

Bullying & Victimology in the 21st Century

A Study & Report Encompassing Three Generations

Observations have been made that there is a difference not only in how Baby Boomers, GenX, Millennials and GenY perceive bullying, but in how they respond to it. There is further conjecture that this is the direct (unintended) result of various government directives or recommendations given to the public education system nationwide. A study was conducted and this report contains the details of it, the results of it, an analysis of the results and extrapolation of the analytical results.

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INTRODUCTION

While “zero tolerance” can be cited as having its beginnings with the enactment of the Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994, and originally intended to mandate school districts to adopt gun-free policies in exchange for federal funding. Almost immediately there were instances of the zero tolerance policies being applied to far more offenses than bringing a gun onto school property and by as early as 2005-2006 there were numerous reports of students receiving harsh administrative (suspensions / expulsions) for fighting *even in self-defense or defense of another*.

Additionally, there are documented cases of “zero tolerance” being used, at least in part, to justify harsh sentences against juvenile offenders even in offenses where no violence was committed and the offense wasn’t even on school grounds.

In 2008 in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, two judges were accused of accepting payments to impose harsh penalties on juveniles for such offenses as posting insults on social media, fighting (with no injuries) in school hallways, trespassing (even in vacant buildings) and shoplifting at a commercial department store.

There are multiple stories about “zero tolerance” having been abused or misused. Some of the more blatant and shocking of them include:

- In 1999 a high school student was suspended for 90 days – which resulted in him failing that school year – because he was found in possession of a broken pocket knife (which he used to clean his golf cleats).
- In 2009 an Eagle Scout was suspended for 20 days for having an emergency supply kit in his car, parked in the school’s parking lot, that included a pocket knife.

Why this
research
report?

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The purpose of this study, survey and report was to ascertain if a correlation could be established between age, education level and enhanced perception of “bullying” and/or the enhanced perception of being a victim or having been victimized.

A comprehensive survey was conducted in June & July 2018. The response data was mined and the results were analyzed. This report contains all of the garnered information including extrapolated correlations.

If you have any questions about the content, please don’t hesitate to email it/them to frank@frankborelli.com.

- In 2009 a 3rd grader was expelled because she brought a birthday cake to school that her grandmother had baked and sent in. A knife to cut the cake was also sent in by the grandmother and after using it to cut the cake the girl's teacher reported her to school authorities for having a dangerous weapon.
- In 2010 a 5-year-old kindergartner was suspended for making a "finger gun."
- In 2013 a second grader was suspended for biting his Pop-Tart into the shape of a mountain which was mistaken by school officials as being in the shape of a gun.

With such stories documented and on the national news, it's obvious that the students were as aware of them, if not more so than, as their parents were. With such over-reaching and bordering on ridiculous responses to these "violations," it's no wonder that so many students felt the need to be beyond cautious in their behavior; even to the extent of not defending themselves or anyone else in the event of an actual attack on their person.

In parallel to this growing abuse of the zero tolerance protocol, there grew a greater effort, nationwide, to reduce bullying through awareness and prevention. How the word "bullying" was defined changed across the span of decades since 1994 as the intrusiveness of social media has steadily grown in each person's day. Where a bully in the hallway might be prevented from committing his or her acts of abuse on school property, very little stopped him/her from being abusive via various social media platforms, messaging software applications ("apps") and group chat programs. This became known as "cyber bullying," and became viewed almost as worse than simply punching a fellow student.

A number of cases were reported where a student was cyber-bullied in such a saturated fashion that they ended up committing suicide. An understandable response from many school systems was to enact further restrictions and policies regarding the use of "smart phones" for the purpose of bullying.

All of these events have culminated resulting in a setting in our public schools where students feel that they cannot defend themselves or another, and if they do they risk severe punishment which may negatively impact their educational career or even result in criminal charges. Could such "conditioning" result in an entire generation of young adults who are more susceptible to being victimized because they've been so thoroughly well taught never to fight back?

That was the question this study sought to answer... and the author believes it has.

