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Parental advice to preadolescent bystanders about how to intervene during bullying differs by form of bullying

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Abstract

The current study examined parental advice given to fourth- and fifth-grade preadolescents who imagined being bystanders to different forms of bullying (physical, verbal, property attack, social manipulation, exclusion). We assessed the frequency with which parents advised youth to follow specific intervention strategies (stop the bully, help/comfort the victim, tell adults), and we tested whether the frequency by which parents provided each kind of advice varied by the form of bullying described. One hundred and six fourth- and fifth-grade preadolescents completed an interaction in which their parent gave them advice about how to respond if they were bystanders to five hypothetical bullying situations. Each situation described a different form of bullying. Across forms of bullying, parents most frequently told bystander children to intervene by telling an adult. However, advice differed based on the form of bullying presented. Parents most frequently advised children to "tell an adult" in response to physical bullying or property attacks, most frequently advised children to "help/comfort victims" in response to social exclusion and physical attacks, and most frequently advised children to "stop the bully" in response to verbal and social manipulation bullying.

KEYWORDS
bullying, bullying form, bystander intervention, parental advice, school-based programs

1 | INTRODUCTION

Ten percent of youth report being bullied regularly (Nansel et al., 2001), with bullying defined as intentional, repeated acts of aggression involving a power imbalance (Olweus, 1993). Bullying can take various forms including physical aggression (e.g., hitting or kicking), verbal aggression (teasing or name-calling), social manipulation (e.g., gossiping or spreading rumors), property attacks (e.g., damaging or stealing another's belongings), and social rebuff (e.g., ignoring or excluding; Morrow, Hubbard, & Swift, 2014). Bullying is associated with harmful outcomes across academic, emotional, and health domains both for bullied youth (Due et al., 2005; Hawker & Boulton, 2001; Nansel et al., 2001) and for bystander children who witness bullying (Machmutow, Perren, Sticca, & Alsaker, 2012; Nishina & Juvonen, 2005). Given these problematic outcomes, educators, parents, and children alike are invested in addressing the problem of school bullying. To make a meaningful impact on the problem of school bullying, it is important to understand how the social ecology in which children are embedded establishes and maintains bullying (Swearer & Espelage, 2010). Such an understanding can help guide efforts to engage multiple stakeholders in prevention and intervention efforts to reduce school bullying.

Bullying is widely understood as a social phenomenon that includes not only bullies and victims but also bystander children who respond in a variety of ways including watching passively, leaving the situation, or joining the bullying (Pöyhönen, Juvonen, & Salmivalli, 2012). When bystander children actively express disapproval, bullies tend to stop aggressing (O'Connell, Pepler, & Craig, 1999; Sainio, Veenstra, Huitsing, & Salmivalli, 2011; Salmivalli, Voeten, & Poskiparta, 2011). In fact, a hallmark observational study found that, most of the time, bullying stops within 10 seconds of a bystander intervening (Craig & Pepler, 1997). Given these findings, many schools have adopted bullying prevention programs that encourage children to intervene on behalf of victims (Polanin, Espelage, & Pigott, 2012). A meta-analysis indicates that such bystander-oriented bullying prevention programs do, in fact, increase bystander intervention (Polanin et al., 2012).

In addition to the peer network, children's social ecologies include adults who may be well-positioned to prevent or put an end to bullying. School-based professionals such as teachers, principals, and headmasters spend considerable time with their students and often observe or learn about bullying that occurs. These professionals can intervene directly to support victims, and their beliefs and behaviors have been shown to relate to bullying reductions. For example, when students perceive their teachers as efficacious in decreasing bullying, there is a longitudinal reduction in peer-reported bullying (Veenstra, Lindenberg, Huitsing, Sainio, & Salmivalli, 2014). Similarly, teachers' specific responses to bullying (e.g., separating students) have been longitudinally linked to changes in bullying among their students (Kochenderfer-Ladd & Pelletier, 2008; Troop-Gordon & Ladd, 2015). Clearly, teachers can be powerful agents in preventing school bullying.

