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EARLY ADOLESCENT GIFTED AND TALENTED STUDENTS AND THEIR  
EXPERIENCE WITH BULLYING

by

William T. Allen Jr.

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree

of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

Education  
(Curriculum and Instruction)

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Logan, Utah

2020

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## ABSTRACT

Early Adolescent Gifted and Talented Students and Their Experience with Bullying

by

William T. Allen Jr., Master of Educational Administration

University of Utah, 1995

Major Professor: Dr. Scott L. Hunsaker  
Department: Teacher Education and Leadership

When comparing high-achieving early adolescent gifted and talented (GT) students to the mainstream population, contradictions between quantitative research findings pointed to qualitative differences as a possible answer to distinctions in bullying responses. Although GT students (GTs) experience bullying in much higher frequencies, they have comparable proportions of trauma internalization, suicide ideation, and suicide. Using a qualitative case study method and interpreting resultant data through the application of personality theory, the conclusions indicated possible reasons for such differences—GTs in this study seemed to cope in their own unique ways. With a concentration on bullying experiences and reflections on those occurrences, these GTs provided information concerning both coping differences and what they believe schools could do to improve antibullying efforts.

To help reveal how GT students were coping, 204 sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-grade GTs at Washington Middle School were invited to participate in a research study

that sought to ascertain bullying experiences. After parent informed consent, data gathering began with a student online survey. To determine which students were the best informants; quality, quantity, self-reflective capability, and answer clarity, resulted in the selection of six cases. For each case, three confidential interviews were scheduled. For the first interview, general prompting questions included, “What did you think of your bullying experiences?” “Why did you respond the way you did?” “How did that experience make you feel?” “How did you make yourself feel better?” And, “What do you think the school can do to help?” The second interview encouraged each student to clarify his or her previous answers. During the second interview, each student was also given a journey map assignment. Each student utilized the journey map to illustrate his or her bullying history. For the third interview, the journey-map helped further clarify and develop previous understandings.

Viewed through the lens of personality theory, research interpretations from this study offered new insights concerning how and why these GTs responded to bullying the way they did. These conclusions may help in the design of innovative antibullying programs in the future.

(264 pages)

## PUBLIC ABSTRACT

## Early Adolescent Gifted and Talented Students and Their Experience with Bullying

William T. Allen, Jr.

Bullying, in all its forms (e.g., verbal, physical, cyber, social ostracism), is a continual problem in public schools. It exacerbates the painfully high suicide rate among early adolescent students, especially in the western U.S., with some evidence showing distinctions within the academically advanced gifted and talented (GT) cohort. Research shows GT students (GTs) are bullied at nearly double the rate of the mainstream population. Yet, quantitative statistics indicate GTs and non-GTs suffer comparable rates of trauma internalization, suicide ideation, and suicide. Some quantitative differences do start to appear with further personality distinctions. This points to a possibility that qualitative dissimilarities may best explain why GTs either respond similarly or differently to ill treatment.

Using case studies, the findings of this investigation suggested how and why six distinctive GTs coped with bullying behaviors. The results indicated the potential need for more nuanced antibullying approaches that focus on the unique needs of each student, not the typical one-size-fits-all consequence-oriented school-wide program. Past research has shown such programs having limited effectiveness in their attempts to ameliorate bullying behaviors. Essentially, it may be time to try a more student-centered personality approach to the bullying problem in U.S. public schools.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This study was done in a western state with roughly double the adolescent suicide rate than the overall U.S. When considering the effects of bullying on suicidal ideation in schools, it became imperative to find a different theoretical lens to help bring forth deeper student insights. As one of the most bullied student groups, the gifted and talented (GTs) provided these perceptions. The theoretical lens was Dabrowski's theory of positive disintegration (TPD). As an indispensable, and, because of its complexity, an oftentimes ill-advisedly discarded approach, the challenge was to communicate student perceptions, through the TPD lens, to parents, educators, counselors, and administrators, in an understandable and usable format. This task was difficult. It required the experience and profound expertise of educational psychologists at Utah State University. Specifically, I would like to formally thank Dr. Scott L. Hunsaker for his time, constructive criticism, and patient support throughout the 2-year research process. I would also like to thank Dr. Suzanne Jones for her challenging critiques and queries—helping provide key directions to the study. I am also indebted to Drs. Sherry Marx, Ryan Knowles, and Tyler Renshaw for their skill, pointed criticism, and research suggestions.

On a personal note, I want to give special thanks to my mother and my sisters for their help and encouragement throughout my doctoral training, publishing, and dissertation research. Throughout all the challenges, they said I could do it, and, without their support, I do not think I could have done it.

William T. (Tom) Allen Jr.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Bullying is a harmful social display in which students are emotionally and/or physically harmed (Bosworth, Espelage & Simon, 1999; Kohut, 2007; Olweus, 1993, 1995). Bullying in schools typically involves three roles—perpetrator, victim, and bystander. In school settings, perpetrators are students who oppress other students—the victims (Craig & Pepler, 2003; Kohut, 2007; Olweus, 1993, 1995). Bystanders are students who watch the victimization occur.

Craig and Pepler (2003) define bullying as “negative physical or verbal actions that have hostile intent, cause distress to victims, are repeated over time, and involve a power differential between bullies and their victims” (p. 577). Peterson and Ray (2006a) signify bullying as “aggressive behavior with potential to cause physical or psychological harm to the recipient” (p. 148). The expressions of bullying involve “name-calling, teasing about appearance, pushing/shoving, and beating up” (p. 155). Bullying behavior stems from a need for bullies to overpower or control others based on human differences (Kohut, 2007; Olweus, 1995; Peterson & Ray, 2006a; Zhang, Gong, Wang, Wu, & Zhang, 2002). Bullying socially manifests as verbal abuse, physical mistreatment, cyber oppression, social ostracism, or rumors concerning dissimilarities (Olweus, 1995; Peterson & Ray, 2006a; P. K. Smith et al., 2008; Wang, Ignnotti, & Luk, 2012; Zhang et al., 2002). According to Bosworth et al. (1999), “Impulsivity, feelings of depression, and sense of belonging in school” (p. 357) denote the main reasons for bullying. If unconstrained, it threatens both early adolescent psychological well-being (Perren,

Dooley, Shaw, & Cross, 2010) and intellectual growth (Bosworth et al., 1999; Kohut, 2007; Peterson & Ray, 2006a). In addition, a lifetime of psychological problems (e.g., post-traumatic stress, anxiety, depression, suicide ideation, and suicide) can be difficult for victims (Crick, 1995, 1997; Litweller & Brausch, 2013; Mynard, Joseph, & Alexander, 2000; Olweus, 1993; Turner, Exum, Brame, & Holt, 2013).

National statistics from 2005 indicated that 28.27% of secondary students experienced at least one act of bullying in school, decreasing to 20.8% in 2013 (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). From this, bullying appears to be going down. However, Bosworth et al. (1999), in a study of 558 urban early adolescents, stated that 81% of student perpetrators reported within a 30-day period at least one act of bullying responsibility. Even though this study is dated, it still raises the possibility, with such a high perpetration rate, that students in general tend not to report all their bullying. Other research has suggested seventh and eighth grade gifted and talented (GT) students have faced additional bullying. Peterson and Ray (2006a) indicated that GT students (GTs) endured nearly double the bullying, with 67% experiencing at least one act of bullying over nine years of education, with “almost half of all participants and more than half of all gifted males [being] bullied in Grade 6, and two in five gifted females experienc[ing] some kind of bullying in middle school” (p. 160).

While the experience of bullying in general has been both quantitatively and qualitatively well-studied, the experience of GT students has not. Researchers in GT education have posited that, along with evident ability differences, GT students have distinctive emotionally intensive reactions to social experience (Dabrowski, 2016/1964;

Daniels & Piechowski, 2009; Mendaglio, 2008a, 2012). This creates the possibility that GT students experience bullying in ways different from the general population. This will be the focus of this research study.

### **Statement of Purpose**

Because it appears that gifted students experience bullying more frequently and with greater intensity than the general population of students, this study seeks to provide a deeper personal explanation of the bullying experience of gifted students, both to understand their experiences as reported by the students, but also to understand the intensity of the experiences using a theory of emotional giftedness that specifically addresses such intensity. That theory is the theory of positive disintegration originally developed by Dabrowski (2016/1964). Researchers in the field of gifted education still actively investigate the theory of positive disintegration (TPD; Beduna & Perrone-McGovern, 2016; De Bondt & Van Petegem, 2017; Thomson & Jaque, 2016) to address questions of intensity of GT socioemotional experience.

TPD offers a personality growth framework that has been used to study many social-emotional issues pertaining to gifted students, but rarely bullying (Allen, 2017a). Further, Peterson and Ray (2006b) recommended the application of “developmental markers related to making positive changes” (p. 266) to research about bullying—a recommendation that has not been implemented as of yet. Analysis of the developmental markers suggested by TPD, in relation to how individual students manage bullying outcomes, would add important knowledge to our understanding of the intensities with

which GTs experience the bullying that occurs.

Further, from a pragmatic point of view, it would do little to ameliorate conditions for students being bullied at school, gifted or not, if some effort were not also made to understand how students, in this case, gifted students, would suggest addressing the issue. As a result, the students in this study will be given the opportunity to provide suggestions.

### **Research Questions**

The research questions for this investigation were as follows.

1. How do early adolescent GT students perceive their bullying experiences, either as victims or perpetrators?
2. What do early adolescent GT students who have experienced bullying believe educators can do to help them feel safe from bullying?

## **CHAPTER II**

### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

The available literature on bullying that involves gifted students provides data on prevalence and its reasons and outcomes. While bullying is experienced by students at all ability levels, it appears to occur more frequently among gifted populations than amongst the general student population (Peterson & Ray, 2006a). Further, while differences among students frequently lead to bullying, whether resulting from ethnicity, class, or gender issues, for example—all of which are worthy of study—gifted students are unique in that their bullying experiences are based on differences related to their advanced academic or intellectual abilities, which have been shown to contribute to the greater intensity with which GTs experience bullying. In making this claim, it should be understood that researchers did not always specify how the GTs in their study were identified as gifted. In general, the GTs were identified based on the criteria of the school they attended or the program in which they were enrolled. Finally, while no specific intervention has been created that addresses specifically the bullying of GTs, even GTs experience the outcomes of more generalized programs. Each of these points will be discussed in this literature review.

#### **Prevalence of Early Adolescent Gifted and Talented Bullying**

Peterson and Ray (2006a) reported the bullying experiences over nine years of education of 432 GT eighth graders across 11 states. These students reported experiencing bullying in Grades 6 through 8 at nearly two times the rate of more typical



students. That is, a total of 67% of the gifted students reported being bullied at some time in their school experience. The prevalence of each bullying type is reported in Table 1, which shows that the most prevalent type of bullying experienced by early adolescent GTs was name-calling, followed by teasing about their appearance, intelligence, and grades. In addition, 41% of the GT eighth graders in this study reported worrying about violence at school every day.

Table 1

*Percentages of Types of Bullying at Each Grade Level Reported by Gifted Eighth Graders (n = 423)*

Bullying types by grade	5 <sup>th</sup> grade (%)	6 <sup>th</sup> grade (%)	7 <sup>th</sup> grade (%)	8 <sup>th</sup> grade (%)
Name-calling	32	35	33	32
Teasing				
Appearance	21	24	23	23
Intelligence	13	17	18	19
Grades	14	18	19	18
Family	4	5	5	6
Social status	4	4	5	6
Knocking books	4	10	10	11
Damaging possessions	4	4	5	5
Taking possessions	3	3	4	5
Threatening, intimidating	1	1	2	3
Hitting/punching	7	7	8	9
Pushing/shoving	11	13	12	11
Beating up	7	12	11	11

*Note.* Adapted from “Bullying and the Gifted: Victims, Perpetrators, Prevalence, and Effects” by J.S. Peterson and K.E. Ray, 2006, *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 50, p. 156.

To study the impact of bullying, Peterson and Ray (2006a) had GTs complete a questionnaire on which they reported the extent to which bullying affected them on a response continuum from “a lot” or “not at all.” Peterson and Ray found that students

were “bothered a lot” (p. 156) when teased about appearance at Grades 6 and 7 ( $p < .001$ ), being teased about intelligence at Grade 7 ( $p < .01$ ), physical bullying and being beaten up at Grades 7 ( $p < .01$ ) and 8 ( $p < .001$ ), and being threatened in Grade 8 ( $p < .001$ ). In addition, Peterson and Ray conducted a factor analysis that generated a three-factor structure, with all types of bullying loading on a factor they labeled *general bullying*, which explained 35% of the variance; *teasing about ability*, which added an additional 10%; and *teasing about socioeconomic attributes*, which added an additional 9%. Because these data come from retrospective self-report, caution should be exercised in relying too heavily on the GT students’ incidence reports, especially those reported for primary grades, because of issues with time-period and recall accuracy and subjective motivation to appear cooperative in the research context (Pratt, McGuigan, & Katsev, 2000). Nonetheless, the Peterson and Ray data point to a tendency that eighth grade GTs believe that they were teased more frequently about their advanced abilities at the middle school level than at the elementary level and that this teasing about their abilities had greater impact on them than the more prevalent name-calling. This is a situation that would be unique to GTs.

One manifestation of bullying is social ostracism (Kohut, 2007; Olweus, 1995). Ogurlu (2015), in a study of 94 middle school GT students attending a summer enrichment program, examined social ostracism among gender and grade levels. Using the Ostracism Experience Scale for Adolescents, a validated self-report instrument, Ogurlu assessed early adolescent GT perceptions of social ostracism. The evaluation covered three categories. The first two were *ignored by* and *excluded from*. The third

category was *total ostracism*. The Ostracism Experience Scale for Adolescents is a Likert-type scale with five measurement levels ranging from never - 1 to always - 5. For each category, high scores indicated elevated ostracism rates.

Using the Mann-Whitney  $U$  and Kruskal-Wallis  $H$  tests, Ogurlu performed statistical tests for gender and grade-level. Between genders revealed no statistical difference for total ostracism ( $U = 926.50, p > .05$ ), ignored by ( $U = 1015.00, p > .05$ ), and excluded from ( $U = 969.00, p > .05$ ). GT boys did have a higher average in comparison to GT girls. However, it was not statistically significant. Regarding grade level, the application of the Kruskal-Wallis  $H$  test suggested a dissimilarity. Total ostracism and ignored by scores were not statistically significant ( $p > .05$ ). Nevertheless, the excluded from sub-score indicated important differences among grade levels ( $X^2(3) = 8.19, p < .05$ ). Eighth graders scored higher on excluded from than seventh and sixth graders.

Ogurlu (2015) utilized Spearman coefficient correlations to determine significant relationships between social ostracism and intellectual development. Using the ostracism data and Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children, Ogurlu found a statistically significant correlation between students' high intelligence scores and total ostracism  $r = .264, p < .05$  and excluded from  $r = .257, p < .05$ , but not with the ignored by subscales  $r = .178, p > .05$ ). It would appear that there may be a link between intelligence and social ostracism, but the relatively small correlations found in the study have to be taken tentatively.

The Ogurlu study provided two conclusions. First, the data indicated social

ostracism was higher for eighth grade GTs. Second, total ostracism and social exclusion significantly correlated with high GT intellectual development. This means, as measured by the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children, the more intelligent the GT student the more she or he likely experienced social ostracism. In the Peterson and Ray (2006a) study, eighth graders experienced bullying at about the same rate as seventh and sixth graders. Thus, Ogurlu's finding seems to contradict the Peterson and Ray result.

However, Peterson and Ray did not include ostracism as a form of bullying in their study. Further, Peterson and Ray found that the group most concerned with being bullied on a daily basis was the eighth graders. The Ogurlu study also raises the possibility that, had ostracism been included as a form of bullying in the Peterson and Ray study, the percentage of students who experienced bullying may have been even higher than the reported 67%.

### **Reasons Gifted and Talented Students are Bullied**

As reported, Peterson and Ray (2006a) identified two factors of teasing experienced by early adolescent GTs. These were teasing about their abilities and teasing about socioeconomic attributes. Both are expressions of broader social issues that have been demonstrated to lead to bullying behaviors; individual differences and anti-intellectualism.

#### **Individual Differences**

Human differences sometimes incite bullying aggression. This is the case for students with gifted-level abilities as for other differences (Allen, 2017b; Howard, 2006;

Kumashiro, 2000). Based on her more than 25 years of experience working with adolescent GTs who entered college early, Robinson (2008) declared:

In one or more cognitive/academic domains, [GT students'] development is advanced. Aside from this characteristic, however, they are as diverse as any group one can find—diverse in ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds and experiences, diverse in family composition and family dynamics, and diverse in aptitudes and creativity. They are just as diverse in motivation, energy, confidence, temperament, and social skills. Finally, they are diverse in the asynchronies they exhibit—some advanced in all cognitive domains (though seldom equally advanced in all) and others in only a few; some exhibiting maturity in social skills and emotional self-regulation at a level commensurate with their mental age and many somewhere between mental age (MA) and chronological age (CA) in this respect; some only age-appropriate in fine and/or gross motor skills; and so on. (p. 33)

Robinson is not saying that *only* GTs experience this diversity, but that *even* GTs experience this diversity.

Gifted students, like others, can be targeted for bullying based on any human distinction, but are particularly vulnerable due to differences related to ability. Moreover, Robinson (2008) added that within certain classroom/school circumstances, GT students may go through related socioemotional and psychological issues wherein they:

- Experience loneliness as a product of the struggle to find friends who share aspirations;
- Pursue grownup friends who understand the social difficulties of high aptitude;
- Remove themselves from an unproductive social scene, giving the idea that they are unfriendly;
- Experience difficulties settling ambitions with their own subcultures that do not respect high academic achievement;
- Deal with dull classroom life in negative ways such as displaying impatience, touchiness with other students, as well as daydreaming; and,
- Experience despair about the future. (pp. 36-37)

Along with human differences and ability distinctions; loneliness, self-isolation, social isolation, subculture disrespect, and personal irritability, leave GTs even more vulnerable to bullying from their same-age peer group (Kohut, 2007; Peterson & Ray, 2006a).

### **Anti-Intellectualism**

Delisle and Galbraith (2015) studied the concerns of gifted middle school students and identified eight issues these students had with being gifted. One of the issues gifted students listed was being teased for their abilities. Thus, anti-intellectualism has played a part in the bullying gifted students experience. The idea of anti-intellectualism was first introduced by Hofstadter (1963), who stated:

The common strain that binds together the attitudes and ideas which I call anti-intellectual is a resentment and suspicion of the life of the mind and of those who are considered to represent it; and a disposition constantly to minimize the value of that life. (p. 7)

In the face of intellectual advancements in science, medicine, philosophy, math, engineering, and social/psychological/physical sciences, respect for intelligence in U.S. society has been “subject to cyclical fluctuations” (p. 6). That is, scholarly advancements continue to progress over time resulting in constant resistance manifesting as skepticism and ambivalence.

Gallagher (1986) corroborated this idea in his discussion of “our love-hate affair with gifted children” (p. 47). For instance, in times of national crises, the government supports programs that address the specialized educational needs of gifted students. At other times, the belief that gifted students “will make it on their own” (p. 47) prevails and little government assistance results. Howley, Howley, and Pendarvis (1995, 2017) argued

that such ambivalent vacillation has resulted in inconsistent support for intellectual endeavors in public schools and classrooms, as well as for GT education. In their commentary on American schools, they noted that school personnel, including faculty and students, have favored emotion over intellect, happiness over achievement, and social luxuries over academic accomplishments—foundations of an anti-intellectual environment.

In a study of ancient and traditional cultures, Hunsaker (1995) found an ambivalent attitude toward gifted individuals as one of five themes about cultural beliefs related to giftedness. Building on Gallagher's (1986) idea of the love-hate relationship with giftedness, Hunsaker pointed out that this attitude can be directed toward their knowledge, their perceived power, or their behaviors. For example, when gifted students contribute potentially obscure information to class discussion, other students may perceive this as showing off and use it as an excuse for bullying the gifted student. As a counter example, a gifted student, acting as a bully, may use his or her advanced vocabulary to mock another student. This would run counter to the priorities of emotion, happiness, and social luxuries identified by Pendarvis et al. (1995/2017). Hunsaker also explained that the terminology used to identify gifted students often is used pejoratively when gifted students are bullied by others. Attempts to change terminology to reduce such bullying are only likely to increase the repertoire of terms bullies can use.

For example, Lecklider (2011) traced the development of the word "egghead." Egghead was initially a positive intellectual term on the onset of the Cold War, but referred to only White intellectual men. Then, the term became negative as intellectual

opportunities expanded to more disenfranchised Americans who promoted cultural change. In turn, those who supported change became ideologically suspect (e.g., pro-Communism) when the term egghead was applied to them. Now, anti-intellectuals, who view egghead as a negative term referring to intellectuals who cannot be trusted, support limitations on educational opportunities (e.g., money invested in GT education or affirmative action). Middle school students, hearing the political discussions on these issues, may view this as license to name-call.

Mazo (2011) described the “know-nothing” (p. 238) appeal to the anti-intellectual masses of the modern political “race to the bottom,” (p. 239) as many political operatives, in their quest for power, have denied and continue to repudiate science (e.g., climate change, evolution, and vaccinations). In such a political environment, middle school students may again find license to tease students who understand and try to explain the science behind such issues. Subjects the anti-intellectual masses tend to view as controversial.

If Lecklider (2011) and Mazo (2011) are to be believed, anti-intellectualism persists. Lecklider, for example, concerning the disconnection of the so-called egghead from American popular culture, stated that “he [i.e., egghead] could manage nothing more productive than to take out his frustrations by cooking up nasty theories about the society that sustained him” (p. 262). On the other hand, Mazo supported this idea by describing modern “attacks on the competence, integrity and funding of scientists; and the muzzling of government-funded researchers and censoring of their reports” (pp. 239-240). These ideas are evidence of the hate side of the love-hate relationship with gifted



individuals identified by Gallagher (1986).

Thus, when enthusiastic early adolescent GT students enter U.S. public schools and classrooms, they may encounter outright disrespect and bullying as an outcome of wavering support or the oscillating attitudes toward giftedness just described. Bullies enact this disrespect with offensive name calling, including terms such as “egghead, geek, nerd, brain, and so on” (Allen, 2017b, p. 132; see also Lecklider, 2011). Szostak (2018) coupled anti-intellectualism and bullying in his discussion of why many American voters “disdain” (p. 177) individuals more interested in or capable of scholarly pursuits. J. R. Cross, Bugaj, and Mammadov (2016) specifically studied the link between academic identity of GTs in middle school and bullying. While Cross et al. found that students who identified with the academic crowd experienced no more bullying than GTs who did not identify with the academic crowd. The reasons for being bullied differed between the two groups. GTs who were bullied perceived that the reasons for the bullying were based on characteristics associated with the academic “nerd” (p. 30) stereotype. In contrast, GTs who reported they were not part of the academic crowd perceived they were bullied for having “weird” friends. Cross et al. stated, “If these ‘weird’ friends are members of the academic crowd, this may be an impetus to avoid association” (p. 42). Cross et al. conjectured that avoiding association with the academic crowd may be related to the anti-intellectualism that exists in the school. When anti-intellectual attitudes have goaded contempt for exceptional academic effort in learning contexts, self-disparagement and various bullying transgressions result both within and beyond the educational circumstances (Cross, 2011; Robinson, 1990; VanTassel-Baska, 1992).

## **Coping with Bullying**

The literature on gifted students coping with bullying has followed three lines of inquiry. These include suicidal ideation and suicide, bullying behaviors, and social competence. Each will be discussed in turn.

### **Suicidal Ideation and Suicide**

When looking at the relationship between suicidal thoughts and behaviors and school climate, LaSalle, Wang, Parris, and Brown (2017) studied 152,191 middle school students in a Southeastern state. Students took an anonymous online school climate survey concerning, among many topics, bullying and school safety. LaSalle et al. created a structural model to examine the relationship between suicidal thoughts and behaviors and school climate, indicating a strong inverse association ( $\beta = -240, p < .001$ ), suggesting that when school climate is negative suicidal thoughts and behaviors tend to increase. LaSalle et al. also found more outside-of-school reasons for suicidal thoughts and behaviors than inside-of-school reasons. However, within the school environment, bullying was the leading indicator of suicidal thoughts and behaviors, with girls having more suicidal thoughts and behaviors than boys ( $\beta = -154, p = < .001$ ). Given that GTs seem to experience more bullying (Peterson & Ray, 2006a) than the general population, GTs may be more at risk than the general population for suicidal ideation.

However, Cross, Cassady, and Miller (2006) reported no difference between GTs and the general population related to suicidal ideation or suicide. Instead, Cross et al. proposed that, for GTs when compared to non-GTs, the difference in suicidal ideation

and behaviors is in personality characteristics. Cross et al. used the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator and the Suicide Ideation Questionnaire to sample 152 juniors in a public GT residential high school. The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator measures psychological types symbolized by capital letters. The types and symbols are extroversion (E), introversion (I), sensing (S), intuition (N), thinking (T), feeling (F), judging (J), and perceiving (P). The Suicide Ideation Questionnaire uses a seven-point likert-type scale ranging from “never had a thought” to “almost every day” (p. 300). Using gender and the Meyers-Briggs Type Indicator types as independent variables and Suicide Ideation Questionnaire data as the dependent variable, between group comparisons confirmed that female GTs had higher suicidal ideation than GT males  $F(1, 48) = 9.54, p < .002$ ). Moreover, GTs higher on the perception (P) type had more suicidal ideation than those higher on the judgment (J) type  $F(1, 141) = 9.15, p = .003, ES = .06$ ). A regression analysis demonstrated that differences in gender, extroversion (E)/introversion (I), and judgment (J)/perception (P) predicted greater likelihood of suicidal ideation, with females, introversion, and perception (i.e., emotionally sensitive) being the higher risks  $F(5, 137) = 6.12, p < .001$ ). As has been stated, while suicidal ideation is no more prevalent among gifted youth than among the general population, the notion that some personality types of gifted students may be more prone to suicidal ideation as a response to bullying is certainly possible.

Cross et al. (2006) revealed personality differences among GTs, whereas Sak (2004) suggested that differences also exist between GTs and non-GTs. Sak did a meta-analysis of 14 studies with 19 independent samples containing 5,723 participants and a

normed comparison group (i.e., 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> graders). Of the 16 total Meyers-Briggs Type Indicator profiles, he found the most typical profiles in the general population were ESFP, ENFP, ESTJ, and ESFJ. On the other hand, the most characteristic of the GT population were INFP, INTP, ENFP, and ENTP. Thus, GTs were significantly more introverted (I) than the normed group  $z = 3.85, p < .01$ . GTs were also significantly more intuitive (N)  $z = 12.71, p < .01$ , more thinking (T)  $z = 1.72, p < .05$ , and more perceptive (P)  $z = 4.96, p < .01$ , than the normed group. This contrasts with the Cross et al. study that found their smaller sample evenly split between introversion and extroversion, though girls tended to be more extroverted, and boys tended to be more introverted. The other findings are consistent with the Cross et al. findings.

The work of Peterson and Ray (2006a) indicated that GTs experience more bullying than non-GTs and that the primary reasons for this bullying related to individual differences. Given the findings of Sak (2004) coupled with those of Cross et al. (2006), it is not unreasonable to conjecture the differences in personalities could result in GTs being targeted for bullying. Further, given the finding related to personality types and suicidal ideation, it is possible to consider the notion that the bullying experienced by GTs can lead to suicidal ideation.

When an individual successfully commits suicide, researchers use psychological autopsies to reconstruct internal lives to understand why an individual committed suicide. Using interviews with parents and archival information (e.g., letters, medical records, personal letters, essays, diaries, and notes) to establish themes and patterns, Cross, Gust-Brey, and Ball (2002) conducted a psychological autopsy of a GT young man named

Reed Call (pseudonym). Well-known academically as a math “whiz,” Reed typically achieved very high on his standardized tests: He scored in the 99<sup>th</sup> percentile on the Wechsler Intelligence Scales for Children exam. He also experienced a lifetime of social problems including; romantic issues, bullying victimization, and social isolation. Reed also separated himself from others whom he knew could help him with his irrational thinking. He could not find meaning in his relationships, so he habitually withdrew. Reed could not face the harsh realities of his social problems, so he internalized his emotions. The outcomes were depression, anger, mood swings, and uncertainty about the future. Because of poor coping approaches, Reed desired to escape his pain through suicide.

Hyatt (2010) conducted a psychological autopsy of a GT student named Amber (pseudonym). Like Reed, Amber was very intelligent. She had an IQ score of 140 and achieved to the 98<sup>th</sup>/99<sup>th</sup> percentile on the math and language sections of the Iowa Test of Basic Skills. When she failed at achieving valedictorian in high school, she internalized her grief. According to Hyatt, she suffered from perfectionism, coping poorly whenever she faced disappointment. Whenever Amber failed, she saw no value in her life—resulting in guilt, depression, and anxiety. Hyatt stated, “Amber’s frustration, anger, and unhappiness seemed, at least in part, to be directly related to her experience at being bullied, rejected, and misunderstood at school” (p. 523). As she struggled with her emotional problems, Amber also experienced approximately seven years of suicide ideation. When she tried to discuss suicide, her peers suggested various methods. At age 18, she committed suicide with a handgun.

Details about what has happened to specific GT students as a result of their

psychological uniqueness in school contexts are pertinent to this study. The preponderance and effects of bullying has the potential to cause enough distress to contribute to suicidal ideation and suicide.

### **Bullying Behaviors**

Pelchar and Bain (2014) measured psychological distress with respect to externalizing and internalizing emotion in response to bullying with fourth and fifth grade students after transitioning to middle school. With a sample of 43 GTs, Pelchar and Bain assessed each student between November and January: Using the standardized Reynolds Bully-Victimization Scale, they measured victimization frequencies. Using the Bullying Victimization Distress Scale within the Reynolds Bully-Victimization Scale, they calculated psychological distress in relation to bullying. The Bullying Victimization Distress Scale has two scales. The Externalizing Distress Scale measures acting-out, outward anger, and conduct disorders. The Internalizing Distress Scale calculates loneliness, anxiety, depression, and misery.

Pelchar and Bain (2014) used a Mann-Whitney  $U$  non-parametric test that revealed correlations between bullying and both externalized and internalized stress. Differences between males and females did not show in the data. Among these gifted children, data indicated that fifth graders perpetrated more bullying than fourth graders ( $U = 122, p < .01$ ). Bullying and externalizing distress moderately correlated  $r = .49, p < .01$ ). In other words, as a student displayed more bullying behavior, the student was more likely to display externalizing distress behaviors. The researchers also found a strong correlation between victimization and overall stress  $r = .76, p < .01$ ), internalizing

distress ( $r = .68, p < .001$ ) and externalizing distress ( $r = .74, p < .001$ ). In other words, GT students showed both internalizing their victimization and externalizing—striking back. Possibly such externalizing behavior can lead to a victim acting out as a bully.

Peairs, Putallaz, and Costanzo (2019), using peer nominations with a sample of 327 seventh-grade students attending a secondary magnet school, including 141 GTs, determined key differences between GTs and non-GTs regarding peer status, prosocial behaviors, and antisocial behaviors. For information gathering, researchers gave students a set of rosters of the school's seventh graders. At the top of each roster, a nomination question was printed, such as "Who do you like the most?" or "Who do you like the least (p. 190)?" A total of seven such rosters were completed by students to measure social preference, perceived popularity, overt aggression, relational aggression, leadership, and victimization. Peairs et al. found identified GTs had significantly higher relational aggression scores than overt aggression scores. This is completely opposite from the pattern for nonidentified students ( $X^2 = 26.42, p < .001$ ). GTs who were perceived to be popular also had significantly higher scores on relational aggression ( $b = .58, p < .001$ ) and overt aggression ( $b = .18, p < .001$ ), though not at the same level as nonidentified students' relational aggression ( $b = .86, p < .001, \text{adj. } p < .05$ ), and overt aggression ( $b = .82, p < .001$ ) measures. This, nonetheless, seems to support Pelcher and Bain's (2014) finding that gifted students do act out aggressively when bullied. Peairs et al. conjecture that GTs preference for relational aggression rather than overt aggression may result from the more advanced cognitive abilities needed to exercise relational aggression. In contrast, Peairs et al. also found that identified GTs were perceived to have higher

prosocial leadership status than nonidentified students.

### **Social Competence**

Despite the relationship between bullying/social ostracism and those with high intellectual ability, Lee, Olszewski-Kubilius, and Turner Thomson (2002) found GTs comparable to their same-age peers concerning social competence, supporting the view that GTs also are socially respected by their peers. Lee et al. found “positive perceptions of their [GTs] abilities to initiate, form, and maintain relationships with other people, including same-age nongifted peers” (p. 90). Using an online self-report survey, 1,526 GT adolescents answered a series of questions that originated from four valid and reliable measurement instruments. The researchers used four instruments: Internal Competence Questionnaire Revised, Socioemotional Survey, Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents, and Social Coping Questionnaire. The questions represented student formation of friendships, provision of affective support, assertion of influence, disagreement resolution, self-concept, social coping, self-worth, and the like. Students were categorized according to their degree of social competence “(i.e., highly capable vs. less capable), and high versus low groups were compared for their performance on off-level tests (e.g., SAT, ACT, EXPLORE) and the amount of time they participated in in-school or out-of-school gifted programs, using the MANOVA” (pp. 96-97).

The results from Lee et al. (2002) indicated that GTs were above average in social competence. The mean effect size comparison between GTs and the normed sample was negligible ( $d < .3$ ). Multiple regression examinations suggested statistical significance only with gender and interpersonal ability ( $r = -.16, p < .05$ ). A separate t-test for gender



confirmed this finding ( $t(602) = -3.94, p < .001$ ). Gender also predicted positive peer relationships ( $t(695) = -5.27, p < .001$ ). In other words, these results revealed female GTs had higher interpersonal ability than male GTs. This might seem to contradict the findings of Pelchar and Bain (2014), who indicated no differences between male and female GTs in terms of internalizing and externalizing bullying trauma. Following from Lee et al., one might expect that there would be a difference between males and females on internalizing and externalizing stress. However, Pelchar and Bain suggested both male and female GTs as similar regarding internalizing stress and externalizing or striking back when victimized, likely externalizing stress in more relational and cognitive ways (Peairs et al., 2019). The apparent contrast might be resolved by considering that Lee et al. specifically studied prosocial behaviors, while Peairs et al. specifically studied stress. It is possible that even though male and female GTs likewise internalize and externalize stress, females are more apt at using their relational abilities to solve their difficult bullying issues.

As bullying has been shown as a leading indicator of suicidal thoughts and behaviors in school (LaSalle et al., 2017), with higher overall rates of bullying within anti-intellectual climates, GTs may be more at risk for socioemotional problems. As GT personalities have been revealed as more perceptive (Cross et al., 2006) and introverted (Sak, 2004), with female GTs in these two categories at higher risk for suicidal ideation (Cross et al., 2006), it is not unreasonable to infer that these character differences may expose GTs to both bullying and suicidal ideation. Also, when considering transitioning to middle school, GTs both internalize and externalize ill-treatment (Pelchar & Bain,

2014). If a GT student internalizes enough trauma, she or he could externalize or strike back, likely using cognitive skills in more interpersonal and covert ways (Peairs et al., 2019). On the other hand, regarding social competence, Lee et al. (2002) have indicated GTs as above average in terms of social competence with social coping as one element of that capability, and female GTs having more positive peer relationships and interpersonal ability. Including probable personal differences in social competence, when also considering the perception and introversion findings, with possible character distinctions involving internalizing and externalizing trauma, subjective student responses to bullying victimization may not only be more covert, but unpredictable. If this information is to be believed and adhered to, schools would need to continue antibullying efforts to ensure the personal safety of early adolescent GTs.

### **Efforts to Stop Bullying**

The LaSalle et al. (2017) study substantiated the suggestion that school climate does influence the prevalence of suicidal ideation among the general school population. They strongly supported the development of prevention and intervention programs related to school climate, mentioning bullying as one specific issue needing attention. Schoolwide endeavors to address the problem of bullying have occurred at three levels. First, schoolwide antibullying programs have focused on overall school climate. Second, schools have offered specialized GT curricula with formal socioemotional programs. Last, at the classroom level, individual teachers have provided strategies, methods, and techniques that protect the socioemotional health of early adolescent GTs.

Several meta-analyses have revealed both positive and negative effects of antibullying programs. Smith, Schneider, Smith, and Ananiadou (2004) conducted a meta-analysis of 14 antibullying studies, using the inclusion criteria of whole-school intervention programs, conclusive quantitative outcomes, and studies comprising multiple classrooms. They located eight studies with control groups, four with random assignment, and six with no control groups. They concluded that the programs studied had negative or negligible effects on both victimization and perpetration. The one exception was that victimization reports decreased with greater program monitoring. Smith et al. cautioned, “Only some of the studies incorporated systematic procedures to ensure that the planned interventions were implemented with integrity [program fidelity]” (p. 554).

In a meta-analysis of 42 antibullying studies, Ferguson, Miguel, Kilburn, and Sanchez (2007) included programs studied between the years of 1995 and 2006, reflecting only school-based peer-reviewed investigations with measurable antibullying outcomes determined with control groups. The study excluded gang-related and psychological behavior disorder (e.g., attention deficit hyperactivity disorder or ADHD) research. While finding statistical significance ( $r = .12$ ;  $p \leq .001$ ), the effect size was relatively small ( $r^2 = .0144$ ). Given the high costs of such programs, Ferguson et al. concluded that “antibullying programs produce little discernable effect on youth participants” (p. 401). Again, as in the Smith et al. (2004) study, individual school program implementation fidelity was in question.

Ttofi and Farrington (2011) also conducted a meta-analysis regarding the effectiveness of schoolwide antibullying programs. They chose 44 schoolwide studies

conducted between the years of 1983 and 2009. The inclusion criteria required studies with clear definitions, random experiments, intervention/control comparisons, age-cohort designs, published and unpublished reports (i.e., avoiding publication bias), and studies only in English. In contrast to Smith et al. (2007), Ttofi and Farrington (2011) concluded that school-based antibullying programs were often effective, resulting in bullying perpetration decreasing by a range of 20-23%, with a 17-20% reduction in victimization. More intensive programs that included parent meetings, antibullying videos, firm disciplinary methods, teacher training, and improved playground supervision were found to be more effective. Since Smith et al. (2004) and Ferguson et al. (2007) had questions concerning school program fidelity, or, schools within their investigations faithfully executing antibullying programs, Ttofi and Farrington emphasized implementation intensity to address such problems. Indeed, the degree to which a program is implemented may influence its effects.

Despite their generally positive findings, Ttofi and Farrington (2011) discovered that one prevention program element associated with an *increase* in victimization was working with peers ( $p = .0001$ ). Working with peers refers to formal engagement between bullies and other students such as peer mediation, peer mentoring, and encouraging bystander interventions. Ttofi and Farrington recommended that “work with peers should not be used [because] programs targeting delinquent peers tend to cause an increase in offending” (p. 44). Ttofi and Farrington also concluded that the more rigorous the study included in their meta-analysis (i.e., randomized control design), the smaller the effect size for the antibullying program. Thus, they recognized that that the design of their

meta-analysis may be overly influenced by more weakly designed studies.

To assess the effectiveness of bystander intervention in bullying, Polanin, Espelage, and Pigot (2012) conducted a meta-analysis of 11 bystander studies with 12,874 participants. Their inclusion criteria required treatment and control research designs performed between the years of 1980 and 2010. Such studies needed to address how antibullying programs trained student bystanders in terms of developing empathy for victims, self-reflection, social skills, bullying awareness, parent involvement, or behavior modification. With their study, Polanin et al. indicated bystander interventions reduced bullying to a statistically significant level  $g = .20, p < .001$ ). However, the development of bystander empathy was still statistically insignificant  $g = .05, p = .38$ ), likely due to a “small number of studies that reported this outcome and its secondary nature” (p. 60). Nevertheless, the emphasis of the Polanin et al. meta-analysis both contradicts and agrees with Ttofi and Farrington (2011). Ttofi and Farrington showed programs with bystanders not working well but indicated programs as more effective when accompanied by intense monitoring and applied to older children. Even Polanin et al. go on to state that “bystander behavior is a developmental process and programs may not influence younger students as intended” (p. 60). They also explain the need for future research to “focus on changing the behavior of the bystander” (p. 62).

In a more recent meta-analysis, Evans, Fraser, and Cotter (2014) investigated 32 studies with 24 interventions. The inclusion criteria for this meta-analysis required studies from elementary and middle schools between 2009 and 2013 including “gray literature” (i.e., unpublished studies to avoid publication bias). Other inclusion standards

required studies with at least one measure of bullying intervention and control group designs, and English-only manuscripts. They reported that 67% of the studies they selected found “bullying programs are effective in decreasing bullying and victimization” (p. 532). Yet, they also proclaimed, “To be sure, the evidence is sufficiently strong to indicate that bullying interventions can be effective. At the same time, many programs appear to be ineffective” (p. 536). Evans et al., in opposition to the generalizability of the positive interventions found by Ttofi and Farrington (2011), indicated intervention elements such as teacher training, classroom rules, parent involvement, and whole school approach were not necessarily “associated with significant reductions in bullying perpetration and/or victimization” (Evans et al., 2011, p. 536). However, school success was unpredictable; it was dependent upon antibullying program implementation and operation (i.e., program fidelity). Evans et al. also stated, “We may be observing more experimentation and a blossoming of [schoolwide] programs with creative features” (p. 536). Thus, for these researchers, creative and differing schoolwide program designs may be too variable to accurately encode for research comparisons. Moreover, the bullying investigations used in the Evans et al. meta-analysis were problematic because many of the studies did not distinguish bullying from any other form of student aggression.

