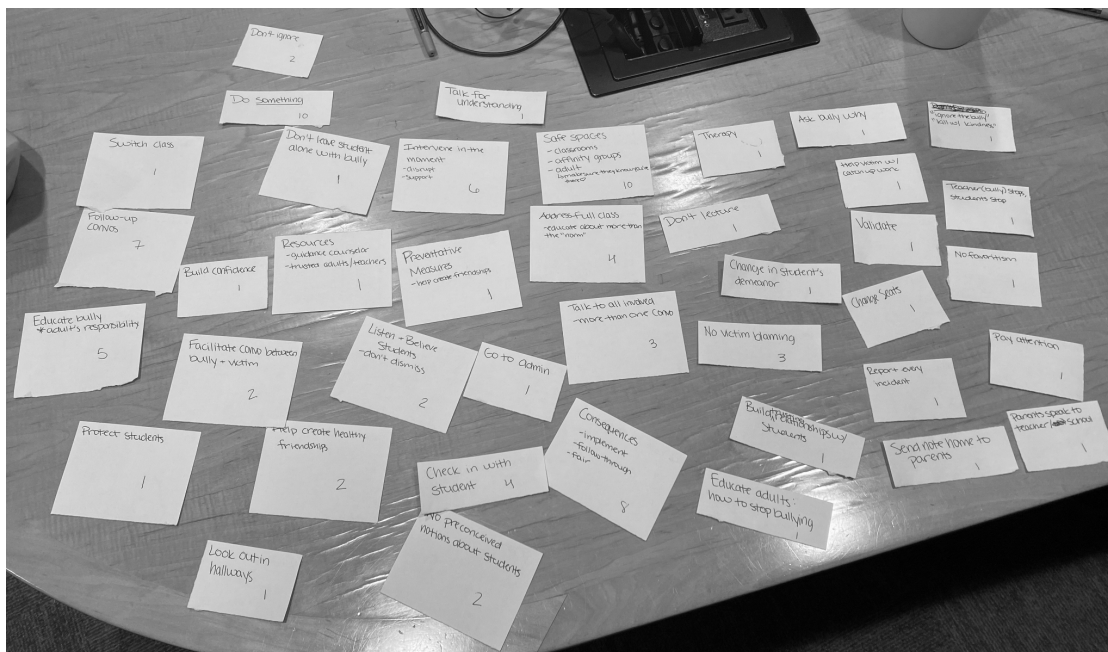
Liam - is passion more important than n.h.
 Rory - is encompassed only option
 Jie - is bias negative
 how much considering their feelings

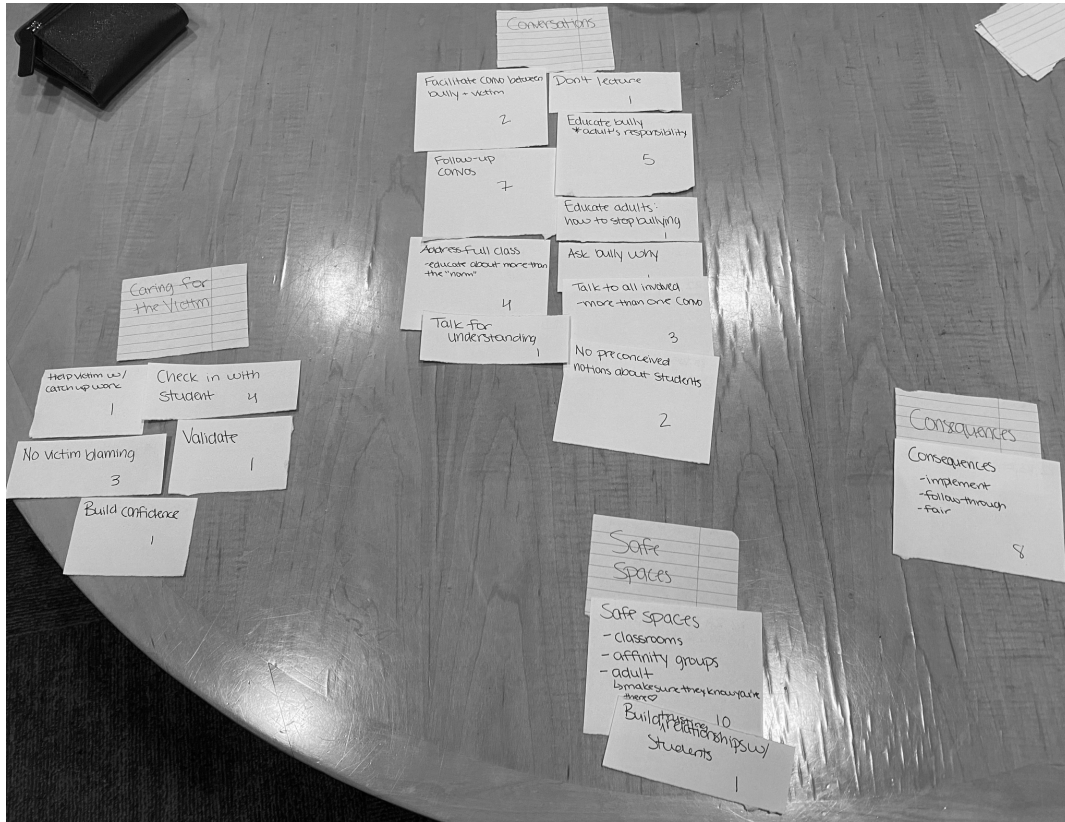
5) Meg - sym / emp as strengths
 Noah - self-care techniques
 Klanna - ie strategies to protect victims can protect me
 Meg - keeping separate running note about feelings
 Sarah - learning into sym emp to guide research
 Jennie - like meg's idea, reframe to positive
 Nadia - unpacking own experience
 Zoe - tangible ways to build healthy barriers (ex recommended)
 Siddhan - feeling alone, who to connect with, info privacy laws
 Zayda - thought new I've chosen method
 Nora - how analyze unfamiliar trauma, will lessen fears
 Mai - using boundaries I use w/ friends
 Nani - taking actions before reviewing results
 Liam - how I will output my cases in + way
 Rory - networking w/ researchers to get advice
 Jie - ask self what helps me be resilient

