Left Off the Route: A Qualitative Examination of Urban Bus Drivers Wanting to be Players in the Bully Prevention Solution

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Abstract
Every school day millions of children board the bus from home and school oftentimes with 90 others including a bus driver. Perhaps not found in a bus drivers’ job description are the details to monitor and respond to all suspected bullying behaviors. Being bullied can have long-term negative consequences for both bullies and victims. The school bus has been identified as a potential hot spot for student bullying, wherein bus drivers may see, hear, and respond to several types of bullying on a daily basis that often require support from school officials. However, a bus driver’s ability to intercede effectively in cases of school bus bullying may be limited. This qualitative study used a nonprobability, purposeful sample to examine 18 urban African American school bus drivers’ and bus attendants’ experiences in addressing school bus bullying within the context of their riders and school officials. Using focus groups, a definition of school bullying was read aloud to provide context to six questions from a semistructured interview guide that related bus drivers’ experiences in responding to acts of bullying. An
interpretive phenomenology method was used throughout the data analysis process. Several key themes and practices emerged. Results suggest bus drivers' reports were mostly passified and not taken seriously. Furthermore, these bus drivers' experiences overwhelmingly reflected a lack of both being taken seriously and being included in decision making. This led to a key stakeholder: bus drivers, being left out of the process. From these drivers' interviews, a model was developed to illustrate their lived experiences from behind the wheel to working with the school in responding to bullying.

**Keywords**
Bully prevention, bus drivers, youth violence

Wanted: School district looking for adult with excellent driving record to drive a six wheeled, 45-foot-long vehicle that picks up and drops off, twice daily, up to 90 students from home and school. The applicant will be responsible for driving, monitoring, and managing students, ages 4-21, some of whom have behavioral, emotional, and/or physical health conditions. Applicant must also be confident in driving in adverse weather and navigating changing routes. High School diploma or equivalent required. Partial benefits. Please apply.

Although this job posting may be less than appealing for some, 687,200 school bus drivers do, in fact, sign up for such an assignment each year (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016). These drivers are responsible for transporting 25 million U.S. students during the school day (American School Bus Council, 2017) and must not only work with students but at times, parents and school officials (deLara, 2008). Despite Vaillancourt and colleagues’ (2010) study that drew attention to addressing bullying “where this behavior is taking place” (p. 50), bullying has been studied primarily at the intraschool level, with fewer studies that have expanded beyond the playground and into the bus (deLara, 2008; Perkins, Perkins, & Craig, 2014; Raskauskas, 2005). For example, Perkins et al. (2014), looked specifically at middle school students and found that whether male or female, one in five middle school youth reported being bullied while on the bus during the last 30 days. Taking Perkins and colleagues’ (2014) study into account, it stands that for school bus drivers to respond effectively to both bullying and harassment, drivers must rely on school districts’ policies, trainings, and support in challenging situations. However, examining the literature on the inclusion of bus drivers to prevent bullying systemically, it was surprising to learn that, though whole-school approaches were widely in use, there was limited emphasis on bullying on the bus and on the inclusion of bus drivers in bullying prevention.
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(C. B. Evans, Fraser, & Cotter, 2014; Merrell, Gueldner, Ross, & Isava, 2008; Ttofi & Farrington, 2011; Vreeman & Carroll, 2007). That is to say, though programs purported to cover all potential areas to address bullying, a noted hotspot, like the bus, appeared to be a glaring omission (deLara, 2008; N. Evans, 2015). Ttofi and Farrington (2011) suggested specific prevention components that are especially effective with schools that, in congruence with their findings, seem to relate well with school bus bullying: videos, strong disciplinary methods, parent training and meetings, and cooperative group work among school professionals. Yet, when bus drivers are excluded from bully prevention training (deLara, 2008) or cooperative group work with school officials, they can find themselves both having to respond to and becoming targets of harassment and bullying by students, an experience that can be overwhelming (Raskauskas, 2005; P. K. Smith, Shu, & Madsen, 2001). An environment conducive to bullying and harassment may account for the estimated 160,000 students per school day who avoid going to school for fear of being bullied (Flynt & Morton, 2004).

In addition to victims within the general population, empirical literature suggests that many children and adolescents with gender and sexual orientation identities experience harassment, bullying, and physical violence in school environments (Kosciw, Palmer, Kull, & Greytak, 2013; McGuire, Anderson, Toomey, & Russell, 2010). The outcomes for this population of children and adolescents are equally disastrous if not worse than the general population, leading to suicidal ideation and suicide attempts (McGuire et al., 2010). To understand all aspects of school bullying, attention beyond the classroom, hallways, and playground must intersect with incidents of bullying on the school bus (deLara, 2008; Olweus, 1993). However, the extant but limited research informs us on how bus drivers experience bullying and report to school officials (deLara, 2008; N. Evans, 2015; Goodboy, Martin, & Brown, 2016).