The meta-analyses reviewed here present a mixed picture of schoolwide antibullying programs. Program elements that seemed to reduce bullying included intensive program monitoring and working with older children (i.e., early adolescent and high school). However, along with positives, the effectiveness of peer interventions (i.e., bystanders) was unclear. The meta-analyses also identified several problems and

disagreements regarding the effectiveness of antibullying programs. For example, effect sizes for successful programs tended to be small. Further, program fidelity concerns may have affected measurement outcomes. In addition, schoolwide programs that continually evolve may have been too variable to encode for research purposes.

In an article intended to synthesize the research on bullying, Swearer, Espelage, Villancourt, and Hymel (2010) revealed methodological issues across bullying studies make comparisons among studies difficult. They discussed the need for schoolwide programs to focus on the 10-20 percent of the students who are involved in bullying. Other recommendations included grounding programs in solid theoretical frameworks, directing program interventions at appropriate ecological levels (e.g., peers and parents), and addressing human differences such as “race, disability, and sexual orientation” (p. 42), and for the purposes of this study, GT students. In essence, all this research has been done without ever really hearing the voice of one of the most distinctively bullied groups (Allen, 2017b). None addressed the individual difference of advanced ability that has been shown to invite bullying (Peterson & Ray, 2006a). This study seeks to resolve this gap by exploring how early adolescent GTs describe their bullying experiences and seeking potential solutions from these students.

Eddles-Hirsch, Vialle, McCormick, and Rogers (2012), conducted a phenomenological study of gifted students’ experience in school settings specifically designed to address those students’ needs. Eddles-Hirsch et al. interviewed 27 randomly selected students from Grade 3 to 6 (i.e., ages 8 to 13) from three private elementary schools (i.e., one boys’ school, one girls’ school, and one coeducational school). Based

on in-depth interviews concerning student experiences in these schools, three topics emerged; challenging instruction, social power, and peer relations.

At Burkeston (i.e., the boys' school) challenging instruction for GT students took place in a weekly pull-out program. Social power at the school was based on a negative view toward academic ability, placing more value on athletic talent (Eddles-Hirsch et al., 2012). The school did not have a formal social skills program. Eddles-Hirsch et al. indicated that GTs had to figure-out, on their own, how to solve their bullying problems. As a result, GTs coped by hiding their intellectual capabilities. In other words, with no social skills program, Burkeston could not officially help address school bullying and its probable link to GT introversion (Sak, 2004), internalization of bullying trauma (Pelchar & Bain, 2014), and suicidal ideation (Cross et al., 2006). If GTs adapted to the social environment, they likely perceived anti-intellectualism at the school and hid their abilities. Evidence showed when openly revealing their intelligence, instances of name-calling and social ostracism did occur (Eddles-Hirsch et al., 2012). This seems consistent with the findings of Peterson and Ray (2006a) that show GTs are uniquely targeted for their advanced abilities.

GTs at Agnes (i.e., the all-girls school) and Willowdale (i.e., the coeducational school) had more positive educational experiences. Agnes had an ability-level math program, accelerated classes, and an extended curriculum. The school also had a social skills program that encouraged social interaction which helped promote and create a friendly learning environment. In comparison, Willowdale had a pull-out program as well as subject-matter acceleration classes. The school also had a social skills program that



encouraged social communication. For both schools, efforts to establish socioemotional programs relieved detrimental socioemotional and academic issues as GTs intermingled with their peers.

Eddles-Hirsch et al. (2012) discovered more acceptance of academic differences at Agnes and Willowdale. Students at these schools eluded the GT stigma without difficulty. They felt comfortable learning with their intellectual peers. They experienced less teasing and any resulting psychological stress and fear. Most important, GT students had a support system to help them cope with social stress. These findings suggest that elementary schools can manage bullying, while, at the same time, protect scholastic rigor and academic acceleration. Since Ttofi and Farrington (2011) suggested older children benefit more from schoolwide programs, recommending “Programs should be targeted on children aged 11 or older rather than on younger children” (p. 46), it is possible that research-supported schoolwide academic and socioemotional programs can also benefit early adolescents (i.e., ages 12-to-15) GTs as well.

In addition to schoolwide programs, according to Ttofi and Farrington (2011), the role of teacher becomes important in regard to monitoring. In a qualitative study, Allen (2017a) found that a mix of teacher perspectives and practices in autonomous classes (i.e., GT only classes) helped negate bullying effects on student socioemotional health and intellectual development. With an ethnographic research approach that utilized case studies as an analytical method, three veteran women teachers of GT, each with a master’s degree in education and at least 10 years of experience, volunteered for an interview process. Allen conducted two interviews with each teacher. After data

collection and information verification, he pinpointed emergent themes and patterns. He concluded that despite different educational and classroom discipline styles, each teacher exercised methods sensitive to their students' needs. The following is a summation of the findings.

- All teachers used a challenging curriculum to focus learning in a positive direction;
- Each teacher viewed bullying as normal and therefore made efforts to know each student's unique emotional sensitivities, helping ease emotive response and problem resolution;
- Teachers practiced caution in regard to avoiding student embarrassment and public humiliation when solving bullying issues; and,
- For both bullying victims and perpetrators, with knowledge of individual student emotional sensitivities, when bullying and social ostracism did occur, teachers wisely paired or grouped compatible students together for socioemotional support. (pp. 269-280)

A combination of continual academic challenge, knowledge of individual student sensitivities, nonembarrassing problem-solving, and wise use of student pairing or grouping, appeared to ameliorate the effects of classroom bullying.

In summary, evidence suggests gifted students experience more of a preponderance of bullying when compared to the general population (Peterson & Ray, 2006a): The reasons for ill-treatment appear distinctive. Even though any student may fall victim to bullying because of individual differences, gifted students are typically pursued because of their academic ability. This makes sense because of anti-intellectual school environments (Howley, Howley, & Pendarvis, 1995, 2017). Social ostracism as a form of bullying is especially notable among gifted populations because GTs seem to use their cognitive skills in interpersonal and covert ways (Peairs et al., 2019), potentially

externalizing (Pelchar & Bain, 2014) and victimizing others. On the other hand, an individual GT may turn out to be a victim as well, internalizing their trauma and/or become socially isolated.

Ways in which GTs cope with bullying victimization may include suicidal ideation (Cross et al., 2006). Even though evidence shows gifted students are bullied more and for different reasons than the mainstream population, GTs, as a group, may not experience more recurrent thoughts of suicide. A full explanation of this trend points to evidence suggesting the content of their psychology in relation to socioemotional discernments can be qualitatively different than non-GTs. Moreover, in support of this notion, GTs have also been quantitatively found to be more perceptive and introverted than mainstream students in respect to psychological makeup (Sak, 2004). GT students who are more perceptive and introverted have been shown to think of suicide more often than non-GTs as well as other GTs (Cross et al., 2006). Further complicating these findings, internalization of bullying trauma (e.g., loneliness, anxiety, depression, and misery) has been indicated as comparable between GTs and non-GTs as well (Pelchar & Bain, 2014). While GTs have also shown above-average social competence (Lee et al., 2002), again, even more alarming is the further indication of a GT character distinction in regard to using cognitive skills in relational and covert ways (Peairs et al., 2019). As mentioned before, if a GT student is both perceptive and introverted as well as cognitive and covert, how will parents and educators know if she or he is internalizing and suffering from ill-treatment? To be sure, psychological autopsies of successful suicides involving GTs have shown internalization of bullying trauma as part of the student's pre-

suicide experience.

Without attending to GT socioemotional differences, schools have attempted to prevent bullying and its socioemotional effects. Aside from questions of schoolwide program implementation fidelity, meta-analyses of intervention programs are a mixture of differing inclusion criteria and findings. While peer (i.e., bystander) intervention programs are questionable, positive antibullying results can occur when schoolwide programs provide intense monitoring and applied to older children (Ttofi & Farrington, 2011). On the other hand, most important to this study, antibullying attention focused on the qualitative difference of advanced ability stands ignored. Given the difficulties with GT quantitative findings, it might be important to look at gifted personality distinctions that show psychological qualities that enable GTs to respond to bullying in different ways and how schools and educators may be able to address these characteristics. There is some evidence that early adolescent GTs may be bullied for their distinctive characteristics. Given this, it would be important to know how do early adolescent GTs perceive their bullying experiences? What do they believe schools can do about bullying?

## CHAPTER III

### METHOD

This chapter presents the researcher positionality statement, research setting, and qualitative research methods used to conduct this investigation. This study of early adolescent GT student experiences with bullying in a school context employed multiple case study as a research method (Yin, 2014). Case study research includes investigation of a phenomenon, such as bullying, within a distinctive and complex real-world context. Case study depends upon the triangulation of multiple forms and sources of evidence. In addition, this study utilized theory as both a guide to data collection and for analysis in the process of determining research findings (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007), applying Dabrowski's (2016/1964) theory of positive disintegration as a lens for deeper understanding of student personality in relation to bullying experiences.

#### **Researcher Positionality**

Mosselson (2010), through her research on Bosnian refugees, stated the importance of understanding her one's own positionality in regard to research being conducted. She explained:

I realized I needed to understand my own positionality in terms of the research project in order to better reflect upon and understand how my 'self' was understanding the 'selves' in the interviews. After all, I was being entrusted to interpret and make sense of the refugees' stories, and I realized that it was important to my own integrity and ethical practice to be reflexive about the impact of my perspective on the research. (p. 484)

Essentially, I am essentially an instrument for collection, analysis, and interpretation of

all the research data in this study. A disclosure of my positionality is vital for exposing my own biases and research positions.

I am a teacher at the middle school involved in this research study. I teach GT social studies and history to seventh and eighth grade early adolescent students and have done so for 12 years. I fully participate in the school's antibullying program. I have observed the social and emotional lives of early adolescent GT students in both self-contained GT classes and within the overall school community. I have observed or had reported to me physical, verbal, and cyberbullying, as well as the emotional and physical consequences including the suicides of three talented students. I have seen how traditional schools struggle to meet the emotional and intellectual needs of regular, honors, and GT students. In my view, schools typically overlook the talent development needs of GTs, which can contribute to student misbehavior and bullying.

On a more personal note, as a public-school student from a deeply impoverished background, I grew up in a society with a hegemonic structure (Gramsci, 1971; Howard, 2006). After periods of parental unemployment, homelessness, and food scarcity in California, my mother moved my family to Utah. When in Utah, I was a social misfit. In junior high and high school, social avoidance was evident. I could not eat or dress well. I also did not know how to behave in social situations. I tried to fit-in with others but rejection usually resulted. I was able to form, with time and effort, friendships with other marginalized ethnic, racial, and cultural minority students—including scholars.

I also underwent bullying victimization in Utah. I experienced physical threats, fighting, and name-calling from socially dominant students. I fought back when

physically attacked. I endured names such as geek, nerd, and weird. Nevertheless, as a good-natured young man, I laughed and shrugged-off the name-calling but internalized the pain. In seventh grade, I tried to focus on being a scholar.

Thinking of bullying as a normal aspect of schooling, I made a switch through junior high from an ill-treated enthusiastic young scholar to a bullying sports enthusiast. I came to realize my physical strength and endurance. As a result, I worked and saved money to play football. I also participated in track and field. I later quit football for two reasons, the physical toll and expense. I nonetheless continued my involvement in track. During my athletic popularity, after winning track races, I became socially attractive. At the same time, I ignored, bullied, and ostracized my scholarly friends. Having little guidance in my life and not realizing the educational price, I also let my grades slip as my physical strength made me a self-centered quasi-popular athlete. As my athleticism waned (i.e., I began to lose track races), my social popularity also declined. With lower grades, I barely made it into college. Probably because of my many divergent points of view, adult bullying continued in college and throughout my professional life. Now, after a lifetime of socioemotional awkwardness, I have dedicated myself to both peaceful coexistence and resistance to unjust social domination.

As an adult and veteran teacher, I have served in an unofficial role as a GT student advocate, personally supporting these students through their struggles, bullying victimization, and, in some cases, perpetration. Through my own experiences and the involvements of my students, I have grown very sensitive to their socioemotional issues. I have also noticed, through my advocacy, that some students seem to cope better than

others with bullying victimization. For some students, verbal bullying seems socially fun. For others, it results in anxious or depressive behavior, and, in some cases, social ostracism.

Given these experiences and biases, it is possible that, in my research, I may interpret information according to my own experiences and beliefs. My positionality is not something I can necessarily change, but I can acknowledge possible influences and design the research in a way and manner that alert me to moments that may be overly subjected to that influence. I describe these safeguards in what follows.

### **Researcher's Theoretical Perspective**

It is my belief that student experiences involve both emotional and intellectual components for learning to occur. The intellectual component of learning for gifted students is recognized through the ubiquitous use of aptitude and achievement tests in identifying students as gifted (Plucker & Callahan, 2014). Pekrun, Lichtenfeld, Marsh, Murayama, and Goetz (2017) verified that positive and negative emotions had statistically significant effects ( $p < .001$ ) on intellectual activity in terms of academic achievement in classrooms (i.e., test scores and grades). Pekrun et al. elaborated that the “two variables reciprocally influence each other over time” (p. 4). According to Rosenberg (1990), “Emotion is more than a state of physiological arousal. It is also a process of bringing one’s intellectual powers to bear on this internal state and basing one’s emotional identification on these reflexive processes. In other words, we do not simply ‘feel’ an emotion; we also ‘think’ an emotion” (p. 5). Dabrowski agreed that the



merging of the emotional and intellectual reflects such a qualitative evaluation emphasizing that public schools need to specifically balance their intellectual emphasis with emotional development so that this convergence can facilitate personality growth within each student. Dabrowski referred to this as authentic education (Rankel, 2008). In relation to experiences such as bullying, Scherer (2005) indicated that one can “ask the individual to report on the nature of the experience” (p. 712) and explain that emotions as feelings occur after an intellectual judgment or “appraisal checks with emotion-specific outcome profiles” (p. 701). Rosenberg (1990) stated, “The full-fledged feeling of fear comes into being only when such psychological responses are coupled with the cognitive interpretation of a situation as dangerous” (p. 5). With this study, TPD is used as an analytical method to evaluate qualitative evidence of perceptions of student experiences with bullying. TPD is a theory based on the notion that personality development begins with the convergence of human emotions and intelligence as individuals mix within their social environments (Dabrowski, 2016/1964).

Kazimierz Dabrowski was a psychiatrist and university researcher who survived both World War I and World War II. During these wars he witnessed differing levels of human suffering. He also noticed, through his psychiatric patients, the same kinds of misery. For over two decades he recorded his empirical observations, ultimately resulting in his theory of positive disintegration (TPD; Daniels & Piechowski, 2009; Mendaglio, 2008a).

TPD represents the idea that human personality growth is based on lived experience within social environments that facilitate psychological disintegration of

primitive human impulses toward self-determined values. Disintegration entails the breaking down of existing mental structures through which individuals experience social environments. Dabrowski (2016/1964) indicated that the disintegrative route from what he termed as primary to secondary integration involves three factors. Heredity, or an individual's capacity for psychological advancement represents the first factor. Environmental (i.e., social or educational) influences constitute the second factor. He revealed that from both genetic traits and the environment "conscious differentiation and self-definition" (p. 40) occur, spawning self-determination, creative impulses, and special talents; all forming the third factor. With the third factor, "socialized, robotic and unreflective behavior" (Tillier, 2016, p. xiv) becomes both inhibited and disintegrated through personal willpower. In other words, disintegration occurs within individuals as a result of an internal genetic push for psychological progress, the development of personal self-reflection or the ability to think beyond the primitive human manifestations, particularly during critical life changing events. This requires the development of new mental structures that the individual reintegrates into a new personality. According to Dabrowski (2016/1964), "Disintegration is described as positive when it enriches life, enlarges the horizon, and brings forth creativity; it is negative when it either has no developmental effects or causes involution" (p. 8). Disintegration is negative when the person digresses or when positive moral progress is absent.

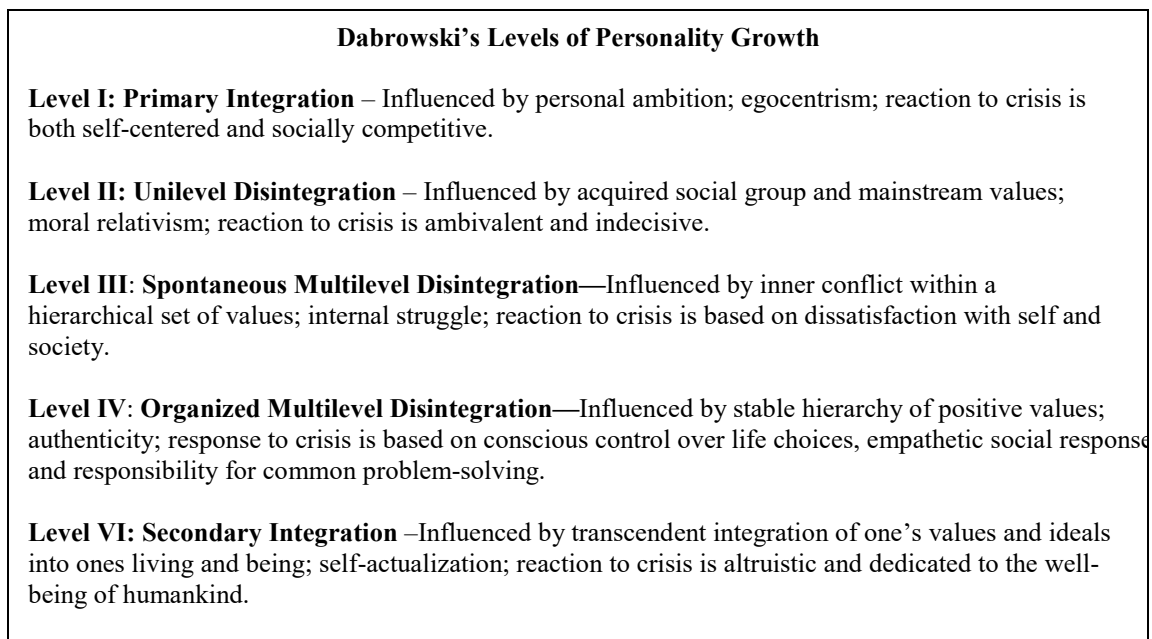
TPD consists of five levels of mental growth. These include; primary integration, unilevel disintegration, spontaneous multilevel disintegration, organized multilevel disintegration, and secondary integration (Mendaglio, 2008a; Silverman, 1993).

Personality change is continual. An individual can start at any level and move up or down, so this is not a developmental stage theory (Dabrowski, 2016/1964). Both primary and secondary levels are integrative, representing the beginning and end of personality growth. Integrative individuals are empty of inner psychological conflict. A person at primary integration experiences self-centered inner peace with no self-awareness. An individual at secondary integration is at inner peace, focused on empathy and/or helping humankind. As individuals try to acquire positive human values, the three disintegrative levels embody both inner and external psychological conflicts as procurement either progresses, regresses, or digresses, resulting in neurosis (e.g., depression and anxiety), and the human struggle to create. At the age in which an individual's personality is apparent, a person can be at any level, advance, and even end up at a lower level later in life (Ackerman, 2009). Figure 1 shows the five levels of psychological growth.

Fundamentally, Dabrowski's TPD, as a grand theory (McAdams & Pals, 2006), provides a helpful framework for understanding how bullying victims, perpetrators, and bystanders may characterize bullying as well as why they react to it the way they do.

### **Bullying and Theory of Positive Disintegration**

TPD operates on the notion that growth from primary to secondary integration requires neurosis or mental illness (e.g. anxiety and/or depression; Dabrowski, 2016/1964). Neurosis aids in positive disintegration of negative personality influences, which are replaced with individually determined higher human ideals (Daniels & Piechowski, 2009; Mendaglio, 2008a; Mendaglio & Tillier, 2006; Tillier, 2016). In other words, when a student suffers neurosis, she or he may acquire the ability to learn positive



*Figure 1.* Dabrowski's levels of integration and disintegration revealing human personality growth.

values and self-reflect on social problems, resulting in personality growth.

Psychoneurosis or “the dis-ease (sic) that motivates one to question one’s beliefs and values, to seek new answers, to discover one’s deeper self” (Tillier, 2016, p. xvii) starts with personal crisis and remains necessary at each level of positive disintegration. For example, a student may lose a close friend, feel bad, and not know that a personal characteristic largely contributed to the loss. A deep personal crisis with the inability to completely process, solve and cope, defines unilevel disintegration. Spontaneous multilevel disintegration occurs when solving a crisis with a self-directed ideal. In other words, the student realizes her or his personal flaw (e.g., personal narcissism), corrects it, and experiences positive results (i.e., more friends). With the further learning of positive ideals and advancement of a hierarchy of values, organized multilevel disintegration aids

in the disassembly of further unwanted personality elements leading to the possibility of secondary integration. For example, the growing psychological realizations and reasons (i.e., increased mental structure) including positive actions toward social justice on the complexity of human problems reflects multilevel disintegration. An individual dedicating his or her life to combating social injustice is an example of secondary integration. If an individual does grow through each level, he or she, in response to crisis, experiences neurosis that either propels the individual to the next level or back to the psychological security of the previous personality condition. Therefore, the more multilevel expansion, the more an individual can self-psychoanalyze, cope with problems such as bullying, and solve social problems equitably.

An individual at primary integration is completely self-serving. Therefore, in a bullying situation; victims, perpetrators, and bystanders react to protect self-interest. Under such a scenario, in a culture of violence, bullying participants can serve both self-interest and peer recognition with aggression. At unilevel disintegration an individual accepts societal values from the norms of her or his cultural life—suppressing individuality. In a bullying circumstance; victims, perpetrators, and bystanders will respond in ways that are socially acceptable. Within an overall culture of violence, bullying participants may feel free to bully each other.

An individual switching back-and-forth between primary integration and unilevel disintegration follows what is called the horizontal dilemma. It is a common personality transformation dynamic. According to Tillier, paraphrasing Dabrowski (2016/1964), people who make choices to transfer to either primary integration or unilevel

disintegration are practicing ambivalence and/or ambitemperies: It characterizes a state of no personality growth. Tillier (2016) stated:

Dabrowski characterized primary (socialized) behavior as unilevel, literally existing on a horizontal plane. Often individuals are faced with a fork in the road: one can turn left or one can turn right. For Dabrowski, these horizontal flatland choices [primary integration and unilevel disintegration] are different but essentially equivalent and do not present true opportunities for growth. As long as an individual is locked into this horizontal view, development is thwarted. (p. xiv)

On the other hand, an individual at spontaneous multilevel growth has inner-conflict concerning social expectations. In a culture of violence, a bullying conflict may propel the individual to try to stop the violence. However, she or he, through social pressure, may regress and become part of the bullying problem. At organized multilevel progression, an individual has a more stable hierarchy of positive values. She or he will confront a bullying situation with conscious control and take part in responsible problem-solving. An individual at this level of psychological growth is much more resistant to reverting to aggression. Conversely, based on deep consideration of higher ideals and acting with self-ruling/determination, secondary integration represents dedication to the well-being of humankind. Therefore, when confronting a bullying situation, victims and bystanders nonviolently respond to help the bully.

**Overexcitabilities.** Overexcitabilities (OEs) are hypersensitivities to social or educational stimuli shown to be more prominent with GT students (Dabrowski, 1970). The five OEs include: emotional, intellectual, imaginal, psychomotor, and sensual. Specifically, Piechowski (1995) translated Dabrowski's definition of OE from Polish. Piechowski stated:

Dabrowski emphasized the disequilibrating, disorganizing, and disintegrating

action of overexcitability on various areas of psychological functioning.... Overexcitability was defined by the following characteristics: (1) a reaction that exceeds the stimulus 2) a reaction that lasts much longer than average 3) the reaction often not being related to the stimulus (e.g., a fantasy image in response to an intellectual response) 4) a ready relaying of emotional experience to the sympathetic nervous system...(fast beating heart, flushing, perspiring, headaches). (p. 3)

In response to an educational or social (i.e., bullying) stimulus, a GT individual may have a strong emotional response. For GTs, in regard to name-calling, the emotional response at the primary level is reaction to protect self-interest—conceivably attacking back either verbally or physically. At unilevel disintegration, the emotional retort typically represents an attempt at reasoning based on the social norm or perhaps striking back again. At spontaneous multilevel disintegration, a positive human value—beyond the norm—like application of peaceful resistance to a bullying situation is key. If peaceful resistance is uncomfortable to an individual because of an indecisive mental structure, reversal back to unilevel is probable.

If she or he emotionally responds at organized multilevel disintegration or secondary integration, with a more stable hierarchy of values, the intellectual OE activates with the application of “positive values” (Dabrowski, 1967, p. 6). This is referred to as valuation (Dabrowski, 2016/1964, 1970, 1996). Or, “it is a factor of internal motivation” (Dabrowski, 1996, p. 15; see also Kaminski Battaglia, 2002, p. 31). In other words, this is any instant in which an individual at one of these two high levels of personality development intellectually and immediately applies a positive value when empathetically charged. The imaginal OE also comes into play when solving a problem such as name-calling. The psychomotor and sensual, which cannot work alone,

will join-in with the other OEs at high levels of development as well. The greater an individual's personality growth, the more all five OEs work together to solve problems such as bullying.

**Dynamisms and positive values.** Dynamisms (i.e., instincts and drives) comprise the motivations needed for multilevel progression. Different dynamisms are active at different levels of development. For example, at primary integration, no dynamisms are present. Individuals respond to experience primarily through first factor components such as biological impulses. Second factor social values are derived from the environment without question. At unilevel disintegration, dynamisms begin to emerge. Social values may be questioned, but not in a way that leads to the development of a hierarchy of values that would initiate the next level of disintegration. Questioning of values occurs, rather, because the individual becomes aware of competing value systems in the environment. Two of the most important dynamisms at unilevel disintegration are shame (i.e., an external reaction to social expectations) and guilt (i.e., an internal reaction to those expectations). At spontaneous multilevel disintegration, dynamisms begin to emerge as individuals become more aware of social connections, if still primarily only self-absorbed. When coupled with a positive value, such as awareness and emerging respect for different points of view, shame and guilt, moving the individual toward spontaneous multilevel disintegration. A hierarchy of positive values begin to develop. If an individual reaches organized multilevel disintegration, shame and guilt disintegrate, and the third factor appears. The third factor is a self-determined "transcendental, autonomous, power to develop beyond the limits set by his/her genetic and environmental



abilities” (Kaminski Battaglia, 2002, p. 31; see also Dabrowski, 1967) open to all people. Thus, the third factor encompasses and organizes, as a dynamism, other dynamisms such as inner psychic transformation, personality ideal, empathy, valuation, self-reflection, authenticity, responsibility, auto-psychotherapy, self-education, self-awareness, autonomy, and self-control—all aid in equitable problem solving. (Dabrowski, 2016/1964, 1967; Kaminski Battaglia, 2002; Piechowski, 2008). In the final step of secondary integration, individuals develop a hierarchy of self-selected values built on the dynamism of the personality ideal. Mendaglio (2008a) states, “Virtually no other conflict is experienced, since the lower forms of motivations [e.g., shame and guilt] have been destroyed [i.e., by the disposing and directing center] and replaced by the higher forms of empathy, autonomy, and authenticity” (p. 39).

**Early adolescent instincts.** For Dabrowski (2016/1964) personality change is continual but growth occurs generally at times of psychological tension (e.g., puberty). Early adolescent puberty reveals “states of nervousness such as emotional, psychomotor, sensory, imaginal, and intellectual overexcitability” (pp. 4-5). Equipped well for personality change, early adolescent GTs have been shown to have higher measurable OEs compared to mainstream early adolescents (Ackerman, 1997; Daniels & Piechowski, 2009; Piechowski, 1997; Tieso, 2007a). According to Dabrowski (2016/1964), emotional OE reacts first while the others may follow. For the early adolescent GT, the psychomotor OE has been shown as the greatest predictor of academic potential (Tieso, 2007a). The intellectual, imaginal, and sensual OEs may react as well depending on individual capacity and personality growth level (Dabrowski, 2016/1964). With an

average level of OEs, early adolescents struggle handling stressful situations.

Dynamisms are the primary motivations that accompany each personality level beginning at unilevel disintegration contributing to personality growth at organized multilevel disintegration. For Dabrowski (2016/1964), with the caveat that not everyone has the internal nature and/or adeptness to break free from social convention, some individuals may indeed fail in some way to reach his or her ideals. An individual may lack OEs or excitable impulses to respond to social/educational stimuli. She or he may also lack the internal shame or guilt needed to steer disintegration forward. Reintegration at a lower personality level occurs if an individual has insufficient OEs and developed dynamisms at the organized multilevel disintegration level. For example, a student lacks shame for not doing schoolwork, not fully understanding (i.e., lacks the developed mental structure) the intellectual and future costs linked to the neglect. Neuroses and/or suicidal ideation accompany the mental confusion with reintegration. Then again, OEs together with dynamisms can also move personality progression forward.

Dabrowski (2016/1964) stated, “There is a prevalence of automatic dynamisms with only slight self-consciousness and self-control” (p. 5) revealing unilevel disintegration. Nonetheless, increased OEs and self-determination “found in individuals at times of their greatest psychological development, in highly creative persons and those of higher moral, social, and intellectual caliber” (p. 11) prompt multilevel disintegration, “largely conscious, independent, and influential in determining personality structure” (p. 6). For example, creative producers like the Wright brothers (i.e., inventors of the airplane), against public skepticism (McCullough, 2015), disintegrated negatively in

favor of positive mental structures as they learned, collaborated, and worked tirelessly toward the human aspiration of flight.

Historical evidence reveals organized multilevel dynamisms such as authenticity, autonomy, self-education, self-awareness, and self-responsibility when the Wright brothers worked separately and together as the original aerospace scientists. The dynamism illustrated as “a feeling of guilt in relation to the personality ideal” (Dabrowski, 2016/1964, p. 6) evidently helped drive the individuality of each Wright brother forward. According to TPD, neurosis results if creators yield or stop their endeavors. When patent lawsuits challenged their rights, Wilbur, the dominant older brother took control of the situation, likely struggled at the multilevel disintegration levels before reintegrating at unilevel disintegration (i.e., the struggles against lawsuits remain a societal norm). He experienced sadness as he tirelessly fought long legal battles. He stopped both researching and flying, and “worn down in body and spirit” (McCullough, 2015, p. 256), died from typhoid fever on May 30, 1912. On the other hand, Orville, the younger brother who piloted the first flight, continued to fly and conduct research, improving aeronautics for most of the rest of his life. During World War II, revealing evidence of secondary integration, Orville viewed war planes dropping bombs on peaceful people as a deplorable use of aircraft technology.

**Overexcitabilities and bullying.** When combined with dynamisms, high emotional OE activates when GT students either become educationally excited (e.g., Wright pursuit of human flight) or socioemotionally ill-treated or bullied (e.g., law suits against the Wrights; Dabrowski, 2016/1964; Mendaglio & Tillier, 2006; Tieso, 2007a,

2007b). When striving for multilevel growth, peer pressure makes GTs more susceptible to neurosis (Christopher & Shewmaker, 2010). For example, working in cooperative learning groups with functioning dynamisms and high OEs, bullying—a social push to do perfect work in unchallenging circumstances (Robinson, 1990; VanTassel-Baska, 1992)—can halt multilevel disintegration. Or, in other words, in social pressure learning circumstances, if a GT student regresses back to unilevel disintegration, it can lead to psychosis or neurotic perfectionism (Christopher & Shewmaker, 2010).

According to Hamacheck (1978) individual frustration or lack of academic fulfillment in bullying situations in which “they [i.e., GT students] never seem to do things good enough” defines neurotic perfectionism (p. 27; see also Christopher & Shewmaker, 2010; McGrath et al., 2012; Mushquash & Sherry, 2012). Depression can result, including “eating disorders, obsessive compulsive disorders, suicide, and alcoholism” (Christopher & Shewmaker, 2010, p. 23).

Current theoretical disagreement exists concerning OEs and TPD. Some scholars have criticized the concept of OEs based on the five-factor model (FFM) of personality. Proponents for FFM, when looking at potential applications for the understanding of GT personality, claim that OEs are nothing more than openness to experience. Openness to experience is one of FFM’s five-factors that also include neuroticism, agreeableness, extraversion, and conscientiousness (Vuyk, Kerr, & Krieshok, 2016a; Vuyk, Krieshok, & Kerr, 2016b). Vuyk et al. (2016a) show the five OEs as comparable to the six facets embodying openness to experience; fantasy (i.e., imaginal OE), aesthetics (i.e., sensual OE), feelings (i.e., emotional OE), actions (i.e., psychomotor OE), ideas (i.e.,

intellectual OE), and values (i.e., likely an aspect of the intellectual OE). In defense of TPD, Mendaglio (2008b) replied that overlap does exist between OEs and FFM. However, he also stated that FFM “is not a theory of personality” (p. 272). The origins of FFM remain “in words that the general population uses, rather than in the work of experts in psychology and psychiatry” (p. 272).

McAdams and Pals (2006) critiqued FFM and stated, “Personality psychology has yet to articulate clearly a comprehensive framework for understanding the whole person” (p. 204). They also asserted that the FFM “should be offering more” (p. 204). Instead the FFM offers a trait psychology useful for when an individual meets a stranger rather than a comprehensive theory of personality growth. Mendaglio (2008b) further explained TPD as a grand theory of personality that dynamically clarifies personal transformation rather than just assessing character traits.

Mendaglio (2012) also argued that OEs, again, separate from FFM overlap, can only be understood within the overall complexity and dynamics of TPD. TPD applications to bullying interactions allow deeper personality interpretations, explanations that may further illuminate how and why a student responded to bullying in her or his own way. Winkler and Voight (2016) stated, “In-depth, qualitative studies might be preferable for detecting the nature of OEs” (p. 251). For qualitative analyses of bullying, a dynamic personality theory such as TPD, that includes OEs, shows promise when exploring early adolescent GT student personality in relation to bullying interactions.

## Research Setting

With 14 junior high schools and two middle schools, Jefferson School District (JSD; pseudonym) educates on the order of 68,000 K-12 students. Located in the Rocky Mountain west, Washington Middle School (WMS; pseudonym) has roughly 900 students in attendance. As a public school, WMS serves residents from a prosperous upper-middle class neighborhood built along the beautiful Wasatch Mountain range. Its student population is about 96 percent White. The configuration of the other four percent includes a mixture of several ethnic and racial groups. The culture in which the school operates is heavily influenced by a single religious organization.

WMS is well known for outstanding GT programs and functions as an unofficial magnet school for high-level early adolescent GT students. Approximately 62% of its students come yearly from other JSD schools and neighboring school districts. Under the school's open-admission policy, parents can register their children until full enrollment (i.e., 30 students in each GT class). When the classes are full, parents can put their child on a waiting list. If an opening occurs, registration of the next student on the list takes place. Advanced technology, math, and GT programs attract parents and students to WMS. As enticements for parents and students, the GT program includes social studies, English, and science courses. Moreover, a well-respected educational staff imparts the GT program components as dedicated professionals.

Student acceptance into the GT program, as defined by JSD administration, depends upon a high combined score computed from the Cognitive Abilities Test (CogAT) and a criterion referenced test. For this to occur, administrators convert the

student's criterion test score to a standard score, which is then averaged with the CogAT score, resulting in the combined score. The total scores are ranked and then students are admitted according to rank into GT classes until full. This process generally results in students with a minimum CogAT at the 92<sup>nd</sup> percentile in GT classes. Those students not accepted can take academic courses in the honors program.

Once in the WMS program, GT-endorsed teachers address student educational and socioemotional needs in self-contained GT classes. Administrators show their support through extracurricular activities including science fairs, History Day, and cultural fairs. Counselors show their support through helping students register for the classes based on student need. For example, if a student struggles in GT English, counselors switch the student to Honors English without removing the students from the other GT courses.

A few years ago, JSD instituted antibullying programs in all its schools. WMS included informational assemblies, a school-wide life-skills curriculum, and anonymous reporting as elements of its antibullying program. Through the assemblies and life-skills activities, educators instruct students concerning unacceptable bullying behaviors and what students can do, as bystanders, to protect each other from victimization. Students can also report bullying anonymously utilizing a locked metal box called the Buddy Box. It is a box with a slit cut-out on top, placed in the media center, where any student witness can report bullying.

“Bullying and the Unique Socioemotional Needs of Gifted and Talented Early Adolescents: Veteran Teacher Perspectives and Practices” (Allen, 2017a) was a study

also done at WMS. This study provided contextual information regarding what veteran teachers do to protect GTs from bullying. By exploring GT student bullying experiences in the same setting, this investigation built on the findings of the previous analysis including student insights and perceptions.

### **Recruitment**

After initial planning meetings with the principal and district, I met with the school's two English teachers of GT students to describe the research study, including the benefits of the research. Both consented to permit recruitment of potential student participants in their classrooms. As a GT social studies teacher at the school, to avoid coercion, recruitment from GT English classes prevented any possibility of conscription from my classes. GT English teachers were also selected because the researchers needed to ensure that both GT and English as a Second Language (ESL) students had the opportunity to access research information and informed consent forms in the home language(s) of their parents. Along with the prevention of coercion, recruitment from English classes helped solve this issue as well.

Following the procedure approved by the IRB to limit any perceived coercion that could have resulted from my recruiting of students, given my role as a teacher at the school, the nominal principal investigator for the study (i.e., Dr. Scott Hunsaker) presented the study to 204 GT students in their sixth, seventh, and eighth grade English classes. He followed a specific script (see Appendix A). After Dr. Hunsaker's presentation, students moved to a designated location in the room to pick up a letter of



information they could take home to inform their parents of the study. The letter of information provided basic study information and a participation timeline (see Appendix B). To ensure equitable opportunities for student participation, the letter of information was printed in English, Spanish, Chinese, Vietnamese, and Korean. Students were given the option to select letters to take home in whichever languages they preferred. For the next two-weeks, all study materials, including the letter of information, parental informed consent, survey questions, and interview questions were posted on the school's website. This enabled parent and student access to information to guide their decision-making before agreeing to participate. In addition, mental health and suicide information was made available because of the recent apparent suicide of a former GT student from the school.

After the 2-week window, Dr. Hunsaker came back to the same GT English classes and provided students with the parental informed consent form (see Appendix C) printed in the same languages. Again, students were able to select the forms they felt their parents would need. At that point, students and parents had one week to decide if they wanted to participate or not. Students who wanted to participate received parental consent and returned their signed consent forms in a sealed envelope to their GT English teacher, who placed the sealed envelopes in a large manila envelope. Dr. Hunsaker later retrieved these from the English teachers. Dr. Hunsaker opened the sealed envelopes and noted which parents indicated consent and which, if any, did not. He then informed me which students had opted into the study. Those who returned their informed consent forms were invited to participate in the online bullying survey questionnaire. I sent an e-mail to the

parents with a link to the questionnaire (see Appendix D). Students accessed and completed the questionnaire at their convenience. Twelve students completed the questionnaire. Each student created a pseudonym while completing the survey. This kept their identities unknown while their responses were being analyzed for purposeful sampling. Students responded to both forced choice and open-ended items about bullying victimization and perpetration (see Appendix E).

### **Sampling Procedure**

After the questionnaires were completed, both researchers studied the data. This shared analysis was a requirement of the Institutional Review Board (IRB). Participants to be interviewed were purposefully selected using the following criteria; quantity of bullying experiences (i.e., number of bullying experiences), quality of bullying experiences (i.e., represented in multiple bullying categories), student communication ability, and student self-reflection.

To assess the twelve questionnaires completed, a rubric was created that awarded points on a 1- to 15-point scale, to the students for the number of bullying incidents they reported, the number of different bullying categories they reported, a professional judgment of the fluency of their writing, and a professional judgment about the degree to which they reflected on their own role in the bullying situations reported. This provided a practical way of ensuring usable data. After determination of the individual criterial scores, all four scores were totaled for each student. Then, students were ranked from highest to lowest total score. From the list, the first six students were invited to

participate in the interview process. The students' actual names were extracted by Dr. Hunsaker from a separate part of the survey not available to me (i.e., student-researcher), again an IRB requirement to reduce coercion. I obtained the students' contact information from school records and sent an e-mail invitation to the parents' preferred email address for their child to participate in the interview. Initially the top scorers included six girls. When one of the girls declined to participate, to gain broader perspectives, we took the next highest scoring male to invite to participate. In the end, five girls and one boy accepted the invitation, through their parents, to participate in the research.

### **The Interview Process**

To avoid interfering with instructional time, the researchers scheduled interviews with students before and after school. Interview arrangements were made through email communication with the parents. To address equity and coercion considerations, I was not allowed to interview my own students. Any students registered in a class that I taught were interviewed by Dr. Hunsaker; this totaled three of the six students. I interviewed the other three students. To protect student confidentiality, each student was interviewed three times in a conference room at the school or at some other location convenient for parents and students. All interviews were recorded, transcribed, and stored with password protection and under lock-and-key. All recordings were destroyed at the end of the study.

To increase the likelihood that the interviews would produce accurate student perceptions of bullying, the interviewers started the interviews with several assurances. First, an assurance was made that participation would in no way positively or negatively

affect their grades in any class. Second, students were guaranteed that they would not get into trouble for reporting bullying incidents. Third, students were told that they would not be required to answer any question that made them feel uncomfortable. Fourth, students were informed that no wrong answers existed when talking about personal experiences. Fifth, all interviews were conducted in secure meeting rooms protected from interruption. Last, students and parents were previously informed that according to law and district policy, critical problems, such as sexual harassment between adults and children, child abuse, drug abuse, and threats to commit suicide, required by law or school district policy, needed immediate reporting to authorities.

To further check my power as a teacher at the school, the principal and one counselor were available for assistance if a student needed it. Both the principal and counselor received CITI training regarding human research subjects. This proved important because one student had emotional problems throughout the duration of the first interview. As a result, she was taken immediately to the counselor for assistance. After both counseling and talking to the student's parents, a determination was made she could continue with the study.

The first interview was limited to one hour. Open-ended questions used in the first interview are shown in Appendix F. Follow-up questions were used as needed.

