

Alberti Center for Bullying Abuse  
Prevention Keynote Address



# Fostering Kindness: Using Technology to Combat Online Bullying

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University of Nebraska – Lincoln

September 28, 2017



*Empowerment Initiative*  
Developmental • Neuroscience • Translational

## Disclaimer

- ***Our Mission:*** The nonprofit Empowerment Initiative supports translational research designed to foster positive, accepting communities free from bullying and other negative behaviors.
- We don't provide advice on individual cases without a full evaluation. We would have to do a complete evaluation and make recommendations based on data.
- Any anti-bullying initiatives/outreach services or resources in this presentation are for informational purposes only (i.e., not endorsements).

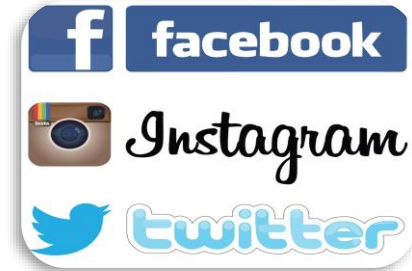
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## — We want to hear from you!

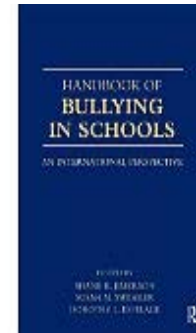
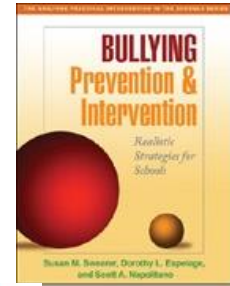
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- **Facebook:** The Empowerment Initiative and Bullying Research Network
- **Instagram:** Empowerment\_UNL
- **Twitter:** @Empowerment\_UNL  
@Dr.SueSwearer @Bully\_Research
- **Website:** <http://cehs.unl.edu/empowerment>



# Keynote Background

- Studying bullying since 1998
- A supervising **psychologist** in the child and adolescent therapy clinic at UNL since 1999
- Co-edited/authored: “Bullying: At School and Online” ([www.education.com](http://www.education.com)) and these **books** ➔
- Developed a **cognitive-behavioral intervention** for bullying behaviors
- **Parent** of two adolescent girls



# Chair of the Research Advisory Board for the Born This Way Foundation



## What is the Empowerment Initiative?

### Empowerment Initiative Research Lab @UNL

- We conduct research on bullying and related constructs (e.g., depression, anxiety, hazing, empathy, body image, health behaviors)
- We have been working with schools and districts across the U.S. since 1998
- We help schools make data-based decision making about how to prevent and intervene with bullying behaviors ([www.hhpublishing.com](http://www.hhpublishing.com))



## — Translational Research

“The final test of the value of science is its **applicability.**”

(President Woodward of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, 1907)



## Helping Everyone Achieve Respect

- Anti-bullying presentation created for the National Guard
- Rick Weissbourd, Stephanie Jones, & Susan Swearer (2013)
- Published by Career Training Concepts, Inc.
- **Can we reduce bullying in high schools by using National Guard recruiters to deliver the H.E.A.R. message?**





## **N-Lighten ® SEL Program**

- Created for the nationwide network of Paul Mitchell Schools
- SEL curriculum focused on self-empowerment, anti-bullying, and self-awareness
- N-Lighten your mood, mind, actions, school, and world
- **Will teaching SEL skills reduce bullying, mean behavior and increase self-awareness and empowerment among young adults?**



## Born Brave Experiences Study

- Mixed methods research study
- Completed three years of data collection
- First international survey in Spanish to examine mental health correlates and social support
- Data collected on over 10,000 youth and young adults
- **What are the supports that youth need in order to create a kinder and braver world?**



## Keynote Objectives

1. You will gain information about translational research approaches to responding to bullying;
2. You will understand the complexity of bullying and the factors that influence bullying;
3. You will build a toolbox of kindness-based strategies to help address bullying in your school; and
4. You will leave with ideas about how to use technology to put an end to bullying and related mean behaviors.

**There is no single, simple solution to stopping bullying!**



## Why Focus on Bullying?

- **Bullying is a ubiquitous problem**
  - Approximately 8-18% of students report bullying others; 10-20% report being victimized; 75% or more report witnessing bullying (Swearer, Collins, Fluke, & Strawhun, 2012)
- **Involvement in bullying has serious consequences**
  - Teenage bullying predicts violent convictions
  - Victimization is related to anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem
  - Involvement in bullying leads to lower academic performance, truancy, and dropout



## **Bullying is a Public Health Issue**

- Bullying is a major **public health concern**
  - Dropout, suicide, and litigation
- Bullying is a **mental health problem** (depression, anxiety, conduct disorder)
- Bullying contributes to a **negative school climate**, which is related to **lower academic functioning**
- One common problem is that students and adults often **do not know how to effectively respond** to bullying



## Why is it Important to Define Bullying?



- A uniform definition helps to monitor the incidence/magnitude of youth bullying, examine trends over time, and inform prevention and intervention efforts.



## Definition of Bullying

- Bullying includes three criteria:
  - a. Unwanted aggressive behavior that is purposeful
  - b. Is repeated or has the potential to be repeated over time
  - c. Involves an imbalance of power that is observed or perceived (can be physical, social, or intellectual)

(Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2014)
- Bullying includes making threats (**verbal**), spreading rumors or excluding someone from a group (**relational**), attacking someone physically or verbally (**physical**), and can be done **electronically** (i.e., cell phone, computer, gaming). These forms co-occur.



## What is Bullying?

- Bullying is **different** from other aggressive and mean behaviors:
  - **purposeful, repeated** (or potential), and **imbalance of power**
- These **three elements** mean that bullying must be addressed **differently** than other aggressive behavior
- Examples of bullying:
  - Bullying includes making threats, spreading rumors or excluding someone from a group, attacking someone physically, verbally or electronically (i.e., cell phone, computer, gaming)





## Types of Bullying

- Physical
  - punching, kicking, pushing, destroying things
- Verbal
  - name calling, teasing, threats
- Social/Relational
  - spreading rumors, excluding others
- Electronic
  - any verbal or social bullying that uses electronic media (i.e., social media, online gaming)

**These do not  
happen in  
isolation; they  
tend to occur  
together.**



## Debunking the Dyadic Bias in Bullying

### ○ Myth:

- Bullies are bullies
- Victims are victims

### ○ Fact:

- Bullies can be victims
- Victims can be bullies



Students' role/status in bullying is dynamic, not static.



