

Guardians Who Are the Last to Know: An Investigation of *Why* Adolescents Choose Not to  
Report Bullying to Teachers

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## Personal Section

When one asks a group of students at any school in the country if they have ever been involved in and/or affected by bullying almost every hand shoots up into the air. Such instances demonstrate the rising incidence of bullying in each community, the country, and throughout the world. Although it is obvious that bullying occurs in schools, teachers, the adults closest to the problem, have been avoided by students. Prior studies already established statistics indicating that teachers are the last group to be approached, followed by family and friends, in cases of students who witness bullying. This study explores the reasons behind this phenomenon and proposes the question “why do students choose not to approach teachers about bullying?”

The teacher is supposed to be the protector of students and, consequently, the person who ensures a safe and comfortable environment for children so that they are not worried about being picked on in the lunch room or called names in the hallways. Students, however, are reluctant to share instances of bullying with their teachers. This reluctance to report bullying to teachers has a devastating impact on the mental and physical well being of students. This project proposes to explore the causes of student hesitation to tell teachers.

I conducted my research in my high school and the data collection was supervised by my mentor and social science research teacher. Working within my high school allowed me to shape my project instead of working on research developed by others in a lab setting at a university. Additionally, working within my school provided me with the opportunity to observe what was happening in the local community, as well as to investigate how my peers perceived approaching a teacher about bullying. I also gained insight about the incidence of bullying in general.

Although behavioral science may not appear to have much math involved, math actually plays a major role in the research and especially in data analyses. Mathematics, and particularly statistics, was utilized to analyze data in the form of correlation analyses, Independent T-tests, and Analyses of Variance. Behavioral science, although dealing with human subjects and their interactions with others, still involves testable explanations based on logic and facts. Mathematic analyses and statistical decisions were paramount to the interpretation of results; I was able to form valid conclusions from the data and offer explanations as to why students are unwilling to approach teachers about bullying situations.

Working on this project has been an experience that I will always see as enlightening and stimulating. Not only did I share my findings with the community, but I also gained an understanding of a dilemma that continues to perplex teachers, administrators and parents. For students who aspire to conduct research, I would encourage them to select a research topic that addresses personal interest as well as societal importance. Before arriving at a specific topic, students must be prepared to read many scholarly studies in order to understand what research has been performed, and what still needs to be addressed.

## Introduction

The incidence of bullying among teens has remained an alarming statistic to families, school communities, and lawmakers. Media announcements detailing horrific consequences of bullying situations leave the public astonished about the cruelty that seemingly normal adolescents can inflict upon their peers. As recent as April 2011, the public learned about Tyler Clementi, a Rutgers student, who committed suicide after his roommate posted a video online of Clementi having relations with another Rutgers student. A year earlier, the nation woke up to the startling news of the suicide of Phoebe Prince, a fifteen- year-old freshman at South Hadley High School in Massachusetts, who was consistently bullied by her peers in the school library, the lunchroom and in the hallways. When authorities investigated the incidences of bullying, they learned that Phoebe Prince was harassed in the library and in the lunch room and when she left the school, soda cans were thrown at her. In fact, the level and frequency of bullying against Prince was so intense, that the district attorney, Ms. Sheibel, concluded, “It was particularly alarming, that some teachers, administrators and other staff members at the school were aware of the harassment but did not stop it. The actions or inactions of some adults at the school were troublesome, but did not violate any laws” (*New York Times*, March 29, 2010). What is as alarming as the district attorney’s findings in the Phoebe Prince case, however, is the statistic that in school bullying situations, the teacher is the last person who the students will tell. According to Oliver and Candappa (2007), teachers are reported to have the lowest rate of student report about bullying with only 35% as compared to family (45%) or friends (43%).

The purpose of this study is to investigate student perceptions of teacher involvement in bullying situations. Different from most studies on bullying, this paper probes the reasons why

students are unwilling to approach teachers about bullying situations. Some reasons that students provide include: fear of reprimand, lack of confidentiality, apathy, and sometimes blatant indifference. Still, there are also other factors that influence the decision of a student to tell the teacher; unknown to most, teens take into account the gender and experience of teachers. It would also be short sighted to ignore the social demographic variables affecting teens who are encouraged to contact educators. Social demographic variables such as gender, age, ethnicity, and academic achievement also influence adolescent decisions to report bullying to teachers.

Bullying is defined generally as "violence that is observed among peers, in which there is no provocation and no equality of power physically and psychologically and in which the strong one applies pressure to the weak one deliberately" (Olweus, 1994). Physical bullying could include hitting, punching, kicking, or any other act that would cause physical pain, harm, or embarrassment. Verbal and psychological bullying is typically in the form of name calling which includes racist and sexist terms (Oliver and Candappa, 2007). Every type of bullying causes harm to the victim, whether emotional or physical, and is detrimental to his or her health, mental state, and perception of safety (Boulton et al., 2009; Mishna et al., 2005).

