2011

MARC Freshman Study 2011: Bullying, Cyberbullying, Risk Factors and Reporting

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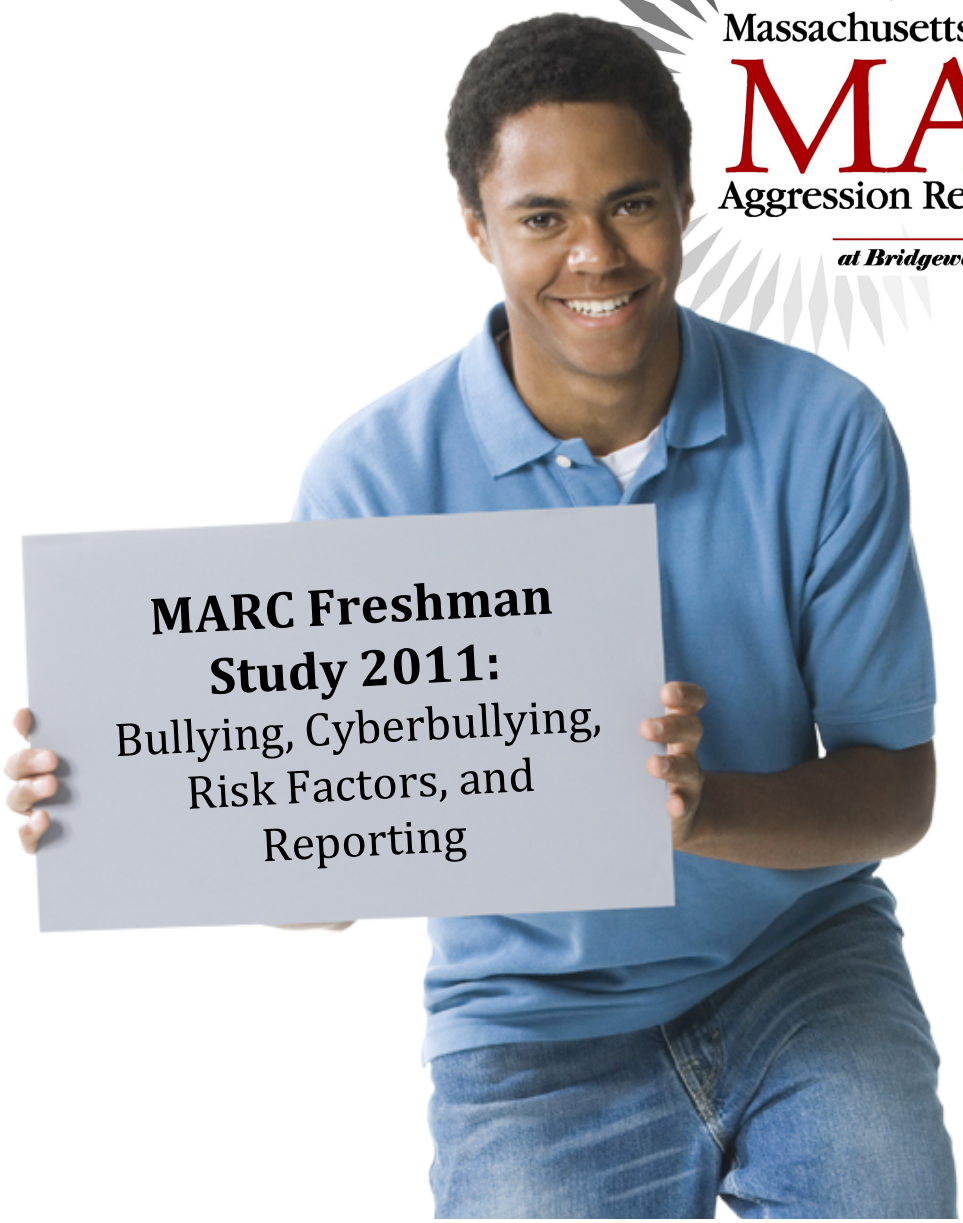

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The Sample

- 617 College freshman, studied over a 6 month period in 2010-2011
- Predominately white
- Predominately 18-19 years old
- Parents tend to be high working class, low middle class, or middle class
- Studied for: rates of behavior; risk factors & their relationship to bullying and cyberbullying; and many other social, family, and school factors
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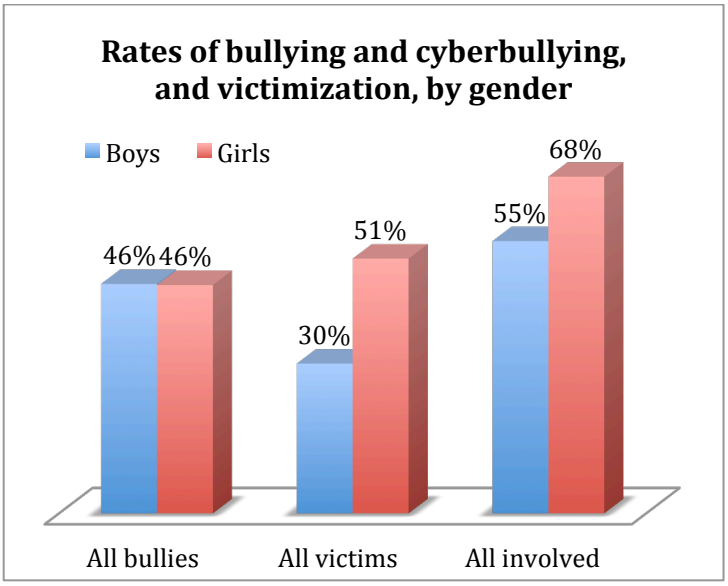
Contents Of This Report:

Section I: Frequency of bullying and cyberbullying

Subjects were asked about bullying and cyberbullying that might have occurred during high school. To be classified as bullying or cyberbullying, an incident needed to be:

- Repetitive
- Intentional
- Inflicted by a more powerful student upon a less powerful student
- Rated by the victim as **at least** moderately upsetting or bothersome ("4" out of a scale of 0 to 10) (the "Upsetedness Factor")

The frequency estimates below should be regarded as **conservative**, given these classification requirements.

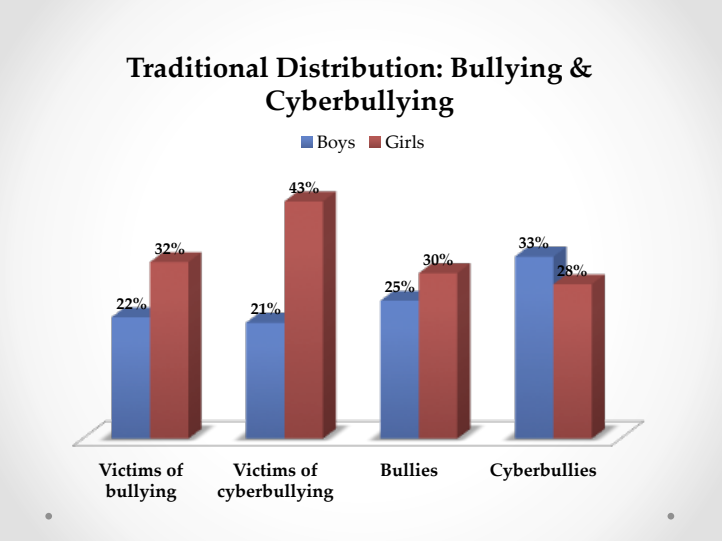


Overall, when both bullying and cyberbullying are considered, slightly fewer than half of students admitted to bullying behaviors.

Although girls and boys admitted to bullying at similar rates, girls were two-thirds more likely to report being a victim of either bullying or cyberbullying, and overall, more girls than boys were involved in either of these behaviors.

Boys were more likely than girls to be cyberbullies, but girls were more likely to be bullies in school, and girls were more likely to be victims – especially online.

The gender differences were most noticeable online.



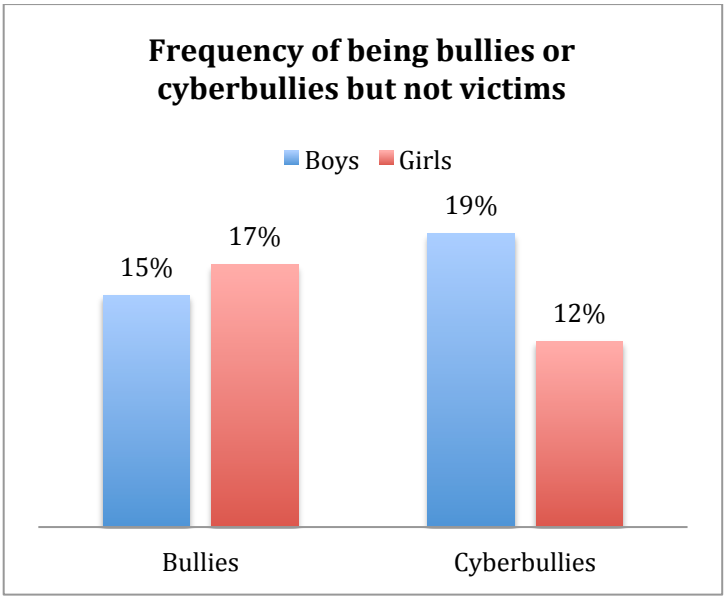
The Takeaway

Section I: Frequency of bullying and cyberbullying

- About half of both boys are girls reported engaging in some type of bullying or cyberbullying, but girls are slightly more likely to bully in school and boys are slightly more likely to bully online.
- Girls are more likely to be victims, both in school and (especially) online.

Section II. Frequency of different types of bullies and victims

Some subjects reported being bullies, some reported being victims, and some reported being both bullies and victims. There were gender differences in how these groups formed.



The first category examined is the subjects who reported that they were bullied but NOT victims.

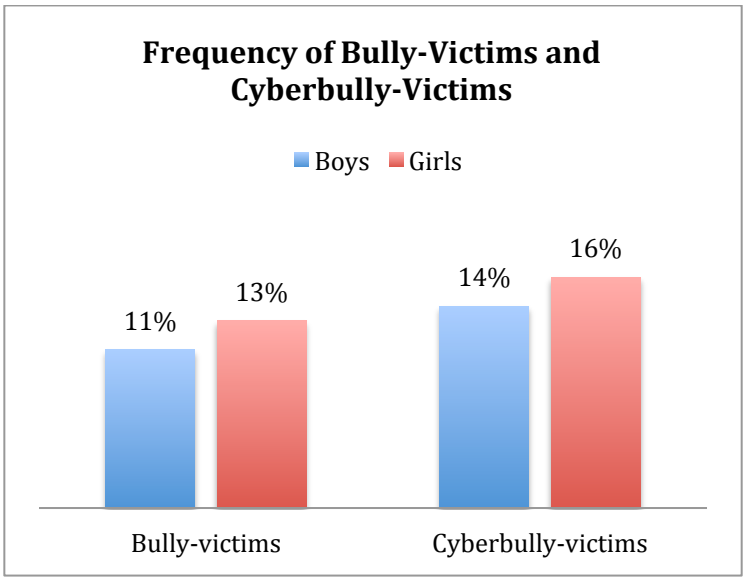
Girls were more likely to be bullies, but boys were much more likely to be cyberbullies. Almost 1 in 5 boys reported being cyberbullies.

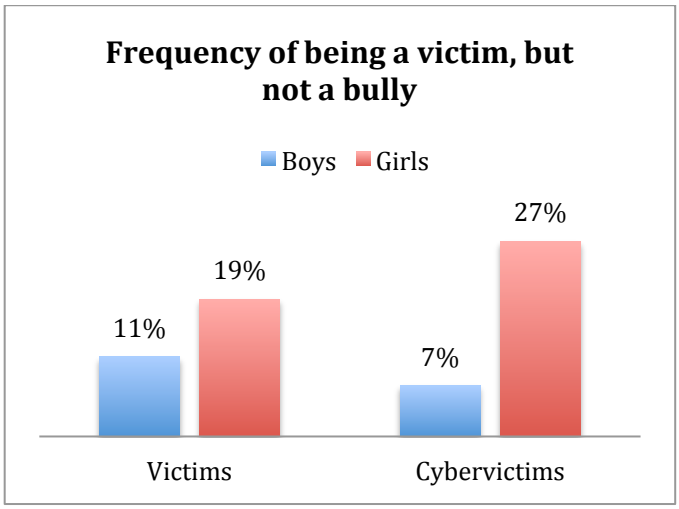
Gender differences aside, about 1 in 6 students reported being bullies, and a similar number reported being cyberbullies.

About 12-15% of subjects reported being BOTH bullies and victims.

More subjects reported being cyberbully-victims (i.e., both victims and bullies online), than bully-victims.

Girls reported this status slightly more often than boys. We did not find the gender discrepancy online found among the cyberbullies (above).





These subjects reported being victims who did not engage in bullying behaviors.

Girls were clearly more likely to be this type of victim. The gender discrepancy was even greater online.