Anecdotal “Stories”

Baby Boomer

In the late 1940s, one man recalls being a student and carrying his .22 rifle into his ELEMENTARY school where he attended training at the NRA range in the school’s basement. And this wasn’t in the Midwest – this was Lancaster, New York. The elementary school aged student would carry his rifle to school where it was stored in a designated closet and then retrieved at the end of the school day to take down to the basement for the training.

It was the middle of the 1960s and in New York, at a public school, students were regularly carrying their .22 caliber rifles in and out of the school. Why? Because the school had a rifle range in the basement where students attended training. Reportedly, the gender breakdown included more females than males attending the training. The presence of rifles on school property wasn’t an issue. Many of the male students, after school hours, would take those same rifles into the surrounding countryside to hunt rabbits and squirrels.

Gen X

The year is 1985 and the state is Oklahoma. One student, who was a senior that year, remembers carrying a folding lock-blade pocket knife to school, and in school, every day. He states that a lot of his friends did as well. He further states there were plenty of pick-up trucks in the parking lot each day, belonging to parents or driven to school by students, that had gun racks with rifles or shotguns (or both) in them mounted in the back windows. In spite of this plethora of weapons in school or on school grounds, the person relating this information can’t remember an incident, any time during his years of school, wherein a weapon (of any kind) was used in a fight in school.

In Wisconsin, in the same time frame, a woman who was a senior at the time reports how her school all but shut down during deer season because so many of the older students were out hunting. They regularly carried their rifles and shotguns in their pick-up trucks in a variety of fashions, with the rear-window hanging rack being the most common. She states she knew plenty of students who carried knives in school, with the faculty’s full knowledge and implied consent, and further states there were never weapons used in the fights she was aware of in her school.

Hypothesis

That the perception of bullying and/or victimization has changed across the span of the past three generations and further that the change in perception of the term “bullying” – what actually comprises such – combined with the societal shift toward punishing students for any act of violence, even if in self-defense or defense of others, has increased the willingness of people to be victims, thereby empowering criminal activity.

By extension, that the public education system’s adoption of “zero tolerance” toward fighting in schools, however well-intentioned to minimize bullying, was misused, perhaps unintentionally but misused just the same, to prevent students from fighting *in self-defense* or in *the defense of another*.

Survey Methodology

With the object of the survey being to collect answers from identified differing generations, genders, education levels, etc., the questions were structured to identify such. Following that, the questions were structured to identify which generation had the greatest chance of being punished for defending themselves or another in school. The end group of questions were used to identify which generation had the greatest chance of being targeted as the victim of a personal crime. The survey was left open for two months and had 721 responses. Every respondent answered every question. The responses were then analyzed and compared to see if the hypothesis is supported.

Extrapolation of Results

Hypothesis supported

Respondents sorted by education level:

In the GenX and Baby Boomer generations, the largest portion of respondents had a Bachelor's Degree.

In the Baby Boomer generation the difference between those who had a Bachelor's Degree and those who had some college was only 0.4%. This generational group includes people born prior to 1969 and those raised in the 1950s and 1960s were not expected to attend college as "the norm." College was something some people attended and finished.

In the Millennial generation the largest education group is "Some College" at 40.6%. This is most likely due to the fact that this generation group includes people at ages wherein they haven't had enough time to complete a Bachelor's Degree yet, i.e. those under 22 years of age.

6.6% or roughly 48 of the respondents stated that they hold a Doctorate degree or have done post-doctoral work.

Respondents sorted by veteran status:

Across the generation groups, the percentage of veterans drops significantly from Baby Boomer to GenXer (a 6.4% drop) and then even more severely from GenXer to Millennial (an 11.7% drop). Part of the reduction between GenX and Millennial can be attributed to the age of some in the Millennial group; they simply may not have had a chance to enlist or serve yet. Still, the overall drop from Baby Boomer to Millennial in terms of veteran status is 18.1% or nearly one-fifth.

This MAY be indicative of a shift in outlook toward military service and/or willingness to sacrifice across the generations.

Respondents sorted by self-Defense training participation:

While the percentage of GenXers and Baby Boomers who have participated or do participate in self-defense training is roughly equal (the 0.6% difference represents about 4 people out of 583), the difference between those groups and the Millennials is notable. With 50.7% of the Millennial respondents saying they've participated in or continue to participate in self-defense training, that's a 17.2% drop off from the previous generations which averaged 67.9%.

