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Determinants of Self-reported Bystander Behavior in Cyberbullying Incidents amongst Adolescents¹

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Abstract. This study explores behavioral determinants of self-reported cyberbullying bystander behavior from a behavioral change theoretical perspective, to provide levers for interventions. Nine focus groups were conducted with 61 young-adolescents (aged 12-16y, 52% girls). Assertive defending, reporting to others, providing advice, and seeking support were most mentioned behaviors. Self-reported bystander behavior heavily depended on contextual factors and should not be considered a fixed participant role. Bystanders preferred to handle cyberbullying offline and in person, and comforting the victim was considered more feasible than facing the bully. Most prevailing behavioral determinants to defend or support the victim were low moral disengagement, that the victim is an in-group member and that the bystander is popular. Youngsters felt they received little encouragement from their environment to perform positive bystanding behavior, since peers have a high acceptance for not defending and perceived parental support for defending behavior is largely lacking. These results suggest multi-level models for cyberbullying research and interventions are needed.

¹ Part of these results were communicated at the 17th CyberPsychology and CyberTherapy conference

With much previous research into cyberbullying insufficiently founded in theoretical models, the employed framework of Integrative Model and Social Cognitive Theory may inspire future studies into bystander behavior.

Introduction

Despite the benefits social media bring for adolescents, they also carry risks by exposing them to potential cyberbullying. Cyberbullying is commonly defined as intentionally and repeatedly sending or posting electronic messages or images with hurtful content, to cause the victim harm^{1;2}. Cybervictimization rates among youngsters largely vary between 3% and 24%^{3;4}, although rates may be even higher as cyberbullying is often underreported by victims for fear of losing Internet privileges, shame or perceived lack of self-reliance^{3;5}. Seventh- and eighth-graders show the highest victimization rate³, consistent with the age at which social use of the Internet booms⁶. Being cyberbullied can be associated with several psychosocial problems such as depression, anxiety, stress and suicide attempts^{7;8}. Cyberbullying victims are confronted with these problems more often than victims of offline bullying while those victimized by both forms of bullying suffer the most^{7;8}.

In tackling offline bullying, bystanders or witnesses play an important role. Firstly, their social support can attenuate the harm caused to the victim^{9;10}. Secondly, schools where bystanders defend rather than stand-by passively are experienced as safer¹¹. Furthermore, defending the victim and not reinforcing the bully has been successful in reducing offline bullying^{12;13}. These findings have spurred health professionals to increase positive bystander behavior (i.e. assertive defending, reporting, comforting, not reinforcing the bully) as a way to decrease the harm and occurrence of offline bullying. Despite differences between offline bullying and cyberbullying^{1-4;7;14-18}, there is also substantial overlap in their participant roles and behavioral determinants¹⁹. Bystanders in cyberbullying have not yet been extensively studied. The scarce studies on cyberbullying show that, as in offline bullying, many adolescents have witnessed cyberbullying, albeit less often in cyberbullying via private messages, and that most bystanders witness passively and take no action²⁰⁻²².

When designing interventions which are evidence-based and effective in changing behavior, it is crucial to first understand the changeable determinants of this behavior and their importance, and next to select appropriate methods to change the main determinants^{23;24}. Behavior change theories such as the Integrative model (IM) and Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) are well-suited for this and were hence used to guide the current study²³. Combining theories is encouraged in health promotion to grasp the complexity of behavior change^{23;25}. IM merges the former Theory of Reasoned Action and Theory of Planned Behavior and states behavior is determined by intention, provided environmental factors and skills allow actual control. Intention is in its turn influenced by attitudes, norms and self-efficacy. The strength of this model for our study lies in its clear guidelines for determinant measurement and the suggested causal paths. SCT shares most determinants with IM but also provides methods for change, useful for later stages of intervention development. Furthermore, SCT has been applied to study moral behavior, documenting moral disengagement attitudes²⁶ which can avoid self-condemnation when behavior is not in accordance with moral values²⁷. These attitudes were previously studied in offline bullying literature on bystanders^{28;29} and in cyberbullying from the bully's perspective³⁰⁻³². Figure 1 shows the theoretical foundation for this present study. Table 1 shows an example of how these theories can be integrated. This theoretical framework is used here to explore determinants, but presently not to assess their causal paths or change methods which requires further quantitative verification.

