



BULLY

PRODUCTION NOTES

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Running Time: 98 minutes

MPAA Rating:

R for some language

BULLY – PRODUCTION NOTES

- Front Credits – page 2
- Synopsis – page 3
- The Stories – page 3
- Q&A With Lee Hirsch – page 5
- About the Filmmakers – page 11
- End credits – page 13

CREDITS
FILMMAKERS

Directed by	LEE HIRSCH
Produced by	LEE HIRSCH CYNTHIA LOWEN
Executive Producer	CINDY WAITT
Cinematography by	LEE HIRSCH
Edited by	LINDSAY UTZ JENNY GOLDEN
Original Score by	ION FURJANIC JUSTIN RICE/CHRISTIAN RUDDER
Consulting Editor	ENAT SIDI
Written by	LEE HIRSCH CYNTHIA LOWEN
Music Supervisor	BROOKE WENTZ

FEATURING

JA'MEYA JACKSON
KELBY, LONDA and BOB JOHNSON
ALEX, JACKIE, PHILIP, MAYA, JADA, ETHAN and LOGAN LIBBY
KIM LOCKWOOD
DAVD, TINA, TERYN and TROY LONG
DEVON MATTHEWS
BARBARA PRIMER
KIRK and LAURA SMALLEY
TREY WALLACE

SYNOPSIS

Over 13 million American kids will be bullied this year, making it the most common form of violence experienced by young people in the nation. The new documentary film **BULLY**, directed by Sundance and Emmy-award winning filmmaker Lee Hirsch, brings human scale to this startling statistic, offering an intimate, unflinching look at how bullying has touched five kids and their families.

BULLY is a beautifully cinematic, character-driven documentary. At its heart are those with huge stakes in this issue whose stories each represent a different facet of America's bullying crisis. Filmed over the course of the 2009/2010 school year, **BULLY** opens a window onto the pained and often endangered lives of bullied kids, revealing a problem that transcends geographic, racial, ethnic and economic borders. It documents the responses of teachers and administrators to aggressive behaviors that defy "kids will be kids" clichés, and it captures a growing movement among parents and youths to change how bullying is handled in schools, in communities and in society as a whole.

THE STORIES

Alex, 12

For 12-year-old Alex of Sioux City, Iowa, the slurs, curses and threats begin before he even boards the school bus. A sweet-natured kid just starting middle school and wanting more than anything to fit in, Alex assures his worried parents that the kids who taunt and hit him are only "messing with him." But bullying has trailed Alex thorough life like a shadow, and as his seventh grade year unfolds, the bullying only escalates.

Kelby, 16

Since 16-year-old Kelby came out as a lesbian, she and her family have been treated as pariahs in their small town of Tuttle, Oklahoma. The onetime all-star athlete, Kelby has faced an outpouring of hatred from classmates as well as teachers, and has been forced to leave her sports teams by attacks. Refusing her parents' offers to leave Tuttle, the gutsy teenager is bolstered by her adoring girlfriend and a few staunch friends, resolving to stay in her town and change a few minds.

Ja'Meya, 14

In Yazoo County, Mississippi, 14-year-old Ja'Meya was picked on every morning and afternoon of the hour-long bus ride between home and school. On the morning of September 1st, the quiet, unassuming girl had had enough and brandished a loaded handgun she'd taken from her mother's closet to scare off her tormentors. Incarcerated in a juvenile detention facility and charged with multiple felony counts, Ja'Meya fearfully awaits the outcome of her case, supported by her loving mother.

David and Tina Long

In October 2009, 17-year-old Tyler Long of Murray County, Georgia, hanged himself after years of abuse at the hands of his classmates and indifference from school officials. As his parents, David and Tina Long, mourn the loss of the son they tried to protect, and demand accountability from the school that failed him so miserably, his death has sparked a war in a community forced to face its bullying demons.

Kirk and Laura Smalley

Following the bullying-related suicide of their 11 year-old son, Kirk and Laura Smalley are determined to prevent other children from suffering Ty's fate. As schools around the country prepare for the start of a new academic year, Kirk launches an anti-bullying organization, Stand for the Silent, coordinating a series of vigils that underscore the high stakes of America's bullying crisis.

Q&A WITH LEE HIRSCH

Q. What was the impetus behind BULLY? Was there a particular incident that prompted you to make this film, and when did you begin work on it?