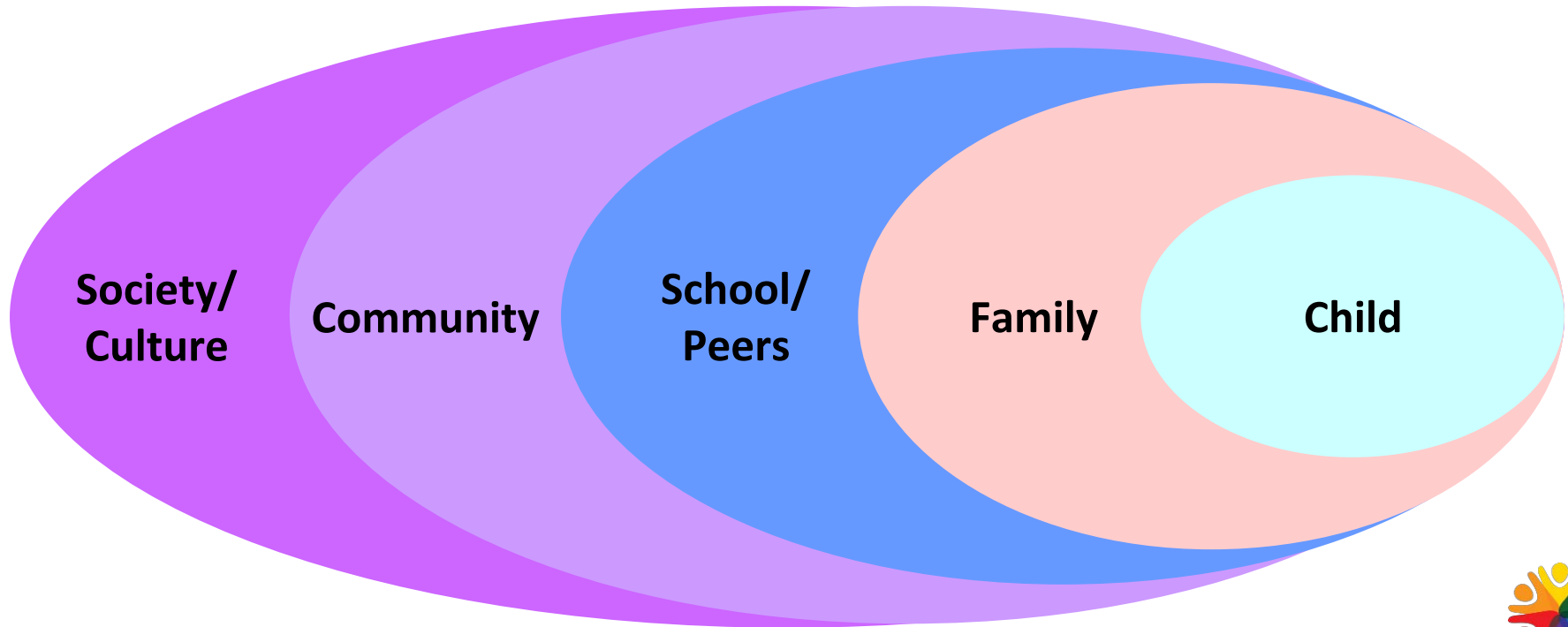
## Bully/Victim Continuum

- **Bully Perpetrator** – reports bullying others
- **Victim/Target** – reports being bullied by others
- **Bully-Victim** – reports bullying others & being bullied
- **Bystander** – reports observing others being bullied
- **No Status/Not Involved** – does not report any involvement with bullying

**\*\*\*\*\*These roles are NOT fixed\*\*\*\*\***



## **The Social-Ecological Model of Bullying**



(Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Orpinas & Horne; 2006; Swearer & Doll, 2001)



## **The Facts (Individual Level)**

- Most students are involved in bullying, regardless of sex
- Bullying increases during periods of change (e.g., transition from elementary to middle school)
- Bullying decreases as youth get older (e.g., less frequency in high school when compared to elementary)
- LGBTQ youth and students in special education are at greater risk for being bullied

**Youth are bullied because they are seen as different**



## **The Facts (Family Level)**

- Modeling of aggressive behavior is a risk factor for bullying
- Punitive and unsupportive parenting styles predict bullying
- Physical discipline is correlated with bullying
- Sibling aggression at home is associated with bullying at school

**When aggression is modeled at home, youth are more likely to be violent and aggressive at school.**



## **The Facts (School/Peers Level)**

- Bullying typically occurs where school professionals cannot see it (i.e., bathroom, hallway)
- Classrooms with negative peer friendships, poor teacher-student relationships, lack of self-control, and poor problem-solving have higher levels of bullying
- Negative and punitive school climate is associated with higher levels of bullying
- Students who feel connected to school are less likely to be involved in bullying

**Strategies that are generally effective at promoting positive, prosocial behavior will also be effective for preventing bullying.**



## **The Facts (Community/Society Level)**

- Bullying has an audience; however, it is difficult for bystanders to intervene
- Bullying is reinforced (e.g., passive acceptance, laughing, taunting) by the audience
- Bullying is an effective strategy to gain social status
- Youth who are positively engaged in their communities are less likely to be involved in bullying
- Societal messaging (i.e., media, elected officials, celebrities) influences engagement in bullying.

**Positive, high status role models MATTER**





## Ineffective Strategies

- “Punish the person doing the bullying”
  - detention
  - suspension
  - expulsion
  - zero tolerance
  
- Traditional punishment alone does not work
- Zero tolerance policies are ineffective



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1.

