

“Laura in the Spotlight”

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EC 299: Capstone

Section A

Capstone Project

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May 11/ 2024

## Introduction

For my capstone project, I created a film that was inspired by my own experiences of being deeply depressed due to bullying. My personal story impacted me and drove me to talk about this serious issue and raise people's awareness.

Over the years, my desire to be independent from my family and society was fueled by a deep desire to escape the place of constant comparison and criticism.

The trauma I experienced at home and school returned years later, out of sight. Every day was like a battle where my life was scrutinized and deemed inadequate by those around me. At home, I was constantly compared to the children of my mother's friends, and my flaws were pointed out. It was a constant cycle of injustice which made me feel like an outsider to my family.

But there was no way the family could stop the torture that awaited me in the school hallway. As a child, I was proud of the physical signs of my heritage—my dark skin, eyebrows, and body that didn't conform to society's beauty standards, which then became the target reasons of criticism by my friends, family, and overall the society causing indiscretions, causing insults and humiliations deeper than physical abuse.

The classroom, which was supposed to be the bastion of learning and development, turned into a war where my efforts and achievements were ignored. I always remembered these nights spent reading books and getting criticized by others about my appearance. The injustice weighed me and omitted a sense of self-worth or hope for the future.

But in the depths of my pain, the truth was hidden: The inevitability and consequences of bullying. The word bullying has a cold meaning that expresses not only the experience of someone like me but also a global problem with far-reaching consequences. The statistics paint a

grim picture and reveal a disturbing truth: For many, bullying is not just a childhood experience but a lifelong torment.

The mental impact of bullying cannot be overstated – insults and bullying can damage a person's sense of self and leave an empty shell of potential. For me, this made me try taking my own life; It's all a reminder of the depth of despair that tyranny can inflict on its victims.

But the darkness has a silver lining: the power of knowledge and protection. By shedding light on the silence of bullying, we can begin to dismantle the systems of oppression and indifference that allow bullying to thrive. This is a call for parents, teachers, and society to stand up and say, "Enough is enough," to create a safe environment where every child is valued for who they are, not for who they are, how they are, or where they come from.

My story is just one of countless stories of people suffering in silence because of their voices being drowned out by the violence. I decided to share my story in a film format, a combination of dramatic scenes and real-life interviews fostering the perception of bullying as a global issue. The film has a dramatic genre, including real-life scenes, emotions I have experienced, and interviews regarding bullying from people of different nationalities.

Bullying is a predominant issue that impacts individuals regardless of their age and background. It involves constant aggression to harm individuals who seem weaker. After looking through many articles, I found the ones that helped me learn about this topic and find the needed information to raise awareness of this issue. My literature review explores the reasons and effects of Bullying, shedding light on its preponderance, psychological influence, and interventions.

### Bullying in Armenia and frightening statistics

When walking across the corridors of Armenian schools, we can see a lot of unhappy, weak, and at the same time aggressive faces because of the term bullying.

Students in one of the Armenian schools asked questions about Bullying, such as how often they bullied someone or got bullied. The study showed that over 13, 6% of students got bullied the past few years, and most were boys under 15. (Torchyian et al., 2022) However, the reasons for this gender inequality regarding Bullying have not been found.

Another study showed the link between Bullying and the student's health. Even though bullied children are more likely to have low psychological well-being and feel stressed and anxious, the researcher discovered that being a bully was not directly related to feeling generally.

It was also reported that being bullied was invariably linked to having poorer health in various ways.

Ultimately, they found that being a bully or being bullied did not depend on each other; in other words, being a bully did not necessarily mean you were also more likely to be bullied. (Torchyian et al., 2022)

The researchers utilized a statistical method to make sure that the conducted information is reliable and, in conclusion, found out that whether as a perpetrator or victim, Bullying impacts a student's health, and being from a poor or rich family has no essential link to Bullying.

## History of Bullying

When examining a global issue, it is essential to go deep into its history, which is basically what this article did.

Bullying, in simple words, we call it a survival instinct among people. Herbert Spencer popularized the phrase "survival of the fittest," which has occasionally been used to defend policies like racism, laissez-faire economics, and militarism.