Overall, about 1 in 6 subjects reported being this type of victim.

Gender Differences

For subjects who were only victims or only bullies, gender differences were greater online than in school. Online, boys were more likely to be cyberbullies and girls were much more likely to be Cybervictims. In school, girls were somewhat more likely to be both bullies and somewhat more likely to be victims.

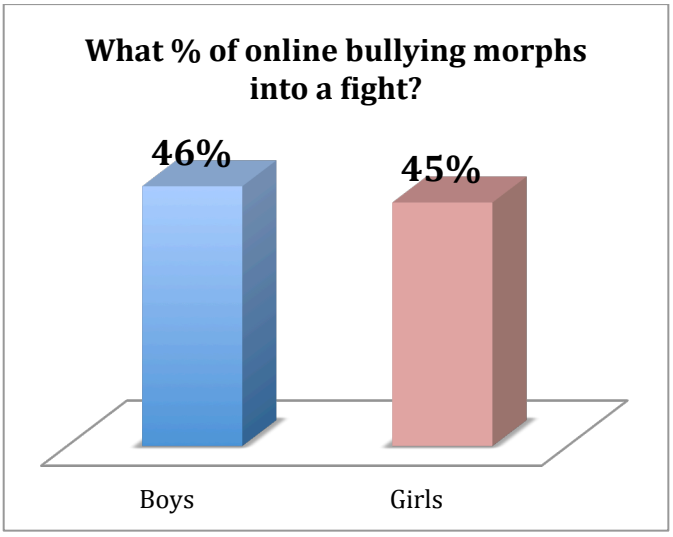
Subjects who reported being bully-victims and cyberbully-victims did not show these patterns of gender discrepancy. That they are a distinct group is supported by the findings below.

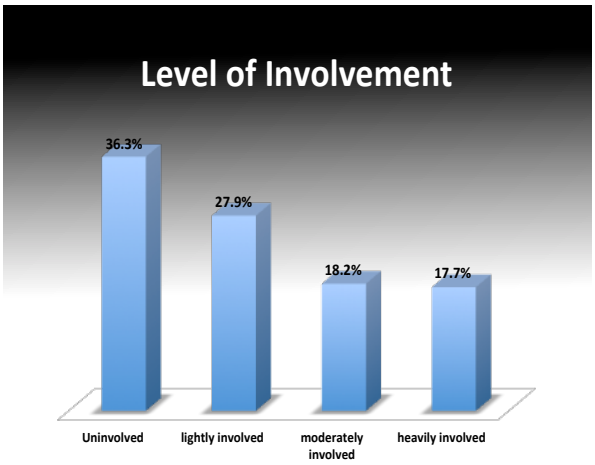
Complicating Factors in Measuring Bullying or Cyberbullying

Is it bullying or conflict?

Online, the power structure between users tends to be fluid and changeable. Less powerful individuals in school may feel emboldened online. Thus, online bullying may change into a more equal-power fight.

This makes measuring cyberbullying more challenging. It is unknown to what extent in-person behaviors "morph."





Comparison Permutations

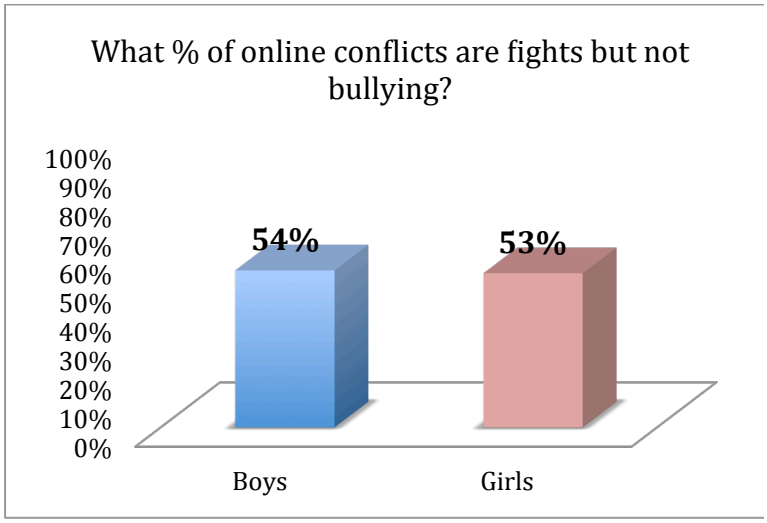
Because subjects were often classified differently online and offline, the number of distinct comparison groups multiplied rapidly (there were 16 possible comparison groups).

Thus, for some analyses, a "shortcut" was used – subjects were classified by *level of involvement*.
Uninvolved subjects were in no bully or victim group.
Lightly involved were either bullies or victims in only one area (online or offline).
Moderately involved were a bully-victim in one area or a bully or victim in both areas.
Heavily involved subjects were all involved in both areas and as both victims and bullies.

Overuse of the term "cyberbullying"

There is some awareness regarding the overuse of the term "bullying" but less regarding the overuse of the term "cyberbullying."

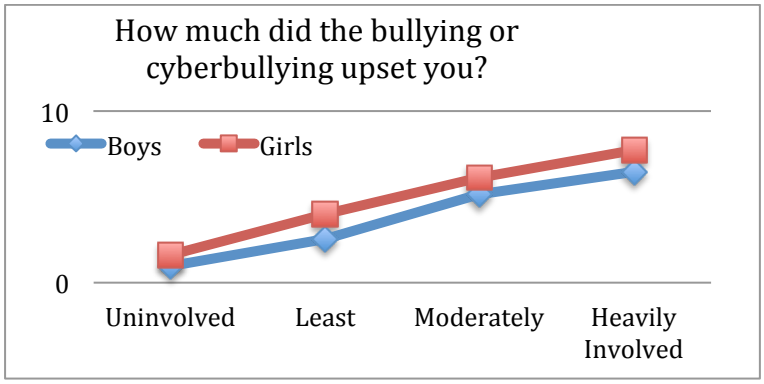
In this study we were careful to distinguish, for subjects, the difference between cyberbullying and equal-power cyber-conflicts.



It's still notable that subjects reported that many cyber-incidents are more like fighting than bullying.

Upsetedness Levels

Because more heavily involved subjects rated their bullying incidents as more upsetting, it is possible that subjective perceptions differ between subjects. It is hard to predict how this could affect the results seen in this study.



The Takeaway

Section II. Frequency of different types of bullies and victims

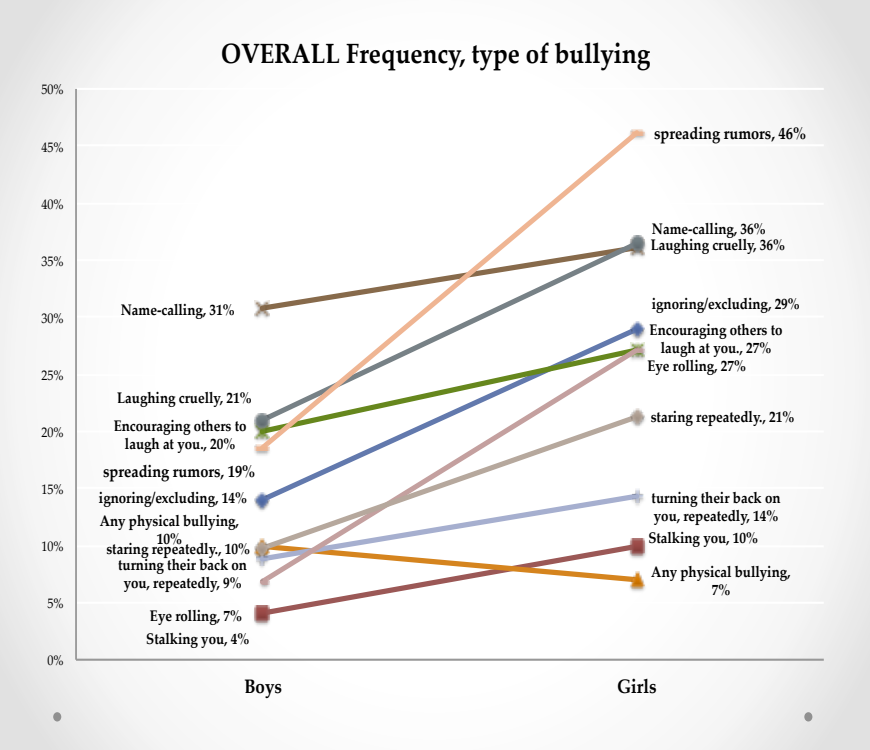
- Although we tend to think of most kids as either bullies or victims, they are just as likely to be both.
- Subjects were separated into only-bullies, only-victims, and bully-victims (both online and offline). Overall, between 10% and 20% of subjects fell into each of these categories.
- The most marked gender differences were found among cyberbullies (more likely to be boys) and cybervictims (more likely to be girls).
- When problems begin online or migrate online, the power differential that defines a bullying situation may begin to shift. Online, bullying may turn into an equal-power fight, or vice-versa.
- Slightly more than half the time, cyber-incidents are better characterized as fighting, rather than as bullying.

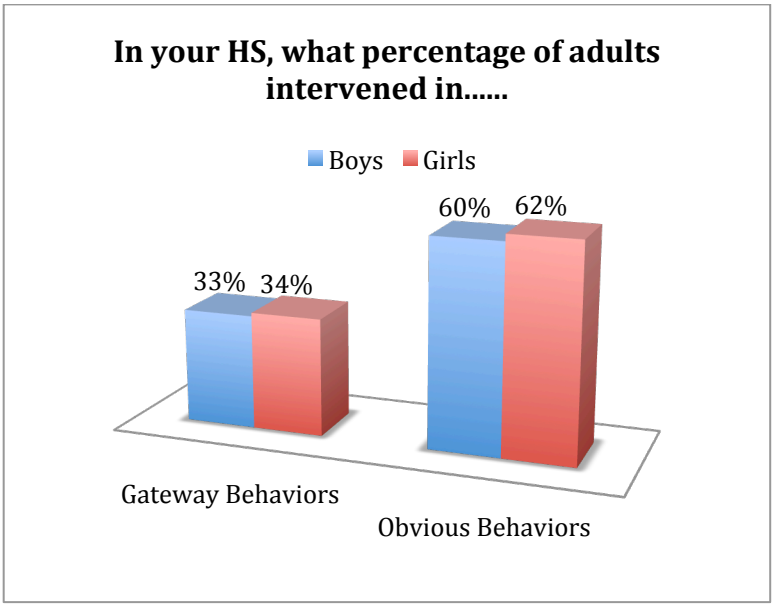
Section III: Nature & Types of Bullying and Cyberbullying

For both boys and girls, gateway behaviors dominated as the most common types of bullying.

(Gateway behaviors are subtle, psychological bullying behaviors that express contempt and dominance but do not break any formal rules. Examples are eye-rolling and subtle name-calling.)

Most common bullying behaviors were subtle name-calling, rumors, and revealing personal information.





Subjects reported that the educators in their high schools were almost twice as likely to intervene in obvious bullying behaviors, rather than in gateway behaviors.

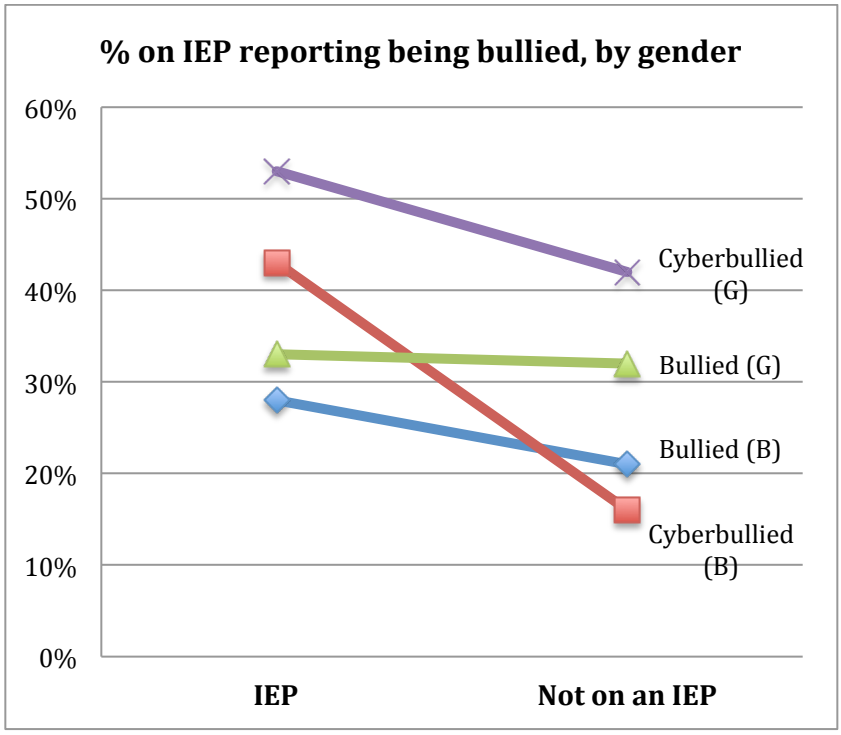
Thus, gateway behaviors were both the most common type of bullying, and the type that adults were least likely to recognize and respond to.