Generational definition of bullying and what behaviors are included:

The government website stopbullying.gov lists twelve behaviors as potential bullying. Each respondent was asked to identify which of those listed behaviors s/he considered “bullying.” The list of behaviors is below in order of average rating/inclusion by all three generations.

Threats / Intimidation (95.5%)

Shoving / Hitting / Physical Assault (95.3%)

Cyber Harassment (threats, name calling, gossip via cyber means) (80.2%)

Name calling / insults (76.9%)

Racist Comments (73.2%)

Homophobic comments (69.7%)

Damaging property / vandalism (69.3%)

Fighting (68.5%)

Spreading Rumors / Gossip (66.3%)

Sexual comments / suggestions (61.2%)

Exclusion / Leaving someone out (54.6%)

Stealing (49.9%)

It's not surprise that such a large percentage of all three generations consider threats, intimidation, shoving, hitting and physical assault to be bullying.

It is significant that cyber-harassment ranks with such a high percentage given that many Baby Boomers aren't as saturated in the virtual world, or as commonly using “cyber” tools, as the GenX or Millennials are.

It is noteworthy that Name Calling, Racist Comments and Homophobic Comments are clustered together and within a 7% spread of each other. Both Racist Comments and Homophobic Comments could be grouped under Name Calling / Insults, and if that were done, then the ranking for that single bullying behavior would rank, as an average, at 86.6%, right below the threats, intimidation and physical contact items.

Perceived Bullying Victimization:

In examining the results, it appears that, with the exception of cyber-harassment, Millennials have been the victims of fewer acts of bullying than GenX or Baby Boomers.

Cyber-Harassment:

Millennials: 40.6% GenXers: 18.9% Baby Boomers: 11.2%

Given that Baby Boomers, in general, didn't even have cell phones available until they were in their twenties (at least), there was no chance for them to be bullied via cyber means. The availability and saturation of mobile phone technology grew through the GenX years and grew to encompass desktop, laptop, notebook and tablet computers in addition to mobile "smart" phones. Millennials are the first generation to have truly grown up with this technology from the day they were born.

The responses indicate that each of the generations have had an approximately equal exposure to being threatened or intimidated with the percentages ranging from 65.9-70%. However, those same responses show that Baby Boomers had a 60.4% chance of actually being physically assaulted as compared to 59.2% for GenXers (1.2% difference) and 42% for Millennials – an incredible 18% reduction as compared to Baby Boomers. The same ratios are shown for Fighting. Millennials are 18% less likely to be involved in a fight as compared to a Baby Boomer and 15% less likely as compared to a GenXer.

The remaining significant difference shown through the responses reveals Millennials are 11% more likely to be "bullied" through exclusion or being left out as compared to Baby Boomers and 6% more as compared to GenXers.

Victims of Crime

In virtually every crime category included, Millennials have a lesser chance of being the victim (based on responses) with the exception of every sex related crime.***

For Assault & Battery Millennials reported a 55% lower experience rate as compared to Baby Boomers and 51% less as compared to GenXers.

For Armed Robbery Millennials reported a 50% lower experience rate as compared to both other generations.

For Attempted Murder Millennials reported an 80% lower experience rate as compared to both other generations.

Zero Millennials reported being the victim of Strong Armed Robbery (robbery where no weapon is used) as compared to 3.3% for GenXers and 7% for Baby Boomers.

For Theft of Property Millennials reported a 16% lower experience rate as compared to Baby Boomers and 14% lower as compared to GenXers.

For Vandalism to property Millennials reported an experience equal to Baby Boomers (41%) and slightly lower than GenXers (44%).

For “None of the Above,” meaning that the respondent had experienced being victim of none of the listed crimes, Millennials reported an experience of 29% compared to 19% for GenXers and 16% for Baby Boomers.

***For the majority of the crimes listed, Baby Boomers had the highest percentage of experience. This may be for no other reason than that they've lived significantly longer and have, therefore, had a longer time frame in which to be targeted as a victim.