Bullying can be viewed as a means of advancement in communities that value wealth and achievement. Bullying is not just about physical acts. It includes many types and settings and can happen everywhere, such as in the workspace, school, and even home.(Allanson et al., 2015)

Many years ago, we could encounter the term bullying in a positive sense, meaning "sweetheart" or "fine fellow," but later, it changed its meaning. Now, by saying Bullying, we mean the ones who harass or mistreat others. Researchers did not pay much attention to Bullying until more recent times. In the 1990s, the US considered Bullying a significant global issue after several school massacres. Anti-bullying programs appeared in the early 2000s, including special laws for schools. (Allanson et al., 2015)

Since 2000, people and the Armenian government put much effort into preventing Bullying and lessening its levels; however, many jobs still need to be done. Schools are trying to make themselves safer by focusing on security measures, holding bullies accountable, and implementing various solutions. By emphasizing security precautions, holding bullies accountable, and putting other solutions in place, schools are attempting to make themselves

safer; however, we are still having problems with people's perception of bullying in a serious way.

### Victims of Bullying and Maltreatment

According to research conducted on 185 kids 10.8% of them were bullies, 6.5% were victims, 11.9% were both bullies and victims, 45.9% said they did not engage in Bullying, and 24.9% were classified as "borderline." (Ibitian & Oweini, 2019) This is a shocking statistic on Bullying, which shows that Bullying is more than we think about it, and actually, it has more profound reasons, one of which is maltreatment.

The study emphasized the role of family affecting Bullying as when one of the family members is trying to mistreat the other one, it affects children's psychology. It can later become a reason for school bullying, whether as a victim or perpetrator. Research has shown that neglect, maltreatment, and abuse in families can trigger aggressive behavior and lead to Bullying. (Ibitian & Oweini, 2019) It means that later, the children as students already get aggressive behavior resembling the maltreatment and abuse they experienced at home, so families should start the prevention of Bullying itself.

Smith, P. K. (n.d.). Cultural factors

To easily understand the link between cultural factors and Bullying, recent approaches have underlined the need to unpack culture by using a national mean level of cultural values. Forecasts regarding the relationships between Bullying and victim rates have been studied by Smith et al. (2016a) and Campbell, Kettle, and Sundaram (2018), including all six cultural value dimensions suggested by Hofstede et al. (2010), namely power distance, individualism-collectivism, masculinity-femininity, uncertainty avoidance, long-term orientation, and indulgence-restraint. It was found that individualism is linked more with face-to-face Bullying, whereas collectivism is more about cyberbullying perpetration (Wright et al., 2015). Another research done by Ji, Zhang, and Jones (2016) showed that countries with more collectivistic-oriented societies, including Armenia, are more likely to have higher rates of Bullying.

Bullying and how to handle it

The size and frightening consequences continue to rise as the governmental bodies do not take this problem seriously, and sometimes, even because of this mentality, children are too shy to talk about this problem. Instead, they carry out dangerous actions to harm themselves. Bullying prevention is not easy and can't be done alone; it should include the whole society, such as parents, schools, peers, and governments. Parents are the most important people who can help deal with Bullying, as children often refer to them to be guided. (Bullying in Armenia and How to Prevent It - Pink Armenia, 2023) Parents and overall society often ignore signs ( unreasonable injuries, lost items, loss of interest in their hobbies), which means that the children are getting bullied.

It is evident that for some families, it is tough to survive because of the lack of money, and they work 24/7; some parents do not have time. However, the child's upbringing is responsible work regardless of our problems, and parents should start anti-bullying conversations with their children from an early age, watch educational videos about it together, and not ignore their children's school life.

Therapy is helpful for kids who are facing Bullying. Therapists have an essential role as they create a comfortable and safe space for children to talk about their psychological issues and, most importantly, be honest with them. They impart knowledge on topics such as conflict resolution, emotion management, self-worth development, empathy, anxiety reduction, and dealing with thoughts of self-harm. (Bullying in Armenia and How to Prevent It - Pink Armenia, 2023) The therapies help victims and perpetrators with their emotionality and behavior.

### LGBT Community and Bullying

Sometimes, when something is out of our way of thinking, mentality, or upbringing, it can become a real reason to bully, and one of these reasons is the LGBT community, which is not accepted in my country. The researchers conducted interviews with 28 LGBTQ students and 19 school health professionals.

Those students experienced various types of Bullying, including verbal, social, and physical harassment. (Earnshaw et al., 2019)

Students whom we call transgender people experience Bullying because of their gender identification, including calling them by their birth name or using inaccurate pronouns. (Earnshaw et al., 2019)

The most terrible thing here is that school professionals are kind of unaware of what is happening in their schools, particularly among natural and LGBT community students, as the community students' reports do not match with the professor's reports.

School experts should communicate more with adolescents in order to understand them. The experts should be well-trained to address this issue and provide children with a healthy and safe environment.