giving power to participants - Zoe
 this could be a barrier, not sympathy/emp

Appendix B

Findings Categorization Map





Appendix C

Turn 2 Notes

Solutions

- Kianna
 - Research workshops led by peer.
- Cam
 - Frame it to be more reflective for attendees. Think tank for
 - Mary from cpg
- Siobhan
 - Sounds like benefit from brainstorming. Brainstorm with classmate
 - What mats are experiencing specifically
 - Youth work based classes at clark dilemma focused
- Megan M
 - Use real examples maybe from MATs to have a discussion
 - Talk with anya and libby
- Zayda
 - Speaking more broadly about findings
 - Discussion based off of those findings
 - Discussion questions
 - Anything problematic- intervene
- Nadia

- Open up workshop by asking people what they want out of it. Have three different options ready
- Jennie
 - Same thing as nadia. Options
- Nani
 - Starting off with presentation to push dialogue. Have slides in case things taper off. Options
- Liam
 - Multiple blocks within workshop. Presentation block; collaboration block
- Ella
 - Structure like class and do turns like peeling the onion. Can use turns as a way to be a facilitator. Research behind why turns may work
- Mai
 - Talk to someone in psych department. Maybe have them there
 - Maybe CPG
 - Get in touch w peer mentors and RA's
- Noah
 - Need to incorporate dialogue into workshop. Try to incorporate storytelling. If uncomfortable, turn to people who have experience with difficult dialogues
- Jie
 - People need a framework and something to hold onto. Can't say "let's just talk". Much of it should be collaborative. Not just what stories there are, ask what knowledge participants have
 - About harm: there's published stories.
- Nora
 - Word of caution: distance from personalizing still using someone's story through themes, risk of censorship
 - Have people reflect and interrogate own assumptions about bullying.
- Megan S
 - Own personal reflections on data would be valuable
 - Opportunities for personal reflection that people don't necessarily share
- Zoë
 - Small groups. Give groups different stories
 - Loop someone in from psych department or someone from CPG or from a different worcester school
 - Open to non cyes and non mat people. Reach out to ssj and cdp and ask them to spread the word about it
- Sarah
 - Give group something to talk about: published bullying story, take common themes and write a fake one, need structure

Appendix D

Bullying Intervention Workshop Plan and Notes

Workshop

I. Intro

- Who am I, etc.
- up to you to share, trigger warnings
- does anyone have experience w/ bully.int.
- introduce yourself
- name, pronouns, worked with kids, profession, experience w/ bully.int. (w/ kids?)

School

policy

II. Scenarios - biases

- critique, approve, change, etc. does it count as bullying?
- my ex: [redacted] bathroom, girls at [redacted] exclusion, Isa cyberbullied, comment @ [redacted]

III. Talking to victim

IV. Talking to bully

- SCT

V. Talking to parents

VI. When teacher is the bully

VII. Anything we didn't go over you want to talk about?

VIII. Reflection Time

IX. Takeaways

SdT + SCT

X. Improvements

- whoever comes are the right people

• calling out in front of class

• didn't realize

Findings - helpful

- nothing
- address anything that happens
- "in the moment support"
- safe space to talk (counselor, soc worker)
- validate
- listened
- safe spot in classroom during recess
- talk the bully through it
- classrooms "safe spaces"
- affinity groups SOC + LGBT +
- teachers you connected with/enjoy having - if you don't make yourself a safe space
- apologize
- "believed me"
- principal stepped in
- eat lunch in library
- parents complain to school
- comfortable talking to parents
- report each incident
- therapy
- speak to your kids about it

Findings - not helpful

- no consequences
- adults didn't comment
- turned a blind eye
- make student talk to teacher (bully)
- principal shouted at bullies + made them write apology notes
- just saying "stop it"
- "ignore", "kill w/ kindness", "be better person"
- never had convos
- "you're making it up"
- forced apologies
- racial bullying - "cosmetic reforms"
- didn't trust guidance counselor
- teachers already had preexisting opinions about student/s (family)
- yelling - "you're over reacting"
- made them write
- not checking in
- equal punishments
- teachers didn't pay attention
- dismissive
- lectures
- yelling @ bully instead of helping them understand

Appendix E***Living Document***

Bullying Intervention Tools - Living Document

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1e94VzziRFui4HAtIIInzQ8WLDM3cOY7n_Pg5v2kqhkhzQ/edit?usp=sharing

Example:

What Can I Do?	Why Is This Beneficial To Me?	Why Is This Beneficial To My Students?
Educate yourself!	The more you know about bullying and bullying intervention, the better prepared you will be to care for your students! Resources can be scarce, so the internet is your friend. Try looking up articles and YouTube videos that are grounded in research from recent years.	It is <i>your</i> responsibility to be educated in how to care for students who are engaged with or impacted by bullying. Your students deserve a teacher that knows their stuff and is prepared to intervene in bullying properly.