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TWEENS, CYBERBULLYING, AND MORAL REASONING: SEPARATING THE UPSTANDERS FROM THE BYSTANDERS

Erhardt Graeff

ABSTRACT

Purpose − *To inform policy, curricula, and future research on cyberbullying through an exploration of the moral reasoning of digitally active 10−14-year olds (tweens) when witnesses to digital abuse.*

Methodology/approach − *Conducted interviews with 41 tweens, asking participants to react as witnesses to two hypothetical scenarios of digital abuse. Through thematic analysis of the interviews, I developed and applied a new typology for classifying "upstanders" and "bystanders" to cyberbullying.*

Findings − *Identified three types of upstander and five types of bystander, along with five thinking processes that led participants to react in those different ways. Upstanders were more likely than bystanders to think through a scenario using high-order moral reasoning processes like disinterested perspective-taking. Moral reasoning, emotions, and*

contextual factors, as well as participant gender and home school district, all appeared to play a role in determining how participants responded to cyberbullying scenarios.

Research limitations/implications − *Hypothetical scenarios posed in interviews cannot substitute for case studies of real events, but this qualitative analysis has produced a framework for classifying upstanding and bystanding behavior that can inform future studies and approaches to digital ethics education.*

Originality − *This study contributes to the literature on cyberbullying and moral reasoning through in-depth interviews with tweens that record the complexity and context-dependency of thinking processes like perspective-taking among an understudied but critical age group.*

 Keywords: Cyberbulling; digital ethics; moral reasoning; tweens

INTRODUCTION

On January 14, 2010, after numerous incidences of bullying, a 15-year-old girl named Phoebe Prince hanged herself in the Massachusetts town of South Hadley. Between her death and September 2011, at least seven more suicides linked to bullying made national headlines in the United States (Rooke, 2011). These high-profile cases turned the attention of parents, teachers, policymakers, and researchers onto what appears to be a growing "cyberbullying" problem in American schools. Just four months after Prince's death, Massachusetts legislators responded by unanimously passing one of the strictest anti-bullying bills in the country, which included a provision requiring schools to investigate all bullying and incorporate anti-bullying programs into their curricula (*ibid.*).

Unfortunately for victims, digital media allow bullies to follow their prey home from the schoolyard, ramping up their attacks via text messages and posts on social networking sites; as a result, the potential for schools to curb bullying through rules and disciplinary actions may be limited (Agatston, Kowalski, & Limber, 2007; Mishna, Saini, & Solomon, 2009). With victims even younger than Phoebe Prince committing suicide, like 14-year-old Jamey Rodemeyer of Buffalo, New York (O'Connor, 2011), the tween years, ages 10−14, mark a critical period of moral development with respect to cyberbullying.

An important question that follows for parents, teachers, policymakers, and researchers is: How and why do some young people choose to intervene in cases of cyberbullying (i.e., act as upstanders) and others ignore it or even join in (i.e., act as bystanders or co-perpetrators)? The present study focuses on this question, describing how tweens respond to hypothetical cyberbullying dilemmas posed during in-depth interviews and discusses what the findings may indicate for educational interventions. Specifically, I look at upstanding and bystanding responses to two hypothetical cases posed to participants, wherein they witness (1) cyberbullying of a teacher and (2) antipathy broadly directed at a particular race or religion online.

CONTEXT

The majority of current research into cyberbullying reports the rates of various forms of digital abuse within a population (Patchin, 2010). Where studies include tweens at all, they are usually clumped with older teens in broad age ranges. Early studies, even those focused purely on the middle school age range (Kowalski & Limber, 2007), are also hard to assess for representativeness given: (1) how rapidly socio-cultural spaces online change (Livingstone & Haddon, 2008) and (2) valid doubts over the appropriateness of asking about "bullying" to youth who may instead see certain forms of abuse as "drama" and respond based on accepted gender roles (Marwick & boyd, 2011).

Two recent studies offer both a quantitative overview of the incidence of cyberbullying while also asking youth about how they react when they witness digital abuse. A July 2011 telephone survey of American youth, ages 12−17, by the Pew Internet & American Life Project reported that one in five youth say they have been bullied in the past year, and that the bullying was more often in-person than via the internet or text message (Lenhart et al., 2011). The report found that most youth see social media meanness being ignored by others, though a substantial number of youth have also at one point or another witnessed someone defending a bullying victim. The majority admitted to being bystanders themselves; several teens even admitted they joined in bullying on occasion. However, a large majority said they have defended a victim on occasion. Girls and higher SES teens were more likely to see others acting as upstanders online, but higher SES and older teens were also more likely to ignore bullying themselves.

A 2011 AP-MTV digital abuse poll asked youth ages 14−24 questions similar to Pew's survey (Knowledge Networks, 2011). The majority said they have witnessed people being mean to each other on social network sites on multiple occasions. Youth reported how offended they would be if they saw various slurs being used online against others; the most offensive to them was "nigger." If a slur was used against them, the rates of being offended went up for all slurs other than "nigger." Participants were almost evenly split between feeling the use of discriminatory language was OK "as long as you make clear you're "just kidding" versus it "is never OK" (*ibid.*, p. 8). The majority felt that "trying to be funny" would be a reason for using such language. Fewer youth felt perpetrators "really hold hateful feelings about the group." Only a bare majority said they would be likely to ask perpetrators to stop.

One qualitative cyberbullying study in 2009 asked focus groups of tweens about their views on cyberbullying and factors connected to their willingness to tell an adult (Mishna et al., 2009). Virtually all youth said they would not approach their parents, citing fears of retaliation from their friends or loss of technology privileges. However, this and most other studies of cyberbullying fail to analyze in any depth the thinking processes and moral reasoning that may drive youth to act or not. Recent studies by Thornberg (2007, 2010) have looked at moral reasoning and the "bystander effect" offline among elementary school children up to age 11 and found evidence of specific thinking processes like trivialization and dissociation that can lead to bystanding behavior. Thornberg cites Kohlberg's theory of moral development, as well as the importance of emotions and social context on the development of morality among children (2010).

