

A STUDY OF BULLYING AND MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES
WHY DO WE BULLY AND ALLOW OURSELVES TO BE BULLIED?
HOW CAN WE MAKE OTHERS AWARE OF BULLYING?

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Growing Up

My name is Miyako, and the first thing that may come to your mind is that my name is different from your typical American names. My project is on the topic of bullying and mental health. For this project, I would like to write about what I have learned reflecting from my own experience through the country's educational system and a small survey I asked the students on a college campus.

Introduction

I want to talk a little about my childhood experience first. America already views bullying as one of a biggest problem we have today. Our society works as a community, and human interaction is quite important in order to make connections. When I first moved to New York, I did not speak English at all. I was 12, and I had no friend. I was scared because I could not understand the language everyone was speaking. I studied very hard so that I can make friends. The middle school I was attending decided to put me in a class with other students who are also learning English as their second language. Most of them were Chinese and two were Korean. Unsurprisingly, they formed groups with the classmates who share common language. Because I did not speak neither of those, I was still alone. That environment continued for three full years of my middle school. In addition, one of the Chinese students came to tell me after social studies class, "Miyako, you're Japanese right? Then you should go die, because Japanese people killed so many Chinese." Because he was from China, he learned history from China's point of view. American history also depicts Japanese as evil during the chapter of World War. Because his childish comment was very upsetting, I talked with the deans at school. The Chinese student was called to the office and came back to apologize to me. First, I was scared that I could not understand what people were saying, but now I am scared to understand what people are

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saying. Bullying targets people who are ‘different.’ I was targeted because I was from Japan. You can be a target because of your name, face, height, weight, skin, hair, eye, voice, act, clothing... anything. Bullying is a repeated act of seeking harm or intimidate another person or a group. Bullying is toxic and always unfair. The purpose of my research is to bring to light the negativity of bullying. My goal with my research is to make the reader aware of bullying. For the purpose of this research, my questions are:

RQI: Why do we bully others?

RQII: Why do we allow others to bully us?

RQIII: How can we make others aware of the aspects of bullying?

Review of the Literature

Dan Olweus (1970), produced the first data about bullying which was published in Sweden and then in the U. S. in 1978 (Reese, 2018). Olweus created the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program and defines bullying as. “A person is bullied when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other persons, and he or she has difficulty defending himself or herself” (Vikneswaran, Idayo, Halim, Norfazilah & Hanizah, 2018, p. 1).

Bullying is a toxic injustice and discrimination against differences.

One common factor for being a victim of bullying is appearance. During the academic study as a Communications major, I stumbled upon a course titled Cross-Cultural Psychology class. Cross-Cultural Psychology is a scientific study of human behavior and mental processes under diverse cultural conditions. A chapter from the course textbook “*Cultural Psychology*” by Steven J. Heine introduces an interesting concept upon a topic attraction, close relationships, and groups. There are universal standards of attractiveness around the world with an exception of cultural differences. Discriminations against an individual come from the ‘difference.’ The

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characteristics of attractive faces have following three features: complexion, bilateral symmetry, and average. There appears to be universal agreement that skin that looks free of blemishes, blotches, sores, and rashes and people whose left sides of their faces and bodies look identical to their right sides is viewed as more attractive. Being attracted to 'average' face means that "facial features that are close to the average in size and configuration are perceived as most attractive" (Heine, 2015, p.466). In one study, the faces of a number of Euro-Australians and a number of Japanese were averaged together, both within and across cultures.

"Participants in both cultures viewed the average faces to be more attractive, regardless of the faces' culture of origin. The researchers also averaged the Australian and Japanese faces together. They found that the biracial averaged face was the most attractive face of all particularly as judged by members of the opposite sex" (Heine, 2015, p.466).

My theory is that they are more attractive because they have more commonality and approachable. "Because we can process quickly something that resembles a prototype, and quick processing is associated with good feelings and feelings of attraction" (Heine, 2015, p.466).

After all, whether you are attractive or not, it is the viewer's brain that judges and process their feeling towards you.

"Consider the different ways people alter their faces to make themselves beautiful. Among the Padaung in Thailand, women elongate their necks by several inches by inserting an increasing number of brass rings around them as they grow up. Among the Mursi in Ethiopia, women stretch their lower lips by inserting progressively larger ceramic disks in a hole that has been cut through the lip. Among the Ainu of northern Japan, women often tattoo their faces in what looks like a moustache around their lips. Among Westerners, women darken their eyelashes with mascara, paint their lips with lipstick, and shave the hair from their legs" (Heine, 2015, p. 463).