To our knowledge, no study yet exists on theory-driven modifiable determinants of positive bystander behavior in cyberbullying. Two studies examined factors influencing bystander behavior in cyberbullying^{33;34}, but neither included theoretical determinants such as attitudes, self-efficacy or social norms. The purpose of this study was to explore self-reported cyberbullying bystander behavior and its determinants among adolescents aged 12-16y. In offline bullying, positive bystander behavior was influenced by affective empathy, social self-

efficacy, pro-victim attitudes, moral disengagement, coping skills, in-group norms, peer pressure, parental attachment and teacher beliefs^{29;35-40}. Since most offline bullying and cyberbullying research notes differences despite many similarities, we expect to find both parallels and disparities also for self-reported bystander behavior. These insights could help professionals in fine-tuning existing effective interventions against bullying to include all necessary elements for cyberbullying bystander behavior.

1. Method

A qualitative study was conducted using focus groups with young-adolescents.

1.1. Sample and procedures

Data was collected between May and December 2012, from a convenience sample of three secondary schools in [region information omitted]. All 7th, 8th and 9th graders received information and consent forms to take home. Fifty-three percent did not return forms, 27% did not provide consent. In total nine focus groups were conducted with youngsters for whom both youngster and parental consent was obtained. Groups were organized per grade but from mixed classes, with a minimum of two adolescents per class. All group members knew each other prior to the study. In one school, provided consent forms surpassed desired group size and here adolescents were randomly selected by the research assistant.

The study received ethics approval from the University Hospital of [region information omitted] Ethics Committee. No information on real-life cyberbullying experiences could be collected for ethical reasons, to avoid adolescents disclosing private information that could increase their vulnerability. If adolescents did disclose personal experiences, their feelings were acknowledged and the moderator suggested to talk privately after the group session. Only one case of offline victimization was disclosed. All groups were led by a clinical psychologist and a trained research assistant, during school hours with no school staff present.

School counselors were informed and available for support to participants, who also received coordinates for anonymous support. Conversations lasted on average 45 minutes and were audiotaped and transcribed. Detailed group information is shown in Table 2.

1.2. Measures

The interview guide was inspired by IM and SCT (see Table 3). Participants were asked not to talk about their own bully or victim experiences, but to focus on the perspective of a cyberbullying bystander. The interview guide was pilot tested for relevance and comprehensibility among 7th graders. Only minor textual modifications were made, the pilot group is therefore also included in the analysis.

1.3. Analysis

Data was analysed via Thematic Analysis using NVivo software. The codebook was based on the abovementioned theories. One group interview was independently rated by two coders, showing good interrater reliability (single measures ICC=0.87). Differences were discussed until full consensus was reached.

2. Results

In total sixty-one youngsters participated. Participant characteristics are shown in Table 4.

2.1. Self-reported behavior and behavioral intention

All adolescents said their defending behavior depended on the context, i.e. victim characteristics, bully characteristics and circumstances (see Table 5). Bystanders hence did not assume fixed participant roles.

Participants mentioned several options to react as a bystander, but remained vague in their practical execution. How to address the bully or how to change the bully's mind were not thoroughly discussed.

Defending can take several forms in adolescents' perceptions: talking to the bully (offline), asking for motives, providing advice, comfort or protection to the victim, telling friends, allowing the victim to join their group, using humor to get back, frightening the bully or physically retaliate. These are considered by most youngsters as appropriate reactions. Options they consider less are: reacting online, installing own Internet safety and talking to adults. Surprisingly, reinforcing the bully is not considered incompatible with positive bystander behavior. Several youngsters would reinforce the bullying online by commenting or liking it, whilst at the same time providing the victim comfort offline.