Kohlberg's (1984) theory of moral development states that moral behavior follows from moral reasoning that develops over time. He lays out a framework of consecutive stages to analyze youth moral reasoning and to suggest a goal state of higher level moral thinking that could lead to more prosocial or upstanding decisions and behavior. Kohlberg's six stages span three levels of moral thinking which can be summarized as concerning help or harm to oneself, concerning known others and rules, and concerning abstract communities and principles. Kohlberg argues that youth develop into more mature moral thinkers, albeit at different rates, throughout adolescence and into early adulthood. The ideal outcome is the primary reliance on thinking processes found in the last level, either engaging moral reasoning through relativistic perspective-taking (stage 5) or critical appeal to universal ethical principles and logic, like the Golden Rule (stage 6).

More recent scholarship takes issue with Kohlberg's causal framework, saying that moral reasoning is not the sole path to moral judgment and action. Krebs, Denton, and Wark (1997) argue that Kohlberg's focus on a natural progression to higher moral thinking works only for specific individuals in specific contexts, wherein they can take on the role of a "philosopher of ethics." Instead, they suggest a broader and, in their empirical approach, more realistic view of moral reasoning acknowledges its context dependence, whereby individuals express morality at different stages depending on personal needs and ability.

Moving away from an emphasis on rational decision-making, Haidt's (2001) social intuitionist model argues that intuition is the purest source of moral judgment action and often relies heavily on emotion or affection rather than reason. His argument was reinforced by Greene, Sommerville, Nystrom, Darley, and Cohen (2001), who used fMRI scans while posing moral dilemmas to participants and found evidence in the neurological data that emotion was linked to moral judgment. Haidt (2001) suggests that moral reasoning may play more of a *post hoc* role in moral judgment by manufacturing the rationality for one's actions, which Krebs et al. (1997) also acknowledge. Greene, Sommerville, Nystrom, Darley, and Cohen's work suggest that reasoning can still play an important role in cases in which reasoned considerations and emotional intuitions conflict (Greene & Haidt, 2002).

Moral reasoning and judgment become even trickier when digital media are involved; Silverstone (2003) theorizes that establishing a balance between personal and impersonal connections among individuals, what he calls "proper distance," is problematized by digital media. Specifically, individuals struggle to maintain a sense of responsibility to each other since digital media afford both extremely intimate and completely anonymous interactions, sometimes simultaneously.

In a study that directly influenced this chapter, Flores and James (2013) analyzed interviews with 61 teens that explored ethical dilemmas such as illegal downloading and inappropriate uses of Wikipedia and found evidence of four different moral thinking processes: ethical thinking, moral thinking, consequence-based thinking, and amoral and unethical thinking. The first three processes map roughly onto Kohlberg's levels, but the authors did not see evidence of a clear progression from one to the next. Regardless of the amount of higher level moral or ethical thinking displayed by participants, they found that 98% of them also displayed at least one instance of amoral or unethical thinking during the interview. Similar to the problem of "proper distance," Flores and James conclude that

"certain online contexts may engender greater 'moral sensitivity' while others may coincide with greater 'disinhibition,'" citing Bebeau, Rest, and Narvaez (1999) and Suler (2004).

Furthermore, these moral and ethical considerations online can be tied to development in terms of age ranges − Bouhnik and Deshen (2013) found a significant difference in the application of lower and higher level moral reasoning between junior high school and high school students. In considering the case of illegal music downloads, junior high school students relied more on self-interest and social norms, whereas high school students appealed to a more universal ideal of justice, suggesting it is worthwhile studying the moral reasoning of each age group in depth.

METHODS

Setting and Participants

During the spring and summer of 2010, five researchers including myself working at Project Zero at the Harvard Graduate School of Education conducted in-depth interviews with 42 tweens in grades 5, 6, 7, and 8 with an average age of 12. One participant was not asked about the digital abuse questions, so only 41 participants are included in this analysis. Interview candidates were pre-screened using a survey, which asked about a variety of online activities. We selected participants to fill a range of types of online users based on reported time spent instant messaging, social networking, creating content, and gaming online. Many participants across these types had accounts on or experience using Facebook and to a lesser extent MySpace. We also considered demographic factors including age, gender, grade, race/ethnicity, and mother's education − as a rough proxy of SES − to create a diverse sample. The demographic characteristics of the sample are detailed in Table 1.

We did the majority of our recruitment through middle schools, except for three participants recruited from a summer youth program, and one participant recruited through a personal connection. The middle schools are spread across three school districts in the same major metropolitan area in the Massachusetts: School District 1 is a predominantly minority, low-SES, urban district; School District 2 is a racially diverse, mid-SES, urban district; and School District 3 is a predominantly White, high-SES, suburban district. SES is inferred by using the percentages of students that

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Sample ($n = 41$).

Age (# of years)	
Range	10−14
Mean	12
Gender (# of participants)	
Girls	23
Boys	18
Grade in school	
5th grade	12
6th grade	11
7th grade	8
8th grade	10
Race	
Black	17
Asian	4
White	11
Other	9
Ethnicity	
African	4
East Asian	2
European-American	2
Latino	10
South Asian	2
Other	7
No response	14
Mother's education	
Less than high school	2
High school graduate or GED	7
Some college	6
College graduate	9
Graduate or professional degree	8
Do not know or did not report	9

Note: All data self-reported by participants in a prescreening survey.

qualify for free or reduced lunch. The demographic characteristics of the three school districts are detailed in Table 2.

Data Collection

One-on-one interviews were conducted at the sites of recruitment in private classrooms and conference rooms after school or during a study hall periods. Participants sat for two, separate one-hour interviews. Interviewers

Table 2.   Demographic Characteristics of School Districts Used for
Participant Recruitment.

