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Bullying Victimization through an Interpersonal Lens: Focussing on Social Interactions and Risk for Depression

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Bullying Victimization through an Interpersonal Lens: Focussing on Social Interactions and Risk for Depression

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to obtain the degree of PhD at the
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Rector Magnificus Prof. C. Wijmenga
and in accordance with
the decision by the College of Deans.

This thesis will be defended in public on
Thursday 10 February 2022 at 16.15 hours

by

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“There are still many instances of bullying that I remember as if it was yesterday. Remembering them now, I am still filled with physical fear. Sometimes instead of sleeping, I lie awake and think of these moments. I used to believe that if I only did something, said something, punched someone, it would have changed everything. I realise now that it probably wouldn't have changed anything. It's strange how even as an adult I am made to feel like a child by my own recollection. Helpless and shameful.”

"Being socially excluded by my "friends" from high school partly resulted in me being susceptible to emotional abuse by my teacher at the age of 15. Now, more than 15 years later (including many psychotherapy sessions), I still have difficulty trusting people. Building new friendships is challenging and it took me years to trust my partner."

"I was never actually directly bullied but I was raised in a society that expected “real” men to be strong and strict in order to provide for their family. Growing up and realizing that I'm gay, I struggled with these expectations and felt pressured (or bullied?) to fit into this image of a “real man”. I started building a wall around me as a defence mechanism. The wall I built prevented me from showing emotions, being vulnerable, and loving people, and of course telling the world who I truly am. I acted in a way that society wanted me to. I left my country thinking that I will be free and happy in a new place. But it turned out that the expectations were deeply ingrained in me, which initially still made me struggle to be myself. Luckily, now I can say I found myself. "

"I wasn't bullied for long. Maybe a few months when I was 11. From one day to another a group of friends decided to pick on me and call me names. I was in complete shock. It took me a lot of therapy to get over the constant feeling that all my friends secretly dislike me. It's gotten much better but to this day, I sometimes feel that the laughter of strangers on the street is about me."

"I always thought about bullying as the typical United States high school movie. Teenagers preying on teenagers. A cruel stage of a teenager's life. It was only until I was an adult and so lost and deep in my depression that I realized that, in my early thirties, I had been a victim of bullying. It took me years to realise that it was still affecting my daily life and how I felt about myself. Therapy helped me heal and I am on a journey of growing my empowerment and agency. It is a pity we don't talk more openly about bullying in adult life. Microaggressions, power imbalance, toxic work environment, minorities, and other related topics need to be looked at and discussed from a bullying perspective."

¹ All quotes were collected through personal communication.