I encountered a lot of essential themes when studying Bullying in Armenia, and I found that Bullying is more severe and profound than we think. Bullying has always lived near us, triggering aggression and anxiety. Sometimes, we subconsciously get bullied because of sociological, historical, psychological, and cultural aspects. In summary, the integration of different sources highlights the complex dynamics of Bullying in Armenian schools and emphasizes its multifaceted nature. During the prevention of Bullying, it is essential to involve parents, schools, health experts, and governmental authorities.

Putting efforts to build a safer and more supportive environment for all kids is not enough; we should find solutions and change social perceptions and attitudes toward this universal problem. One of the solutions which can help to see hear and talk about the issue is creating a film and including possible situations and emotions the bullied person can feel in order to highlight the severe character of the problem.

### Creative goals

I mainly concentrated on the question of how has bullying evolved in Armenian schools, and what are its sociological, historical, and psychological implications? I mainly concentrated on the question of how bullying has evolved in Armenian schools and what are its sociological, historical, and psychological implications.

As I am writing about bullying in detail, I used sub-questions such as What are the psychological factors that impact bullies and victims in Armenian schools? Which programs or tactics have previously worked well to lessen bullying in Armenian schools? What effects has Armenia's historical background had on bullying in schools? And finally, what is the link between LGBT and bullying in Armenian schools? Moreover, I did a creative project on this topic; I made a film and partially showed the answers to my questions in practice, the consequences of bullying, and possible solutions.

Besides my main research question and all these sub-questions, I wrote about the prevention methodologies of bullying to guarantee that people reading my capstone or watching my film can learn about the prevention methods, see and compare possible solutions, and differentiate between adequate and silly methodologies.

### Real-life interviews

I interviewed high and middle school students with special permission to gather real personal stories to develop the script. Furthermore, I interviewed foreigners of different nationalities to show the volume and variety of the issue. Interviews are an essential part of my research as they represent the real emotions and stories of victims experiencing bullying..

### Brief Synopsis of the Plot

In the heartwarming and terrifying story of Laura's Finding the Spotlight, we follow the path of a young girl named Laura as she discovers her strength and purpose while dealing with the harsh reality of bullying and self-doubt. Laura is not your typical heroine. She is a pimple-faced, bespectacled girl who is mourning the death of her mother. However, Laura's most important feature is her resilience in facing difficulties.

As you can see from the opening scenes, Laura's life is not easy at all. Bullied at school and home, she endured the taunts of her friends, especially Sarah and Leah, who put her life to the test every day. Even her father, consumed by his own emotions and insecurities, could not see the beauty and potential in Laura, viewing her as objectionable and blind.

Laura wears the clothes in which her mother died; it's a symbolic gesture that draws further criticism from his tormentors. But under the weight of pain and rejection, Laura climbs into hopes and dreams greater than her current struggles.

As Laura's despair deepens, she decides to commit suicide. Still, in a moment of divine intervention, Laura is faced with a vision of her future when she enters the audience as an attractive performer famous for her talent and patience. This event shakes Laura profoundly and makes her realize that her life is worth living and that her struggle has more purpose than she thought.

Embark on a journey of self-discovery and empowerment to advocate for change and inspire others to stand against bullying. Through candid interviews with individuals from diverse backgrounds, "Laura in the Spotlight" reveals the origins of bullying, its devastating effects, and the transformative power of compassion and empathy. Interviews are an essential part of my research as they represent the real emotions and stories of victims experiencing bullying. Ultimately, Laura's story is a beacon of hope for anyone who feels misunderstood. It reminds us that no matter how dark life may seem, there is always a light to take us forward." "Laura in the Spotlight" is much more than a movie; it is a testament to the resilience of the human spirit and the power to endure and be brave.

Title: "Laura in the Spotlight"

Bullying is a problem that crosses borders and affects people from all walks of life. It is a problem that can have a profound impact on victims, often leading to feelings of isolation, hopelessness, and even suicidal thoughts. The issue of bullying takes center stage in Laura Seeks the Spotlight and its impact on protagonist Laura and the people around her. As I have mentioned before, in my opinion, a visual depiction of the issue is the most effective solution for such a severe issue. According to worldwide research, people remember 10% of the information they read, 20% of what they listen to, and 80% of what they see. This is a vivid example of the

statement that to take the problem seriously; the person needs to see and feel it. My film shows the complexity of bullying by combining both, simultaneously conveying hope and perseverance.

The essence of the story is Laura, a young girl who tries to cope with the trauma of losing her mother and being bullied by her friends and family. Laura's character reflects real-life experiences and follows my long experience with bullying. I decided to play the role of Laura as I have experienced most real-life situations and emotions in the film. I thought I could successfully transfer these honest emotions and pain that I had inside. By anchoring the story in personal reality, the film achieves an authentic reality that resonates with audiences facing similar challenges.