	School District 1 (%)	School District 2 (%)	School District 3 (%)
Free or reduced lunch	75.6	45.5	7.6
Gender			
Girls	48.2	49.6	49.6
Boys	51.8	51.0	50.4
Race/ethnicity			
African American	36.5	33.6	2.7
Asian	8.6	11.2	1.5
Hispanic	39.6	14.2	3.0
Native American	0.4	0.6	0.0
White	13.1	36.4	92.0
Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander	0.1	0.3	0.0
Multi-Race, Non-Hispanic	1.8	3.7	0.8

Note: All data collected from Massachusetts Department of Education (2010).

trained in qualitative methods followed a pilot-tested, semi-structured inter-
view protocol. The interviews featured a set of hypothetical scenarios and
questions about the participant's own online experiences addressing poten-
tial ethical dilemmas. One of the hypothetical scenarios involved a series of
personal profiles created by a friend of theirs, Jeff, on a new, fictitious
social networking site, "MyLife," in addition to his main profile on a differ-
ent social networking site. We designed Jeff's profile pages to look similar
to the default layout common on sites like Facebook and MySpace at the
time. They were printed in full-color and presented to the participant to
examine. The profiles were used primarily to discuss ethical dilemmas
around identity online as Jeff represented different sides of his personality
on each of these "second" profiles. However, the last profile page was also
designed to introduce two dilemmas involving online harassment. On this
particular profile, Jeff has partially anonymized, or pseudonymized, himself
using the handle "J-Dawg," a profile picture featuring the character
"Stewie" from the cartoon *Family Guy*, and listing his location as
"Somewhere, MA."

We asked participants to study the profile page and to pay particular
attention to what was being said on the "wall," where Jeff and his friends
were discussing a new forum on their "I Hate Mr. Garrett" web page and
saying derogatory things about their teacher Mr. Garrett. We then asked

participants a series of open-ended questions intended to elicit how they might respond to this scenario as witnesses in real life. To prompt a second ethical dilemma about group harm, we modified the scenario by asking participants how they would respond if instead the web page was "I Hate [A Certain Racial or Religious Group]." This question was always initially asked using the base, non-specific language of "a certain racial or religious group."

All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. However, findings from one participant are based on notes taken by the interviewer, as the voice recorder was not operating at that time.

Data Analysis

A single coder (the author) coded all the transcripts by hand in an exploratory and iterative process following the tenets of "thematic analysis" (Braun & Clarke, 2006), used because of its rigor through reflection and iteration and its flexibility allowing both "etic" (derived from research questions) and "emic" (derived from perspectives shared by participants) codes (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Coding occurred in two major phases. In the first phase, I familiarized myself with the data by reading and re-reading the transcripts and then summarizing all the reasons each tween gave for being bothered or not bothered by a dilemma. I categorized these summaries based on words and phrases used by the participants, such as "that's rude," "that's mean," "it's not funny," or "that makes me kind of laugh." Similarly, I summarized and categorized all actions proposed by a tween in response to a dilemma, such as "I would tell his parents" or "I don't care," and any reasons for action or inaction. Based on these responses, I classified each tween as bothered or not bothered by each dilemma and as taking action or not taking action.

During the second phase, I inductively grouped the actions into new codes for types of upstanders and bystanders based on the primary goal of the action; the top-level codes of upstander and bystander come from the pre-existing (etic) categories of "upstand" and "bystand" developed by Feigenberg, King, Barr, and Selman (2008). After iterative grouping and reviewing of themes across initial codes, tweens who performed types of actions that could be considered positive interventions in the dilemma fell into one of three emic categories of upstander: interventionist, adult reliant, or information gathering. Tweens who performed types of actions which were self-centered or conditional, who took no action, or who were not

even bothered by the dilemma in the first place fell into one of five emic categories of bystander: self-serving, discriminating, powerless, unbothered, and unclear. In the case of more than one action being given by a participant, I re-read and re-coded those transcripts to discern the *primary* goal of their actions based on order of expression and emphasis.

In order to more easily connect tweens' thinking processes to their ultimate decisions to become an upstander or a bystander, their reasons for being bothered or not bothered by a dilemma, and any reasons given for not taking action were also iteratively grouped and reviewed. This produced five thinking process categories, derived in part from Kohlberg's theory of moral development − making them both emic and etic − to represent the primary processes used by participants to arrive at their reasons: looking out for oneself, looking out for friends, using moral absolutes, calculating the severity of the problem, and perspective-taking. The final codebook of all typologies is reproduced in Table 3.

Table 3. Codebook.

Code	Definition
Upstanders	Participant who proposed a selfless, positive action in response to the dilemma
Interventionist	Upstander who proposed a direct action such as telling Jeff to stop
Adult reliant	Upstander who proposed seeking out an adult to intervene or for advice on what to do
Information gathering	Upstander who proposed asking Jeff why he is behaving negatively
Bystanders	Participant who proposed a selfish action or no action, or is not bothered by the dilemma
Self-serving	Bystander who proposed a selfish action like unfriending Jeff or no action out of self-concern
Discriminating	Bystander who did not want to betray a friend or might only act on behalf of certain victims
Powerless	Bystander who did not feel like their actions would have much effect
Unbothered	Bystander who was not at all bothered by the dilemma and might even join in as a perpetrator
Unclear	Bystander who did not offer reasons for inaction or cannot be clearly defined as bothered or not by the dilemma
Thinking processes	
Looking out for oneself	Reason for being bothered or not that hinges on self-centered reasoning such as whether the participant will get in trouble
Looking out for friends	Reason for being bothered or not that hinges on the social distance between the participant and the perpetrator or victim

Table 3. (*Continued*)

Code	Definition
Using moral absolutes	Reason for being bothered or not that hinges on the seemingly black and white (im)morality of a behavior such as swearing or making racist comments
Calculating the severity of the problem	Reason for being bothered or not that hinges on the number of people affected by Jeff's behavior or "how bad" his behavior is relatively speaking
Perspective-taking	Reason for being bothered or not that hinges on taking the perspective of the perpetrator or the victim

FINDINGS

Upstanders and Their Thinking Processes

In the Teacher Scenario, the minority of tweens, 39% or 16 of 41, were upstanders, meaning they would take some kind of positive action in response to a scenario in which a teacher was the target of an online hate group. Girls were twice as likely as boys to be upstanders. There were no clear trends in upstanding across grade levels, although fifth and eighth graders were more likely to be upstanders than sixth and seventh graders. A slight majority of tweens enrolled in the high-SES School District 3 were upstanders, followed by a large minority in the mid-SES School District 2 and a very small minority in the low-SES School District 1. These data are displayed in Table 4. Perspective-taking was the key thinking process leading upstanders into taking direct action in this scenario.