Teacher response has been linked to several factors including teacher attitudes towards bullying and level of teacher training. Teachers who see themselves as effective are more likely to intervene in bullying situations (Novick and Isaacs, 2010). Pre-service teachers (teachers who have little teaching experience or none at all) often report feeling unprepared to intervene in bullying (Beran, 2005). Research has also shown an inverse correlation between severity and efficacy with teachers reporting weaker ability to handle bullying when the bullying was a serious problem (Novick and Isaacs, 2010). Teacher responses have also been influenced by the particular type of bullying that took place. In a study conducted by Yoon and Kerber (2003), 10% of teacher responded to relational bullying and involved disciplinary action towards the bully as compared with the 50% response in situations of physical and/or verbal bullying. Therefore, the teacher's definition and understanding of bullying could play a possible role in determining the teacher's intervention. Teacher action and behavior will determine the students' decisions whether or not to tell the teacher about the bullying (Novick and Isaacs, 2010). According to Mishna, Scarcello, Pepler & Wiener (2005), teacher responses are determined in part on whether the teacher considers the student responsible for his or her victimization.

Teachers reported that some children are responsible for their own victimization and therefore, such teachers do not consider the alleged student a victim. This finding was troubling to Mishna, et al. (2005) who advocated that teachers take action against all students involved, victim and bully, to stop the behavior.

Students also report mixed feelings and even strong condemnation of victims who report bullying behavior to adults. Students who tell teachers about being bullied risk rejection by their peers (Oliver and Candappa, 2007). This demonstrates a fear of reprisal from peers and the bully which can further prevent the student from reporting the bullying to the teacher. Victims fear retaliation from their tormentors if they report them because students feel that the teacher's passive actions with the bully will not be effective and will not protect them from further bullying (Novick and Isaacs, 2010). The concern for a lack of confidentiality on the part of the teacher has also led to a fear of consequences from the bully (Oliver and Candappa, 2007).

Studies have also found that students with a more positive perceptions of their relationship with a class teacher felt safer in both the classroom and playgroup from bullying than students who held more negative perceptions of their relationship with a teacher (Boulton et al., 2009). The teacher's confidence in managing the classroom and handling bullying situations is critical to teacher intervention. The more confidence a teacher has in his or her ability, the greater the likelihood a teacher will intervene and the greater likelihood of student report of bullying.

### **Hypotheses**

1. There will be a positive correlation between the anti-bullying policy of a school and the incidence of reporting bullying to teachers.
2. Adolescents who are more comfortable about approaching a teacher about bullying will exhibit a higher rate of confidence in teacher involvement in bullying.
3. Adolescents will exhibit lower rates of confidence in teacher involvement in verbal or relational bullying situations than in physical bullying situations.
4. The gender of the teacher will be a significant factor in student confidence in teacher involvement in bullying.
  - a. Adolescents will exhibit a higher rate of confidence in teacher involvement in bullying if the teacher was female rather than male
  - b. Adolescents will exhibit a higher rate of confidence in teacher involvement in physical bullying if the teacher was female rather than male
  - c. Adolescents will exhibit a higher rate of confidence in teacher involvement in relational bullying if the teacher was female rather than male.
5. The degree of experience of the teacher will be a significant factor in student confidence in teacher involvement in bullying

- a. More experienced teachers will receive higher rates of confidence in teacher involvement in bullying.
  - b. More experienced teachers will receive higher rates of confidence in teacher involvement in bullying if the bullying is physical.
  - c. More experienced teachers will receive higher rates of confidence in teacher involvement in bullying if the bullying is verbal or relational.
6. Fear of reprimand from the teacher will be a significant factor in adolescent report of bullying to teachers.
- a. Students who are more comfortable in approaching a teacher about bullying will report less fear of reprimand from the teacher.
7. Fear of reprimand from the bully will be a significant factor in adolescent report of bullying to teachers.
- a. Students who are more comfortable in approaching a teacher about bullying will report less fear of reprimand from the bully.
8. Adolescents will exhibit greater fear of reprimand from the teacher than fear of reprimand from the bully.
9. When adolescents believe that the teacher will respect confidentiality, they will display higher rates of disclosure of bullying to the teacher
10. Adolescents who are confident in teacher involvement, will also be confident in teacher involvement in instances of cyber bullying.
11. The gender of the adolescent will influence his or her confidence in teacher involvement.
- a. Female adolescents will exhibit a higher rate of confidence in teacher involvement in bullying.
  - b. Female adolescents will be more comfortable approaching a female teacher about bullying.
  - c. Male adolescents will be more comfortable approaching a female teacher about bullying.
  - d. Females will exhibit a greater fear of reprimand from the teacher than male adolescents.
  - e. Female adolescents will exhibit a greater fear of reprimand from the bully than male adolescents.
12. The age of the adolescent will influence his or her confidence in teacher involvement in bullying.
- a. Younger adolescents (grades 9 and 10) will exhibit a higher rate of confidence in teacher involvement in bullying than older adolescents (grades 11 and 12).
  - b. Younger adolescents (grades 9 and 10) will exhibit a greater fear of reprimand from the teacher than older adolescents (grades 11 and 12).
  - c. Younger adolescents (grades 9 and 10) will exhibit a greater fear of reprimand from the bully than older adolescents (grades 11 and 12).
13. The ethnicity of the adolescent will influence his or her confidence in teacher involvement in bullying.
- a. Adolescents who are of a minority ethnicity (African American, Asian, or Hispanic) will exhibit lower rates of confidence of teacher involvement in bullying than adolescents of the majority ethnicity (White/ European American).