2.2. Behavioral determinants

Knowledge and exposure

All participants knew what constitutes cyberbullying. They differentiated between teasing (i.e. among friends, not meant to hurt, considered funny by the 'victim') and bullying. Knowledge on cyberbullying consequences for the victim was limited, mental health consequences were not mentioned. Mostly physical consequences of physical bullying were discussed. Although interviews and these results focus solely on cyberbullying, all youngsters discussed offline bullying as intertwined with cyberbullying.

Attitudes

Cyberbullies are considered losers or cowards; peers who reinforce the bullying are seen as fake friends or trying to fit in. Those who defend are considered "*popular*" or "*strong*".

Passive bystanding is rather acceptable, some would not mind if their friends did nothing if they themselves were victimized.

Prominent in all discussions were moral disengagement attitudes by blaming or dehumanizing the victim. Bullying is considered unfair when the bully picks on characteristics out of the victim's control (e.g. appearance, handicap), when the victim's family is dragged into it or when group norms are attacked (e.g. racist remarks). The 'loners' form an exception. By behaving differently they are considered to blame for their own behavior, which justifies bullying. These people do not deserve to be defended in the youngsters' opinion.

Most thought they risked getting bullied next by standing up for the victim. However, this did not deter them in intending to defend their friends. Several strategies were mentioned to lower this risk: to not embarrass the bully, address the bully offline, when he is alone, or to take friends along.

Outcome expectations for telling teachers were fairly negative: it takes too long and they are better off solving it themselves. Teachers prefer open discussions, while youngsters prefer to remain anonymous to avoid being seen as a squealer. Some teachers assume reporting bystanders had an active role in the bullying and blame those reporting the incident.

Norms

Most felt their teachers expected them to tell school staff about cyberbullying. Perceived expectations from parents were more diverse: some said thinking their parents expected them to stay out, to avoid personal risk. Others thought their parents wanted them to handle it themselves. They thought peers expected them to comfort their friends, rather than address the bully. They felt this assertive form of defending was difficult and if they were victimized, they would understand if their friends did not assertively defend them, as long as friends showed compassion and did not reinforce or assist the bully. But when a friend is popular or

strong, not defending others would make him a coward. Those perceived as popular or *'broad-shouldered'* should defend.

Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy differed by self-reported bystander response. Self-efficacy for confronting the bully was higher when social support could be expected, either by being popular, by clearly unacceptable circumstances or by pro-actively getting support (*'adding friends to the chat'*). Adolescents could not imagine telling their parents.

Facilitators

Repeated bullying or bullying involving serious physical threats were considered more severe and would encourage bystanders to tell an adult independent of the abovementioned contextual factors.

Table 6 shows quotes for the various behavioral determinants.

3. Discussion

This study explored self-reported cyberbullying bystander behavior and its determinants, to provide insights for interventions.

The themes confirm a connection between offline and cyberbullying: it often starts offline, continues online, but is preferably solved again offline. Similar determinants of self-reported bystander behavior were found as for offline bullying, with high moral disengagement attitudes for not defending, high importance of sticking up for in-group members, low self-efficacy for defending when not feeling supported and the significance of peer expectations and parental support.

The repeated nature of cyberbullying is important in the youngsters' perception, despite this not being considered crucial in the cyberbullying definition^{1;2}. While repetition may not be necessary to define cyberbullying, it does play a role in how severe bystanders consider the incident and what action they would take. As repeated bouts of cyberbullying do inflict more harm⁴, the youngsters' perception of repeated cyberbullying as more severe holds some ground.