In contrast to the Teacher Scenario, 71% or 29 of 41 tweens were upstanders in the Race/Religion Scenario, meaning they would take some kind of direct action in response to a scenario in which a race or religious group was the target of an online hate group. Girls, at 22 of 23, were almost universally upstanding in this scenario compared to only 40% of boys. All participants in seventh and eighth grade were upstanders, compared to 7 of 12 fifth graders and 4 of 11 sixth graders. A large majority of tweens enrolled in mid-SES School District 2 were upstanders, followed by a slightly smaller majority in the high-SES School District 3, and the fewest again were in the low-SES School District 1 with a very slight majority. These data are displayed in Table 5.

Despite the widespread use of perspective-taking among upstanders in response to the Teacher Scenario, the key thinking process appeared to be

Table 4. Numbers of Upstanders versus Bystanders in the Teacher Scenario.

	Total	Girls	Boys	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8	School D. 1	School D. 2	School D. 3
Upstanders	*16*	*12*	*4*	*6*	*3*	*2*	*5*	*2*	*7*	*5*
Interventionist	10	8	2	4	1	1	4	2	4	2
Adult reliant	2	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	2
Information gathering	4	3	1	1	1	1	1	0	3	1
Bystanders	*25*	*11*	*14*	*6*	*8*	*6*	*5*	*9*	*11*	*4*
Self-serving	7	3	4	1	3	1	2	1	4	2
Discriminating	2	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	1
Powerless	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	1	0	0
Unbothered	10	4	6	2	2	3	3	4	5	1
Unclear	5	3	2	2	1	2	0	3	1	0
All participants[a]	*41*	*23*	*18*	*12*	*11*	*8*	*10*	*11*	*18*	*9*

[a]School numbers do not add up to the total number of participants because three participants were not recruited through schools.

Table 5. Numbers of Upstanders versus Bystanders in the Race/Religion Scenario.

	Total	Girls	Boys	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8	School D. 1	School D. 2	School D. 3
Upstanders	*29*	*22*	*7*	*7*	*4*	*8*	*10*	*6*	*15*	*6*
Interventionist	14	10	4	6	1	2	5	1	9	2
Adult reliant	10	8	2	1	2	4	3	2	5	3
Information gathering	5	4	1	0	1	2	2	3	1	1
Bystanders	*12*	*1*	*11*	*5*	*7*	*0*	*0*	*5*	*3*	*3*
Self-serving	4	1	3	1	3	0	0	2	1	1
Discriminating	4	0	4	2	2	0	0	1	1	2
Powerless	2	0	2	0	2	0	0	1	1	0
Unbothered	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	0
Unclear	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
All participants[a]	*41*	*23*	*18*	*12*	*11*	*8*	*10*	*11*	*18*	*9*

[a]School numbers do not add up to the total number of participants because three participants were not recruited through schools.

"using moral absolutes" in the Race/Religion Scenario. The tweens no longer referred to Jeff as being "mean." Instead, four interventionist and three information gathering upstanders had initial reactions explicitly calling out Jeff's behavior as "racist." In all, 19 of the 29 upstanders relied on moral absolutes in some way.

Interventionist Upstanders

Ten of the upstanders in the Teacher Scenario were "interventionist," meaning they proposed taking direct, positive action. Most of these upstanders wanted to tell or explain to Jeff that he was being mean. Jade, grade 8, simply wanted to tell Jeff, "You need to calm that down." Whereas, Maya, grade 5, said she would express her disappointment with her friend Jeff: "Why did you do such a thing? You shouldn't do that. I wouldn't go out like that. Like I didn't expect this from you." Others would tell Jeff explicitly to delete the "I Hate Mr. Garrett" website. Rather than focusing purely on Jeff's behavior being wrong, two interventionist upstanders wanted to warn Jeff he might get in trouble. Gavin, grade 5, would tell Jeff, "Oh, that was mean, what you wrote about Mr. G. You could get in a lot of trouble if he sees that."

Most interventionist upstanders in the Teacher Scenario, 6 of 10, first gave a primary reason for being bothered by the scenario which was derived from perspective-taking with the victim, the teacher. Deva, grade 8, said she would take action "because it's not nice at all to the person [their teacher]." Jade went further, saying it is not okay "because that could lead somebody into depression." Marisa, grade 5, used perspective-taking to emphasize why Jeff should take down the website, "What if Mr. Garrett made a website about that, about you? You wouldn't do anything, you'd just be mad. You would be mad, then you will start saying stuff to him."

The second most common thinking process among interventionist bystanders in the Teacher Scenario, used by 3 of 10, was "looking out for friends." These motivations came out of a concern that Jeff, a friend, would get in trouble. Emma, grade 8, exemplifies this attitude in her reaction to Jeff: "You should delete that thing about Mr. Garrett before the school sees it because schools do have access into it."