- b. Adolescents who are of a minority ethnicity (African American, Asian, or Hispanic) will exhibit greater fear of reprimand from the teacher than adolescents of the majority ethnicity (White/ European American).
  - c. Adolescents who are of a minority ethnicity (African American, Asian, or Hispanic) will exhibit greater fear of reprimand from the bully than adolescents of the majority ethnicity (White/ European American).
14. The school performance of the adolescent will influence his or her confidence in teacher involvement in bullying.
- a. Adolescents who report having poor school performance will exhibit lower rates of confidence in teacher involvement in bullying than adolescents who report having good school performance.
  - b. Adolescents who report having poor school performance will exhibit greater fear of reprimand from the teacher than adolescents who report having good school performance.
  - c. Adolescents who report having poor school performance will exhibit greater fear of reprimand from the bully than adolescents who report having good school performance.

### **Methodology**

#### **Sample and Procedures:**

The project was reviewed and approved by an institutional review board. Informed consent was obtained from participants. The sample population in this study consisted of 9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, and 12<sup>th</sup> grade students attending, a suburban public high school. To ensure that the sample of participants would be representative of all teenagers aged 13-18, the survey was distributed to Advanced Placement, honors, and average level classes. Respondents were informed of the purpose of the questionnaire, the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses, and the approximate time necessary to complete the questionnaire. The students took approximately 15-20 minutes to complete the questionnaire. The instrument contained several demographic questions and a scale entitled the *Teacher Involvement Scale*, a scale measuring designated variables involved in student perceptions of teacher involvement in bullying. Two hundred surveys were distributed, and the final sample consisted of 194 participants. Of these participants, 101 were male and 93 were female.

#### **Instruments:**

The instrument used in the study, the *Teacher Involvement Scale* was developed by the researcher because there was no scale related to adolescent perception of teacher involvement in bullying. Items in the scale were developed from a review of the literature examining teacher involvement in bullying.

The instrument consisted of 36 original items consisting of a bullying situation and potential primary responses. Students were asked to choose the option they saw as the most probable teacher response. Each situation was measured on a Likert-type scale. For the particular situation, each consecutive answer was associated with a score of 1, 2, 3, or 4. Higher numbers indicated increased teacher involvement in bullying. Higher numbers also indicated the participant's increased confidence in teacher involvement in bullying. The 36 item scale was divided into eight subscales: (1) teacher involvement (NI), (2) lack of confidentiality (LC), (3) fear of reprimand from the teacher (FR), (4) fear of reprimand from the bully (FRB), (5) teacher experience (TE), (6) cyber bullying (CYB), (7) teacher gender (TG), and (8) school anti-bulling policy (SC). Each subscale included four questions with two items addressing situations involving relational bullying and two items addressing situations involving physical bullying. There were four separate items involving cyber bullying. For situations applying the subscale of teacher gender, two different statements were used. Four questions included a bullying situation, the student's first response, and required a response from participants about the most probable teacher response to the bullying situation. Four questions employed a "Finish the Statement" design with a short situation proceeding. Out of the total eight questions addressing the subscale of teacher gender, four items related to female gender and four items related to male gender. For the subscale of teacher experience, four questions were divided evenly to represent both non-experienced and more experienced teachers with each receiving two questions. Questions involving the teacher experience subset included both one question addressing physical bullying and one question addressing relational bullying for both the non-experienced and the more experienced teacher situation. The demographic questions for gender and grade contained a "choose one" option with grades 9, 10, 11, 12 awarded a number 1,2,3,4 respectfully. Female gender was awarded a 1 and male gender was awarded a 2. Questions addressing student involvement in bullying (B1, B2, B3) were a "yes" or "no" question. The answer "Yes" was awarded a 1 and "No" was awarded a 2. The fourth (APT) demographic question measured student comfort in approaching a teacher about bullying. The scale was from 1 to 7, (1) representing the very comfortable and (7) representing not very comfortable. Values in between 1 and 7 were associated with the participant's level of comfort in approaching a teacher. The fifth demographic question (SE) measured the student's personal evaluation of his or her school

performance. Consecutive answers decreased in student performance. Excellent, Very Good, Good, Average, Below Average, and Poor were awarded a 1, 2, 3, 4, 5,6 respectfully with the higher numbers indicating lower student evaluation. The sixth demographic question (ETH) indicated ethnicity. The items included: white (non-Hispanic)/ European American, Black (non-Hispanic)/ African American, Asian/ Asian American/ Pacific Islander/ South Asian, Hispanic/ Latino. Answers were awarded a 1, 2, 3, and 4 respectfully. Each student was then directed to answer all of the 36 subscale questions by choosing one answer.

## **Results**

### *Hypothesis One*

Adolescents who are exposed to a school with a strong anti-bullying policy reported bullying to teachers more often. A correlation analysis detected a significance between strong anti-bullying policy within the school and report of bullying to teachers ( $r = .327, p = .000$ ).

### *Hypothesis Two*

Adolescents who were more comfortable about approaching a teacher about bullying did exhibit a higher rate of confidence in teacher involvement in bullying. A correlation analysis detected significance between comfort of approaching a teacher about bullying and confidence in teacher involvement in ( $r = -.142, p = .049$ ). This inverse correlation was significant as lower scores on the scale concerning degree of comfort in approaching a teacher about bullying indicated that the student was more comfortable.

