

Article 8:

Coloroso, Barbara. The Bully, the Bullied, and the Bystander. New York: Harper/Quill, 2004.

[Excerpts]

¶1 In a study conducted in 2001 by the Kaiser Foundation, a U.S. health care philanthropy organization, in conjunction with the Nickelodeon TV network and Children Now, a youth advocacy group, almost three-quarters of preteens interviewed said bullying is a regular occurrence at school and that it becomes even more pervasive as kids start high school; 86 percent of children between the ages of twelve and fifteen said that they get teased or bullied at school—making bullying more prevalent than smoking, alcohol, drugs, or sex among the same age group. More than half of children between the ages of eight and eleven said that bullying is a “big problem” at school. “It’s a big concern on kids’ minds. It’s something they’re dealing with every day,” report Lauren Asher of the Kaiser Foundation.

¶2 Dr. Debra J. Pepler and her colleagues at the La Marsh Centre for Research on Violence and Conflict Resolution at York University conducted a descriptive study on bullying at the request of the Toronto Board of Education. Drawing on answers given by the 211 students in fourteen classes from grades four through eight, their teachers, and their parents, two other researchers, S. Zeigler and M. Rosenstein-Manner (1991), compiled the following statistics:

- 35 percent of the kids were directly involved in bullying incidents.
- Bulling peaked in the eleven- to twelve-year-old age group.
- 38 percent of students identified as special education students were bullied, compared with 18 percent of other students.
- 24 percent reported that race-related bullying occurred now and then or often.
- 23 percent of the students bullied and 71 percent of the teachers reported that teachers intervened often or almost always. (page 12)

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¶3 Individual incidents of verbal, physical, or relational bullying can appear trivial or insignificant, nothing to be overly concerned about, part of the school culture. But it is the imbalance of power, the intent to harm, the threat of further aggression, and the creation of an atmosphere of terror that should raise red flags and signal a need for intervention. Sadly, even when the[se] four markers of bullying are clearly in evidence, adults have been known to minimize or dismiss the bullying, underestimate its seriousness, blame the bullied child, and/or heap on additional insult to injury. (page 22)

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¶4 Racist bullying doesn't just happen. Kids have to be taught to be racist before they can engage in racist bullying. Racist bullying takes place in a climate where children are taught to discriminate against a group of people, where differences are seen as bad, and where the common bonds of humanity are not celebrated.

¶5 Children systematically learn the language of racial slurs and the rules of bigoted behavior through thought (stereotype), feeling (prejudice), and action (discrimination). First, children are taught to *stereotype*—that is, to generalize about an entire group of people without regard to individual differences: [insert a group] are hot-tempered, ugly, lazy, stupid, no good, crazy. . .

¶6 Second, children are taught to *prejudge* a person based on this stereotype. Prejudice is a feeling: We don't like [-----].

¶7 Combine racist thought and feeling and you get children willing to *discriminate* against individuals in that group: You can't play with us. You can't come to our party. We don't want you on our team. Get out of here, you creep!

¶8 This is bullying and needs to be addressed as such. It is only a short walk from racist discrimination to scapegoating a particular child—selecting someone to suffer in place of others or attaching blame or wrongdoing to a specific child when it is not clear who is at fault. Rangi was accused of starting the fight because “his kind” has hot tempers. (page 30)

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[Sexual Bullying]

¶9 Just as racist attitudes can collide with bullying, so, too, can sexist attitudes. And all three forms of bullying—physical, verbal, and relational—can be wrapped in sexual overtones. Because our sexuality is an integral part of who we are, sexual bullying cuts at the core of our being and can have devastating consequences. Peer-to-peer sexual bullying is one of the most widespread forms of violence in our schools today. According to the 1993 “Hostile Hallways” study conducted by the American Association of University Women Educational Foundation, questionnaire responses of 1,632 students from grades eight to eleven offered some startling information:

- 85 percent of girls and 76 percent of boys reported having experienced sexual harassment.
- 65 percent of girls reported being touched, grabbed, or pinched in a sexual way.
- 13 percent of girls or 9 percent of boys reported being forced to do something sexual other than kissing.
- 25 percent of girls stayed home from school or cut classes to avoid sexual harassment.

- 86 percent of girls targeted reported being sexually harassed by their peers.
- 25 percent of girls targeted reported being sexually harassed by school staff.

¶10 One-third of the kids surveyed reported experiencing sexual bullying in sixth grade or earlier. Boys and girls reported experiencing sexual harassment in the hallway (73 percent), in the classroom (65 percent), on the school grounds (48 percent), and in the cafeteria (34 percent). The study pointed to serious education consequences as well as significant threats to the physical and emotional well-being of targeted kids. Girls who mature early and boys who mature late are at a high risk for being targeted for sexual bullying. Kids of different sexual orientation from the majority are likely to be bullied. In the article “Young, Gay, and Bullied (*Young People Now*), researcher I. Rivers wrote about his 1996 study, in which he interviewed 140 gay and lesbian young people. He found that 80 percent of those responding had experienced taunting about their sexual orientation, and over half had been physically assaulted or ridiculed by peers or teachers. (pages 34, 35)

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¶11 Days after the shooting at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado, a group of Nashville, Tennessee, students created a Web site: www.iwillpledge.nashville.com. They invited other students throughout the world to sign the following pledge:

¶12 As part of my community and my school, I WILL:

- pledge to be a part of the solution.
- eliminate taunting from my own behavior.
- encourage others to do the same.
- do my part to make my community a safe place by being more sensitiveto others.
- set the example of a caring individual.
- eliminate profanity toward others from my language.
- not let my words or actions hurt others . . .

. . . and if others won't become a part of the solution, I WILL.

¶13 These kids were willing to take a leadership role, knowing that if they took a stand, others might follow. They also recognized that even if no one else followed in their footsteps, they would do what they knew was right.

¶14 *Cowardice asks the question: is it safe?
Expediency asks the question: is it politic?
Vanity asks the question: is it popular?
But conscience asks the question: is it right? And there comes a time when one must take a position that is neither safe, nor politic, nor popular—but one must take it because it's right.*

--Martin Luther King Jr. (pages 174, 175)