Everyone is different and everyone is beautiful in their own way. It is wrong to intimidate someone for the looks they were born with and their fashion. They want to dress in a way they feel most beautiful. It is okay to dislike something, but it is not right giving a terrible feeling to someone else from your hatred.

What I see on Media today regarding the topic of Bullying

Netflix is an American media-service provider rising in its popularity in recent years between teenagers and young adults. With a recommendation of Communications Research professor, I came across a Netflix series released March, 2017, "*13 Reasons Why*." It has brought a huge impact for viewers on how we, as a society, value children's mental health. The purpose of this show is to spread awareness. The major issue of the series is that there is no complete solution because it starts after the damage is done. The first season is about everybody in the community who was involved in this tragic incident. A recording was left by Hannah Baker, a girl who committed suicide, pointing fingers at 13 people explaining why she has left this world. The recording includes Hannah's friends, colleagues, someone who was in love with Hannah, school advisor, and parents. Some of them fell into a deep sorrow of guilt. Some want to admit and confess their truths. The other wants to keep quiet and protect their reputation. The second season is more about lawsuit claimed by Hannah's parents against the school, questioning their value and maintenance of students' mental behavior. The view of this tragedy shifts from ethical to political between these two seasons. Is bullying a crime? Are these teenagers guilty for the mistakes they have accidentally made? The series depicts extreme real-life tragedy. Using some of Hannah's tape as an example, I want to discuss the characters' mental states and reasons behind their actions.

Friends and enemies

Jessica Davis is Hannah's best friend and one of the reasons why she committed suicide. Hannah has just moved into a new town and was feeling nervous from being surrounded by unfamiliar environment and people. Jessica Davis is also the new kids at Liberty High. Having similar circumstances, those two soon became best friends with an addition, Alex Standall to

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become a trio. However, Jessica and Alex started to drift away from Hannah, with Hannah finding out they were dating and stating she was fine with it. After Jessica refused to have sex with Alex, Alex broke up with Jessica without explaining why. Soon after, a ranking list of girls with a section criticizing their appearance spread around the school with Hannah as the best and Jessica as the worst. Jessica discovered that the section was added by Alex and became suspicious of Hannah. Even though Alex only did this to spite Jessica for her refusal to have sex with him, Jessica angrily accused Hannah of cheating with Alex and refused to listen. She called Hannah a slut and slapped her on the face. Jessica's words and action in that moment were what marked the end of their once strong friendship as she started to believe and listened more into the rumors. Because humans are social creatures, most events in our lives unfold in the context of the relationships we have with others. Going back to Steven J. Heine, he states:

“Researchers who have systematically eavesdropped on people's conversations find that the most common topic of conversation is gossip about other people (Dunbar, Marriott, & Duncan, 1997). Studies that track people's happiness over time find that our happiest times are when we are with others (Csikszentmihalyi & Hunter, 2003). People's most emotionally wrenching experiences involve that breakup relationships and the deaths of loved ones (Holmes & Rahe, 1967). Our relationships with others are concerns that dominate our lives and it would be impossible to have a good understanding of human nature unless we also considered how people relate to others. This social foundation of human nature is universal in that there are no cultures in which people live as lone individuals” (Heine, 2015, p.474).

When everybody is speaking the different facts, it is very difficult to make an accurate decision especially when you're angry and/or sad. People often assume from information provided and that thought haunts them until proven wrong otherwise.

Sexual and Gender Identity

Courtney Crimsen is one of Hannah's peers. She is popular, intelligent, manipulative and is generally liked by others. She is Hannah's fifth reason for committing suicide. Courtney is so perfect, yet has a complex of having two gay fathers and herself being gay. A not-so-clear photo