Reasons for Bullying and Cyberbullying

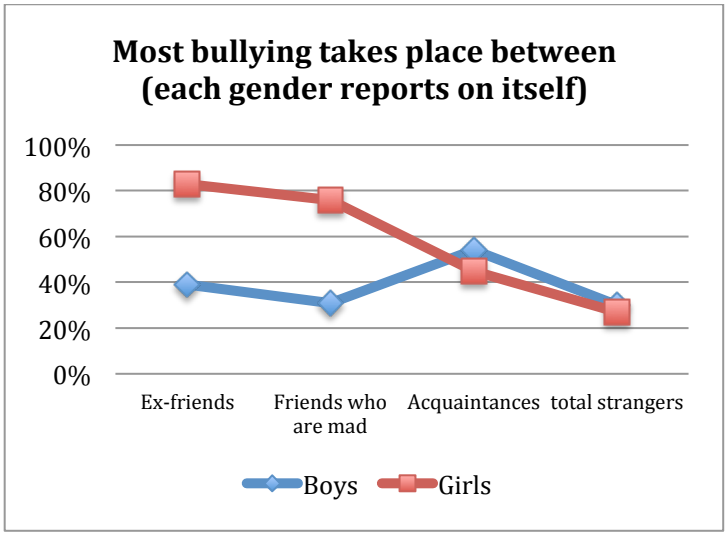
For both boys and girls, victims were most likely to report, "Didn't fit in," "Looks" and "Sexual orientation" as the most common reasons for being targeted.

Although the literature has identified special needs children as preferred targets, overall, this study did not find that being a special education student was a common reason for bullying.

However, more analysis alters this conclusion somewhat. Being on an IEP affected different types of bullying differently. For boys and girls, but especially for boys, being on an IEP increased the probability of being a cyber-victim (but not a victim) significantly.



Relationship between the Bully and the Victim



Subjects who reported being victims were asked their relationship with the individual(s) who targeted them.

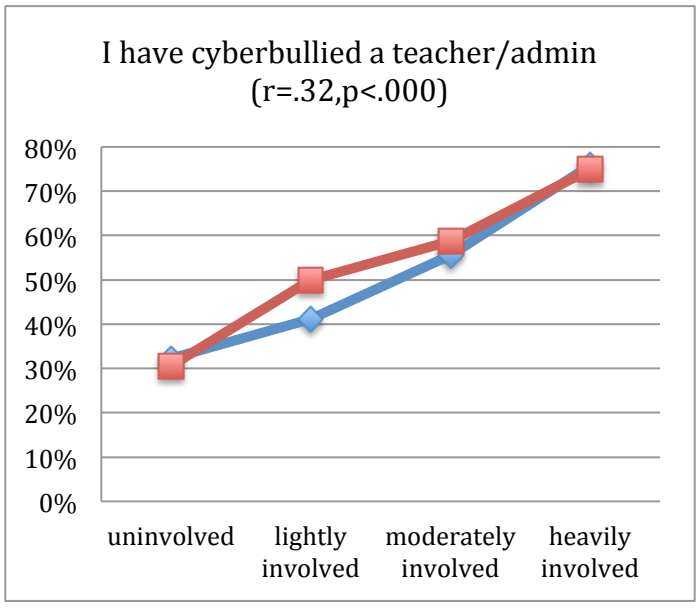
Both genders reported, fairly equally, that they were targeted by acquaintances and strangers.

However, girls reported that their friends were the **most** likely bullies; boys reported that friends were among the least likely bullies.

Subjects also reported bullying teachers and administrators, in addition to their peers.

There was a moderate correlation between the level of involvement in bullying and cyberbullying and the percentage of subjects who reported that they had cyberbullied a teacher or administrator.

The more involved a subject was in bullying, the more likely that they also targeted the adults.



The Takeaway
Section III: Nature & Types of Bullying and Cyberbullying

- The most common types of bullying behaviors were "gateway" behaviors – subtle psychological bullying behaviors that generally break no rules and thus can be done right in front of adults.
- Subjects reported that adults in their high schools were only about half as likely to respond to a gateway behavior (versus a more obvious bullying behavior).
- Students who were most likely to be targets were those who didn't "fit in." Special education students were also likely targets, but primarily for cyberbullying, not for bullying.
- Both genders targeted acquaintances but girls were much more likely to target friends when bullying.
- Students who were heavily involved in bullying or cyberbullying were much more likely to cyberbully teachers or administrators, relative to other students.

Section IV: Characteristics of Different Types of Bullies and Victims

Summary **(More detailed findings follow)**

Characteristics/Risk Factors studied:

- Special education status and type (IEP types 1, 2 and 3, explained below);
- Social skills;
- Bullying between siblings and parental response;
- Dating violence or threats experienced;
- Substance abuse and digital behavior;
- Digital Risk behaviors and tolerance; and
- Sexting, including sexting under pressure or coercion.

Bully-victims, cyberbully-victims, and heavily involved subjects (subjects who were both bullies and victims and involved both in online and in-school incidents) were clearly more likely to:

- Be on Type 3 IEP's (no IEP during elementary school, but IEP during middle and/or high school);
- Have significantly poorer social skills, relative to other types of bullies, victims, and uninvolved subjects;
- Report that they had been bullied by a sibling;
- Report that their parents did not adequately respond to this bullying by a sibling (similar to other involved subjects);
- Report that they had been a victim of dating violence or threats of violence;
- Report that they "get drunk" a few times a week or more (boys only);
- Report that when they drink or "party," they are more likely to post something inappropriate or mean online (girls only);
- Engage in what is perceived as digitally risky behaviors (e.g., following instructions in a phishing message); and
- Report that they were pressured to sext.

Any degree of involvement increases the frequency of these risk factors.

- Moderately and lightly involved subjects (bullies *or* victims, in school and/or online) usually demonstrated more of these risk factors relative to uninvolved subjects.

- In most cases, the relationship was linear in nature – the higher the level of involvement in bullying and cyberbullying, the higher the frequency of reporting a risk factor.

Boys were more likely to show a relationship between increasing involvement in bullying and cyberbullying and:

- Having been on IEP Type 3's in high school;
- Getting "drunk a few times a week or more often";
- Most digital risk variables, such as "believing that private information is of no interest to others," or "going to meet an online friend in person"; and
- Being pressured by a friend into sexting;

Girls were more likely to show a relationship between increasing involvement in bullying and cyberbullying and:

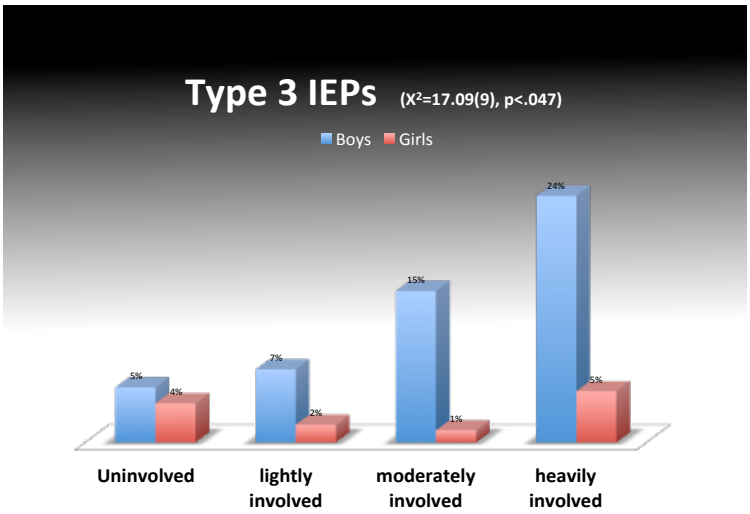
- Being a victim of dating violence, or threatened violence;
- Doing mean or inappropriate things online when drinking; and
- Being pressured by a boyfriend into sexting.

RISK FACTOR #1: Special Education Students, Bullies, and Victims

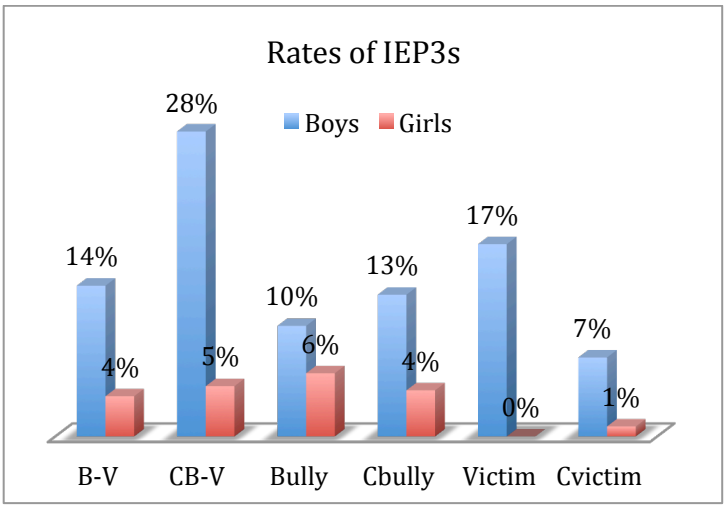
This study measured not only the presence of an IEP, but its type.

Type	Elementary IEP	Middle/High School IEP
Type 1	√	√
Type 2	√	
Type 3		√

Type 3 IEP's were most significantly associated with bullying and cyberbullying. Type 3 IEP's are probably associated with either long-term conditions that are not addressed during early years, or, with conditions that typically emerge during pre-adolescence or adolescence (e.g., depression, substance abuse).



Type 3 IEP's were clearly associated with degree of involvement, but only for males. The more heavily involved boys were in bullying and cyberbullying, the higher their rate of IEP 3's.



Subjects in different categories were then compared in their rates of IEP 3's.

Elevations in IEP 3's were seen only among boys.

The most notable elevation was seen among the boys who were Cyberbully-Victims. Other groups that were high in IEP 3's were bully-victims, victims, and Cyberbullies. (This was also noted in Section II above.)

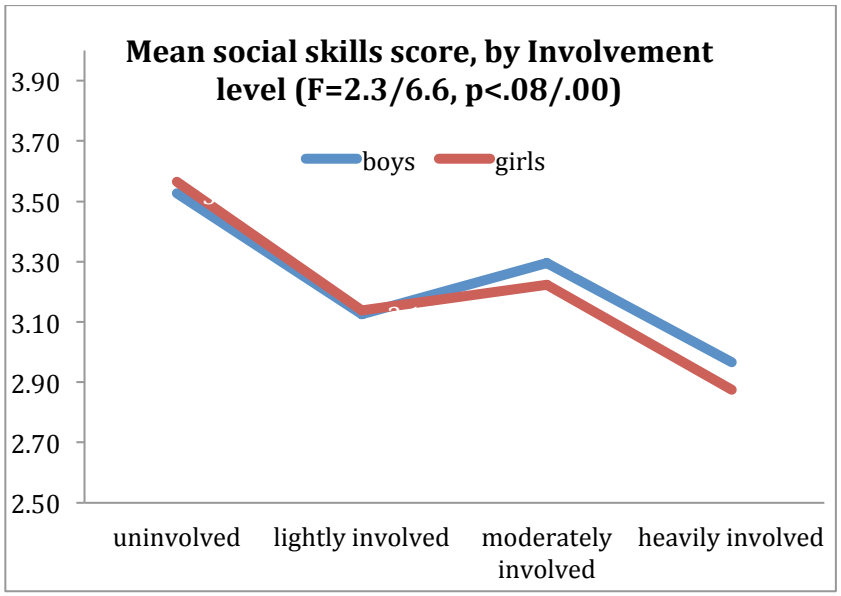
RISK FACTOR #2: Social Skills

A highly reliable social skills "score" was calculated for each subject (Chronbach's alpha (standardized items)=.972). The score consists of answers to questions about problems in social relationships, and how they are handled. For example: "Do you have one or a few close friends you feel you can count on?" and "Did you have small problems with friends that frequently "blew up" into large fights [and that were not resolved successfully]?"

More heavily "involved" subjects have significantly lower scores on social skills, for both boys and girls.

For boys and girls, social skills were particularly low among Cyberbully-Victims and Cybervictims.

Male Victims, and female Bully-Victims were also significantly lower in social skills.