Self-reported bystander behavior largely depended on the context and was less so a stable personality trait. The importance of who victim and bully are in adopting bystander behavior is consistent with recent findings³⁴. Contrary to offline bullying research assigning fixed roles of bystander types⁴¹, we could not identify 'defenders' versus 'reinforcers' or 'passive bystanders' given the significance of contextual factors. This ties in with some bullying studies viewing participant roles as a continuous dimension rather than strict role categories^{36;40;42;43}. The finding that everyone reports to defend their friends also raises questions on the peer nomination approach used to assign adolescents to a participant role in bullying. Someone with many friends will be more often nominated by his peers as a defender, while he may not necessarily always defend, e.g. if the victim is a loner. Since moral disengagement attitudes are used to excuse youngsters from defending the 'loners', future studies should investigate motives for supporting socially isolated adolescents.

Moral disengagement attitudes prevailed in our study, despite earlier reports of lower use of these in cyberbullying than in offline bullying^{30;31}. Cyberbullies feel less need for using disengaged justifications than offline bullies due to anonymity and little confrontation with the caused harm. The bystanders in our research however used many moral disengagement mechanisms. Possibly bystanders in cyberbullying, who have higher moral values and emotions than cyberbullies³⁰, feel more guilt and shame for not helping and need to use more

moral disengagement attitudes in order to avoid self-condemnation than cyberbullies do. Further research involving both cyberbullying bystanders and bullies could clarify this.

Of all bystander behavior forms, self-efficacy was highest for comforting the victim and was also what they would expect from friends if they were a victim. Since comforting the victim can buffer against negative effects of victimization⁴⁴, this should be promoted as a first stepping stone, to extend also to out-group members.

Self-reported ability for talking to the bully was high, but with possibly limited knowledge on how to do so effectively, suggesting low self-efficacy. With a preference for offline confrontation, successful bystander strategies from offline bullying⁴⁵ could help increase these skills in cyberbullying incidents.

Bystanders had a low intention to talk to adults. Teachers were thought to react inappropriately, which is consistent with earlier reports of perceived ineffective teacher reactions to cyberbullying reports, mainly due to their low social media literacy^{46;47}. Not only teacher knowledge, but also teacher support for bystander intervention has predicted defending behavior in offline bullying⁴⁸. This suggests that addressing teacher beliefs and knowledge in handling cyberbullying incidents, e.g. by teacher-student social networking⁴⁹, can increase positive peer interventions.

Knowledge on mental health impact of cyberbullying without physical threats was lacking and increasing this may encourage adolescents to defend for non-physical bullying types. As mental health problems associated with bullying are highest amongst cyberbullying victims^{7;8}, it is necessary to change adolescent beliefs about the harm that cyberbullying causes.

Youngsters recognized the risk of defending, but consider the risk of being isolated when not defending a friend as more threatening. Youngsters with few friends are indeed often the target of offline bullying, this was however not found for cyberbullying⁵⁰.

These results indicate that bystanders of cyberbullying report using similar behavioral options as in offline bullying, but apply these variably to the context. Positive bystander interventions thus hold promise to also tackle cyberbullying. Self-reported cyberbullying bystander behavior appears influenced by multiple behavioral determinants. Future studies and interventions on cyberbullying bystander behavior should therefore apply a multilevel scope on both intrapersonal, interpersonal and environmental factors rather than targeting one level when e.g. changing skills. Ecological models in health behavior change suggest larger and more sustained effects than single-level approaches⁵¹. Multilevel models against offline bullying exist in the form of whole-school approaches. With many determinants shared between offline and cyberbullying bystander behavior, existing multilevel bullying interventions could inspire interventions for cyberbullying bystanders. Although a few interventions designed to reduce offline bullying also reduced cyberbullying^{52;53}, these interventions need to be tweaked to include all relevant behavioral determinants for cyberbullying¹. Ideally, offline and cyberbullying interventions are integrated⁵⁴ to avoid a shifting occurrence from one bullying type to another⁵⁵. Our findings indicate that interventions to increase positive bystander behavior in cyberbullying should include modeling this behavior in different contexts, making teachers more social media savvy, increasing perceived parental support for bystanders and showing bystanders the harm cyberbullying inflicts. Especially for adolescents who find themselves outside of a close circle of friends, peers should be encouraged to help.