Similarly, adults at home may be well-positioned to end bullying. Research suggests that parents are more likely to be aware of their own child being the victim of bullying than are the child's teachers (Houndoumadi & Pateraki, 2001). In fact, parental involvement is theorized to be a key component of bullying prevention and intervention (Fekkes, Pijpers, & Verloove-Vanhorick, 2004; Jeynes, 2008). A meta-analysis of bullying prevention programs suggests that the most effective school programs include parent components (Ttofi & Farrington, 2011). These parent components can take many forms. For example, some school-based programs could include trainings, meetings, and/or written guidelines for parents to reference; however, these activities have been described as being a "light touch" (Bradshaw, 2015). Additional information about *how* parents' can become *more* involved in school-based bullying prevention and intervention programs may help make these programs even more effective.

One way that parents influence children's behavior is through "social coaching" or giving children advice about difficult peer interactions. In fact, adolescents identify advice-giving as the most salient way that parents can be involved in their school-related behavior, including behavior with peers (Holloway, Park, Jonas, Bempechat, & Li, 2014). Generally, children who receive quality parental coaching and facilitation around peer issues exhibit greater social competence (Laird, Pettit, Mize, Brown, & Lindsey, 1994; Mize & Pettit, 1997), and, in preadolescence,

parental advice predicts peer acceptance prospectively across the transition to middle school (Gregson, Tu, Erath, & Pettit, 2017). Furthermore, mothers' advice about specific coping strategies has been shown to predict preadolescents' responses to peer stress longitudinally (Abaied & Rudolph, 2011). On the topic of bullying, children who receive coaching and facilitation around peer issues have been found to experience bullying less frequently (Healy, Sanders, & Iyer, 2015), although some parents of children who have been bullied report that they believe that giving advice to victimized children is ineffective in stopping the bullying (Brown, Aalsman, & Ott, 2013). Clearly, advice-giving is a common way that parents contribute to children's social development. Advice-giving may be particularly helpful to children who are bystanders to bullying and who have power to stop bullying incidents.

It is surprising that little work has examined parental advice to bystander children, given that many bullying prevention programs are bystander-oriented, parents play an important role in these programs, and advice-giving is a common and salient way that parents socialize their children's peer behavior. One recent study demonstrated that children generally respond as bystanders to bullying in ways that their parents have advised them to respond (Grassetti et al., 2018). In that study, children were more likely to intervene when their parents advised intervention. When their parents advised staying out of the situation, children were not only more likely to remain passive bystanders, they were also more likely to behave in ways that worsened bullying. This investigation revealed the importance of consistent messaging between bullying prevention programs and parents and suggested that it is important to understand the factors that predict parental advice to bystander children.

One factor that predicts parental advice to youth may be the form of bullying to which the child is a bystander. Although researchers (e.g., Morrow et al., 2014) and the developers of bullying prevention programs (e.g., Salmivalli, Kärnä, & Poskiparta, 2011) identify multiple forms of bullying, parents typically focus on physical and verbal behaviors when they are asked to define bullying (Smorti, Menesini, & Smith, 2003). Similarly, parents are more likely to contact school when a child has been a victim of physical or verbal bullying compared to social manipulation or exclusion (Waasdorp, Bradshaw, & Duong, 2011; Werner, Senich, & Przepyszny, 2006), perhaps because parents may view social manipulation or exclusion as less serious and harmful than physical or verbal bullying (Sawyer, Mishna, Pepler, & Wiener, 2011). Since bystanders intervene more frequently during situations that they perceive as more dangerous, it may follow that parents will be more likely to suggest that children intervene during situations that they most clearly perceive as bullying (e.g., physical and verbal bullying).