Following the first interview, the transcripts were analyzed for emerging themes. The second interview consisted of member-checking the accuracy of the first interview transcript. In addition, the interviewee was given an opportunity to clarify and give further information. Finally, interviewers asked questions related to broad general themes

that emerged from the first analysis. For example, one theme that emerged was differences in what students and adults believed was bullying behavior. So, a follow-up question for the second interview was, “Do you think there is a difference in the ways students and adults define bullying?”

At the conclusion of the second interview, the researchers explained a picture elicitation technique known as *journey maps*. According to Noe (2000), pictures or artist renditions can make an important contribution to phenomenological research. He states, “The work of some artists can teach us about perceptual consciousness by furnishing us with the opportunity to have a special kind of reflective experience. In this way, art can be a tool for phenomenological investigation” (p. 123). Through picture renditions, in a safe setting, students can both create and express the complexity of their lived experiences (Leavy, 2010; Meyer & Marx, 2014) not necessarily possible through only verbalization (Zambo & Zambo, 2006). Moreover, journey maps prompt and allow more student insight so that researchers can understand students’ lived experiences “from the inside out” (Le Count, 2000, p. 20). Thus, interviewers explained how the students should draw her or his journey map.

The following procedure allowed each student to produce a journey map (Nyquist et al., 1999).

1. At the end of the second interview, the student was given the journey map instructions;
2. The student was told to think about her or his personal journey through school as a bullying victim, perpetrator, or bystander;
3. The student received a fine-tipped black-marker and a blank piece of white paper;

4. The student was shown a sample drawing of my journey map (see Appendix G), illustrating that the entire space of the paper could be used and that adding detail was encouraged.
5. Assurances were made to the student that aesthetic qualities of the drawing were not important, and the drawings should be “engaging, personal, and meaningful for each student” (Adams, 2012, p. 27); and,
6. Each student was able to keep her or his journey map for at least a week to complete the assignment.

The third interview was scheduled as soon after the second interview as possible, trying to make it soon enough for the student to remember what she or he drew and why. At the start of the third interview, to put the student at ease and reduce the power differential between the interviewer and the student, students had the opportunity to ask questions about my journey map. A photocopy of each student’s journey map appears in Appendix H, in the same order as the student appears in the results chapter. At an appropriate time, the interviewer transitioned to the student’s journey map. Then, the interviewer asked follow-up questions to probe for additional detail or insight concerning the student’s bullying experiences as expressed through the journey map. An example of a probing question was, “Where does the bullying incident start?” And, “Can you tell me as much as you can about what’s happening with bullying right here?” Interviewers also asked questions derived from the analysis of the previous two interviews to address unclear details and authenticate nuances at key moments (Minichiello, 2016) related to the student’s experiences. Follow-up questions also provided information concerning what students think schools should do to alleviate bullying.

## Data Analysis

For the transcript analysis process, a complex selection of qualitative research coding techniques helped derive meaning from the interview data. This was necessary when considering the pursuit of understandings through etic examinations of student bullying experiences, perceptions, opinions, and also, through the lens of TPD (Dabrowski, 2016/1964). Thus, the determination of an appropriate coding procedure required multiple coding choices and methodical combinations. This included two across-the-board attempts at coding the corpus of information. After the first attempt at coding 18 transcriptions, the second and current attempt comprised a total of 15 first cycle analytical coding techniques with follow-up second cycle investigative processes deemed appropriate and justifiable.

### First Cycle Coding Methods

First cycle refers to initial methods for coding unprocessed data (Saldaña, 2013). Figure 2 is an illustration of first cycle codes in a systematic array leading to TPD (Dabrowski, 2016/1964). This sequence separates first cycle codes from affective codes. Utilization of first cycle codes in different combinations with applicable affective codes was instrumental in both deriving meaning from the data and exploring emotional characteristics in relation to student responses to bullying. These processes also enabled examinations and considerations of emotional traits that coincide with the lens of TPD. An example of the application of these progressions, including detailed explanations, will occur later in this discussion with a student interview excerpt from a coding transcript.

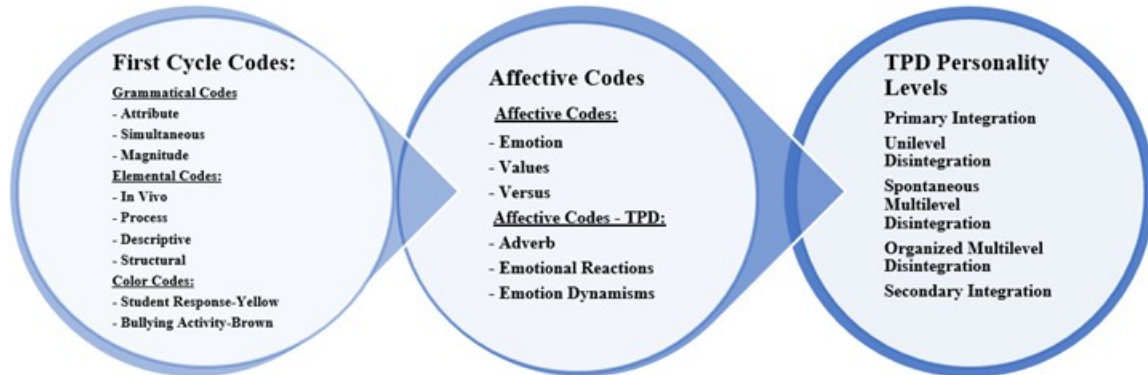


Figure 2. First cycle coding leading to understandings through the lens of TPD.

Applications of first cycle and affective codes occurred after the interview process. Each code in the Figure 2 sequence performed a specific function under its general method. Saldaña (2013) describes these methods as grammatical, elemental, and affective. Other essential affective codes were specifically developed to explore the data that coincide with TPD. A discussion of the function of each code under its aforementioned method will follow.

**Grammatical coding techniques.** According to Saldaña (2013), grammatical techniques are coding procedures referring “to the basic grammatical principles of a technique” (p. 69). These included; attribute, magnitude, and simultaneous codes. Attribute codes record “essential information about the data and demographic characteristics of the participants” (p. 69). Beginning the coding process, the completion of attribute coding occurred at the end of the third interview with an informational questionnaire given to each student (see Appendix I). Then, during the interview transcript analysis process, magnitude codes employed “alphanumeric or symbolic codes and/or subcodes to the data, when needed, to describe their variable characteristics such



as intensity or frequency” (p. 69). Also, simultaneous codes occurred “when two or more codes are applied to or overlap with qualitative datum to detail its complexity” (p. 69).

**Elemental coding techniques.** Elemental techniques aid in data analyses having “basic but focused filters for reviewing the corpus and they build a foundation for future coding cycles” (Saldaña, 2013, p. 83). For this study, these comprised; structural, descriptive, in vivo, and process techniques. First, structural codes are based on the interview questions. They help categorize the data “to examine comparable segments” (p. 84). Second, descriptive coding “summarizes in a word or short phrase—most often as a noun—the basic topic of a passage of qualitative data” (p. 88). Third, in vivo coding “refers to a word or short phrase from the actual language found in the qualitative data record” (p. 91). Last, process coding “uses gerunds (“-ing” words) exclusively to connote action in the data” (p. 96), exposing the information to further exploration.

**Affective coding techniques.** Affective techniques help explore emotions in response to human experiences. For the current procedure, these included; emotion, values, and versus codes. They help “investigate subjective qualities of human experience (e.g., emotions, values, conflicts, judgments)” (Saldaña, 2013, p. 105). Emotion codes “label the emotions recalled and/or experienced by the participant or inferred by the researcher about the participant” (p. 105). Values codes, in response to a bullying experience “reflect a participant’s values, attitudes, and beliefs, representing his or her perspectives or worldview” (p. 110). In turn, versus codes help “identify in dichotomies or binary terms the individuals, groups, social systems, organizations, phenomena, process, concepts, etc., in direct conflict with each other” (p. 115).

Falling under the same general umbrella as affective techniques are those codes developed to explore student characteristics coinciding with the lens of TPD. For example, adverbs are linguistic representations of emotional and intellectual expression. At the basic level, adverbs modify verbs, adjectives, and other adverbs. Analysis of adverbs in this study focused primarily on adverbs of stance. Biber and Finegan (1988) described adverbs of stance as “the overt expression of an author’s or speaker’s attitudes, feelings, judgments, or commitment concerning the message. Adverbials are one of the primary lexical markers of stance in English” (p. 1). Epistemic adverbs were also coded in this study. Epistemic adverbs “indicate that the speaker considers certain situations as possible, impossible, probable, certain, or uncertain. At the same time, they signal the author’s presence in the text and invite the reader to make his/her own conclusions and interpretations” (Rozumko, 2017, p. 73). In this analysis, adverbial usage represented emotional convergence with intellectual thoughts as individual students communicated their ideas and points of view concerning bullying. Thus, stance and epistemic adverbs and adverbial phrases were coded to emphasize actions or occurrences students emotionally and intellectually describe when answering questions, highlighting and building upon each student’s expression of their unique voice and perceptions of experiences. Following from this, adverbs were underlined as depictions of emotional and intellectual OEs in this analysis.

Figure 3 is an example of a coded student interview transcript excerpt. A coding key is at the bottom of each of the three columns. An explanation of the rest of the coded information will follow.

First Cycle Codes	Interview Data	Affective Codes/TPD Lens
<p>TEASING ABOUT GRADES - CONDITIONAL HELP <b>Teasing</b></p> <p>“but it’s not like I’m going to offer myself every single time because some people don’t have as good of a grade just because they don’t work hard at it or they don’t focus.”</p> <p>Cookie [pseudonym] v. Bully</p>	<p>Okay. So, in Okay. So, in this part <u>where</u> I was <u>just</u> saying <u>how</u> people make fun <u>of my math grade</u> and I’m <u>usually just</u> like “Hey, can I help you out?” It’s <u>not...</u> I <u>don’t</u> <u>always</u> love to help them out. I <u>just</u> end up doing it, [giggle] helping them out <u>anyway just</u> ‘cause they <u>still</u> should be helped out, but it’s <u>not</u> like I’m going <u>to offer myself</u> <u>every</u> single time because some people <u>don’t</u> have as good of a grade <u>just</u> because they <u>don’t</u> work <u>hard</u> at it or they <u>don’t</u> focus. So, they <u>kind of...</u></p>	<p>Disquietude and Empathy dynamisms – Taking responsibility for own personality development.</p> <p>Empathy</p> <p>Helping out a bully is Multi I or II. Multi I if it’s spontaneous.</p> <p>Emotional and Intellectual OEs</p> <p>Low and calm/Serious and Medium</p> <p>Giggle (High) Serious (Medium)</p> <p>Positive Value – “still should be helped out.” Disquietude</p> <p>Low and calm</p> <p>Helping out is conditional upon the Positive value of hard work with little if any Shame and Guilt.</p>
<p><b>Process Codes</b> (i.e., gerunds) – In Bold</p>	<p>Brown – Experience with Bullying</p> <p>Yellow – Student Responses</p> <p>Green – Student Emotional Reaction to Bullying</p> <p><u>Underlined</u> – Adverb Modifiers</p>	<p>Red – TPD Dynamism and Personality Lens</p> <p>Purple – TPD OEs</p> <p>Blue – Values</p> <p>Black – Emotion Code</p>

Figure 3. The three-column coding sheet showing the complexity of the coding scheme.

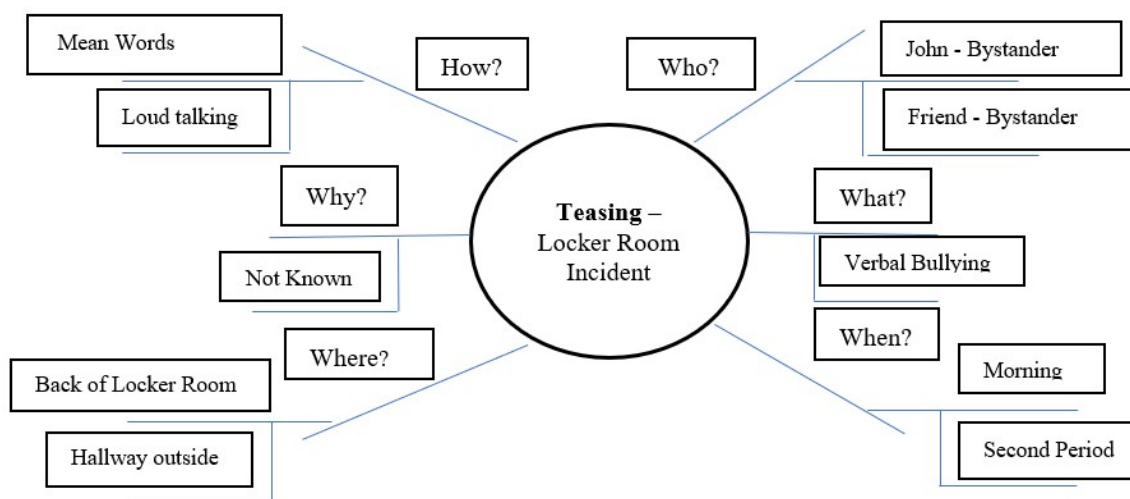
**Creative coding adjustments.** Notwithstanding codes developed specifically for TPD analysis, creative adjustments were necessary for the standard coding procedures (Saldaña, 2013). Saldaña stated, “In qualitative data analysis, some interpretive leeway is necessary—indeed, imagination and creativity are essential to achieve new and hopefully striking perspectives about the data” (p. 208). Therefore, slight adjustments to common first cycle codes were made in-order-to “transcend” (p. 208) the data. Thus, with each round of transcript reading, first cycle codes were applied with adjustments to certain codes.

**The first round of coding.** The first round of transcript reading included

descriptive, versus, and structural first cycle techniques. As a starting point, in the middle column student responses to bullying were highlighted yellow. In turn, identified bullying experiences were also highlighted brown (see Figure 3). Then, descriptive coding provided a short explanation of a student response as a topic heading. It reflected “a word or short phrase” (Saldaña, 2013, p. 88). This is illustrated with all capitalization, “TEASING ABOUT GRADES – CONDITIONAL HELP” in the first column in Figure 3. The first round also included affective versus codes. These helped pinpoint the nature of the bullying conflict. For example, the first column shows “Cookie [pseudonym] v. Bully.” Structural coding followed. As a “question-based code” (p. 84), instead of using these codes as a “labeling and indexing device” (p. 84), the questions themselves provided structure. Whether the questions were preconceived in the first interview, or emerged, especially for the second and third interviews, each question, along with follow-ups, provided structure for student responses. Thus, student response, bullying experience, descriptive, versus, and structural coding were completed during the first round of readings because they helped ascertain the basic question, “What is going on here?” (p. 88). To continue probing this question, the second round of coding helped provide answers.

**The second round of coding.** The second round of transcript reading included in vivo and process techniques. In vivo codes reproduce the exact words of a student response. This helps protect both the authenticity and nuances of student voices. Nonetheless, counter to Saldana’s (2013) recommendation of an in vivo code written as a “word or short phrase” (p. 91), a complete understanding of a student response required

inclusive thoughts. This helped limit the practice of reductionism. It also extended the length of the code. The first column in Figure 3 shows an *in vivo* code within quotes. Process codes, on the other hand, identify gerunds representing human actions. The first column in Figure 3 also shows the word “teasing” in bold. From this gerund, a broad understanding developed. Therefore, rather than processes “ordered as a numeric series of actions” (p. 98), utilization of a who, what, when, where, why, and how mind-map helped delineate the particular bullying problem. Figure 4 is a visual depiction. It resembles a wheel in which the spokes connected to the central incident helped reveal the intricacies of the ill-treatment. As I learned new details, I would write data on the spokes and related information on connections or lines. Each added line represented a more intricate detail related to the previous data. As details grew, more lines were added. Further searches for additional gerunds such as *name calling* and *gossiping* were also instrumental in establishing other explanations of different bullying experiences and scenarios for the inquiry process.



*Figure 4.* Process code graphic mind-map used to illustrate the details of a bullying incident.

**The third round of coding.** The third round of transcript readings began with an understanding of simultaneous coding. Simultaneous codes were not necessarily written as a code per se. They represented the recognition that multiple codes were being used at the same time to derive meaning from the data (Saldaña, 2013). Simultaneous interpretations are utilized when “two or more different codes” (p. 80) are applied “to a single qualitative datum, or the overlapped occurrence of two or more codes applied to sequential units of qualitative data” (p. 80). When looking at student responses, to help further determine “What is going on here?” (p. 88), efforts at a complete examination and interpretation of student reactions at certain times involved several codes applied simultaneously in combination with previously coded data. To help with this endeavor, for the third and fourth rounds of reading and coding; emotional reaction, values, emotional dynamism, magnitude, adverb, and emotion codes were added to this investigation.

The third round of reading included emotional reaction and values coding. For example, as aforementioned, whenever a student emotionally reacted to a bullying experience in some way, it was coded green in the middle column of the coding sheet. This was easily recognizable if a student either exclaimed her or his reaction or asked a question. In Figure 3, the student says, “Hey, can I help you out?” With this, simultaneously, the student used a positive human value of caring for others when emotionally reacting to the ill-treatment illustrated with previous coding in the first two columns. In turn, the positive value is coded blue in the third column.

From bullying experiences, student perceptions and judgments of what should be

done are based on emotional reactions and any application of human values to solve the problem: The relevance of these two affective elements coincide with the lens of TPD. Their natural expression characterizes personality development. Therefore, if the application of a human value only secures personal safety, it suggests primary integration (Dabrowski, 2016/1964). If it also helps the bully stop and learn, it reveals evidence of multilevel disintegration.

**The fourth round of coding.** Further examination of emotional reactions, application of values, and viewing through the lens of TPD, required a fourth round of coding. These methods involved emotional magnitude coding, emotional dynamism coding, and adverb coding. These three codes required listening to the recordings of each interview multiple times while reading the transcripts. This procedure allowed me to gauge the emotional magnitude produced as students responded to questions. While listening to each recording, I wrote down changes in volume with each student interview response. This would provide a mechanism for me to evaluate such energy as OEs. This procedure also allowed me to further assess and interpret emotional reactions and specific emotions coinciding with TPD dynamisms. As I tracked each recorded conversation, I marked codes in the third column of the transcriptions (see Figure 3). As students communicated, emotional magnitude coding helped reveal low, medium, and high volume. Low volume was normal conversation. Medium was an increase in volume. High was a strong emotion such as laughing, giggling, shouting, or crying. If the emotional reaction and application of values in column two coincided with a TPD dynamism such as shame or guilt, it was also coded in the third column. Furthermore,

adverbs as linguistic facilitators of OEs and additional TPD lens simultaneously coalescing several first cycle codes across the three-column progression, further illuminated personality meaning from student emotional reactions.

As I tracked each interview conversation, it became clear that each student had a unique vocal inflection for expressing her or his answers to the interview questions. For some, an increase in volume revealed emotional strength and the saliency of their argument. I also recognized that in some cases and instances, students may have had a lot of excitement going on internally without OEs showing externally or conversationally.

To solve this problem, I detected salient arguments by tracking and coding adverbs—language modifiers representing emotional and intellectual expression—on each interview transcription. This provided not only more objective indicators regarding verbal expression of the emotional OE, but the intellectual OE as well. This revealed rational thoughts contributing to the importance of the emotional reactions. In concert, a preponderance of adverbs coalescing next to a student reply indicated salient significance. This blending was easily recognizable.

For example, using the same student response as in Figure 3, adverbs are underscored. Using a mixture of low, medium, and high tones, the student used twenty-two adverbs in the passage to make her points. She stated:

Okay. So, in this part where I was just saying how people make fun of my math grade and I'm usually just like "**Hey, can I help you out?**" It's not... I don't always love to help them out. I just end up doing it [giggle], helping them out anyway just 'cause they still should be helped out, but it's not like I'm going to offer myself every single time because some people don't have as good of a grade just because they don't work hard at it or they don't focus. So, they kind of...

These adverbs helped her explain how she responded to ill-treatment. As her inflection



rose, she started using more adverbs. Her volume increased when she giggled during her explanation. Her use of adverbs coalesced around her emotional reaction and application of the human value of caring. This is highlighted. It demonstrates her salient emotional and intellectual use of a positive value to solve a bullying problem. Similar usage of adverbs helped me detect emotional reactions for all student interview responses from the 18 interview transcriptions.

If the student also responded with creative language and/or problem-solving, this indicated activation of the imaginal OE (Dabrowski, 2016/1964; Silverman, 2016). For example, one student described being “sandwiched between two chairs” when ill-treated in class. Another student stated “the millionth time” when expressing frustration with ineffective antibullying announcements. Any change in tone and/or inflection with animated expression, when quoting or mimicking other people, also signified imagination. Such expressions provided key evidence of divergent problem-solving ability or thinking outside the box. How students creatively determine ways schools can solve the bullying problem reflects such ability. Moreover, Dabrowski (2016/1964) has indicated the big three OEs; emotional, intellectual, and imaginal, working together, as vital for eminent attainment. Thus, if students feel emotionally unsafe because of bullying, both intellectual and imaginal OEs stand effected as well.

**The fifth round of coding.** The fifth and last round of coding was practical. In Figure 3, in the third column, I wrote down emotion first cycle codes representing what students emoted with their responses. These emotions represented student feelings that, at times, crossed over with TPD emotional dynamisms. Through the analysis process, these

expressions helped me locate specific emotions and emotional reactions. Among many, these included: confidence, frustration, anger, empathy, hurt, shame, and guilt.

In respect to student journey maps, as established in the transcript of the third interview, each map was analyzed only in terms of the students' explanations of their drawings. In other words, I did not attempt to interpret the journey maps myself but relied on student words and expressions used to describe as reflected in the interview transcriptions. These transcriptions were coded with the same process as explained above.

### **Second Cycle Coding Methods**

After first cycle coding, second cycle methods included focused and pattern codes (Saldaña, 2013). Second cycle coding helps “develop a sense of categorical, thematic, conceptual, and/or theoretical organization” (p. 207). Notwithstanding a suggestion by Saldaña that “simple organizational or hierarchical outlining of categories and subcategories gives you a handle on them” (p. 216); this study avoided descriptive hierarchies derived from one-or-two-word categories in favor of themes. Themes appeared to better explain yet encapsulate the nuances of student voice. Thus, for this investigation, thematic organization led to focused codes. Focused coding “searches for the most frequent or significant codes to develop” (p. 213) representing the salient themes. According to Saldaña, “a theme is an *outcome* of coding” (p. 175). It is “not something that is, in itself coded” (p. 175). A theme emerges through hermeneutic interpretation and summation. It represents “a strategic choice as part of the research design that includes the primary questions, goals, conceptual framework, and literature

review” (p. 177). As such, pattern coding helps “pull together a lot of material” (p. 210) with color code matching used to identify and analyze commonality within the data. This enabled the development of themes written as focused codes.

**From patterns to focused codes.** The determination of focused codes from patterns followed a specific procedure that led to the lens of TPD. Pattern code matching determined focused codes within the data of each student’s school bullying experiences, perspectives, and opinions. Using the same pattern codes, students were also compared for any possible associations among the six cases. Figure 5 is a section of the data chart used as an information summary. It begins with “Types of Bullying” experiences as the focused code. It displays a pattern for each kind of bullying experience for each student. The data chart also shows in which interview each student revealed each type of bullying occurrence. The chart further produces a total for all students for each type of incident, revealing the overall pattern. Taking a cursory view at the data, each student appeared to have had distinctive bullying experiences. However, a closer look revealed some similarities. Carol and Cookie experienced mainly gossiping and cyberbullying. Mia also faced gossiping. Mary recounted cyberbullying. Both Kate and John reported only name calling and physical bullying. Along with Kate and John, Mia experienced physical

<b><u>Focused</u></b>	<b>Carol</b>	<b>Mia</b>	<b>Mary</b>	<b>Cookie</b>	<b>Kate</b>	<b>John</b>	<b><u>Pattern</u></b>
<b>Types of Bullying</b>	<b>Interview 1</b> Gossiping Cyberbullying	<b>Interview 1</b> Gossiping Teasing Physical	<b>Interview 2</b> Name-calling Teasing Cyberbullying Taking possessions	<b>Interview 1</b> Cyberbullying Teasing about grades Gossiping	<b>Interview 1</b> Name-calling <b>Interview 2</b> Physical	<b>Interview 1</b> Name-calling Physical	<b>Name-calling 3</b> <b>Gossip 3</b> <b>Cyber. 3</b> <b>Teasing 3</b> <b>Physical 3</b> <b>Taking</b> <b>Possessions 1</b>

*Figure 5.* Types of bullying thematic focused codes and patterns within and across student cases.

bullying while Mary was a victim of name calling. Only Mia, Mary, and Cookie reported teasing. Essentially, each student shared at least two types of bullying with another student.

**Further investigation.** As I looked at their specific experiences and each of their perspectives, as my investigation became more complex, pattern coding with color code-matching leading to focused codes became interesting to pursue. For all cases, further exploration allowed more qualitative similarities and differences to arise from the data. This includes analysis through the lens of TPD. For example, Figure 6 is a section of the data chart showing the theme-based focused code representing the application of human values as either an emphasis on personal values or positive values. Analysis of commonality of patterns between the three interviews with each student case indicated either a prominence of the application of values to either secure personal safety or positive values to help others. In response to bullying, personal values are those values

<b><u>Focused</u></b>	<b><u>Carol</u></b>	<b><u>Mia</u></b>	<b><u>Mary</u></b>	<b><u>Cookie</u></b>	<b><u>Kate</u></b>	<b><u>John</u></b>	<b><u>Pattern</u></b>
<b>Application of human values to help solve bullying – Is it positive values or personal safety?</b>	<b>Interview 1/2/3</b> She learns defensive human values through others. She reluctantly looks for peer acceptance and has bullied others.	<b>Interview 1/2/3</b> She follows peer norms because she has not learned positive human values at home. She has bullied back to defend herself.	<b>Interview 1/2</b> She follows peer norms and will bully back when necessary.	<b>Interview 1/2</b> She leaned positive values from parents, especially mother. <b>Interview 3</b> Outwardly practices empathy and seeks to learn and apply positive values – since second grade	<b>Interview 1</b> Positive values learned from mother and father. <b>Interview 2</b> She feels empathy with justice first when trying to help bullies.	<b>Interview 1</b> Personal ways to cope learned from parents. <b>Interview 2</b> He has personal values and avoids bullies, but doesn't see much bullying – situational norms	<b>Personal Safety = 4</b>  <b>Positive Values = 2</b>
	<b>Personal Safety</b>	<b>Personal Safety</b>	<b>Personal Safety</b>	<b>Positive Values</b>	<b>Positive Values</b>	<b>Personal Safety</b>	

*Figure 6.* Application of human values as either to secure personal safety or apply positive values toward others.

students apply to only themselves, such as fighting back or avoidance. Carol, Mia, and Mary have bullied others. John avoided bullies. On the other hand, positive values are those applied to help others, especially bullies. This is not meant to imply that personal values cannot be positive. It is to show that from a Dabrowskian perspective the application of positive values indicates evidence of multilevel disintegration (Dabrowski, 2016/1964). Cookie and Kate show important proof of using positive values to help stop bullies from ill-treating others. Thus, the overall pattern revealed four of the six students having indications of primary integration with two having suggestions of multilevel disintegration.

**Expansion of the investigation.** The second cycle process of determining theme-based focused codes from the commonality of patterns proceeded throughout the inquiry process. These included focused codes entitled; differences between student and adult bullying definitions, opinions concerning physical and verbal bullying, differences between definitions of bullying and feelings about bullying, judgments concerning effectiveness of school programs, and student responses to bullying victimization. These focused codes represented the emphasis of the research questions—student bullying experiences, perceptions, and judgments concerning what schools should do. As more data coincided with the lens of TPD, focused codes began to represent OEs, dynamisms, and further evidence of particular personality levels, further illuminating “...What is going on here?” (Saldaña, 2013, p. 88).

## **The Triangulation Process**

Triangulation is the process by which the trustworthiness of the data and the findings that emerge from that data can be ascertained. To establish trustworthiness, I used multiple data sources and data gathering methods, along with member-checking. I also kept carefully recorded field journals. Furthermore, I established fidelity checks through regular meetings with a peer debriefer.

### **Multiple Data Sources and Methods**

I used at least three data collection methods; questionnaires, interviews, and picture elicitation. While these collection methods were used, this was not a mixed methods study. The questionnaires were completed by 12 students, while interviews and picture elicitation were completed by six students. The 12 students who participated in the study included some who had taken classes from me and some who had not; drawing from all three grades at the junior high school—sixth, seventh, and eighth. The utilization of multiple sources and methods added to the rigor and robustness of the study “to indicate that the more sources contributing, the richer the data and more complex the findings” (Glesne, 2011, p. 48). In turn, the study became more “trustworthy and plausible” (p.48).

**Member-checking.** At the beginning of the second interview, students were instructed to read through the transcript of their first interview. Both interviewers explained to them that the purpose of this process was to verify the data from the first interview. Thus, students had the opportunity to correct the transcript. If necessary, they

could add any information they believed would clarify their initial statements. During the third interview, each student member-checked her or his transcript of the second interview as well.

**Field journals.** I kept a three-part field journal. Part I included notes made during interviews including key terms that prompted follow-up questions. Part II constituted a reflective journal in which I recorded my thoughts and impressions concerning the study's findings. This included exploration of possible themes used in focused coding and resultant outcomes. It also comprised examinations of how my positionality affected findings and interpretations. Part III served as a record of the methodological decisions made while conducting the study. As an example, I recorded decisions about further questions to ask following the first and second interviews. I also made analytical determinations concerning themes, patterns, and outcomes supported by the evidence (Glesne, 2011).

**Peer debriefing.** A peer debriefer offered an "external check on the inquiry process" (Lincoln & Guba, 1991/1985, p. 301). Debriefing helped me understand and control my subjective judgements as well as added clarity and direction to the study. The peer debriefer for this project was a fellow graduate student with training in qualitative research methods. Peer debriefing meetings took place every week during the analysis. At the debriefing sessions, interview transcripts and field journals were reviewed as well as other data collected, such as the journey maps. At each session, the peer debriefer took time to peruse the research materials. We then engaged in conversations about the conduct of the research. The peer debriefer pointed out possible influences from my

positionality, verified the reasonableness of decisions made, and suggested alternative explanations and routes that might be considered. For instance, while reviewing my interview transcription coding sheets, my peer debriefer noticed an error. I had given too much credit for a student independently applying positive personal values toward a bullying incident. This resulted in a misjudgment concerning the student's personality level. This problem forced me to go back to the data and re-evaluate my original decision. The result was that the peer debriefer was partially correct. So, I re-assessed and corrected the error. My peer debriefer also commended my use of adverbs in the analysis of each interview transcript. All peer debriefing sessions were recorded in the field journals.



## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

#### The Case of Mia Min

Mia Min was an 11-year-old sixth-grade GT student at WMS. She has always scored highly proficient on her standardized tests. She has also achieved straight As except for one A-. Then again, she took little notice of her achievements. Mia stated, “I don’t really take much notice into my accomplishments because I was born into a family where accomplishments are the norm and are expected of you.” Also, Mia’s parents did not permit her to have dislikes. She stated, “I’m not really allowed to have any dislikes or I’ll get judged.” Contradicting this, Mia has one thing that she really detests. She stated, “I hate haunted houses.” Mia’s favorite school subject was orchestra. She stated, “My favorite school subject is orchestra because it’s the only class that I don’t have to worry about and just have fun and relax.” Mia reported that she loves swimming and spending any free time with her friends. She swam competitively on a team. She stated, “I like swimming and the people on my team, but it gets stressful sometimes.” As a result of her studying and swim training, she had little time for anything else. She reported that she usually spends her free time talking with her friends, writing stories, and drawing pictures. Mia said that she wants to change society. She stated, “I would like to change society’s stereotypes and unfair judgements about people because it just makes every good person bad.”

## **Experiences with Bullying**

Mia's experiences with bullying began in preschool. They continued throughout elementary school. At the time of the interview, social ill-treatment was a problem for her in middle school as well.

**Bullying in preschool.** Mia went to a private preschool. Her parents thought it would provide Mia with a better educational foundation. She did not like it. Mia believed she "was the only average person there who wasn't rich or comes from a whole business family." She claimed she was ill-treated. Other kids gossiped about her, "like rumors, somebody calling me stuff." The rumors dealt with "income stuff, and they also called me other personal things, like ugly and fat."

Mia believed she "wasn't that smart." She stated, "Preschool didn't really teach us much, and so they called me stupid because they already learned it from their parents and stuff, but then I didn't know that because my parents didn't really teach me anything." Mia's parents thought the schools would do it. Mia stated, "I didn't learn how to tie a shoelace until third grade."

**Bullying in kindergarten.** Mia's parents sent her to another school for kindergarten. She stated that it was "a new start. I can just be happy, and so I started—I tried talking to people, but they kept saying, 'No, I don't want to talk to you, go away.' So, I was just kind of lonely." When asked if other students were gossiping about her, she replied, "Well, I really didn't take much notice, but probably because I talked to people and they'd say, 'Go away,' and then they'd start talking to other people about me, and so those people wouldn't talk to me." When asked what she thought they were talking about,

she stated, “I don’t know.” Then she said, “They called me ugly for a lot of school.” She continued, “Well, I wasn’t—I think they mostly called me ugly for my weight and stuff, because—but little kids, they’re all a little chubby.” She followed-up explaining about chubbiness, “It’s normal.” In response to the gossiping, Mia would try to talk to the offenders, but ostracism resulted. She stated, “I was going to talk to them, but they were like, ‘No, go away.’” She kept at it, stating “I kept trying.”

**Bullying from second through third grade.** Name calling occurred throughout elementary school. She stated that from second through third grade, “I was actually pretty happy and stuff, but during school, the bullying was fine, but I was still kind of messed up from the other stuff that happened, so internally I wasn’t that fine, but during school it was pretty happy.”

**Bullying in fourth grade.** In fourth grade, Mia noticed a boy with autism being ostracized in her class. The boy had moved into the area and just enrolled in school. Mia approached the boy and formed a friendship. This seemed to ease her loneliness. Everything was going well until he started passing notes to her. When fellow classmates heard of the note-passing, they would try to intercept the notes. They would also gossip inappropriately about Mia and the boy. Not helping the situation, the boy had other students pass the notes to her during class. He would also put notes in her locker.

In response, the other students bullied Mia. They would push her around. They would try to block her locker to prevent her access. They would also try to take the notes away from her. Mia’s ill-treatment continued throughout the rest of the school year.

As the bullying persisted, the boy continued to write messages that made Mia

uncomfortable. Mia explained that he went from one extreme to another. The notes began with, “Hi, do you want to be friends? Then, he immediately went to, ‘I love you.’” She felt embarrassment, so she told the boy, “Sorry, I don’t feel the same way.” He responded by getting angry. As the note passing continued in class, he would write stories to her “about being the vulnerable princess who can’t do anything was saved by the huge knight or whatever.” Her discomfort continued as he wrote, “Will you marry me stuff.” She stated, “I was so ashamed” and “I don’t like this.” Meanwhile, Mia’s classmates continued to make fun of her. They would say, “Why are you so ashamed? Are you sure that you’re not a freak now, because an autistic boy likes you?” One note, she stated, “had it where we kissed, and that made me really uncomfortable. I told him multiple times to stop, but every time I’d tell him to stop, he’d get really mad. I’d say, ‘I’m sorry, this is making me uncomfortable,’ and he’d get really mad and everyone would start blaming me for it.”

The bullying situation between Mia and the boy became complicated. Mia stated, “No one did anything to him. He was treated specially. He was treated specially. They were like, ‘He’s autistic, he doesn’t know any better, he’s fine. It’s just the girl that’s a freak. It’s obvious that since an autistic boy likes her, she must be really weird.’” Feeling terrible, Mia wrote a note back to the boy. She stated, “I wrote him a note saying, ‘I’m sorry, I’m sorry, I’m sorry, I don’t like you that way. Can you please stop? I’m sorry. I’m sorry.’ I apologized every sentence, but then his mom still said it was mean.”

**Bullying in middle school.** Mia’s experiences with bullying in middle school involved cyberbullying. In sixth grade, she began to hang-out with a popular group of

boys. She stated:

So, I hung out with this group of people. It was mainly guys, but we were just hanging out and stuff. But then because I was friends with them, and they were actually quite popular, rumors started spreading because they'd see me with them, so rumors would start spreading. And then it has become obvious, just inappropriate rumors.

She also explained:

People would message me on Instagram and like talking about it and stuff. And then like it was a point where strangers I don't even know or like I've never even seen before in the school would come up to me and ask me about the rumors, and they'd only talk to me because of the rumors.

They would harass Mia with questions.

At times she received cyber messages from those who were jealous. She stated, "Yeah, I guess a lot of people were jealous, too." In response to the cyberbullying, Mia stated:

[I] just kind of ignored it. I just tried to ignore it, but then once it all stopped and I told my friends about it, that was like when I was ok. Like a lot of girls who liked those guys, they were jealous and said they'd come up to me and start being like, "You're not good enough. You don't deserve to be friends with them."

Mia moreover stated, "For me I was just friends with them. But then for them they were actually trying to have something with them."

In response to ill-treatment, Mia did get into trouble for bullying perpetration. Mia slugged another student. In reaction, her mother became angry. When thinking about her mother's response, when asked about involving adults to help students with bullying problems, Mia stated:

A lot of adults I've asked; they say that since they're older, they have more authority and so, in my experience, adults make it worse. I told my mom and she started yelling at me, but she got so annoyed that I was crying and she said, "Do you want me to talk to the principal? Do you want me to?" Really angrily, she

used it like a threat. She made it sound as though I was the one who was going to get in trouble. She made it sound like I was—I just punched someone. And she was going to tell the principal, and I was going to get really in trouble and stuff and everyone was going to be ashamed of me.

Such experiences encapsulated how Mia both thought and felt about bullying.

### **Mia's Thoughts about Bullying**

Mia reported that she thinks ill treatment has to be repeated and hurt the victim for it to be bullying. It can be on purpose or not. And, if not severe, people can talk it out among themselves in order to solve the problem. Mia characterized bullying in the following way:

Bullying is really like when someone's doing something that hurts someone else, even if it's not purposeful. But I don't believe that doing it once is either bullying too. It's more like if it brings someone to the point when they feel like they're gonna—that it changes their life. I don't feel like—even if they do it twice, but it's not that bad. I feel like if you talk it out with them and it stops, then it wasn't that severe. But if it changes someone's life or how they think or how they feel, then I consider it bullying.

After talking to the perpetrator, “and then, if they still do it, then it's not that great.” She explained that if the bullying is physical, “You need to get an adult.” She stated:

If it's really severe, like physical, then yeah, go straight to an adult. But, if it's just like a small rumor, or like someone says they don't like your clothes or something like that, then you can try to talk it out. But then, if it happens more and they don't stop, then you can go to adults.

When addressing possible circumstances in which bullying should or should not be acceptable, Mia turned defensive, stating, “No, because no one knows the other side of the story. People have made fun of me for being so sensitive and crying so easily. But they don't know that I was bullied.” Mia's defensiveness and evidence of physical retaliation seemed a result of her frustration with past ill-treatment and adult

involvement.

### **Mia's Emotional Response to Bullying**

Mia's emotional response to bullying derived from what she thought about it. Mia was frustrated. She thought students should be able to "talk it out with them [other students] until it stops." Involvement with adults should only occur if it is severe, hurtful, physical, and "they [bullies] do it intentionally, multiple times and changes someone." To back this opinion, Mia stated, "I feel like kids should learn how to be more independent and try to figure things out, before they go to other people. Going to other people just makes it harder, unless it is actually really serious." She explained her feelings of frustration, "Everyone at the school—a lot of people would say that they're being bullied, even though it wasn't. It kinda made me angry that they were saying that they were getting bullied, even though they weren't." Talking about involving friends to help with bullying issues, she reported, "Like my friends and I, if we did something that we didn't like, but we talked about it, and so now we're friends." In turn, Mia gets aggravated when "they [bullying victims] went straight to the top people and they started saying that they were getting bullied, even though we talked it out, and all woulda stopped." She followed up, explaining, "It's a lot of people who are just overdramatic about it."

For Mia, her main frustration was other students responding overdramatically.

She stated:

It kinda upsets me that someone who isn't being bullied starts saying they're bullied. Because like people who aren't bullied but say they're bullied, it makes everything so much harder for people who are bullied. Because then, everything is just you're overdramatic, you're sensitive."

Thus, Mia said, “It makes bullying sound stupid.” On the other hand, Mia explained:

I don’t want people to say that everyone is being overdramatic because a lot of people are actually getting bullied. But it just makes it harder because when people who are being overdramatic say that they’re getting bullied, then people who are being bullied are called overdramatic, and that makes it worse.

### **Through the Lens of Theory of Positive Disintegration**

The lens of TPD helps in comprehending Mia’s personality in relation to her bullying experiences and perceptions. This includes an analysis of the overexcitabilities (OEs) she seemed to express, as well as the dynamisms and positive values, all leading to a conclusion about the TPD level at which she appeared to be operating.

**Overexcitabilities.** As described earlier, overexcitabilities (OE) is a term coined by Piechowski (2008) used to describe the intense experiences of individuals as they move through the levels of TPD. For Mia, the data strongly indicated the presence of emotional, intellectual, and imaginal OEs. Each of these will be discussed in turn.

***Emotional overexcitability.*** Emotional OE “involves intense connectedness with others; the ability to experience things deeply; fears of death, embarrassment, and guilt; emotional responsiveness” (Silverman, 2008, p. 160). During our interview conversations, whenever Mia talked about her bullying experiences or her family, she tended to cry openly and continuously. She also revealed flushing. Crying changed both her speech inflection and increased her voice volume. During the first interview, Mia wept almost continuously throughout its duration. She talked about her past depression, times of suicidal ideation, and how she needed help. For example, one-time in her past, Mia found a knife to use on herself, but when her older sister entered the room, she



decided against suicide.<sup>1</sup> During the second interview, Mia did cry some again, but insisted that she said that she was fine each time I offered to stop the interview. Her vocal inflection and voice volume did not increase the way they did during the first interview. She cried only when talking about her family. This pattern of conversation occurred in the third interview as well.