This study was guided by behavioral prediction and change theories. Tokunaga's review highlighted that cyberbullying research often lacks foundation in these theories while they are direly needed to advance cyberbullying understanding². Recent progress was made in a study applying the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) to cyberbullying perpetration⁵⁶. Some criticism however exists in applying TPB to bullying behavior since the model assumes

volitional control². It also understates affective factors²³. Unlike TPB, the Integrative Model does take these elements into account.

Applied to bystander behavior, the Integrative Model yielded rich and detailed data in our study and underlined the importance of contextual factors. Considering the role of contextual, environmental (e.g. parental supervision) and affective factors (e.g. anxiety, anger) for victim and bully behavior as well^{1;2}, the Integrative Model may lend itself not only to studying bystander behavior but also to advance research on other types of cyberbullying involvement. This warrants further research attention.

And lastly, understanding behavior is not an end-goal in itself but serves to create effective interventions. We strongly advocate the combined use of behavioral prediction theories, such as IM, with theories that provide methods for behavioral change such as SCT.

To conclude, our study showed similar bystander behavior in cyberbullying as in offline bullying but heavily dependent on contextual factors rather than reflecting a stable trait. Moral disengagement attitudes prevailed, and perceived environmental support for defending was low. Multilevel interventions guided by well-chosen behavioral prediction and change theories appear best-suited to change cyberbullying bystander behavior.

Strengths and limitations

This study was to our knowledge the first to explore adolescent views on bystander behavior in cyberbullying from a behavioral change theoretical perspective, with the aim to provide levers for effective interventions.

The study explored perceptions and not actual behavior or efficacy of suggested actions.

This was a qualitative study and the conclusions that can be drawn are limited by this non-representative method. These results will need to be confirmed by further quantitative

research to test the conceptual model, assess the determinants' weight and prioritize these for interventions, as is common when using behavioral change theories.

There may have been some social desirability bias. Attempts were however made to reduce this bias by emphasizing anonymity to the participants. As the participants felt comfortable in admitting some not-socially desirable behavior, we suspect social desirability bias not to play a significant role in this study.

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Table 1. Illustrative example of a potential integration between Social Cognitive Theory and Integrative Model

Cyberbullying content	Determinant (Integrative Model)	Change method (Social Cognitive Theory)
<i>Confronting the bully</i> “Adolescents experience relatively low confidence in their own skills to confront the bully, they do not see themselves capable of doing so in every situation“	<i>Low self-efficacy</i> Low perceived behavioral capability by the person	<i>Enactive Mastery Experience</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adolescents are taught how to safely confront the bully and next will perform this new skill in simulated settings (e.g. in role-play or videogames). Feedback will help to increase competence in situations of gradually increasing difficulty level. By actively experiencing mastery in confronting the bully in simulations, self-efficacy to perform this skill in real-life can be enhanced.

Table 2. Group characteristics

	Number participants	Boy/girl ratio	Age range in years	Mean age $\pm$ SD
Grade 7				
Group 1 (pilot)	4	2/2	12-12	12.60 $\pm$ 0.24
Group 2	5	1/4	12-13	12.91 $\pm$ 0.70
Group 3	10	8/2	12-14	13.17 $\pm$ 0.57
Grade 8				
Group 4	7	2/5	13-15	14.44 $\pm$ 0.73
Group 5	9	5/4	13-14	13.67 $\pm$ 0.42
Group 6	6	4/2	13-15	14.06 $\pm$ 0.98
Grade 9				
Group 7	6	2/4	14-16	15.68 $\pm$ 0.68
Group 8	6	2/4	14-17	15.19 $\pm$ 0.95
Group 9	8	3/5	13-15	15.20 $\pm$ 0.78