BULLY is a deeply personal film for me: I was bullied throughout middle school and much of my childhood. In many ways, those experiences and struggles helped shape my worldview and my direction as a filmmaker. Bullying was a subject I wanted very much to explore in a film, and it was always on the list of projects I wanted to develop. But it stayed an abstraction for a long time -- I was too scared to start developing the idea in earnest because it would mean confronting my own demons, and revisiting a painful period of my life.

By the early spring of 2009, a documentary about bullying had moved to the forefront of my mind. Then, in April of 2009, came news about two 11-year-old boys -- Carl Joseph Walker Hoover of Massachusetts, and Jaheem Herrera of Georgia -- who took their own lives. Both deaths were linked to trauma from chronic bullying. In the wake of those tragedies, I turned my full focus to making this film. I partnered with producer Cynthia Lowen, and we began research and fundraising.

Q. Can you discuss the research you did for the film? Were you surprised to learn that the Department of Education estimated the number of bullied kids at over 13 million?

Not surprisingly, the Internet was a major source of information and contacts. All over the Internet -- in chat rooms, on websites, on YouTube -- kids and families were desperate to find a way to voice their experiences of bullying, harassment and loss. Most of these families shared several things in common: they had been coping with the bullying for years; they had received no support from their school administrators after numerous complaints; and they felt they had nowhere to turn. There were thousands of these postings, filled with frustration and anger. People needed to tell their stories from the frontlines, and that defined our approach to BULLY.

We also did extensive academic research for this film, which included working with a number of nationally recognized experts in the field of bullying prevention. We attempted to translate a number of daunting statistics and studies into real-life experiences and potential stories. Through each of the five different stories in the film, we were able to explore different facets of bullying, and to show how universal a problem it is, crossing boundaries of race, class and geography. From that perspective, the figure of 13 million represents youth from every single community in the United States.

Q. The film's central character is Alex, a 12-year-old in his first year of middle school. How did Alex come to take part in the film?

Our primary goal -- which was also our primary challenge -- was to actually capture bullying on camera. Cynthia and I knew the only way to do this was to embed ourselves at a school, preferably for the length of the academic year.

In the spring of 2009, while doing research for preproduction, we came across the Workplace Bullying Institute, run by Gary and Ruth Namie. They had recently published the first study on the incidence of workplace bullying, which was funded by the Waitt Institute for Violence Prevention, based in Sioux City, Iowa. Gary Namie introduced us to Cindy Waitt, the executive director of WIVP, who became an executive producer of BULLY.

WIVP is very active in the Sioux City School District's violence prevention work, and Cindy introduced us to the Sioux City Superintendent, Dr. Paul Gausman. In July of 2009, we presented our idea for the film to the Sioux City Community School Board, requesting permission to film throughout the district for the 2009/2010 school year. The Board felt it was an important project, and they agreed to be partners in the process. This was a huge leap of faith, and represented a brave commitment to their ongoing bullying prevention programs. The Board was willing to take a tough look at their own community through the camera's lens. They wanted to see where efforts were succeeding, and where there was still work to be done.

We decided to spend a year as “flies on the wall” inside East Middle School, in Sioux City.

We met Alex before the first day of school. He was just beginning 7th grade, and had been chronically bullied since grade school. In following Alex over the course of the year, during which he was severely bullied, we were able to see not only the huge toll bullying takes on the kids who are bullied, but also on their families. And we witnessed how administrators and schools are profoundly challenged in successfully dealing with bullying.

Q. How did the students at East Middle School population react to your presence?

Initially we were something of a spectacle, but that quickly faded away to the daily drama of a middle school environment.

Q. BULLY documents Alex being bullied on the school bus. Were you surprised that kids would do this in full view of a movie camera?

Kids had been bullying Alex for so long, with such impunity, that they had no fear of consequences. So while the bullying on camera was initially surprising, the reasons for it soon made sense. We were also shooting on the Canon 5d Mark II, which looked like a still photographic camera to the kids, so a lot of them were not necessarily aware that we were actually shooting video. Because we spent so much time in the school, we eventually became like the wallpaper and were able to witness what a very typical day looked like. That said, we believe that the bullying was also much worse when the camera was not present.

