

Chapter 1

Silent Struggles of D/deaf Youth

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ABSTRACT

This chapter focuses on bullying of youth within the D/deaf community. D/deaf students often struggle with mental health and the development of emotional intelligence, both of which are critical to an individual to be successful and happy. The goal of this chapter is to provide original insight to highlight the negative impact of bullying in the D/deaf community while offering promising points of consideration so that teachers, parents, guardians, and other adults who are prominently featured in a child's life may be better prepared to help. This is a topic important to all, as one in three babies is born with hearing loss and by 2050 nearly 2.5 billion people will have some degree of hearing loss.

“The handicap of deafness is not in the ear; it is in the mind.” —Marlee Matlin

PURPOSE

In a 1984 national convention address, civil rights activist and politician Jesse Louis Jackson said, “America is not like a blanket—one piece of unbroken cloth, the same color, the same texture, the same size. America is more like a quilt—many patches, many pieces, many colors, many sizes, all woven and held together by a common thread.”

That quilt – bursts of colors and textures and seams that are more like veins running in different directions – is indicative of America's melting pot. As a society, we are fond of the idea of celebrating differences. However, equally true is that our society possesses a tendency to target those individuals who have distinguishing characteristics and who are different in some way. This targeting can manifest in stereotyping, scrutinization and shunning, and it can be disheartening at any age or stage. For youth, it can be particularly heart-wrenching. According to the National Bullying Prevention Center, one out of five children reports having been bullied, and 41% of these children report that they believe the bullying will be repeated. These experiences and feelings have been linked to depression and anxiety in young adults.

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This chapter focuses on bullying within a particular community of individuals – those who are deaf. Deaf individuals bring beautiful color and texture to our patchwork quilt, but in allowing them to become victims of bullying, we are diminishing their value and place in the fabric of our society. The result of this is that D/deaf students often struggle with mental health and the development of emotional intelligence, both of which are critical to an individual to be successful and happy. The goal of this chapter is to provide data and original insight to highlight the negative impact of bullying in the deaf community, while offering points of consideration so that teachers, parents, guardians, and other adults who are prominently featured in a child’s life may be better prepared to help.

The topic should be important to all of us. One in three babies is born with hearing loss and, by 2050, nearly 2.5 billion people will have some degree of hearing loss. Hearing loss effects many aspects of an individual’s life, including cognition, education, employment, and social interaction. The perceived differences surrounding these factors contribute to the negative stigma that surrounds deafness and can lead to actions of bullying (WHO, 2021).

This chapter will share data and original stories from numerous interviews to illuminate the topic and encourage awareness and inclusivity as related to school, media, sports and more, allowing the research to show real people facing real struggles who have real insight to offer. The interview design is used to obtain “thick, rich data utilizing a qualitative investigational perspective (Creswell, 2007). According to Turner (2010), the strength of the general interview guide approach – used in this chapter – is the ability of the researcher “...to ensure that the same general areas of information are collected from each interviewee; this provides more focus than the conversational approach, but still allows a degree of freedom and adaptability in getting information from the interviewee”. Interviews with deaf individuals and those who work with programs associated with deaf culture were conducted, with over 10 original interviews taking place.

Figure 1. Deaf Culture Sign



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