**Background**

Bullying has serious consequences for its victims, perpetrators, and bystanders (Thorton, 2002). Being bullied has been shown to be a risk for children; and the bullied youth often experience health problems, such as bed wetting, loss of appetite, headaches, and/or abdominal pain (Gini & Pozzoli, 2013). Furthermore, targets of this type of aggression have been shown to struggle disproportionately, in comparison with individuals who are not bullied, with low self-esteem, loneliness, depression and anxiety, while also being at risk of truancy and dropping out of school (Card, Isaacs, & Hodges, 2007). The bullies, however, are not immune to these
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consequences, as they too can struggle with increased social withdrawal, poor academic achievement, and higher rates of substance abuse and criminal justice system involvement in adult life than the general public (Bender & Lösel, 2011; Olweus, 1993; Ttofi & Farrington, 2011). It is worth noting that bullying is not linear or purely didactic, and that the targeting, social context, and covert delivery often make it dynamic (Sweearer & Hymel, 2015). The social context within the average bullying dynamic has been found, about 85% of the time, to consist of four bystanders witnessing the bullying incident (Pepler et al., 2010), with fewer bystanders willing to intervene as they transition from elementary school to middle school or high school (Marsh et al., 2011). Scholars on this subject have suggested that part of the consequence of being a bystander when bullying is occurring is an elevated risk of negative outcomes (Rivers, Poteat, Noret, & Ashurst, 2009). These findings suggest that bullying, especially in areas with low adult supervision and little means of escape, does not only increase the allowance of bullying behaviors, but is also detrimental to all involved. Vaillancourt et al. (2010) advanced the argument for lack of adult supervision as one of the root causes of the ineffectiveness of school-based antibullying programs. These researchers, upon reviewing 14 antibullying programs (in J. D. Smith, Schneider, Smith, & Ananiadou, 2004), found that a good number of these programs either yield little or no improvement or caused more harm than good. Vaillancourt and colleagues reiterated a study by Vreeman and Carroll (2007) that revealed this same failure, where only three out of 26 programs produced reliable reductions in bullying and victimization.

However, Vaillancourt et al. (2010) using a sample of 5,493 girls and 5,659 boys (Grades 4-12) corroborate that students felt safe when they were well supervised by adult school personnel. This empirical research supports both the need for adult supervision and the potential benefits of school bus drivers’ involvement in antibullying policies and operating procedures that train them to be prepared in situations and circumstances that no one person may be fully ready to address alone (Galliger, Tisak, & Tisac, 2009). Even though these findings are important in promoting school safety, they are not inclusive. Some researchers suggested that adults, especially, school personnel, may participate in harassment of nonheteronormative gender and other gender diverse students (Bontempo & D’Augelli, 2002; Kosciw et al., 2013; McGuire et al., 2010). However, on U.S. school buses most behavior is in fact, prosocial (Galliger et al., 2009). Yet, there is a dearth of empirical literature examining student bullying on the bus (i.e., deLara, 2008; Goodboy et al., 2016; Olweus, 1993; Perkins et al., 2014; Putnam, Handler, Ramirez-Platt, & Luiselli, 2003; Raskauskas, 2005).
Bus Drivers Left Out

It is unfortunate that with an issue such as bullying, which demonstrates underpinnings of students’ antisocial and aggressive behaviors (Olweus, 1993), the views and perspectives of bus drivers are rarely sought after or taken into consideration (deLara, 2008). This marginalization of bus drivers’ views and perspectives is due to society’s largely dismissive attitude toward the role of bus drivers in school systems (deLara, 2008; Putnam et al., 2003). The neglect of bus drivers’ needs and concerns may be borne of the implicit and erroneous assumption that bullying in schools is limited to the physical boundaries of the school (deLara, 2008; McNamee & Mercurio, 2008). Researchers, program developers, policy makers, and experts on bullying have often failed to give bus drivers adequate representation (deLara, 2008). Bus drivers’ services are mostly viewed as auxiliary and thus, their opinions are often overlooked (deLara, 2008). This deprecating perception of the bus drivers’ role in the ecology of the school may help explain why the school bus is usually not viewed as a focal point of aggression and antisocial behavior.

Examining risks of bullying and harassment on the bus involves not only students but sometimes bus drivers, as well. Bus drivers are constantly exposed to a variety of student aggression—as witnesses, observers, and even as targets of students who mostly exercise verbal abuse (Glasø, Bele, Nielsen, & Einarsen, 2011; McNamee & Mercurio, 2008; P. K. Smith et al., 2001). In view of this, deLara (2008) highlighted the importance in polling school bus drivers to understand their unique perspectives and to gain insight into the phenomenon of bullying. This is of particular importance in developing holistic and comprehensive solutions to school bullying (McNamee & Mercurio, 2008; Putnam et al., 2003).

School Bus as Bullying Hot Spot

The potential exists for the school bus to be a hot spot—an environment with limited adult supervision with high incidences of bullying. Evidence is emerging, beyond anecdotes, that bullying on the bus needs further attention. Perkins and colleagues (2014) surveyed over 10,000 students, Grades five through nine, from New York and New Jersey. Their study asked all students where they had been victimized during the school year. The results indicate that about 35% of students reported that they had been bullied or harassed on the school bus. Although less prevalent than the hallways (58%) or lunchroom (51%), the bus was a place where higher victimization occurred as compared with the playground (28%) or bathroom (19%) when combining male and female students. These findings underscore the need for schools to
identify and keenly monitor hot spots to help decrease bullying (Olweus, 1993; Pellegrini, 2002).