To date, only one study has examined how bullying form relates to parental advice. Offrey and Rinaldi (2017) asked parent–adolescent dyads to discuss four hypothetical situations in which they were to imagine that the adolescent was the victim of either physical, verbal, relational, or cyber bullying; parents and adolescents each generated solutions to these situations. Across forms of bullying, parents most often advised youth to inform adults. However, results also revealed differences across forms of bullying, with parents and adolescents generating assertive solutions most often in response to physical bullying, help-seeking solutions most often in response to physical and verbal bullying, and non-confrontational solutions most often in response to verbal and relational bullying. More work is needed to discern whether similar links are found between form of bullying and parental advice when youth are *bystanders* rather than victims of bullying. Furthermore, since adolescent developmental norms indicate movement away from seeking parental advice, research should focus on understanding predictors of parental advice to younger samples of youth. This focus could have important clinical implication for younger children who may be more regularly seeking advice from their parents about social challenges like bullying. Understanding the relative frequency of parents' specific behavioral advice to preadolescent bystander children and determining whether bullying form impacts the advice are the first two goals of the current study.

An additional goal is to investigate whether child gender plays a role in parental advice about bystander behavior. It is well established that girls intervene in bullying situations more frequently than boys (Espelage, Green, & Polanin, 2012; Hawkins, Pepler, & Craig, 2001; O'Connell et al., 1999). This finding combined with the results of the study by Grassetti and colleagues suggesting that bystander children follow their parents' advice about how to respond to bullying (Grassetti et al., 2018) suggests that parents may suggest intervention during bullying more frequently to girls than boys. This hypothesis is consistent with evidence that parents implicitly and explicitly

socialize the prosocial development of boys and girls differently (Mesman & Groeneveld, 2017); for example, parent encourage prosocial behaviors more frequently in infant girls than infant boys (Power & Parke, 1986). On the other hand, Poulin, Nadeau, and Scaramella, (2012) found that the quantity and quality of parental advice about peer relations more generally did not differ by child gender. However, these researchers did not examine the bystander-to-bullying context specifically, nor did they investigate the particular behavioral strategies that parents suggest. To address this question, a final goal of the current study is to examine whether the frequency of each type of bystander advice differs by child gender.

1.1 | The current study

In the current study, we re-analyzed an existing data set (Grassetti et al., 2018) to meet three goals. Our first goal was to assess the frequency by which parents provided different types of advice for how preadolescent bystanders should respond to bullying. Consistent with work on parental advice to victims (Offrey & Rinaldi, 2017), we hypothesized that parents would more frequently advise bystander children to tell adults than advocate for other forms of intervention (i.e., stop the bully or comfort the victim). Our second goal was to examine the link between the form of bullying witnessed and parental advice to bystanders. Since existing literature suggests that form of bullying predicts parental advice to adolescents (Offrey & Rinaldi, 2017), we also expected form to predict parental advice to preadolescents. In particular, since parents most readily define physical and verbal forms as "bullying" (Smorti et al., 2003), we predicted that parents would most frequently advise children to intervene in response to physical and verbal bullying compared to other forms of bullying (property attacks, social manipulation, exclusion). Our third goal was to assess whether the frequency of parental advice about bystander behavior differed by child gender; given the exploratory nature of this goal, we did not make specific a priori hypotheses.

2 | METHOD

2.1 | Sample and participant selection

This study was approved by the University of Delaware Institutional Review Board and was conducted in strict accordance with the approved protocol. Participants were 106 parent–child dyads who were recruited as a subsample from a larger study examining the effectiveness of the KiVa anti-bullying program (KiVa). KiVa is an evidence-based, school-wide bullying prevention program that aims to increase bystander children's intervention in bullying and support of victims. Teachers implement the program through 10 monthly two-part 45-min lessons. KiVa also includes a school-wide KiVa team that addresses indicated cases of bullying through individual and group discussions with victims and bullies (Kärnä et al., 2011; Salmivalli & Poskiparta, 2012). Parents' involvement in this implementation included the ability to access an informational website and booklet.

After stratifying the full sample by child gender and school SES, a researcher telephoned parents at random to invite families to participate. Parents who expressed an interest were scheduled for a 90-min home visit.