Change Bullying Behaviors by  
Changing Cognitions



## How I Think Questionnaire (HIT)

- A self-report measure of cognitive distortions for adolescents (ages 14-19)
  - Cognitive distortions: persistent errors in thinking despite contradictory evidence
- Eight subscales divided between two domains: cognitive distortions & antisocial behavior
- Interpretation: higher scores indicate elevated levels of cognitive distortions

<b>Cognitive Distortions</b>	<b>Antisocial Behavior Referents</b>
Self-Centered	Opposition-Defiance
Blaming Others	Physical Aggression
Minimizing/Mislabeling	Lying
Assuming the Worst	Stealing



## HIT Data Analysis: Methods

- All participants ( $n = 42$ ) were part of the Target-Bullying Intervention Program (T-BIP)
- All completed the HIT prior to the intervention and approximately two weeks post-intervention
- Statistical analysis: Paired samples t-test
  - Used to compare each participant's average score pre and post-intervention
  - Comparison allows for the determination of statistically significant changes in scores



## HIT Data Analysis: Results

Paired-Samples *t*-Test to Compare Total HIT Score or HIT Sub-Scores Before and After T-BIP.

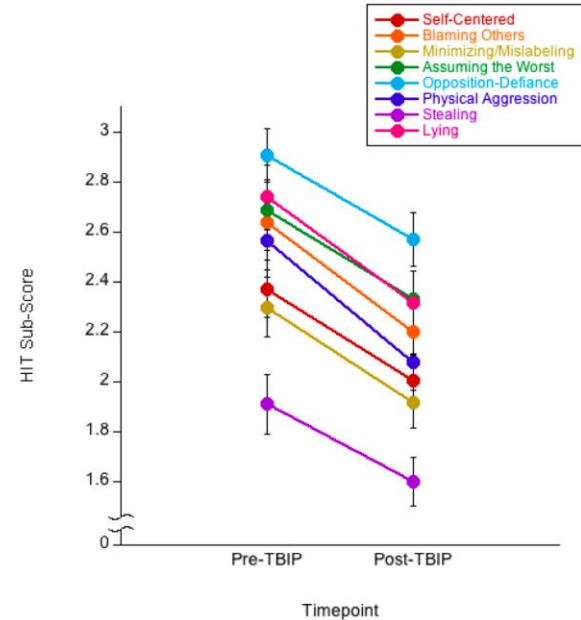
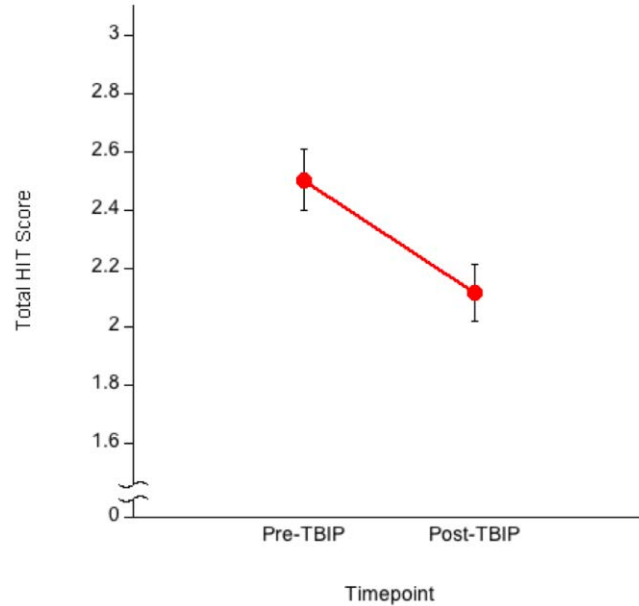
	<i>N</i>	Pre-TBIP Mean	Post-TBIP Mean	<i>t</i> -value	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i> -value
Self-Centered	41	2.37 (.726)	2.01 (.697)	3.626	40	.001
Blaming Others	42	2.64 (.708)	2.20 (.094)	5.148	41	.000
Minimizing/Mislabeled	42	2.30 (.770)	1.92 (.657)	3.731	41	.001
Assuming the Worst	42	2.69 (.791)	2.33 (.721)	3.724	41	.001
Opposition-Defiance	42	2.91 (.684)	2.57 (.683)	3.328	41	.002
Physical Aggression	42	2.56 (.756)	2.08 (.713)	5.241	41	.000
Lying	42	2.74 (.832)	2.32 (.834)	3.364	41	.002
Stealing	41	1.91 (.761)	1.60 (.622)	3.328	40	.002
<b>Total HIT</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>2.50 (.664)</b>	<b>2.12 (.615)</b>	<b>4.492</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>.000</b>

Note: A value within a parenthesis indicates a standard deviation. A higher score on HIT indicates higher levels of self-serving cognitive distortion.





# HIT Data Analysis: Results





## A Simple Kind and Brave Test

“Are my words **necessary**?”

“Are my actions **helpful**?”

“Are my words **kind**?”

“Are my actions **nice**?”

“Are my words **true**?”

“Are my actions **brave**?”

“Are my words **useful**?”





## Acts of Kindness App

- #kindness
- [www.randomactsofkindness.org](http://www.randomactsofkindness.org)





**“When you teach kindness, love, and empathy, there is no room for hate.”**



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# Break



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# 2.

## The Paradigm Shift

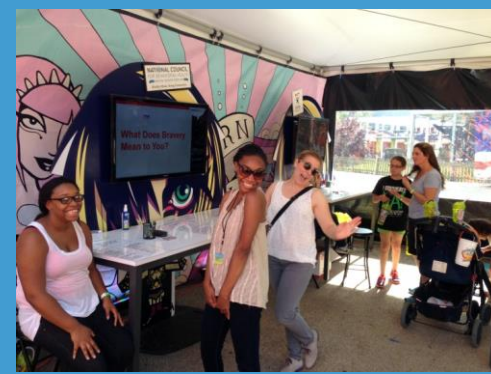


- **Bullying prevention starts with every individual person making a commitment to treating all people with dignity, respect, and acceptance.**