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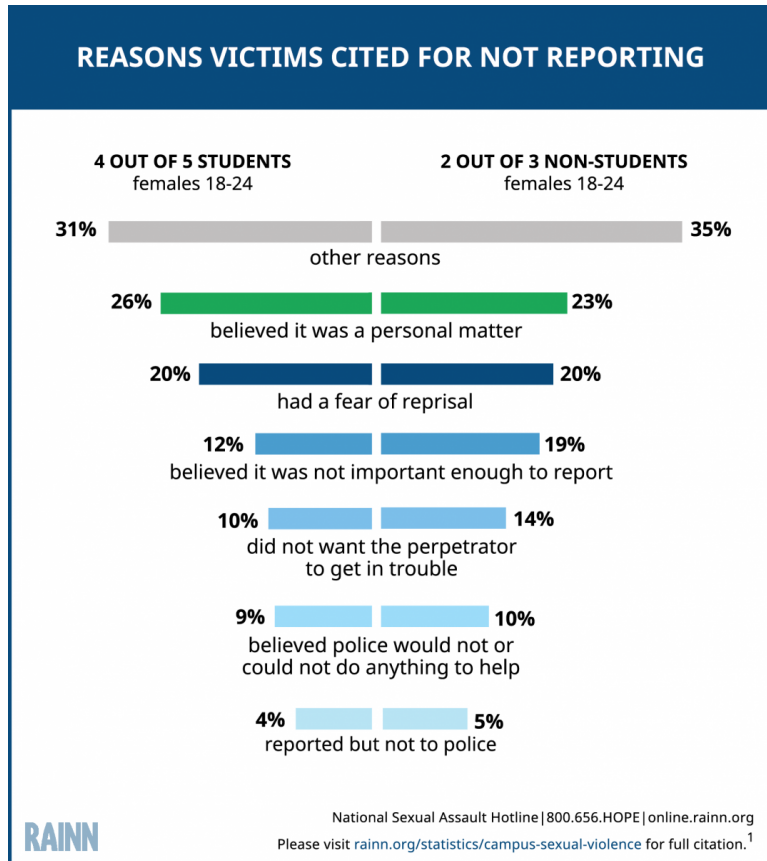
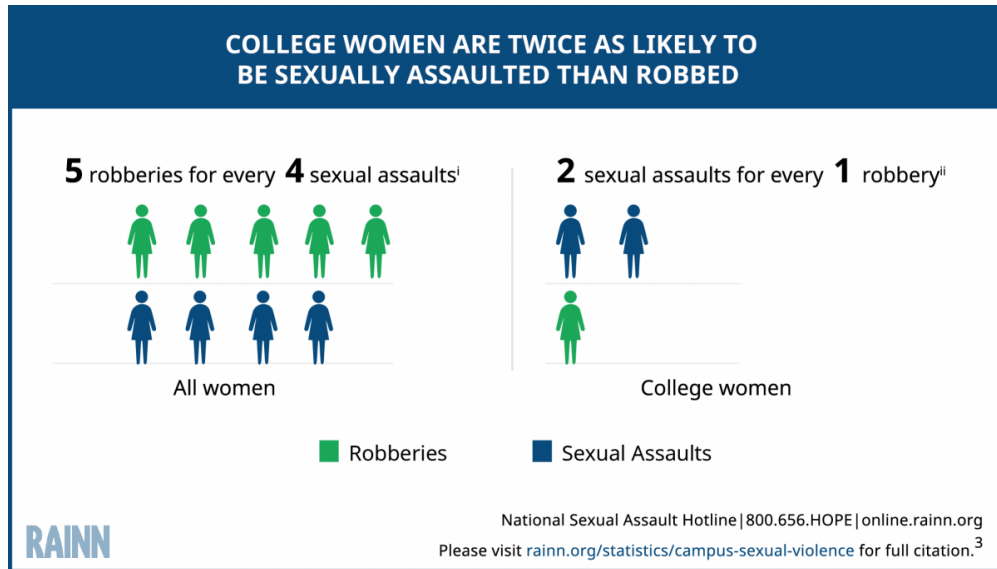
of Courtney and Hannah kissing had spread around the school. To protect her own reputation, Courtney attempts to distance herself from Hannah in order to prevent people from figuring out that they are the ones in the photo and spread sexual rumors involving Hannah Baker. Hannah is completely angered at her for piling more rumors about her just because she is afraid to admit her sexuality and tells her that she is not Courtney's shield to hide behind. This completely ruins Hannah and Courtney's friendship permanently. Everyone has their own fears, and Courtney's was her sexual identity.

Sexual identity is a very sensitive topic as some communities still view sexuality other than straight as abnormal. However, as the popularity of social media rises, the frequency of people discussing the topic of sexual and gender identity is also increasing. The upside of the discussions online is that it can be done anonymously. A person can talk about their insecurities without revealing their name and face; without making a fool of themselves. It is becoming a common sense to ask a person for their pronouns before "assuming" their identity. Some people would act upset when the others get their gender identity wrong and it is considered rude. The social media gave them power by connecting those with similar circumstances online. It has showed them that there are many people in community that are willing to accept who they are and tell them that it is totally normal. Alone we feel powerless, but with others we feel empowered. Insecurities are a person's weaknesses. If a bully speaks negatively about your insecurity, you may take more offense and be emotional. However, if you feel confident about what the bully is trying to attack you about, you may not even bother because you already know that you're the best. Building confidence is a great start to fight back the bullying and stabilize your emotions. Being understanding and accept who they are is what we as community can do to everybody who struggle with their identities.