The following is an example of when Mia used low and medium voice volume with stance and epistemic adverbs. With this example, Mia talked with a friend about her parent's reactions regarding a bullying issue.<sup>2</sup> Mia said:

Well, not about them because they were *actually* my friends, so they ranted about their parents with me. In a scenario this time, one of my friends, this person kept *accidentally* knocking into them *completely, frivolously not personally, accidentally*. I was with them. I saw what was happening.

The stance adverbs, especially, emphasize her emotional response, which may appear to be a “reaction that exceeds the stimulus” (Piechowski, 1995, p. 3), as would be predicted for an emotional OE.

As another example, Mia explained how she felt when victimized and disregarded by her family. She stated:

When I was being bullied, it wasn't *really just* one person. It was someone who was *more* popular, so a lot of people get into it and exposed to *so* many people. Basically, *almost* everyone I knew at that time. They made me feel like I was *alone*. And then, when I went to my family, they said they couldn't do anything and that I was being overdramatic. I *just felt really alone*, and I felt like nothing

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<sup>1</sup> A procedure established during the Internal Review Board (IRB) approval process anticipated that a situation like this might occur. Mia was immediately referred to the IRB approved guidance counselor at the school according to this procedure. Mia's parents were immediately contacted. The principal investigator was also informed. Following the guidance counselor's discussions with Mia and discussions among the guidance counselor, the principal investigator, the school principal, and her parents, Mia was given the opportunity to make the final determination as to whether she would continue with the interview process. She decided to resume and completed her participation in the study.

<sup>2</sup> To help the reader, the adverbs of stance are italicized; epistemic adverbs are underlined.

was going to get *better*. It's *really* a loss of hope—you know?

Again, adverbs of stance reveal intensified emotions. Throughout this excerpt Mia was weeping heavily. Her crying was deep with a repetitive throat clenching inflection, especially when stating, “I just felt really alone.” This reflected the strength of her emotional OE reaction.

***Intellectual overexcitability.*** Intellectual OE “includes probing questions, analytical thinking, reflectiveness, problem solving, and interest in abstraction and theory” (Silverman, 2008, p. 160). In the previous two excerpts, her sentence structure, as well as high level vocabulary, were beyond the capacity of a typical sixth grade student. This was also apparent with her use of adverbs as modifiers that emphasize her emotional response. When stating, “Completely, frivolously, not personally, accidentally,” she constructed a sequence of adverbs of stance atypical of speakers her age. Mia’s reasoning was also evident in the following passage. She stated:

Because I don't feel like—even if they do it *twice*, but it's *not that* bad. I feel like if you talk it out with them and it stops, then it wasn't *that* severe. But if it changes someone's life or how they think or how they feel, then I consider it bullying.

The use of epistemic adverbs, especially the string at the end (i.e., how, how, then) reveal an unusual level of abstract thinking that is evidence of an intellectual OE. A solid underpinning to Mia’s analysis was her argument that students can figure-out bullying issues on their own, without adult involvement. She stated, “If it’s just someone saying something to you and then you feel bad about it, try talking to them right away, instead of going straight to an adult because it causes more trouble.”

***Imaginational overexcitability.*** The imaginational OE displays in figurative

speech, imagination, drama, artistic ability, fantasy, and problem-solving. Mia often used drama, taking on the role of her mother, when reporting how her mother treated her. For example, concerning incidents with the boy with autism, Mia said, as if she were her mother, “Stop complaining to me; you’re overreacting. People have it worse. You don’t deserve to talk about it.” Also, when talking about her mother, Mia explained, ending with some dramatic mocking of her mother, “My siblings, if anyone even talked about them, whether it be good or bad, my mom would be like “Okay, who are these people? Ya da da da da.”

Mia also used her imaginal OE by reading and writing stories as a way to work through bullying trauma. She stated, “I write stories. I would write—they’re like sad stories. So, then I can get my life into a different character, like on paper, where I’m in control of their [they bullies’] life. And I always give them a happy ending, so I can feel better.” She also said, “I also read a lot of stories. A lot of them are like cute little love stories, but I write—always a happy ending. I write sad stories, so I have something else to cry about besides my own life. So, you know I have a reason to cry.” There is, perhaps, an element of creative problem-solving evident in the way Mia uses stories as she copes with bullying.

**Dynamisms.** Dynamisms comprise the motivations needed for multilevel progression, with shame and guilt being perhaps the most important that develop at unilevel integration (Dabrowski, 1967). Initially, Mia denies the presence of shame and guilt. She stated, “Yeah, I didn’t really. No, I didn’t really feel shame or guilt, because I know that I wasn’t really making judgements.” However, when Mia ended her friendship

with the boy with autism, she stated, “I wrote him a note saying, ‘I’m sorry, I’m sorry, I’m sorry.’” She later confirmed the presence of shame and guilt when she said, “I was so ashamed.”

Another dynamism Mia may have been experiencing was a feeling of inferiority. While discussing her efforts to get her mother to intervene with the bullying, Mia reported, “Well, she [Mom] wasn’t really making me comfortable. She was saying, ‘Stop complaining to me. You’re over-reacting. People have it worse. You don’t deserve to talk about it.’...Well, she really didn’t care about me for it.” Then she continued with the “Ya da da da da” quote given earlier. Moreover, Mia’s mother did not allow her to cry. She explained, “I’m not allowed to cry, or else she [Mom] gets really mad at me and yells at me, and gets—she starts calling me stuff, telling me I’m ungrateful.” Mia said that “because I wasn’t allowed to cry at night. I’d go to the bathroom and cry.” She further stated, “My brother, when he cries, she’ll hug him and tell him it’s okay.” Mia also said, “So she [mom] does a lot of stuff to me that she doesn’t do to my older siblings.” She furthermore explained, “She [Mom] believes that everyone else can’t do anything wrong and it’s just my [Mia’s] fault.”

**Positive values.** Positive values are the thoughts and actions that respect all those involved in the conflict. Mia reported that she primarily learned values on her own. When asked whether her family taught her about bullying being right or wrong, she stated, “Not really. I kind of just learned it myself....I just went with what I thought was morally right, like humanity.” She also stated, “I kinda lost hope for adults at the time. I’d reach out to my friends more, and they were actually really helpful.” She further explained, “Yeah, I

always trust my friends.”

Mia did, however, learn one value from her family, which she applied to her friendship groups. As reported previously concerning Mia possibly feelings of inferiority from her mother telling her she was “over-reacting.” She eventually applies this value in the formation of her friend groups, explaining:

Well, my friends, they’re kind of like me. They know when something’s serious and when something’s not serious. My old friends, they were overdramatic about it. But my newer ones, they know. Or, my not quite newer ones but newer than the old ones. I was talking about, they knew what’s serious and what’s not serious. And if I—because you know sometimes when people are crying, they’re really sensitive? And, so they get kind of moody or they make things seem worse than it is? You know, yeah?

**Personality development.** It was through the negative value of being overdramatic, coupled with her reference to “humanity,” that Mia revealed that she was likely practicing the horizontal dilemma. This quandary results in a choice an individual makes to either follow self-interest (i.e., primary integration) or the interests of the crowd (i.e., unilevel disintegration).

In both elementary school and middle school, Mia wanted social popularity. This made bullying victimization hard to handle. She stated, “Well, I just wanted—as I said in my previous interview, I tried to be friends with everyone and just be a nice kid.” After bullying victimization throughout preschool and elementary school, and upon entering middle school, she changed, explaining, “Yeah, I feel like listening to a lot of people a lot, It’s not weird, but I used to not be very popular, so I’d just observe people and see what they were doing.” With this, she viewed herself as more socially popular in middle school. She stated, “Your friends can tell if it’s serious [bullying] or not. Then, they can

go to adults to get help too. It's more helpful to not keep it in." Following this, she explained, "If it's small, you can get help by your friends too." When asked if popularity was still important to her, Mia stated:

It's not important to me, but it's important to other people. At that school [WMS], if you were popular, you had more friends. It's kind of like a get out of jail free card in a way. If you were popular and had friends, you wouldn't be bothered, stuff like that.

However, with a horizontal dilemma choice to switch to unilevel disintegration, Mia had instances of fleeting empathy towards friends and others. She stated:

I've had a lot of people come up to me even if I didn't know them that well. I've always *tried* to be helpful. I always tried to help someone, even if it was math or something. But then—I tried to make everyone's life better than mine.

Then, when Mia did help, it was unilevel. For example, Mia and her friends experimented with name-calling. They apparently good naturedly gave each other nicknames.

Afterward, she would try to protect those who appeared not like the name they were given. She stated:

I did feel bad about it because the person that was being called it [nickname], after I knew it was hurtful, I felt bad, but they seemed fine. They were smiling, they were laughing. They even joked about it themselves and said that—If they were talking like third person, they'd be like, "This person and me," but they'd say their nickname. "We're doing this and stuff." And so, I thought it was fine.

Later, she said, "Because they [the student who dislikes her or his nickname] seemed *genuinely* sad about it. So, the next day, I'd hear people say it and I'd tell them to stop."

With such fleeting moments, Mia may have assumed she was practicing empathy. However, momentary feelings of empathy resulting from giving someone an inappropriate nickname was empathy in its "primitive, impulsive forms" (Dabrowski, 1970, p. 178; see also Silverman, 2016). As Mia played a strong deterministic role within

her social structure, she also, at times, felt unilevel shame and guilt. This apparently reflected an internal need to be a good person (Dabrowski, 2016/1964).

### **How Schools Can Improve**

When asked what schools should do about bullying, Mia simply stated, “I don’t think school needs to do much. I think the students need to do more.” She also claimed taking care of the bullying problem would be difficult. She explained:

A lot of people say hurtful things but as a joke, and the person that they’re saying it to is fine with it. So, people—it’s hard to see when people are actually being made fun of and stuff, because—You know, my friends and me we joke about each other, but it would be jokingly and everyone should be fine with it. A lot of inside jokes sound bad if you’re not in it, so it’s hard.

Regarding the effectiveness of school announcements and assemblies about bullying, Mia stated, “Well, I think it [school announcements and assemblies] could help some people but every time announcements comes or just something comes after, kids are always joking about it.” Concerning antibullying assemblies, Mia maintained that students believe they are “stupid.” She stated, “They’ll say, ‘That was so stupid. We didn’t need to know that. We already know that, we don’t need to do this or that for it.’ But I think it is useful. I don’t think they should get rid of it.”

### **The Case of Cookie Cake**

Cookie Cake was a 14-year-old eighth-grade GT student at WMS. She scored in the 95<sup>th</sup> to 99<sup>th</sup> percentile on her standardized tests depending on the subject matter. She has also achieved “nothing less than an A-.” Furthermore, she was a talented performer on the school dance team.

At WMS, Cookie was a math whiz. She reported that math is easy for her: It seems to just make sense, it “clicks in her mind.” She also stated that she is fond of mathematics because it “is very factual.” She has also, at times, enjoyed helping others with their homework and any issues they were having with math calculations.

Along with dancing and math, Cookie reported having many hobbies and enjoys spending time with her family. She stated that she likes basketball and playing soccer. She also likes to read, hike the Wasatch foothills, and travel to foreign countries. She is especially fond of superhero movies. In her free time, she said that she enjoys going to theaters and watching movies with her brothers and family.

One thing Cookie would like to change about society is the value of women. In history class, she learned that women remain unequal in our society. She stated, “I think the value of women should change. We are taken for granted and get paid much less.” Cookie did not like certain things about school. She stated, “I don’t like to do homework, specifically science.” Particularly, she hated studying “atoms.”

### **Experiences with Bullying**

Although bullying was apparent in her life, Cookie Cake handled such experiences with both self-awareness and social responsiveness. She stated her philosophy in the following passage:

Well mine is just more being positive in general, just like seeing the good in people and being the good with people. Because some people just can’t have that, or can’t do that, so just trying to be the best I can be so other people can benefit from it.

Just looking at the pseudonym she chose for this study, Cookie was consistent with her



positive attitude toward herself and others.

**Bullying in kindergarten.** Cookie's experiences with bullying started when she learned about it in kindergarten. When looking at her journey map, she pointed to a picture of herself in kindergarten apparently confused about bullying. She stated:

Okay. So, this is me, first hearing about bullying and just being kind of confused and intrigued, like what is that, why would people do that? Because when you're young hearing about bullying, you've never experienced it because kindergartners are cute and all. Yeah.

At a very young age, she could not understand why people would ill-treat each other in such

ways.

**Bullying in second grade.** Cookie's direct exposure to bullying and application of self-awareness and social responsiveness occurred in second grade. Pointing again at her journey map, she explained, "I'm just super confused and I don't know what to do. Then I go and I stop the bullying." She reported that "this kid, I think he was making fun of this other kid for not being able to lift a brick."

After initial ambivalence, Cookie explained what she did to solve the bullying problem in the following statement:

So, I went and I stopped the bully. Then I thought, why is the bully—like why would he do that? So, then I thought back, and this is the bully again in my thought bubble. And he's being bullied by another person, so I'm thinking, oh. So, I go and I become friends with both of them. And I kind of think, okay I've got this all figured out. I've got this bullying thing figured out. Then I go to cyberbullying, my first incident with the group stuff.

At seven years-old, after remembering what to do, she practiced respect for others and spontaneously stopped a bully. Then, she became friends with both the victim and the bully.

**Bullying in middle school.** Cookie's perspective on bullying centered on how she was different from her classmates. She realized her differences with other people. Those differences involved both her GT status and her apparent perpetually excellent attitude toward herself and others. She also recognized that fellow students may struggle in life and bully other people because of human differences. She stated:

Well, usually the reason why I've been bullied is due to my grades and the fact that teachers usually tend to like me better, and sometimes kids, their parents are mad at them about their grades. Or, they're mentally just not able to get their grades up. Or, teachers just don't like them for whatever reason.

She also reported that bullying victimization involved her GT status. She explained:

Well, it's just the fact that I am in GT classes and that people think, "Oh, they're snobby, they think they're smarter than everyone." They think we have a really high self-esteem about it, which sure, it makes you feel smarter and better about yourself, but it shouldn't really matter though because GT students have a different mentality than other students. It doesn't mean we're smarter. It just means we think differently, and so we need different classes to help nurture that thinking.

She experienced specific anti-GT sentiments. She stated, "Well, somebody said, 'You're not smarter than anyone. You don't deserve to be getting those grades, and it's only because, well, the teacher's like you or just because you're in GT classes and people think you're smarter.'"

In response, Cookie's self-awareness and caring for others prompted her to help such students stop their bullying behaviors. She stated, "Because they usually have a reason to do it, so I don't want to just leave them hanging and make them feel even worse about themselves." So, in reaction to her victimization, she explained her typical response, "I'm sorry you feel that way because I'm fine with how I am." In turn, she would help her classmates when they were feeling bad about themselves. Cookie stated:

But my best subject is probably math. So, I tend to do better in math, and other people find math very challenging, so when people come up and they're like, "You don't deserve that math grade. You just have it. It's not okay. It's not fair." Then I'll usually say, "Okay, can I help you with that? Can I just help you with any of those tests that you need help with because I can help you even though I'm not amazing at math, but I can help you if you're struggling."

Because Cookie's prosocial behavior was both authentic and unusual, students would get bewildered when she responded in such a positive manner. Sometimes students would even walk-away. Later, she or he would usually come back to receive her help. For Cookie, such social receptiveness did have its limitations.

**How Cookie responds to bullying.** Although Cookie responded in positive ways, she did not allow other students to take advantage of her goodwill. She stated, "I'm not going to let them make me feel bad about myself, just make them feel better." She said that she believes bullying is unfair. However, she remained conscientious about what was good for people. She stated:

I felt that it's not fair, and I didn't do anything to deserve it besides the fact that I am the person that—like I don't deserve it, but also if that person feels like they're jealous, then maybe I can help them out of a bit. It's not like I'm going to be walked over by people. I'm going to stand up for myself. I'm just going to be more conscience of what's good.

Although Cookie practiced self-awareness and social responsiveness, she did not mean she was a pushover. She explained:

I don't always love to help them out. I just end up doing it, helping them out anyway just 'cause they still should be helped out, but it's not like I'm going to offer myself every single time because some people don't have as good of a grade just because they don't work hard at it or they don't focus.

Cookie's social awareness compelled her to help, but only if the fellow student worked hard and honestly deserved help. Or, she stated, "It's the consequences of their actions."

And, in turn, she said:

It's just whatever, you reap what you sow, you give what you take. Then there are other people who literally are just having the worst time and this is their way of saying, "I need help." You really should help them out.

Following up, she explained, "But for a lot of people, it's just that they don't really pay attention." With such awareness, Cookie showed both high standards and respect for herself as well as others. She helped other students when they really needed it. On the other hand, she did not let others take advantage of her positive inclinations.

**The extra-credit bullying incident.** Understandably, with such a positive attitude, Cookie had many friends at WMS. Nevertheless, she did have one major bullying incident. It had to do with an extra-credit math student group. Evidently, a fellow classmate became upset when not invited to join the group. This student blamed Cookie, in a text message, for her exclusion from the group. Cookie explained:

This person got really upset because I had been doing extra credit work, and I had been doing it with a group of people, and this person was like, "Oh, I want to be part of that extra credit group," and so she started getting mad at me and texting me and just being super dumb about it. I mean, I need extra credit, too, and just being super rude and super mean. And it got to the point where I had to tell my parents and say, "Hey, we need to shut this girl down because, sure, I'd like her in this group, but it's not like I'm in charge or anything, and she shouldn't be saying that stuff."

With her prosocial behavior and a widespread friend group, someone outside the group targeted Cookie as someone of influence and tried to bully herself into the group.

Cookie had difficulties trying to solve the problem. Before it was resolved, periodic awkward situations occurred between the two young women. She stated:

Whenever I'd go hang out with a couple of my friends, she would end up being there, and I couldn't really leave, because that's kind of rude. And we ended up negotiating it out, and talking it out. And it's been a couple of years, so it's just

over time.

After the uneasiness, Cookie's parents helped her unravel the difficulty. Eventually, she stated, "They [Cookie's parents] talked to her [the perpetrator's] parents, and they talked to me about it, and then they made us talk to each other about it." This parent-initiated social process solved the problem. Nonetheless, interestingly, even with the ill treatment, Cookie still wanted the other young woman to join the extra-credit group.

With time, both students became good friends. Today, they can talk about the incident. Cookie stated, "Yeah. I don't think too specifically, but we've had conversations about it, and just about how it's not always what it seems, and we're not always trying to not include people." In return, the other girl apologized back. Cookie remembered that she said something like, "Hey, I'm sorry for making you upset, or anything."

**Problems with gossiping.** Cookie had experiences with students gossiping. However, it was something she believed as unsolvable. She stated, "With the gossiping, it's something I feel like I can't really do too much about because people can talk about what they want to talk about. It's like, it's part of America, like you can say whatever you want to say."

Cookie also explained her uneasiness, "It [gossiping] makes me feel uncomfortable." Whenever she was in an awkward position of being in a group in which gossiping took place, she confronted it. She explained, "There have been multiple times where I'm like, guys I know she kind of might not be the nicest, but we're being really rude right now. So just leave your opinions to yourself." She also stated:

Just because this person who's being gossiped about doesn't really deserve to be gossiped about, unless they actually legitimately did something horrible that like is news around the whole school. But when it's something that they're just like making an inference and thinking, "Oh my goodness, this person," and saying all these bad things. Then I'm like, okay we need to shut them down.

Cookie had self-awareness and social responsiveness in her reply to gossiping, similar to how she handled other situations.

Cookie practiced empathetic sophistication when confronting gossiping. Even if the rumors were true, she showed caring towards the victim with proper respect. She stated:

Well, if it's true you kind of tell them, okay leave that to yourself because sometimes it's personal. Like you don't want too many people to know and it just gets leaked and then everybody knows. And other times you just think, okay maybe this person made a mistake and you just—like we just don't want too many people talking about it. But then there are other times where this person legitimately did something and wants everybody to know, where you kind of just can't do anything about it.

When asked how she coped with gossiping, Cookie first tried to understand what was actually happening. Then, she practiced self-reflection. She explained:

It's going to my parents, or just being comfortable with myself and kind of thinking it through and saying, okay wait. Maybe is this actually real, and can I make a change? Or, do I just need to sit it out and wait it out? Or in most incidences I'll deal with it myself and if somebody started a rumor about me. Like one time somebody started a rumor about me that my mom had a list of people I could hang out with. And so, everybody was so offended and I was getting all these texts and stuff about like, that's so dumb your mom is so mean, why would she make a list? Like is this why you haven't been hanging out with me?

To solve this problem, Cookie asked questions, gathered the facts, if needed, got help from her parents, and made decisions concerning how she would proceed.

An example of her decision-making process was as follows:

And so, I had to address the situation and figure out who it was and I told the

person I was like, hey, my mom does not have a list. I'm just busy and I can't hang out with people all the time. And so, I'm sorry if you're offended that I don't hang out with you all the time, but I don't hang out with too many people all the time. So, it's usually just me handling it.

Once Cookie decided what to do, she was sensitive to the individual, told them the truth, and addressed the reasons for her actions. This process indicated care and respect for herself and the bully.

### **Cookie's Thoughts about Bullying**

When asked to define bullying, Cookie stated, "When somebody's taking advantage of another person due to jealousy or they just want what the other person has, and they're using that other person to get it or to make them feel better about themselves." The follow-up question concerned what she meant by jealousy. Cookie explained, "In these times, they're envious, or they want what you have, and they don't have it, so they'd rather make you feel bad about it." Regarding what she has, she answered, "I have a good relationship with my parents. I get good grades. I have good friends." Echoing the notion that bullying is never acceptable, she understood that other people may not have certain things. In response, she typically offered help to stop those who ill-treated others.

### **Cookie's Emotional Response to Bullying**

What Cookie felt about bullying went hand-in-hand with what she thought about it. She recognized other students may be jealous of her—for whatever reason. Some students tried to bully their way into her group of friends. Cookie's feelings of self-awareness, empathy, and altruistic action prompted her to try to help them out. She

stated, “Because they usually have a reason to do it, so I don’t want to just leave them hanging and make them feel even worse about themselves.” In turn, she responded in prosocial ways. This was likely why she had many friends. Cookie explained:

Most people want to have friends who normally understand them. And my friend group is a pretty widespread friend group, so there are a lot of people who aren’t in that friend group who will come up to me and they say, “Hey, it’s kinda dumb that you don’t invite me to stuff””

She responded in her typical style. Cookie stated, “And, I think, ‘Oh, I didn’t know you wanna be invited. If you wanna be invited, I’d love to invite you, but I didn’t even know you were interested.’”

### **Through the Lens of Theory of Positive Disintegration**

The lens of TPD aids in the understanding of Cookie’s perceptions of her bullying experiences. This includes an analysis of her OEs, dynamisms, and application of positive values. Altogether, the TPD lens helps in our understanding of her personality level.

**Overexcitabilities.** Cookie seemed confident and enthusiastic during her interviews. Cookie’s conversational pattern throughout her three interviews displayed a consistent use of emotional, intellectual, and imaginal OEs. Each of these will be discussed in turn.

***Emotional overexcitability.*** Emotional OE is an intense feeling when communication occurs. Cookie’s vocal responses carried a confident and enthusiastic attitude reflecting concern for her values and caring for others. Her voice changed slightly with an increase volume when she was serious and excited about defending her



high standards. When responding to social criticism about her high grades, her voice went from calm to serious when stating, “I thought that’s dumb because I deserve those grades, and I should be getting those grades.” In second grade, her explanation again became serious and ended with a giggle when explaining, “I’m super confused and I don’t know what to do. Then I go and I stop the bullying... This kid, I think he was making fun of this other kid for not being able to lift a brick [giggle].

The following is a passage from Cookie indicating emotional intensity with serious voice inflection and medium tone. She was again defending her standards. She stated:

Yes, because I’m *pretty* okay with my standards. If other people aren’t okay with it then I’m *kind of* like, “That’s cool, but I *really* don’t care.” There are other people who *really* are affected by that. They *really* hate when that happens. If they’re being bullies and they’re saying like, “You don’t deserve those grades,” then their grades are going to drop because they *don’t* feel as secure with themselves. I *almost always* feel the need to intervene with the victim.

Throughout this excerpt, Cookie utilized the stance adverbs “pretty” and “really” to intensify her expression of emotion, appearing to show strong responsiveness in defense of her standards (Silverman, 2008). She also seemed to soften her stance with “kind of” and “almost.”

The following passage illustrates Cookie’s emotional intensity through the use of epistemic adverbs. She stated:

I think I’m proud of them [grades], and that’s part of—my family *really* respects that, and it’s valuable to me, so I’m *not* going to let somebody else say, “Oh, that’s dumb. You don’t need to get good grades,” because in my life I do because that’s what I want to do in life. I want to have good grades, go to college, get a good education. So, it’s valuable to me, so I don’t *really* care what they think.

Cookie’s epistemic adverbs mixed into the passage indicated not only her presence but

her intense connection to family and capacity to experience life deeply (Silverman, 2008). This reflected her profoundly held personal values and goals not characteristic of typical early adolescent students.

In Cookie's second interview, when describing other students approaching her for friendship, she imitated them, saying, "Hey, it's kinda dumb that you don't invite me to stuff!" Periodic usage of exclamations such as "oh" and "hey" accentuated her emotional overexcitability. She used "hey" a total of 11 times within her animated and keen responses to questions during her three interview sessions.

***Intellectual overexcitability.*** Intellectual OEs indicate intense experiences in an individual's intellectual life. Two such elements of intensity are reflectiveness and problem-solving (Silverman, 2008). She stated, "I *usually just* pull the victim aside and *just* say like, 'Hey, calm down, you're good!' Then, I'll go and talk to the bully after and *just* say, 'That wasn't too great.'" The stance adverb "just" suggests Cookie is taking a reflective stance when stopping a bullying incident. Her response also represents high-level sentence structure that may give evidence of analytical thinking beyond the capacity of a typical 14-year-old. In addition, the entire passage illustrates a problem-solving disposition that Silverman lists as one of the characteristics of intellectual OE.

***Imaginational overexcitability.*** The imaginational OE displays as drama and creative problem-solving. With many of Cookie's responses above, her imaginational OE was consistently apparent. For example, problem solving, as presented in the previous passage is listed by Silverman (2008) as characteristic of imaginational OE as well as intellectual OE. As her emotional and intellectual OEs emerged with adverbs, she also

became animated and dramatic with creative conversational snippets. The following is an emotionally intense passage with a dramatic extract—the phrase in italics—helping illustrate Cookie’s intellectual reflection. It also contains high level vocabulary and sentence structure indicating a problem-solving justification for GT classes. She stated:

*Well, it’s just the fact that I am in GT classes and that people think, “Oh, you’re snobby, they think they’re smarter than everyone.” They think we have a really high self-esteem about it, which *sure*, it makes you feel smarter and better about yourself, but it shouldn’t really matter though because GT students have a different mentality than other students. It *doesn’t* mean we’re smarter. It *just* means we think *differently*, and so we need different classes to help nurture that thinking.*

**Dynamisms.** The evidence provided by Cookie demonstrated that the dynamism of shame was becoming “feeble” (Dabrowski, 2016/1964, p. 27) in her personality development. An example of this is in the following quote:

Just sometimes I’m like, “That’s kind of not great that this person who felt the need to bully has this life that made it happen.” At the same time, I’m usually going to be pretty tough on them somewhat and just say, “Yeah, but [the victim] didn’t deserve that.” There’s a little bit of pity [shame], but not enough that it’s going to make me feel bad [guilt] or make them feel bad [shame and guilt].

Cookie’s use of the word “pity” and the words “feel bad” along with the phrases “a little bit” and “but not enough” could be indications of the disintegration of shame and guilt, perhaps leading to the organization of the third factor.

**Third factor.** Throughout her interview conversations, Cookie provided evidence of the third factor that was explained in chapter III. For example, Cookie displayed elements of this factor as early as second grade, when she first stopped a bullying incident in which other students were making fun of another student who could not pick-up a brick. This revealed after her initial ambivalence, evidence of a personal act of

compassion spontaneously performed to help another student.

Evidence indicated the development of the valuation dynamism—a major impetus of the third factor. It is defined as an “autonomous function which centers upon reflective, conscious, valuative choice” (Kaminski Battaglia, 2002, p. 33) involving the “fusion of intellectual and emotional functioning” (p. 32) when applying positive values to help others. For example, when Cookie described coming to the defense of another student, she stated, “There have been multiple times where I’m like, ‘Guys, I know she kind of might\_not be the nicest, but we’re really\_rude right now. So, just leave your opinions to yourself.’” With this, she gave the impression of displaying immediate, conscious, and autonomous self-control when applying empathy. When Cookie said, “Just leave your opinions to yourself,” she seemed to reflect upon and establish her own independent hierarchy of values. When she stated, “I know she kind of might not be the nicest,” she appeared to “be mindful of the effect of the choice upon the other” (p. 33).

Cookie provided evidence of self-awareness, self-reflection, and autopsychotherapy. In discussing what she could do about bullying, she explained:

[Bullying is] not acceptable, and it shouldn’t be justified, but there’s always a reason behind it. It’s not like any kid is just thinking, “Oh, I’m just going to go bully this kid because I want to.” There is a reason behind it, but they shouldn’t use that as an excuse to do it.

Cookie further explained:

Talking to them or asking them, or sometimes usually they’ll bully you about what they’re having issues with, so if it’s grades, it’s about grades. If it’s about friends, then they’re probably having issues with friends. If it’s about parents, they’re probably having issues with parents. So, it’s usually what they’re jealous of or what they want from you.

She also stated:

It's not like I'm going to be walked all over by people. I'm not going to let them make me feel bad about myself just to make them feel better, but I'm going to be more considerate of what's going on.

These excerpts seemingly reveal three elements of that are representative of the third factor. Especially those elements that emphasize an autonomous application of an emerging, independent hierarchy of values.

**Syntony.** Cookie also revealed the syntony dynamism. This is the acceptance of “only those influences of a social group that are congruent with his [sic] self-consciousness—those, therefore, that agree with the demands of his [sic] developing personality” (Dabrowski, 2016/1964, p. 45). She stated:

I'm friends more with people who are honors students just because they're the people I hang out with; they're the people I like. And you'll mostly see GT students are hanging out with other GT students. So if that ever happens where I'm just left out, I will go up to the person, and I'll say, “Hey, you're supposed to be my friend, and you are my friend, so you need to step it up and start inviting me to things because I know you want to be my friend, but you can't forget about me.”

Thus, Cookie cooperated “with the needs of social life despite his [sic] attitude of contradiction and disapproval” (p. 45).

**Positive values.** Cookie's parents have raised her in an environment of empathy, self-awareness, and social action. She reported belonging to humanitarian charity organizations along with her entire family, committing time and money to help people all over the world. Cookie explained that her family travels to poverty- and famine-stricken countries to learn and support. She knows how privileged her life has been. She explained:

I'm looking at my situation where I have really good—I have food; I have water. I'm not impoverished at all. And then I look at like Nepal and Peru and all these

other places that are struggling to live. So, I just think, okay, my life's pretty great.

When asked who taught her the positive values reflected in her empathetic reactions, Cookie responded that it was her mother. Cookie's mother taught her to respect herself and others with "the Golden Rule," revealing not only a positive value but the beginning of her personality ideal (Dabrowski 2016/1964, 1967). Cookie stated:

It's kind of the Golden Rule. You just need to treat people how you want to be treated, and you always want to come off as a person who people can relate to, and be nice to, and every person is a person. So, whether they're really mean, or dumb, or just not nice to you, you always have to, like they have their own lives. So, you always have to treat them right, even if you don't necessarily relate to them, you always just have to treat them right.

Again, showing her personality ideal, Cookie went more in-depth with her explanation.

She stated:

Just remembering that everybody has something going on, and sometimes you need to be the person, not necessarily like the fall person, but the person who's going to be there for them, because you want them to be there for you.

When asked how she thinks positive values influenced her life, she stated:

It's the same thing. Just thinking if they [bullies] need help, or if I can help them out, or if they need to go to people. It's just realizing that they're a person, too, and I'm not the center of the universe, and neither are they. So, we deserve to be nice to each other.

These quotes indicate the beginning of a personality ideal based on mutual respect in which an intentional empathy is manifest.

**Personality development.** From the evidence it appears that Cookie was likely operating at organized multilevel disintegration. In second grade, as a bystander in the brick incident, she performed a spontaneous act that stopped ill-treatment. She appeared to not know what was going on when "first hearing about bullying and just [being] kind

of confused and intrigued, like: What is that? Why would people do that?" She then did something about it. This seemed to begin positive disintegration with her "disposing and directing center" ((Dabrowski, 2016/1964, p. 27) prompting self-reflection and the practice of empathy. She stated:

So, I went and I stopped a bully. Then, I thought, why is the bully—Like why would he do that? So, then I thought back, and this [pointing to her journey map] is the bully again in my thought bubble. And he's being bullied by another person, so, I'm thinking, oh. So, I go and become friends with both of them.

As early as second grade, Cookie appeared to have the ability to self-reflect, understand the cycle of violence, and apply the Golden Rule to all involved. Interestingly, this evidence also gives the impression that Cookie experienced inner-psychic transformation as well as other third factor dynamisms such as autonomy, self-control, authenticity, and personality ideal (Piechowski, 2008).

Cookie's inner psychic transformation with application of the Golden Rule and third factor motivation also seemed apparent in middle school when confronting gossiping and cyberbullying, reflecting her organized multilevel development and thinking. She stated, "It's [Gossiping] something that I feel like I can't really do too much about because people can talk about what they want to talk about. It's like it's part of America, like you can say whatever you want to say." However, displaying multilevel development, she stated:

It kind of makes me feel uncomfortable. Just because this person who's being gossiped about doesn't really deserve to be gossiped about, unless they actually did something horrible that like is news around the whole school. But when it's something that they're just like making an inference and thinking, "Oh, my goodness, this person," and saying all these bad things. Then, I'm like, "Okay, we need to shut them down."

After stating her feelings about gossiping, Cookie's self-reflection and application of the mutual respect continued with the following:

Well, if it's true, you kind of tell them, "Okay, leave that to yourself," because sometimes it's personal. Like you don't want too many people to know, and it just gets leaked and then everybody knows. And other times you just think, "Okay, maybe this person made a mistake," and you just like, "We just don't want too many people talking about it." But then there are other times where this person legitimately did something and wants everybody to know, where you kind of just can't do anything about it.

She summed up her perspective explaining, "Well, it's just knowing right from wrong.

Making sure that everyone socially is doing well and benefitting each other."

Cookie's organized multilevel development was also evident when defending her standards of integrity and hard work. She stated:

With some people who are just saying things just because they just feel mad or upset, and they really just want to take it out on you, I feel like that's the person's issue. I'm not necessarily going to help too much with it just because it's a consequence of your actions. It's just whatever; you reap what you sow; you give what you take. Then there are other people who literally are just having the worst time, and this is their way of saying, "I need help." You really should help them out.

### **How Schools Can Improve**

Because of Cookie's positive personality, she was both complimentary and critical toward school antibullying programs. About the people at WMS, she stated:

Our student body officers are doing a pretty good job at looking out for people. Then, our leadership team is doing a really good job. I would say just having people who are like students who are looking out for other people. Yeah, I think that's helping.

From her observations of teachers, she was also complimentary and critical, explaining:

We have a lot of seminars about being an ally, and whatnot, and that is really beneficial, but I think also, we need to have teachers looking out for it more,



because there are some teachers who aren't present in the classroom. Like, they don't know what's going on, and teachers should be well enough trained to recognize if anything is going on, or if people aren't being an ally, and also having good classroom standards and classroom rules.

She also noticed fellow classmates not taking the WMS antibullying program with necessary seriousness. Cookie stated:

It's just those cheesy seminars sometimes. Not all the time, but just some seventh graders or eighth graders, or all of the kids, they don't really take it seriously. Those don't really help too much just because nobody's really paying attention.

In response to the overall bullying problem, she encouraged educators to form close relationships

I would just say, "Have a better relationship with the students," instead of—because I have a lot of teachers who—not a lot—a couple of teachers that I have pretty good relationships with, and they tend to know more about what's going on inside the school and with students and how students are feeling. I feel like that needs to be extended to the counselors and the other people because I bet the counselors do have a really good relationship with certain students, but the students who actually are being affected or who needs help with this stuff aren't the people who are going to go to the counselors. So, I would say just having better relationships with the students and getting to know them each by name and how they're doing and how their life is.

Cookie even offered a creative problem-solving solution. She stated:

I would say first start off with just a typical student who is someone who just watches things happen and maybe get to know them a little bit so then they can find out, "Oh, these are these people who seem to be having a hard time." Or maybe just going out in the halls because counselors have a pretty good way of telling how students are doing. So maybe just seeing how, watching and just looking at their behavior and doing check-ins with people and whatnot. And they do a pretty good job at that, but it's the same thing. People who need it the most aren't coming in.

She followed-up with the need to understand the problems of each student through their friends or "through another student." Cookie explained, "If it's somebody who just is in your class and you're just looking at them and they're not doing so great, then I think

they would share because you're obviously concerned about them.”

Altogether, consistent with her multilevel development, Cookie self-reflected, identified what was going well, what was not good, how to improve WMS, and offered creative problem-solving solutions. Not surprising, her major solution to solving bullying problems was building positive relationships with students.

### **The Case of John Walker**

John Walker was an 11-year-old sixth-grade GT student at WMS. He described himself as a responsible student. He stated, “I am typically a good student, and I get my work done on time.” With good habits, he achieved A and A- grades.

John's greatest accomplishments involved athletics and math. He was a track and field athlete and ran cross-country. He favored simple sports like running because an individual knows exactly what she or he needs to do. He explained, “I am also very fast and have won several races.” In academics, he enjoyed the challenge of solving math problems and liked to spend time with his family. For relaxation, “if I can get out of the house,” he stated that he hikes the Wasatch Mountain foothills. He indicated that he is fond of reading and watching movies. With his family, he has enjoyed playing board games and just spending quality time with his mom, dad, and siblings.

John wished that people in our society would practice mutual respect, believing that people need to be better at helping each other. He stated, “I dislike it when people are arrogant toward others and act like they are better than everybody else.” Along with this line of thought, he also stated, “I wish our society was better at helping others and being

more aware of the world around them. We could all be more supportive.”

John was practical concerning his dislikes. He stated, “I don’t like to get up too early in the morning.” He also said that he loathes doing household chores.

### **Experiences with Bullying**

During the interview conversations with John, he was reticent concerning discussing his experiences with bullying. The first time he responded to an interview question about his bullying experience, he stated:

Well, it was a little while ago, kind of in grade school, or elementary. It was mainly at recess times, or times when there weren’t a lot of other people around. It only happened once or twice, because usually I would be able to just shake it off, and it wouldn’t really be very effective. So, they kind of just stopped after a little while. I was never physically bullied. I was called a nerd and a geek before, but that’s about it. It never really got terrible; it wasn’t super bad.

Even after completing a survey that illustrated John’s bullying history, he was able to “shake it off,” and “it never really got terrible, it wasn’t super bad.”

**Bullying in elementary school.** For John, bullying in elementary involved name-calling. As stated before, he was called “a nerd and a geek.” He elaborated how he felt, stating:

It was a little shocking. I guess. The first time because the past few years I thought I had gone to a pretty safe school where no one really bullied anybody else. So, the first time it was a bit of a shock, and it was a little strange to me. It was a new experience, but after that, it was all like, “Eh, whatever.”

Consistent with his ability to “shake it off,” he also ignored it with “Eh, whatever.”

**Bullying in middle school.** In middle school, John did not see much bullying at WMS. He remembered a serious bullying incident occurring near the end of gym class. It started in the boy’s locker room. John explained:

So, there were these two older kids bullying this one kid in my grade. They were throwing out some insults, and some mean comments, and this was kind of at the back of the locker room. So, I didn't really notice it at first because my locker is more towards the front. Then, I started noticing they were starting to get harmful; I guess.

As the incident became more harmful, he said, "They were just making threatening gestures, and then at one point they pushed him against a locker, which is where a teacher stepped in." The bullying continued outside the locker room when the dance teacher also came over to stop the ill-treatment. He stated:

I didn't really notice towards more of the end, until it was starting to get more serious with the gestures, and the physical bullying. That's when I started noticing it more and more often, and at some points I did feel like I could intervene. So, I asked the kid what was really happening, and see if it was serious enough to take to a teacher.

After gym class, John did not understand and tried to figure out the seriousness of the incident. He wondered if harm was being done.

John approached the victim to check if he required more help. John repeated, "I asked him [the victim] what was going on, to see if it was serious enough to take to a teacher, or if it was just like those were his friends and they were teasing him." After their discussion, as it turns out, the episode was a serious bullying incident. In John's recollection, his opinion was that the victim appeared fine. They both moved on to their next class.

### **John's Thoughts about Bullying**

John explained his definition of bullying "as something either physical or emotionally harmful that one person does to another in order to make themselves feel better about something." Then, he stated, "I would define bullying like that mainly

because a lot of people get bullied due to those specific reasons, and it usually does some sort of physical or emotional damage to the person being bullied.”

Acknowledgement that bullying was damaging, John’s thinking process for stopping a bully was precise. He said:

Usually you should probably try to avoid conflict, but if it’s something really bad, like people are starting to get physical, like bumping you around, you should start by telling them to stop doing those things before it gets too out of hand. And if it gets bad, you should probably tell someone else about it and make sure they stop doing that, because that can do some real physical damage.

John echoed a consistent theme among the students in this study. When bullying became physical, it was serious.

While discussing covert relational types of bullying, John explained the difference between physical and relational bullying. He stated:

Yeah, I do think those would be the most common forms of bullying over physical bullying because you can get away with those a bit easier than you can get away with actually physically harming someone. So, those would be more common in schools.

Along with physical bullying as more damaging, it was also more noticeable to adults.

Hence, for John, relational forms were most common at WMS.