### *Hypothesis Three*

Adolescents did exhibit lower rates of confidence in teacher involvement in verbal or relational bullying situations than in physical bullying situations. A correlation analysis found a significance between verbal or relational bullying and physical bullying ( $r = .619, p = .000$ ). The mean scores for physical bullying ( $M = 42.7629, S.D. = 5.72$ ) were higher than in relational bullying ( $M = 42.28, S.D. = 5.96$ ).

### *Hypothesis Four*

Teacher gender was a significant factor in student confidence in teacher involvement in bullying. Female teachers were associated with the greatest confidence in involvement in all forms of bullying. A correlation analysis found significance between the gender of the teacher and student confidence in teacher involvement in bullying ( $r = .438, p = .000$ ).

- a. A correlation analysis found significance between the gender of the teacher and student confidence in teacher involvement in physical bullying ( $r = .287, p = .000$ ). The mean scores for female teachers ( $M = 6.07, S.D. = 1.10$ ) were higher than the mean scores for male teachers ( $M = 5.90, S.D. = 1.17$ ).
- b. A correlation analysis found significance between the gender of the teacher and student confidence in teacher involvement in relational bullying ( $r = .335, p = .000$ ). The mean scores for female teachers ( $M = 6.04, S.D. = 1.15$ ) were higher than the mean scores for male teachers ( $M = 5.36, S.D. = 1.06$ ).

### *Hypothesis Five*

The degree of experience of the teacher was not a significant factor in student confidence in teacher involvement in bullying. A correlation analysis did not find significance in teacher experience and student confidence in teacher involvement in bullying ( $r = .083$ ,  $p = .251$ ). The mean scores for teachers with experience were higher ( $M = 6.05$  S.D.  $1.35$ ) than teachers without experience ( $M = 4.61$  S.D.  $1.27$ ).

- a. A correlation analysis did not detect significance in teacher experience and student confidence in teacher involvement in physical bullying ( $r = -.037$ ,  $p = .604$ ). The mean scores for teachers with experience were higher ( $M = 3.28$  S.D.  $.95$ ) than teachers without experience ( $M = 2.21$  S.D.  $.77$ ).
- b. A correlation analysis did not detect significance in teacher experience and student confidence in teacher involvement in relational bullying ( $r = .012$ ,  $p = .875$ ). The mean scores for teachers with experience were higher ( $M = 2.76$  S.D.  $.87$ ) than teachers without experience ( $M = 2.42$  S.D.  $.87$ ).

#### *Hypothesis Six*

- a. Fear of reprimand from the teacher was not a significant factor in adolescent report of bullying to teachers. A correlation analysis did not detect significance between fear of reprimand from the teacher and report of bullying to the teacher ( $r = -.011$ ,  $p = .875$ ). The mean scores for fear of reprimand from the teacher ( $M = 10.98$  S.D.  $2.83$ ) were higher than for report of bullying ( $M = 5.03$  S.D.  $1.75$ ).
- b. Students who were less comfortable in approaching a teacher about bullying reported slightly greater fear of reprimand from the bully as seen in the mean scores. No strong correlation was found.

#### *Hypothesis Seven*

Fear of reprimand from the bully was a significant factor in adolescent report of bullying to teachers. A correlation analysis did detect significance between fear of reprimand from the bully and adolescent comfort in reporting bullying to teachers ( $r = -.136$ ,  $p = .05$ ). The lower scores on the scale concerning degree of comfort in approaching a teacher about bullying indicate that the student is more comfortable. This was the inverse of higher scores indicating a higher rate of fear of reprimand from the bully.

#### *Hypothesis Eight*

Adolescents exhibited greater fear of reprimand from the teacher than fear of reprimand from the bully. A correlation analysis detected significance between fear of reprimand from the teacher and fear of reprimand from the bully ( $r = .235$ ,  $p = .001$ ).

#### *Hypothesis Nine*

When adolescents believed that the teacher will respect confidentiality, they displayed higher rates of disclosure of bullying to the teacher. A correlation analysis indicated significance between belief in respect of confidentiality and rates of disclosure of bullying to teachers ( $r = .976$ ,  $p = .002$ ).

#### *Hypothesis Ten*

Adolescents who reported higher confidence in teacher involvement in bullying also reported higher confidence in teacher involvement in instances of cyber bullying. A correlation analysis detected significance between teacher involvement and teacher involvement in cyber bullying ( $r = .432$ ,  $p = .000$ ).

#### *Hypothesis Eleven*

An Independent T-Test did not indicate significance between female and male adolescents when comparing confidence in teacher involvement, teacher gender, fear of reprimand from the teacher, and fear of reprimand from the bully.