To evaluate the prevalence of bullying on the bus by observation, Raskauskas (2005) used bus surveillance videos to examine bullying behavior of students on bus routes in Northern California. With videos from 10 school buses that were examined over a month, Raskauskas examined 30 total bus rides and observed that bullying, indeed, occurs on the bus, with an average of two bullying occurrences taking place on each 25-min bus ride. Physical bullying (49%), was most often identified by Raskauskas compared with verbal bullying (36%), with 21% of all other bullying occurrences having two or more types regarding victimization. Time of day also played a role in predicting the amount of bullying with a significant amount of bullying happening on the trip home from school ($M = 2.50$) compared with the morning trip to school ($M = 1.28$). The increase from morning to afternoon was statistically significant $t(28) = −.2229, p < .05$ with the time of a bullying occurrence ranging from 1 s to 15 min with an average episode taking 2.9 min (Raskauskas, 2005). This suggests that bus drivers who have bigger passenger loads, especially while driving in the afternoon, are at greater risk of school bus bullying. These higher rates of bullying on the bus may also negatively affect bus drivers.

**Bullying: Effects on Bus Drivers and Attendants**

Goodboy and colleagues (2016), when surveying a mostly White sample of 117 Virginia school bus drivers, found that bus drivers were affected not only by student-on-student bullying on the bus, but also that the bus drivers were often personally victimized by student bullies. The researchers found drivers targeted by students and bullied to be stressed, which resulted in an increase in these bus drivers’ anxiety while driving, as well as occupational stress, a lack of job satisfaction and burnout, regardless of their coping strategies. Veteran bus drivers reported being affected more severely than novice drivers (deLara, 2008; Goodboy et al., 2016). This may suggest a negative, cumulative effect of being on the job, year after year, and being targeted by bullying students (Goodboy et al., 2016). Although not widely reported in the empirical literature, it is possible that school bus attendants who ride along and help with loading and unloading students and assisting divers are not immune to the harassment of the bullies.

The bus drivers in Goodboy and colleagues’ (2016) study reported that about two out of the three of school administrators were perceived as supportive. Of the bus drivers who did not experience support, a “lack of follow up” to bus drivers’ concerns were cited. When the sample of bus drivers was
asked if school officials did anything about students who chronically caused problems on the bus, six (20%) answered *not at all* while none of the 30 bus drivers answered *always* (deLara, 2008). This suggests a belief that school administration may have an opportunity to improve support with school bus drivers.

DeLara (2008) also found that veteran bus drivers were less likely to submit the paperwork regarding student bullying or harassment due to the school administrators’ lack of response or interest in the problem. Bus drivers reported, they had stopped filling out discipline reports due to a “lack of response from school administrators” (p. 60). This systemic problem seemed to be indicative of one-way communication: bus drivers reporting bullying incidents to school administration but not receiving follow-up or support, which left bullied children in a continued state of risk. Therefore, this interpretive phenomenological study examined urban school bus drivers’ experiences confronting and coping with student bullying and harassment.

**Method**

**Procedures**

Following the approval of the Indiana University institutional review board (IRB; 1409993201), recruitment for bus drivers was initiated by a nonprofit public health agency that required their newly developed bully prevention program evaluated by an outside source. A community grant, which funded this independent research, used the primary author to lead interviews. Through the public health agency, whose program was being evaluated, and several urban school district administrators, the bus garage supervisor agreed to the interviews.

The study was announced to bus drivers in two ways: First, the bus garage supervisor announced the research project over the P.A. system and, second, flyers were made by the researchers and posted throughout the bus garage. Both the flyers and announcement stated, “Breakfast would be included for those who choose to participate” after their morning bus routes were completed.

**Participants**

After participants gave their consent, colors were chosen as pseudonyms to protect participant identities. In total, two separate focus groups took place on two different days in a private room at the bus garage. A six-question semistructured interview guide was used by three interviewers. Before the
questions were asked, bus drivers were read aloud a definition of bullying (See the appendix).

The bus garage supervisor did not attend the interviews. The first group of drivers interviewed involved seven participants; the second involved 11 participants. The first focus group, although scheduled for 1 hour, lasted nearly two. The second group lasted one and a half hours.

A total of 18 bus drivers and bus attendants (bus monitors) participated in the study. A bus attendant provides support to children and youth who may have severe emotional handicapping conditions or for bus routes that have been found to be behaviorally problematic and need additional assistance to address safety. The bus drivers had a wide range of school bus experience, ranging from 4 to 33 years. All participants identified as Black or African American. All but two participants identified as female.

Analysis

The data were analyzed using a thematic analysis approach. Thematic analysis focuses on the identification of patterns and themes embedded within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The thematic analysis process was used to ensure congruence with the interpretative phenomenological study, which could be based on an inductive approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis was done on a semantic or latent level. At the semantic level, the analysis was generally restricted to explicit semantic content. At the latent level, the analysis involved an exploration and examination of the data to uncover underlying ideas. Finally, thematic analysis was approached within a constructionist or realist framework (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This means that we explored and examined the underlying ideas of the data, and the sociocultural contexts that influenced the focus group discussions.