Within John’s discernment, he also differentiated between bullying and messing around with friends. He explained:

When I was little, when I was younger, and even into fourth or third grade, I was usually a quiet kid. I would usually keep to myself, and, like I said, I tried to avoid conflicts. I would tease around with my friends a lot, but those were all jokes that we laughed at together. So, I wouldn’t really define that as bullying.

Thus, for John, “teasing around with my friends” was not bullying. He continued to explain the difference, stating:

I think messing around is different because the person who you're messing around with, they usually are there too, and they laugh at it, and they enjoy it among friends. However, bullying, it's more one sided where the person who is the bully is enjoying it, but the person who is being bullied, that's not really fun for them.

He furthermore explained, "Because it would usually be the person inside the group, and they would laugh with us, and they wouldn't show any emotional pain; I guess. So, I think they found it funny, and they'd mess around, too."

The evident difference was someone else who purposefully bullies—perhaps a stranger outside the social group with bad intent determined to hurt others. As such, for John, no circumstances existed in which bullying was ever acceptable. He stated:

I don't think so. I don't think there's any one circumstance, really, where it's okay to bully other people. Unless you can define defending yourself as bullying, but I don't really believe you can, because that's just defending yourself against other people when they're trying to bother you, to some extent.

For John, bullying should not happen, but if victimized, defending yourself was appropriate.

### **John's Emotional Response to Bullying**

John felt upset at first about being name-called, but then seemed to brush it off. He stated, "Yeah, I just thought that because I'm like, 'Well, you don't really know me. You're just insulting me for not really much of a reason,' so I just kind of shrugged it off and went on with my day." He also explained, "It bothered me a little the first couple of times, but after a while, it just kind of—my skin kind of hardened, and it was just like, 'Whatever.'" Thus, after it emotionally hurt him, he backed his emotive strength with protective reasoning. He explained, "Maybe not to give so much of a reaction that they would do it again."

John's feelings about his victimization either gave the benefit of the doubt to the bullies or his nonchalance reflected a display of masculine strength—one or both seemingly did not tell the whole story. He tried to explain,

Well, I was thinking—I don't really know. I was just kind of like, "Well, whatever, these guys are just being annoying to me right now." So, I just shrugged it off and left. I don't really remember having very many thoughts go through my head.

When victimized, his insouciance was telling. Whatever his complete and true feelings were concerning his victimization, he would not befriend the bullies later. He stated, "Yeah, I just, if I saw those kids later throughout the year, I would just avoid them, or just not really go over in that area, I guess." Whether he gave the bullies leeway or offered a show of masculine strength, in either case, he practiced avoidance as a response. Moreover, he said, "Yeah, for the most part I try to avoid conflicts."

### **Through the Lens of Theory of Positive Disintegration**

As with Mia and Cookie, the lens of TPD aids in the understanding of John's perceptions of his bullying experiences in middle school. This involves the analysis of overexcitabilities (OEs) he appeared to express during his interview conversations, in addition to dynamisms and application of positive values, all indicating a suggested TPD personality level in which he seemed to be functioning.

**Overexcitabilities.** As described earlier, OEs help explain the strong intensities of GTs as they move through the levels of TPD. For John, the data indicated the presence of emotional and intellectual OEs. Each OE is discussed in order.

*Emotional overexcitability.* Emotional OEs reflect the ability to experience life

deeply and to sensitively respond to social stimuli. During John's interview conversations, as he explained his bullying experiences, his tendency was to converse in a normal fashion until excited about what he thought was important to discuss. When talking about such topics as bullying definitions, experiences, opinions, and self-management, his voice inflection slightly changed to a higher volume. This appeared to occur when making a serious point. When he thought something was funny, he slightly giggled, though this was a rare occurrence.

In the following excerpt, John explained how he coped with bullying conflicts and the importance of avoidance. He stated:

Because, well, for me, *sometimes* I *usually* try to avoid conflicts because I know that getting angry and being *really* mad about something *isn't really* going to get you *very* many places. I *usually just* try to avoid it, and *not* give *much of a* reaction, and then find a different place to cool or calm down, and then it *usually* works itself out.

John's usage of specific stance adverbs, such as "sometimes," "really," and "usually," seems to indicate his emotional intensity concerning avoidance. The epistemic adverb "for me" suggests John's emotional commitment to avoidance.

***Intellectual overexcitability.*** Intellectual OEs encompass characteristics such as analysis, problem-solving, and reflection. In the above quote, when John said, "well," he drew the word out and paused briefly. He did this also when using stance adverb "just." This was something he did at other times during his interviews, as well. The stance adverbs "well" and "just" appear to indicate self-reflection in terms of determining his response to the interview questions. His behavior of finding a "place to cool or calm down" would also seem to imply a reflective nature as well as the use of avoidance as a



problem-solving technique.

The following quote also suggests John's analytic ability demonstrating how he can move from one perspective to the other.

A lot of students mock [antibullying announcements and assemblies], and they're like, "Oh, they're repeating this *for the millionth time.*" *Don't really* take it into account, and then another portion of the students are *really* listening, and *actually* paying attention and making sure this gets through to them.

The use of stance adverbs that have been italicized in the passage possibly shows a deeper understanding of each side.

**Dynamisms.** The dynamisms of shame and guilt are both needed for personality growth (Dabrowski, 2016/1964, 1967). When asked if he had shame or guilt, John stated, "Not really, because I haven't seen many instances where there's been a lot of bullying." Then, he remembered ill-treatment in the boy's locker room. He stated, feeling "not a lot of guilt, now that I think about it. I probably could've done more at the locker incident, but other than that, not a lot." So, these two quotes seem to reveal ambivalence for John on the question of shame and guilt.

**Positive values.** The data seemed to suggest that John applied two values within his experiences with bullying. These values could be labeled as the need to control one's anger, and the need to protect others from harm. John's tactic of avoidance is built upon these two values. John stated:

Well, during a cool down, I kind of just think about, I don't know, kind of just angry thoughts; I guess. Like I'm mad at the person so I have to leave and cool down so I don't do anything too harmful.

John's parents apparently taught him to think about self-control through his breathing. He stated, "They usually taught me to just think about my breathing, taking

deep breaths, and it's usually pretty calming, so it's a good strategy to cool yourself down." He explained:

I need to go cool down because I have gotten really angry at my siblings in the past when I was younger and nothing good really came out of that. And so, I usually think I need a cool down period. I need to get away from this person before I start getting really mad.

When looking at his journey map, John pointed to a picture of himself being bullied. He explained, "This is the bullying incident, where they're throwing out some mean words. Then here I shake it off, just kind of." Then he pointed to other pictures, further clarifying, "Yeah. Then here is more of this, just learning, getting better at things. Then down here it's showing that I always kept my distance from them [bullies] afterwards." Thus, for John, finding a place to calm down and keeping his distance from bullies were two important ways he used to protect himself, and the bullies.

**Personality development.** Based on the evidence from the interviews, John seems to be operating within the horizontal dilemma between primary integration and unilevel disintegration. This is shown through his apparent lack of shame and guilt, along with his need to control himself and his environment to protect himself and others—values he adopted from his parents. Evidence of his inactions at this developmental level are presented here.

**Primary integration.** The main evidence of John being at the primary integration level is his use of avoidance. John stated, "When I was little, when I was younger, and even into fourth or third grade, I was usually a quiet kid. I would usually keep to myself, and, like I said, I tried to avoid conflicts." For example, John's response to his experience of being called a "nerd" and a "geek" at school was to avoid those who did the name-

calling. Further evidence of John's avoidance could be drawn from his apparent lack of awareness of peer pressure that was likely going on around him. He reported:

Well, I've never really experienced peer pressure, and I know it is a powerful thing that can make a lot of people do bad things. So, I don't really think it would affect me too much, but then again, I've never seen it, and how harmful it can be. So, just depending on the amount of peer pressure that was put on me, it may or may not affect my decision.

***Unilevel disintegration.*** Despite John's claim that he would not be affected by peer pressure, he stated "I would tease around with my friends a lot, but those were all jokes that we laughed at together, so I wouldn't really define that as bullying." He followed this explanation, stating, "Because it would usually be the person inside the group, and they would laugh with us, and they wouldn't show any emotional pain, I guess, so, I think they found it funny, and they'd mess around, too." John further stated, "I don't believe it's considered bullying if the person you're teasing likes it, and enjoys it, and is laughing along with you." However, when asked if there might be a difference between friendly and harmful bullying, he stated:

I'd say the difference would be if the person that you're teasing is with you, and same thing as last time, they're laughing along with you, and think it's funny. Whereas bullying is where you're either doing it behind their back, or the person doesn't like what you're doing.

***Horizontal dilemma.*** Rather than taking a stand against bullying, John gave the impression of caring more about what others thought. His ambivalent response about the difference between friendly and harmful bullying potentially revealed the moral relativism that Dabrowski identified characteristic of the horizontal dilemma (Dabrowski, 1967). For John, this is especially revealed in his hesitancy to act during the locker room incident previously described. He stated:

I didn't really notice towards more of the end, until it was starting to get more serious with the gestures, and the physical bullying. That's when I started noticing it more and more often, and at some points I did feel like I could intervene. So, I asked the kid what was really happening, and see if it was serious enough to take to a teacher. Or if it was just [his friends].

John stated, "I asked him [victim] what was going on, to see if it was serious enough to take to a teacher, or if it was just like those were his friends and they were teasing him or what not."

### **How Schools Can Improve**

John had practical advice concerning how schools could improve their antibullying efforts. He stated:

I believe we could have more teachers and more monitors in places like the locker rooms, or the hallways where there are less people really around to witness it. But, other than that, I haven't really seen much more than harmless teasing, so I think just having more teachers in those certain areas during certain times would be beneficial.

### **The Case of Carole Crandano**

Carole Crandano was a 13-year-old eighth-grade GT student at WMS. She typically scored in the highly proficient category on standardized tests. She was also a straight A student. Concerning her accomplishments, she stated, "I have done cool stuff, but no great stuff. I made it into the GT program, which was cool. I got an award for an art thing in elementary school. I have also read 149 books in a year. I was so close to 150!" Carole's favorite subject was math. She stated, "I really enjoy math at the moment because there is always one answer, or at least not opinion based, and always a methodical way to find it."

Carole enjoyed many sports and pastimes. Although she did not like watching sports, she liked to take part. She stated, “I don’t like watching sports, but I do swimming and karate. I did play soccer and volleyball, but I gave those up. I also did cross country.” Carole also had many hobbies. She explained, “I really love reading. I enjoy watching TV, YouTube (I know it’s dumb), and sewing sock creatures. They’re stuffed animals made out of socks, that look like monsters.” During her free-time, Carole enjoyed spending time with her family “playing board games, and overall just hang out with them. They’re the best.”

What Carole would like to change about the world concerns open-mindedness. She stated, “I would like everyone to look at problems from everyone’s point of view. That way people come up with the best solution for everybody.” In contrast to such impartiality, Carole also had dislikes. She explained, “I dislike chocolate. I will eat it, but I don’t like it.” She also dislikes “people who are bad drivers.” Furthermore, she does “not like to play video games, probably because I am not good at it.”

### **Experiences with Bullying**

Carole’s experiences with bullying at WMS were “very little.” She stated:

Okay. I’ve never been bullied, as far as I’m aware. The one experiences that I think I noted on the sheet [survey] is that I’m new to [WMS] this year, and I haven’t made friends within the GT community is the prominent thing. I’ve seen bullying-like activities, but that is something else.

Originally from the State of California, Carole attributed her lack of bullying activity to her quiet disposition and status as a new student. However, she did have an experience as a bystander. Her focus on bullying involvement was watching other GTs ill-treat

teachers. She explained her reserve, “It’s hard to say anything about it, especially with the type of bullying it was, because it wasn’t to a student, it was to a teacher.” She explained further:

Yeah. There’s this one particular teacher I’m thinking about, although it’s multiple. The student body has the habit of disrespecting teachers behind their back beyond the point of like, “Oh, this person didn’t give me a certain score on my test.” But to the point like. “Oh, this teacher is fat, he smells weird,” and stuff like that. And it makes me really uncomfortable because it feels like they don’t realize that they’re people too.

Students bullying teachers bothered Carole. Not only because it was wrong, but because it was excessive. She clarified further:

And it’s like all the kids in the GT class, which is again uncomfortable. There are some students who participate in that activity more than others, but it’s weird to have people constantly saying mean things towards teachers. Yeah. Oh, and they draw funny pictures, funny pictures of this certain teacher that makes them look like an idiot.

Moreover, because of her discomfort, she did not want any friendship with any of her fellow GTs. She said, “I don’t know. I don’t like gossiping, which is what it really is. And I’ve had experiences with gossiping before and I’ve just regretted it because I can see how damaging that can be to a person.” Gossiping did not evidently correspond with her respectful attitude toward others.

Carole also reported being “painfully shy.” She stated, “I haven’t really tried to reach out, but I don’t mind.” Essentially, because of disrespectful GT student behavior, Carole had decided to remain an introvert.

**Bullying in elementary school.** Carole’s problems with gossiping began at the elementary school level. Although she called it “harmful gossiping” as well as bullying, she remembered a time in fifth grade when she learned about gossiping. She recalled and

stated:

Story time. In fifth grade, I hung out with these kids, my best friends and two boys who were friends. And we would just play truth or dare but ended up being mostly truth. And it'd be like, "Ah, would you rather kiss this person or this person?" Dumb stuff like that. And during those things we'd say like, "Ah, I wouldn't want to do that." I'm wouldn't want a kiss this person because they're ugly but I don't want to kiss this person either, because they're stupid. And then some people would want to join the group and it was like our thing, so we didn't want to let anybody in. So, I felt like it was damaging to relationships with other people.

Carole began to feel like gossiping was hurtful to others. Nonetheless, she continued this behavior into the fifth grade.

**Bullying/gossiping in fifth grade.** Carole persisted with gossiping in fifth grade.

She stated:

Well, back to fifth grade. There was this one kid who was probably mentally challenged in some way but I wouldn't really know which is why, thinking about that. But I mean he was definitely mentally challenged or something. Our school had a ward, you could call it for mentally challenged kids. There was this one girl who would have seizures all the time. And she couldn't speak. It was just groups of those kids who were challenged but this kid was less challenged but he still had that person that went around with him to help him, if that makes sense?

She continued with her story:

So, he was just different, not as smart, not as good at interacting. So, sometimes, we would talk about how weird he was and then there was at some point where I think it was during that school year that I had the revelation that that was harmful.

From this situation, Carole came to the realization that bullying in the form of gossiping

hurt other students. Thus, she expressed her feelings further:

I never really liked the drama so I've developed a high hatred of stuff like that now. I try to be nice about it because I try to see that people are people too, if that makes sense. So, I, it's sort of annoying sometimes because I can't just go along with stuff like that, because I don't like it.

From the realization that gossiping was harmful, Carol entered sixth grade with a new

attitude.

**Bullying in sixth grade.** In sixth grade, Carol tried to help stop other students from ill-treating peers. This seemed to reveal the disquietude dynamism or a feeling of responsibility. This also appeared to show her disposing and directing center (Dabrowski, 2016/1964). However, her efforts were unsuccessful—consequently, she stopped trying to help. Carole explained:

Sometimes I say, “That’s not cool,” And it’s not like people listen, and I’ve gotten some nasty glares when I do that. But more lately than not I’ve just sat quietly if that makes sense. Because nothing I do makes a difference when it’s the entire student body, as far as I’m aware.

Thus, she felt frustrated when students gossiped and she could not do anything to stop it.

When gossiping occurred, she also suggested feelings of shame and guilt. She stated:

Yeah, I mean it’s hard for me because that’s just something I used to describe something. It’s like when you can’t do anything, so you feel sort of trapped. It’s just like a clenching of the heart in a way. I don’t know. Like you feel bad about yourself.

The last time she attempted to stop bullying, a girl in her sixth-grade class was the victim.

She recalled:

I mean, I’m annoyed. I’m a bit angry sometimes. In sixth grade I sat at this table, and I mentioned this girl that got bullied, in my sixth-grade class, earlier. Don’t know if you remember that? They were just saying some things about her, like she was weird, and I was like, “Hey, that’s not cool.”

When asked about her feelings toward the incident, she explained:

It’s hard to put myself back in that situation. I’m annoyed, very annoyed, like angry annoyed. There’s not a whole bunch of emotion. I feel sad for the other person, but I don’t feel sad for myself, it’s a bit of pity. Usually I self-reflect a bit in those situations, because I think those things too, in my head. But not only would I not say them out loud, I wouldn’t have that effect my view of the person



as a person.

Carole tried to protect someone from gossiping but stopped. With uneven thought patterns (Dabrowski, 2016/1964)—“angry annoyed” yet “not a whole bunch of emotion”—for the victim, she still felt guilt, shame, and disquietude. She would also conceal any outward feelings of compassion.

**Bullying in middle school.** For Carole, bullying in middle school comprised early adolescent GTs bullying teachers. One specific teacher was her focus. She stated:

Oh, I’m going to tell you one story about one specific teacher. At the beginning of the year, this certain teacher was, I don’t mean any hard feelings by this, but sort of wimpy, if you understand what that means. Like he didn’t, they didn’t command the respect of the class. There was one point, and I think this is when it started really getting bad and I was sort of the cause of that. So, he was doing something that was confusing on the board and although I regret it, I said it in sort of a negative tone. Like, “Why are you doing it like that? Can’t you just do it this way?” He was sort, they were sort of over complicating it and I called them out on that.

Then, after feeling guilty concerning her contribution to the ill-treatment, she described what happened when the class started acting-out and bullying the teacher. She stated:

Like he [the teacher] flustered in a way. He was like, “Oh, I’m doing this. I’m defining the variables so it’s easier for me.” And then someone in the class was like, “Roasted.” And then the entire class and broke out in like pandemonium of this teacher being roasted. And that was awful because I felt so bad because that was not fun.

She seemed to feel shame, guilt, and disquietude when the class began to embarrass the teacher. She explained:

I was going to talk to him after class and be like, “Hey, I’m sorry it came out like that. I didn’t mean for that to happen.” But he came over to me and was like, “Hey, your tone was a bit iffy.” And I was like, “Yeah, I’m so sorry.”

She expanded on how she felt and apologized for her contribution to the problem.

She then stated further emotional abuse toward the same teacher. Carole disclosed the following statement:

For example, that story I just told you. I said that partially because my emotions were high, but I didn't mean anything harmful by it. There's this other time when someone was talking about said teacher in his classroom. That's so terrible to just talk about them in their classroom and pretend they can't hear you.

She continued with how emotionally problematic the incident became for the teacher.

Carole explained:

There are some things I should mention, but the next day or something, he came the class, and it was like, "You guys don't give me the respect I deserve." I was like—I felt really bad for him because it clearly hit him hard. It clearly hurt him, but people didn't see that they had done something wrong. They saw that there was this man who wasn't able to take it, and they're like, "Aw, this teacher had tears in his eyes when he said that." I was like, "Why are you saying that as a bad thing? You clearly hurt his feelings."

It was clear from all her explanations that Carole viewed bullying in middle school as directed toward all teachers as "terrible."

Carole later disclosed that the bullying was even more widespread at WMS. In an additional incident directed at a teacher, another educator joined-in. Carole explained her frustration:

So, the students will draw these mean pictures of the teachers who get bullied on the board and they won't do anything. And there was even one time while we were doing the lab and people are carving the faces of a certain teacher onto a piece of chalk because we are doing that lab. And she was like, "Oh, that's funny," and "Oops, did I say that out loud?" Like she's trying to seem cool and in with it. And I was just like, that's so weird. It made me feel all weird to have a teacher doing that too. And I don't think they really think those things because these teachers are really nice, they're nice people, but for some reason they make them seem like villains.

While expressing her positive values when complimenting teachers as "really nice," such bullying seemed to make her feel bad, frustrated, gross, terrible, weird, and otherwise

awful.

### **Carole's Thoughts about Bullying**

As stated, Carol thought about bullying in the form of gossiping. Carole said, "Bullying is when gossiping is specifically targeted to one person or a group of people and it happens repeatedly." She explained:

Well, I'd have to look at a specific definition, but bullying is damaging a person, whether it's mentally or physically. So, if you're giving rude remarks to a person, like if I were to say you have big eyes or something weird like that, and you took personal offense to that, that would be considered bullying if it happened over and over.

She further stated:

It's not always physical stuff. It can even, I feel like the most prominent form of bullying is like gossiping and saying mean things, even if it's not directly to that person. At least, that's the most common form of bullying, as far as I'm aware. I don't really have that much experience.

In turn, she explained, "There are no circumstances where bullying is okay." She also echoed a constant theme found with all the cases in this study. Relational bullying was most prominent at WMS.

### **Carole's Emotional Response to Bullying**

As mentioned before, in fifth grade, Carole realized that bullying hurt people. Sometime in the sixth grade, Carole seemed to feel shame, guilt, and disquietude about bullies victimizing students and teachers. She tried, one more time, in sixth grade, to stop students from gossiping about a girl. Then, she discontinued her efforts to help. She stated:

I don't want to hang out with certain students because I wouldn't want to have to

listen and hear them talking about teachers like that, or have to stand up to them and to be pushed aside or to just have to—I don't know.

Throughout her educational history, Carole's feelings toward bullying changed. She appeared to feel shame, guilt, and disquietude as well as a need to help victims, but no longer felt comfortable responding. On the other hand, she seemed to have a need to socially connect with other students—at certain times, acted as part of the crowd, perpetrated bullying, but also felt shame and guilt afterwards. At the same time, again displaying uneven thought patterns, she claimed that her high standards did not match the gossiping culture of GTs at WMS. Thus, she appeared socioemotionally confused, confined, and trapped as an introvert with no socioemotional way to escape. This information gives evidence concerning Carole's possible personality level.

### **Through the Lens of Theory of Positive Disintegration**

Like Mia, Cookie, and John, the lens of TPD helps in comprehending Carole's personality in terms of her bullying experiences and insights. This comprises an analysis of the overexcitabilities (OEs) she gave the impression of communicating, along with dynamisms and positive values, guiding to a decision about the TPD level at which she seemed to be functioning.

**Overexcitabilities.** Carole's interviews provided evidence of three OEs. These were emotional, intellectual, and imaginal. Each is discussed here.

***Emotional overexcitability.*** Through the first two interviews, Carole communicated in normal conversation then switched to medium with a serious emotional inflection when talking about her characterizations of bullying and past experiences with

gossiping. At times, she switched back to normal conversation. Moreover, during all Carole's interview conversations, random moments of giggling and laughing occurred as well. Altogether, expressions such as these seem to indicate responses that exceed the question stimulus, having long duration and suggesting strong OE reactions (Piechowski, 1995). The following is an excerpt of a serious inflection comment concerning Carole's characterizations of bullying. She stated:

It's *not always* physical stuff. I can even, I feel like the *most* prominent form of bullying is like gossiping and saying mean things, even if it's *not directly* to that person. *At least*, that's the *most* common form of bullying, as far as I'm aware. I *don't really* have that much experience.

Adverbs of stance in this passage seemed to reveal Carol's emotional responsiveness. They give the impression that she is stressing a point regarding her bullying definition. Her initial stance adverbs (e.g., "not always," "most," "not directly") illustrate her perception of the prominence of relational bullying at WMS. At the end of the excerpt, she uses a negative contraction and "really" to emphasize her inexperience. Unlike the first two interviews, the third interview appeared more relaxed for Carol. Nevertheless, adverbs seemed to continue to reveal her emotional OE. For example, Carol said:

Oh, *for sure*. Physical bullying *just doesn't really* happen, because those are the types of things where *not only* is it *very* easy to get in trouble—like, it's hard to excuse away punching somebody in the face—but it's hard to catch somebody like, calling another person a name. Or, in the case of gossiping, it's *behind the other person's back*, so while it's *still* harmful, that makes it *harder* to catch. Sometimes that makes it *harder* for the person to catch that it is bullying.

In this passage, Carol conceivably demonstrates her connectedness with others as she explores the nuances of relational bullying.

***Intellectual overexcitability.*** Also, in the above passage, Carole appeared to use

adverbs to express her ideas and opinions regarding the difference between physical and relational bullying. Carole brought together stance adverbs while making her emotional and intellectual argument that physical bullying “just doesn’t really happen.” This reveals her analytical thinking.

The above passage also exemplifies complex sentence structure that typically does not occur with 14-year-old students. It contains dependent and independent clauses and parenthetical phrases, all delivered without pauses and minimal filler language. This provides evidence of apparent interest in abstraction as well as analytical thinking and reflectiveness.

***Imaginational overexcitability.*** The imaginational OE in the form of drama and animated response came into the conversations at periodic moments. For instance, when Carol wanted to apologize to her math teacher, she stated, “I was going to talk to him after class and be like, ‘Hey, I’m sorry it came out that way.’” Her description of the entire math teacher episode seemed to reveal a sense of drama and a desire to solve the problem at least at a personal level.

**Dynamisms.** Throughout her interview discussions, Carole provided many instances of spontaneous multilevel dynamisms that were explained in Chapter III. However, those dynamisms still are built upon the dynamisms of shame and guilt. For example, Carole said that “it makes me feel gross to have people—I mean gross in the like moral sense of the word—to have people talking about teachers like that, and not being able to do anything.” According to Dabrowski (2016/1964), guilt “is a powerful, penetrating feeling” (p. 27) experienced when an individual needs to do something but

simply cannot because of emotional distress. Carole explained:

Yeah, I mean it's hard for me because that's just something I used to describe something. It's like you can't do anything, so you feel sort of trapped. It's just like a clenching of the heart in a way. I don't know like you feel bad about yourself.

In this passage, evidence appears relating to the dynamisms of disquietude and discontent with oneself. Carole felt the responsibility to address the problem but was unhappy with herself because could not do anything about it. She explained her frustration in the following passage:

Sometimes I say, "That's not cool." And it's not like people listen, and I've gotten some nasty glares when I do that. But more lately than not, I've just sat quietly, if that makes sense, because nothing I do makes a difference when it's the entire student body, as far as I'm aware.

Dabrowski (2016/1964) stated, "Guilt involves discontent with oneself and in some feeble degree of shame; it permeates the whole personality and is closely related to affective memory and a retrospective attitude" (p. 27). However, for Carole, the dynamisms of disquietude and discontent seemed not strong enough for her to respond in a spontaneous and respectful way. Carole appeared to have the potential for spontaneous multilevel response, but such responses remained socially reserved.

**Positive values.** In elementary school, Carole revealed caring for others as a positive value when trying to stop bullies. When asked who taught her that bullying was wrong, Carole stated her "sixth grade teacher." She explained:

So, my teacher taught science and math and she was just really smart and knew what she was doing and knew—She was just always bold and didn't take crap from no one. That kind of person, I learned a lot in math. That's why I'm, I now love math today. I could trace it back to that class because that was, I mean sixth grade is a great year for math. It's the year you finally start realizing, "Oh, this is why this boring stuff we learned in elementary school actually becomes cool in algebra."

Carole further expressed her respect for this teacher in the following:

It was a very orderly classroom. People wouldn't say mean things about her, because she's a great teacher and she commanded respect. There was one-time people saw her name on her computer but they didn't connect it to her name. And it was a bit of an interesting name, and they were like, "Huh? That's a weird name." And she just stared coldly at them. And she was like, "That's my name," and they shut up immediately. That was a cool moment....She didn't let anybody else tell her what to think, that was cool. She wasn't the type of person to let people think they were better than they are—that sounds sort of wrong. Like, if you did something wrong she's not going to try to, like, sugarcoat it to make it seem better.

Evidently, from this teacher, "the one in sixth grade that really inspired me," Carole appeared to witness the value of standing-up for herself, reflecting respect for strength in terms of a plausible influence on her own personal safety.

**Personality development.** Throughout her school experience, Carole appeared to fluctuate between primary integration and unilevel disintegration, while at certain times, reacting internally with spontaneous multilevel feelings. However, after sixth grade, these feeling were never strong enough to maintain spontaneous action. On the whole, though Carole shows early signs of spontaneous multilevel disintegration, she seems be practicing the horizontal dilemma.

**Primary integration.** Carole acknowledged that, as a fifth grader, she participated in gossiping. She explained:

In fifth grade, I hung-out with these kids, my best friends and two boys who were friends. And we would just play truth or dare but ended up being mostly truth. And it'd be like, "Ah, would you rather kiss this person or this person?" Dumb stuff like that. And during those things we'd say like, "Ah, I wouldn't want to do that. I wouldn't want to kiss this person because they're ugly, but I don't want to kiss this person either, because they're stupid." And then some people would want to join the group, and it was like our thing, so we didn't want to let anybody in. So, I felt like it was damaging to relationships with other people.



Eventually, she stopped gossiping when it felt “gross” and began telling bullies, “That’s not cool.” This experience shows the positive values associated with spontaneous multilevel disintegration, as Carole appears to be rejecting the standards of the group.

In contrast, while in sixth grade, Carole tried to help a girl who was being mistreated, but eventually she ceased her efforts, “because nothing I do makes a difference.” She seemed to reintegrate to primary integration, revealing social competitiveness—the idea that there must winners and losers. She explained, “You don’t want to damage feelings, but you don’t want to ruin your time by having that person hang-out....”It’s not entirely fair to have to sacrifice your fun times to make another person feel like they’re okay.”

In response to the feedback she perceived she was getting from “the entire student body,” Carole discontinued her bullying interventions and seemed to withdraw into herself. As reported earlier, she hesitated making friends and, when bullying occurred, sat silently. On the surface, at least, these behaviors could be seen as self-isolation, a characteristic of primary integration.

***Unilevel disintegration.*** Key evidence of unilevel disintegration is a student trying to conform to the norms of a social group. In the incident with the math teacher, Carole was clearly acting in response to the actions of her classmates. Later, she did feel some guilt about this.

Carole claimed several times that she did not like gossiping. On the other hand, with her elementary friends, she had a history of conforming to norms regarding gossiping. She stated:

So, in elementary school I had these sleepovers with a friend and we would like talk into the night because that's what you do at sleepovers and we would gossip in a way. Like talk about things that happened to us. It's a way of bonding with someone by sharing information that you might not want everyone to know.

Carole however cautioned:

Where gossiping can become harmful is where you're sharing information about other people that they might not want everyone to know. So, when you tell someone your crush or something like that. You're like, "Okay. Don't tell anybody else." But then, if they go to tell it to somebody else, that's considered gossiping.

She also stated:

But if they say something like that and the person to which it is being said doesn't want that information shared or it's untrue. Yeah. So, if it's untrue or they don't want people to know about it, it's harmful and if a group of people participate in gossiping about that, that could be considered bullying if that happens on multiple occasions.

Concerning gossiping in middle school, she offered this enthusiastic justification:

Fun fact! People bond more over hatred than they do over liking the same things. If you hate the same thing as someone, you bond with them more than if you like the same thing, which is why people criticize things so often; it's because it's a way of making friends.

Altogether, Carole seemed to assume that if it was a friend who gossips, it was bonding.

Therefore, it was fine. This appears as unilevel disintegration.

Carole also claimed if name-calling was joking with friends, it was not bullying.

Again, it was bonding. For example, Carole said:

Like nickname-calling and teasing and those things, it's like joking around. You know it's not true and you're just trying to lightly push their buttons. But some people take it too seriously. Like they're dramatic in a way and they'll be like, "Why are you calling me that?" I don't like that person.

With this, Carole revealed her conformity to group norms regarding name-calling. In

addition, she used her group status to exclude other people. These behaviors, again, are

characteristics of unilevel disintegration. Carole's fluctuation between primary integration and unilevel disintegration constitute the horizontal dilemma.

### **How Schools Can Improve**

When addressing what schools could do to stop the practice of bullying, Carole understood the concept of the "herd mentality." She stated:

I think bullying is a herd mentality thing because I saw it with that student at my previous school. A lot of the students disliked this person, but they weren't alone, as these teachers are, if that makes sense. What could the school do about it? That's a very hard thing to do. I feel like education is always something good, but there's a point where it's just weird that people saying bullying is bad on the announcements because everyone's like, "Oh, they're so ridiculous." Those things don't really do anything. It's when people stop to think for themselves, "Why am I doing this? Why do I think this? Are these people not people too?" Yeah, and unless people are wanting to listen to those things, they won't hear it.

This appeared as a poignant anti-herd statement showing her self-awareness and social consciousness not apparent in the evidence of her current personality level.

In turn, she credited her parents for teaching her to think for herself. She explained:

So, I feel like I'm partly the way I am because my parents helped me to think for myself. I don't know a good way to approach it, because usually if people don't want to change, they won't. In herd mentality, the majority of people have to think something is wrong for the few people who think differently to feel weird or want to change. Like if someone's saying something mean about another student and someone's like, "Hey, that's not cool!" If people were like, "Hey, why are you doing that?" Then the person will be like, "Ah. Sorry." That's why—allies is, I think, the term the school is using right now. How could they help?

Thus, Carole spotlighted the need to help other students think about what they are doing rather than just telling them not to do it.

Along with previous indications of compassion, she seemed to stay within herself

in a primary integration posture at WMS. From her horizontal dilemma findings, this capability gave the impression of being unfulfilled.

### **The Case of Kate Plumeet**

Kate Plumeet was a 13-year-old seventh-grade GT student at WMS. Depending on the subject matter, she scored in the 90<sup>th</sup> to 99<sup>th</sup> percentile on her standardized tests. She was a straight A student. As a result of her precociousness and excellence, she felt excited about “skipping a grade but still making it into GT.” In turn, Kate enjoyed studying and learning all her subjects in school. Nevertheless, although oftentimes necessary, she stated, “I don’t love writing essays.”

Kate was an artist, scientist, and athlete. She won two art contests at WMS, enjoyed learning new ideas in science, and played on the school soccer team. She was very athletic and enjoyed basketball and baseball or any other sport played outside. On the other hand, she never liked gridiron football because “I don’t like getting hurt.”

Kate had an optimistic outlook when thinking about people. Nonetheless, she stated, “I don’t like all the pollution.” She believed it is a problem that everyone will eventually work on together and change. She had a positive outlook, maintaining faith that people will find the resolve to collaborate with each other and work for positive results.

### **Experiences with Bullying**

Kate was continually ill-treated throughout elementary into middle school. Her experiences with bullying first occurred in kindergarten. Most of her victimization

happened during elementary school recess. Although bullying transpired at WMS, she did not think it was as bad as elementary school. Overall, she thought bullying behavior was just “horrible.”

**Bullying in elementary school.** Kate was always exceptionally intelligent. As a result, she enrolled in elementary school a year early. While in school, Kate could not understand why she was always a target for teasing. She was a little confused but came to an important realization. At first, what she thought of as joking, in which she was able to laugh at herself, became a constant barrage of harassment that bothered her deeply. As a result of being young, she appeared to her classmates as small in stature, so the bullies made jokes about her being too short.

**Bullying in kindergarten.** Kate explained her kindergarten experience in her own words. She stated:

So, at first when it happened, I didn't really know what was happening because I went to kindergarten a year early. So, I was often teased and joked about being short. And so, I just thought it was just a joke at first. But then they went on and on and I realized it was not just a joke. I was physically—or like, I was not. Like I was getting bullied.

When teasing about her human difference became constant, it began to affect her emotionally. Kate explained, “I think it felt the way it felt because I had never experienced it before and so I was really—oh, it started out as like not a big deal but then it kept on going and going and.” When the bullying began to hurt her, she would go home and talk with her mother. She stated, “So I helped myself feel better, it's near the end of school, so I went home and talked to someone and they made me feel better. I specifically talk to my mom because she was pretty understanding.” As a result, Kate made it a habit

to seek guidance from her mother.

**Bullying in third grade.** Most of the bullying Kate experienced in elementary school happened during recess. One profound experience occurred when playing the common recess game called four square. Kate explained:

So, one of the times when I got bullied, I was in elementary school and the big thing there was four square, and so there is—so, I was playing four square and the object of the game is to get the highest position and to get to the highest position you’ve got to get other people out. So, there was this one kid that was playing four square, and I just remember getting him out and I don’t think he really liked that and we were pretty young at the time, so I don’t know if it made sense to him or anything, but he got pretty mad and his face turned red and at that point I knew something was wrong. So, I started walking away for my own safety, and then he started walking towards me. And then nothing was like processing in my brain except just run, so I ran around the thing, but he kept chasing me.

Kate began to run because she was afraid. She said, “I was a tiny bit faster than him but there were times where I kind of stopped a little like I stumbled and he did like a light pushing or something.”

Kate kept running until she found a “duty.” For student safety, teachers working recess supervision stood as duties or supervisors. Kate further described what happened next:

Well, after a while of running, I was a tiny bit faster than him so after some running he kind of ran out of breath and there are—Well, there are duties at recess, so I found one and she locked me inside, and I just sat in the classroom for the rest of the time for reading because I didn’t know what he was going to do.

Hence, Kate felt safe in a classroom. She did not know what happened concerning the boy.

In another game of four square, another bullying incident happened with Kate as the victim. She noticed another angry boy who became upset. She detected his anger and

asked a friend to help. She explained:

I was in—there's, there's spots in four square, and there's Teddy Bear, Servant, Queen and King. I was in the Queen spot, and that's second to highest. All of a sudden I was like, "Hold on guys, you can take my spot. I need to go somewhere right now." I remember one of my friends, she saw that there was something wrong. I just remember, she was just behind me the whole time. She didn't really do any of the talking, but that she was there.

Kate continued with her story:

Yeah, it's four square again. There is a lot of things on four square. They got mad for some reason. I can't remember all the details, but I just remember him throwing a ball at my face.

When the boy threw the ball at her face, it hit her in the mouth and did some damage.

Kate said, "I got a bloody nose, and I lost a tooth."

**Bullying in fifth grade.** In fifth grade, Kate was a victim of a serious bullying incident in class. She explained:

We were cleaning up for the day and it was almost time to leave and this boy comes up and I was pushing in my chair, and I don't—I don't know what was going on, but the desks were like, the chairs were back to back from each other, and I was pushing in my chair and I was behind the chair and the guy comes up and he pushes another chair into my back, so I'm sandwiched between the chairs and it was pushing against my stomach.

The boy who sandwiched her between the desks had previously bullied Kate. She was not sure of his intent. She stated, "I don't know if he was mad at me from other times or something. I just remember getting sandwiched and the teacher came and I was fine."

The classroom teacher controlled and stopped the incident from getting worse. Kate's mom also became angry at the principal. Kate explained, "The principal did not do very good job with the bullying."

Throughout elementary school, from first through sixth grade, one boy in Kate's

GT magnet class bullied her. A magnet class is a specialized class designed to address GT academic and socioemotional needs. In this class, when the teacher was not watching, the boy would start his routine. He would sandwich her between an open-door and a wall, pushing the door against her and the corner of the wall. He would also pick her up without her permission and spin her around. Each day she worried about his behavior. Kate would always have to look over her shoulder and be aware of whatever the boy decided to do.

In elementary school, Kate had also been a proactive bystander. Today, schools and administrators use the term “ally” as a synonym for bystander. An ally is simply a friend or another student who will step-in and help a victim. For one example, Kate had intervened to help a friend. She remembered a time when somebody called one of her friends some bad names. She explained:

This is—elementary, and I remember that school had—I can’t remember if it was a girl or a boy, but someone was calling one of my really good friends names. I can’t remember specifically. I was mad because—I don’t know why I was mad. I was just really mad. I walked over to her, and I said, “Stop that. Do you know what you’re doing?”

Kate gave the impression she was a constant target of victimization. But, at the same time, in the social position of an ally, she had the socioemotional strength to intervene to help stop a bully.

**Bullying in middle school.** Kate did not experience as much bullying in middle school. She believed the leadership at WMS did a much better job than the principal at her previous elementary school. She stated, “Well—I don’t think bullying happens that much in this school.” However, what had occurred was serious. For instance, Kate



recounted a classroom collaborative learning activity. With this activity, members of her group had come to a consensus concerning creative changes to a chosen item. She remembered the object was a pair of sunglasses.

A boy who had a disagreement with his group's choice, took his pencil and stabbed her hand with it. Kate explained:

I don't know what we were doing with sunglasses, and then we decided as a table not to do that because of something, and so I took a pencil and I crossed it out because we decided as a table. And then he got mad at me because he really liked that idea, I think. And then with his pencil he stabbed me on the hand and.

A trip to the principal's office followed the incident. The boy received a serious punishment. Kate obtained medical care. Today, Kate has a visible scar on her hand.

### **Kate's Thoughts about Bullying**

Kate stated, "I would define bullying as being either physically harmed or put down by someone other than you that discriminates you against who you are." She continued, "So, like getting physically touched, but being put down for like who you are or like for religious reasons or like physically like what you are." She followed-up with, "I don't think there's any circumstances bullying would be okay." And, she said, "I can't think of anything where—any place or time that bullying is acceptable."

Whenever Kate was a victim of ill-treatment, she coped by talking and learning about it from other people, specifically, her mother. For example, she stated, "I specifically talk to my mom because she was pretty understanding."

### **Kate's Emotional Response to Bullying**

Kate stated that bullying was "horrible." Specifically, she said, "Yeah, because

I've felt bullying. And bullying is such a bad thing that I don't want anyone else to feel how it feels because just being threatened or put down, it's just horrible." Whenever Kate saw bullying, she felt like helping in any way she could. Kate explained, "If I didn't help them in the situation then, I would help them when the bully leaves or something." She clarified, "and just walk away. That just wouldn't happen."

### **Through the Lens of Theory of Positive Disintegration**

The lens of TPD assists in understanding personality with reference to Kate's experiences with bullying and her perceptions thereof. This involves an assessment of the overexcitabilities (OEs) she appeared to show, along with the dynamisms and positive values, all preceding to a decision concerning her apparent TPD personality level.

**Overexcitabilities.** Overexcitabilities are defined by the different intensities individuals experience as their personality develops. Kate's interview data revealed evidence of emotional, intellectual, and imaginal OEs. Each will be discussed in succession.

***Emotional overexcitability.*** Emotional OE comprises experiencing life intensely, deep connectedness, embarrassment, and emotional responsiveness. Kate's conversation style was personally unique. Her voice seemed low volume but intensely and emotionally guttural, tightening in her throat as she expressed herself, she used slight inflection changing her volume periodically barely audible to medium volume when stressing some of her salient points. She followed this characterization throughout the interviews.