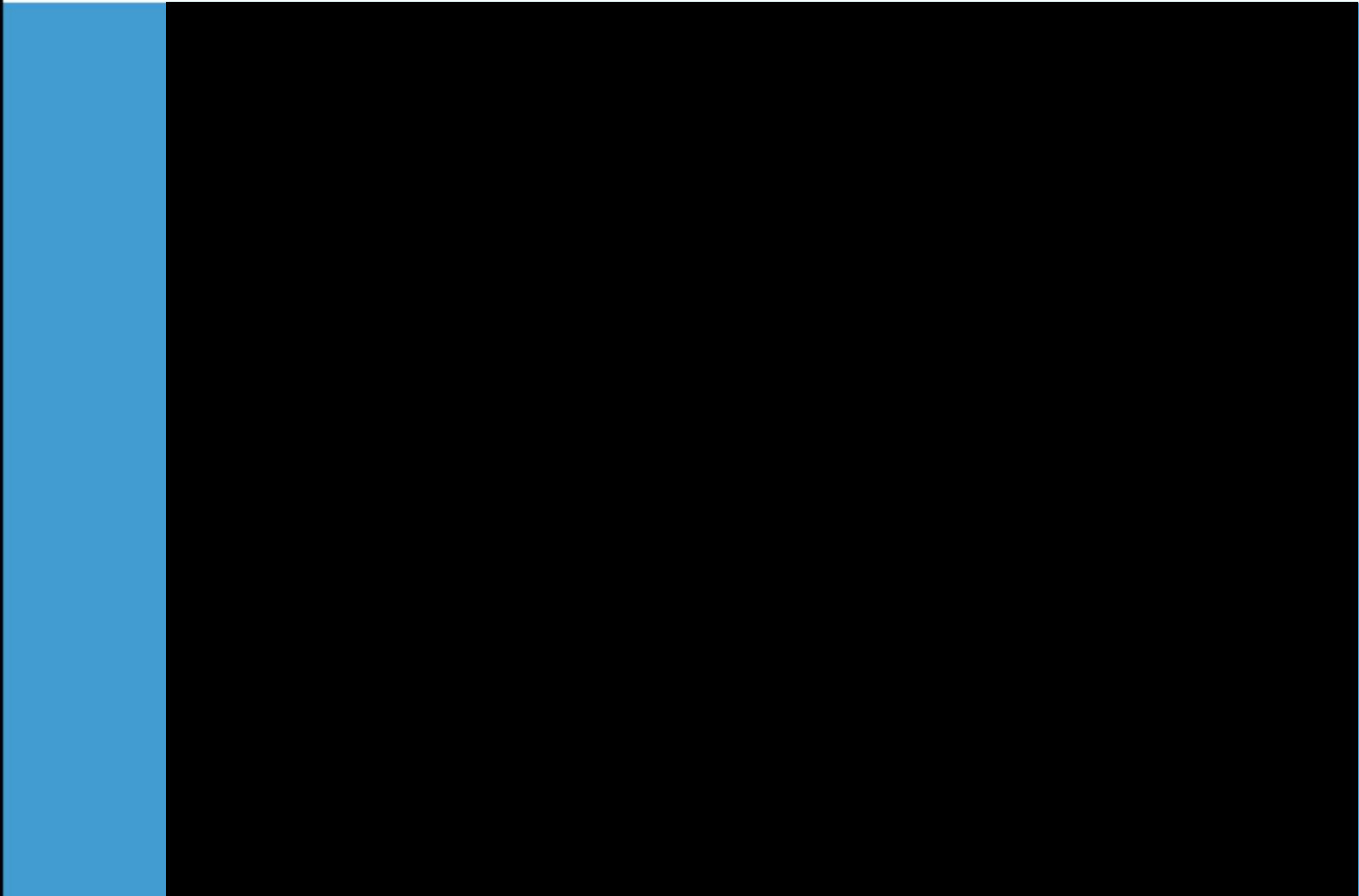


# BORN BRAVE BUS TOUR





# Born Brave Bus Tour





# RESEARCH STRATEGY

- **2012:** BTWF partnered with Viacom Media Networks and Shireson Associates to survey young people on their perceptions of kindness and bravery.
- **2013:** The Born Brave research study was conducted to assess the impact of the Born Brave Bus Tour and the supports that youth and young people need to create kinder and braver homes, schools, and communities.
- **2014:** The Born Brave research study was designed to assess and validate a measure of kindness and bravery and to assess the impact of Born This Way Foundation and what supports youth need to create a kinder, braver world.
- **2015:** The Emotion Revolution survey was launched with Yale's Center for Emotional Intelligence to assess how our nation's youth feel in school and how they would like to feel in school.
- **2016:** Phase 3 of the Born Brave research study was launched to further refine the measurement of kindness and bravery and will assess keys to mental wellness among youth and young adults.



# Born Brave Experiences Survey 2013-2016

<b>Year</b>	<b>Youth</b>	<b>Young Adult</b>
<b>2013</b>	<b>1744</b>	<b>3622</b>
<b>2014</b>	<b>923</b>	<b>2772</b>
<b>2016</b>	<b>1062</b>	<b>3162</b>





# Theoretical models for kindness and bravery

- **Social Cognitive Theory** (Bandura, 1963, 1986)

Behavioral Capability; Observational Learning; Reinforcements; Expectations; Self-efficacy

- **Transtheoretical Model of Change** (Prochaska & DiClemente, 1983)

Stages and processes of change are fluid and dynamic; Decisional Balance; Incorporates Bandura's concept of self-efficacy