To keep with the standard of trustworthiness (Guba, 1981), several steps were taken. First, after each interview, a debriefing took place and notes on thoughts were independently taken for further exploration. Second, member checking was conducted by sending each of the study participants a typed copy of the transcript, encouraging responses for any changes or clarification. Finally, the two lead researchers independently coded the data and developed memos. Afterward, codes and memos were compared and discussed, which led to some codes being changed through the consensus of both lead researchers (Guba, 1981).

From the above process, we identified broad and prevalent patterns, and examined their viability as themes. The viability of the themes was dependent upon how well they reflected the content of the data (Patton, 2002). Thematic labels were agreed upon through comparing interpretations.
Results

This study examined urban school bus drivers and bus attendants’ experiences addressing student bullying and harassment. Interpretive phenomenology method was used to examine and make meaning of this data set. All participants indicated that bullying among students, specifically bullying on the bus, were problems that needed to be addressed. In addition, two of the 18 participants stated their school officials provided a strong response to reports of students bullying on the bus. In summary, these participants stated that bullying on the bus persisted as a result of both the failure of school administrators to respond effectively to bus drivers’ reports and the lack of parental cooperation with or support of the schools. The participants noted certain actions and inactions of school administrators and parents that created a culture of impunity among students, with the students believing they could do bullying behaviors without consequence, creating the attitude of “Yes, I can.” These participants expressed a belief that adequate school administrators’ (schools’) responsiveness and parental cooperation were critical to addressing bullying on busses.

The bus drivers and attendants revealed that several factors were responsible for bullying in general, specifically for bullying on the bus. The participants’ responses helped to provide a profile or picture of bullying as they experienced or perceived it. Again, the participants’ responses also related to their experiences with school administrators (schools).

Without an adequate response, students believed that “Yes, I can’ bully and not receive a sanction.” Bus drivers’ responses also focused on how the home environment and community at large factored into the prevalence of bullying. Furthermore, the participants shared how they manage and cope with students’ behavior. Finally, the participants offered suggestions for effective solutions.

Profile of Bullying on Bus

The bus drivers indicated that bullying was simply ubiquitous—in classrooms, on playgrounds, and so on—yet the bus, being a more confined space, appeared to present students with an opportunity that may not be present in school. The bus drivers recognized both perpetrators and targets of bullying varied, as did the types of bullying that occurred on the buses. Notably, bullying was not primarily associated with a particular group of students. Rather, bullying was done by students of different grades, ages, gender, and stature/physical size. Various forms of bullying (e.g., verbal and physical bullying) occurred on the buses. As Mrs. Purple, stated, “I have a first grader on my bus
and he picks on every older... kid that he sits with... it could be him telling them to ‘shut up, you’re ugly, you stink.’” A bus attendant mentioned that on her bus routes, the “younger ones were [her] worse ones.” Providing an age range for these students, Mrs. Aqua, a bus attendant, stated, “... anywhere from the age of nine to about 13 and they are wild.” Mrs. Black, a bus driver, also remarked, “The elementary [students] are much worse.”

There was no clear gender disparity with regard to the initiation or perpetuation of bullying. However, the bus drivers seemed to be in general agreement that boys were often targets of bullying. A bus driver, Mr. Green, mentioned that on his routes, girls did more of the bullying. He said “it’s a unique thing when you see, it’s crazy but you see the girls are harassing more of the boys, bullying them on the buses as opposed to the boys bullying boys and girls bullying girls.”

Two bus drivers mentioned race or immigrant-based acts—one involving a “Mexican,” and the other a student from an unnamed country. The “Mexican” student was the target of both verbal and physical bullying, and the student from the unnamed country was the target of verbal bullying.

Some of the bus drivers and attendants also made oblique references to students with emotional disabilities or behavioral challenges. They mentioned violent bullying episodes, which led to physical restraining when students with severe special needs were on the bus. These EC runs (EC, another term for children in special education with emotional conditions), were often the most difficult to handle according to these bus drivers, as the violent acts exceeded the technical definition of bullying and seemed to be considered to be acts of assault (e.g., beating another student with a seat belt buckle).

Nevertheless, some of the insights the participants shared may be more particular to the bus. For example, the degree of bullying and aggression on the bus seemed to be more extreme depending upon the time of the day. In the mornings, such acts were perceived to be minimal. According to one bus attendant, in the morning, the students were often sleeping—they were the “best kids in the world” (Ms. Orange). On the contrary, in the afternoons or evenings, when students were being driven home from school, acts of bullying and aggression were more prevalent. According to Ms. Aqua and other participants, compared to the morning route, the evening drive is different.

Ms. Aqua: And you would be amazed, “Oh, Lord.”
Unidentified Participant: You’ll be amazed. Don’t do it in the morning
[observe on the bus], do it in the evening.
[Participant Laughs]
Ms. Aqua: What I’m saying catch it in the evening when they light up.
Participants: [laugh] Yea.
Ms. Aqua: They are asleep in the morning.
Unidentified Participants: Because, they sleeping—
Ms. Orange: Best kids in the world.
[Participants Laughing]
Unidentified Participant: I had a substitute driver, she said “oh, this school
is not bad.” Really? Drive me this evening. [Participants Laugh]

Hot spots alone may not indicate a potential incidence of bullying behavior. These participants suggest time of day as an indicator of when students may be more likely to “light up.”