Kate was asked at the beginning of the interviews to define bullying. The

quotation below provides part of her response, with adverbs of stance italicized and epistemic adverbs underlined. She said:

I *don't* know the exact definition of bullying, but—it's like, well—I *don't* know. Sometimes, I feel like it's *purposefully* hurting someone *in any way*. Like, *physically* or, like, I *don't* know.

The use of negations throughout the quote seemed to indicate uncertainty or embarrassment in defining bullying. Statements such as this one, were often accompanied by blushing during the interviews. Embarrassment is not viewed negatively under TPD, but as evidence of emotional OE (Dabrowski, 2016/1964; Silverman, 2008).

Kate also used stance adverbs when describing a response to a bullying incident.

She explained:

This is elementary, and I remember that school had—I *can't* remember if it was a girl or a boy, but someone was calling one of my *really* good friends names. I *can't* remember specifically. I was mad because—I *don't* know why I was mad; I was *just really* mad. I walked over to her, and I said, “Stop that. Do you know what you're doing?”

Again, Kate's use of negative contraction stance adverbs, as well as the stance adverb “really” and the epistemic adverb “specifically,” indicate her emotional intensity in terms of embarrassment, uncertainty, and confusion. However, these adverbs also highlight her emotional responsiveness and connection to others.

***Intellectual overexcitability.*** Kate's reasoning ability in terms of analysis, self-reflectiveness, problem-solving, and abstract thinking was noteworthy. For example,

Kate stated:

Yeah. I mean, I feel like some bullies *don't even* realize they're bullying until after. So, I think it's *just*—It's good to let them know this is what's happening. Did you do that? And if you did, you should *probably* stop it.

While Kate uses second person voice in the question she believes bullies should ask themselves, it could be reason that these are questions she might ask herself, giving evidence of self-reflectiveness. The sentence that includes her epistemic “after” appears to articulate an important principle about bullying perpetration. This reveals Kate’s ability to analyze and use abstract thinking, and perhaps even an interest in theory about bullying.

***Imaginational overexcitability.*** The imaginational OE represents elements such as fantasy, figurative speech, drama, and problem-solving. When combined with the emotional and intellectual OEs, the imaginational OE, when focused on issues such as bullying, reflects problem-solving. The quotation used in the description of intellectual OE provides an example of Kate’s problem-solving with the suggestion of questions bullies should ask themselves.

When describing what another student said to her during a volleyball game in Physical Education class, Kate stated:

I don’t think I told anyone about it, because it wasn’t *that* bad. Basically, we were playing volleyball, and I’m *not very* good at volleyball. There was this person on my team that was like, “Okay, *so you can’t*—.” I missed the ball *once* or *twice*. *Probably* a few times, and he’s like, “Okay. Kate, if you’re *not* going to be good, *just* go sit out.” I was *really* sad, *so* I went out of the thing.

Here, Kate was imitating a social put-down by a peer, revealing her dramatic nature. She also used adverbial phrases of stance with dramatic language. This was an imaginational OE response not connected to the question stimulus.

**Dynamisms.** Dynamisms are internal motivations at different levels of development that promote personality growth. Kate seemed to be experiencing

dynamisms of disquietude, discontent with oneself, and feelings of inferiority. She also exhibited evidence of developing the third factor.

***Disquietude, discontent, and inferiority.*** On one occasion, Kate spontaneously responded to a friend's victimization. She said speaking to the bully:

I was like, "I have some homework for you. Look online and see what the Golden Rule is."...So, I go, "Do you know what the Golden Rule is?" I think it was a she... And, I was like, "Okay, repeat it to me." And she's like, "Treat people the way you want to be treated."...And I was like, "Okay, now go talk to her and call her those names, and I'll just repeat it back to you."

When witnessing the bullying that kindled Kate's response, she did appear to feel enough disquietude, which is defined by Dabrowski (2016/1964) as an internal sense of responsibility, to prompt intervention to help stop ill-treatment.

When asked about her responsibility to intervene whenever she witnessed bullying, she stated that maybe she would but was not sure. In responding to a question about why she would not intervene, she stated, "I wouldn't feel like it was completely my fault,..but I would feel like it was a quarter of my fault that I didn't help them." In this statement, Kate revealed a certain amount discontent with herself applying another dynamism that could help her personality growth.

Interestingly, although Kate was compassionate toward the victim, she gave the impression of disquietude and discontent if she did not help the bully as well. She rejected the suggestion that she would "just walk away, that just wouldn't happen." Moreover, feelings of inferiority or "increased awareness of the discrepancy between where one is and the higher level to which he or she aspires" (Mendaglio, 2008a, p. 30) seemed to emerge when she stated about future interventions, "I don't care if it's a

stranger getting bullied.”

***The third factor.*** Kate appeared to reveal not only bullying victimization, but concern for all those involved. This seemed to indicate evidence of self-awareness (Dabrowski, 2016/1964), which is a vital element of the third factor. In a moment of self-awareness, Kate stated, “I think bullying has changed me for the better, because I had gotten bullied before. There was no one there to help because I don’t think they realized that. I just felt horrible.”

Once she realized that bullying was “horrible” for herself, she appeared to feel compassion and sensitivity for others. Kate stated, “I don’t want any other people getting hurt. I don’t want people getting stabbed with a pencil.” Kate also gave the impression of concern that bullies understand that what they do is wrong. According to Kate, bullies need to be taught that ill-treatment toward others is not acceptable.

Kate’s approach toward the bully seemed to show increasing empathy (Silverman, 2016). Third factor empathy needs to contain “the ability to feel sad for another,...the ability to know what another is feeling,...[and] accurate reading of another’s perspective,” (Silverman, 2016, p. 33). Kate, under her mother’s guidance, seemed to use both a compassionate and sensitive approach to teach the perpetrator proper and positive behavior without getting “him in trouble.” This was the illustrated “brownie” incident previously described.

Actively and autonomously seeking out ways to make others’ lives better is another aspect of a developing third factor (Dabrowski, 2016/1964; 1967). Kate performed random acts of compassion and sensitivity at school. For instance, she noticed

somebody having a bad day. In the following quote, she referred to that individual in the third person plural. She said, “They were just grumpy, so I gave them a fake mustache, and that just seemed to make them laugh.” This was not only an example of compassion but sensitivity to what others were feeling (Lovecky, 1986, 1992).

**Positive values.** Kate received a lot of guidance from her mother, who directed her through confusion about bullying in elementary school to application of positive values of justice and mutual respect in middle school. Her sense of justice was shown in the fact that she reported incidence to adults so that the bully would experience appropriate consequences. Later, she shifted the responsibility of intervening with the bully to herself, not wanting the bully to get in trouble. Still, she autonomously administered consequences with the little lectures and questioning she would give to the bully. Eventually, she also began seeking understanding of the bully’s perspective, leading to mutual respect.

Kate had learned that “people are going to be mean to you in life.” She used the Golden Rule as a guide to how she should treat others, even those who were “mean to [her].” She stated, “I remember—I think my parents taught me that. Then, I actually understood it in elementary school.” Kate also had a teacher who taught the Golden Rule. She explained, “I just remember I had a teacher that had like a golden sheet of paper that said, ‘The Golden Rule.’” Thus, Kate’s application of positive values seemed to provide evidence of high-level development capacity.

**Personality development.** The evidence seems to point toward Kate at being at the personality development level of spontaneous multilevel disintegration. This

conclusion is supported by the dynamisms Kate exhibited, the positive values she has adopted, and her spontaneous actions in response to the bullying she experienced or witnessed. Moreover, Kate claimed she would continue to confront bullies, stating, “I don’t even care if it’s a stranger getting bullied.”

A preponderance of the evidence seemed to show Kate’s personality at the level of developing elements of the third factor. Kate’s sense of responsibility for intervening in bullying situations seemed motivated by her disquietude, discontent with oneself, and feelings of inferiority, all important dynamisms associated with spontaneous multilevel disintegration. She clearly was experiencing the conflict between the way things are and the way they ought to be. Further, preponderance of the evidence seemed to show Kate’s personality at the level of developing several elements of the third factor. She seemed willing but perhaps not always ready, to form friendships with previous perpetrators. Forming friendships is key to developing empathy, specifically, the ability to accurately learn how to read the perspectives of others (Lovecky, 1986, 1992). The problem seemed to be a concern for her personal safety. However, Kate’s mother seemed to have a concern for Kate’s personal safety, causing her to advise Kate to avoid intervention. Kate, on the other hand, gave the impression of having a conscious will to develop her personality. While, from, time-to-time, she appeared content to follow unilevel norms established by her mother, at other times she would still spontaneously intervene in a bullying situation at school. In the four square incidents, Kate initially went to her teacher, then to her mother, both of whom intervened appropriately. Nonetheless, when the boy brought over the brownies, Kate still involved herself in instructing the boy about



proper behavior. Thus, she is likely undergoing what Dabrowski (1967) referred to as positive maladjustment. A conscious decision toward what ought to be.

### **How Schools Can Improve**

When asked about what she thinks schools and districts could do about bullying, Kate stated, “So the district—Because I was bullied once and the person who bullied me got suspended for a few days,...that made me feel a little safer.” She also gave advice concerning what processes schools and districts could implement to help victims. She explained:

I could also go into a teacher’s room or the office just instead of being outside, because I was kind of scared. Because of the person who kept bullying me could maybe bully me on being like told on them. And the district, I think the district can also transfer classes, because I know there are multiple, two GT classes in English, and so I could maybe transfer to a different one just to make me feel safer if the bully is in my class.

Kate furthermore believed school announcements and assemblies help students. She stated, “I really think they do help.” In sixth grade, the ‘Don’t Be a Monster’” assembly was beneficial. It was questionable whether that assembly matched Kate’s emotional level. She explained, “It was pretty cool. It, I don’t know. I felt it was a little young.”

### **The Case of Mary Smith**

Mary Smith was a 13-year-old eighth-grade student at WMS. She was an outstanding student who achieved as “most of the time” and top scores with each subject on her standardized tests. Her favorite subject was orchestra. She explained, “Orchestra,

you get to play—nice break from school.” She had outstanding debate skills. She recently achieved “fourth place” at the State debate competition.

During her free time, Mary was involved in many activities. She liked to read books, enjoyed movies, and appreciated the challenge of figuring-out puzzles. She especially loved watching movies with her family. She stated, “I like watching Netflix.” Mary was also an “active Girl Scout.”

Mary had dislikes. She did not like watching or playing sports. She also had an aversion to peer pressure.

Mary had three things she would like to change about society. She wanted equal rights for all people. She also desired society to have fewer “evil politicians” and “mean people.”

### **Experiences with Bullying**

When Mary displayed her journey map, she pointed to illustrations of first grade through middle school. She reported no instances of bullying perpetration or victimization. In fact, she explained her student depictions as everyone being happy and friendly. Mary had a firm belief that bullying is just students normally interacting in social settings. She drew a teacher on her map saying, “You all must feel bullied.” Still, certain regarding her point of view, for the last picture on her map, Mary sketched question marks above the heads of each student on her stick figure drawings.

According to Mary, she did not see a problem with bullying at WMS. She had never seen physical bullying at the school. However, if someone did bully, it was verbal ill-treatment of another student. She said, “Usually, we’ll [GTs] say, ‘Stop that.’” At that

point, it usually ended. Mary believed standing-up to the bully until victimization stopped was appropriate. However, unlike the other students in this study, her main concern was teachers bullying GTs.

**Bullying in middle school.** Displaying uneven thought patterns (Dabrowski, 2016/1964), her opinion of “no bullying” was questionable. Mary had experienced bullying in terms of other students taking her possessions in class. She said, “Sometimes, kids will steal each other’s things.” However, it was not a big problem for her. She explained, “They always give it back, so it’s not really a big deal.” However, sometimes trying to get her things back was a hassle. She stated, “Occasionally, you know you’ll always get it back, but sometimes, you want it back then instead of after the class period or whatever.” She followed-up, “It doesn’t bother me as much as some other people, but mostly frustrated. Frustration is a big one.” Mary explained why she thought other students take stuff, “Sometimes, they think it’s funny. It could just be boredom. I think a lot of people just find it funny, entertaining.” Other than petty problems like stealing possession, she really did not see much bullying at WMS. Ill-treatment comprised more verbal sparring rather than physical fights. She stated, “No. We do not fight here, fight free zone.” Again, Mary thought the biggest bullying problem was teachers bullying students.

Mary focused her explanation on two teachers of GTs whom she believed actively bullied students. She began by talking about the mistreatment of a younger student in a GT class. She stated:

Well, there are two teachers. So, we had a sixth grader in our class and this teacher is usually a jerk to everyone. He was being extra jerk to the kid. I guess.

And it's the strangest because he was only a jerk to our two class periods that were the GT classes. Sounds like he was normal in the other classes, but he couldn't stand us for some reason. He would go out of his way to be a jerk and give us extra assignments and give us assignments at the very, very end of class, which we couldn't complete. There's very little instruction. And he wasn't a nice person to be around.

Mary evidently did not like this teacher of GT. She explained further:

He just acted like this kid was an idiot, which makes no sense because he was probably one the smartest kids in there. I mean, he was a sixth grader in a ninth-grade class. He was a genius. He just—our stupid teacher acted like he was a little idiot.

Mary continued her complaints about another teacher of GT. She stated:

Yeah, well she did two grades of the GT subjects. She definitely wasn't GT certified. First off, she was giving us seventh grade curriculum instead of eighth. And then we told her—we pretty much said that's not okay, we want eighth grade curriculum, because she would give us packet charade and it would be seventh grade level, which we read last year. And then over and over we would say, "Please give us things that we are supposed to be doing." From that point on in the year she was just very angry whenever we tried to ask her any questions. And she would also tell people their grades in class, out loud in front of everyone.

She went on protesting, stating:

And there are instances—once she pulled out a student to the hall and said the student's name and then, "I just don't really think you have the drive to be a GT student." Which was ridiculous because another one of the smartest guys I've ever known. She liked putting people down in class, too.

She added more concerning this incident:

Other than telling him that he didn't have the drive to be a GT student, she would come up to students and say, quite loudly, "You haven't turned in any of your assignments." In front of the entire class. Once a girl was doing a presentation and the teacher kept interrupting her to make grammar changes and the teacher didn't really—she can't even spell things right, so it was kind of ridiculous.

After her diatribe toward the two teachers, she turned her grievances toward the school.

About WMS, Mary expressed, "I thought that honestly the school should try

better to get competent teachers. Because in both instances the teachers weren't competent for the job, and they just weren't nice individuals." She continued to try to complain to the school. She stated:

I mean, well, I would come back every day or whatever and say, "These two teachers are being idiots again." And, really they [students] had to put up with it every day because every day they [teachers] did something idiotic. I know tons of people complained to the school about both teachers throughout the year. Nothing ever really happened. We would complain to the teachers ourselves and ask for a change. Sometimes they'll say, "Yeah, we'll try better." Never did. The school, they just never done anything really.

Mary explained the reasons why she and her parents so incessantly complained. She said:

Because we're in the GT program. We're supposed to be challenged. And instead the one teacher couldn't teach us, and then he was the only teacher there that was teaching that subject so we couldn't change into a different class or anything. And then with the other teacher, yeah, she just didn't even try. So.

For Mary, other than bullies taking her possessions and two teachers ill-treating GT students, verbal or relational bullying was the main problem at WMS.

### **Mary's Thoughts about Bullying**

Mary defined bullying as "When someone tries to hurt someone else intentionally." She explained, "Because that means they're trying to do it. When it's not intentional, maybe they're not trying to bully. It's one thing if it's happening all the time, but usually, it's just a slight mess up." She also differentiated what adults and student believe was bullying. She said, "A lot of the bullying stuff, no one [students] actually thinks it's bullying. A lot of what the adults say, 'This is bullying. Don't do it.' None of the kids really." With this, Mary's thinking represented moral relativism. Her bullying definition was relative to whether a person was a student or an adult. Then, as a student, was the bullying intentional or not? How would anybody know intentions? With such

relativism, she did not reveal evidence of the practice of self-awareness regarding any potential for hurtful behavior. She knew bullying was wrong but appeared not to realize that students forming their own behavioral norms could perpetuate ill-treatment. In turn, she seemed not realize that her verbal attack against teachers could be perceived as gossiping.

Essentially, Mary thought that bullying was just the way kids “interact.” She explained, “It’s pretty much just our way of communicating. A lot of the time, it is overlooked.” Mary used the example of name-calling. Students essentially make up names for each other for fun. She stated:

Well, a lot of the time, they’re just name-calling. Usually, if someone’s actually offended, they’ll tell you and it’ll stop. But name-calling, usually, it’s kind of nice name-calling like nicknames. We just don’t really have bullying here to reference.

When asked if there were any circumstances in which bullying would be fine. She stated, “I don’t know. Just maybe if there’s an actual bully, someone who bullies someone else constantly, physically. If it’s a teeny bit of bullying, to stand up to them and—I don’t know. I guess.”

When asked if it should be permissible to bully back in self-defense, Mary said, “Not bully forever, but maybe just insult enough to make it stop.” Thus, being able to stand-up for yourself was important for her self-defense. She reasoned that “Maybe, I don’t know. If it prevents the situation from increasing because a lot of the time, you just have to stand up to the bully.” When asked if retaliation was acceptable, she stated, “I think if the bullying has gotten bad enough, then yes.” Thus, she believed a person should be able to retaliate until the victimization stops. Or, if she could not make it stop, she

stated, “I would probably find someone who can actually get it to stop.”

Mary’s moral relativism revealed uneven thought patterns (Dabrowski, 2016/1964). If bullying did not exist at WMS, how was it then possible or acceptable to bully back if victimized?

### **Mary’s Emotional Response to Bullying**

Mary felt that teasing between friends was appropriate and fun. However, with random people who you do not know, it was not suitable. For example, she talked about name-calling or when friends make up nicknames for each other. She stated, “Well, it’s always between friends. It’s not like it’s random people in the hall. And then a lot of the time you kind of make up your own nicknames, so no one ever gets offended. Or, it’s inside jokes”

Mary claimed the focus of name-calling was within the GT group of students at WMS. She explained, “I think there’s more of it within the GT students. People are less likely to get offended at any name-calling.” With GT friends, she stated, “Well, we can walk up and say, ‘Hey, loser.’ And it’ll be normal and funny because none of us are actually losers. I don’t know. But no one ever gets offended at it.” Furthermore, she expressed, “It’s kind of hard to explain. We just interact. It’s like—it’s just—normal. And I guess some adults might consider it bullying, but.”

If directed at Mary, bullying did not bother her very much. She reported ignoring it without thinking about it too extensively. She stated, “You’re not thinking about it. It’s no longer bothering you. I don’t know why you would choose to just think about it all the time. It’s easier to kind of just forget about it.”

Continuing with her moral relativism and uneven thought patterns, Mary also felt a little frustrated but also responsible when other students overreacted to bullying. If any GT student became offended, she stated, “Well, I mean, there are a few people who overreact to situations. They might be offended, but after that you’ll know they’re offended. We’re not going to do that again.” Furthermore, she claimed that friends also protect each other if real bullying occurred. Mary explained, “Well, schools always encourage it, but I honestly feel like we just stand up for each other, because it’s the right thing to do.”

### **Through the Lens of Theory of Positive Disintegration**

The lens of TPD facilitates helpful understandings of Mary’s personality development in terms of her experiences with bullying and her perceptions of those experiences. These understandings include an analysis of overexcitabilities (OEs) she expressed, along with the dynamisms and positive values, all directing to an inference regarding the TPD level at which she gave the impression she was functioning.

**Overexcitabilities.** For Mary, the data suggested the presence of three OEs. These were intense emotional, intellectual, and imaginal OEs. Each of OE will be examined in succession.

***Emotional overexcitability.*** To reiterate, elements of emotional OE include deep “emotional responsiveness” (Silverman, 2008, p. 160) and “ability to experience things deeply” (p. 160). Mary had low volume and a serious voice inflection throughout the interview process. However, her speech switched periodically to serious inflection and



medium volume when talking about bullying victimization, name-calling, GT norms, and bullying punishments and responses. This also occurred when giving advice and opinions, especially concerning what schools could do to combat the problem. Whenever in medium volume, her throat seemed to tighten, revealing some self-control over what she emoted. At periodic times, laughing and giggling also occurred during the interview process.

In the excerpt below, in which Mary is trying to describe the nature of GT bullying at WMS, again, adverbs of stance are shown in italics, and epistemic adverbs are underlined. She stated:

Well, it's *not so much* as the fights *so much* as *just* little arguments because it's *just not really quite* a big—So, I guess it would *just more* be sparring instead of fighting....

Well, a lot of the time, they're *just* name-calling. *Usually*, if someone's *actually* offended, they'll tell you and it'll stop. But name-calling, *usually*, it's *kind of* nice name-calling like nicknames. We *just don't really* have bullying here to reference.

Mary's use of multiple adverbs of stance in a row, such as “not so much,” “so much as just,” “just not really quite,” and “just don't really,” would seem to indicate a depth of commitment to her opinion.

Mary continued with this same pattern of conversation, stating, “I thought that *honestly* the school should try better to get competent teachers. Because in both instances the teachers weren't competent for the job, and they *just* weren't nice individuals.” Across the two quotes, use of adverbs such as “really,” “usually,” and “honestly,” again reveal the intense depth of her experience. In addition, her continued use of what appeared to be her favorite adverb, “just,” seemed to represent an intense reply, appearing

as a mix of frustration and seriousness, reflecting her emotional depth.

***Intellectual overexcitability.*** Recalling that intellectual OE includes intense analysis and reflectiveness, Mary’s evidence of these characteristics in several passages was noteworthy. For example, when analyzing ineffective consequences for bullying perpetration, she reflected:

Well, a lot of the time, they’ll also give [bullies] detentions, but there isn’t really a good way to punish them for their actions because a lot of people would say, “Hit them back,” but then you’d be hitting someone, so I guess detention. I don’t know. I guess that’s why bullying still happens. They haven’t come up with a good punishment for it.

As Mary was speaking, she recognized a problem in logic. She eventually corrected herself by connecting “why bullying still happens” with a lack of “a good punishment for it.” This exhibits her analytical thinking.

Mary’s sentence structure and vocabulary also exceeded what is expected of a typical 13-year-old student. In the excerpts given in this section, for example, she strung together multiple independent and dependent clauses. As to her vocabulary, she filled her statements with adverbs and used advanced words such as “sparring,” “reference,” and “detentions.” This ability provides further evidence of her thinking.

An interesting practice Mary used throughout her interviews was the way she shifted gears in her explanations as in “it’s just not really quite a big—So, I guess it would just more be.” This demonstrates Mary’s reflectiveness as she appeared to be constantly evaluating her own speaking.

***Imaginational overexcitability.*** Figurative speech, drama, and creative problem-solving are defining characteristics of the imaginational OE. Mary used animated

language at certain times when answering questions. For instance, when she expressed the differences between student and adult definitions of bullying, she dramatically mimicked adults when declaring that they always said, “This is bullying. Don’t do it.”

Interestingly, Mary’s emotional, intellectual, and imaginal OEs seemed to merge when she explained how she tried to influence educational change at WMS. She stated:

I mean, well, I would come back every day or whatever and say, “These two teachers are being idiots again.” And really they [students] had put-up with it every day because every day they [teachers] did something idiotic. I know tons of people complained to the school.

While perhaps offensive, Mary used figurative language here when labelling the teachers as “idiots.” She also used figurative language in an earlier quote when she referred to the teasing among GT students as “sparring instead of fighting.”

Mary also implied problem-solving in this excerpt. She apparently advocated “every day or whatever” about the incompetence she experienced with the teachers. She reported that she was part of a larger advocacy effort regarding these teachers because, “tons of people complained.”

**Dynamisms.** In her interviews, Mary exemplified the dynamisms of ambivalence and ambivalence. Accordingly, along with other students in her classes, she initially seemed to try to help the two teachers address the GTs’ learning needs. She explained, “Over and over we would say, ‘Please give us things that we are supposed to be doing.’” Eventually, the students, according to Mary, stopped trying. She said, referring to one of the teachers, “From that point on in the year she was just very angry whenever we tried to ask her any questions.” She also stated:

In all honesty, the teachers didn't understand what they were teaching. Like the one teacher would be up at the board, trying to explain it, then he would just get completely lost and have a teacher--not a teacher—a student demonstrate on how to do it because he had no clue what was happening. And then the other teacher she didn't even try, she just gave us seventh grade curriculum, the same thing she was giving to seventh grade core students. And we were the eighth grade GT. Yeah.

Ambivalence and ambivalence in this passage are demonstrated by the students trying to help then giving up. The ambivalence in this passage is demonstrated by the students' desire for advanced materials coupled with giving up on trying to get them.

Ambivalence is displayed by the students actually asking the teachers for proper curriculum and instruction while continuing to complete lower level work.

Further illustrating her ambivalence or uneven thought patterns, Mary referred to the possible reluctance of allies intervening in bullying situations or the ill-treatment circumstances that, in her opinion, did not exist. She stated, "Probably not. One of us will always step in. We're pretty good about it." Mary again expressed ambivalence with her opinion of "no bullying" in the following interview exchange:

Interviewer: So, is it possible that you are being bullied and you just don't recognize it?

Mary: I guess so. I mean I could always be wrong.

**Positive values.** The data on Mary suggested that she held the positive values of integrity and courage. Both of which she applies primarily to having her personal educational needs met. Integrity referred to an individual's consistent practice of a given belief. Throughout her three interviews, Mary always fought for the idea that name-calling and teasing were not bullying. She was unswerving in her criticism of the school's antibullying efforts. She unfailingly advocated for advanced curriculum appropriate to

the needs of GTs.

This advocacy also shows her courage. She stated, “We would complain to the teachers ourselves and ask for a change. Sometimes they’ll say, ‘Yeah, we’ll try better.’ Never did.” She said that “neither of the teachers should have been teaching us.” Then she explained that “those would be [her] personal feelings.”

She gave the impression of safeguarding her own education and that of her fellow GTs. Her concerns for the teaching she and her friends were receiving and the school’s antibullying efforts seemed focused on what they were not getting. When asked why they should be getting a more advanced curriculum, she said, “because we are in the GT program. We’re suppose to be challenged.” Her emphasis here was on their status as gifted students rather than any particular growth need.

**Personality development.** Notwithstanding the possibility that teachers do bully students, the concern here was Mary’s personality development. Mary appeared to be practicing the horizontal dilemma. Mary and the other GTs apparently rallied against the two teachers, trying to force their issue. This seemed to be unilevel disintegration because the GTs apparently formed a group norm that dictated how they would advocate for a proper curriculum. The group norm seemed to be to challenge the teachers directly.

Mary did not entertain the possibility that she and the other students may have been bullying the two teachers. For example, she was persistent in her use of the word “idiot” and “idiotic” in reference to the two teachers she perceived as incompetent. While defending the use of name-calling as “interacting” among friends, she seemed unaware that, with the teachers, she was name-calling in a manner that was unfriendly. This gives

the impression of primary integration with the focus solely on personal needs.

With these actions, as well as her “teeny bit of bullying” back toward other students to “make it stop;” also stating, “Sometimes kids will steal each others’ things,” and defining bullying as “interacting,” her personality level seemed mainly at primary integration, changing at certain times to unilevel disintegration. As mentioned previously, this is what Dabrowski (2016/1964) referred to as the horizontal dilemma—the psychological condition in which no personality growth takes place.

### **How Schools Can Improve**

Mary was critical of the school’s antibullying program, insisting that it was “ridiculous” because of the assumption that bullying was occurring at the school. Mary spoke strongly about the ability of students to handle bullying on their own. Thus, she stated the following:

I think really just the students because, at least in my classes, all the students get along. They all think they’re—everyone makes an effort of getting along with someone else. Even if you don’t get along as much with someone, you still try. I’ve been in the GT since I was in first grade, and we’ve never really had any bullying at all.

In accordance, to help all students get along, she proposed the formation of better student relationships. To help the school facilitate this plan, she stated:

Maybe instead of trying to have this person and not have—how should I put this? There are different classes, right. And then you might have only one class with this person, but four with this other person. If they try to put the four classes together—because usually if you have one class with that person, you have all the same classes as them, just not at the same period. So, if they try to match periods up, maybe people will be closer to each other because there’s really no escape from the other person.

This plan would essentially bring students together to talk and get to know and

understand each other.

Not surprisingly, Mary also favored better teachers for GT students. In her view, this was to prevent teachers from bullying students. She stated:

When we were in grade school, adults would always underestimate how we can take care of our problems by ourselves. But now one of our biggest united problems is how our teachers are the bullies. And not much is happening so—I don't know.

Mary seemed to imply the need for better teacher evaluation. Mary explained:

Honestly, the teachers probably shouldn't be in their jobs because the one teacher—or, at least teaching the subject. Because the one teacher is only mean to the GT kids. And he just—he shouldn't be allowed to teach us then. They should do something about it. Anything. I mean, occasionally they'll talk to the teachers, but nothing ever actually happens. And they'll have principal sit-in and watch the class, but it doesn't matter since the teachers are on their best behavior.

She furthermore said, "Every time someone's watching the class, the teachers act so different." She added:

They're just like, "Oh, well, there's someone watching the class. They're acting nice. There's once where someone from the district walked into the one class where our teacher was terrible, with the principal, and the guy was like, "What a nice class." And we all just stared at him.

## CHAPTER V

### FINDINGS

This study focused on two questions.

- 1 How do early adolescent GT students perceive their bullying experiences, either as victims or perpetrators?
- 2 What do early adolescent GT students who have experienced bullying believe educators can do to help them feel safe from bullying?

#### **Student Experience with Bullying**

Taking together the information garnered from the six GT students, several themes emerged in describing the general experience these students had with bullying. This includes the ways in which the students defined bullying, the types of bullying experienced, and the students' reaction to the bullying.

#### **Student Definitions of Bullying**

In defining bullying, all six students mentioned the concepts of harm and intent. These two ideas comprised a unifying definition for these students.

John stated that bullying is “physical or emotional harmful that one person does to another in order to make themselves feel better about something.” Carole said essentially the same thing in terms of emotional harm, “I mean, words can hurt a lot, especially when you’re a teenager, all those hormones really mess with your mind, and you just care about what other people think.” She also highlighted distress to the victims, stating, “Bullying is damaging to a person, whether it’s mentally or physically—if it happened over and over.” Kate accentuated repetitive harm, stating, “It kept on going and going.”



Mary deemphasized repetition, saying, “But usually its’s a slight mess up.”

The students were not as clearly unanimous on the idea of intent. Reflecting the attitudes of at least two other students, Mia stated, “Bullying is really like when someone’s doing something that hurts someone else, even if it’s not purposeful.” She further explained, “Even if they do it twice, but it’s not that bad. I feel like if you talk it out with them until it stops, then it wasn’t that bad.” Cookie stressed hostile intent. She stated that bullying is “when somebody’s taking advantage of another person or they want what the other person has.” John tried to disempower the intentions of the bullies by rationalizing and dismissing his victimization, stating, “Well, you don’t really know me, you’re just insulting me for not really much of a reason, so I just kind of shrug it off and went on with my day.”

The acts these students did not define as bullying emerged as one of the most important themes. Mia, John, Carole, and Mary seemed to agree that name-calling and teasing were not victimizing acts. Mia participated in name-calling with her friends, stating, “But no, it was like all my friends, they all have a nickname that they prefer to be called. Like they get mad at someone if they call them their real name.” Mary argued, “A lot of bullying stuff, no one actually thinks it’s bullying.” She also contended, “Well, it’s always between friends. It’s pretty much just our way of communicating. We tease each other but it’s all in good fun.” Carole seemed to agree, stating, “Like nickname-calling and teasing and those things, it’s like joking around. You know it’s not true and you’re just trying to lightly push their buttons.” Also, in agreement, John stated, “I don’t believe it’s considered bullying if the person you’re teasing likes it, and enjoys it, and is laughing

along with you.” One of the strongest statements in this regard was made by Mary. When asked what she would call this teasing and name-calling, simply said, “interacting.”

The students appeared to believe that the adults in their lives (e.g., school administrators, teachers, parents) have a much broader definition of bullying and that the application of this definition may interfere with the students’ efforts to navigate their junior high school experience. Carole had this to say about what she believes adults think, “Adults, in general, feel that one act could be considered bullying” and “To me bullying has to be repeated offenses.” Cookie observed, “Kids are joking around and parents are like, ‘That’s too far.’” She also explained, “The kids are like, ‘No, that isn’t it because we’re friends.’” She further said, “Parents will like go super fiery.” John stated, “Teasing with your friends, some adults might see that as a form of bullying.” Kate also contended, “Kids like to joke and tease.” She furthermore argued, “I think it depends on the circumstances.” Mary, consistent with bullying as interacting, recognized that “an adult might see it and they’re saying bullier.” Last, Mia maintained her adamant belief that adults should let students figure out their own social problems. She stated, “Like my friends and I, if we did something that we didn’t like, but we talked about it, and so now we’re friends.” For Mia, no pretext for bullying existed to convey such problems to the “top people” of the school.

### **Types of Bullying**

The students had varying experiences with bullying. All students agreed that they had hardly seen or experienced physical bullying at WMS, because it is easier to get caught. Overt bullying identified by the students took the form of name-calling or

teasing, despite the students' definition of bullying that excluded name-calling or teasing. More covert forms of bullying included cyberbullying and gossiping. The manner in which each of these was expressed can be categorized as relational bullying.

When asked to describe a bullying experience, some of these students described a name-calling or teasing experience. This included Mia, John, and Mary. Mia reported being called "ugly and fat." John told of being labelled a "nerd and a geek." His response was "whatever." Then, he avoided the bullies. Mary talked about her possessions being taken. She stated, "Sometimes kids will steal each others' things." She also explained, "Occasionally, you know you'll always get it back, but sometimes, you want it back then, instead of after the class period or whatever." She further expressed feeling "mostly frustrated" because "I want my stuff back and you're not giving it to me." On the other hand, Mary witnessed teachers bullying students, not realizing her own name-calling, declaring, "These two teachers are being idiots again."

More covert types of relational bullying included cyberbullying and gossiping. At WMS, Cookie was a victim of covert aggression through cyberbullying. She stated, "It happens a lot." She reported that another student tried to bully her way into an extra-credit math student group, explaining that "people think they can put stuff online instead of having to say it in person." At certain points in their educational experiences, Mia and Carole appeared to have either received or practiced gossiping aggression. Mia described this incident, "Rumors started spreading because they'd see me with them [popular guys], so rumors would start spreading, and then it had become, obviously, just extremely inappropriate rumors." It got to the point that "strangers I don't even know, or like I've

never even seen before would come up to me and ask me about the rumors.” Carole admitted perpetration with this description:

Well, back to fifth grade. There was this one kid who was probably mentally challenged in some way but I wouldn’t really know which is why, thinking about that. But I mean he was definitely mentally challenged or something. Our school had a ward, you could call it, for mentally challenged kids. There was this one girl who would have seizures all the time. And she couldn’t speak. It was just groups of those kids who were challenged, but this kid was less challenged, but he still had that person that went around with him to help him, if that makes sense. So, he was just different, not as smart, not as good at interacting. So, sometimes, we would talk about how weird he was and then there was at some point where I think it was during that school year that I had the revelation that that was harmful.

Mia and Carole, with the addition of Mary, have also asserted adults as either perpetrators or victims. Mia reported that her mother and family apparently practiced ostracism, dismissing Mia’s social sensitivity in terms of crying as overdramatic. Mia stated, after social exclusion at school, “When I went to my family, they said they couldn’t do anything and that I was being overdramatic.” She also explained, “She [mother] hates crying. She gets really scary when she’s mad. She gets mad a lot.” Then, Mia’s mother would say, “Deal with it.” In response, Mia stated, “I just felt really alone” and “It’s really a loss of hope.” Carole stated a teacher’s participation in gossiping. She explained, “We were doing the lab and people are carving the face of a certain teacher onto a piece of chalk.” She asserted that the teacher said, “‘Oh that’s funny,’ and ‘Oops, did I say that out loud?’ Like she’s trying to seem cool and in with it.” Carole followed up with, “It made [me] feel all weird to have a teacher doing that too.” Carole also furthered her contention that GTs also relationally bully teachers. With a teacher as a victim, she stated:

At the beginning of the year, this certain teacher was, I don’t mean any hard

feelings by this, but sort of wimpy, if you understand what that means. Like, he didn't command the respect of the class. It started really getting bad and I was sort of the cause of that. So, he was doing something confusing on the board and although I regret it, I said it in sort of a negative tone. Like, why are you doing it like that? Can't you do it this way?

In response, the teacher grew embarrassed as the class would proceed to humiliate him. Classroom "pandemonium" broke-out when someone yelled "roasted." "Roasted" is a term that means humiliation. The class joined in and demeaned the teacher. The next day, the teacher said to the class something like, "You guys don't give me the respect I deserve." Carole expressed, "It clearly hurt him, but people didn't see that they had done something wrong. They saw that there was this man who wasn't able to take it, and they're like 'Aw, this teacher had tears in his eyes.'" She stated that the class "clearly hurt his feelings." Last, Mary claimed that two teachers bully GT students. She explained, "He [teacher] would go out of his way to be a jerk and give us extra assignments at the very, very end of class, which we couldn't complete. There's very little instruction. And, he wasn't a nice person to be around." Concerning the other teacher, Mary stated, "She was just very angry whenever we tried to ask her any questions. And, she would tell people their grades in class, out loud in front of everyone. She liked putting people down."

What is interesting was that all the GTs in this study, in general, shared the same teachers in WMS's high-level math and GT program. They were essentially referring to the same teacher or teachers when discussing these bullying scenarios.

### **Student Reactions to Bullying**

Students reacted to their bullying experiences in various ways. For example, Mia,

Carole, and Mary responded to victimization with perpetration. After the frustration of continuous ill-treatment at school, Mia stated, "I just punched someone." She then explained, "I told my mom and she started yelling at me, but she got so annoyed that I was crying." Carole said, "In sixth grade, I sat at this table, and I mentioned this girl that got bullied. They were just saying some things about her, like she was weird, and I was like, 'Hey, that's not cool.'" Afterward, Carole's response to the victim was ostracism. She stated, "For that specific girl, I wouldn't want to be friends with her." Carole has currently isolated herself to avoid other GTs. She stated, "I've just regretted it [gossiping] because I can see how damaging that can be to a person. And again, I haven't really tried to reach out, but I don't mind." Mary would apparently persist in bullying other students until her victimization stopped. She said, "If it's a teeny bit of bullying, to stand up to them." Then, she stated, "Not bully forever, but maybe just insult enough to make it stop."

John practiced evasion. He described his reaction this way, "It was a bit of a shock, and it was a little strange to me, it was a new experience, but after that, it was like, 'Eh whatever.'" He then explained, "If I saw those kids later throughout the year, I would just avoid them."

Cookie seemingly consistently reacted with empathy, helping both the victim and bully. She said, "I'll usually pull the victim aside and just say like, 'Hey, calm down, you're good.' Then, I'll go talk to the bully after and just say, 'That wasn't so great.'" She further explained, "I'm friends with most people. I usually will know the bully and just try to talk to them, or talk about it."

Kate spontaneously helped the perpetrator, describing her efforts in this way, “Someone was calling one of my really good friends names.” She stated, “I was mad.” Then, she said to the perpetrator, “Stop that! Do you know what you’re doing?” Afterward, she proceeded to teach the perpetrator proper behavior according to the “Golden Rule.” Kate would, at other times, evade bullies. She explained that her mother would tell her “to avoid that person.” She said the reason was that “I’m scared, because I don’t know if I’m safe.”

While some of these students reported adults as perpetrators and victims of bullying, all reported that their parents played an important role in how the students responded to bullying. For example, Cookie said, “I’ve always wanted to be a good person, but they’ve raised me to be a good person, and taught me to be one, but their motivation has motivated me more.” Carole credited her parents with teaching her “to look at things and see why they happen, to think for myself.” Kate stated, “So I helped myself feel better. It’s near the end of school, so I went home and talked to someone and they made me feel better. I specifically talked to my mom because she was pretty understanding.”

### **Acceptance of Bullying**

Each student emphasized different types of bullying and reacted to it distinctively. With dissimilar perceptions, each discernment appeared based upon whether the student absolutely rejected bullying behaviors or not. On one side are those students who mainly rejected such conduct. They were more on the side of no bullying under any circumstances. On the opposite side were those students who accepted such actions

through moral relativity.

Although within their social milieu both seemed to balance both sides, Cookie and Kate were good examples of leaning more toward eradication. Cookie stated, “It’s not acceptable, and it shouldn’t be justified, but there’s always a reason behind it.” However, even if the bully had reasons to ill-treat others, Cookie explained, “they shouldn’t use that as an excuse to do it.” Kate said, “It’s just a horrible thing. I can’t think of anything where any place or time that bullying is acceptable.”

On the other hand, Mia, Mary, Carole, and John revealed moral relativism during their interviews. Mia explained, “Your friends can tell if it’s serious or not.” Mary stated, “A lot of bullying stuff, no one actually thinks it’s bullying. A lot of what the adults say, ‘This is bullying don’t do it.’ None of the kids really, it’s pretty much interacting.” Carole viewed bullying in the form of relational teasing as unacceptable. With an incident at a Summer camp, some “girls in the cabin said something that was out of line to me about me, and it hurt me at the time. They were comparing me and this friend, and they were like, ‘Oh, if we had to kill one of you.’” On the other hand, she also considered gossiping as a bonding experience or a way for her to make and keep friends. She stated, “It’s a way of bonding with someone by sharing information that you might not want everyone to know.” John explained, “I would tease around with my friends a lot, but those were all jokes that we laughed at together, so I wouldn’t really define that as bullying.” Ultimately, with these last four cases, the notion of moral relativism revealed a danger of expecting students to approach bullying situations the same way, or, as allies.