Similar to the Teacher Scenario, in the Race/Religion Scenario the plurality of upstanders were interventionist, 14 of 29. Rosa, grade 8, would explain to Jeff why he was wrong, "If you don't like the religion, it's your opinion, but you don't have to bring it out there." Maria, grade 5, would tell Jeff, "That's mad racist" online, "but in a way nobody else could see what I'm saying […] like in a private message." Caleb would encourage Jeff to engage in perspective-taking: "That's not right, talking about people and their religion. And what would you like if someone talked to you − talked about you and your religion?" Several interventionist upstanders wanted to in some way stop Jeff rather than simply tell him he was doing something wrong. Emma, grade 8, would send the owner of Jeff's profile, even if it was not Jeff, an appeal to his self-interest: "You should delete that. I don't

know if you're Jeff. I don't know if you're not. But you should really delete that, because that will just get you in loads of trouble." In an attempt to redirect the conversation online, Christina, grade 5, suggested, "Maybe I'd tell them to stop first. And then if they didn't stop, maybe I'd try to get on there and put positive notes. Then try to get everybody to put positive notes. Then it would feel like really weird, just putting bad notes."

The reasons upstanders gave for being bothered and taking action in the Race/Religion Scenario were more varied than those given in response to the Teacher Scenario. Perspective-taking was common again, especially among interventionist upstanders, but it was most often used in combination with another primary thinking strategy. Three interventionist upstanders, like Caleb, combined perspective-taking with relying on moral absolutes to make the argument that all religions are the same or that it is simply not okay to say you hate a religion. Jonah, grade 8, reflected, "There's always, like I said, good people out there. You can't judge people if you don't know them." One interventionist upstander, Perry, grade 8, responded to the switch from the Teacher Scenario to the Race/Religion Scenario using a combination of perspective-taking and "calculating the severity of the problem" saying,

> I would feel that was more wrong. More because, I don't know, I mean Mr. Garrett could be a teacher who people don't like for a reason. He could be a bad teacher, he could be rude to kids, he could do any of that. But I mean, hating an entire racial group is kind of absurd to me.

Two interventionist upstanders used perspective-taking to understand Jeff's motives, suggesting Jeff was trying to be funny by stressing this behavior was not funny. Only two upstanders in the Race/Religion Scenario mentioned looking out for friends. Besides the interventionist Emma, another interventionist considered Jeff might lose friends over this.

Adult Reliant Upstanders

Only two Teacher Scenario upstanders were "adult reliant," seeking help from adults rather than approaching Jeff themselves. Charlotte, grade 5, would go to Jeff's parents and show them the website, "So they'd be able to read it. So they'd probably be upset about that." Ben, grade 6, was less sure of how to best deal with his close friend Jeff: "I'd ask someone what to do about it, like a parent or a teacher, a guidance counselor." Both adult reliant upstanders used perspective-taking. Charlotte took Jeff's comments about the teacher literally in saying, "I would think that's kind of mean,

because Mr. Garrett doesn't try to be ugly. Unless it's like Halloween and he's doing a costume or something."

A larger percentage of upstanders, 10 of 29, were adult reliant in their responses to the Race/Religion Scenario than were in the Teaching Scenario. One participant, Charlotte, immediately suggested, "I would actually call the cops." Three adult reliant upstanders specified they would tell someone at their school; Makayla, grade 7, said, "I would go to the school, definitely. Because they deal with stereotypical stuff. They always tell us not to be stereotypical about stuff." Three other adult reliant upstanders said they would tell their parents, and in particular their mom. Grace, grade 6, would do so in order to get to Jeff's parents: "I would ask my mom to talk to his mom, because that's really − it can hurt a lot of people."

Two adult reliant upstanders in the Race/Religion Scenario combined perspective-taking with the thinking process "looking out for oneself." Charlotte talked about her personal concern leading to why she would call the cops: "For some people, it's really offensive. Like you know how there are bad groups for Judaism? I'm Jewish and so I sort of don't really like people like that. […] You know how in the, black people couldn't be with white people, the segregation? That's one thing, like say you're having a sleepover with somebody and your mom doesn't let you and say, "'Oh, I'm not going to let a colored girl be in my house.' That's a really mean thing, because that's very offensive to that person." Similar to Perry, the interventionist upstander, adult reliant upstander Molly, grade 7, combined perspective-taking with calculating the severity of the problem: "A lot of people don't like teachers, so it would be different than a religion because a lot of people have different religions. You don't want people saying bad stuff about your religion." One adult reliant upstander tried to use perspective-taking to understand Jeff's motives, suggesting that Jeff was trying to fit into a group by behaving this way, which they considered inappropriate.

Information Gathering Upstanders
In the Teacher Scenario, four upstanders were "information gathering," and, like Ben, were less sure of the best course of action, wanting to ask Jeff why he was being mean to the teacher and in some cases confirm Jeff's motives. Lindsay, grade 5, said "I would talk to him about it. And ask him why did he do it." And if Jeff said it was because he "doesn't like the teacher," then she would answer, "You shouldn't talk about teachers even if [you don't] like them." The most important thinking process for information gathering bystanders, being cited by three of the four, was "looking out for friends." Kevin, grade 6, was concerned that Jeff didn't realize

someone might actually see it: "He probably didn't have to say 'it's ugly out, it's dot dot dot' on the web because you never know who's watching, like who's on your profile right then and there."

Five upstanders in the Race/Religion Scenario were information gathering. Most information gathering upstanders wanted to confirm Jeff's hateful thoughts. Emily, grade 6, would do so as a precursor to possible further action like unfriending him: "I'd probably just ask him if this is what he really thinks about that certain type of person. And if he said that's what he really thinks, then I honestly wouldn't want to be friends with him." Ashley, grade 7, responded out of self-concern: "I will ask him, because I might be the same religion as them. He could hate me." One information gathering upstander, similar to the earlier mentioned adult reliant upstander, suggested that Jeff was trying to fit into a group.

Bystanders and Their Thinking Processes

In the Teacher Scenario, the majority of tweens, 61% or 25 of 41 were bystanders, proposing a selfish action or no action or were not bothered by the scenario. Sixth and seventh graders were slightly more likely to be bystanders than fifth and eighth graders. A large majority of tweens enrolled in the low-SES School District 1 were bystanders, followed by a slight majority in mid-SES School District 2 and a slight minority in high-SES School District 3. These data are displayed in Table 4. The thinking processes used by bystanders in the Teacher Scenario included several instances of looking out for oneself and looking out for friends, supplemented by calculating the severity of the problem and a couple of cases where perspective-taking led to bystanding rather than upstanding.