School Administrators and Needed Support

Although the bus drivers and attendants noted that their experiences of bullying and support from school administrators and staff in addressing bullying varied from school to school as well as from one school district to another, almost all of them relayed experiences of receiving little to no support from school administrators. One bus driver described a situation in which a school failed to respond to a report of physical assault on the bus. She asserted that the actions of some schools do not correspond to the existing codes for addressing student misconduct. That bus driver, Mrs. Turquoise, exclaimed, “I’ve got a paper with a [report] of a child hitting a child in the stomach. Bold print! Says ‘any physical contact that is an automatic suspension.’ But they say that is ‘a warning.’” Mrs. Aqua made a similar assertion: “Nothing can be done, write them up, write them up, write them up, they [school administrators] are not gonna do anything.” Concerning the failure of school administrators to take action, Mrs. White, a bus driver, wondered: “Why is it on paper here, and it says that these are the consequences but none of that is happening?”

Furthermore, the bus drivers and attendants revealed that the lack of action by school administrators helped perpetuate bullying and aggressive conduct. The failure of school authorities to act contributed to students’ sense of “Yes I can,” meaning that they could continue bullying without fear of being sanctioned. As one bus driver, Mrs. White, stated, bus drivers did “not have a system to back [them] up” and though people often looked at the issue in terms of respect and disrespect, “it’s the backing that you need in the school system.”

The primary grievance from participants was a lack of administrative support; however, one bus driver disclosed that her school administration worked with her as a driver closely in enforcing sanctions, and that she had “no bullying issues” on the bus. According to Ms. Magenta, who has been a bus
driver for 5 years, and a bus attendant for 4 years, at her school: “they suspend them from the bus... they get suspended from the bus and then their parents have to bring them to school.” As conveyed by Ms. Magenta, and as illustrated in the Bus Drivers’ Approach to Bullying Intervention and Perpetuation model (Figure 1), the intervention of the school administration is a major step in addressing bullying.

For many of these bus drivers, a mantra from the school administrators emerged in response to their reports of bullying incidences. Ms. Aqua states it repeatedly: “Some [schools] be like, ‘just get them home safely.’” Mrs. Mauve, a bus attendant of 7 years, added that: “That’s their famous line—‘get them home safe.’” This demonstrates a continued risk not only for drivers, but also for the students.

Mrs. Turquoise illustrated a story that all participants recalled, in which one of her colleagues, a driver, quit his position mid-route—walked off the job. She recounted,
We had a driver, because “they can,” at her school, a little nice school . . . during the EC, mind you we do these rounds in the evening. . . he kept calling for help, “help me” in other words, oh, they’re slow, city Police. . . I felt for him because you know what, he told them “I’m done, come get the bus.” [The] dispatcher said, “you’re not gonna bring the bus back?” He said “No! I’m done!” [said in unison by the six other participants]. The dispatcher was laughing because she’s like, “everybody is shocked. How you going to get back?” He said, “I will walk, I will catch a cab, I’m done.”

As this incident was being recounted, other participants recalled hearing the situation over the radio and nodding in agreement. This bus driver’s reaction to overwhelming behaviors and lack of support demonstrates the extreme conditions bus drivers can endure and what can occur when needed support from school officials is absent.

Changes in the Home and Community

The bus drivers and attendants expressed the view that the student’s home had a part to play in the students bullying behavior. Also, as captured from the data in the Bus Drivers’ Approach to Bullying Intervention and Perpetuation model, the participants shared their understanding that parental cooperation played a crucial role in addressing bullying. According to Mrs. Turquoise: “when you see the behavior of some of these kids and you meet the parents you just shake your head and say, ‘I know why.’” In addition, participants stressed the complicity of parents in the prevalence of bullying by revealing that there were instances where parents “bullied” school authorities, making it difficult for them to enforce sanctions. With the belief that the home contributed to the incidence of bullying, Mrs. Black stated that efforts to address bullying had to start in the home. She remarked,

I think they need to start at home because sometimes when the kids get on the bus it’s a problem already. Something may have happened in the house for them to start to react at 6:30 in the morning. So they’ve been bullied, whatever, in that house and its coming to me.

Besides repeated examples by bus drivers of how parents contributed to the prevalence of bullying, the bus drivers and attendants also intimated that bullying was a result of societal changes. For example, Mrs. Aqua stated: “It’s more babies having babies, so, they don’t have no guidance.” The same point was also couched in generational terms with indications that we live in a different era. For instance, Mrs. Turquoise stated, “The age we’re dealing
Table 1. Reported Bus Drivers’ Behavior Management Strategies.

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<th>Calling it Out</th>
<th>Rapport Building</th>
<th>Prepraising</th>
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<td>“Calling it out as ‘Bullying.’ When I say that’s ‘bullying,’ that stops them.”</td>
<td>“. . . it helps a lot because it’s not like you are just up there fussing at them—‘why you doing so and so?’ . . . can help sometimes with the fights or the bullying on the bus.”</td>
<td>E.g., “This nice gentleman [student] he will take you.”</td>
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<th>Strategic Seating</th>
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<td>“Now what I do. . . , I say ‘Okay, you guys the last 8 seats on each side leave them blank.’ . . . they are close together and there is no bickering, no hitting, it’s just quiet.”</td>
<td>“Don’t be a friend because they will lose respect for you.”</td>
<td>“Please don’t let me get a new Johnny that won’t act right. . . ”</td>
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with. The age of the parents, I feel that we are totally different than years ago.” Some of the participants also made comparisons between students’ conduct and how principals responded to misconduct several decades ago when they were students, and how these situations are currently being handled. According to Mrs. Black, “the principals didn’t allow that. They took care of the problem,” when she was a student.