Moral relativism reflected multiple standards as individual students determined



what bullying was and was not. This set-up multiple expectations among students as well. A great example was Mia. From a socially dominant position, she appeared to pick-and-choose her friends based on her bullying definition of being overdramatic and who followed it. Indeed, the overdramatic label was Mia's response to non-friends. She explained, "Well, my friends, they're kind of like me. They know when something's serious and when something's not serious. My old friends, they were really overdramatic about it. But my newer ones, they know." Thus, Mia's overemotional friend today may not be a friend tomorrow. In other words, depending on friend status, some students could practice bullying behaviors while others could not. In consideration of Mia's relativism, even as a past victim of bullying, she could not seem to grasp or admit her own perpetration toward others.

### **Student Bullying Experiences and Theory of Positive Disintegration**

When considering a unified student definition of bullying, types of bullying, reactions to bullying, and acceptance of ill-treatment, the lens of TPD helped in the understanding of student experiences and perceptions. Mia, Mary, John, and Carole appeared fluctuating at the lower personality levels of primary integration and unilevel disintegration—the horizontal dilemma (Dabrowski (2016/1964)). Kate seemed at spontaneous multilevel disintegration. Cookie gave the impression she was at organized multilevel disintegration. Providing the strength for personality development, OE evidence suggested ample energy for all these students in terms of emotional, intellectual, imaginational OEs. In the sections that follow, dynamisms or motivational findings for

each personality level are given and discussed in turn for each student.

**Primary integration.** The characteristics of primary integration are self-centeredness and social competitiveness (Dabrowski, 2016/1964) with a tendency toward self-protection, in the case of bullying. This includes fighting back or avoidance or both. Mia and Mary practiced perpetration. Carole practiced both. John practiced avoidance. In reference to social competitiveness, relational bullying would be typical. Mia and Carole were prime examples of such relational aggression. For example, Carole stated about the girl she first tried to protect from ill-treatment, “I wouldn’t want to be friends with her.” The behaviors these students showed, associated with self-centeredness and social competitiveness, are, of course, not overly different than the behaviors one would expect from any junior high student.

**Unilevel disintegration.** The characteristics of unilevel disintegration are moral relativism and the peer pressure of social group norms (Dabrowski, 2016/1964). Data analysis suggested that Mia, Carole, John, and Mary operated at this level at least part of the time. Moral relativism engenders feelings of shame and guilt. For example, Carole stated, “This girl we didn’t know tripped over a bush and we started laughing, like not in a mean-spirited way.” This mean-spirited comment seemed to indicate a defensiveness on the part of Carole, reflecting the shame she may have felt from group norms. Interestingly, Carole remembered the girl’s response, stating that she said, “Don’t you guys know it’s mean to laugh at somebody?” Later, Carole argued, “You bully other people to make yourself feel better.” Here, Carole demonstrated the influence of guilt as a unilevel dynamism that begins to move a person away from pressure of group norms.

Dabrowski (2016/1964) came up with the idea of the horizontal dilemma. This is a personality characterization defined by moving back-and-forth between conforming to a social custom and the serving of self-interest (Dabrowski, 2016/1964). The evidence suggested Mia, Carole, John, and Mary experienced this personality condition. For example, in the incident with the English teacher Mary perceived to be incompetent, she seemed to join with others in complaining about that teacher and asking for challenging materials, apparently responding to group norms, as would be expected at unilevel disintegration. In contrast, at one point, Mary argued, "I don't like peer pressure." She made other statements about the influence of peers, such as, "Well, I guess some people, they're just, they're more likely to care if someone says something. Whereas, other people really couldn't care," and "I don't care what other people think. I never have. I probably never will." These quotes might indicate a switch to primary integration, especially given the frequent use of the first-person pronoun, "I."

**Spontaneous multilevel disintegration.** The characteristics of spontaneous multilevel disintegration are internal conflict and eventually seeing injustice in society and applying a positive value in order to help others with the unfairness (Dabrowski, 2016/1964). The data indicated that Kate was likely at this level. Along with spontaneous multilevel dynamisms such as disquietude and discontent with oneself, she felt some shame and enough guilt to spontaneously responded to a bullying situation with a positive value. She proceeded to educate the bully in terms of the Golden Rule. Kate seemed to be experiencing positive maladjustment (Dabrowski, 1967). While she sometimes acquiesced to her mother's concern for her safety, she continued to positively

intervene in bullying situations.

**Organized multilevel disintegration.** The main characteristic of organized multilevel disintegration is multilevel thinking that results in a consciously steady and controlled application of positive values. Such values are rooted in empathy and focused on a personality ideal and altruistically applied to all those involved in a social problem (Dabrowski, 2016/1964). The information gleaned in this study indicated that Cookie likely functioned at this personality level. The most compelling evidence supporting Cookie's multilevel development concerned the TPD dynamism of valuation (Dabrowski, 1996; Kaminski Battaglia, 2002). Whenever Cookie involved herself as an ally, at the moment of conflict, she appeared to intellectually apply a positive value such as empathy. For example, when stopping her friends from gossiping, she stated "multiple times," that "We're really being rude right now. So, just leave your opinions to yourself." What typically followed was an educational conversation with her friends concerning the importance of mutual respect.

### **What Schools Should Do**

The second research question focused on what students think schools should do about the problem of bullying. Students' judgments of school efforts were mixed reflecting the child's personality development level. Each student also reported some parent support regarding efforts to prevent ill-treatment.

### **Student Judgments of School Efforts**

In the judgment of these six GTs, the effectiveness of the WMS antibullying

program—announcements and assemblies—was lukewarm at best. Carole and Mary were two cases proclaiming school announcements and assemblies as not effective. Carole stated:

There was a bullying thing on the announcements today. These girls were bullying another girl, but it was staged. But they were adults doing it to kids, which is different. I don't know if kids would have done in that situation.

She explained, “They [students] were taking the content, and looking for things to criticize.” She contended, “Those things don't really do anything. It's when people stop and think for themselves, why am I doing this?” Also, she argued, “Unless people are wanting to listen to those things, they won't hear it.” Mary stated, “There's really no good way, at least in my classes, all the students get along.” She also claimed punishments do not work, stating, “They'll also give [bullies] detentions, but there isn't really a good way to punish them for their actions.”

On the other hand, Mia and John thought that the school programs were good for some but not for others. Mia explained, “Well, I think it could help some people but every time announcement comes or just something comes, after, kids are always joking about it.” She also argued, “But I think it is useful. I don't think they should get rid of it.” John stated, “A lot of students mock it, and they're like, ‘Oh, they're repeating this for the millionth time.’ Don't really take it into account, and then another portion of the students are really listening, and actually paying attention.”

With infectious enthusiasm, Cookie stated, “Our student body officers are doing a pretty good job at looking out for people. Then our leadership team is doing a really good job. Yeah, I think that's helping.” Although she did recognize that students did not take

the antibullying program seriously, she favored ways for counselors to learn about those students who struggle socially. She observed, “Some seventh graders or eighth graders, or all of the kids, they don’t really take it seriously. [School programs] don’t really help too much just because nobody’s really paying attention.” However, she also suggested, “The students who actually are being affected or who need help with this stuff aren’t the people who are going to go to the counselors.” She elaborated, “I would say just having better relationships with the students and getting to know them each by name and how they’re doing and how their life is.” Kate, on the other hand, said, “I think the district can also transfer classes, because I know there are multiple, two GT classes in English, and so I could maybe transfer to a different one just to make me feel safer.” Notwithstanding good faith school efforts, all six students perceived bullying as relational and, in accordance, a seemingly clandestine problem at WMS.

### **Parental Support for Early Adolescent Gifted and Talented Students**

While not specifically mentioned as something schools could do, students implied that drawing on parental support might be a useful approach to addressing school bullying efforts. For the four students shown at primary integration, parents appeared encouraging, seemed to support their daughter’s negative attitude, ostracized their child or relied on the school system to teach their daughter, and taught their son self-control rather than ways to socially process his anger. For example, Carole stated, “I’m partly the way I am because my parents helped me to think for myself.” Also, when openly criticizing the two teachers of GT as “idiotic,” Mary was asked if she involved her

parents in solving this issue. She stated, “Of course, I mean, I knew nothing was actually going to occur, but I mean the circumstances were kind of ridiculous. Neither of the teachers should have been teaching us.”

With students recognized at multilevel disintegration, parents were active in helping develop their child’s personality. Throughout her life, Cookie’s parents helped her learn and apply positive values. This appeared to shape her self-awareness and altruistic action toward helping people—both victims *and* bullies. Cookie stated, “I’ve always wanted to be a good person, but they’ve raised me to be a good person, and taught me to be one. So, I guess I’ve always wanted to, but their motivation has motivated me more.” She followed this with, “Well, it’s obviously it’s my mom, of course just telling me to be the good and see the good. And I have a pretty good family life.” Her parents furthermore involved her in altruistic organizations. She explained, “I’m part of a humanitarian group, so we work in other places to help impoverished countries.”

Kate also had the personality ingredients to start to disintegrate negativity, spontaneously responding to a bully in a positive way. In middle school, with guidance from her mother, she pursued compassion in the form of justice for the bully. However, rather than having full reign to further help other bullies in a consistent manner—to disintegrate further—it seemed a safety-first approach for her personal protection. She stated, “Well, I know [Mother] assures me that there are people, there are teachers that are there, and you don’t go to school to get hurt. School should be a safe place.”

## CHAPTER VI

### DISCUSSION

This study focused on two primary research questions: how early adolescent gifted students describe their experience with bullying and what they think schools should do about it. The perceptions of these six students enhanced knowledge concerning their definitions of bullying, prevalence of bullying, reasons for bullying, coping with bullying, and schoolwide efforts to stop bullying. Understanding of these themes was enhanced through application of the lens of TPD theory.

#### **Definition of Bullying**

Definitions of bullying were mostly in agreement when considering a scholarly definition, the local school district definition, and the students' unified definition. Agreement on the concept of harm or hurt was unanimous, but there were some differences related to the ideas of intent, the repetitive nature of perpetration, and perception of a power differential. Thus, the students' definitions diverged in some circumstances from the way experts might define bullying for scholarly research purposes.

The one idea upon which all student informants in this study agreed was that bullying involves harm or hurt. Craig and Pepler (2003) provided a scholarly definition of bullying as “negative physical or verbal actions that have hostile intent, cause distress to victims, are repeated over time, and involve a power differential between bullies and their victims” (p. 577). While the words “harm” or “hurt” are not specifically stated in this



definition, they are certainly implied in the use of words such as “negative” and “distress.” The local school definition for the school district in which the students live states, “‘Bullying’ includes these three prongs: (1) unwanted or aggressive behavior involving a real or perceived power imbalance; (2) intent to hurt, intimidate, humiliate, or cause harm; AND (3) behavior is repeated, or has the potential to be repeated -OR- single egregious event. Putting aside confusions created by the inattentive grammatical structure of this policy statement, the terms “hurt” and “harm” are explicitly used, in addition to the terms “intimidate” and “humiliate.” Perhaps John articulated this best of all the students when he stated that bullying is “physical or emotional harmful that one person does to another in order to make themselves feel better about something.”

Interestingly, the official school definition relies on the term “perceived,” implying the empowerment of the victim to protect herself or himself in cases of the distress. With the school definition depending on the perception of the victim, any event can be individually judged as harmful or egregious. This becomes important for the GT students interviewed for this research who specifically excluded teasing and name-calling as forms of bullying in their definitions. Their view seems to be that some teasing and name-calling is to be expected among friends. This, then, begs the question of intent.

While intent is clearly delineated in both the scholarly (e.g., hostile intent) and official definitions (e.g., intent to harm) of bullying, the role of intent, while mentioned by all six interviewees, was not as clear as the role of harm. Three students insisted that if one person caused harm to another, it was bullying, even if harm was not intended. Others felt that some hostile intent needed to be present, consistent with the scholarly

definition. For Mia, John, Carole, and Mary, four students identified with the horizontal dilemma (Dabrowski, 2016/1964), harm and intent were based upon either personal needs at primary integration or moral relativism at unilevel disintegration. All four cases revealed the difficulty of the moral relativism regarding whether the intentions of the perpetrator were friendly, and whether the friendship was acceptable or harmful toward the victim. For example, as bystanders, on the outside looking in, they were not sure what to do, asking rhetorical questions such as, “Is it friendly or not?” or “How can I personally benefit from this bullying scenario?”

A third definitional issue raised by the scholarly definition (Craig & Pepler, 2008) was *repetition* of harmful acts. In a similar vein to their communications about intent, these students were even less clear-cut among themselves about repetition. Similar to Craig and Pepler, the JSD definition also contained repetition as an element of bullying. Only two students stressed repetition, which was not unanimous with either Craig and Pepler’s scholarly definition or the JSD definition. The JSD definition also contradicts itself by focusing on a single “egregious” event as constituting bullying. For example, Kate mentioned the possibility of an isolated event being defined as bullying when she described how a boy stabbed her with a pencil during a collaborative classroom activity. She argued that the boy did not like the group’s idea, “then with his pencil, he stabbed me on the hand.”

A fourth construct used by Craig and Pepler (2003) in their definition was *power differential*. Again, the six students did not show unanimity with the scholarly definition or the JSD definition. Two students implied a power differential that favored gifted

students in the bullying experiences at WMS. Such a power differential could be the result of the insularity of the GTs at WMS. These students have been together for many years in elementary gifted programs and take the majority of their classes together at the middle school. While the religious affiliation of the students in the study is not known, the power differential could also perhaps reflect the school's uniquely monocultural status, with the majority of the students being members of a locally dominant religion. Carole, a new student from the State of California, recognized how exclusive the GTs at WMS were when her family first moved in. She seemed to feel like an outsider, and she did not want any friendships with GTs at WMS—using exclusion to fight exclusion. The GT group apparently perceived themselves as more powerful than their teacher and, thus, felt free to perpetrate by bullying their teachers, as reported by Carole. Carole herself initiated one sequence of events that brought a teacher to tears. She later would feel shame and guilt for participation in perpetration along with the GT group. On the other hand, Mary appeared to claim two teachers of GT ignored the educational needs of gifted students. This could also mean that Mary was using the group's collective power to bully the teachers into satisfying her own needs as well. Carole and Mary per se both suggested a switch from unilevel disintegration group norms to the egotism of primary integration, or, the horizontal dilemma.

The cliquish nature of GTs at WMS would suggest unilevel norms (Dabrowski, 2016/1964) that channel student perceptions and senses of power that both allow and value certain types of name-calling and teasing among friends. Carole and Mary seemed to practice the horizontal dilemma indicating an awareness of social power in the

formation of norms. Mia also inferred her own power in different circumstances when making determinations for others if any given nickname was hurtful. She would also dominate in the formation of friend group norms when deciding if any ill-treatment toward friends was overdramatic, ostracizing those who did not conform. On the other hand, John indicated the formation of norms minus any suggestion of a social power differential. In any case, all four still appeared to wonder if any ill-treatment was friendly or not. Each of the four, at specified times, would also switch to primary integration to protect self-interest. The difference with Cookie and Kate was these two students provided evidence of resistance to both self-interest and moral relativism in favor of social justice.

### **Prevalence of Bullying**

Peterson and Ray (2006a), in their retrospective study of GT eighth graders, reported that GTs experienced bullying at almost double the rate of other students throughout their nine year education to that point. Peterson and Ray noted that GT sixth, seventh, and eighth graders experienced about the same rate of ill-treatment. In contrast, Ogurlu (2015) suggested GT eighth graders experienced more social ostracism in the form of ignoring others and social exclusion.

In contrast, all six GTs indicated at certain points during their interviews that bullying was not a problem at WMS, making statements such as, "It's not a big deal." This again raises the issue of the use of teasing and name-calling in defining bullying. Peterson and Ray identified name-calling and teasing about appearance and grades as the

most common forms of bullying experienced by GTs. As stated before, while the students in this study excluded teasing and name-calling from their definitions of bullying, nearly all reported incidents of teasing and name-calling when they were asked to describe a bullying incident. One difference among the students was that the two identified as multilevel disintegration (Dabrowski, 2016/1964), positively addressed the few problems they had with ill-treatment, then proclaimed that bullying was not a problem because they were able to handle it. In contrast, the other four viewed teasing and name-calling as acceptable only among their friends and, because they did not interact a great deal with students outside their group, claimed bullying was not a problem. Thus, unilevel disintegration norms were acceptable to their group. When not acceptable, a return to primary integration would result, or, the horizontal dilemma.

The difference between the findings of Peterson and Ray (2006a) and the results of this study could also be engrained in demographic differences. The 432 students in Peterson and Ray's sample came from sixteen school districts throughout the US. Fifty-four percent of their sample came from large cities (p. 153). Ethnic and racial representation was 68% White, 15% African American, 6% multi-racial, 5% Asian and Pacific Islander, and 2% other (p. 153). In contrast, WMS is an upper-middle class suburban school. During the time of this study, it had 96% White representation in a population of approximately 900 students. Thus, the six students at WMS would not consider bullying as a big problem because of the possibility of less social trouble based on human differences. In other words, more monocultural groups could represent less potential for conflict within the total school population. Dabrowski (2016/1964)

supported this supposition, defining unilevel disintegration as those in a society who share the same cultural norms going about their lives in unafraid, conservative, and predictable ways.

### **Reasons for Bullying**

A variety of reasons exist for the perpetration of bullying. Two that have been identified specifically for GTs being victimized are individual differences (Robinson, 2008) and anti-intellectualism (Howley, Howley, & Pendarvis, 1995/2017). These two reasons are clearly related as the individual difference specifically identified with GTs would be their intellect. Thus, the students discussed being bullied because grades, being called a “nerd” or a “geek,” or being bullied by teachers who seemed to resent their giftedness. However, not all bullying of these students related to their intellect as some were teased for physical traits such as height or being “ugly and fat.”

Through the lens of TPD (Dabrowski, 2016/1964), four students seemed to be practicing the horizontal dilemma, either drawn toward perpetration based on self-interest, in retaliation for being victimized by others, for example, or deciding to go along with peer norms. A combination of lukewarm support for the school’s antibullying program and students’ individual understandings of the JSD bullying definition could be fueling such egoism or morally relative applications. Indeed, just JSD’s definitional aspects that include the allowance of victims’ perceptions of a power imbalance, “unwanted or aggressive behavior,” or one egregious event, and any combination of the three, could be both encouraging and reflecting individual self-interest or the formation

and establishment of friend-group norms.

Students may also perpetrate bullying because they perceive a certain amount of tolerance for such behaviors. For example, Allen (2017a) reported that a teacher at WMS appeared to believe that students naturally bully each other and even supported the students forming their own behavioral norms in class. The teacher stated, “Children normally try to dominate or bully each other” (p. 275). She also distinguished between bullying as hurtful and annoyances as non-hurtful. She permitted her GTs “to form their own norms regarding annoyances” (p. 275). In direct contrast, on the multilevel development side (Dabrowski, 2016/1964), Cookie appeared to resist egotism and moral relativism, both allowing ill-treatment, in favor of positive interactions. She would stop her friends “multiple times” from gossiping, then lecture them concerning mutual respect.

### **Coping with Bullying**

The way the six GTs at WMS coped with social ill-treatment included relational bullying, social competence, and suicidal ideation. The discussion in terms of coping follows this sequence.

#### **Relational Bullying and Social Competence**

One means of responding to bullying for some of the students in this study was to bully in return. Peairs et al. (2019), when comparing GTs with non-GTs, have shown GTs with significantly higher relational than overt aggression measures. Consistent with this, the six GTs at WMS revealed relational bullying as more prominent. This included acts of gossiping, social ostracism, name-calling, and teasing. According to the lens of TPD,

four students seemingly practiced the horizontal dilemma (Dabrowski 2016/1964) or no personality growth. When not conforming to the social norm, each retreated in her own way to the personal comfort of primary integration.

In contrast, some students responded to bullying with internalizing the trauma. Pelchar and Bain (2014) showed significant similarities between male and female GTs with internalization of trauma, much the same as for non-GTs, but externalization was “slightly higher” (p. 330) for GTs. Because five of the six students interviewed for this study were female, comparisons between the two genders is not really possible. However, three females and the one male did show internalizing behavior consistent with the findings of Pelchar and Bain. Externalizing behaviors were also shown, such as when Mia applied labels like overdramatic to others’ responses to her bullying, working her aggression through her social milieu, and, in one case, punching another student. Kate, on the other hand, showed externalizing behaviors through receiving help from her mother and finding ways to not only educate the bully, but understand the bully’s perspective. In the former case, evidence shows a negative example of externalizing behaviors, while, in the latter case, evidence shows a positive example. In general, GT students are supposed to be capable of more emotionally sensitive responses to trauma (Dabrowski, 1970), and, for the most part, the students in this study seemed to demonstrate that sensitivity. However, the case of Mia also shows that negative externalizing behaviors are a possibility.

Another response to bullying would be to address it directly through the application of interpersonal skills. Lee et al. (2002) indicated that, although male and



female GTs have more interpersonal ability than non-GTs, females have even more than males. It might be expected, then, that, with five females interviewed for this research, interpersonal skills would play a role in coping with bullying. However, only two, Cookie and Kate revealed evidence of interpersonal skills in solving their difficult social problems. These two also indicated substantial parental guidance in terms of multilevel development and the application of positive values (Dabrowski, 2016/1964). According to Dabrowski 2016/1964), such environmental influence is a vital aspect of positive disintegration. On the other hand, Mia and Mary, both appeared to lack positive parental guidance. Along with a lukewarm response to WMS's antibullying program and complicated implementation of JSD's bullying definition, both Mia and Mary seemed to have their OEs focused on personal concerns and unilevel norms rather than the development of positive values, self-awareness, and empathy.

OE evidence suggested, in terms of coping, ample emotional and intellectual perceptive energy for each of the six students. The issue was the focus of such intensity. Mia, Carole, John, and Mary seemingly concentrated their OEs on the horizontal dilemma (Dabrowski, 2016/1964), either coping inwardly with primary integration or converging on the social norms at unilevel disintegration, appearing to socially manage without applying positive values toward perpetrators. On the other hand, an example on the progressive side, Cookie employed such values, stating about bullies, "I don't want to just leave them hanging and make them feel worse about themselves."

### **Suicidal Ideation**

Suicidal ideation is no more prevalent among GTs than it is in the general

population (Cross et al., 2006). For the most part, this is not an issue for most GTs. Thus, if lack of discussion of suicidal ideation is an adequate gauge, five out of the six students in this study gave the appearance of coping in less dramatic ways with their bullying issues. Further, LaSalle et al. (2017) suggested that bullying in school was the leading indicator of suicidal thoughts and behaviors. Given that these students felt that bullying was not a problem at their school, one would expect that suicidal ideation would not be present to any great extent for these students, which, apparently, was the case. Though, because students were not asked directly about suicidal ideation, it may have been more prevalent than indicated.

Cross et al. (2006) indicated GTs as more perceiving, with perceptive and introverted females more susceptible to suicidal ideation. Sak (2004) furthermore revealed GTs as more perceptive, introverted, thinking, and intuitive when compared to non-GTs. Thus, the possibility exists that GTs, especially perceptive and introverted females, think of suicide more often. While Myers-Briggs typing was not part of this study, one student emerged who seemed to fit this profile and who experienced suicidal ideation. Mia appeared to be perceptive and introverted. She openly and freely wept when discussing her friendship with the boy with autism, other scenarios with bullying victimization, and especially her mother's actions toward her sensitivity.<sup>3</sup> As an

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<sup>3</sup>As indicated in a previous footnote, when Mia began discussing the idea of suicide during the first interview, she was immediately led to the USU IRB-approved guidance counselor for intervention and support. Mia's parents were contacted. After consultation with parents, the principal, and the Principal Investigator, Mia was given the choice whether to continue with the study. She decided to continue and completed the interview process. Mia and her family were later offered and referred to a JSD social worker for family support.

apparently introverted individual, she coped alone in her home, and she would read and write stories in isolation. Embedded in this description of how she copes are both her motivation to protect herself from victimization—to control others—and her volition to help others. Students such as Mia need ways to process their emotions in multilevel ways (Dabrowski, 2016/1964) with healthy personality development rather than the suicidal idea.

### **Schoolwide Efforts to Stop Bullying**

Research into efforts to stop bullying in schools represents a mixture of approaches that may prompt educational authorities and parents into questioning what exactly they should do to protect children. Whatever the determinations of school systems and schools, knowledge of student personality levels should aid in individual accommodation. As of now, research provides lukewarm support for schoolwide programs. Smith et al. (2004) indicated school programs had insignificant effects on bullying except for increases in program monitoring. Ferguson et al. (2007) suggested “little discernable effect” (p. 401) regarding school programs. On the other hand, Ttofi and Farrington (2011) revealed that improved supervision increased program effects for older students but that “work with peers should not be used [because] programs targeting delinquent peers tend to cause an increase in offending” (p. 44). The suggestions from the six students matched these general findings, with four stating that the school’s current efforts were ineffective and, perhaps, even confusing, while two others thought they were useful.

As it turns out, Ttofi and Farrington's (2011) concern about using peers to prevent bullying seems a rational conclusion when considering the relatively low levels of personality development along the Dabrowskian arrangement of early adolescents. The majority of GTs interviewed in the study showed no greater progression of personality development than the general early adolescent population. Thus, GTs at primary integration or unilevel disintegration may not understand and be able to apply positive values as an ally without strong adult or educator guidance and both any better than any other junior high school student. Essentially, without evidence of the development of self-awareness or empathy, such students may have no personal understanding regarding her or his own bullying perpetration.

The development of outward empathy is vital for both personality development and the ability to respond appropriately to ill-treatment (Dabrowski, 2016/1964). Polanin et al. (2012) stated, "Bystander behavior is a developmental process" (p. 60). They encouraged school systems to educate students in terms of empathy building, social skills, self-awareness, self-reflection, parent involvement, and behavior modification. Of the six GTs at WMS, Mia appeared to be a prime example of an individual's emotional and volitional need for empathy development.

On the other hand, with parental guidance, Kate's outward behavior did reveal the development of empathy. Recalling that Lovecky (1986, 1992; see also Silverman, 2014) defined the three elements of outward empathy as compassion, emotional awareness, and sensitivity to perspectives. Kate showed compassionate caring and emotional awareness toward an upset student, stating, "I guess they were just grumpy, so I gave them a fake

mustache, and that just seemed to make them laugh.” Kate, with her mother’s guidance, also met together and talked with a boy who chased her on the playground. This appeared to begin Kate’s teaching and learning of multiple perspectives. She appeared on her way to fully developing empathy, a key dynamism of the third factor and organized multilevel development (Dabrowski, 2016/1964), plus an effective tool for bystander interventions.

### **Summary**

While the academic and institutional definitions of bullying include the concepts of harm, intent, repetitiveness, and power differential, the students as a whole seemed to be aware of harm only, though some did raise the issues of intent and repetitiveness. While the idea of power differential was evidenced, especially in relation to the GT students targeting teachers for bullying, students seemed unaware of the concept. The focus on harm could possibly come from students sensing a need for self-protection, which would be typical of a primary integration emotional development level.

National statistics indicate a much higher rate of bullying experiences for GTs (Peterson & Ray, 2006a). At WMS, the experiences of the six GT students suggested that the prevalence of bullying is not that bad. This may be because the students could practice bullying behavior, such as name-calling and teasing with their friends. This could be influenced by the cliquish nature of the GT students and a lack of diversity at this school.

Bullying of GTs is often based on differences in ability and physical differences. The students in this study were, indeed, victimized for these reasons. While these

students were split on whether bullying was ever acceptable or not, some GT students felt that perpetration as part of a friends' group or for retaliation was acceptable. It seems that the culture of the school allows some bullying to occur as a normal practice among early adolescents.

Early adolescents cope with bullying through relational responses that can internalize or externalize their trauma, through the application of social competence, or through suicidal ideation. In general, GTs tend to internalize the same as the general population but can externalize slightly more often. This pattern appeared to be shared by the students in this study. GTs are inclined to be better at using social competence to solve their problems. Only two showed this ability. The remainder appeared to be no more competent than other middle school students. These students were caught in the horizontal dilemma, moving back and forth between unilevel disintegration and primary integration, seeming not to make the emotional development Dabrowski (1970) would predict for GTs. Finally, one student did experience suicidal ideation. She reflected the female, perceptive, introverted profile found by Cross et al. (2006).

Schoolwide efforts to stop bullying have had little discernable effect, especially when they involve peer intervention. Programs that focus on adult monitoring tend to be more successful when they are implemented in a middle school (Ttofi & Farrington, 2011). The GT students at WMS found the school's program to be ineffective. According to the students, WMS uses an approach that depends on assemblies and announcements. The students gave these lukewarm support. Interestingly, the two students who have moved to a higher level of emotional development found this approach to be useful.

Polanin et al. (2012) has encouraged schools to work on self-awareness, social skills, empathy building. The two GT students who favored the school's approach are also the students who are the most self-aware, employ social skills to address bullying more effectively, and are developing empathy for students who bully. While the school's program may have had some influence on this, the students gave greater credit to parental involvement.

## **CHAPTER VII**

### **CONCLUSION**

This study encompassed how six GTs at WMS perceived their bullying experiences and what they thought schools could do to solve the problem. This conclusion is a review of the study's findings, possible questions for future research, and appraisal of TPD's application with these students, and a statement of limitations. Further, possible implications for gifted students, schools, parents, and a final word are given.

#### **Review of Findings**

The six GTs at WMS had mixed definitions of bullying with harm being the unifying element. Students displaying the horizontal dilemma appeared to characterize the harm of bullying in terms of self-protection. Relational bullying, which was found as more pervasive, was more acceptable among the students' clique of friends. Reasons for bullying experienced by the students in this study were consistent with reasons shown in previous research involving broader early adolescent GT samples. Any retaliation by the students in this study, especially those practicing the horizontal dilemma, was not only acceptable with their clique, but appeared somewhat customary at the school, thus giving the impression that they were no different than the general student population. Students indicated at higher levels of personality development seemed to resist bullying behaviors with positive interventions, displaying social competence. The social ability of these students was also reflected in more compassion and empathy toward bullies and their



victims. Most of the students in this study exhibited lukewarm acceptance of WMS's antibullying program. But the students operating at higher emotional development levels thought the program was worthwhile. They also gave acknowledgement to their parents for helping them develop their interpersonal abilities.

### **Future Research**

The findings of this study suggest future research investigations. Especially important would be studies to clarify the prevalence question; to understand cultural influences on bullying; and to bring light to the experience of suicidal ideation among perceptive, introverted female GT students; and to promote consideration of school antibullying efforts that recognize difference in emotional development among early adolescents.

Research on the prevalence question has relied on students indicating their experience with victimization and perpetration, or identifying who the bullies in their schools are. This depends on the student's internal definition of bullying. This study found that students were inconsistent in defining bullying and applying that definition to their experience. This could provide one possible explanation for why current research on the incidents involving GTs is contradictory. In this study, the definition of bullying with some of the students shifted depending on whether they were describing ill-treatment that came from within their friend circle or not. Their definition could also change concerning a single incident when a friend was no longer a friend. This illustrates the horizontal dilemma of the movement between primary integration and unilevel disintegration.

Future studies need to delineate the nuances within this definitional change.

Research on bullying has largely ignored the influence of culture. The finding within the GT group at WMS was a cliquishness in which a certain level of name-calling and teasing were tolerated within their group. Why and how does this occur? This investigational result revealed a likely formation of group norms. However, a deeper answer to such questions involves looking at the delineation of social dynamics of culture at three different ecological levels that include, culture of the GT group, culture of the school, and the overall cultural diversity of the community. Investigations concerning behavioral patterns within and between these three levels of culture could help in a much deeper understanding of why and how cultural influence and resultant social power effect the individual personality development of GTs.

Studies of suicidal ideation have shown no difference between GTs and non-GTs. However, perceptive GTs (Cross et al., 2006), especially perceptive and introverted females, have been found more susceptible to the idea of suicide. Most students in this study did not report this problem. Mia both reported this problem and fit the research profile. More specific research on the female perceptive and introverted personality type is needed to fully address this suicidal ideation issue. Such investigations need to further delineate the nature of such sensitivity and introversion, detail their antecedents, and address them in terms of healthy personality development. With more information, program adjustments that also support a student-centered approach could hopefully help ameliorate this problem in the future.

## **Strength of Theory of Positive Disintegration in Qualitative Student Development Contexts**

The theoretical lens of this study was TPD. Application in authentic and qualitative human settings was the original purpose of TPD (Dabrowski, 2016/1964, 1972; Rankel, 2008). For Dabrowski, personality development needs to explicitly transpire within the psychological dynamics of individual students socially functioning in schools. The TPD lens, as shown in this investigation, offered important insights into student perceptions of their experiences. Paraphrasing Dabrowski, Rankel (2008) stated:

Dabrowski was optimistic enough to believe that this change [application of TPD to understand and develop student personalities] could and should begin in schools, in collaboration with parents. Teachers and counselors, once acquainted with his theory [TPD], would apply their understanding of his developmentally positive methods to their students, thereby not only preventing mental illness, but also aiding in the development of mental health. (p. 82)

Dabrowski referred to this as authentic education that balances both the intellectual and emotional/personality needs of each student. This case-study research supported such a balanced approach, applying the TPD lens by way of conversations with GTs concerning perceptions of their experiences with bullying at an operational middle school.

### **Limitations of Theory of Positive Disintegration in Qualitative Contexts**

When applying the lens of TPD, investigational problems did occur when conducting these case-studies. Dabrowski expected difficulties to transpire. Piechowski (2008), a former doctoral student of Dabrowski, stated, “A person’s profile cannot be expected to conform completely to an ideal type” (p. 57; see also Dabrowski 2016/1964).

On the other hand, Dabrowski described this complexity as personally dynamic. He explained:

Individuals are not always at the highest level of their development. Fatigue, nervousness, disquietude, and anxiety may cause them to descend to lower levels of activity, that is, to a more primitive integrated state. But the individual in real development cannot remain at this level long. He becomes discontented with himself; he has feelings of guilt and of inferiority toward his personality ideal. He then has the tendency to return to his higher level of development. (p. 34)

More succinctly, when studying those likely at high development, such as Kate and Cookie, Dabrowski stated, “high level cannot always be without a moral disruption within himself and some degree of negative progress” (p. 34).

Therefore, both limiting and compelling evidence revealed likely personality profiles for each of the six students at WMS. For instance, during data analysis, at certain points with each student, some dynamisms did not show in the data. This was understandable since there are 28 total dynamisms (Piechowski, 2008). To help solve this problem, pattern coding the data and matching to a focused code provided illumination to other characteristic dynamisms. For example, in second grade, although not disclosing or expressing shame or guilt, Cookie revealed, after some unilevel ambivalence, the disquietude dynamism when spontaneously stopping a bullying incident. This same disquietude, or personal acceptance of responsibility, as well as many other high-level dynamisms such as empathy, authenticity, self-awareness, and self-reflection; continued throughout her interpersonal conduct at school. These provided supporting evidence to suggest a likely organized multilevel disintegration personality.

Another research limitation concerned OEs. For the analysis process, only emotional, intellectual, and imaginal OEs emerged from the data. Still, for these

OEs, Dabrowski (1972) stated, “Three occurring at high levels for advanced human development to take place: emotional (affective), imaginal, and intellectual overexcitability are the richer forms. If they appear together, they give rich possibilities of development and creativity” (p. 7).

Identification of these three OEs involved vocal magnitude, grammar, and phraseology methods. These approaches helped identify conversational salience from feelings and ideas pronounced when students answered questions. Thus, recognition of emotional, intellectual, and imaginal OEs consisted of how, why, and what each student *emoted* through her or his communication patterns. This revealed personal and distinct conversational variations. In turn, adverb usage characterized significant details regarding specific bullying problems. This helped provide OE connections to TPD. At the same time, linguistic cleverness revealed in creative expression delivered further evidence of the imaginal OE. Then, if a student also offered inventive suggestions containing positive values, empathy, or altruism; also produced positive problem-solving evidence concerning what schools could do. Thus, altogether, from each student’s OEs, the rest of TPD followed within the analysis procedure to a possible personality profile.

Although generalizations were limited to these six students, it appeared that evidence supported four of the students at likely low levels of personality development or the horizontal dilemma. With parental support, two seemed to have followed a personal path to disintegration.

This overall pattern from the six cases is common when applying TPD (Dabrowski, 2016/1964; Rankel, 2008). For Dabrowski, low-level personality,

specifically primary integration, with many of its potential ills; chronic psychopathy, juvenile delinquency, crime, educational mediocrity, overreliance on objective measures, overconsumption, and economic selfishness; remained ordinary aspects of life in the US (Rankel, 2008). Thus, large numbers in the US are likely at primary integration. This is reflected socially, culturally, politically, and economically, as self-centeredness appears a necessity for survival in a free-enterprise system. Consequently, the ills that accompany such a societal structure seem to follow. Notwithstanding, if personality development is ignored, along with many of these possible problems, the danger for the four students at primary integration is an increased possibility of chronic mental illness (Dabrowski, 2016/1964). For Kate, at probable spontaneous multilevel disintegration and the likelihood of positive maladjustment, reintegration back to primary integration was easily possible, especially if not provided with safe opportunities to disintegrate beyond her present personality level. For Cookie, the chance of reintegration would be much lower due to the nature of organized multilevel disintegration. Again, its nature is the ability of individuals to self-educate, self-reflect, and to self-psychoanalyze their own mental health condition—to heal themselves. This appeared so evident in Cookie’s interview responses.

### **Systemic Change for Schools and Districts**

Schools and districts oftentimes due to financial limitations and/or conservative bias are reluctant to change from traditional practices. They appear to restrict themselves vis-à-vis helping students with personality development. Modification to traditional educational practices should include changes to basic counselor practices and schoolwide

programs. For example, teachers have recognized common sense ways to help counselors build better relationships with the students in their care (Allen, 2017a). As Allen (2017a) has pointed out, a middle school science teacher at WMS, stated, “Parents need to teach the ‘Golden Rule’” (p. 278). She also explained, “It is important that everyone work together for socioemotional health of GT students” (p. 278). She followed-up with, “Administrators also need to ‘take away the extraneous stuff that they stick on our counselors frequently.’ Counselors need ‘a relationship with every kid in their caseload’ so that GT students ‘feel comfortable going to counselors’” (p. 278). On the other hand, concerning schoolwide change, Allen (2017b) has shown ways educational systems can empower teachers, counselors, and administrators to respond in more in-depth ways to help individual students disintegrate negative personality traits in favor of multilevel development (Dabrowski, 2016/1964).

To reiterate, Dabrowski (2016/1964) identified primary integration as the personality level of psychological calm and non-reflective living, but also the personality level of chronic mental illness and delinquency. Therefore, if Dabrowski is to be believed, changes in traditional school practices should be important for educational authorities to pursue. With these six cases, personality growth seemed an issue in which parents could take the lead for the welfare of their children. If the data from these six GTs are an accurate representation, it looks as if some parents may have more of an ability to perform such an important task. With the apparent seriousness of bullying, schools may need to move personality development beyond what parents can do at home. When recommending creative changes to school counseling services, Cookie probably stated it

best, “I would just say have a better relationship with the students.”

### **Emergent Theme—Parental Involvement**

An emergent theme from this investigation was parental influence on personality development and resultant student behavior in school. In sum, Carole’s parents encouraged her to think through her social issues. However, Mary’s parents appeared to support her negative attitude. Mia’s parents, specifically her mother, practiced ostracism when Mia socioemotionally struggled. Mia claimed her mother said she was “too much work.” John’s parents, after every victimization, taught him to isolate himself to calm down. Even with the seemingly positive encouragement from Carole’s parents, the evidence suggested these four students at low personality levels, practicing the horizontal dilemma.

On the other hand, for both Cookie and Kate, parent support appeared a key aspect of high-level personality development and subsequent conduct in school. True to form, both Cookie and Kate supported school efforts to combat bullying. Cookie said it best, stating, “Our student body officers are doing a pretty good job at looking out for people. Then our leadership team is doing a really good job.” In contrast, with each implying an individual level of volition for their own personality growth; Mia, Carole, John, and Mary gave lukewarm encouragement for such programs. Perhaps schools in the future can do more to promote, educate, and support the personality growth of students such as these through greater parent involvement. Schools should do more to educate parents on how to help with bullying prevention and victims’ coping skills. Maybe, along



with academic growth, personality development can also become more of a central feature of educational instruction.

### **Study Limitations**

In this multiple case study performed in a school environment in which I teach, I focused on the viability of TPD interpretations on the distinctive bullying experiences of early adolescent GT students. This created at least two possible limitations. First, my role as a teacher in the school may have affected the students' willingness to share with me in a completely honest manner. I took steps to reduce the power differential between me and my students by assuring the students of confidentiality, while, at the same time, being honest about my legal responsibility to report certain activities. During interviews, I physically positioned myself in a way that invited open response and downplayed my role as a teacher.

The second limitation was the disappointingly low response rate to the bullying survey at the beginning of the study. Only 12 students provided survey data for the interview screening process. This could have limited the outcome of the findings in terms of quality of participants. In other words, if the selection pool were larger, the quality of the student interview sample may have been better.

The third limitation was the possible imposition of theory on the data. While the application of TPD on the bullying experiences of early adolescents could lead to important insights into both the theory and the students' bullying experience, I set in place guards against forcing the data to the theory. For example, as mentioned in my

description of the data analysis, within my step-by-step process, the lens of TPD was methodically and carefully applied, leaving open the possibility that themes and interpretations outside the theoretical explanation could emerge. Further, I specifically asked my peer debriefer to watch for any signs of theoretical imposition that she may notice. In addition, the findings concerning the second research question emerged naturally as well.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A  
Primary Investigator Script

## Primary Investigator Script –Protocol #9739

### Introduction:

I am Dr. Hunsaker. I am an Associate Professor in the Department of Teacher Education and Leadership at Utah State University.

### Script:

We are conducting a study concerning bullying at WMS. We are gathering information in hope that it might help improve school antibullying efforts.