- a. An Independent T-Test indicated higher mean scores for confidence of teacher involvement in bullying among female adolescents ( $M = 11.74$ ,  $S.D. = 1.58$ ) when compared to male adolescents ( $M = 11.54$ ,  $S.D. = 1.89$ ). This indicated that females were more confident in teacher involvement in bullying than males.
- b. An Independent T-Test testing gender of students indicated a higher mean score for teacher intervention in bullying if the teacher was female by female adolescents ( $M = 12.43$ ,  $S.D. = 1.61$ ) when compared to male adolescents ( $M = 11.82$ ,  $S.D. = 2.00$ ). This indicated that female students were more confident in teacher involvement in bullying if the teacher was female.
- c. An Independent T-Test testing gender of students indicated a higher mean score for teacher intervention in bullying if the teacher was male by female adolescents ( $M = 11.28$ ,  $S.D. = 1.70$ ) than male adolescents ( $M = 11.25$ ,  $S.D. = 1.93$ ). This indicates that females were more confident in teacher involvement in bullying if the teacher was male than males.
- d. An Independent T-Test indicated a higher mean score concerning fear of reprimand from the teachers for male students ( $M = 11.09$ ,  $S.D. = 2.91$ ) than for female students ( $M = 10.86$ ,  $S.D. = 2.75$ ), indicating that males feared reprimand from the teacher more than females did.
- e. An Independent T-Test indicated a higher mean score concerning fear of reprimand from the bullies for male students ( $M = 8.90$ ,  $S.D. = 3.17$ ) than for female adolescents ( $M = 8.58$ ,  $S.D. = 3.17$ ), indicating that males exhibited a greater fear of reprimand from the bully than females.

#### *Hypothesis Twelve*

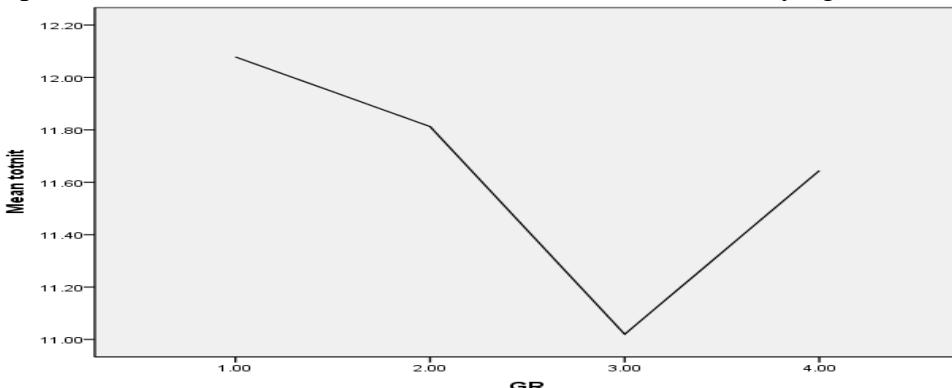
- a. An Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to test hypothesis 12. *Table 1* shows that there was significance between age (school grade) and confidence in teacher involvement in bullying. In general, younger adolescents displayed higher levels of confidence than older adolescents. This finding supported hypothesis 12a. Increasing grade levels also showed a downward trend with the exception of 12<sup>th</sup> grade adolescents, (See *Graph 1*) which indicated that adolescents in the 12<sup>th</sup> grade exhibited a higher confidence in teacher intervention in bullying than 11<sup>th</sup> grade adolescents but lower than 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade adolescents.

**Table 1: Summary of ANOVA for Confidence in Teacher Involvement by Grade  
(9,10,11,12) (N=194)**

Source	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig. Level
Total Confidence in teacher Involvement for 9 <sup>th</sup> , 10 <sup>th</sup> , 11 <sup>th</sup> , and 12 <sup>th</sup> grades	30.45	3	10.15	3.44	.018
Grade	n	Mean	Standard Deviation		
9 <sup>th</sup>	51	12.08	.21		
10 <sup>th</sup>	48	11.81	.22		

11 <sup>th</sup>	50	11.02	.26
12 <sup>th</sup>	45	11.64	.30

Graph 1: Grade vs. Confidence in Teacher Involvement in Bullying



(Note: 1.00= 9<sup>th</sup> Grade, 2.00= 10<sup>th</sup> grade, 3.00= 11<sup>th</sup> grade, 4.00= 12<sup>th</sup> grade)

- a. An Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to test hypothesis twelve b. No strong significance was detected. Adolescents in grade 12 showed the highest mean score for fear of reprimand from the teachers ( $M = 11.84$ , S.D. 3.47) followed by grade 9 adolescents ( $M = 11.14$ , S.D. 2.79), grade 11 adolescents ( $M = 10.52$ , S.D. 2.43), and grade 10 adolescents ( $M = 10.48$ , S.D. 2.43). The highest mean score indicated the greatest fear of reprimand from the teacher.
- b. An Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to test hypothesis 12c. No strong significance was detected. Adolescents from grade 11 showed the highest mean score for fear of reprimand from the bully ( $M = 9.30$ , S.D. 3.08) followed by grade 10 adolescents ( $M = 8.83$ , S.D. 3.17), grade 9 adolescents ( $M = 8.45$ , S.D. 3.08), and grade 12 adolescents ( $M = 8.38$ , S.D. 3.37). The highest mean score indicated the greatest fear of reprimand from the bully.