Conflict Management in Other Aspects of Life

We tend to think about bullying and being a victim only in terms of students and predominantly younger students at that: pre-adolescent to adolescent ages. Not usually in terms of college or junior/senior years of high school.

With zero tolerance in effect for 26 years, are we teaching children to avoid conflict to the extent of sacrificing their own goals? Are we limiting their potential by restricting their responses? By avoiding conflict rather than addressing it, are we preventing them from learning skills that would serve them well in later parts of life? Professionally? Personally? In challenge?

Prominent psychologists and educators agree with my hypothesis that there are long term invasive conditions resulting from the decades+ of training/conditioning to NOT defend one's self.

Absence of self-reliance has a huge impact on personal, professional and relationship responses throughout a person's adult life. Self-Reliance HAS to be taught during youth and early adulthood lest we continue to create adults incapable of managing any conflict or stress situation.

Survey Responses

Survey Summary:

There were a total of 721 respondents. ALL 721 respondents answered EVERY question.* The data was then sorted by age, gender, year of high school graduation, education level and veteran status.

*Only data gathering / respondent mistake identified is that some of the respondents answered question of "What year did you graduate from high school?" with their year of birth instead (assumed from data comparisons). These answers were removed from data analysis where sorted by year of High School graduation.

For the purposes of this study, the goal was to differentiate between "generations." Using the available data, the generations will be sorted by age from 30 & under (born in 1988 or later), 31-50 (born between 1968-1987), and 51+ (born in 1967 or earlier). Using those groups the generational proportions of respondents are:

- < or = 30: 19.14% (for the purposes of this study, this generation will be referred to as "**Millennials**" even though some of them may be younger than would generally fit into that designation.)
- 31-50: 46.19% (for the purposes of this study, this generation will be referred to as "**Gen X**")
- > or = 51: 34.68% (for the purposes of this study, this generation will be referred to as "**Baby Boomers**" even though some of them may be younger than would generally fit into that designation.)

There were responses from North America, South America, Europe, Asia and Australia. The numbers of respondents outside of North America, however, were so small as to be statistically insignificant.

By Age

138 respondents fell into the group of less than or equal to 30 and are included herein as representing the **Millennials**.

333 respondents fell into the group of ages between 31 and 50 and are included herein as representing the **GenXers**.

250 respondents fell into the group of equal to or greater than 51 and are included herein as representing the **Baby Boomers**.

By Gender/Age

The respondent Millennials were 67 male (48.5%); 70 female (51.5%).

The respondent GenXers were 192 male (57.7%); 142 female (42.3%).

The respondent Baby Boomers were 154 male (61.5%); 96 female (38.5%)

Total count by gender** – Male: 413 (57.3%) Female: 308 (42.7%)

**The respondent gender ratios are not equal to the national population gender ratios according to the 2010 U.S. Census which showed a male/female ratio of 50.8%/49.2%. This difference may be impacted by the fact that some respondents were from other countries/continents.

By education level

The respondent Millennials (138) level of education breakdown is:

High School only: 16.7%

Some college: 40.6%

Bachelor's Degree: 31.1%

Master's Degree: 10.9%

Doctorate +: 0.01%

The respondent GenXers (333) level of education breakdown is:

High School only: 8%

Some college: 32.7%

Bachelor's Degree: 40.2%

Master's Degree: 16.8%

Doctorate +: 2.1%

The respondent Baby Boomers (250) level of education breakdown is:

High School only: 11.2%

Some college: 36%

Bachelor's Degree: 36.4%

Master's Degree: 12.4%

Doctorate +: 4.4%

By veteran status

The percentage of veterans (or active duty) respondents in the Millennial group (138) is: 08.7%

The percentage of veterans (or active duty) respondents in the GenXers group (333) is: 20.4%

The percentage of veterans (or active duty) respondents in the Baby Boomers group (250) is: 26.8%

Taken or Participate in Self-Defense Training:

The percentage of Millennials that have taken or continue to participate in self-defense training is: 50.7%

The percentage of GenXers that have taken or continue to participate in self-defense training is: 68.2%