Table 3. Interview guide

	Topics	Questions
Warm-up	Introduction	<p>“Today you are our experts on how youngsters use social media”</p> <p>My name is <researcher’s name>. We don’t know each other and it would really help me if you could write down your name for me on a card. But first, what about you, do you know each other? Is there anyone in the group who is new to you, who you haven’t met before?</p>
	Warm-up questions	Who has a mobile phone / facebook account? What do you use this for?
	Setting the context	“Although Facebook, MSN, texting can be a lot of fun, sometimes it can go wrong, when things are sent out or posted that are hurtful to someone. You sometimes hear about this and they call it cyberbullying”
Focusing questions	Focus on Bystander perspective	<p>“We now want to talk about cyberbullying when you see this happening to someone else, so not when you would experience it yourself as a victim”</p> <p>“OK, this may be how you would react when it happens to you, when you are bullied, but what would you do/how would you feel if you would see this happening to someone else?”</p> <p>“And this is how you feel/how you would react when you see this happening to someone else?”</p>
Background variables	Knowledge and exposure	<p>Who has ever heard of cyberbullying?</p> <p>What do you think this refers to, which forms exist, can you give me some examples of what you call cyberbullying? Which types of cyberbullying have you witnessed yourself?</p> <p>When you witnessed this, what did you think the sender meant? How did you think the receiver took it, how did he feel?</p>
	Past witnessing behavior	<p>When you witnessed cyberbullying, what happened next? Did anyone react? What did they do? Why do you think they reacted this way? Why do you think someone didn’t react?</p> <p>What did you do yourself? Why?</p>

Behavioral determinants	Norms	<p>How do you think the sender had expected you to react? What did you think the receiver expect? How do you think your friends expect you to react when something like this happens? And your teachers? And your parents?</p> <p>What would your friends do?</p> <p>Has anyone ever experienced being pressurized into reacting in a certain way to cyberbullying? How do you handle this?</p> <p>If next time you witness someone being bullied, you would send a message to the bully to let him know this is not cool / you would comfort the victim / report it to others, what would happen? How would the bully react? How would your friends react? How would the one being bullied react?</p>
	Attitudes	<p>How do you feel about cyberbullying?</p> <p>Do you feel this is OK? Are there certain circumstances in which it is OK?</p> <p>What do you think is the best way to react when witnessing cyberbullying?</p> <p>How do you feel about people who witness it and do nothing / about people who join in, for example by forwarding it, by laughing, liking it, or encouraging the bully / about people who report it to teachers or parents / about people who stand up for the one who is being bullied?</p> <p>If you would send a message to the bully to let him know this is not cool / you would comfort the victim / report it to others, what would happen? Would this have positive / negative consequences? Which would you expect? How do you feel about these consequences? Do you think that by how you react the bullying could stop or get worse? What makes you think so?</p>
	Self-efficacy	<p>Do you feel you yourself would be able to do this?</p> <p>What restricts you from standing up for the one being bullied / comforting the one being bullied / reporting the cyberbullying?</p> <p>What could support you in doing this? What do you need to be able to react this way? Support from school, friends, parents, other, ...?</p>

	Behavioral intention	If you would see anything like this occur in the coming week, what would you do?
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Table 4. Participant characteristics

	Total (n=61)
Gender	
<i>Boys</i>	n=29 (48%)
<i>Girls</i>	n=32 (52%)
Age	M=14,16 (SD=,70)
Type of education	
<i>Vocational</i>	n=11 (18%)
<i>Technical</i>	n=26 (43%)
<i>General</i>	n=24 (39%)
Family Affluence	
<i>Low</i>	n=3 (5%)
<i>Medium</i>	n=17 (28%)
<i>High</i>	n=41 (67%)
Country of birth	
Belgium	n=53
Abroad	n=8

Table 5. Differentiated defending behaviour of cyberbullying bystanders

	BULLY		CIRCUMSTANCES		
	<i>Popular</i>	<i>Not popular</i>	<i>Unclear</i>	<i>Fair</i>	<i>Unfair</i>
VICTIM <i>Friend</i>	Always defend, regardless of the bully, regardless of circumstances				
<i>Acquaintance</i>	Look for more information on circumstances	Defend, as there is no risk that the bully is supported by friends	Do nothing (passive bystanding or ignoring)	Do nothing (passive bystanding or ignoring)	Defend, as everyone else will agree
<i>A loner</i>	Never defend, do nothing				
<i>Popular</i>	Defend, because there is a higher chance they are not the only defender in this case				

