

OPINION

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It's Up to Grown-Up to Stop Bullying, Not Kids

If only my teachers intervened

BY JILL RICHARDSON

Bullying's been in the news a bit lately, in part because of the Parkland shooting.

In response, some people suggested that school children themselves should befriend kids who get bullied to prevent school shootings. Others say this is victim-blaming.

I'm not thinking about it too much as a national issue, however. It came up in my life in a more personal way. I suffer from the lasting impacts of childhood trauma, mostly anxiety and migraines.

This past week, I realized that the school bullying I'd experienced must have made a far deeper impact on me than I'd thought. It happened between about first and third grade, and again in junior high. I've spent most of my life trying to just bury those memories and not think about them.

Deep down, bullying made me feel like there's something wrong



with me, and if I got too close to another person, they'd discover it and reject me. It's made me feel mistrustful, and powerless.

My parents comforted me — and sometimes scolded me for being an

actively unsupervised spaces, like when we walked to school or played outside. But so much of the bullying happened in the classroom.

Why didn't the teachers ever do something? I hold the adults who watched and did nothing far more

bullies said about me and they believed it. I thought as soon as anyone heard the awful truth about me, they wouldn't be my friends. Like a cancer metastasizing through the school and resulting in an inevitable social death for me.

a huge dork, and she thought I was cool and wanted to be my friend.

Oh. Really? Because I definitely thought it was the other way around, and she was the cool one.

Talking about painful elementary school experiences with old friends has been eye-opening and healing. I thought I was the freak, the reject, but it turns out I was just one kid among many, all getting picked on.

Where were the adults? Why weren't the teachers intervening? So much less bullying would have happened if only our teachers didn't stand for it.

Why didn't our parents contact the school? Or call the parents of the kids who did the bullying? It seems everyone just took it for granted that little kids were going to pick on one another, and they let us get on with it.

Kids are going to be kids. That's why they're under adult supervision. It's the adults' jobs to stop bullying.

OtherWords columnist Jill Richardson is the author of Recipe for America: Why Our Food System Is Broken and What We Can Do to Fix It.

They have no memory of people picking on me. They remember getting picked on themselves. Each of us was in our own private hell, entirely oblivious that everyone else was in their own private hell.

easy target — but they rarely took action to stop the bullying. Finally, in eighth grade, they asked the school to keep a particularly nasty boy out of my class.

The bullying went on under several adults' noses: my teachers, soccer coaches, and Girl Scout leaders. The adults didn't intervene.

Some of this took place in rel-

responsible than the seven and eight year olds who perpetrated it.

This week, I decided to change my own narrative. I reached out to people I was friends with as a child. Most aren't my close friends as adults, but they grew up to be good people. I asked them, what do they remember?

Back then, I felt like every-

one in our grade heard what the

Instead, the people I went to school with told me that they got bullied too. I had no idea.

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One person told me she felt like

Students of Color Need to See More People of Color

There's no reason for me to be alone

BY NATE BOWLING

I spent most of my first year of grad school sitting in the back row of class with my



hood up. There were nearly 40 of us in the cohort. Two were black.

My hoodie was an act of silent dissent. Today, I completely understand when my students want to do the same, even with me in front of the room. Academia and public schools are spaces where people of color often feel underrepresented, unwelcome and unheard.

From third grade through high school, I was a student in a series of neighborhood public schools. Afterward, I went to community college and then on to a public liberal arts college where I earned my bachelor's and eventually my master's degree. *Each phase in my educational journey shared two characteristics:*

1. The further I progressed, the fewer black and brown classmates I had.

2. As I progressed, regardless

of the demographics of the student population, the faculty and administrators were uniformly nearly all white.

That needs to change.

An organization I am part of, the National Network of State Teachers of the Year, recently released videos designed to provoke conversations that will lead to this kind of change. Called Courageous Conver-

versations About Race in Schools, the

rollment numbers in lower grades. diagrams overlap in a largely white and female workforce. At the same time, because of higher birth rates among immigrant populations and the "mysterious phenomenon" of disproportionately high numbers of white children in private schools, the majority of the population of students in public school are students of color, and those numbers are headed even higher, based on en-

The lack of representation is an equity issue, and to resolve it we can look to lessons elsewhere in our society. During the Vietnam War the Pentagon realized that majority brown platoons of soldiers and Marines wouldn't take life-or-death orders from a uniformly white officer corps.

sations About Race in Schools, the videos provide an effective starting point for real discussions that should be happening in schools—particularly in colleges and universities—across this country.

Research tells us that upwards of 80 percent of U.S. teachers are white. Different research tells us that nearly 80 percent of teachers are female. Obviously, those Venn

Schools systems need to do a better job of attracting and retaining effective teachers of color. Students of color need to see more people of color in positions of expertise and authority, and teachers need to be conversant and literate in the cultural traditions that are present in their classrooms. None of these statements should be controversial.

tagon has submitted amicus curiae briefs in every major affirmative action case before the U.S. Supreme Court because they understand that representation matters.

The word "disruption" gets hurled around frequently in business and increasingly in education. Usually, it's about handing Silicon Valley tech bros a metric-ton of venture capital to sprinkle the

#EdTech fairy dust of the moment. But I'm going to argue that when it comes to teacher diversity and representation in schools, we actually need disruption.

In my neck of the woods the numbers are especially grim: There are only about 800 black teachers in all of Washington State. In my 12-year teaching career, I have never worked with another black male general education teacher.

There's no reason for me to be alone. We see talented students of color all over higher education because universities know how to recruit them. As Jeff Duncan-Andrade says, "Look at any college football or basketball team and tell me colleges don't know how to recruit black talent. When I was a kid I thought Georgetown was an HBCU."

But it can't just be student athletes. We need to bring in students who can increase teacher diversity. It's imperative—and it's well within our power.

Nate Bowling is a high school government teacher in Tacoma, Wash. who was named the 2016 Washington State Teacher of the Year and a finalist for National Teacher of the Year. His blog is called A Teacher's Evolving Mind.