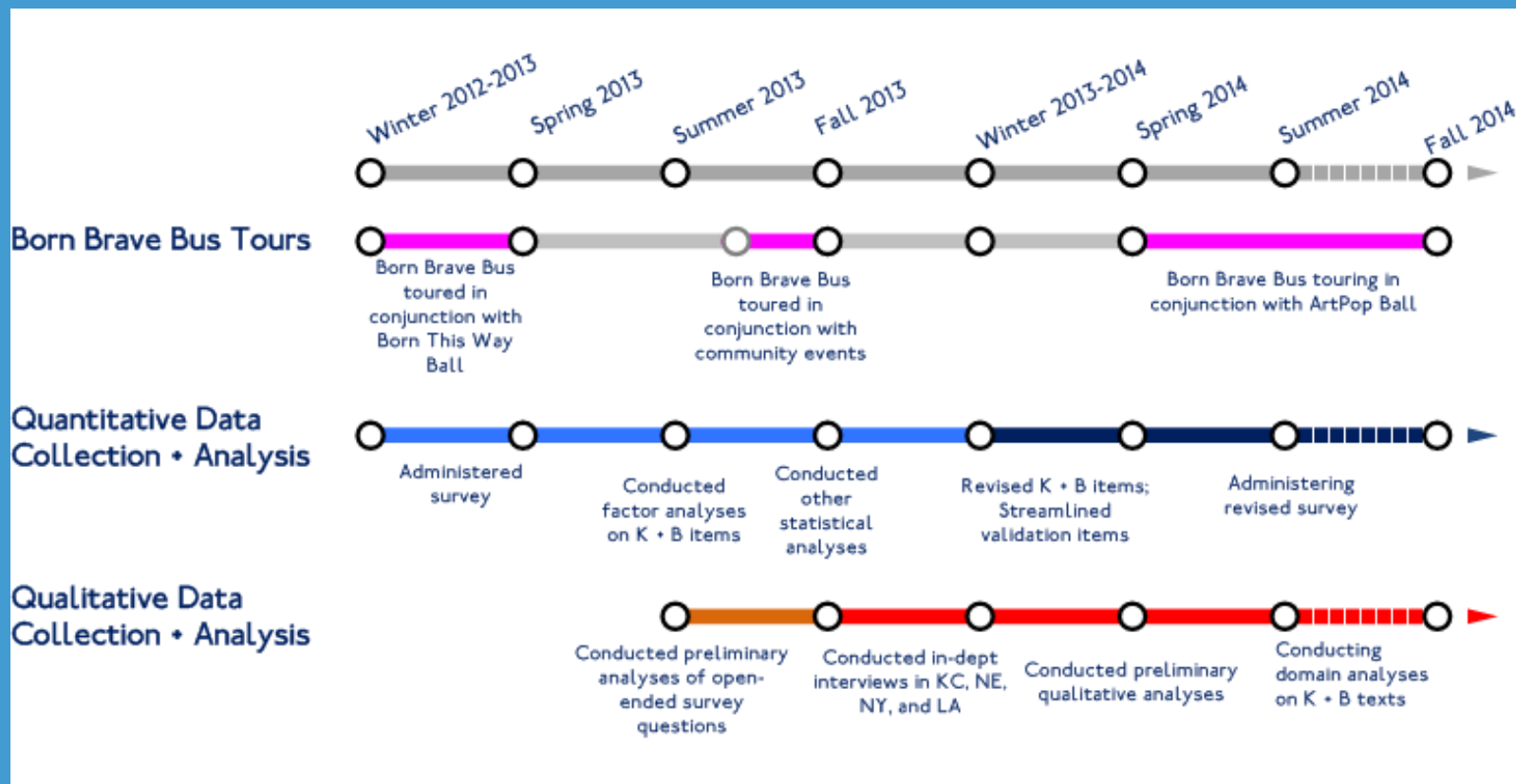
# Born Brave Experiences

## Mixed Methods Research: Goals

- Assess participants' experiences with the Born Brave Bus Tour
- Develop a measure of Kindness and Bravery
- Create model of Youth Empowerment and Engagement
  - What are the factors that contribute to youth empowerment and youth engagement?
  - What are the conditions needed to empower youth to create a kinder and braver world?



# Study Timeline



## QUANTATIVE 1: Survey

### Planned missing data design (Little & Rhemtulla, 2013)



#### Participants

Recruited from BTWF, BBB, Little Monsters, Twitter & Facebook

2,645 completed surveys

#### Data Collection

Kindness & Bravery

Bullying/Victimization; School Climate/Engagement

Depression/Anxiety; Aggression; Hope

Self Description Questionnaire

#### Data Analysis

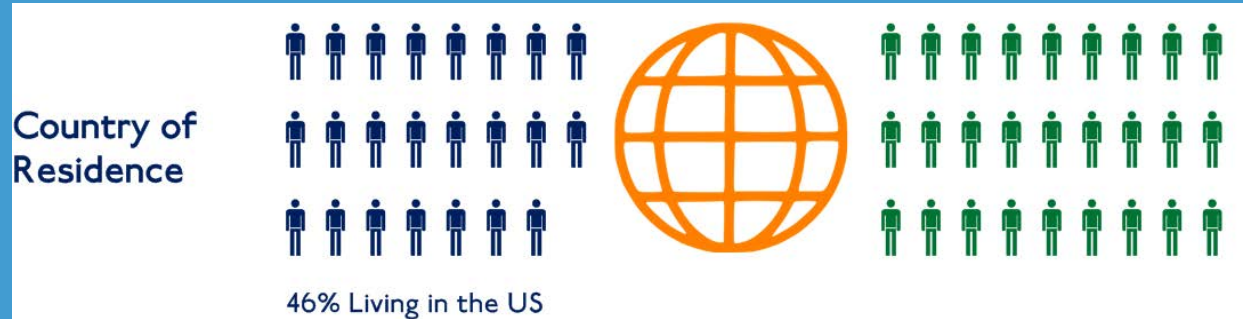
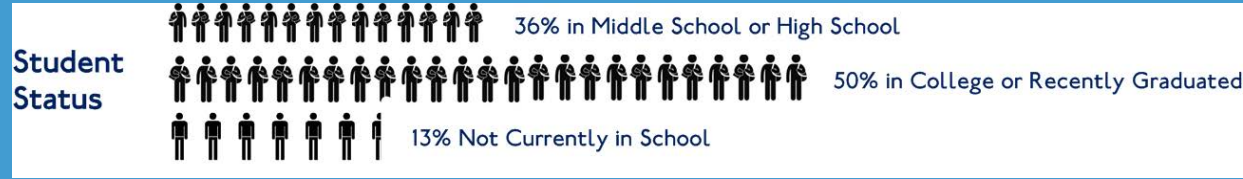
Kindness & Bravery: Reliability, EFA, CFA