In the Race/Religion Scenario, only 29% or 12 of 41 tweens, proposed a selfish action or no action, or were not bothered by the Race/Religion Scenario. Only 1 girl out of 23 was a bystander in this scenario compared to 60% of boys. No participants in seventh or eighth grade were bystanders, compared to 5 of 12 fifth graders and 7 of 11 sixth graders. Nearly half of the tweens enrolled in School District 1 comprised 5 of the 12 bystanders, followed by a third of the tweens in School District 3, and a sixth of the tweens in School District 2. These data are displayed in Table 5. The key thinking process among bystanders to this scenario was looking out for oneself, which led to being self-serving and discriminating.

Looking across the two scenarios, 11 of the 12 Race/Religion Scenario bystanders were also Teacher Scenario bystanders, although only 3 were

the same type of bystander. The discriminating bystander Gavin was the single tween who was a bystander in the Race/Religion Scenario but an upstander in the Teacher Scenario, during which he was looking out for friends and said he would warn Jeff that he could get in trouble if the teacher saw the website.

Self-Serving Bystanders

The second largest cohort of bystanders in the Teacher Scenario was "self-serving," proposing a selfish action like unfriending Jeff or taking no action out of self-concern. Two of the seven self-serving bystanders were not bothered by Jeff's behavior, calculating the severity of the problem as not a big deal and did not want to be seen as tattletales. Aaron, grade 5, said specifically he would not do anything because "it's not involved with me," and then elaborated, "I wouldn't tell Mr. Garrett because that would get him in trouble and he might not want to be friends with me." Jeff's behavior did bother the other five self-serving bystanders, who cited reasons like "you shouldn't talk about teachers" or "behind someone's back." However, they dissuaded themselves from action out of concern for their own welfare. Autumn, grade 8, expressed the two most common concerns of the self-serving bystanders: "I wouldn't do anything because I wouldn't want to get in trouble, or get crap from kids […] by telling on him, being a tattletale." Kiara, grade 8, provided a more neutral rationale in saying she would "just leave it alone and not look at it because I don't want to associate myself with people like that."

Out of 12 total bystanders in the Race/Religion Scenario, 4 were self-serving, who looked out for themselves and decided against taking direct action despite being bothered for other reasons. Anthony, grade 6, was very clearly bothered by Jeff's behavior after calculating the severity of the problem, but he was also adamantly against telling anyone, especially his parents: "If I told them, […] they'll definitely say, 'No more Facebook or whatever for you, because you're looking at these things that you shouldn't be looking at and these things are bad, and I don't want you to be looking at this.'" Lindsay, grade 5, and Jose, grade 6, instead relied on moral absolutes and were eager to simply rid Jeff from their lives by avoiding contact with him such as by unfriending him.

Discriminating Bystanders

Two bystanders in the Teacher Scenario were "discriminating," in that they suggested they would act as upstanders on behalf of only certain victims or perpetrators. In this scenario, both bystanders were only interested in

looking out for their friends. Anthony, grade 6, said, "If he wasn't my friend, I wouldn't do anything. But if he was, I'd tell him, 'What's so bad?' if I liked Mr. Garrett. But then [if] I didn't, I'd probably be like, 'Oh, yeah,' but privately, not on MyLife."

In the Race/Religion Scenario, four bystanders were discriminating when it came to certain possible victims. Gavin, grade 5, started by relying on moral absolutes but switched to looking out for oneself in his reaction: "I would be very mad. Actually, that depends. What do you mean? Racist towards Jews? African Americans? Because I'm Jewish and if he's saying it towards Jews or whatever, I'd be like, 'Wow, you stink. Alright then. That's enough. Goodbye.'" Zachary, grade 6, brought up a similar concern about his Jewish heritage, but went further to say he might join in if Jeff was targeting a group he hated too: "Well, it depends on in what way. If it was like something about maybe how Christianity is doing all the abortion and the problems with how your sexual life goes on, then I might actually join in a little because that just doesn't seem right. But if they're insulting a religion group for no good reason, like − or like making a group of neo-Nazis, then I'm a little pissed because I would be a target."

Powerless Bystanders

Only one bystander in the Teacher Scenario, Louis, grade 6, fell into the category of "powerless" bystanders, feeling like his action would not have much effect. He admitted Jeff and friends were "probably putting bad things up there." But he said he would not do anything "because they probably wouldn't listen anyway and they're expressing their feelings," which suggested that Louis was empathizing with Jeff through perspective-taking as well as calculating the severity of the problem.

In the Race/Religion Scenario, two bystanders felt powerless. Eva, grade 6, was unsure about her response and explained, "I'm used to not saying something. I'm not used to saying stuff like that." The other bystander, Ahmed, grade 6, said Jeff's behavior was "bad and mean" but said he could not do anything because they were not targeting a specific person: "If they were talking to a specific person, and I knew that person, like he was my best friend, you'd tell him to stop, tell my friend."

Unbothered Bystanders

Unbothered bystanders did not find anything wrong with a scenario, and in some cases considered joining in on the abuse, what Feigenberg et al. (2008) would classify as "perpetration" rather than bystanding. In the Teacher Scenario, a plurality of the bystanders, 10 of 25, were

"unbothered." Half of the unbothered bystanders arrived at that state by calculating the severity of the problem and deciding it was not a big deal. Caleb, grade 5, explained, "It's not that bad. It's bad, but it's not serious. They just like joking with each other." Similarly, Brianna, grade 8, said, "I think it would be funny. Like they're just being honest about what they think, and stuff like that." The other half of the unbothered used perspective-taking to empathize with Jeff. Alex, grade 5, suggested Jeff might be justified "because I don't know the teacher and he does." Three tweens went so far as to consider participating, like Jonah, grade 8: "If I hate Mr. Garrett, I'll probably join along."