The study will consist of a confidential survey and interview process. The bullying survey will be used to screen participants for an interview process. If you complete the survey and are chosen to be interviewed, only you, your parents, and the interviewer will know of your involvement in the study.

Mr. Allen, your social studies teacher, will be conducting the survey and interview processes. He will also know of your involvement. He will also keep your involvement in the study confidential.

We are going to need volunteers to participate in the study. If you choose to volunteer, in two-weeks, a permission form will be sent home from your English GT class. From today, for the next two-weeks, all study information including informed consent form, survey questionnaire, interview prompts, and information letter will be posted on both the school's website. After reviewing these materials, if you and your parents agree to participate in the study and you both sign the permission form, you will be given a bullying survey to complete online. If chosen for the interview process, Mr. Allen will schedule separate times for each student, both in the morning and after-school to conduct the interviews. You will have one week to turn-in signed informed consent forms. I will collect them from your English teacher.

From the students who complete the survey, six students will be chosen for the interview process.

If chosen, Mr. Allen will contact you and your parents at home to schedule interviews. There will be three interviews. The interviews will occur either before or after-school so that confidentiality is maintained and you do not miss any class work.

Again, participation is voluntary and confidential.

If you and your parents agree to participate, and, later, want to withdraw from the study, let Mr. Anderson, Mrs. Sherwood, Mr. Allen, and/or myself know of your intention to withdraw. You will be withdrawn from the study with no penalty. Are there any questions?

If there are no more questions or you think of more questions later, ask Mr. Allen.

Remember, in two-weeks, you will be given the permission form to take home the process will start. Thank-you for your time.

Appendix B  
Letter of Information

### Letter of Information – Early Adolescent Gifted and Talented Bullying Study

In conjunction with JSD and Utah State University, a research study concerning early adolescent (i.e., sixth, seventh, and eighth grade) gifted and talented bullying will be performed at WMS. To ascertain student experiences and perspectives, the study will involve both a survey and an interview procedure. Students who participate will help contribute to a process that may help improve future antibullying efforts.

The study represents an endeavor to directly address student needs concerning bullying. As parents or guardians, if you choose to support this study with your child's participation, here is what will happen:

1. With parental permission, your child will take a bullying survey.
2. From those students who answered the survey, six students will be chosen to participate in an interview procedure.
3. Three interviews will be scheduled before or after-school for each of the six students. Each interview will not last more than one-hour.
4. Follow-up member-checking with students will be used to assure credibility of the data.
5. Student interview participants will also be asked to draw a journey map (i.e., timeline), with caricatures, to show their bullying history.

You will receive an informed consent letter in approximately two-weeks. Before that time, study materials will be available for your review at web address:

<https://schools.jsdschools.org/wmsjr/bullying-study-links/>

In addition, because of the recent passing of a former WMS student, you will find materials that may help you help your child with this, if necessary. Participation is completely voluntary. Decisions as to whether or not to participate will not impact student academic or citizenship grades. If you choose to support your child's participation, you are free to withdraw your consent at any time without penalty. Any disruptions to the student's regular school day will be minimized. Both the school and district administrations have agreed to the study conditions including the time flexibility required to conduct the study.

All data will be handled according to the guidelines of the American Psychological Association. All research information is confidential and will only be disclosed with written parental permission. Student personal information will be protected through password protection, encryption, and stored under lock-and-key throughout the duration of the study, then destroyed. All precautions to protect student anonymity will be followed; however, study methodology within a public-school context inhibits complete anonymity. For example, a participating student may talk to a close friend about her or his participation. Although pseudonyms and research numbers will protect student identity outside the school, other people could find out about your son or daughter's



participation.

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a parent or your child as a research participant, please contact Mr. Allen or Scott Hunsaker Ph.D. You can also contact Utah State University's Integrity and Compliance Office.

William T. Allen Jr.  
Social Studies Teacher  
WMS  
Salt Lake City, Utah 84109-3719  
385-646-5244  
[tallen@jsdeschools.org](mailto:tallen@jsdeschools.org)

Scott L. Hunsaker Ph.D  
Associate Professor  
Teacher Education and Leadership  
Utah State University  
435-797-0386  
[scott.hunsaker@usu.edu](mailto:scott.hunsaker@usu.edu)

Appendix C

Parental Informed Consent Form



Page 4 of 50  
 Protocol #9739  
 IRB Approval Date: April 5, 2019  
 Consent Document Expires: December 31, 2019  
 IRB Password Protected per IRB Coordinator

## Informed Consent

### **Early Adolescent Gifted and Talented Students and Their Experience with Bullying**

#### **Purpose**

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Dr. Scott Hunsaker, an Associate Professor in the School of Teacher Education and Leadership at Utah State University. The student-researcher is Mr. William T. (Tom) Allen, a social studies teacher at WMS and doctoral candidate at Utah State University. The purpose of this research is to gain insights into how early adolescent gifted and talented students cope with bullying at school and what they think schools can do in regards to bullying prevention.

This form includes detailed information on the research to help you decide whether to have your child participate in this study. Please read it carefully. If you have questions, please contact Dr. Hunsaker at [scott.hunsaker@usu.edu](mailto:scott.hunsaker@usu.edu).

#### **Procedures**

After turning in this informed consent letter, student participation will involve taking a bullying survey. The survey will be sent to the student's e-mail address. To access the survey, each student will be given a password. After access, your child will enter his or her research number and choose a confidential pseudonym. Prior to receiving the survey, the password and a research number will also be sent to the student's e-mail address. We anticipate that approximately 100 students will participate in the bullying survey. From the information provided in the bullying survey, six students will be chosen to participate in an interview process. The principal (i.e., Mr. Anderson) and designated counselor (i.e., Mrs. Sherwood) will be notified concerning who will participate in the interviews. The interview process involves three interviews. Each interview will be scheduled before or after-school as well. Each interview should take no more than one-hour for a total of approximately three hours for all three interviews. For the third interview, students will draw a journey map or historical time-line showing their bullying experiences. Students will be allowed to work on this for one-week prior to the interview. The journey map activity should take about one-hour. The student drawing will help researchers gain more insights into each student's bullying perspective. If you agree to participate, the researchers will collect interview data that will be transcribed for analysis. Researcher note-taking will also be used to study student responses.

**Risks**

This study is minimal risk, meaning that the risks are no greater than what students encounter in everyday activities. The foreseeable risks or discomforts include possible retraumatization when recalling previous or current bullying episodes. In order to minimize those risks and discomforts, the researchers will permit students not to answer uncomfortable questions. Students will also have the option to visit Mr. Anderson (i.e., school principal) or Mrs. Sherwood (i.e., guidance counselor) where students can talk about any problems they are having, or freely opt-out of the research with no penalty. If your child had a bad research-related experience or is injured in any way during his or her participation, please contact the principal investigator of this study right away at 435-797-0386 or [scott.hunsaker@usu.edu](mailto:scott.hunsaker@usu.edu). In addition, because of the recent passing of a former WMS student, you will find materials on the WMS website that may help you help your child with this, if necessary.

**Benefits**

This study will help the researchers learn more about the personal psychology of gifted and talented early adolescents. In turn, this study may help future researchers design interventions to help gifted and talented students with similar issues in school.

**Confidentiality**

The researchers will make every effort to ensure that the information your child provides as part of this study remains confidential. Your child's identity will not be revealed in any publications, presentations, or reports resulting from this research study. It may be possible for someone to recognize your child's particular situation within the final presentation and/or publication of the research findings, but the researchers will modify information as necessary to be true to the situation but protect confidentiality.

We will collect your information through audio-recorded interviews and journey maps (i.e., picture stories illustrating student bullying experiences). Audio-recording will be made through voice memo technology on an iPhone that will always be in the interviewer's possession and is password protected. The interviews will be transcribed by a transcriber who will have access to the recording through a private Box.com folder that is available only on a password protected computer. Once the interviews have been transcribed and the transcription has been approved by the student-participant, the recording will be deleted from the iPhone. Interview transcripts will be securely stored in a restricted-access folder on Box.com, an encrypted, cloud-based storage system. Field notes/journal, and journey maps will be kept in a locked drawer in a restricted-access office. For confidentiality, student names will be replaced with pseudonyms and research numbers on interview transcripts, field notes/journal and journey maps. Pseudonyms and research numbers will be kept separate from identifiable records and audio recordings. All identifiable documents and records will be destroyed at the end of the study.

It is unlikely, but possible, that others (Utah State University or state or federal officials) may require us to share the information your child gives us from the study to ensure that the



research was conducted safely and appropriately. We will only share your child's information if law or policy requires us to do so. If you want your child's research information released to an insurer, medical care provider, or any other person not connected with the research, you must provide consent to allow the researchers to release it. If the researchers learn that your child is being abused, neglected, engaging in self harm or intending to harm others, state law requires that the researchers report this behavior/intention to the authorities.

### **Voluntary Participation & Withdrawal**

Your child's participation in this research is completely voluntary. If you agree for your child to participate now and because of distress on your child, change your mind later, you may withdraw your child at any time by contacting Dr. Scott Hunsaker at [scott.hunsaker@usu.edu](mailto:scott.hunsaker@usu.edu). You can also withdraw your child by contacting Mr. Anderson at [jcanderson@jdschools.org](mailto:jcanderson@jdschools.org) or Mrs. Sherwood at [esherwood@jdschools.org](mailto:esherwood@jdschools.org) at WMS, who will then forward the information to Dr. Hunsaker. If you choose to withdraw your child after we have already collected information, we will immediately destroy any recordings, transcripts, and timelines in our possession. If you decide not to participate, the services you receive from WMS will not be affected in any way. The researchers may choose to terminate your child's participation in this research study if we determine that participation in the study will be detrimental to the education your child receives at WMS, or if they continually ignore instructions not to use other students' names during the interview process. We will notify you by e-mail should this occur.

### **Findings**

If the researchers learn anything new during the course of this research study that might affect your willingness to continue participation, you will be contacted about those findings. This might include changes in procedures, changes in the risks or benefits of participation, or any new alternatives to participation that the researchers learn about.

Identifiers will be removed from your information. These de-identified data may be used or distributed for future research without additional consent from you. If you do not wish for us to use your information in this way, please state so below.

The researchers would like to keep your contact information in order to invite you and your child to participate in future research studies. If you would like them to keep you contact information, please initial here: \_\_\_\_\_. This information will be entered into a password protected data base that is completely separated from anything to do with this research study and maintained for three-years. You can contact the Principal Investigator at any time to have you and your child removed from the data base.

### **IRB Review**

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the protection of human research participants at Utah State University has reviewed and approved this study. If you have questions about the research study itself, please contact the Principal Investigator at 435-797-0386 or [scott.hunsaker@us.edu](mailto:scott.hunsaker@us.edu). If you have questions about your rights or would simply like to

Speak with someone other than the research team about questions or concerns, please contact the IRB Director at (435) 797-0567 or [irb@usu.edu](mailto:irb@usu.edu).

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Scott L. Hunsaker Ph.D.

Principal Investigator

(435) 797-0386; [scott.hunsaker@usu.edu](mailto:scott.hunsaker@usu.edu)

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William T. Allen Jr.

Student Investigator

(801) 664-2492; [tallen@jdschools.org](mailto:tallen@jdschools.org)

#### Instructions:

You should have received two copies of this informed consent. If you agreed to participate in the study, keep one copy for your records. Then, take the copy you signed, place it in the envelope we provided and seal it. You need to deliver the sealed copy to your English teacher within one-week.

#### Informed Consent

By signing below, you agree to permit your child to participate in this study. You indicate that you understand the risks and benefits of participation, and that you know what your child will be asked to do. You also agree that you have asked any questions you might have and are clear on.

how to stop your child's participation in the study if you choose to do so. Please be sure to retain a copy of this form for your records.

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Participant's Signature

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Participant's Name, Printed

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Date

I do not agree to allow my de-identified information to be used or shared for future research.

### Youth Assent

We are doing a research study about gifted and talented student bullying experiences in junior high school. Research studies help us learn more about people. If you would like to be a part of this research study, you will be asked to complete a bullying survey. The survey has a series of questions designed for you to explain both your bullying experiences and your perspective regarding bullying. You may later be asked to participate in a series of interviews to explore your experiences and perspective.

Before you agree to do these things, we need to tell you a little more. First, when the researchers do the survey and interview process, you may feel uncomfortable explaining your experiences and perspective. If you feel uncomfortable with any question on the survey or in the interview process, you do not have to answer it. You can decide to visit and talk with Mr. Anderson or Mrs. Sherwood about any problems you are having. You can also stop your involvement in the research at any time without penalty.

If you are in this study, there are also some things that you may like including your experiences and opinions potentially contributing to future bullying prevention efforts. You may also know and understand that your contributions may be making the school, community, and overall public education system more emotionally safe for students like yourself.

If this sounds like something you would like to do, we will ask you to say that you understand what we talked about, and that you do want to participate. You do not have to be in this study if you do not want to be. If you decide to stop after we begin, let either Mr. Anderson or Mrs. Sherwood know you want to stop. That's okay, too. No one will be upset if you don't want to do this or change your mind later.

You can ask any questions you have now or later. Your parents know about this research study, and they have said you can participate, if you want.

If you would like to be in this study, please sign your name and write the date.

Name	Date
Student E-mail address	

If, as a parent, you fully understand all the information in this informed consent, please sign below indicating you affirm your understanding:

Parent Affirmation Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Appendix D

E-Mail Invitation to Participate in the Survey



May 8, 2019

Hello!

I want to welcome you to the Utah State University GT Bullying Survey. You need to use the following password in order to access the survey:

GTsurveyEA

The letters are case sensitive, so, use capital letters for GT and EA and lower-case letters for the survey. You need to type in the password in the required space. Then, you need to follow the instructions on the survey. You need to make sure you use a fake name or pseudonym. So, you also need to type in your pseudonym in the other space provided. You can also choose a research number and place it in the required space. When you finish the survey questionnaire, please click on submit. You will be notified soon if you are chosen for the interview process.

Thank-you!

Mr. Allen

Appendix E

Early Adolescent Bullying Questionnaire

### Early Adolescent Bullying Questionnaire

**Parental Consent:** Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

**Pseudonym:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Research Number:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Research Protocol Number:** \_\_\_\_\_

As a gifted and talented (GT) student, providing descriptions where necessary, please answer the following questions in an honest and straightforward way. As you answer, write about why you think it happened and how it made you feel. Also think about any circumstances that such treatment would be fine with you. Space is provided. If you need more room, write on the back of this paper.

1. Has any student ever called you names? Yes No

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2. Has any student ever put you down because of your intelligence? Yes No

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3. Has any student ever put you down because you achieve excellent grades? Yes No

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4. Has any student ever knocked your books around? Yes No

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5. Has any student ever damaged or taken your possessions in class? Yes No

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6. Have you ever been threatened by another student in any class? Yes No

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7. Has anyone ever hit or punched you at school or in any class? Yes No

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8. Have you ever been pushed and/or shoved in school or in class? Yes No

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9. Have you ever been beaten-up at school or in class? Yes No

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10. Have you ever felt socially excluded by any students around you? Yes No

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11. When you were bullied, what did you do about it? Why? Why not?

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12. Other than reporting bullying mistreatment, how did you cope or make yourself feel better about the situation?

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13. Have you ever bullied anyone at school or in class? How? Why?

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Appendix F

Early Adolescent Bullying Interview Questions

**Early Adolescent Bullying Interview Questions****Parental Consent:** Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_**Pseudonym:** \_\_\_\_\_**Research Number:** \_\_\_\_\_**Research Protocol Number:** \_\_\_\_\_

1. How would you define bullying? Why?

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2. You are in this study because you have experienced bullying. Tell me how you felt about bullying when it happened? Why did you feel this way? Also, what were you thinking when it happened?

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3. How did you cope or make yourself feel better? Why?

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4. Are there any circumstances that you think bullying behaviors are fine with you? Explain.

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5. What do you think the school and district can do to make school safe from bullying?

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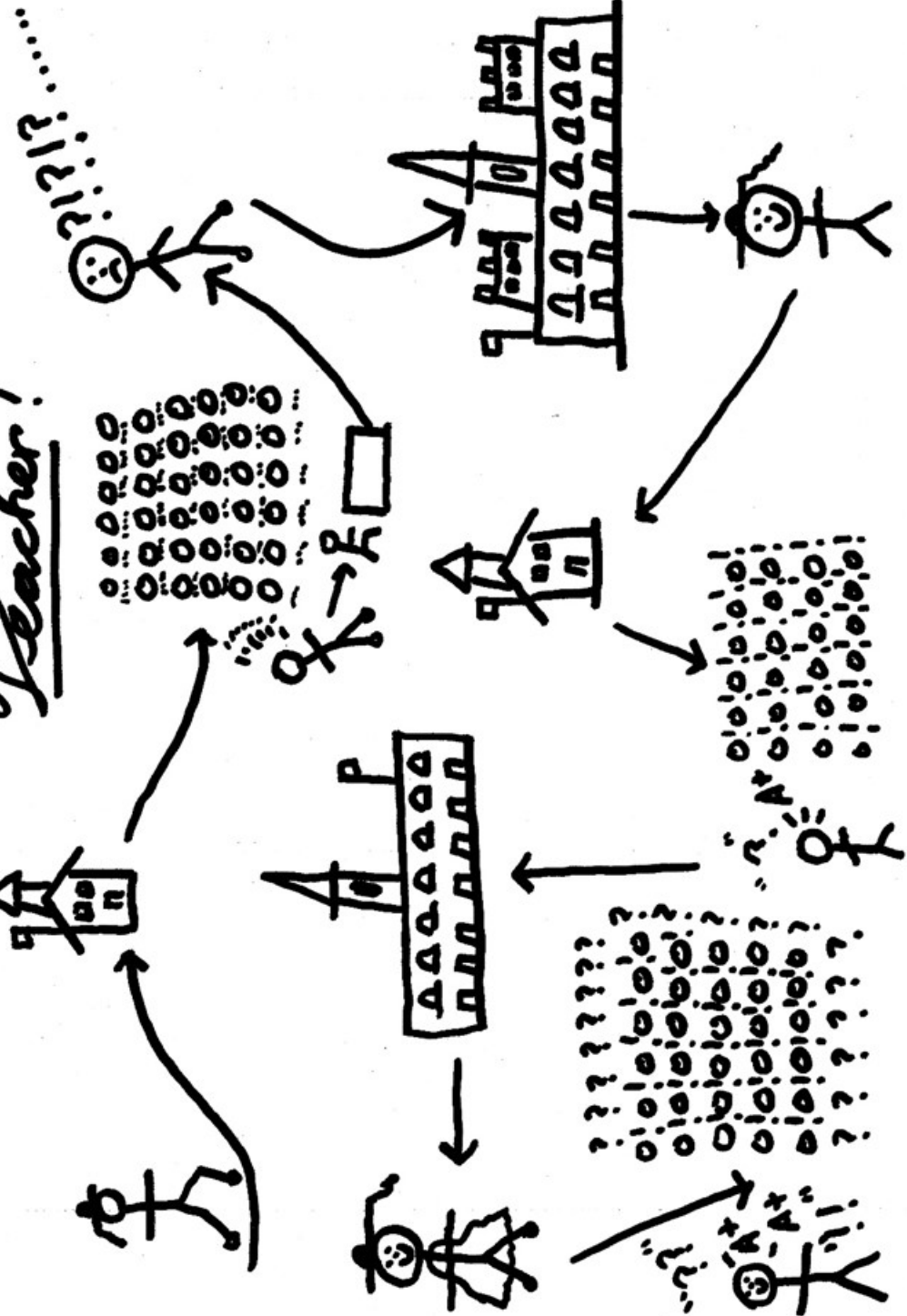
Adapted from "Bullying and the Gifted: Victims, Perpetrators, Prevalence, and Effects," by J.S. Peterson and K.E. Ray, 2006, *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 50, p. 156.



Appendix G

Mr. Allen's Journey Map

# Mapping - My Journey as a - Mr Allen! Teacher!



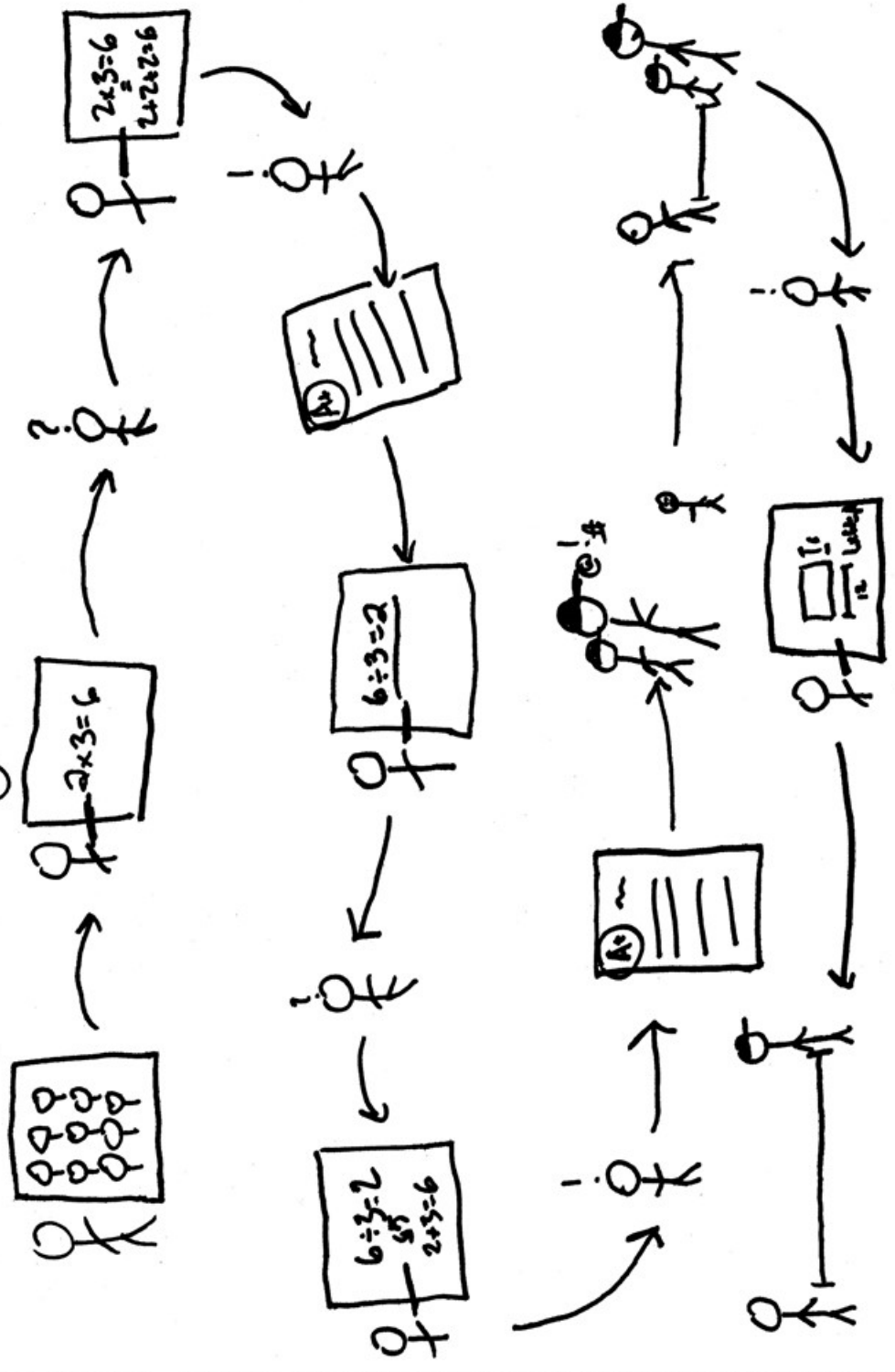
Appendix H  
Student Journey Maps





John

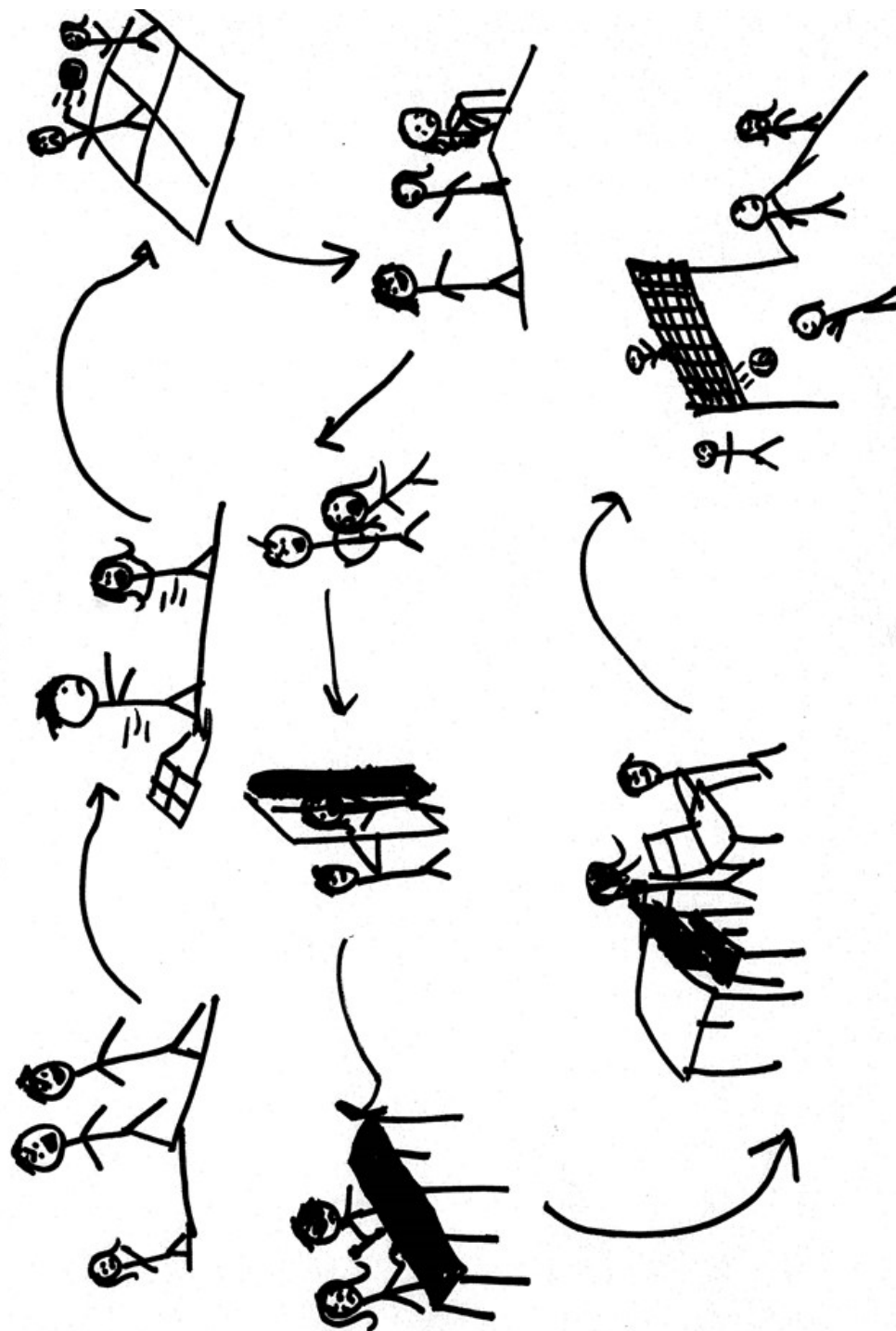
# Mapping - My Journey through school - John Walker





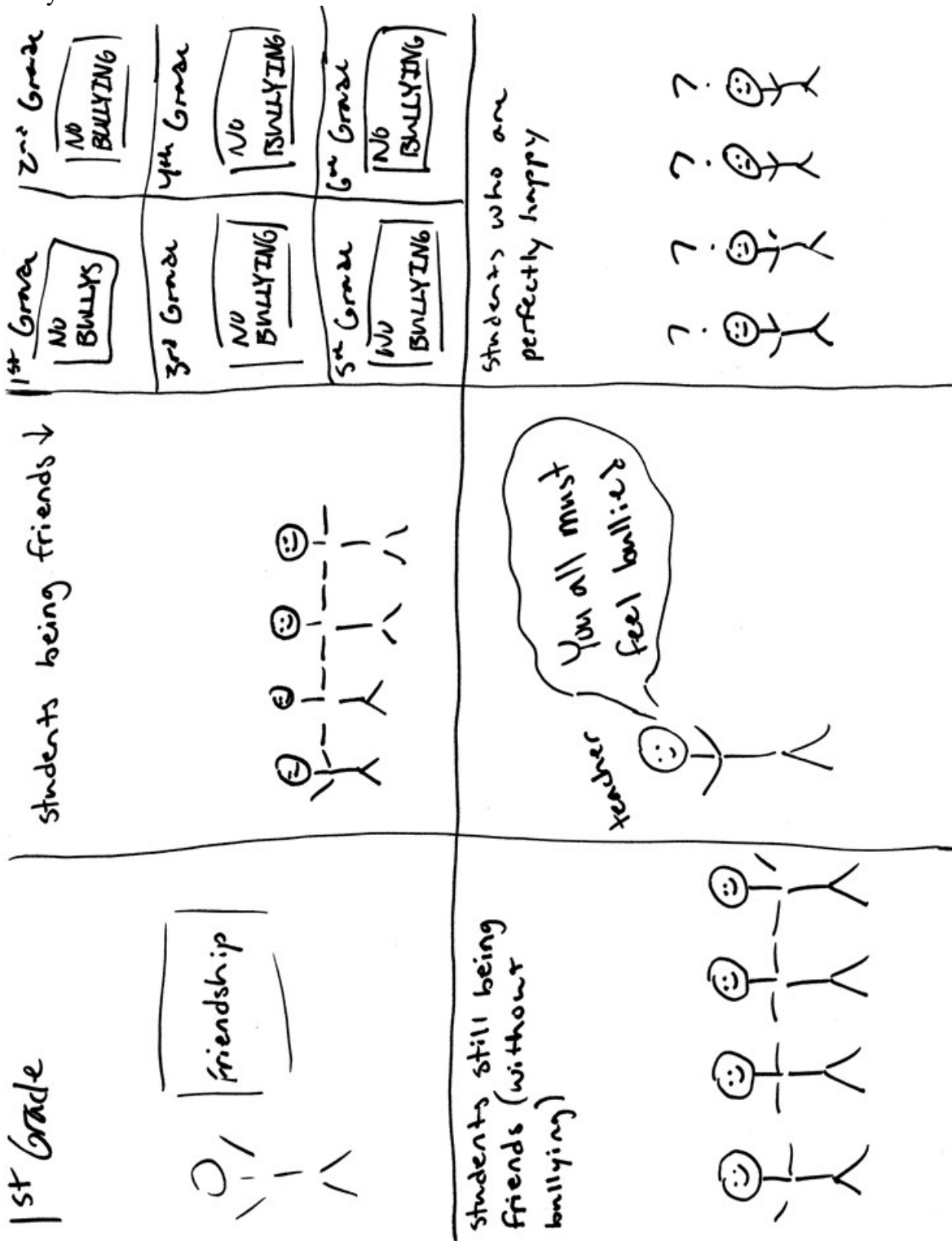
Kate

# MY BULLYING ADVENTURE





Mary



Appendix I

Basic Student Survey Questions

**Basic Student Questions**

1. What is your pseudonym? Also, if you do not have a pseudonym last name, write it here as well (i.e., we are trying to obtain pseudonyms that are less computer language and more normal). \_\_\_\_\_
2. How high do you usually score on standardized tests?  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. How good are your grades?  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. What are your greatest accomplishments?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. What is your favorite school subject? Why?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. What sports do you like to play or watch? Why?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. What do you like doing during your free time? Do you have any hobbies?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. What do you like to do with your family?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
9. Is there something about our society you would like to change? Why?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
10. What are your dislikes? Why?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
11. What do you not like to do? Why?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
12. Is there anything else you would like people to know?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## CURRICULUM VITAE

WILLIAM THOMAS (TOM) ALLEN JR

6446 South 4160 West  
 Taylorsville, Utah 84129  
 cell: (801) 664-2492 wk: (385) 646-5244  
 E-mail addresses: [tallen@jdschools.org](mailto:tallen@jdschools.org) or [wallen9720@aol.com](mailto:wallen9720@aol.com)

### Professional Expertise

- Gifted and talented multicultural education engagement strategies with the employment of positive psychology interventions
- Student socioemotional issues in middle school and the implementation of personality theory
- Gifted and talented creativity, critical thinking, and problem-solving applications in standardized curriculum educational contexts

### Education and Credentials

Ph.D. (Curriculum and Instruction) - Utah State University – 2020  
 M.Ed. (Master of Educational Administration) - University of Utah - 1995  
 M.S. (Master of Science in American History) - University of Utah - 1991  
 B.S. (Bachelor of Science in Sociology) - University of Utah - 1989  
 B.A. (Bachelor of Arts in European History) - University of Utah – 1988

- Gifted and Talented Utah State Certification, Grades 6-12
- English as a Second Language Utah State Certification, Grades K-12
- Utah Administrative Certification, Grades K-12
- Utah State Standard Secondary Teaching Certification, Grades 6-12
- Respecting Ethnic and Cultural Heritage Trainer (REACH) Certification (2000)
- NASSP Springfield Public School Administration Development Certification (1995)
- Middle-Level Teachers Academy Graduate (2003)
- Jefferson District American History Academy (2006-2009)

### **Public School Education - Honors**

- KSL Radio's "Teacher Feature" Award - 2010
- Outstanding Service Award, Thomas Jefferson Junior High – 1994
- Nominee, JSD Education Foundation Excel Outstanding Educator Award: Thomas Jefferson Junior High, 1992; Dwight D. Eisenhower Junior High, 1995, 2001 2002, 2003, WMS; 2009, 2011, 2017, 2018, and 2019

### **Public School Work History**

Aug., 2010 - 2020	Instructor in Gifted and Talented (GT), Utah State University, Logan, Utah
Aug., 2009 - 2010	Adjunct Professor in GT, Southern Utah University, Cedar City, Utah
July, 2006 - Present	Social Studies Teacher, WMS, Salt Lake City, Utah
July, 1995 - July, 2006	Facilitator in English as a Second Language (ESL) and Multicultural Education Facilitator / ESL Oral Language Teacher / ESL Social Studies – U.S. History Teacher / ALP Lead Teacher, Dwight Eisenhower Junior High, Taylorsville, Utah
July, 2001 - July, 2003	Adjunct Professor in ESL, Weber State University, Ogden, Utah
July, 1998- July, 2001	Adjunct Professor in Educational Studies (i.e., ESL), University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah
July, 1994 - July, 1995	Assistant Principal, Dwight Eisenhower Junior High, Taylorsville, Utah
Nov., 1989 - June, 1994	Social Studies Teacher, Thomas Jefferson Junior High, Kearns, Utah
Aug., 1989 - Nov., 1989	Student Teacher, JMS, Salt Lake City, Utah

### **Public School Professional Experience**

#### ***Teaching, Curriculum, Learning, Commendations, and Extracurricular Activities***

- Teaching Experience – Instructed 10th grade World history - 9th grade World geography - 8th grade American history - 7th grade Utah studies/civics - ESL social studies - ESL beginning oral language - 7<sup>th</sup> grade Utah studies GT.
- Curriculum - Followed the REACH concept infusion process authoring comprehensive social studies programs with multicultural concepts integrated into the core curriculum.
- Classroom Teaching and Learning - Achieved the full development of a social studies GT

educational program involving methods, strategies, techniques, and assessments based on current research concerning the GT early adolescent. Content, process, and product differentiation reflecting GT research were integrated into the social studies curriculum.

- Teacher Training – Devoted 5 years to facilitating and training teachers in ESL theory, methods, and evaluation, language proficiency testing, and core curriculum multicultural concept infusion (REACH).
- University Teaching - Taught GT graduate courses for the JSD, Jordan, and Salt Lake School Districts GT certification consortium (Southern Utah University - 2009-2010 and Utah State University - 2010-2018).
- Commendations - Earned praise as an ESL Adjunct Professor from fellow teachers, school/district administrators, and professors from Weber State University and the University of Utah, regarding educator acquisition and classroom applications of new teaching and learning methods, techniques, and strategies.
- Public School Extracurricular Activities – Coached the WMS Academic Team – 2<sup>nd</sup> Place in the 2009-2010 National Academic League Championship, 2010-2011 National Champions of the National Academic League, and 2011-2012 National Champions of the National Academic League. Coach/Monitor – Future Problem Solvers (FPS) – 2011-2019.

### ***Educational Program Planning, Development, and Administration***

- Helped create, implement, and institutionalize the new JSD ESL social studies and beginning ESL oral language programs at Eisenhower Junior High.
- Consulted with JSD personnel at all levels in the implementation, development, and evaluation of new ESL and GT programs. Experience working with university professors and district officials in collaboration for the development and implementation of district ESL and GT programs.
- Served 1-year internship as Assistant Principal co-responsible for school management and reform.
- Worked in collaboration with fellow teachers, counselors, administrators, and parents in the initiation and establishment of the WMS AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination) college preparation program (2009 - 2017).

### ***Community Relations***

- Created business partnerships with local businesses and became a representative on JSD's Invest in Futures business partnership committee.
- Started a consortium of Eisenhower Junior High teachers and Salt Lake Community College professor(s) to address the needs of the increasingly diverse Taylorsville community.

- Established both the Eisenhower and WMS Cultural Fairs, receiving praise from parents, local businesses, and community leaders.

### **Higher Education Professional Experience**

#### **Adjunct English Professor—Weber State University**

- Collaborated with university professors and district officials in the creation, initiation, and implementation of ESL endorsement courses for teacher training - taught ESL endorsement courses at school sites in JSD.

##### *Teaching Assignments*

- ENGL 4410 ESL Foundations
- ENGL 4450 ESL/Bilingual Assessment: Theory, Methods, and Practices
- ENGL 4740 Building School Partnership with ESL/Bilingual Families

#### **Adjunct English as a Second Language Professor—University of Utah**

- Worked with a consortium of university professors and district officials in the initiation and implementation of ESL endorsement courses for teacher preparation - taught ESL courses at school sites throughout JSD.

##### *Teaching Assignments*

- LING 5042/6042 Language Minority Issues
- LING 5812/6812 Content Based Instruction
- LING 5813/6813 ESL/Bilingual Practices
- LING 5811/6811 ESL/Bilingual Methodology
- EDUC 6634 Introduction to Multicultural Education

#### **Instructor in Gifted and Talented Education—Utah State University**

- Trained educators in the identification and evaluation of GT students – given the responsibility to help train JSD teachers in proper pedagogy - taught GT endorsement courses at school sites throughout JSD.

##### *Teaching Assignments*

- TEAL 5420/6420 Education of Gifted and Talented Learners (2)
- TEAL 5430/6430 Practicum – Individual Case Study (1)
- TEAL 5450/6450 Social and Emotional Needs of Gifted and Talented Learners (2)
- TEAL 5455/6455 Practicum – Gifted Social/Emotional Needs Applications (1)
- TEAL 5480/6480 Methods and Materials for Gifted and Talented Learners (2)
- TEAL 5490/6490 Practicum – Gifted Strategies Applications

### **Teaching Assistant and Guest Instructor in Teacher Education and Leadership—Utah State University**

- Served as a doctoral student teaching assistant and guest instructor at the invitation of Utah State University professors.
- TEAL 6190 Theories of Teaching and Learning

### **Adjunct Professor in Gifted and Talented Education—Southern Utah University**

- Taught, for one year, JSD GT endorsement courses for district teachers at school sites throughout the district.

#### *Teaching Assignments*

- EDUC 5420/6420 Education of Gifted and Talented Learners (2)
- EDUC 5430/6430 Practicum – Individual Case Study (1)

### **Higher Education Scholarship**

#### **National Presentations—Peer Invited, Reviewed, and Refereed Presentations**

November 14, 2014 - National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) Convention, Baltimore, Maryland

Presentation: *Linear Change in River School District: Implications for Gifted and Talented Students*, William Thomas Allen Jr., Scott L. Hunsaker, Utah State University

November 3, 2016 – National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) Convention, Orlando, Florida

Presentation: *Bullying and the Unique Socioemotional Needs of Early-Adolescents in Autonomous Middle-School Gifted and Talented Classes – Veteran Teacher Perspectives and Practices*, William Thomas Allen Jr., Utah State University

November 10, 2017 – National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) Convention, Charlotte, North Carolina

Presentation: *Race Matters in Gifted and Talented Education!* – William Thomas Allen Jr., Scott L. Hunsaker, Utah State University

November 4, 2019 – National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) Convention, Albuquerque, New Mexico

Presentation: *Early Adolescent Gifted and Talented and Their Experience with Bullying*—William Thomas Allen Jr., Utah State University



### **Professional Journal Publications—Peer Reviewed**

Allen, W.T., & Hunsaker, S.L. (2016). Teacher conceptions, curriculum ideologies, and adaptations to linear change in River school district: Implications for gifted and talented. *Journal for the Education of the Gifted*, 39, 195-220. doi: 10.1177/0162353216657183.

Allen, W.T. (2017). Bullying and the unique socioemotional needs of gifted and talented early adolescents: Veteran teacher perspectives and practices. *Roeper Review*. 39, 269-283. doi: 10.1080/02783193.2017.1362678.

### **Book Chapter—Invited and Peer Reviewed**

Allen, W.T. (2017). Early adolescent bullying, human differences, and the gifted and talented. In A.F. Osanloo, C. Reed, & J.P. Schwartz (Eds.), *New Directions in educational leadership: Innovations in research: Creating and negotiating collaborative spaces for socially just antibullying interventions and innovations for k-12 schools* (pp. 123-146). Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing.

### **Doctor of Philosophy—Dissertation**

Allen, W.T. (2020). *Early Adolescent Gifted and Talented Students and Their Experience with Bullying*. Logan, UT: Utah State University.

### **Professional Association Memberships**

Member, National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC)  
 Member, Utah Association for Gifted Children (UAGC)  
 Member, National Education Association (NEA)  
 Member, Utah Education Association (UEA)