One thing that we were very careful about, however, was to protect Alex from any negative attention or increased bullying by virtue of us following him over the year. We filmed with lots of kids, in lots of classes, and at lots of different kinds of school events, so it wasn't apparent that we were focusing on Alex.

Q. How did you find the other families that participated in BULLY?

We started the process by reaching out to kids and families across the U.S. We spoke at length on the phone and in person about their experiences and struggles. Many of these families we met through postings on online message boards, Oprah.com, “The Ellen Show,” Facebook and YouTube. We got early support from the producers of “The Ellen Show,” who did a show about Carl Walker Hoover, who was relentlessly bullied, called gay and told he acted like a girl. They agreed to pass along a message from our team to a number of families that had written in looking for help. That led us to Kelby in Tuttle, Oklahoma.

We met some families through reading about their struggles in the news. A young man in Georgia made headlines when he tackled a 14-year-old girl who had taken out a handgun on a school bus. We were curious: what could have prompted this young woman to bring a gun on her bus in the first place? We suspected it might have been bullying, and that turned out to be the case. That’s how Ja’Meya became a subject in the film.

Newspaper reporting also led us to the Longs in Georgia, and the Smalleys in Oklahoma, both of whom lost their children to suicide.

Q. Did you know going into the project that you wanted to tell the stories of families whose bullied children had committed suicide?

Suicide is the ultimate consequence of bullying, so yes, we did know early on that we wanted to tell the stories of parents whose children had committed suicide due to bullying. We wanted people to be aware of how high the stakes are and to dispel the notion that bullying is just “kids being kids.” What we couldn’t have imagined was how many there would be. In the film, you meet two families, the Longs and the Smalleys, who endured this ultimate loss. But we filmed with four families. The youngest child lost was 9-year-old Montana Lance, who hung himself in the nurse’s office at his elementary school.

Q. How large was your crew when you shot in your subjects’ schools? How did the general population of school kids react to your presence?

We had a very small crew. Generally, it was just me directing, shooting and doing sound. When we were filming in the schools in Sioux City, Cynthia Lowen was by my side, helping keep everything together and often doing sound.

Q. Were you ever tempted to intercede when you witnessed kids being bullied? Documentary filmmakers always have to deal with issues of becoming personally involved with the story they’re telling, but it seems like it would be especially sensitive when you’re dealing with vulnerable kids. How difficult was it for you to hold back, and did you have any sort of litmus test for when you might step in?

This was enormously challenging, in part because there were legal reasons not to physically intercede. But what we saw on that final bus ride with Alex was so alarming that it became a breaking point for us. Though it was a difficult decision in the moment, we decided to bring evidence of what was happening to the school, the Sioux City Police Department and Alex’s

parents. This absolutely put us into the story and is acknowledged in the film. Also, because we were not monitoring audio as we shot, some of the instances of violence that Alex endured only became apparent months later when we were in the editing room.

A significant part of this journey was and remains the relationships that developed between me and the film's subjects. The kids and their parents became our partners. Alex wanted the world to know what he experienced, and that simple fact was always in my mind as we filmed. Alex and I talked regularly about what was going on in school and what he felt comfortable with, in terms of my filming.

Q. When did you begin filming, and for how long did you film?

We began filming in August of 2009 and continued throughout the 2009/2010 school year, wrapping on the last day of Alex's 7th grade year at the beginning of June, 2010. We did two additional shoots. The first was in August 2010, when the Stand for the Silent Vigils organized by Kirk Smalley were held all across the nation. We filmed six of these events – with five of the crews being all-volunteer!

We also filmed with the Longs shortly before the one-year anniversary of Tyler's death.

Q. What steps do you think schools could take to prevent bullying? What about families?

Schools need first and foremost to be willing to look at their own climate. Far too many parents are marginalized and ignored when they try to advocate on behalf of a bullied child. What should be a simple intervention often escalates to a combative situation where the student continues to suffer. Families need information regarding strategy, and about their rights and recourse before the law. Schools need to know that this new generation of parents needs to be taken seriously.

While laws, reporting requirements and programmatic solutions are integral pieces of this process, nothing can be more meaningful than a change of hearts and minds. I hope that BULLY can help inspire that. To build from that opportunity, we are working with leaders in the field to provide robust resources for schools, parents and kids.