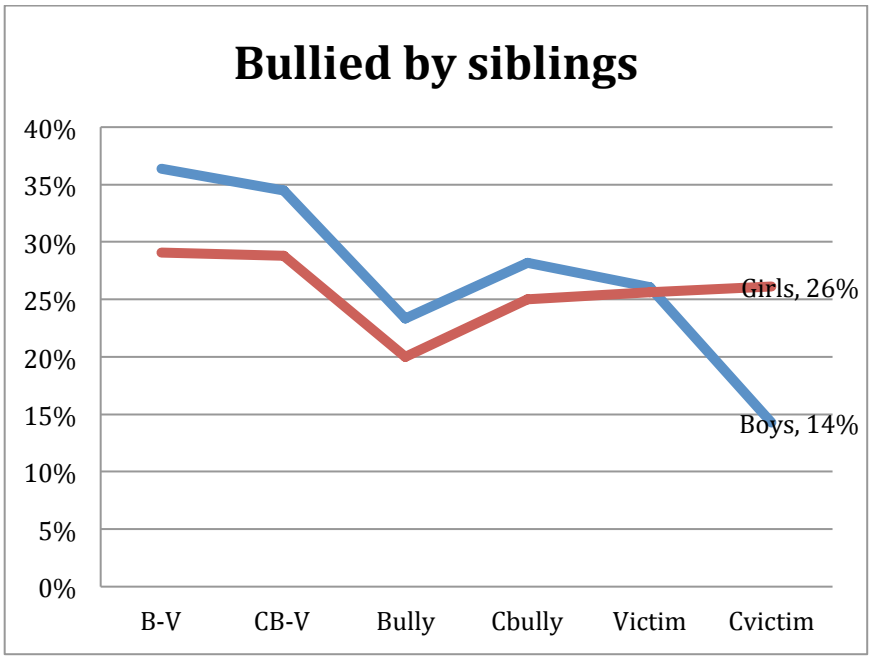
Lowest Sskills	Low Sskills	Moderate Sskills	High Sskills
Heavily Involved	Victims	Moderately Involved	Uninvolveds
Bully-Victims	Cybervictims	Lightly Involved	
Cyberbully-Victims		Bullies	
		Cyberbullies	

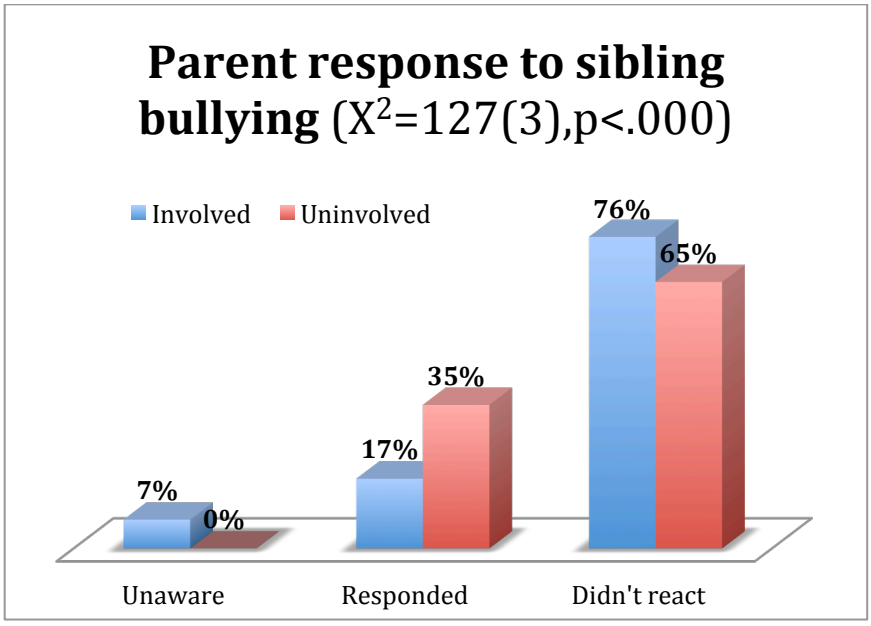
Overall, subjects who both bullied *and* were victims had the lowest social skill scores. Victims had the next lowest. Subjects who only bullied (but were not victims) had moderate social skills, and uninvolved subjects had the highest scores.

There were also **gender differences** in social skills. Overall, scores did not differ by gender. However, boys were more likely to endorse questions that reflected social isolation (e.g., "I felt different in high school," or "I don't have one or a few close friend." Girls, however, were more likely than boys to endorse items that reflect problems within relationships (e.g., "I've been bullied by a close friend," or "I've had friends who have turned on me").

RISK FACTOR #3: Bullying Between Siblings

A few items assessed the presence of bullying between siblings. Subjects were reminded of the differences between bullying and normal fighting between siblings, and then asked if they feel that they were bullied by a sibling.





Across all subjects, about 20% reported that they had a sibling who often or sometimes bullied them.

Heavily involved subjects – **bully-victims and cyberbully-victims** particularly – were most likely to report this.

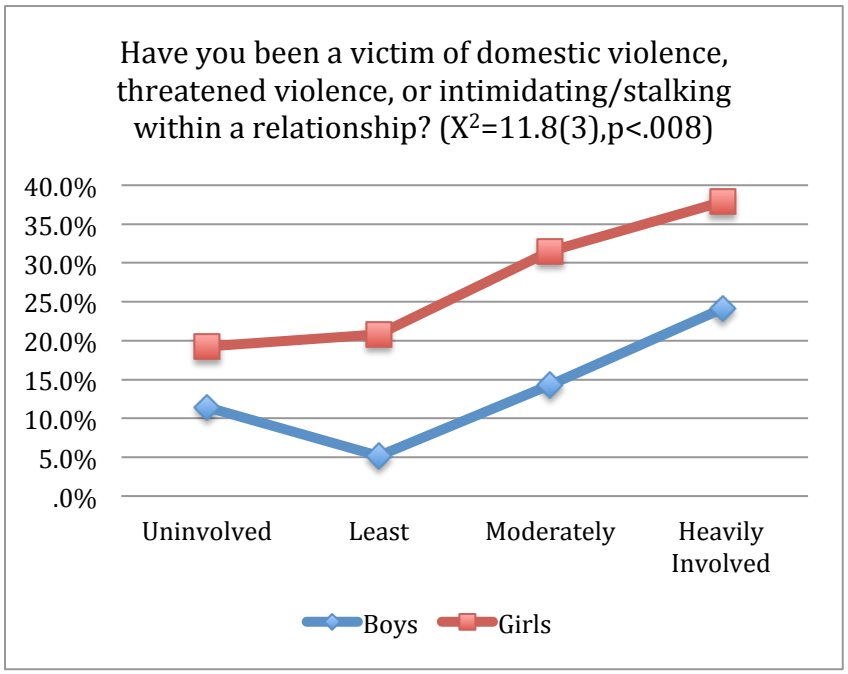
Subjects were also asked about their parents' response to their siblings' behavior.

Although parental response did not differ by bully or victim status, overall, **parents of uninvolved subjects were twice as likely to respond** to sibling bullying and subjects who were involved in bullying or cyberbullying were more likely to report that their parents didn't react or reacted very weakly.

RISK FACTOR #4: Dating Violence

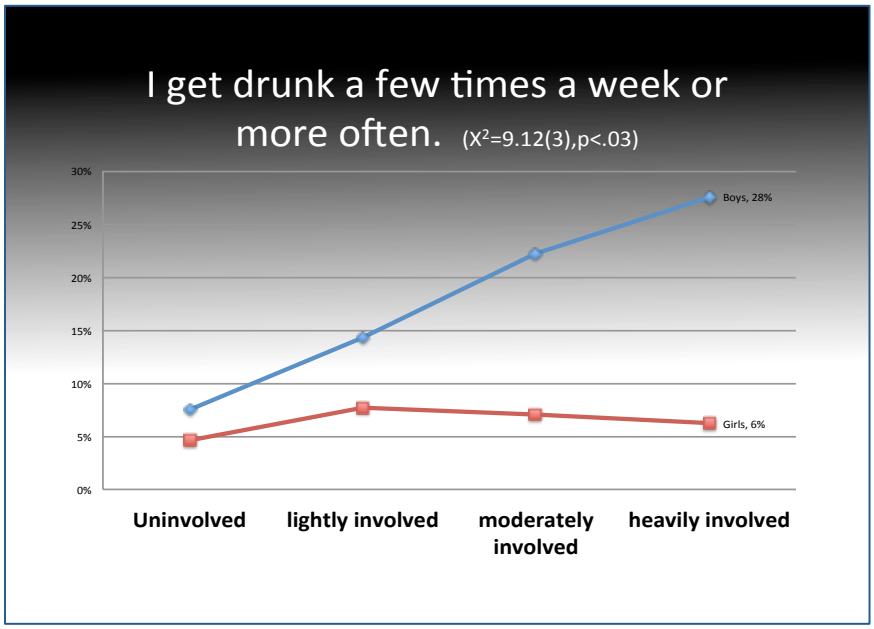
Although overall girls reported being victims of domestic/dating violence more frequently than boys, the gender differences were found most significantly between girls and boys who were heavily involved in bullying.

There was a relationship between having been a dating violence victim and being involved in bullying and cyberbullying.



The more heavily involved subjects were, the more likely they were to report being victims of threatened or real dating violence or stalking. This was true for both boys and girls, but girls consistently reported higher levels of victimization across all levels of involvement.

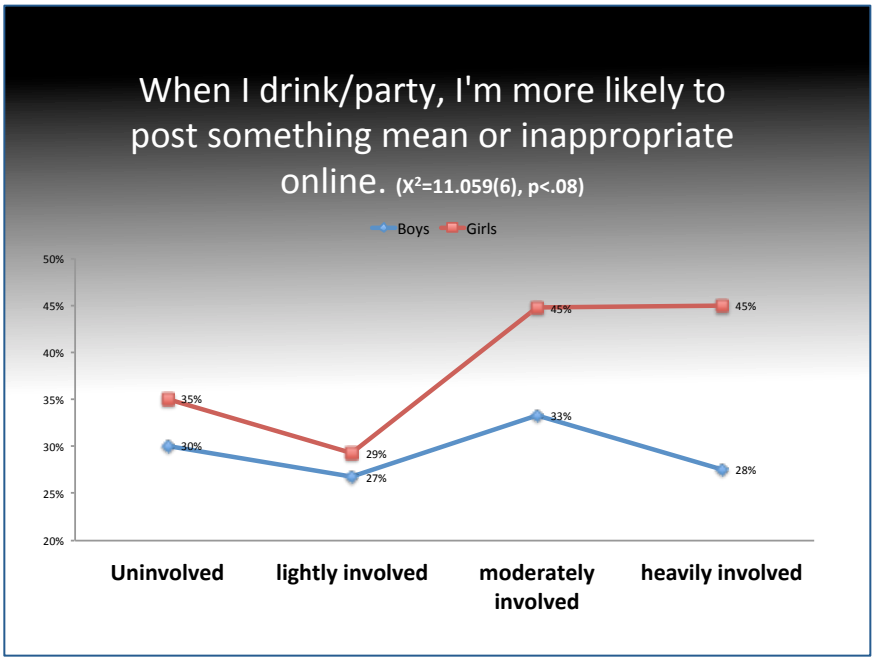
RISK FACTOR #5: Substance Abuse And Bullying



Getting drunk frequently is correlated with level of involvement in bullying and cyberbullying, but only for boys.

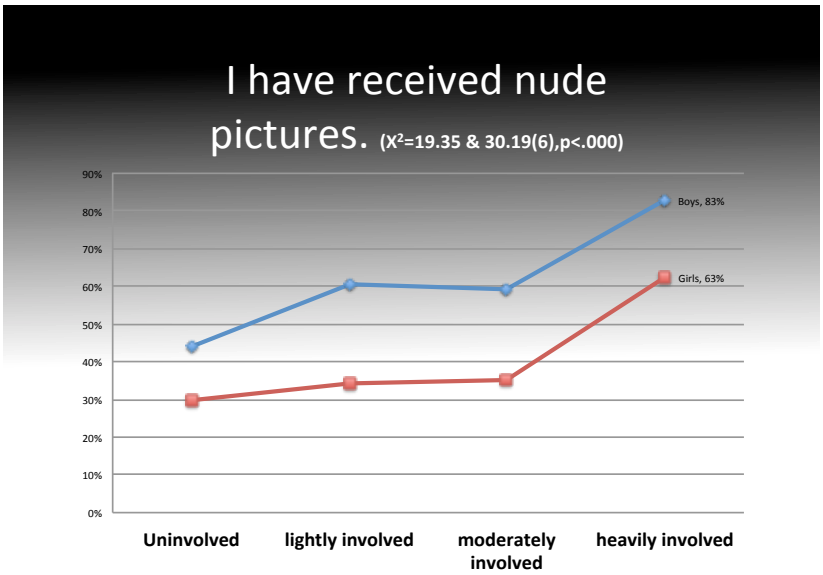
Girls are more likely than boys to report than when they drink/party, they are more likely to post something mean or inappropriate. (37% vs. 29%)

Moderately and heavily involved girls are more likely to do this than are any other group of girls or boys.