Parent participants were primarily mothers (87.7%) of the children, although some fathers (8.5%), grandmothers (1.9%), and one parent's romantic partner (0.9%) also participated. Parental advice did not vary by whether the parent was a mother, father, grandmother, or romantic partner. On average, parents were 39.71 years old (SD = 7.47 years). Fifty-two percent of parents were married, 15% lived with a partner, 14% were divorced, 12% were single, 3% were separated, and 4% described their romantic relationship status as "other." On average, parents completed 14.47 years of school (SD = 2.55), with one third of parents having completed a high school education or less.

Preadolescent participants were 51% female, 50% European American, 32.1% African American, 9.4% as more than one race, 6.6% as Latino, and 1.9% as Asian. Preadolescent participants were on average 10.5 years old (SD = .71 years).

2.2 | Parental advice task

During the home visit, parents and children engaged in a task in which they discussed five hypothetical bullying vignettes. The experimenter introduced the task by saying, "I am going to tell you about some situations that your child might see at school. For each situation, I would like you to discuss what is going on in the situation. Caregiver, please give advice about what your child should do. I will be back in two and a half minutes. Please use the entire time until I return to discuss what is going on in the situation and what your child should do." After 2.5 min, the experimenter returned to the room and read the next vignette to the child. The research presented the vignettes in the same order during each home visit, but the beginning vignette number was randomized across participants.

Existing work suggests that a five-factor model provides a good fit for the multiple forms that bullying can take among 5th graders (Morrow et al., 2014). Although previous studies suggest that verbal bullying is most common in preadolescent samples like the current one, all five forms of bullying occur with sufficient frequency among pre-adolescents to warrant inclusion in the current study (Kshirsagar, Agarwal, & Bavdekar, 2007; Morrow, Hubbard, & Sharp, 2018). For example, Morrow and colleagues used an 8-day daily diary methodology with fifth-grade children and asked them to report whether they were the victim of each form of bullying each day. On average, across the 8 days, children reported being the victim of verbal bullying .95 times, being the victim of exclusion .72 times, being the victim of physical bullying .55 times, being the victim of social manipulation .52 times, and being the victim of property attack .51 times. These data suggest that the average child is the victim of even the least frequent from of bullying approximately once every 16 school days. As such, we developed five vignettes to describe each of the five forms of bullying as follows:

> Verbal bullying: At school, you hear one kid chant to another child "You're ugly, fatty fatty!" You saw this same thing happen the other day.

> Social manipulation: During project time, you overhear one kid say to another child, "If you don't let me have the green marker, I won't invite you to my birthday party." This is not the first time you have heard this kid say this type of thing to this child.

> Property attack: A child in your class just got a cool new backpack and brings the backpack to school. When the teacher is not looking, another kid tries to rip the backpack and then spits on it. You've seen this kid try to mess up this child's belongings at other times before as well.

> Exclusion: During recess, you hear a kid say to another child "No! I've already told you that you can't play with us." This is not the first time this kid has excluded this child from playing.

> Physical bullying: You are working in groups to do a class project. As everyone is moving to form their group, you see one kid push another child so hard that the child falls to the ground. You saw this kid push this child the same way the other day.

2.3 | Observational coding of parental advice

Parent–child conversations during the advice task were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Caregivers' comments on the transcripts were divided into chunks. A new chunk occurred anytime the speaker changed (from caregiver to child). The first author trained eight research assistants to code transcripts of these conversations using a manual describing behavioral advice that was consistent with the KiVa bullying prevention model that was being implemented at the children's school. Each chunk was coded for both context and content. Context codes referred to whether the caregiver's advice was made in the context of the child as a bystander, bully, or victim.