Other Scales: Reliability, CFA, regression analyses



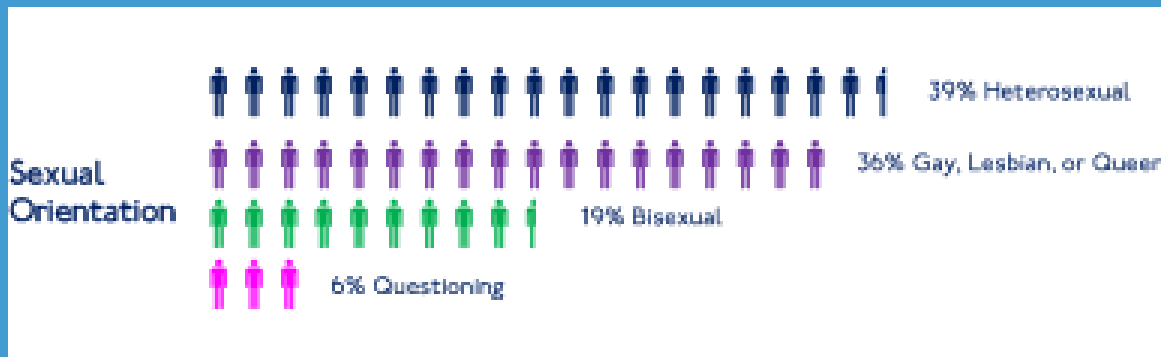
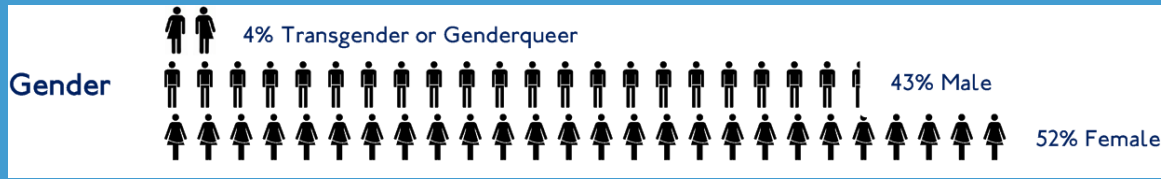


# Survey Demographics (n=2,645)





# Survey Demographics (n=2,645)





# QUALITATIVE 1: Open-ended survey data

## Responses

1,862 How will you be **kinder** in your home, school, and community?

1,810 How will you be **braver** in your home, school, and community?

Data informed interview protocol and item writing for new kindness and bravery scale

## Data Analysis

We coded and analyzed the verbatim responses from an online questionnaire using descriptive (Miles & Huberman, 1994) and values (Saldaña, 2009) coding.



# QUALITATIVE 2: Semi-structured interviews

## Participants

30 semi-structured interviews

4 locations (New York, Los Angeles, Kansas City, Lincoln)

27 in person, 3 via phone

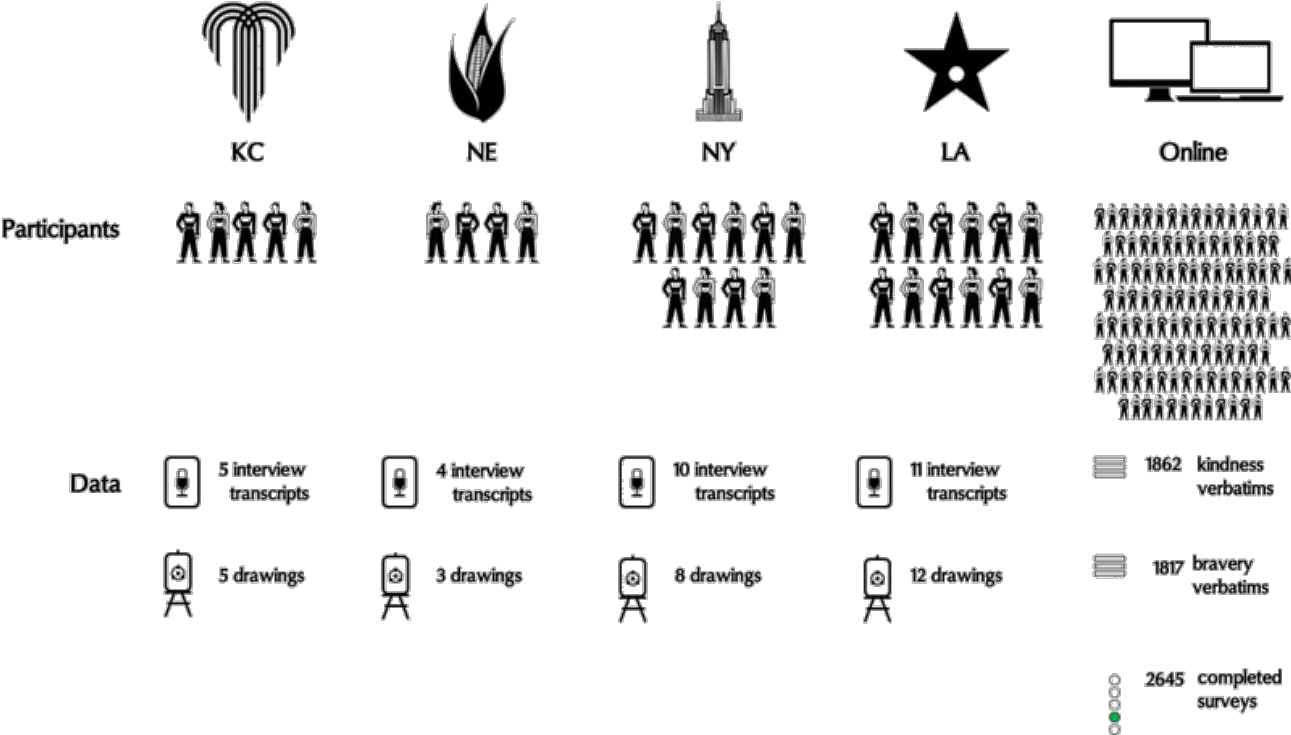
## Data Analysis

Domain Analysis Approach (Spradley, 1979)

How do participants make meaning of kindness and bravery?



# Qualitative Data Sources





# QUANTITATIVE 2: Revised Survey

## Planned missing data design (Little & Rhemtulla, 2013)

### Participants

Online survey (Qualtrics) linked to BTWF website

Recruited from BBB, Little Monsters, Twitter & Facebook

4,556 completed surveys

### Data Analysis

Kindness & Bravery: Reliability, EFA, CFA  
Other Scales: Reliability, CFA, regression analyses

### Data Collection

Kindness & Bravery (focal construct)

Validation: Hope, Altruism, Coping, SDQ Honesty, SDQ

Values,

Bullying/Victimization

Depression/Anxiety

Body Image



# Kindness and bravery

- **Kindness** (*n*): The state of quality of being kind; a behavior marked by ethical characteristics, a pleasant disposition, and concern for others.
- **Bravery** (*n*): The quality that allows someone to do things that are dangerous or frightening.