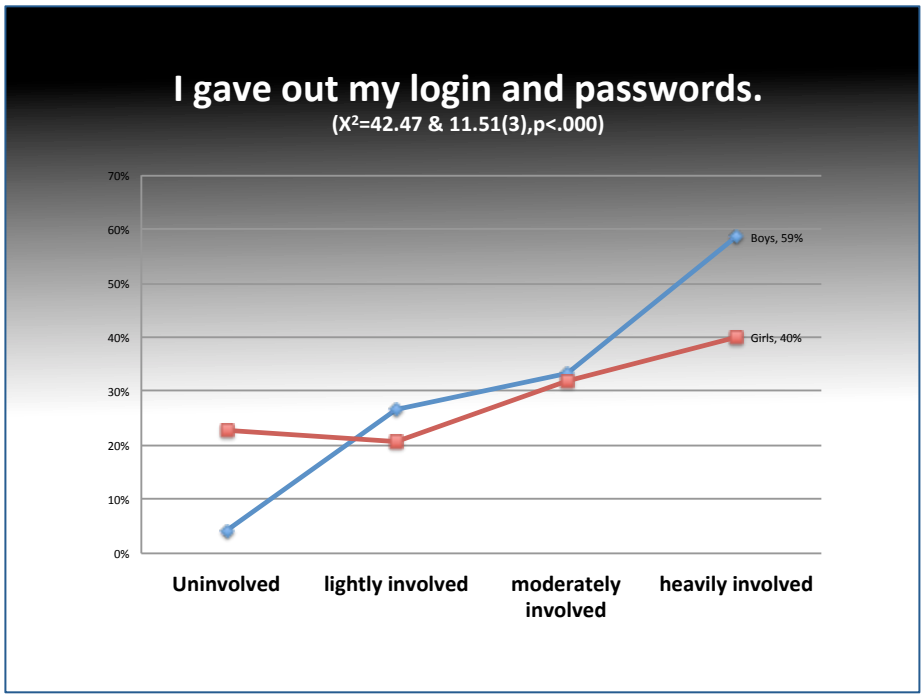


RISK FACTOR #6: Digital Risk Factors

Digital risk factors included variables such as believing that private information is of no interest to others, going to meet in person an online friend, willingness to follow the instructions in an obvious phishing message, giving away login and password information,



sending digital messages which were "misunderstood" as cruelty, and receiving nude pictures. (Note that these variables were chosen to measure the subject's tolerance of risk, versus the presence of truly high risk.) Higher risk tolerance was associated both with being a boy and with being heavily involved in bullying or cyberbullying.

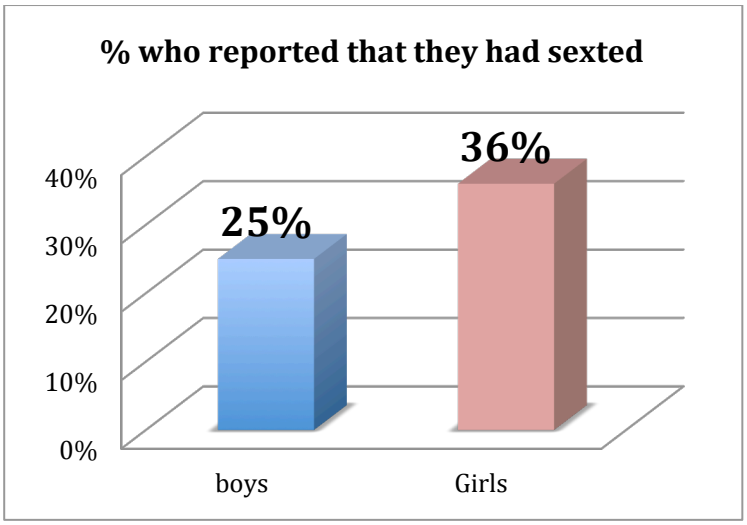


Giving out passwords was associated with level of involvement but was one variable where, among uninvolved subjects, girls were more likely to engage. However, among heavily involved, boys were more likely to give out their passwords.

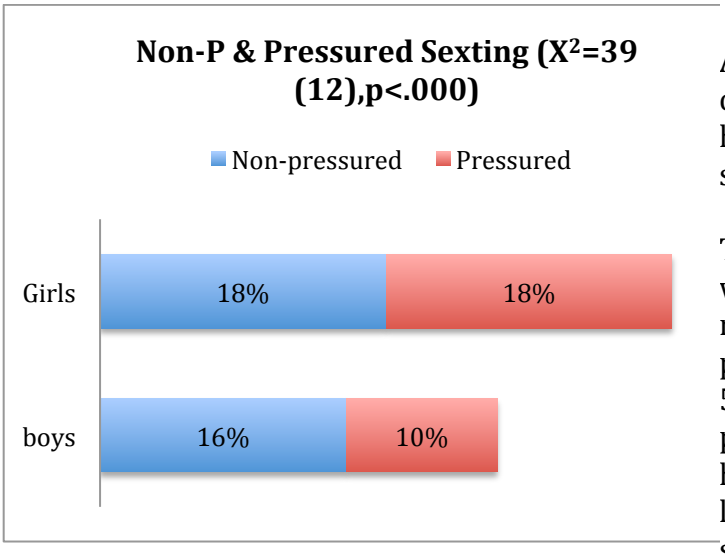
RISK FACTOR #7: Sexting

As with other digital risk factors, the actual risk of sexting (sending nude pictures, in this study) is debatable; but subjects *perceive* sexting as a risky, adult-forbidden activity. Because of the high profile surrounding "sexting" cases, this risk factor was studied in more detail.

In this study, 25% of boys and 36% of girls reported that at some point during high school, they sent a nude photo of themselves via electronic means.



When asked why, in their opinion, teens "sext," most subjects endorsed "they don't know it's a bad idea" (31%) or "they don't think about it until later" (26%). 15% felt that teens are "very emotional" when they sext and similar proportions felt kids are "trying to look cool" or "just don't see it as a bad idea." These findings suggest that education and awareness are an important option.



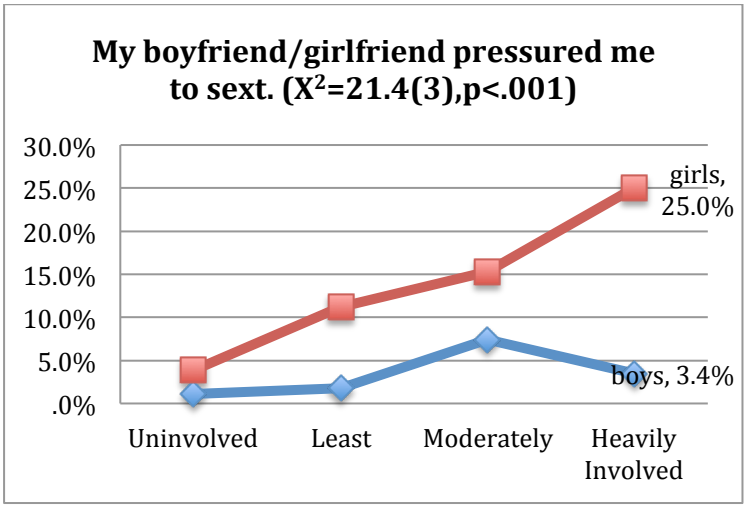
About 50% of sexting girls and 38% of sexting boys reported that they had felt pressured or coerced into sexting.

The more heavily involved a subject was in bullying or cyberbullying, the more likely they were to be pressured into sexting. For example, 50% of lightly involved girls were pressured into sexting, but 70% of heavily involved girls were. 18% of lightly involved boys pressure-sexted, versus 56% of heavily involved boys.

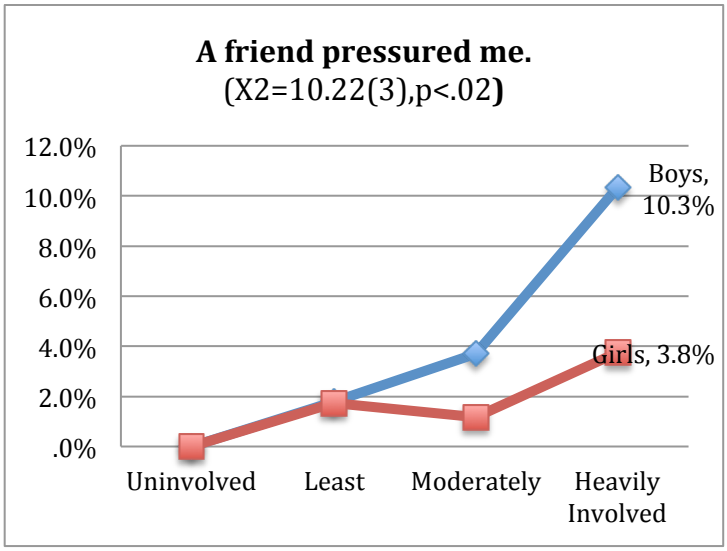
Although pressured-sexting was related to heavy involvement, heavily involved subjects who pressure-sexted reported feeling LESS upset about it than did lightly-involved subjects (F=14.5,p<.000).

About 80% or more of both boys and girls reported that their parents never found out about their sexting.

Notable exceptions were:
Male in-school bullies (60% reported that their parents DID find out about their sexting) and
Male cyberbully-victims (40% reported that their parents did find out).



Girls were much more likely to report that their partner/date had been the person who had pressured them to sext. This was really mostly true, however, for moderately and heavily involved girls.



Boys were more likely to be pressured by friends, but again, this was primarily true for heavily involved boys (X^2=10.22(3),p<.02).

Girls overwhelmingly reported being pressured by boys. Boys reported being pressured by either gender (X^2=67/62(12),p<.000).

Few subjects (1% of girls and 10% of boys) reported being pressured to sext by unknown strangers online.

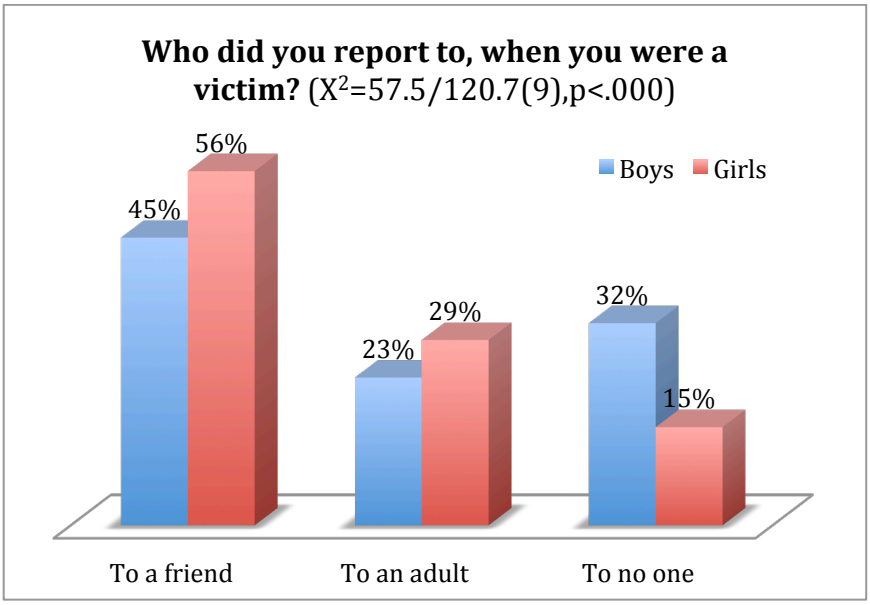
The Takeaway

Section IV: Characteristics of Different Types of Bullies and Victims

- This section found relationships between substance abuse, dating violence, sibling bullying, special education, risky digital behaviors, sexting, and bullying and cyberbullying.
- For both genders, heavily involved subjects (who are both bullies and victims, and involved both online and offline) were more likely to report that a sibling had bullied them.
- For other risk factors, girls and boys demonstrated differences. Male bullies were associated with a certain type of special needs, substance abuse, and risky online behaviors (including sexting under pressure).
- Female bullies were associated with being a victim of dating violence, risky digital behaviors when intoxicated, and being pressured by a boyfriend into sexting.
- Not all students who bully or cyberbully showed elevated risk factors. Heavily involved subjects were much more likely to endorse risk factors.
- Generally, the more involved a subject was in bullying and cyberbullying, the higher the likelihood that they would endorse risk factors.