As bystander contexts were of interest to the current study, and because the instructions to the parent specified that they give advice to the child as a bystander, comments made in other contexts were excluded from subsequent analyses. Reliability for the bystander context code was acceptable (κ = .63). Then, coders assigned each bystander chunk one of six content codes:

A Tell an adult: This code was assigned when parents instructed children to intervene by soliciting help from an adult. Example: "Get a teacher to help" (κ = .89).
B Help/comfort the victim: This code was assigned when parents directed children to intervene by helping or comforting the victim. Example: "Tell that kid that you don't agree with the mean thing the bully said" (κ = .79).
C Stop the bully: This code was assigned when parents directed children to intervene directly by stopping the bully. Example: "Tell that child that he needs to stop saying mean things to other kids" (κ = .75).
D Do not intervene: This code was assigned when parents instructed children to stay out of bullying situations. Example: "Don't get involved" (κ = .69).
E Do not tell an adult: This code was assigned when parents instructed children not to involve adults. Example: "Don't be a tattle-tale" (κ = .93).
F Reinforce/assist the bully: This code was assigned when parents instructed children to join in with the bully. Example: "Call the kid names yourself."

Uncodeable chunks were grouped together and evaluated qualitatively for common themes that could inform the creation of additional coding categories, but no new categories for behavioral advice emerged with any consistent frequency.

2.3.1 | Reliability

After the initial training period, the first author tested coders' reliability in independently coding transcripts from ten caregiver-child dyads. The first author's coding was used as the "gold standard" for determining reliability. Coders were considered reliable if they achieved a Cohen's κ of .80 or higher. Four out of eight coders met this reliability criterion. These four coders then coded the transcripts from the remaining 96 dyads. Twenty-five percent of these transcripts were coded by two coders to assess reliability. Coders were not informed which transcripts constituted reliability trials. κ was acceptable for overall content (κ = .82), and the κ for each individual code is listed above.

Because the first three content codes (tell an adult, help/comfort the victim, and stop the bully) comprised more than 90% of all advice given across vignettes, and because the focus of the current paper is on intervention advice, we omitted the remaining three codes from subsequent analyses. Each parent–child dyad received a score for the number of times the parent gave each of the three types of intervention advice to the child in response to each vignette representing the five forms of bullying. Table 1 provides descriptive statistics on these variables.

3 | RESULTS

The first goal of the study was to test the hypothesis that parents most frequently tell bystander children to intervene during bullying situations by telling adults. To test this hypothesis, we conducted a within-subjects one-way analysis of variance in which the three parental advice scores (summed across all five vignettes) were specified as the three-level within-subjects independent variable. Mauchly's test indicated that the assumption of sphericity had been violated, χ^2 (2) = 14.53, p = .001; therefore, degrees of freedom were corrected using Greenhouse–Geisser estimates of sphericity (ε = .88). The frequency of parental advice differed significantly across the three

TABLE 1 Descriptive statistics and pairwise comparisons (*t*-statistic)

Vignette	M	SD	Min	Max	Skew	2.	3.	4.	5.
Parental advice: Tell an adult									
1. Manipulation	.76	1.23	0	5	1.57	1.01	3.11***	10.63***	10.99***
2. Exclusion	.93	1.40	0	8	2.28		3.90***	10.62***	9.55***
3. Verbal	1.75	1.78	0	9	1.41			5.92***	6.41***
4. Property attack	3.10	1.83	0	9	.26				.54
5. Physical	3.22	2.15	0	9	.59				
Parental advice: Help/comfort the victim									
1. Property attack	.63	.93	0	3	1.27	2.20*	4.73***	6.34***	8.71***
2. Manipulation	.97	1.54	0	9	2.38		3.01**	3.59***	5.89***
3. Verbal	1.54	1.78	0	8	1.27			.87	2.9**
4. Physical	1.71	1.63	0	7	.80				2.48*
5. Exclusion	2.32	1.88	0	9	.76				
Parental advice: Stop the bully									
1. Exclusion	.94	1.38	0	6	1.58	1.12	1.63	1.98	3.93***
2. Physical	1.13	1.39	0	7	1.51		−.61	1.03	3.02**
3. Property attack	1.24	1.61	0	9	1.85			.51	2.26*
4. Manipulation	1.34	1.81	0	9	1.63				.12
5. Verbal	1.64	1.68	0	8	1.19				