#### *Hypothesis Thirteen*

- a. An Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to test hypothesis 13a. There was no significance detected between ethnicity and confidence in teacher involvement. Adolescents of Asian ethnicity exhibited the most confidence of teacher involvement in bullying with the highest mean scores ( $M = 12.13$ , S.D. 1.78) followed by adolescents of a black ethnicity ( $M = 12.00$ , S.D. 2.10), Hispanic ethnicity ( $M = 11.88$ , S.D. 1.88), and adolescents of a white ethnicity ( $M = 11.47$ , S.D. 1.69). The highest mean score indicated the greatest confidence in teacher involvement in bullying.
- b. An Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to test hypothesis 13b. There was no significance detected between ethnicity and fear of reprimand from the teacher. Adolescents of black ethnicity reported the highest means scores in relation to fear of reprimand from the teachers ( $M = 13.00$ , S.D. 2.28) followed by adolescents of Asian ethnicity ( $M = 11.47$ , S.D. 2.65), adolescents of a Hispanic ethnicity ( $M = 11.08$ , S.D. 2.08), and adolescents of a white ethnicity ( $M = 10.76$ , S.D. 2.98). The highest mean score indicated the greatest fear of reprimand from the teacher.
- c. An Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to test hypothesis 13c. There was no significance detected between ethnicity and fear of reprimand from the bully. Adolescents of Asian ethnicity reported the highest mean scores in relation to fear of

reprimand from the bully ( $M = 9.60$ ,  $S.D. = 3.10$ ) followed by adolescents of white ethnicity ( $M = 8.71$ ,  $S.D. = 3.11$ ), adolescents of a Hispanic ethnicity ( $M = 8.16$ ,  $S.D. = 3.36$ ), and adolescents of a black ethnicity ( $M = 7.83$ ,  $S.D. = 3.92$ ). The highest mean score indicated the greatest fear of reprimand from the bully.

#### *Hypothesis Fourteen*

- a. An Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to test hypothesis 14a. There was no significance detected between student evaluation and confidence in teacher involvement. Adolescents who reported themselves as very good students reported the highest mean score for confidence in teacher involvement in bullying ( $M = 11.84$ ,  $S.D. = 1.63$ ) followed by adolescents who reported themselves as average students ( $M = 11.65$ ,  $S.D. = 1.94$ ), adolescents who reported themselves as good students ( $M = 11.63$ ,  $S.D. = 1.82$ ), adolescents who reported themselves as excellent students ( $M = 11.38$ ,  $S.D. = 1.62$ ), and adolescents who reported themselves as below average students ( $M = 9.67$ ,  $S.D. = 2.52$ ). The highest mean score indicated the highest confidence in teacher intervention in bullying.
- b. An Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to test hypothesis 14b. There was no significance detected between student evaluation and fear of reprimand from the teacher. Adolescents who reported themselves as below average students reported the highest mean score for fear of reprimand from the teacher ( $M = 12.33$ ,  $S.D. = 1.15$ ) followed by adolescents who reported themselves as good students ( $M = 11.32$ ,  $S.D. = 3.49$ ), adolescents who reported themselves as average students ( $M = 11.27$ ,  $S.D. = 2.03$ ), adolescents who reported themselves as excellent students ( $M = 10.94$ ,  $S.D. = 2.35$ ), and adolescents who reported themselves as very good students ( $M = 10.57$ ,  $S.D. = 2.71$ ). The highest mean score indicated the greatest fear of reprimand from the teacher.
- c. An Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to test hypothesis 14c. There was no significance detected between student evaluation and fear of reprimand from the bully. Adolescents who reported themselves as below average students reported the highest mean score for fear of reprimand from the bully ( $M = 10.00$ ,  $S.D. = 2.65$ ) followed by adolescents who reported themselves as average students ( $M = 9.62$ ,  $S.D. = 2.97$ ), adolescents who reported themselves as excellent students ( $M = 9.25$ ,  $S.D. = 3.51$ ), adolescents who reported themselves as good students ( $M = 8.63$ ,  $S.D. = 3.09$ ), and adolescents who reported themselves as very good students ( $M = 8.27$ ,  $S.D. = 3.14$ ). The highest mean score indicated the greatest fear of reprimand from the bully.

#### **Discussion**

Bullying in schools has become a tremendous problem not only in the United States, but around the globe. Novick and Isaacs (2010) said it best that “teachers play a significant role as front-line responders to students, peer conflicts and social interactions.” Yet, these vital guardians are typically the last group to be informed of the bullying that occurs in the classrooms and hallways. This study is essentially an examination of the reasons why students do not approach teachers about the bullying that surrounds them. Development and implementation of the *Teacher Involvement Scale* as a measurement of confidence in teacher involvement in

bullying allowed the investigator to ascertain the role of variables in adolescent reporting of bullying to teachers. Fourteen major hypotheses were addressed in this study.

The scarcity of research addressing the variables which affect adolescent confidence in teacher involvement in bullying became the focus of this project. Prior research indicated that consistent implementation of school discipline and the availability of support from caring adults were relevant to school safety will prevent bullying (Gregory et al., 2010; Allen, 2010). In the Gregory et al study, 67% of students were not comfortable approaching a teacher about bullying. The findings of this study further supported the research of Gregory et al (2010) and Allen (2010) and reported low levels of confidence in adolescent perception of teacher involvement. Hypothesis one predicted that a positive correlation would exist between anti-bullying policy in schools and incidence of report of bullying to teacher. This was true as adolescents reported that a stronger school anti-bullying policy would result in greater confidence in teacher aid in bullying situations. Results from this study support the authoritative discipline theory that states that two complementary aspects of school climate (support and structure) are crucial for student safety in school (Gregory et al., 2010). Teacher intervention and support for the victim were related to student comfort in school which would lead to more frequent bullying reports to teachers.