Section V: Reporting

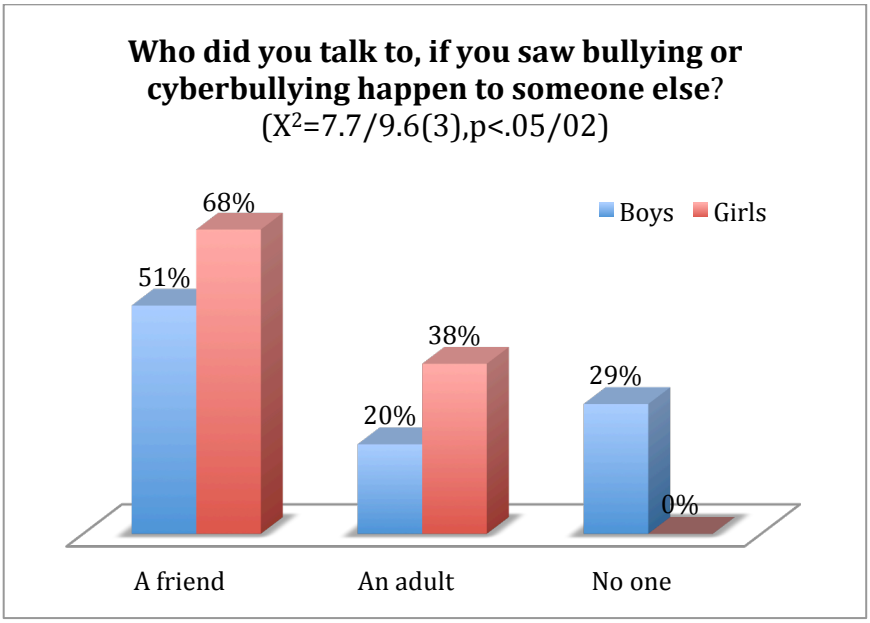
Reporting *as a victim* and *as a bystander* were treated as separate variables. There is no reason to assume that reporting behaviors would be no different if the reporter is the target of bullying, versus a witness to it. In addition, subjects were asked about reporting *both* to adults and to peers.



Reporting as a VICTIM and reporting as a BYSTANDER were similar.

However, girls were slightly more likely to talk as a BYSTANDER.

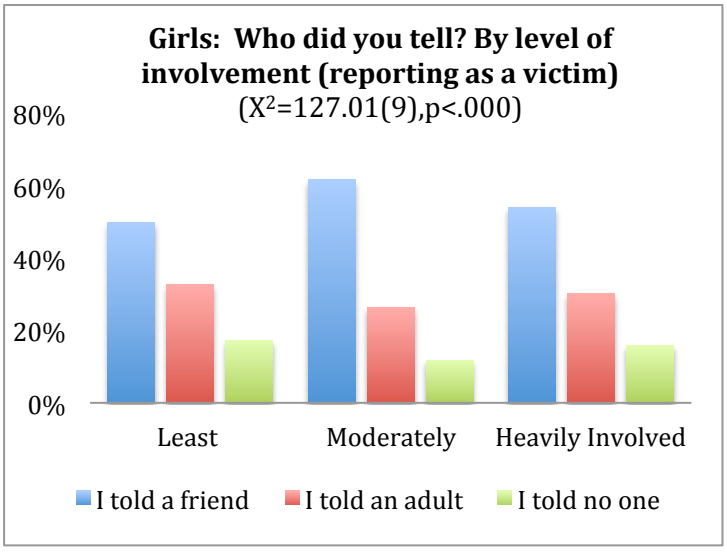
Overall, not surprisingly, both genders showed a marked preference for talking to friends over adults.

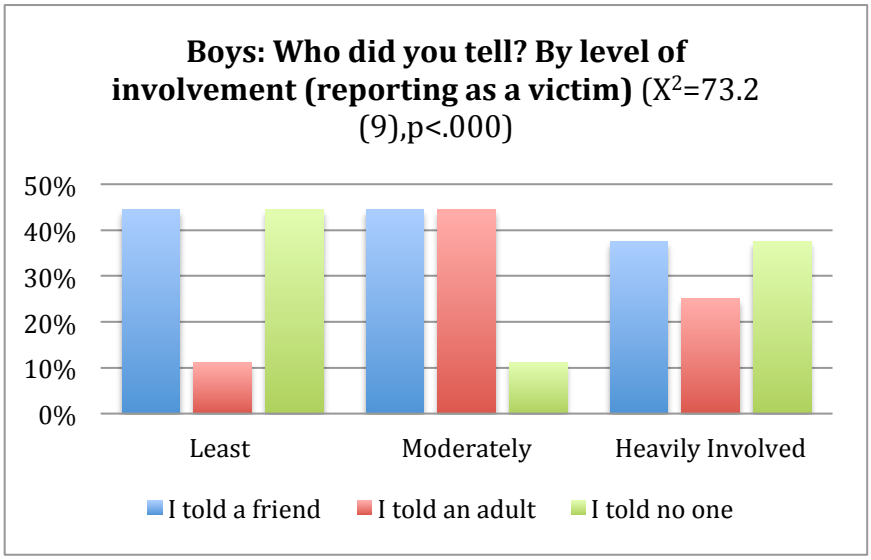


Boys were most likely to report that they told no one, but if you count "telling friends" as reporting, then most kids do report when they are bullied or witness bullying.

At every level of involvement, girls preferred telling friends first, adults second, and "no one" last.

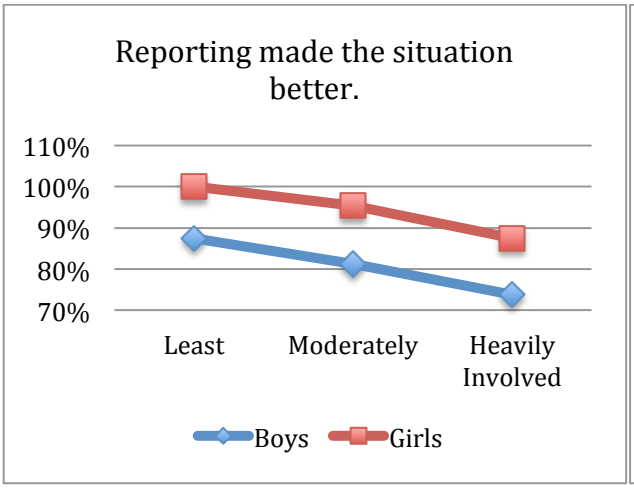
For boys, however, reporting differed between boys who were lightly involved and boys who were more heavily involved in bullying and cyberbullying.

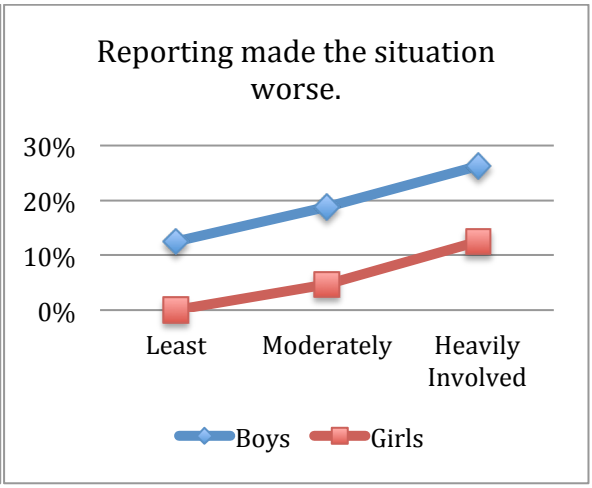




Least involved boys were not interested in talking to adults. They reported only to friends or to no one.

Boys who were moderately and heavily involved were much more willing to talk to adults, although they still liked talking to their friends just as much or more.



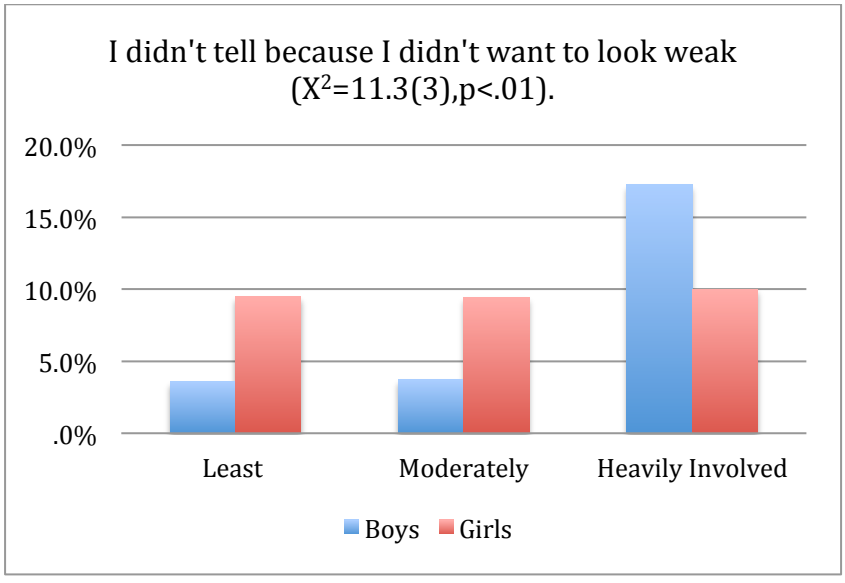


Heavily involved students were more likely to feel that reporting made the situation worse rather than better, and the opposite was true for the lightly involved subjects. Girls were also more likely to feel that reporting was successful, and boys were more likely to feel overall that it made the situation worse.

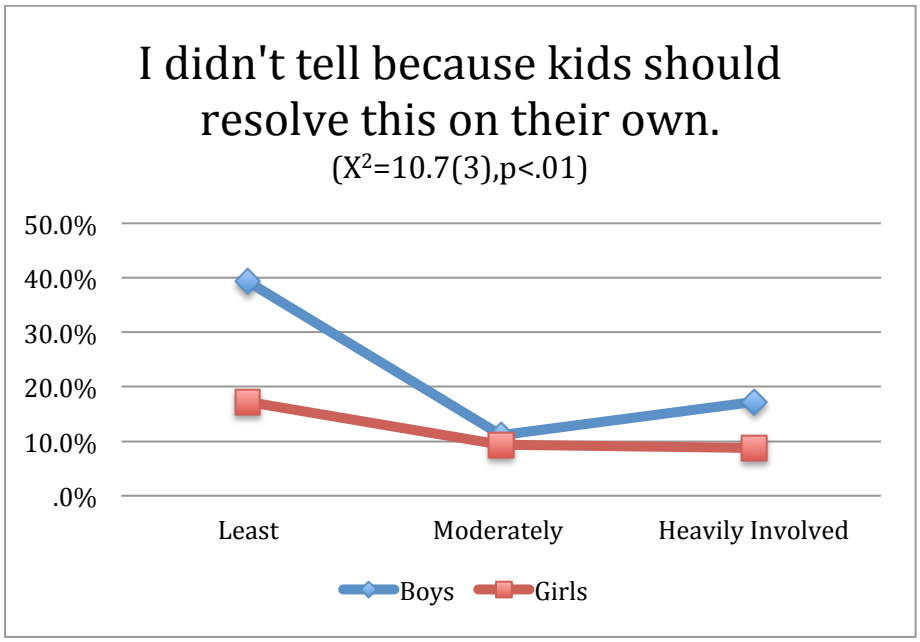
Why don't kids talk to adults (when they are a victim)?

Subjects who were more heavily involved in bullying and cyberbullying had different opinions about why they did not report (as a victim) to adults.

Heavily involved boys were most concerned about appearing "weak" and heavily involved subjects (both boys and girls) were worried about others finding out that they had told.



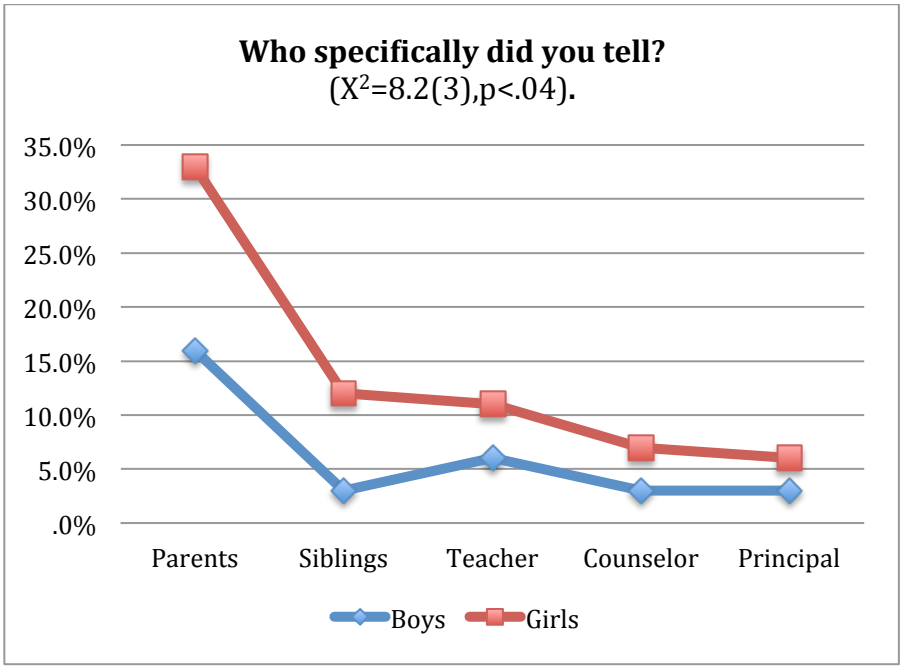
Subjects who were most lightly involved in bullying and cyberbullying were more likely to say that they didn't tell because either "kids should resolve this on their own" or "adults won't take action anyway."