*p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .002.

types of advice, F (1.77, 181.85) = 17.78, p = .001. Post hoc paired-samples t tests suggested that parents told children to tell adults (M = 9.76, SD = 4.83) significantly more often than they told them to stop the bully (M = 6.30 SD = 5.26), t(103) = 4.98, p < .001, or to help the victim (M = 7.16, SD = 4.26), t(103) = 5.17, p < .001. The frequency with which parents told children to help the victim was not significantly different from the frequency with which they told them to stop the bully, t(103) = 1.44, p = .15.

Our second hypothesis was that parental advice to bystander children would depend upon the form of bullying that the child witnessed. To test this hypothesis, we conducted three within-subjects analyses of variance (one for each type of parental advice). Parental advice scores for each form of bullying were specified as the five-level within-subjects independent variable. Each of the three types of parental advice varied by the form of bullying described in the vignette: stop the bully, F (4, 412) = 4.02, p < .05; help/comfort the victim, F (3.26, 332.83) = 20.17, p < .001; tell an adult, F (3.69, 380.26) = 58.23, p < .001. Mauchly's test indicated that the assumption of sphericity had been violated for both help/comfort the victim, χ^2 (9) = .62, p = .001, and tell an adult, χ^2 (9) = .83, p = .05; therefore, degrees of freedom were corrected using Greenhouse–Geisser estimates of sphericity (ε = .81 and .92, respectively). Post hoc pairwise comparisons identified the pairs of forms of bullying that differed significantly for each parental advice code. To account for multiple comparisons, we used a Bonferroni correction of p < .002 (.05/30 comparisons). Pairwise comparisons are presented in Table 1.

Parents were least likely to advise children to tell adults about exclusion and social manipulation, more likely to give this advice about verbal bullying, and the most likely to give this advice about physical bullying and property attacks. Parents were least likely to tell their children to help/comfort victims when bullying involved property attacks, more likely to give this advice in response to social manipulation, even more likely to give this advice about

verbal and physical bullying, and the most likely to give this advice in response to social exclusion. Parents were less likely to advise children to stop the bully in response to physical bullying, property attacks, and exclusion than in response to verbal bullying or social manipulation.

A final goal of this study was to explore whether parental advice differed for boys and girls. A one-way multivariate analysis suggested that there was no significant difference in frequency of parental advice based on child's gender, $F (3, 92) = .48$, $p = .70$. Wilk's $\Lambda = 0.99$, partial $\eta^2 = .02$.

4 | DISCUSSION

The current study had three goals: (a) to assess the frequency by which parents provided different types of advice for how bystanders should respond to bullying, (b) to examine the link between the form of bullying witnessed and parental advice to bystanders, and (c) to explore whether parental advice differed by child gender. Related to the first goal, we hypothesized that parents would more frequently advise preadolescents bystanders to tell adults than advocate for other forms of intervention (i.e., stop the bully or comfort the victim) based on existing literature that suggests this result in a sample of adolescents who are imagining being victims of bullying (Offrey & Rinaldi, 2017). Related to the second goal, we hypothesized that parents would more frequently advocate for all three types of intervention in response to physical and verbal bullying than the other three forms of bullying, since previous research suggests that parents most clearly interpret these forms of victimization as bullying. Our third goal was exploratory, given the mixed results that emerged from our review of existing literature. Findings supported our first hypothesis and partially supported our second hypothesis while adding nuanced information to our understanding of how bullying form relates to parental advice for how preadolescent bystanders should intervene. Regarding our third hypothesis, our findings suggested that parents did not differ in the advice they gave to boys vs. girls.