Q. Are you still in touch with any of the families you profiled?

Yes! We are in touch with all of the families in the film. They have been great champions of BULLY and continue to be very active in advocating for bullied youth. Kirk and Laura Smalley have taken their story all the way to President Obama as Stand for the Silent continues to grow into a powerful call to action – they have already reached over 250,000 students, including all of the middle schools and high schools in Sioux City and Tuttle, Oklahoma.

We still have very close connections to the Sioux City community and the school district, and they have been very supportive champions of the film. The Sioux City School District, along with the families in the film -- who have formed their own extended family, are all partners in

the growing Bully Project movement.

On November 2, 2011 the film screened in Sioux City at a free community forum on bullying, over 1,600 people showed up. It was an extraordinary evening – the film received a standing ovation and East Middle School’s Kim Lockwood addressed the audience with an emotional apology.

Q. Can you discuss the ways BULLY has taken on a life outside the screen? It’s clear that you want the conversation and the action to continue once the theater lights come up.

We look at this film as a very rare opportunity to capture the public’s attention on this issue that affects every community. And while we have their attention, we intend to provide information and resources to help, both in the short term and the long term.

First of all, the film’s website, <http://bully-movie.net/#>, can direct students, parents and educators to the resources they need to deal with bullying right away. There are a lot of great tools and resources out there, the website will be a hub of information for anyone in need.

In the months leading up to the film’s release on March 30, 2012, we will be adding new and powerful tools on <http://bully-movie.net/#>. We want to cover as much ground as possible and are forging partnerships with public and private sector players. The site will offer be hyper-localized information, including district-specific anti-bullying policies and school climate ratings. There will be step-by-step guides for parents: how to communicate with administrators and hold those administrators accountable for addressing bullying situations; how to talk to their kids about bullying and its root causes. We are also working with educational partners to create curriculum around the film and bring it into classrooms. And we are working with many different groups that have a stake in this issue, including pediatricians, the autism awareness community and the U.S. Justice Department; all of whom be using this film as part of their ongoing initiatives

We are working with individuals and organizations to build a movement to end bullying activity. We want to provide a roadmap for how communities can transform themselves. It all comes down to one. One person, one class, one school, one parent or one teacher – individual actions and individual leadership will result in long-term social change.

Q. What do you hope audiences take from BULLY?

Film has a unique power to highlight an issue, touch our hearts and motivate us to act. Sometimes it is the images that stir us; sometimes it’s the opportunity to step into someone else’s shoes. We are hoping that the experience of watching BULLY will motivate audiences -- whether they are kids, parents, educators or administrators – to come off the sidelines to join their community’s work to create positive school climate. This can take many shapes: as a 7th grader it could mean standing up for a peer who is being bullied. As a teacher, it might mean standing in the hall between classes to look out for the more vulnerable kids in the building. Administrators might decide to put their paper work aside for after school hours and take extra

time to get to the bottom of a student conflict. And perhaps parents will see a need to spend more time asking their children about their day. It is through the millions of small actions that result from the experience of being inspired that collectively results in real change.

We made BULLY with the conviction that audiences, especially young people, **can** be moved off the sidelines and empowered to stand up for those around them. We also made this film with the conviction that those children will become the next generation's leaders, and CEOs and educators and innovators, and will show us new possibilities, not only in how we treat the people around us, but in how we lead as citizens of the world.

ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS

LEE HIRSCH (Director/Producer/Cinematographer/Writer)

Lee Hirsch's debut film, *AMANDLA! A REVOLUTION IN FOUR PART HARMONY*, is a feature documentary chronicling the history of the South African anti-apartheid struggle through a celebration of its musical heroes. This film was released to wide acclaim, winning the Audience and Freedom of Expression Awards at the 2002 Sundance Film Festival. Among the many honors the film received were five Emmy nominations and a win. Lee Hirsch was born and raised on Long Island, New York, and attended the Putney School in Vermont and Hampshire College. He currently lives in Manhattan.

CYNTHIA LOWEN (Producer/Writer)

Cynthia Lowen is an award-winning writer and recipient of the Discovery Prize. She is the co-author of *The Essential Guide to Bullying* forthcoming from Alpha Books and her work has been published widely in journals including *A Public Space*, *Best New Poets 2008*, *Boston Review*, *Provincetown Arts* and *Tin House*, among others. She is also the producer of *GOING HOME*, a two-part documentary about teenage incarceration and recidivism. She lives in New York City.