Alex, grade 6, was the only unbothered bystander in the Race/Religion Scenario. He reached this state by first looking out for oneself, saying he was not bothered "because that's just between Jeff hating something, not me." He then used perspective-taking to assume Jeff had a good reason because something happened to him.

Unclear Bystanders

Five bystanders to the Teacher Scenario definitely did not take action but their reasons were "unclear." Four of these tweens did not clearly indicate whether or not the scenario bothered them. For example, Maria, grade 5, seemed to not notice or care what Jeff and friends were saying about their teacher. The remaining tween, Michael, grade 5, said that Jeff could get in trouble, but he would not take action, and then could not give a reason why not. Michael was the only participant in the Race/Religion Scenario who was an unclear bystander, providing a similar response.

DISCUSSION

In line with Kohlberg's (1984) theory of moral development, the findings from this study show that higher level moral reasoning through thinking processes like perspective-taking and using moral absolutes are connected to upstanding behavior in both scenarios. However, perspective-taking was also used by bystanders to justify their actions, which comports with findings from Haidt (2001) and Krebs et al. (1997). I did not find evidence that behavior varies by age, but gender and school affiliation did appear to play a role. Girls and students attending a middle school in a high-SES school district were somewhat more likely to be upstanders. Also, the rates of upstanding behavior were notably different between the two scenarios.

Digital abuse toward an individual teacher inspired considerably less upstanding than digital abuse toward a race or religious group. These findings provide support for the view that, in addition to moral reasoning, emotions and contextual factors contribute to the moral judgments and types of upstander or bystander tweens embody, as Kohlberg's critics argue (Haidt, 2001; Krebs et al., 1997).

Differences between Scenarios

The Teacher Scenario presents individual-level harm − the victim is: (1) a concretely specified individual, (2) someone likely known by the potential upstander/bystander personally, and (3) an adult and teacher. In contrast, the Race/Religion Scenario presents group-level harm − the victim: (1) is abstractly defined, possibly an individual or a large community; (2) could represent someone close to the potential upstander/bystander or entirely foreign; and (3) could represent people of any age or social position.

The dominant thinking process in the Teacher Scenario was perspective-taking. Both upstanders and bystanders took the opportunity to view the dilemma through the eyes of the teacher or of the perpetrator Jeff. However, in the Race/Religion Scenario, the dominant thinking process was using moral absolutes. Because the scenario focused on a potentially racist action by the bully, there was a strong emotional reaction among tweens stating that this was automatically wrong.

Besides emotion, one explanation for the difference in rates of upstanding and bystanding could be the contextual effect of social distance between the potential upstander/bystander and the perpetrators and victims. Social distance here refers to the relationship that the bystander has to the victim and/or the perpetrator in a scenario. The nature of the relationship colors the perspective of whether something is right or wrong or how serious it is. In the Teacher Scenario, the tweens' relationship is much closer to Jeff, the perpetrator, than it is to the teacher, the victim. Some bystanders cited the student norm of complaining about teachers. This might in part explain not only the tweens' not being bothered because it would be entertaining or simply "no big deal," but also the concern many had about their friend Jeff getting in trouble.

Social distance takes on a slightly different role in the Race/Religion Scenario. Although a few of the participants do want to give their friend the benefit of the doubt like in the Teacher Scenario, they are much less concerned about Jeff and more concerned about themselves or their friends

as possible targets in the Race/Religion Scenario. The hypothetical scenario left the certain race or religious group unspecified, but eight participants made it about their own race or religious group. Particularly notable, was the assumption that Jews would be the target. The Jewish faith as a victim was mentioned by four different research participants − three by saying that they are Jewish and would take particular offense and one expressing concern for Jewish friends of his. This trend of personalizing the scenario seems to work as a strategy for some to take an abstract threat and make it something concrete that the participant can respond to. Using a personal race or religion was core to several tweens' moral reasoning, including the discriminating bystanders as mentioned earlier.

The problem of maintaining Silverstone's (2003) "proper distance" online may also be a factor in how participants responded to the moral dilemmas. In the Teacher Scenario, bystanders may not feel the same sense of responsibility to the teacher being attacked by Jeff's online hate group that they would in a real-life context like a school. Conversely, in the Race/Religion Scenario, the target of the online attacks is an unspecified race or religious group, which the research participants themselves define in an attempt to seek out "social closeness," as discussed above; participants may also be relying on their a priori sense of responsibility to specific groups, which Silverstone argues is key to navigating ethics online where social proximity and neighborliness can be ambiguated.

Differences across Demographics

Recent studies have shown girls to be more involved with cyberbullying as witnesses to upstanding behavior (Lenhart et al., 2011), but also as perpetrators and victims (Kowalski & Limber, 2007). Marwick and boyd (2011) cite a long history in literature on relational aggression in their argument that "drama" on- and offline is largely the "cultural work" of girls.

The findings of the present study appear to confirm what Marwick and boyd (2011) saw in theirs. In the Teacher Scenario, girls were more likely to be bothered by Jeff's behavior as well as to take action. The results are even more striking in the Race/Religion Scenario, in which the only tweens not to be bothered or on the fence were boys. The specific reason given by these boys for not being bothered is that they were not the ones directly targeted. This seems consistent with Marwick and boyd's findings that if boys are not directly involved then the act of getting involved in a form of drama would be "girl stuff," that is, not masculine (*ibid.*).

Beyond the surface-level data, female participants also offered a few qualitatively different reasons for why they were bothered and different types of actions they would wish to take. Girls were the only ones to suggest that teachers shouldn't be abused for things that are simply part of their job. They were the only participants to use the words rude or disrespectful to describe their botherment with the Race/Religion Scenario. In both scenarios, girls were more likely to confront Jeff and to approach an adult about the situation than boys. Confrontation fits with another of Marwick and boyd's findings that girls' involvement in drama often entails performativity and/or attention-seeking behavior, which can be amplified online. Why girls are more comfortable approaching adults may be related to boys' preoccupation with forms of drama as entertainment, joking, or "punking" (*ibid.*, p. 6).