The percentage of Baby Boomers that have taken or continue to participate in self-defense training is: 67.6%

Perception & Definition of “Bullying”:

The respondents were asked to indicate what types of behaviors they considered “bullying” from a list of behaviors identified as such on the website stopbullying.gov. That list of bullying behaviors is:

- Name calling / insults
- Threats / Intimidation
- Spreading Rumors / Gossip
- Cyber harassment (any of the above three performed through cyber means)
- Shoving / Hitting / physical assault
- Homophobic comments
- Fighting
- Sexual comments / suggestions
- Exclusion / Leaving someone out
- Racist comments
- Damaging property / vandalism
- Stealing

Each respondent had to select which of those behaviors s/he considered “bullying.” The respondents’ answers were separated based on generational group and then counted.

What behaviors are included in “bullying?”

Name calling / insults (76.9%)

Millennials: 83.3% GenXers: 74.2% Baby Boomers: 73.3%

Threats / Intimidation (95.5%)

Millennials: 94.9% GenXers: 95.5% Baby Boomers: 96%

Spreading Rumors / Gossip (66.3%)

Millennials: 73.2% GenXers: 64.6% Baby Boomers: 61.2%

Cyber Harassment (any of the above three committed via cyber means) (80.2%)

Millennials: 84.8% GenXers: 78.1% Baby Boomers: 77.6%

Shoving / Hitting / Physical Assault (95.3%)

Millennials: 96.4% GenXers: 95.2% Baby Boomers: 94.4%

Homophobic comments (69.7%)

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Millennials: 77.5%	GenXers: 65.7%	Baby Boomers: 66%
<u>Fighting (68.5%)</u>		
Millennials: 69.6%	GenXers: 67.6%	Baby Boomers: 68.4%
<u>Sexual comments / suggestions (61.2%)</u>		
Millennials: 65.9%	GenXers: 55.3%	Baby Boomers: 62.4%
<u>Exclusion / Leaving someone out (54.6%)</u>		
Millennials: 66.7%	GenXers: 44.7%	Baby Boomers: 52.4%
<u>Racist Comments (73.2%)</u>		
Millennials: 83.3%	GenXers: 67%	Baby Boomers: 69.2%
<u>Damaging property / vandalism (69.3%)</u>		
Millennials: 76.1%	GenXers: 67.3%	Baby Boomers: 64.4%
<u>Stealing (49.9%)</u>		
Millennials: 60.9%	GenXers: 41.1%	Baby Boomers: 47.6%

Perceived “Bullying” Victimization:

Each respondent was asked to identify which bullying behaviors they felt they had been victim of in their life. Each behavior is listed with the percentage of each generational group that identified having been a victim of it.

Name calling / insults (89.9%)

Millennials: 89.9% GenXers: 92.2% Baby Boomers: 87.6%

Threats / Intimidation (68.5%)

Millennials: 65.9% GenXers: 70% Baby Boomers: 69.6%

Spreading Rumors / Gossip (73.1%)

Millennials: 76.1% GenXers: 77.2% Baby Boomers: 66%

Cyber harassment (any of the above three performed through cyber means) (23.6%)

Millennials: 40.6% GenXers: 18.9% Baby Boomers: 11.2%

Shoving / Hitting / physical assault (53.9%)

Millennials: 42% GenXers: 59.2% Baby Boomers: 60.4%

Homophobic comments (12%)

Millennials: 14.5% GenXers: 15.6% Baby Boomers: 6%

Fighting (43.2%)

Millennials: 31.9% GenXers: 46.8% Baby Boomers: 50.8%

Sexual comments / suggestions (45%)

Millennials: 48.5% GenXers: 45.6% Baby Boomers: 40.8%

Exclusion / Leaving someone out (62.7%)

Millennials: 68.8% GenXers: 62.2% Baby Boomers: 57.2%

Racist comments (21.9%)

Millennials: 18.1% GenXers: 24% Baby Boomers: 23.6%

Damaging property / vandalism (31.3%)

Millennials: 30.4% GenXers: 33.9% Baby Boomers: 29.6%

Stealing (31.3%)

Millennials: 34.8% GenXers: 32.4% Baby Boomers: 26.8%

None of the Above (2.5%)

Millennials: 2.2% GenXers: 3% Baby Boomers: 2.4%

Criminal Victimization Identified:

Each respondent was asked to identify which crime or attempted crime they felt they had been victim of in their life. Each crime is listed with the percentage of each generational group that identified having been a victim of it.