This study also addressed the relationship between student-teacher relationship and confidence in teacher involvement in bullying. Hypothesis two proposed that adolescents with a greater degree of comfort approaching a teacher about bullying would display a higher confidence in teacher involvement in bullying. This hypothesis was supported with an inverse correlation that was significant as lower scores on the scale concerning degree of comfort in approaching a teacher about bullying indicated that the student was more comfortable. These results are similar to those reported by Eisenberg, Dianne Neumark-Sztainer, & Perry (2003) which stated that young people with greater school ties and a positive association with a school environment reported bullying more often than those students who were not well connected with the school environment. The relationship between the student and teacher is crucial for school connectedness. If there is a positive relationship between the student and the teacher, reports of bullying will increase. The “teacher protection hypothesis” states that children who enjoy a good relationship with their teacher will feel safer in school despite the presence of bullying (Boulton

et al., 2009). Additionally, prior research has determined that a good relationship with the teacher is helpful to students in feeling safe from bullying and this relationship promotes report of bullying to teachers (Boulton et al., 2009). This is supported by the results of this study in which participants reported more confidence in teacher intervention in bullying when the participants also reported a positive student-teacher relationship.

This study also investigated if different types of bullying, physical or relational, would affect adolescent report of bullying to teachers. Hypothesis three stated that relational bullying would be related to a lower confidence in teacher involvement as compared to physical bullying. The results confirm this hypothesis with physical bullying receiving a higher mean score than relational bullying, indicating a greater confidence in teacher involvement in instances of physical bullying as compared to relational bullying. In a prior study, teachers rated relational bullying as less serious than physical bullying and proposed least serious interventions for the relational bullying (Novick and Isaacs, 2010). Additional research determined that teachers considered physical assaults as bullying but not social exclusion and name calling (relational) (Mishna et al., 2005). Indirect bullying was challenging for teachers to recognize unlike instances of physical bullying (Mishna et al., 2005). This could account for the lower teacher intervention rates in relational bullying.

Hypothesis four examined the effect of teacher gender on student confidence of teacher involvement in bullying. This study found significant trends throughout all forms of bullying for teacher gender and confidence in teacher involvement. As predicted, female teachers were associated with the greatest intervention rates. Prior research (Beran, 2005) determined that there was some evidence to suggest that female teachers held more negative views about bullying behaviors when compared to male teachers. This perception on the part of female teachers would account for greater teacher involvement. Research suggested that female teachers also feel greater empathy for the victims of bullying and are more likely to intervene and attempt to resolve the situation (Beran, 2005). Overall, students are more likely to approach female teachers.

The degree of experience of the teacher was not found to be a significant factor in student confidence in teacher intervention in bullying. Although there was no significant correlation found between teacher experience and student confidence in teacher aid in instances of bullying,

a trend was detected as students reported greater confidence in teachers with more classroom experience than in teachers with little classroom experience. This finding might explain why teachers without classroom experience, even those with strong anti-bullying attitudes and supporters of intervention, report being or feeling unprepared to intervene in bullying situations (Beran, 2005; Allen, 2010). According to Novick & Isaacs, 2010, high preparedness or greater teaching experience reinforces a teacher's ability to aid students in situations of bullying.

Fear of reprimand or reprisal is an important reason why victims of bullying do not report their abuse (Oliver & Candappa, 2007). Interestingly, no significant correlation was detected between fear of reprimand from the teacher and student comfort in approaching a teacher about bullying, indicating that fear of reprimand from the teachers had little effect on whether the student would report bullying. Therefore, unlike prior research, hypothesis six was unsupported by the data. Hypothesis seven, however, reported that fear of reprimand from the bully was a significant factor in adolescent report of bullying to teachers. A correlation analysis did detect significance between fear of reprimand from the bully and adolescent comfort in reporting bullying to teachers. One of the most interesting findings of this study was that adolescents exhibited greater fear of reprimand from the teacher than fear of reprimand from the bully. A correlation analysis detected significance between fear of reprimand from the teacher and fear of reprimand from the bully. No prior research has examined whether students fear reprimand more from the bully or from the teacher if they were to report bullying. Hypothesis eight proposed that the teacher will be feared over the bully. Because students fear the teacher more than they fear the bully, this can explain the low student report of bullying to teachers. Students would rather risk continued victimization than report bullying to teachers because they feel that there is a greater risk of the negative results from the situation if a teacher becomes involved. Earlier research has supported this finding with data indicating that telling a teacher ran a higher risk of escalating the bullying situation than telling friends or other adults (Oliver & Candappa, 2007).

Confidentiality was also regarded as a factor in student reluctance to report bullying to teachers in this study. Contrary to prior research, hypothesis nine which stated that students who believe teachers will respect confidentiality will be more comfortable approaching a teacher about bullying, was not supported. Oliver and Candappa (2007) maintained that one of the major deterrents for students in reporting bullying to the teacher was that the teacher would not respect

their confidentiality and escalate the bullying situation. The findings of Besag (1989) concurred with Oliver and Candappa (2007) and claimed that lack of confidentiality on the part of the teacher forces students to assess the risks of telling a teacher and possibly making the bullying worse. Students complained of the lack of confidentiality when seeking out help from a teacher, supporting the notion that students do not feel that teachers can protect them or deal effectively with bullying (Espelage& Asidao, 2001). In this study, no strong correlation was found between confidentiality and approaching a teacher. There was, however, a general trend with the slightly lower mean score for lack of confidentiality indicating lower adolescent confidence in teacher confidentiality. This suggests that even though significance was not detected, there is a trend and lack of confidentiality could be a factor in student disclosure of bullying.