Looking at the findings for upstanding and bystanding across the three school districts, the results reflect responses we received to an earlier question in our interview protocol asking, "Has anyone spoken at your school about Internet safety or cyber-bullying?" Participants attending the suburban middle schools in School District 3 reported the highest rates of cyberbullying messages heard from educators at 66% (six of nine), closely followed by urban middle school students in School District 2 at 63% (12 of 19). This is compared to the paltry number of urban middle school students reporting messages from School District 1: 9% (1 of 11). These data are consistent with the higher rates of upstanding at School District 2 and School District 3 as compared to School District 1, lending additional support to the importance of social context in moral development and suggesting that cyberbullying curricula may be effective in helping scaffold moral reasoning and produce more upstanders to cyberbullying.

Implications for Educators

The majority of cyberbullying interventions in school seem to focus on stopping and/or punishing the bullies. Certainly, the recent anti-bullying bills passed in states like Massachusetts expect public schools to develop plans for doing so. However, cyberbullying is hard to detect without confiscating mobile phones and spying on social networks. Furthermore, simple punitive measures aimed at curbing behaviors that youth may consider to be drama rather than bullying could be ineffective or, worse, could reinforce the conditions for emotions, social factors, and lower-level moral reasoning that lead to self-serving and powerless bystanders. There is a need

to encourage youth to intervene when they see incidences of abuse play out in person and through their social networks. This means school messaging and curricula should focus on confronting harmful social norms, such as exaggerated assumptions about cyberbullying's prevalence, and scaffolding higher-level moral reasoning on which youths can draw when they confront real cases of cyberbullying.

Perkins, Craig, and Perkins (2010) found that middle school students in New Jersey believed bullying perpetration, victimization, and pro-bullying attitudes were far more prevalent than they in fact were. They staged an intervention at the school featuring posters aimed at correcting the perception of bullying norms among students and managed to reduce the perception of bullying as a norm in those schools reporting the highest rates of students recalling the posters.

Such passive school messaging campaigns are good first steps and should be complemented by curricula that pose a diverse set of cyberbullying dilemmas to youth. As Galbraith and Jones (1976) write in their handbook for adapting Kohlberg for the classroom, the keys to engaging students in instructive moral dilemmas are making sure both the problems posed and the experience of social and cognitive conflict are genuine, and then helping them see the inconsistencies in their own reasoning through scaffolding their current level of thought to the next higher level of thought processes; the goal being perspective-taking. Krebs et al. (1997) also recommended that scenarios closely match real life; students should be encouraged to share their own examples for discussion and debate and to attempt to justify their decisions to different audiences, resolving any inconsistencies in their moral reasoning through perspective-taking. This helps model the use of perspective-taking for upstanding behavior, rather than its use for *post hoc* justification behaviors that may include various types of bystanding.

Not all tweens, or even teens and adults, can be expected to act like Christina in the Race/Religion Scenario, who proposed organizing her friends to flood the social network with positive messages. But this idea, expressed by a 5th grader, represents a target to aim for by modeling thinking processes and strategies that can lead to upstanding behavior. Looking out for oneself and friends are natural reactions to any ethical dilemma, but when combined with information gathering behavior can better support perspective-taking and a disposition toward upstanding. Educators should consider how to model this type of engagement effectively. This should include using language that resonates with their students, ensuring that social exclusion and bullying are translated into "stereotyping,"

"drama," and "punking" if necessary. And if possible, dilemmas should be explored using the same social networks, text messages, and other technologies, or facsimiles thereof. Using actual digital media to navigate a variety of examples, with ample opportunities for educators to draw parallels and prompt reflection, could simulate the contextual factors of online participation and help orient students struggling to make moral judgments in the absence of "proper distance."

Limitations

Using hypothetical scenarios to predict actual mental models and future behavior can pose challenges (Jenkins, Bloor, Fischer, Berney, & Neale, 2010). Research has shown that there can be an "ethical gap" between what participants say they will do and what they actually do, and this gap is the result of real-life decision-making processes that are distinct from hypothetical dilemmas (Bazerman & Tenbrunsel, 2011; Woodzicka & LaFrance, 2001); this can also be inferred from Greene and Haidt's (2002) work linking emotion and intuition with moral judgment and action. In the present study, care was taken to ensure the verisimilitude of the hypothetical dilemmas; each one was pilot tested with tweens prior to formal interviewing. I therefore assume the primary responses to the scenarios are reasonable proxies for how a tween might think through a similar digital abuse scenario in real life.

Qualitative interview studies usually result in much smaller sample sizes than in quantitative studies like those discussed in the cyberbullying literature review. While our research team made an effort to recruit a demographically diverse sample, it is not possible to generalize the findings from the present study to a larger population of tweens. In particular, it is possible that the middle schools used for participant recruitment, which are all co-located in the same major US metropolitan area, are unusual in their curricula or climate with respect to digital ethics.

FUTURE RESEARCH

Additional scholarship is still needed to better understand how tweens participate online and the considerations they take when encountering digital abuse. In particular, more studies should closely examine tweens' real life

online practices. This may include ethnographic and experimental research that records exactly how tweens respond *in situ*. Similarly, the study of moral reasoning around digital abuse and cyberbullying can benefit from even more realistic and/or targeted hypothetical scenarios, for instance tailoring specific scenarios to study separately the behaviors and thinking processes of different genders. Such research should help educators to better understand young people's ethical thinking strategies and design interventions that push them toward the higher level moral thinking I found to be associated with upstanding. Future research should also track outcomes of school districts with different SES profiles, their approaches to cyberbullying messaging and curricula, and how they comply with new anti-bullying legislation across the country.

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