CINDY WAITT (Executive Producer)

Cindy Waitt serves as Director of the Waitt Institute for Violence Prevention. She also serves on the National Advisory Board for the Family Violence Prevention Fund's Center to End Violence, and has been a member of the Clinton Global Initiative since 2005.

LINDSAY UTZ (Editor)

Lindsay Utz served as the Executive Producer of Video at *GOOD Magazine* and produced and edited the first ever "making-of" documentary for PBSFRONTLINE.ORG. She also worked as the Associate Producer on "Obama's War," the premiere episode of "Frontline's" 29th season.

JENNY GOLDEN (Editor)

Jenny Golden edited the pilot episode of "This American Life" and was the first season's lead editor. She also edited *MANDA BALA*, which went on to win the Grand Jury Prize at Sundance in 2007.

ION FURJANIC (Original Score)

Ion Michael Furjanic is a composer, sound designer and artist. His film work includes sound and music for *JESUS CAMP*, *FAVELA RISING*, *FREAKONOMICS*, *12TH AND DELAWARE*, *MANDA BALA* and over 50 feature films. Furjanic most recently scored *THE TWO ESCOBARS*, which premiered at the 2010 Tribeca Film Festival and the 2010 Cannes Film festival.

JUSTIN RICE/CHRISTIAN RUDDER (Original Score)

Justin Rice and Christian Rudder perform under the name Bishop Allen. The duo, often assisted by friends on stage and in the studio, has released three full-length records and 12 EPs. They have toured all over the U.S. and Europe, and their music has appeared in numerous films and

TV shows.

ENAT SIDI (Consulting Editor)

Enat Sidi is the editor of many acclaimed films including 12TH & DELAWARE, BILLY THE KID, JESUS CAMP, BOYS OF BARAKA and others.

BROOKE WENTZ (Music Supervisor)

Brooke Wentz is an award-winning music supervisor, intellectual property rights executive and international music expert, and the owner and founder of The Rights Organization. Among the films she worked on are MELANCHOLIA, BILL CUNNINGHAM NEW YORK, CRIME AFTER CRIME, SOMETHING VENTURED, LA MISSION, THE DEVIL & DANIEL JOHNSTON, BALLETS RUSSES, BIG RIVER MAN, AMERICAN HARDCORE, RACING DREAMS, THE UNFORESEEN, and MY REINCARNATION.

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Songs

"Teenage Dirtbag"
Written by Brendan Brown
Performed by Scala
Courtesy of Rhino Entertainment Group
By arrangement with Warner Music Group Film & TV Licensing

"Short Tux"
Written by Rob Burger
Performed by Rob Burger
Courtesy of Tzadik

"To the Stars! To the Night!"
Written by Samuel McDonald Smikoff
Performed by Le Loup
Courtesy of Hardly Art

"Torn By Wolves"
Written by Ben Chasny
Performed by Six Organs of Admittance
Courtesy of Drag City

"From a Sinking Boat"
Written by Stephin Merritt
Performed by Magnetic Fields
Courtesy of Warner Music Group Film & TV Licensing

"Tasha and Rashid and Love Theme Mashup"
Written by Ion Furjanic and Sanford Livingston
Performed by Force Theory

Courtesy of Ile de Force and Sanford Strollers

"This Body"

Written by Brian Miller

Performed by The Lightning Bug Situation

Courtesy of Brian Miller

"Foreground"

Written by Christopher Bear, Daniel Rossen, Christopher Taylor, & Edward Droste

Performed by Grizzly Bear

Courtesy of WARP

"Kapsburger"

Written by Padma Newsome & Bryce Dessner

Performed by Clogs

Courtesy of Brassland

"Busted Heart"

Written by Justin Rice and Christian Rudder

Performed by Bishop Allen

Courtesy of Superhyper

Distribution Advisors

Josh Braun

Amanda Lebow

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who opened their doors to this film.

This openness builds upon the District's decade-long commitment to bullying prevention,
providing programs from k-12, and implementing the first district-wide workplace bullying
program in the country.

Dedicated to

Jon Carmichael
Ty Field-Smalley
Montana Lance
Tyler Long

Get involved.

Go to:

<http://bully-movie.net/#>

Powered by partnership

BeCause Foundation/ DoSomething.org/Einhorn Family Charitable Trust/Waitt Institute for
Violence Prevention)

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