School System is Corrupt

Kevin Porter is a new school counselor at Liberty High School, and Hannah's last thirteen reason why she committed suicide. Mr. Porter met with Hannah right before she committed suicide at his office. He was the last person she visited before deciding to go home and ending her life. His mistake was that he failed to help her as a school counselor when she implied that she had been raped. Hannah refused to give the details or even label it as rape. He told her that if she was unable to tell him who the perpetrator is, then she needs to just move on with life. Mr. Porter assumed that both parties been intoxicated by alcohol and were semi-conscious during the incident. The problem is that Hannah felt shame in what had happened to her and therefore Mr. Porter could not provide the help he wanted.

In a course titled Communications Research, our professor showed the class a documentary analyzing the statistics of the reported sexual assault in American Universities and the ones that has actually been solved. The number of students who received help after reporting the sexual assault was significantly lower than the ones that were reported. The truth is that the school department cannot make decision on who is telling the truth. In some cases, the woman is telling a made-up story to get a specific man in trouble. In other cases, the man who was convicted sexual assault can say "No. I didn't." and get away due to lack of proof. Following is a data chart collected by Rainn on 2015 showing the frequency of women being sexual assaulted on campus compared to the same age group outside of campus.



We learn around the age of eight that there are different individual minds that are distant from our own. As a community, we have to be more aware of someone else’s circumstances. We have to be kind to each other and treat each other with respect. A saying is: *Don’t do something*

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you wouldn't do to your own sister, brother, mother, or father. If Hannah was Mr. Porter's own daughter, he would never let it slide and have told her to move on. If Hannah was the perpetrator's own sister, he would never have sexually assaulted her. Keep in mind that each of your friends are an individual with their own minds, emotions, and thoughts. The person next to you on a bus ride is also a person with friends and family; just like yourself and your loved ones. To change the world, we have to be aware, avoid and protect ourselves from being the victim.

Perpetrator and Victim

A Japanese film, "*A Silent Voice*" released by Kyoto Animation in 2016 sparked in its popularity for the story bringing an issue of bullying. In this movie, a main character, Shoya Ishida and his friends mercilessly bullies a student with impaired hearing, Shouko Nishimiya. Although Shouko does not tell her parents about it, her mother becomes suspicious of the other students' behavior towards her daughter because she has lost several hearing aids after starting the school. The teacher was already aware of the bullying but did not make any action until he received a phone call from Shouko's mother. He opens a class discussion, then he points finger at Shoya in front of the entire classroom claiming that he has bullied her. Shoya feels pressured and brings names of his friends' claiming that they have also bullied Shouko. However, they insisted on accepting their mistake and claimed that only Shoya bullied her.

After the class discussion, Shoya becomes the victim of bullying by his friends for trying to use them as shield and becomes guilty for making his mother pay back for the hearing aids. Although Shouko has moved to another school, the feeling of guilty does not leave Shoya. After graduating high school, he returns the money to his mother, sells everything in his room that it is completely empty, and plans to commit suicide. However, he fails to do so and gets yelled at by his mother until he promised that he would never going to do it again. Later in the film, Shoya

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and Shouko fall in love with each other after several circumstances, but cannot confess their feelings. Shoya stumbles upon Shouko trying to commit suicide and barely saves her from completing the act.

Throughout the movie, Shoya learns from mistake of bullying Shouko for something that she has no control over. He feels ashamed of himself and thinks of himself as a worst human being. In the other hands, Shouko is ashamed of being born with disability which has been stressing her mother throughout her life. The act of bullying will leave both party miserable. In the movie, there is a scene where Shoya and Shouko both thank their friends for being there and being so kind to them. No matter how much you think negatively of yourself, there will always be a person who will love you and support you. Because Shoya acknowledged the mistake, he was able to become a better person. Ending one's life will lead to more sadness. We must stay strong together and better ourselves.

Method

Study of Bullying and Mental Health Issues

Purpose

The purpose of my research is to bring awareness of the world's problem of bullying at school to light.