(Merriam-Webster, 2014)

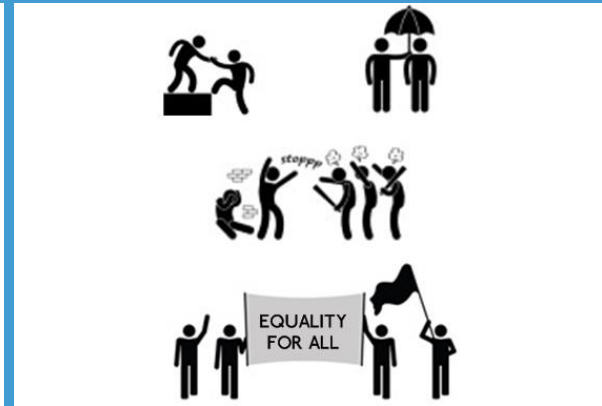


# What is kindness and bravery?

## Internal States

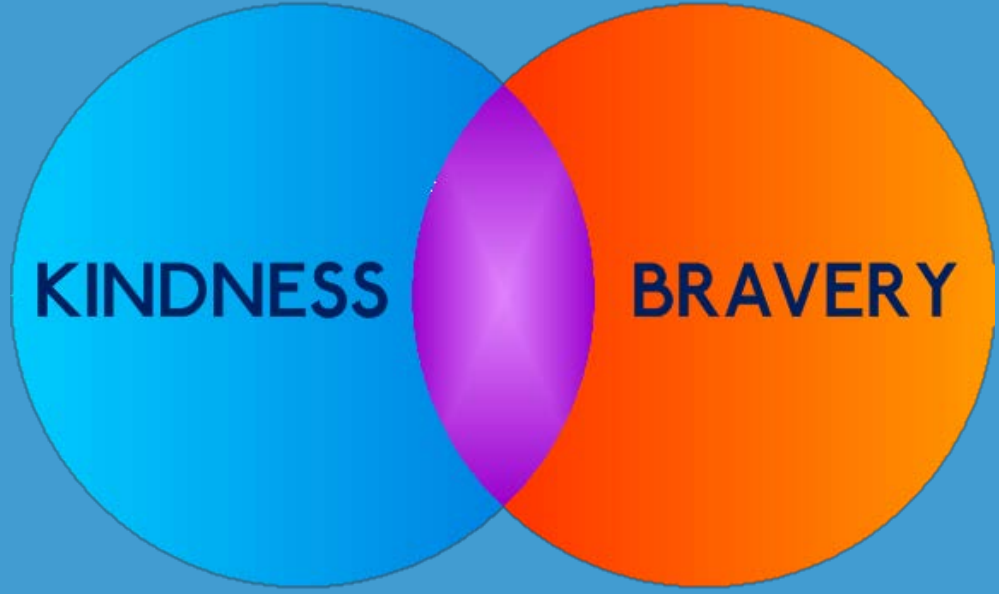


## External Behaviors





# Are kindness and bravery overlapping constructs?





# Is bravery a subset of kindness?





# Are kindness and bravery on a continuum?





# Kindness themes from open-ended survey data

• Felt inspired to be a “better person” / “kinder person”	• Self-regulated behaviors; made efforts to:
• Prompted self-reflection and awareness of the effects of one’s actions on others	○ Refrain from gossip ○ “Stop being mean to others” ○ Control temper, “bitchiness”, and other difficult emotional responses
• Felt a sense of community; “I am not alone”	
• Encouraged greater acceptance of self (including one’s sexuality)	• Helped others at home, in school, and in the community
• Stirred feelings of greater empathy / compassion toward others	• Organized / joined others to “spread the message” to others







# Bravery themes from open-ended survey data

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Felt greater self-confidence and self-acceptance (including one's appearance and sexual orientation)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Stood up / spoke up for one's self or one's beliefs</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Felt empowered to "face one's fears"</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Stood up / spoke up when "something was wrong"</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Expressed willingness "to be more open" to other people and new experiences</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• As an individual, stood up / spoke up on behalf of another</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Developed greater awareness of bullying</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Joined a group that advocates for equality</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Cultivated empathy for both the bully and the bullied</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Came out to family, friends, and/or community</li></ul>

Ideation ←————→ Action



## K+B Sample items

- I want to help others even if I don't get anything in return.
- The only people I treat kindly are those I care about.
- I treat others kindly no matter who they are.
- I try to create positive change in my community regardless of how difficult it is.
- I stand up for others, even if bad things might happen to me.
- If someone is hurt, I try to help.



# Youth engagement = a kinder, braver world

➤ Create opportunities for **engagement** in activities:

➤ Art

➤ Athletics

➤ Music

➤ Academics

➤ Book clubs

➤ School clubs

➤ Student council

➤ [www.4-h.org](http://www.4-h.org)



# Access to treatment = kinder, braver world

- Access to mental health services School psychologists should be leading efforts to provide mental health services in schools
- Counseling centers should provide counseling, not just scheduling and academic advice
- School-based cognitive behavioral therapy
- [www.workbookpublishing.com](http://www.workbookpublishing.com)
- [www.creatingcommunitysolutions.org](http://www.creatingcommunitysolutions.org)

**#TextTalkAct**



# How can we create a kinder, braver world?

- Access to inspirational events
- Community engagement
- Supportive, online events
- Movies
- Pep rallies
- Fun tailgates (like the Born Brave Bus)
- <https://inspired.facebook.com>
- <http://greatergood.berkeley.edu>



# How can we create a kinder, braver world?

- Support to use difficult experiences for **positive change**
- The “Lady Gaga” effect
- Instill hope
- Teach kindness and bravery
- Encourage self-expression and acceptance of self and others
- [www.randomactsofkindness.org](http://www.randomactsofkindness.org)
- [www.casel.org](http://www.casel.org)