**Bus Driver–Student Management**

Bus drivers and attendants identified how they coped with student conduct that could lead to bullying. The behavior management strategies used fundamentally were based on the relationships they maintained with the students. (Table 1).

In addition, bus drivers used different types of seating arrangements other than the one mentioned above. For example, Mr. Blue, a bus driver with 6 years of experience, used the following approach based on gender: “As they get on the bus I say, ‘Guys, you sit in the back, that’s Compton. Girls, sit up in front, that’s Hollywood.’ Compton don’t come to Hollywood, Hollywood don’t go to Compton.”

However, these individual bus driver strategies were reported to intermittently work in addressing bullying, which helped bus drivers offset the lack
of support and backing from the schools as well as parental cooperation. As captured from the data in the Bus Drivers’ Approach to Bullying Intervention and Perpetuation model, the presence of such support resulted in bullying being addressed. This was true for just one (6%) of the 18 (94%) participants. However, the lack of such support, which was the reality of most of the participants (94%), resulted in a reversion to the pernicious cycle of “Yes, I Can” and bullying and aggressive conduct on the bus.

**Bus Driver Seeing and Needing**

These bus drivers and attendants made a case for solutions, noting that addressing or containing bullying in one setting may not necessarily mean that bullying had been stopped. In relation to prevention, Ms. Coal, stated the following:

> I mean we can stop the bullying on our buses as long as they are on our buses seeing that we are the same monitor or bus driver that we’re not gonna put up with this and they don’t do it, but do they get off the bus and take this into the school and still be bullying? I mean have we really stopped the bullying is what I’m asking?

Ms. Turquoise added to the dialogue,

> . . . just give me more support. I don’t care what it may be but support [Interviewer: From?] From everybody. From the parents which I know ain’t happening, from the school, which I know ain’t happening, cos see, they scared of parents. And you know, bringing on down to my job from my supervisor, from everybody cos when I come to you, I’m fed up [Ms. Turquoise: Yea, that’s what I’m saying] I’m fed up cos see, I’ve done everything in my power, what I can do. So when I come to you, you should know this one is a problem and what can we do? So, I will just, [inaudible] you know, support.

The participants revealed that effective solutions require collaboration among various stakeholders. These bus drivers expressed a desire to be included in bullying prevention efforts and interventions. They reported often feeling marginalized when it came to bullying prevention and intervention efforts. As demonstrated above, they noted that although school administrators were willing to work with other stakeholders, bus drivers were often not taken seriously in their reports of bullying behaviors. They interpreted this as the schools’ failure to enforce rules when reports of misconduct were made to be signs of disrespect. Thus, Mrs. Turquoise maintained the position that bullying was “not gonna stop until the schools respect us [bus drivers] a little bit
more and . . . the parents have to deal with more consequences.” She also explained, “the consequences for these parents need to be harder.” However, Mrs. Turquoise also sees school leaders as feeling intimidated by parents whose children are accused of bullying on the bus. She explains,

And they too [school officials], they’ve been bullied. . . and everybody’s been bullied by the parents. . . some schools that you just could see the parents, they just control the whole school and I’m like who is, who is in charge of the school because you got parents, I have been in schools and they literally hollering and screaming on the telephone and the administrator is holding [demonstrates with her hand the pulling of a telephone receiver away from one’s ear] and I’m hearing all of this. I don’t wanna hear that. But they just . . .I think it started at home and it’s just coming out to everybody.

In another interview that underscored bus drivers experiencing reluctance from school officials, Mrs. Red provides further insight by helping explain what is behind the intimidation school officials may be feeling about calling parents.

Interviewer: So we’re kind of just hearing the same theme over and over that it’s just the lack of—
Ms. Red: The school officials—
Ms. Aqua: It depends on the school officials
Ms. Red: I think they’re scared. I think they actually scared, like I looked on this, what this woman was saying, school officials scared of parents. [Participants murmur in agreement] And did you all see that on Facebook, a woman was talking about how the schools are run now, it’s a little circle like the schools are scared of the parents and that it just goes down and down. It’s not like it used to be.

The bus drivers also discussed the need for bullying education to be more graphic by showing students videos on the effects of bullying. Mrs. Silver, a bus attendant with 5 years of experience, opined,

lot of times they don’t show these kids the videos they probably show us. They should show the kids like why kids are killing themselves and you just let them know that’s not nice because we’re all the same just some get it better than others.

Three total participants suggested helping students stand up for themselves and become more assertive. They suggested that students’ lack of assertiveness tended to make them easy targets for bullies. Mrs. White sees it this way:
If you are being bullied it’s because your confidence is low, you know. But if your confidence is up—I think the kids need their confidence built—when the bullying starts, usually, you know how to give people a certain kind of look or you know how to back them off and say “Hey, I’ve had enough.” And it will kind of die down because nobody is gonna try to bully someone that isn’t afraid of them. Bullies only bully people that they know that they can bully.