Paradigm

I believe that acknowledge of the issue of bullying will make the world a better place for everybody. Your problem towards the social community is also their problem. We have to speak up and protect our rights.

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Study Design

This is a qualitative study. I will be applying the theories by Steven J. Heine from his book to the episodes from “13 Reasons Why” on Netflix. Each bullying case is unique and different. One method may solve the one issue and may not solve the other. Therefore, I believe the qualitative approach will be best for this study.

Investigative Techniques

As I researched through the web, I became curious to see the state of a suburban college campus. I decided to conduct a conversation collected from peers who are students. This study will show the reality of our generation and the school’s maintenance regarding the students’ experience of bullying mental health. Because this is a sensitive topic, I want to collect the data anonymously. The conversation questions were asked anonymously and are as follows:

How old are you?

Please select your gender.

Please select your race and ethnicity.

Question 1: Have you ever been bullied before?

Question 2: Have you ever witnessed anyone being bullied?

Question 3: Have you ever bullied another person?

Instrumentation

I designed my own conversation questions. There will be some biases on the data depending on how many students decide to take the survey. I will not directly ask the students to take the survey. I will post on a social media for them to decide whether the conversation interests them enough to be involved or not.

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Data Collections

The conversations will take place the last three weeks of the spring semester to give first-year students an equal opportunity to reflect from their experience on campus.

Data Analysis Plan

I plan to collect inferential statistics. Analysis will simply be done by observing the data collected and comparing them to the statistics found in peer reviewed articles.

Bias

To avoid biases, I designed the survey to be multiple choice questions. There is also an option to answer “I prefer not to answer” if the participant wish to be silent about the topic.

Assumptions

More participants will make my data more accurate. I hope to receive honest responses from all participants.

Limitations

The topic of bullying and the mental wellness issues can be broad. For this project, I am not going to cover outside of the experience within my academic studies. If I were to spend more time in this educational system with more resources to put into this topic, I would spend more time reviewing other literatures and designing a better survey with more accurate data.

Results

Research Question I: Why do we bully others?

In the case of Hannah Baker from “13 Reasons Why”, she did not let the others bully her at first. However, as the story progresses, she started to feel powerless. Unfortunate dramas and miscommunications with her friends along with her parents and school counselor, everything seemed to be going against Hannah. In her head, the picture of herself became what others gossip

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of Hannah. “But you can’t get away from yourself. You can’t decide not to see yourself anymore. You can’t decide to turn off the noise in your head” (Asher, 2007). As Steven J. Heine (2015) stated in the literature review, humans are social creatures and we love the topic on someone else. The humiliating rumors of Hannah that went around the school was of another students’ entertainment. Courtney Crimsen did not purposely spread new rumors but she wanted to hide her weakness. She did not want to be the target, so she used Hannah as a decoy that ended up making Hannah the target. The truth is that “You don’t know what goes on in anyone’s life but your own. And when you mess with one part of a person’s life, you’re not messing with just that part. Unfortunately, you can’t be that precise and selective. When you mess with one part of a person’s life, you’re messing with their entire life. Everything... affects everything” (Asher, 2007). The person may not be intending on harming you, yet depending on the mental states at that moment, words can be painful. Emotions and feelings make us do many unreasonable things at times. A person, like Courtney Crimsen, may just be feeling overwhelmed by the fear of their insecurities. Sometimes, they bully the others to appear stronger in public’s eyes. Maybe you did something in the past to make them upset that you didn’t realize. There are endless reasons to the act of bullying and all of it usually comes from the emotion as well.

Research Question II: Why do we allow others to bully us?

The reason we allow others to bully us is similar to the answer on why we bully others. The victims usually do not have a power to take control of the situation. It is extremely difficult to fight bullying alone. When there is a problem you cannot solve on your own, your options are to seek help or ignore it. It is up to rest of us whether we can provide the help you want or leave you with disappointment. We all have to fight together to stop the bullying and when we fail to do so, we let the them to bully us.

Research Question III: How can we make others aware of the aspects of bullying?

From researching this topic, I have learned that it is nearly impossible to fix this issue. To better the issue, we as a community need to always lookout for your friends and family.

Everyone should acknowledge the existence of the issue and actively discuss about it. When we fall victim to bullying, we have to always remember that we are not alone. When something is unfair, we must speak up. When we need help, we must ask for help. When someone asks for help, we must take our time to sit down and listen to the person. Words can be painful, but they can also be kind and gentle.