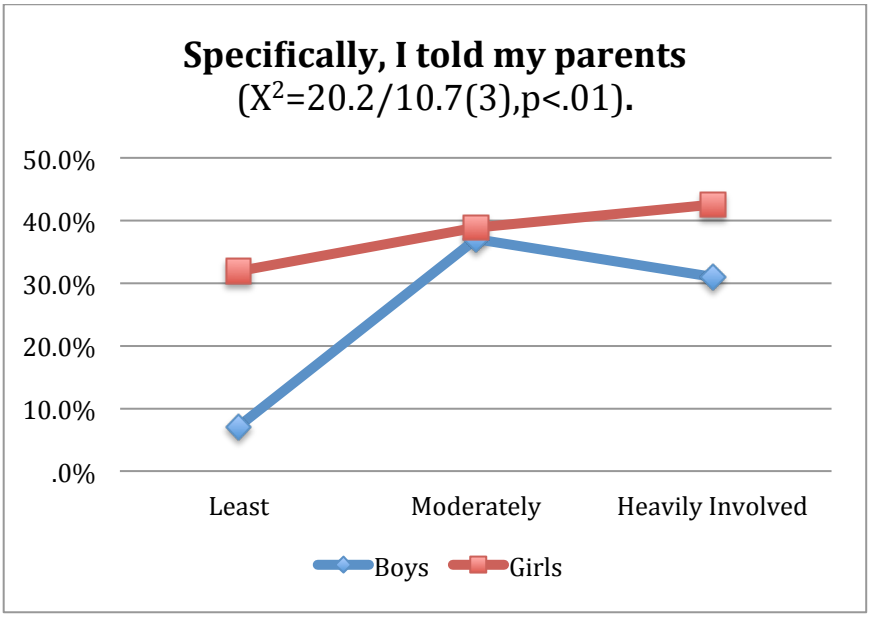


What about the kids that do talk to adults?

Overall, subjects who did report were most likely to report to their parents.

Girls were more likely to report in general, relative to boys.



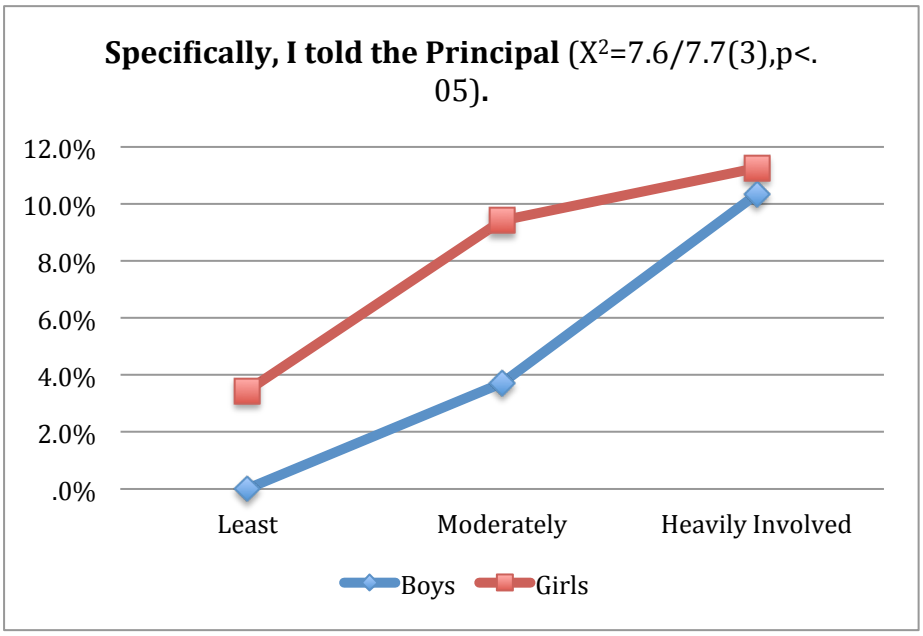


Heavily involved subjects were more likely to report than were lightly involved subjects.

This trend was stronger for boys than for girls.

It is notable than heavily involved subjects – both boys and girls – were more likely than other subjects to report even to the principal.

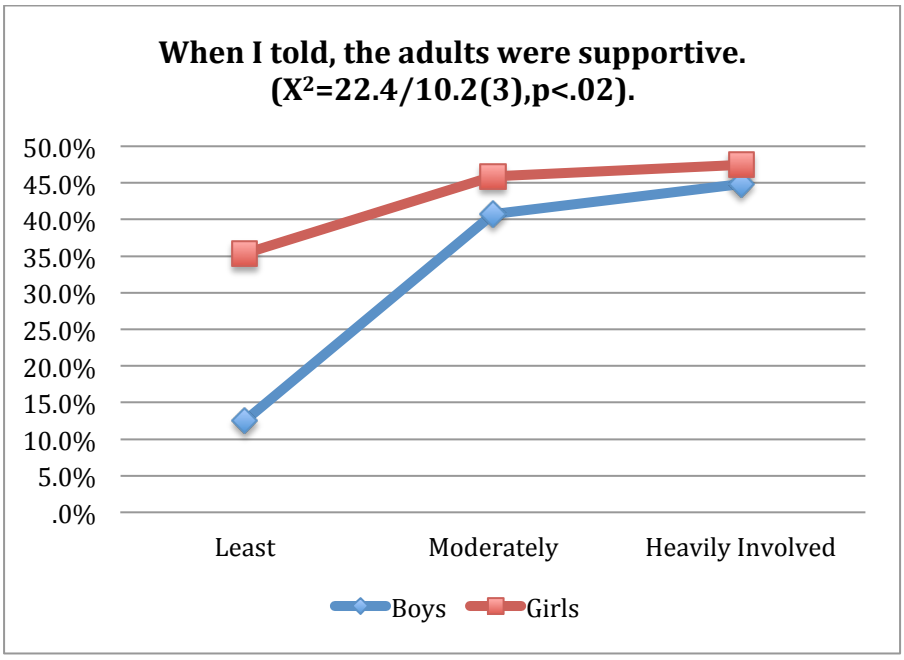
Although overall only 3% of boys reported to the principal, more than 10% of heavily involved boys reported to the principal.

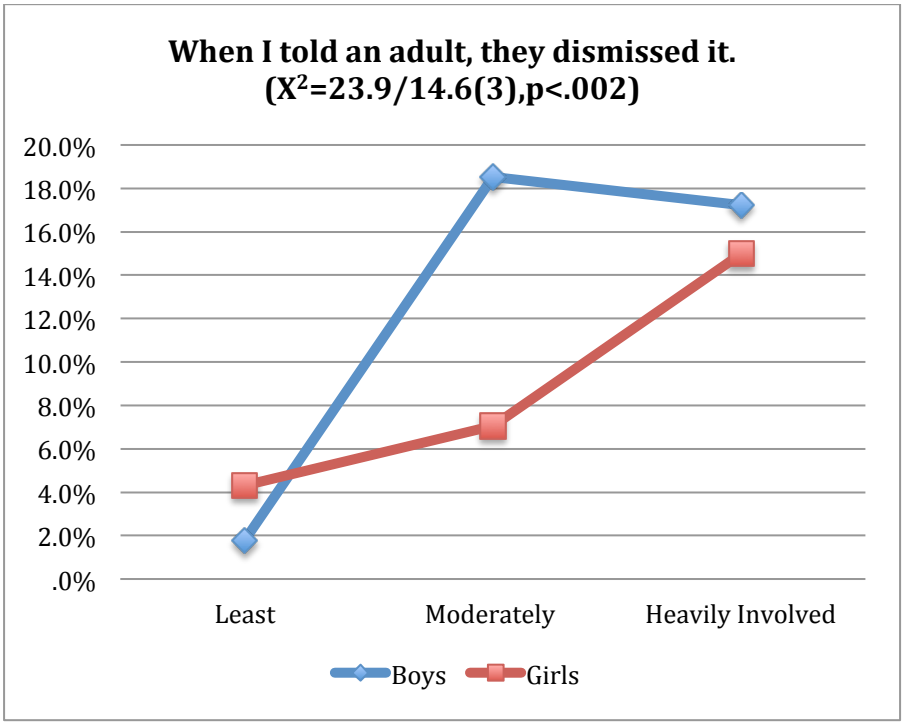


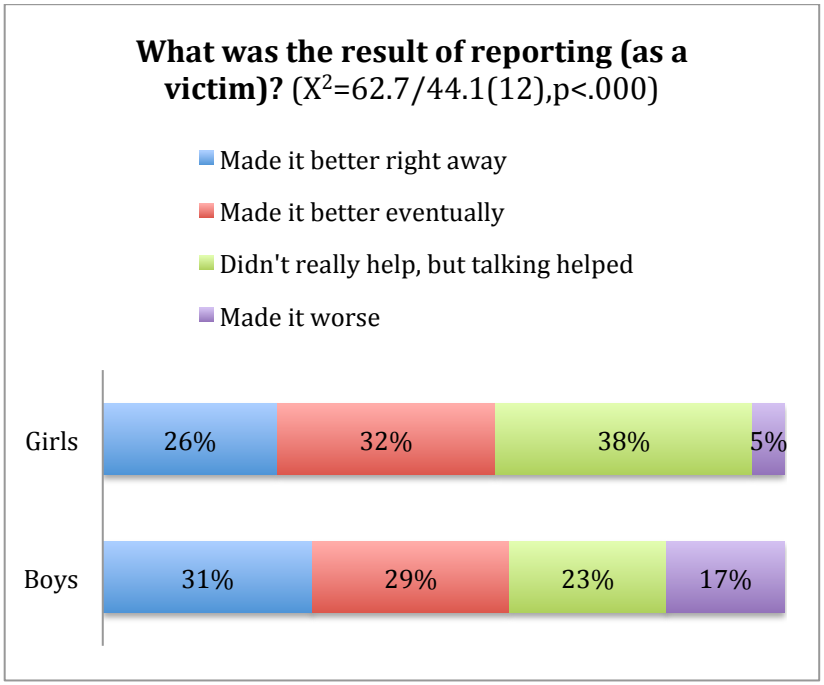
Adult Responses After a Victim Reports

Overall, both male and female victims were most likely to report that adults were supportive when they reported. Girls were more likely to believe this.

It is interesting that heavily involved boys and girls were more likely to endorse both a response that suggested that the adults were supportive, and a response that suggested that the adults dismissed the report (i.e., were not supportive). This suggests that either heavily involved subjects may feel that adults are both supportive and dismissive (e.g., first supportive, then dismissive) or that different heavily involved subjects felt differently. Further analyses will be needed to tease apart this issue.



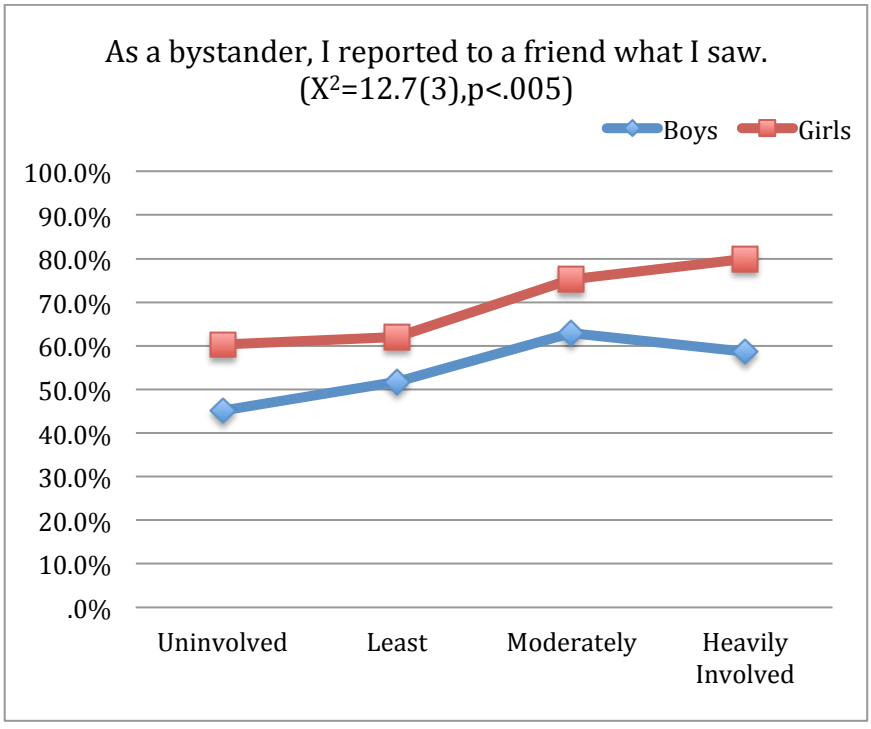




Overall, clearly most subjects found their own reporting helpful, either emotionally or in a practical sense.