Parents in the current study most frequently told bystanders to intervene during bullying situations by telling adults. These results align with Offrey and Rinaldi's (2017) findings that parents most frequently advised adolescent victims of bullying to tell adults. Since Offrey and Rinaldi investigated parents giving adolescents advice as victims and the current study focused on parents giving preadolescents advice as bystanders, we now have evidence that, across developmental time periods and advice contexts, parents default to telling youth to tell adults when bullying occurs. Parents were particularly likely to tell children to intervene by telling adults when children witnessed physical bullying or property attacks, and they were the least likely to give this advice in situations of social manipulation or exclusion. This finding may support the idea that, like teachers (Duy, 2013), some parents view relational forms of victimization as less serious. Thus, they may imagine that children do not need to intervene to stop these forms of bullying. Alternately, although parents may consider these forms of bullying problematic, they may believe that children are well equipped to manage these situations on their own without adult help.

In our sample, "help/comfort the victim" was the second most frequent intervention strategy parents advised. Initially, we hypothesized that parents would readily recognize physical and verbal behaviors as bullying, and thus would be most likely to advise all types of intervention (including help/comfort the victim) in response to physical and verbal bullying. Indeed, physical and verbal bullying emerged as two of three bullying forms that were most likely to spur parental advice to help/comfort the victim. Interestingly, parents also commonly suggested that children help/comfort the victim in response to social exclusion bullying. This surprising finding could be interpreted as meaning that parents recognize social exclusion as a serious form of bullying that warrants intervention, and further, that they recognize the power of children to assist socially excluded peers. This is particularly important among preadolescents as some research suggests that more children are involved in social bullying than physical bullying in elementary school (Vaillancourt et al., 2010). Although adults can certainly offer some comfort to an excluded child, peers are uniquely positioned to do so (Mulvey, Boswell, & Zheng, 2017). Existing literature is consistent with this position; for example, Schmidt and Bagwell (2007) found that friendships characterized by a high level of help buffer the link between peer victimization and many negative outcomes for girls.

Finally, parents least frequently advised bystander children to intervene by stopping the bully. Since parents are most likely to label physical and verbal victimization as bullying (Smorti et al., 2003), we expected that parents would advocate for intervention most frequently in verbal and physical bullying situations. In contradiction to our hypothesis, parents were particularly *unlikely* to advise children to stop the bully when the bullying was physical in nature. One reason for this finding may be that parents were concerned intervening in physical situations could place their children in danger. This interpretation stands in contrast to research that suggests that the bystander effect is attenuated when situations are perceived as dangerous (Fischer et al., 2011), but may make sense considering that participants were parents. In an effort to protect their children, parents may be unlikely to suggest that their children intervene in dangerous situations (e.g. physical bullying), even though people, in general, are more likely to intervene themselves when they are bystanders to dangerous situations. However, parents did advise their children to stop the bully when he/she engaged in verbal bullying, perhaps because this intervention felt safer and possibly more likely to be effective. This finding stands in contrast to the Offrey and Rinaldi (2017) finding that parents and adolescents most often generated non-confrontational solutions in response to verbal bullying; however, the participants in that study were hypothetical victims of verbal bullying, not bystanders to verbal bullying, a role difference that may have provided a greater sense of power. Additionally, parents frequently advised their children to stop the bully in situations of social manipulation, but not in situations of social exclusion. This difference joins with existing work (Morrow et al., 2014) in supporting social manipulation and social exclusion as distinct forms of victimization. One possibility is that parents may view social exclusion as a normal part of social relationships and not necessarily a form of bullying (Sawyer et al., 2011), whereas they may view social manipulation as a more overt and egregious form of peer victimization.

Our final goal was to examine whether parental advice differed for girls and boys. No gender differences emerged; parents advised boys and girls to intervene at similar rates across all three intervention behaviors. Thus, although previous research suggests that girls are more likely to intervene during bullying situations than boys (Espelage et al., 2012; Hawkins et al., 2001; O'Connell et al., 1999), this gender difference does not seem to be attributable to parents advising girls to intervene more frequently than boys. Still, the design of our study did not allow us to examine the frequency with which parents give their children advice about bystander responses in everyday life. Existing literature suggests that, as teens, girls are more likely to seek out their parents' advice about social issues than boys (Greene & Grimsley, 1990). Thus, outside of a research context, parents may talk to girls about peer situations more frequently, and thus might have more opportunities to provide advice.