Peer Conversation Results

I have received total of 21 responses from peer college students. Following are the table of data sets for each question asked.

Table 1 compiled the ages of the peers involved in the conversation for this study. The data shows that the majority of peers were 19 and 20 at 52.4% (n=11).

Table 1

How old are you?

Age	Data
18	4 (19%)
19	6 (28.6%)
20	5 (23.8%)
21	1 (4.8%)
22	2 (9.5%)
24	3 (14.3%)

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Table 2 compiles the gender identity data. Of the peers involved in the study conversation, 71.4% (n=15) were female, 23.8% (n=5) are male. Additionally, one participant identified as a trans man at 4.8% (n=1). From the data compiled, more peer females answered the questions.

Table 2

What is your gender identity?

Response	Data
Female	15 (71.4%)
Male	5 (23.8%)
Trans man	1 (4.8%)

Table 3 has the results of the conversation question: *What is your race and ethnicity?* Of the results, it shows that more white peers answer the question which is 61.9% (n=13).

Table 3

What is your race and ethnicity?

Response	Data
White	13 (61.9%)
Black	1 (4.8%)
Hispanic	1 (4.8%)
Asian	1 (4.8%)
Native American	1 (4.8%)
Prefer not to answer	0 (0%)
Mixed Race	1 (4.8%)
Multiracial (Hispanic-Asian)	1 (4.8%)

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Table 4 has the results of the question: *Have you ever been bullied before?* The response of yes received 95.2% (n=20). Only 4.8% (n=1) were not bullied.

Table 4

Q1: *Have you ever been bullied before?*

Response	Data
Yes	20 (95.2%)
No	1 (4.8%)
Prefer not to answer	0 (0%)

Table 5 compiles the result for the question: *Have you ever witnessed anyone being bullied?*

The responses received showed that the majority of peers conversed with did witness bullying at 81% (n=17).

Table 5

Q2: *Have you ever witnessed anyone being bullied?*

Response	Data
Yes	17 (81%)
No	2 (9.5%)
Maybe	2 (9.5%)

Table 6 has the results for *Have you ever bullied another person?* The results were impressive and encouraging. The results showed that 66.7% (n=14) of those involved in the peer conversations had not bullied others. More than twice as many participants answered they have never bullied anyone while 28.6% (n=6) participants recognize themselves bullying another person in the past.

Table 6

Q3: *Have you ever bullied another person?*

Response	Data
Yes	6 (28.6%)
No	14 (66.7%)
Prefer not to answer	1 (4.7%)

Discussion

Bullying can happen to anybody. It is extremely harmful for an individual’s mental health. As the statistical data shows, there are many reported cases of bullying in this country. Today, the society is using the power of media to spread the awareness of bullying. The advertisement which appears between the web content includes bullying prevention ads. A globally known singer across the country today such as Pink sings a song on the topic of bullying, “Perfect” being played on the radio during the time of students commuting to school. Google brings the page of National Suicide Prevention Lifeline and phone number when a user searches anything that is related to self-harm. To make our future a better place for our children, we must first understand the issue. Then we must teach our children to be kind and strong. We must raise them with kindness and tell them that they are beautiful and perfect the way they are. It definitely feels better to make someone happy than to make someone sad. Because humans are born to make mistakes, we cannot completely fix the issue of bullying, but we can reduce the numbers of bullying that is happening right now and in the future.

Reflection

When I was in 5th grade, I was being bullied by my own classmates. I used to be a social butterfly who never had any problem making friends, so it felt bizarre and confusing at the time. At one point, I realized them avoiding me and acting cold around me for no apparent reason. When I asked to borrow an eraser, a girl next to my seat cold-heartedly said “No, please do not touch my stuff.” That was the time when I realized they were no longer my friends. My 11-year-old self was feeling alone and sad, yet couldn’t come up with a solution. The friends who walked home with me after school no longer waited for me to pack. A friend who slept in a same log house at a camp openly ignored my existence. My best friends who spent my entire summer together blocked my phone number. They did not physically harm me, but I was mentally suffering. Moving to New York from Tokyo Japan, not only got me out of the toxic community, but also gave me an opportunity to study and learn such social behavior.

Researching my topic made me realize that bullying is sadly very common. Up until today, I still wonder the purpose of bullying by my classmates time to time. We were both young and have made many mistakes along the path. I hope that they have come to acknowledge their own mistake and no one was hurt like I was. Reviewing literature, speaking with peers and being exposed to today’s media has sparked my motivation to become a person who can make others smile.

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