The choice of characters, especially Laura and her tormentors Sarah and Leah, shows the existence of bullying and its profound effects. There are consequences for victims and perpetrators. Through Laura's eyes, we witness the cruelty and brutality of her bullies, whose actions alone are unsafe. Sarah and Leah represent the harsh reality of bullying as enemies that push Laura to the brink of despair. However, they are also human to some extent, allowing viewers to see how difficult their struggles and bullying can be for everyone involved. Getting inspired by the film "Lady on Fire," I decided to create a beautiful visualization of the link between the mysterious girl in a long black dress, the sea, and the emotions that the character is experiencing. I want the audience to have a feeling of confusion and mystery, admire the scene, look into the eyes of the character ( I used a close up shot for it), and try to see and notice the pain before they can figure out what is going on. The scene repeats throughout the film from different angles and shots to make the audience understand that Laura recalls her severe life in front of the sea as this is the only place she can be herself.

The film uses flashbacks and dream-like scenes to show her past and the situations that made her cry by the sea. It also adds depth to the narrative, giving the audience an insight into

Laura's Emotional state and struggles. I chose black and white colors for the flashbacks to show the contrast between reality and memory.

I tried to minimize the music in the scene of the flashbacks not to overwhelm the audience and concentrate their attention on the text and genuine emotions. Standing on the beach in a long dress, Laura evokes a sense of melancholy and introspection in the musical movement that sets the stage for her journey of self-discovery.

Integrating the bully's voice into Laura's head in the first scene during the close-up shot helps create a sense of confusion and, simultaneously, drives their attention to the pain and inadequate mental state of her remembering all the stuff. These voices are a constant reminder of the trauma Laura has experienced, highlighting the incredible nature of bullying and its ability to permeate every aspect of people's lives. The first flashback tells about her school life and how she is getting bullied for her external looks, including acne, glasses, and inappropriate dressing, and the texts there are pretty cruel. I have tried to choose characters similar to the ones of my childhood. The girls do not even try to help or understand the reason for such a dress or accept her as she is, which are the fundamental and severe characteristics of the bullies.

The second story talks about Laura's first love, showing her naïve and childish character. As we can see, the boy is trying to attract her with dishonest compliments. Still, he shows his natural face in the presence of his friends, which shows that bullies are very changeable and their surroundings are essential in forming them as human beings. They also need severe psychological help to be adequate and tolerant human beings. The third flashback depicts the lousy relationship between Laura and her father to highlight the fact that bullying starts in our families and the consequences of parental neglect and lack of love.

Sometimes, the generation gap prevents parents from understanding basic things about their children and helping them. First, love, relationships, and such stuff are pretty standard for a teenage girl; however, as we can see, her father is the main bully in Laura's life. It can make the

person feel not protected and odd, leading to the consequences such as the suicide depicted in the film. I didn't let the character commit suicide with the help of a vision that came to her at the last moment.

With this, I wanted to show that killing yourself is not a solution, as we can never know what waits for us in the future. The essential thing in life is what we think about ourselves, our self-love and confidence, but never what others claim about us. This can be seen in the last scene where the girl achieves her goals, showing her bravery and serving as an example to fight for our rights and future without paying attention to the haters, instead taking the painful situations as a lesson. I also added actual life interviews to make the audience believe that the issues really vary over countries and that every person, regardless of his age, race, or nationality, can experience bullying. Besides sharing their personal stories, people also told about possible solutions for bullying.

In terms of editing, I used sharp and quick transformation tools between reality and flashback so as not to spoil the image of a film and not pay so much attention. I also used the blurry effect in the scene of Laura's vision to create a sense of a dream. Moreover, I decided to use soft and real-life color correction to make the film livelier. Another interesting technique I used was mixing the interviews in terms of turn-taking of people to create a sense of professional reportage.

Interviews with people from different cultures continued to convey the film's message and provide insight into the origins of bullying and its profound impact on the international community. The coming together of different voices and perspectives reveals the scale of the problem but also highlights the need for unity to fight against all forms of tyranny.

Finally, "Laura Seeks Attention" is much more than a movie; It is a powerful testimony to the power of the human heart and the transformative power of compassion and empathy. The

film sheds light on the issue of bullying through acting, videos, and ideas, and it gives a message of hope and courage to those who feel disadvantaged. As Laura's story reminds us, no matter how dark life seems, there is always a light to guide us forward.

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