Mrs. Orange, a bus attendant with 8 years of experience, has a similar belief by stating,

. . .you better get you a backbone and stand up and act like you can do something, I mean, even if you can’t, you better act it. You’ve got to fake it to make it sometimes. I mean, if you stand up to some of these kids, they’ll be like, ah, you’ve got a little heart, yea, I’ve got a little heart, even though you’re scared to death but you’ve got a little heart.

Discussion

These findings suggest that systemically, bus drivers and bus attendants in this study, although embedded in a school system that purports to be using whole-school approaches, feel unimportant in their bully prevention (C. B. Evans et al., 2014; Merrell et al., 2008; Ttofi & Farrington, 2011; Vreeman & Carroll, 2007), especially when reporting to school officials. The bus drivers and attendants in this study identified the challenges of working in a space that may be very different from inside the school and they considered their roles as an important part of addressing troubled students who are both bullying and being targeted on the bus. From these drivers and attendants, several new insights as well as additional findings from previous bullying studies have emerged (Raskauskas, 2005).

A Lack of Action

By and large, these urban school bus drivers suggest that a disconnection in support allows students to perceive a “Yes, I can” attitude toward the allowance of bullying. The bus environment, therefore, presents students with a unique opportunity to demonstrate bullying and other aggressive behaviors. These bus drivers and attendants revealed a need for backup from school officials, as the lack of action by school administrators, from the drivers’ and bus attendants’ perspectives, perpetuates bullying and aggressive conduct. The bus drivers suggest failure of school authorities to act or react in these situations created in students a sense of “Yes, I can,” meaning they could continue with their bullying without concern of being sanctioned. As one bus
driver stated, they [bus drivers] did “not have a system to back [them] up. . .
it’s the backing that you need in the school system.” Therefore, a coordinated,
concerted effort of including these drivers who feel desperate to be part of the
system to address bullying is necessary. From these participants, their lack of
representation in how the school system diminishes their roles as bus drivers
to engage and have a place within bully prevention efforts underscores a level
of inequality. These researchers also call into question that because every bus
driver and attendant was African American, could racial bias have contrib-
uted to the limited responsiveness or lack of responsiveness by school offi-
cials to these bus drivers? Perhaps further examination of school occupations,
race and ethnicity, and responses to bullying could be compared.

The authors also wondered if the lack of action perceived by bus drivers
may be, in part, a timing issue. Because these bus drivers report that students
were much more likely to demonstrate bullying and other aggressive behaviors
during their afternoon bus routes, are school administration, by 4 p.m., simply
too worn down to respond effectively to these bus driver’s reports? However,
other evidence substantiates that parents too can find it hard to acquire backup
from administrators when reporting serious acts of bullying (Brown, Aalsma &
Ott, 2013). Therefore, these authors concluded that, from what these bus driv-
ers were describing, their experiences reflected a lack of systemic coordination
in addressing bullying (Hirsch, Lewis-Plamer, Sugai, & Schnacker, 2004).

Finally, are school administrators sufficiently trained to address bus driv-
er’s reports of bullying? Further research must be given to this area.

Parents. From the bus drivers’ perspectives, part of the apprehension of
school principals stems from the way principals are treated and responded to
by parents when reporting bullying. These bus drivers report hearing and see-
ing principals being verbally attacked and threatened by accused children and
youths’ parents. As a result of parental threats, bus drivers see principals as
often being “scared” of parents. This perception of parental retribution, even
verbal, was attributed to principals’ reluctance in making a report to parents.

These researchers wondered if a similar phenomenon found by Goodboy
and colleagues (2016), wherein Virginia bus drivers were often personally
victimized by student bullies, leading to work-related stress, anxiety, and
burnout, regardless of their coping strategy was present among the bus driv-
ers in this study. In this study, principals are reported by bus drivers as being
victimized verbally by parents. The outcome for bus drivers is concerning.
These authors wondered if the apprehension of school officials in responding
effectively may contribute to bus drivers’ developing a “what’s the use” or
learned helplessness (Maier & Seligman, 1976) to interceding or reporting.
Such perceptions would not only leave a bus driver in a state of learned help-
lessness, but consequently, leave the targets of aggression to continue.
Bus drivers in this study overwhelmingly saw parents as part of the solution and believed parents should bear the consequences in some regard to their child’s behaviors. Yet the lack of parent involvement related to bully prevention in schools is well established (Olweus, 2003; Stevens, De Bourdeaudhuij, & Van Oost, 2001). The opportunity for parents to become involved in school interventions can only take place when schools commit to becoming gateway providers for their involvement. (Brown, Aalsma & Ott, 2013; Holloway, Brown, Suman, & Aalsma 2012). Ttofi and Farrington (2011) reviewed bully prevention programs and found a significant decrease in youth’s bullying when parents were involved. They suggest educating parents and communicating with parents as part of programing that needs to effectively address bullying (Ttofi, Farrington, & Baldry, 2008). For example, systemically, parents whose child is found to be bullying at school could become involved by completing an online psycho-educational service that addresses bullying, the warning signs, parenting skills to address bullying concerns, psycho-social implications for youth who continue to bully, and options for getting help. By completing such a module, parents could receive a reduction of the number of days off the bus or days suspended from school.