In the abstract, boys were more likely than girls to feel that reporting ultimately made the situation worse. **Despite this, about 40% of both boys and girls believe that "it usually helps" to tell adults. Only about 5% thought it makes it worse.** One exception was heavily involved subjects, who were most likely to hold that belief.

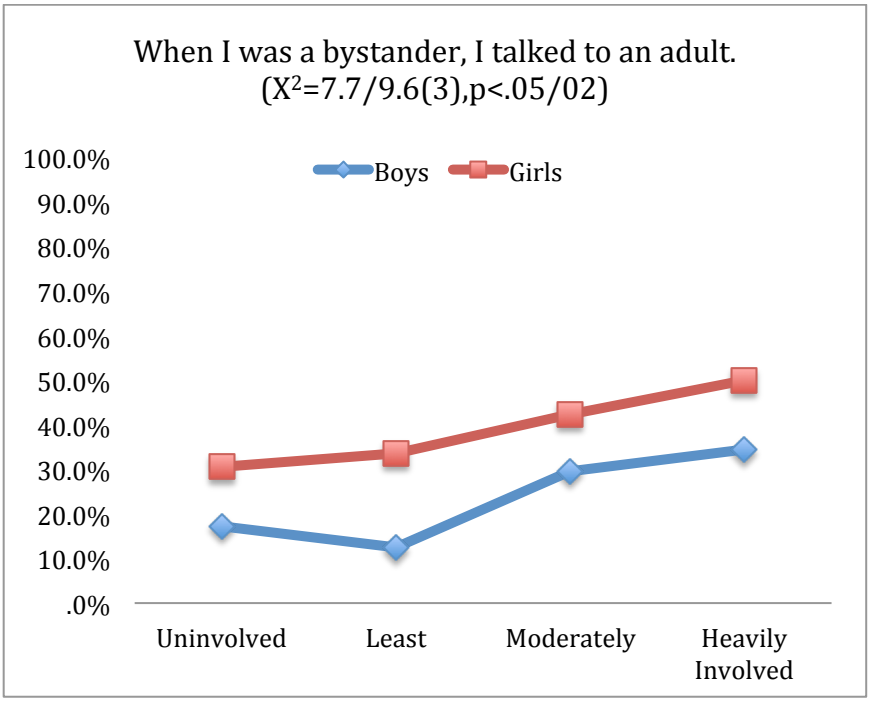
Reporting as a Bystander



In many ways, reporting as a bystander was similar to reporting as a victim.

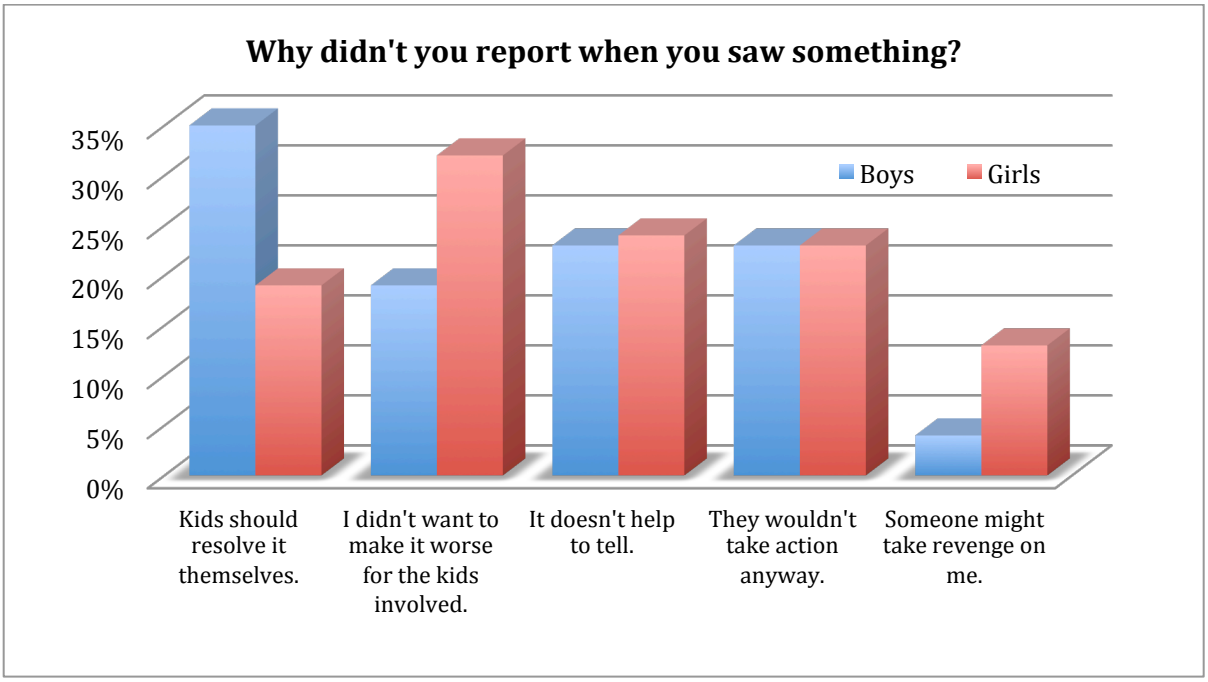
Girls are consistently more likely to state that they reported as a bystander.

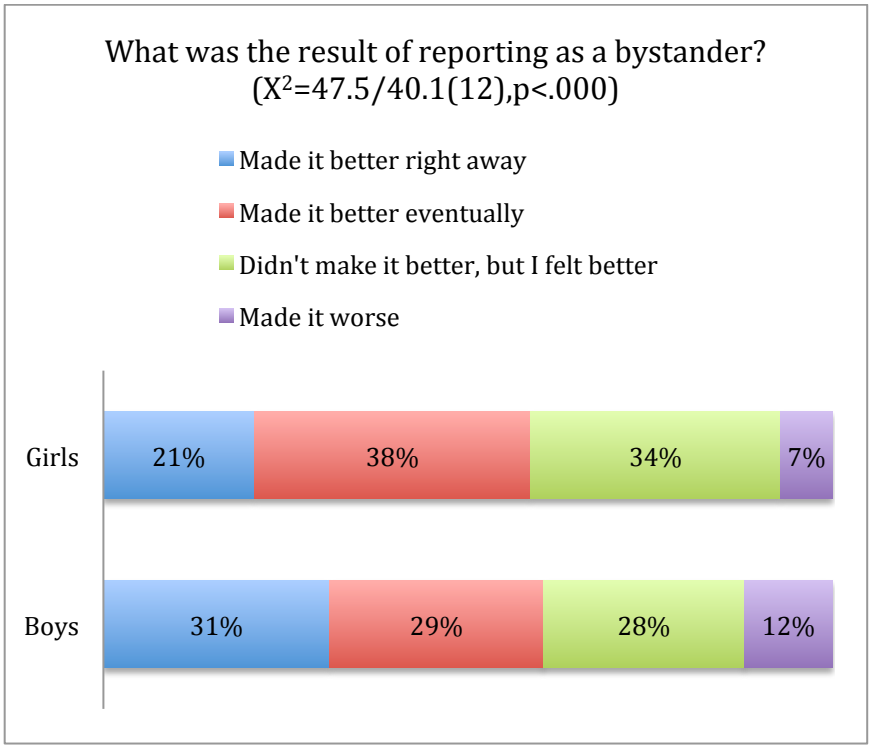
Both boys and girls are more likely to report to friends or peers, rather than to adults.



Both genders are also more likely to report to both friends and adults if they are heavily involved with bullying and cyberbullying.

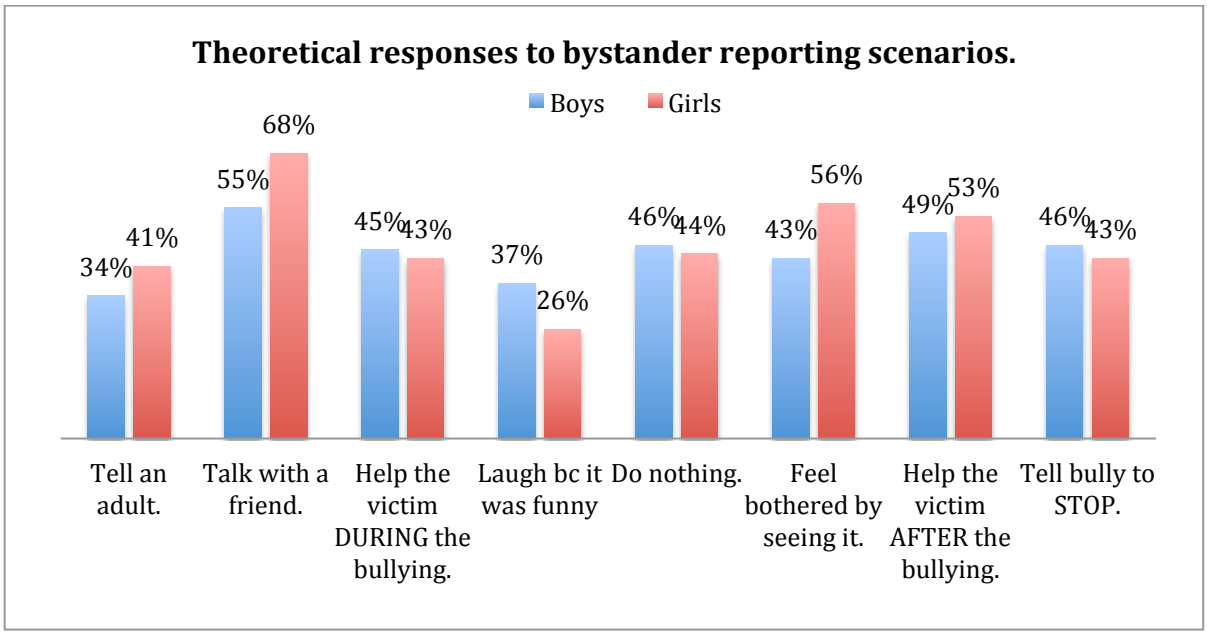
The rationale for not reporting was a little different between the genders. Girls worried more about getting someone in trouble; boys feel that kids should resolve these things alone. The genders equally believed that adults wouldn't help and wouldn't take action anyway.





Although boys were slightly more likely to report that reporting as a bystander made the situation worse, overwhelmingly, both boys and girls said that reporting as a bystander improved the situation.

When given different bystander scenarios, the same pattern consistently emerged. Bystanders prefer to talk with friends about what they see, and if they help a target, they want to help after the bullying episode is over. They do report that seeing bullying makes them feel bothered.



The Takeaway
Section V: Reporting

- Reporting as a victim and reporting as a witness/bystander were substantially similar. Overall, subjects preferred reporting to peers, parents, and adult educators, in that order.

- Compared to their peers, heavily involved subjects were much more willing to report to educators. However, they were also more likely to feel that reporting to adults was not successful.

- Overall, subjects were about eight times more likely to feel that reporting was helpful rather than harmful.

- Boys, and heavily involved subjects, were the most likely to feel that reporting made their situation worse.

- The more heavily involved a subject was, the more likely they were to go report to an adult.

- When given scenarios, subjects reported that as bystanders they preferred helping students who are victims after the bullying is over, and talking the situation over with friends.

Recommendations

1. When a child reports to an educator, educators should query the reporter about their involvement both as victims and as bullies. Children who are involved in both roles may be struggling with other problems, such as substance abuse, risky digital behaviors, dating violence, and other social problems.

2. "Sexting" cases should be queried for evidence of pressure and social coercion from friends and dating partners.

3. Boys whose IEPs commence during middle or high school are probably at higher risk for involvement in bullying and cyberbullying.

4. Online "situations" should be examined to reveal if they most probably resemble bullying or, alternatively, are most like an equal-power fight.

5. Adults should be trained to respond to gateway behaviors.

6. Students require programming to….
    a. address social issues such as tolerance and ethical behaviors in the face of diversity;
    b. enhance their knowledge about risks such as phishing and the relationship between substance abuse and risky digital behaviors; and
    c. teach them how to encourage their friends to report to them and, importantly, how to help friends who do talk with them about either witnessing or being a target of bullying or cyberbullying.

7. All students should be encouraged to report to *anyone* they feel comfortable with, including peers. Adults should make efforts to help students feel comfortable talking. The emphasis on only "telling" adults should be abandoned.

8. All students, and especially boys, should be told as a follow-up to their report that the information is being taken seriously and not ignored or forgotten.

9. Girls require programming which addresses the issue of bullying among friends and the healthy handling of conflict within a relationship. The impact of electronic communications upon handling conflict should be part of that educational programming.

10. Cyberbullying of adults should be regarded as an attempt to engage adults for help (albeit a dysfunctional attempt) and a possible signal that a child is struggling to handle bullying and/or cyberbullying.

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