The prevalent use of technology and the increasing incidence of cyber-bullying were investigated in this study. Teacher involvement in physical and relational bullying may also be an indication of teacher involvement in cyber bullying. This means that students who believed teachers would intervene in physical and relational bullying, might also intervene in cyber bullying. Prior research states that cyber victims are also traditional victims of physical and/or relational bullying, and that cyber bullies are traditional bullies who typically participate in physical and/or relational bullying (Smith and Slonje, 2008). The majority of cyber victims recognize that their cyber bullies attend the same school and therefore the teacher has a crucial role in intervening in the bullying to aid the victim (Smith and Slonje, 2008). This study supported the findings of Smith and Slonje, as adolescents who reported higher confidence in teacher involvement in bullying also reported higher confidence in teacher involvement in instances of cyber bullying. A correlation analysis detected significance between teacher involvement and teacher involvement in cyber bullying.

Gender of the student was also examined as a factor of student confidence in teacher intervention in bullying. Early research (Eisenberg, Neumark-Sztainer & Perry, 2003; Oliver & Candappa, 2007) determined that female students reported bullying more often than male students. Oliver and Candappa (2007) indicated that at a younger age both female and male students displayed the same frequencies in reporting bullying, but as students grew older, male students were significantly less likely to report bullying as compared to female students. Hypothesis eleven stated that female adolescents would exhibit greater confidence in teacher

involvement, greater fear of reprimand from the teachers and the bullies than male adolescents. Both male and female adolescents were predicted to approach female teachers over male teachers about bullying. Although, this study did not yield significant correlations in any of the categories, higher mean scores for females in confidence in teacher involvement in bullying demonstrates a general trend supporting hypothesis eleven a. Both female and male students reported higher mean scores for confidence in teacher aid if the teacher was female rather than male. Male participants exhibited both greater fear of reprimand from the teacher and the bully than female students. Males are reportedly more involved in bullying than females and twice as many males were identified as bullies as compared to females (Seals & Young, 2003). This would explain why male students express greater fear of reprimand from the teacher. Furthermore, males could be more afraid of also being implicated in the bullying situations. Although a trend was identified between student gender and confidence in teacher involvement, no significant correlation was detected. These results are similar to research conducted by Seals and Young (2003) which found that both male and female victims of bullying did not differ significantly in reporting of bullying.

This study investigated age as a factor in determining whether adolescents feel comfortable in reporting bullying to teachers. As a variable, age across high school grade levels, is a demographic that has been largely unexplored. Early research (Frison, Jonsson, & Persson, 2007; Oliver & Candappa, 2007; Seals & Young, 2003; Novick & Isaacs, 2009) determined that report of bullying situations and victimization among students decreases with age. The tendency to tell teachers about bullying decreases from elementary school to secondary school (Novick and Isaacs, 2009). Younger adolescents (grades 9 and 10) were proposed to express greater confidence in teacher involvement than older adolescents (grades 11 and 12). A significant correlation between age and confidence in teacher involvement indicated that indeed, younger adolescents believed that teachers would aid in bullying situation. Such a perception, however, did decline with age.

Ethnicity was not found to be a factor in student confidence in teacher involvement, and fear of reprimand from the teacher or the bully. Earlier research on ethnicity and bullying has been inconsistent. Some studies such as Fleschler Peskin, Tortelero, and Markham (2006) reported that minority groups such as African American and Hispanics were classified as bullies

more than white students, and both minority groups were also more likely to report being bullied. Eisenberg, Neumark-Sztainer & Perry (2003), reported different results with white students reporting the most harassment. Seals and Young (2003) detected no significant differences in involvement based on ethnicity and no significant differences were detected between white and African American students in involvement in bullying. This inconsistency suggests that ethnicity is not a strong factor in bullying and therefore is most likely not a strong factor to determine confidence in teacher involvement in bullying.

The school performance of students also had no significant effect on student confidence in teacher intervention in bullying. Contrary to hypothesis fourteen, which stated that students with lower school performance would exhibit less confidence in the teacher, no significant distinction was found between students with lower and higher grades. Although significance was not detected, however, there was a consistent trend among the lowest academically performing students who reported the lowest levels of teacher involvement and the highest levels of fear of reprimand from both teachers and bullies. This finding is important because poor academically performing students experience more negative implications of bullying. Moreover, Eisenberg, Neumark-Sztainer, and Perry (2003) reported that academically poor students endured the most frequent harassment and disliked school the most. This indicates that poor performing students report bullying less frequently than higher performing students because poor academic students believe reporting bullying escalates the already tense and difficult situation.

Recent bullying horror stories have underscored the importance of reporting bullying to teachers. This study, as well as further research addressing the subject of adolescent reasons for not reporting bullying to teachers, will make educators more sensitive to the perceptions of teens who struggle with the ubiquitous nature of school conformity, intrigue and competition.

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