The finding of students with special needs requiring extra attention due to volatility is consistent with studies about kids with special needs. In deLara (2008), kids with disabilities, whether emotional or physical, were often the kids who were victimized. However, deLara (2008) also mentioned that such kids can be the cause of problems. Our findings from bus drivers are consistent with deLara (2008) about both males and females being likely to cause fights and bully. However, our results indicate that afternoon bus routes are higher risk for bullying.

Some of the strategies the drivers shared in trying to reduce the incidence of bullying are similar to what deLara (2008) mentions, for example, seating, and so on. However, what remains clear upon review is how these strategies are temporal at best in preventing or addressing bullying and its perpetuation. As stated from these interviews, bus drivers’ primary need is based on receiving strong support from their school officials.

Limitations

This qualitative study offered the view from school bus drivers and attendants pertaining to bullying and their roles in addressing these acts. As is the case with nongeneralizable data methods (Creswell, 1998), these results must be taken within their context. Despite that limitation, this study can contribute to informing bully prevention procedures and policies. For future research related to riding on the school bus, we suggest expanding research participants to include teachers, principals, and students.
Conclusion

The school bus remains a hot spot of concern as schools are charged with creating and maintaining safe environments. Considering how the “inhibiting effect” of an attending adult can have in reducing bullying in environments where hot spots exist may not be solely enough on the bus. Drivers who report to their supervisor or school official (Pellegrini, 2002) that they need support to address school bullying, need strong and immediate support when student bullying is found on the bus. These bus drivers, although embedded in a school system that purports to be using whole-school approaches, felt mostly undervalued and on their own in their bully prevention efforts when reporting to school officials.

This study identifies several areas for further research. On a macro level, although every state now has bully prevention statutes, examination of how bus drivers are written into states’ mandates for bully prevention can help address how bus drivers’ reports of bullying are responded to. On the micro level, interviewing students who ride on the bus to better understand what they perceive is happening could help develop a deeper understanding. Also, it is important to explore what these drivers have perceived as principals’ avoidance of parents in reporting that their child was found to be bullying. This concern may be due to a lack of useful tools that school officials have for frequent flyers (Ford, 2004) related to bullying behaviors or principals not having adequate training. These researchers’ question what effective interventions do school officials use to address bus driver’s reports of bullying behaviors while garnering support from the student’s parents? We suggest future examination of what tools principals rely upon that demonstrate care to parents whose child has been found to be bullying and the intervention that will help address the behavior without being solely punitive.

Appendix

Participant Introduction and Interview guide

Stated out loud to drivers: Bus drivers see and hear things kids say that they may not normally express in school or in front of parents. That means what you experience helps us understand trends that may be helpful in understanding youth behaviors.

Can we go around and introduce ourselves using a code name, one that is not actually yours and share how many years you have been a bus driver in your district?
How we are defining bullying behavior is when a more powerful person or persons repeatedly mistreats someone on purpose. It is not hurting someone accidently; the hurt is done purposefully.

- Hitting, pushing, tripping, shoving someone into a locker, pulling on hair;
- Name calling, teasing, making fun of someone because of looks or skin color, or dress, rejecting someone;
- Spreading rumors and lies about someone, writing mean notes, or turning someone against someone, threatening someone, embarrassing someone, or sending texts and pictures that are hurtful to kids;
- Stealing or damaging things that belong to someone.

These are all things that when repeated on a child or youth are considered bullying.

**Questionaire**

With that in mind can you tell me:

1. How this year on the bus has been compared with past years regarding bullying? (example?)
2. Which students seem to be targeted by a bully?

Probe: Are there differences on a school bus compared with other places at school for bullying?

3. How do you see students’ acceptance of bullying behavior compared with past years? (example?)
4. How do you see students’ willingness to report being bullied to you compared with past years? (example?)
5. Have you noticed any differences in administrators or supervisors’ attitudes toward bullying on the bus? (examples?)
6. Was there anything else that comes to mind regarding bullying and this school year?

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**James R. Brown** is an assistant professor who teaches social work at Indiana University. He has published on bullying related to parents responses, the discovery of their child being bullied, and also protective factors in state statues regarding bullying. He is currently working on a multidisciplinary team that is developing school safety services to help children, youth, and parents respond to bullying.

**Isaac Karikari** is a visiting lecturer and research specialist at Indiana University and the Division of Mental Health and Addiction, Indiana Family and Social Services Administration. His research interests encompass child welfare/well-being, behavioral and mental health systems, critical social work, and international social work. He started bullying research in 2014 and since then continues to explore value-added ways to contribute to the field.

**Sean Abraham** is a 4th-year student pursuing a bachelor’s of social work degree at Indiana University. He is furthering his education with a master’s of social work degree and plans to build a career in the health care field, specifically in the field of substance abuse recovery. Being in the health care field, he is passionate about the well-being of all individuals, and values the positive outcomes brought about through bullying prevention.

**Tohoro Akakpo** is an associate professor in the social work professional program at the University of Wisconsin–Green Bay. He has worked in the field of juvenile justice for over 10 years, primarily as a clinician with adolescents and children. His research areas include at-risk families and youth, delinquent youth transitioning in community, racial differences, and disproportionality of minority youth in juvenile justice system.