4.1 | Implications for bullying prevention programs

Parents in our sample most frequently gave their preadolescents the advice to intervene by telling adults. Existing research suggests that older youth (age of 12–18) are most likely to tell adults about physical bullying and property attacks (Petrosino, Guckenburg, DeVoe, & Hanson, 2010). The same study found that other forms of bullying (e.g., verbal bullying, social exclusion, social manipulation) are *not* related to youth informing adults. Since other forms of bullying *do* frequently occur, parents who focus exclusively on advocating that their children "tell adults" about bullying may miss an opportunity to impact children's behavior in peer situations when bystander children cannot or do not want to ask an adult for help. For example, children may encounter situations where they are unable to find an adult who can help. Naturalistic observational studies suggest that bullying often occurs in contexts where adult are not present or where supervision is inadequate (Fite et al., 2013; Hawkins et al., 2001). Furthermore, given that less than a quarter of children report that teachers consistently intervene during bullying situations (Atlas & Pepler, 1998), students may feel that alerting adults is futile. Finally, the social ramifications of overreliance on adult help (e.g., "snitches get stitches") may leave children unwilling to use this strategy even when adults are available and likely to help. As such, children who *only* learn to solicit help from adults may not have other intervention strategies from which to draw when adult help is not feasible or advisable. Accordingly, it is important that bullying prevention efforts provide information to children and parents alike about the variety of options

for intervening during bullying situations. Furthermore, if school-based programs wish to promote children using strategies that include helping and comforting, they may need to provide more instructions about *how* to help and comfort a victim, perhaps by focusing on empathic statements and peer support. Youth who are given opportunities to practice clearly communicating disapproval to a powerful peer could feel empowered to do so when they actually witness bullying occur.

Bullying prevention programs may best meet their goals by enhancing their parental component. To supplement "light touch" (Bradshaw, 2015) support like informational websites, bullying prevention programs might consider engaging with parents through individualized informational sessions and coaching on fostering children's assertiveness and victim-helping behaviors in ways that both maintain bystander child safety and promote the intended outcome of intervening during bullying situations.

4.2 | Limitations

Results should be considered in the context of the study's limitations. First, although the advice-giving task took place in the family's home and the researcher left the room, the task may have lacked ecological validity; in particular, since families understood that they were being recorded, observer effects and socially desirable responding may have occurred. A second limitation is that each vignette focused on a single form of bullying, when real-world bullying episodes often involve more than one form. More research is needed to determine how parents advise bystander children to intervene when they witness multiple forms of victimization in the same interaction.

Moreover, an important direction for future research will be to learn more about the predictors of parental advice and the justifications parents give when they provide advice to their children about intervening in bullying situations. In our transcripts, parents sometimes ask questions before offering advice (e.g., "Is he a nice kid?", "Are you afraid?", "Do you think he would do that to you?"); these questions suggest that some parents may consider multiple factors before offering advice. We also noticed that parents varied in whether they justified their advice, with some parents offering explicit justification ("tell the teacher because he could have really hurt the other kid"), some providing implicit justification ("stand up for that poor child"), and some offering no justification. This range of approaches may influence the likelihood that children will follow parental advice. Finally, parents' own experiences, attitudes, and beliefs around bullying may predict the advice they give. In fact, existing research suggests that parents' historical involvement with bullying is predictive of their views, level of concerns, and strategies when their children are bullied (Cooper & Nickerson, 2013). We encourage future researchers to address each of these predictors of parental advice and the likelihood that children will follow it.

Despite these limitations, the current study helps to advance our understanding of parental advice to bystander children. It is our hope that it will provide some guidance to those seeking to improve consistent messaging between home and school on the strategies that children should employ when they witness bullying occur.

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