Table 6. Quotes from group discussions

<p>Knowledge and exposure</p> <p><i>“Whether something is cyberbullying depends on if it comes from a good friend...and they’ve had a fight..., or if it is meant as a joke and she puts it on Facebook or if someone really wants to bully you with it” (girl, first grade)</i></p> <p><i>“There was a girl and her grandfather had cancer and this other girl started writing insults and saying ‘your grandad’s gonna die’ and so on – that was worse [than other cyberbullying incidents] (girl, third grade)</i></p>
<p>Past witnessing behavior</p> <p><i>“I interfered and I got into trouble myself. I said –stop, this isn’t nice for that person, and then [the bully] started calling me bad names, and then I didn’t say anything after that, but it stopped anyway”(girl, second grade)</i></p> <p><i>“I do nothing because sometimes these are things that aren’t real, it’s just to play though” (boy, second grade)</i></p>
<p>Attitudes</p> <p><i>[Cyberbullies are] “losers who don’t have a real life”(boy, first grade) ; “cowards who don’t dare to say it to my face” (several), “they do it because they are jealous” (girl, third grade); “they do it to feel better” (girl, third grade)</i></p> <p><i>“When you’re a foreigner or you’re not pretty..., and you are bullied, you can’t do anything</i></p>

about that. But if you are not clean or act stupid towards other people, well, then it's your own fault" (girl, first grade)

"If someone calls a person fat and ugly on Facebook, and it's true, this person is really fat and ugly, then it's not bullying"(girl, second grade)

[Reinforcers are] "not real friends" (several mentions); "hypocrites, stupid, fake" (boy, first grade); "they don't realise that it is hurtful, they think it's funny" (boy, third grade); "they want to fit in and be accepted"(girl, third grade)

"If you're going to defend someone and you are not popular, then you will be bullied as well" (girl, second grade)

"If it's someone you don't know well [who gets bullied], I would do nothing because you don't know how they would react. They might tell you not to interfere if you do try to help" (girl, second grade)

Self-efficacy

"I can't imagine telling my parents, that is weird, [the victim] should tell his own parents" (girl, second grade)

"When [the bully] is mega popular and is a couple of grades ahead of you, and if you say something to them, then the whole school would know, yeah, then I wouldn't dare to say anything to them [to defend the victim]" (girl, first grade)

Norms

"I think my parents would say: well, that is your problem to deal with" (girl, second grade)

"My mom always tells me not to get bothered and to stay out...for my own safety" (girl, second grade)

"We are not in grammar school and need to stand up for ourselves"(girl, third grade)

"If [the victim] is a friend, a cousin or family, then my parents would tell me to stop it" (boy, second grade)

"I would not tell the principal because [the victim] would not want this, she would get into more trouble, they would think she is weak and she would get bullied more, I don't want my friend to be upset with me" (girl, first grade)

Behavioral intention

“There is someone I know a little, and he is weak and the other one who says things to him is strong, and if he wouldn’t dare to say anything back, I would defend him. I would say, don’t be afraid, if he does anything to you, I will help you” (boy, second grade)

“It depends on how you see it and how you interpret it, there’s always two stories going around...I first want to know more about what happened” (boy, second grade)

“Defending in cyberbullying, it depends on who it is and how bad it is. If it’s a good friend and it’s really bad, like threats of ‘I’m going to beat you up’, I would step in, but not for someone I don’t know” (boy, second grade)

“I would tell [the victim] to ignore the bully and look for people to hang out with people that [the victim] gets on well with” (boy, first grade)

“I would react via chat, because it’s personal, no-one else has any business with it, because otherwise the others might get angry with you” (girl, first grade)