Assault and battery

Millennials: 25.4% GenXers: 38.7% Baby Boomers: 40%

Armed robbery (weapon used to commit crime)

Millennials: 3.6% GenXers: 6.3% Baby Boomers: 6%

Attempted murder

Millennials: 1.4% GenXers: 5.4% Baby Boomers: 4.4%

Date Rape

Millennials: 9.4% GenXers: 9% Baby Boomers: 6.8%

Sexual assault (inappropriate touching)

Millennials: 34.1% GenXers: 24% Baby Boomers: 20.8%

Sexual assault (any type of penetration)

Millennials: 13.8% GenXers: 6.9% Baby Boomers: 9.6%

Strong arm robbery (no weapon involved)

Millennials: 0% GenXers: 3.3% Baby Boomers: 7.2%

Theft of property

Millennials: 43.5% GenXers: 57.3% Baby Boomers: 59.6%

Vandalism of your property

Millennials: 41.3% GenXers: 44.4% Baby Boomers: 41.6%

None of the Above

Millennials: 29% GenXers: 19.2% Baby Boomers: 16%

Fights and Motivations:

Each respondent was asked if they had ever been in a fight caused or instigated by a disagreement, someone calling them a name (or vice versa) or having been threatened. The answer options were YES or NO. The percentage of each generational group that answered YES is shown.

Millennials: 40.6% GenXers: 56.2% Baby Boomers: 52%

Each respondent was asked if they had ever been in a fight while acting in self-defense or in defending themselves against an assault on their person. The answer options were YES or NO. The percentage of each generational group that answered YES is shown.

Millennials: 42% GenXers: 61.3% Baby Boomers: 65.6%

Each respondent was asked if they had ever been in a fight for the purpose of defending someone else. The answer options were YES or NO. The percentage of each generational group that answered YES is shown.

Millennials: 48.6% GenXers: 60% Baby Boomers: 63.2%

Punished for “Justified” Fighting:

Each respondent was asked if they had ever been punished for being involved in a physical altercation (a “fight”) while acting in self-defense or defense of another. The answer options were YES or NO. The percentage of each generational group that answered YES to having been in a fight for either reason AND answered YES to having been punished for such is shown.

Millennials: 52.8% GenXers: 39.3% Baby Boomers: 33.8%

Appendix A: Survey Questions

Each of the following represents one survey question. The potential responses are listed after each question.

1) Gender

Male

Female

2) Age:

18-22

22-26

27-30

31-35

36-40

41-45

46-50

51-55

55+

3) Continent of primary life residency:

North America

South America

Europe

Africa

Asia

Australia

4) Level of Education:

High School Diploma

Some college

Bachelor's Degree

Master's Degree

Doctorate

Post-doctoral work

5) What year did you graduate high school?

1975 or earlier

1976-1980

1981-1985

1986-1990

1991-1995

10) Please check all those crimes someone has attempted or has successfully committed against you:

Assault and battery

Armed robbery (weapon used to commit crime)

Attempted murder

Date Rape

Sexual assault (inappropriate touching)

Sexual assault (any type of penetration)

Strong arm robbery (no weapon involved)

Theft of property

Vandalism of your property

11) Have you ever been in a fight that resulted from a disagreement/name calling/threat?

Yes

No

12) Have you ever been in a fight while acting in self-defense? / acting against an assault on your person?

Yes

No

13) Have you ever been in a fight for the purpose of defending someone else?

Yes

No

14) Have you ever been punished for “fighting” while acting in defense of yourself?

Yes

No

15) Have you ever been punished for “fighting” while acting in defense of another person?

Yes

No

Bibliography

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zero_tolerance_\(schools\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zero_tolerance_(schools))

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gun-Free_Schools_Act_of_1994