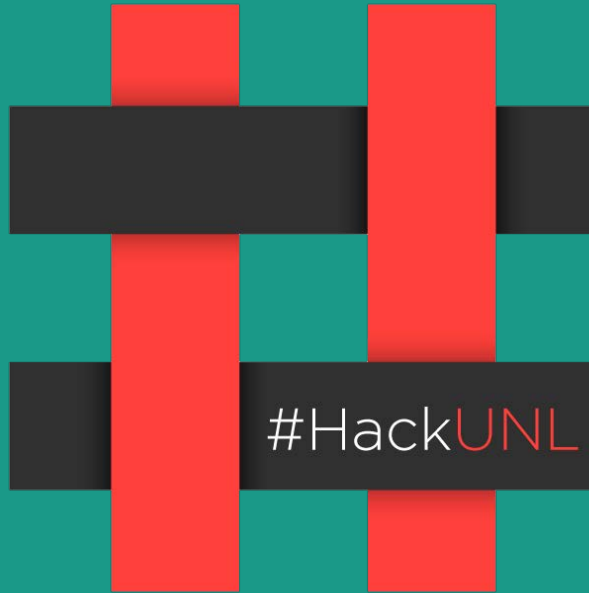


# Empowering a Kinder, Braver World

- BTWF focuses on the **emotional and mental health and well-being** of young people
- BTWF works collaboratively with national partners to support efforts to **develop the skills** associated with self-awareness, self-acceptance, resilience, empathy and compassion, and the acceptance of one's self and others.
- Together, we can create a **kinder and braver** world!
- [www.bornthisway.foundation](http://www.bornthisway.foundation)

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3.



**Using technology to address online harassment and cyberbullying**





# The problem

1

Recent study showed that tweens (ages 8 to 12) and youth (ages 13 -18) spend on average approximately nine hours per day online and check their social media accounts 100 times per day.

2

**More time online = greater potential for online harassment and victimization**

3

Rapid emergence in technology use has prompted parents, educators, and researchers to look for ways to protect and support their children from online harassment and cyberbullying.



# Definitions

## Online Harassment

Online harassment is defined as “an overt, intentional act of aggression towards another person online.” - Ybarra & Mitchel (2004)

## Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying differs in its definition and can be described as “a situation in which someone intentionally and repeatedly harasses, makes fun of, or mistreats another person on social media sites, through text messages, or in other ways online” (Patchin & Hinduja, 2006)



# Why is Online Harassment Important?

There is evidence to suggest that youth impacted by online harassment and cyberbullying victimization experience many negative outcomes such as:

- **Loneliness** (Sahin, 2012)
- **Depression** (Bonanno & Hymel, 2013)
- **Anxiety** (Kowalski & Limber, 2013)
- **Low self-esteem** (Patch & Hinduja, 2010)
- **Substance abuse** ( Gamez-Guadix, Orue, & Calvete, 2013)



# #HackUNL

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- Grounded in translational research we organized an event designed to enable students to create solutions to combat online harassment and cyberbullying utilizing a hackathon model.
- Given that technology is constantly changing, with new technological applications being created daily, we hypothesized that the hackathon model would empower students to create innovative web applications to combat online harassment and cyberbullying in a 24-hour period.
- Two key participants: **Content Experts** (School Psychology Students + Education Majors) and **Technology Experts** (Computer Science Majors)



# What is a Hackathon?



## #HackUNL – Hackathon Overview

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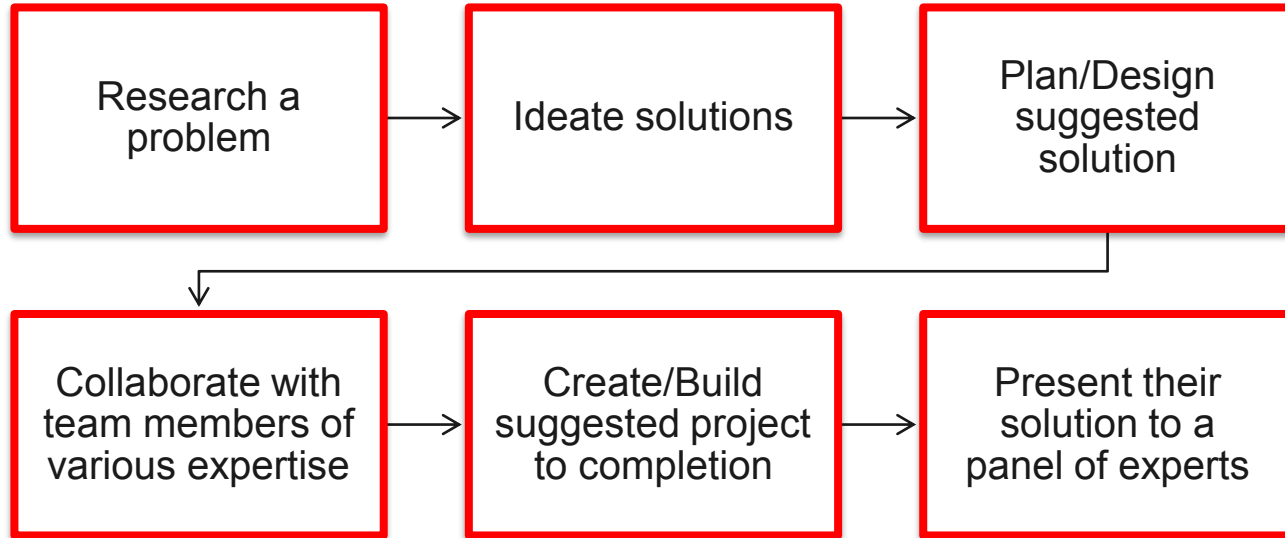
- Hackathons emerged during the late 1990s (Calco & Veeck, 2015)
- Described as a time-limited event in which people form teams to work on developing a project (Davis, 2016). “Seen as an innovative way to attack problems” (Calco & Veeck, 2015)
- These events can last anywhere from four hours to 72 hours
- The newly formed teams were given 24-hours to provide a solution for the following question, “**How can we create a kinder and braver online environment?**”



# #HackUNL – Hackathon Overview



Hackathons focus on optimizing participants ability:



# #HackUNL Photos





# #HackUNL Photos



## #HackUNL – Outcomes

- Awards and prizes were awarded to the top three teams for “Best Overall Project,” “Best Implemented Project,” and “Best Idea Project.”
- A total of six web applications were created and presented for the hackathon.
- Participants highly endorsed the hackathon as a positive experience which enabled them to collaborate with different minded individuals, conceptualize solutions to a complex societal issue, and to develop crucial skills not allowed via traditional educational techniques (e.g., class, laboratory, etc.).



# The Empowerment Initiative



## Winning Project Videos

1. FeedKindness
2. Kindr Bravr



# Feed Kindness

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# Kindr Bravr



# Channel Kindness



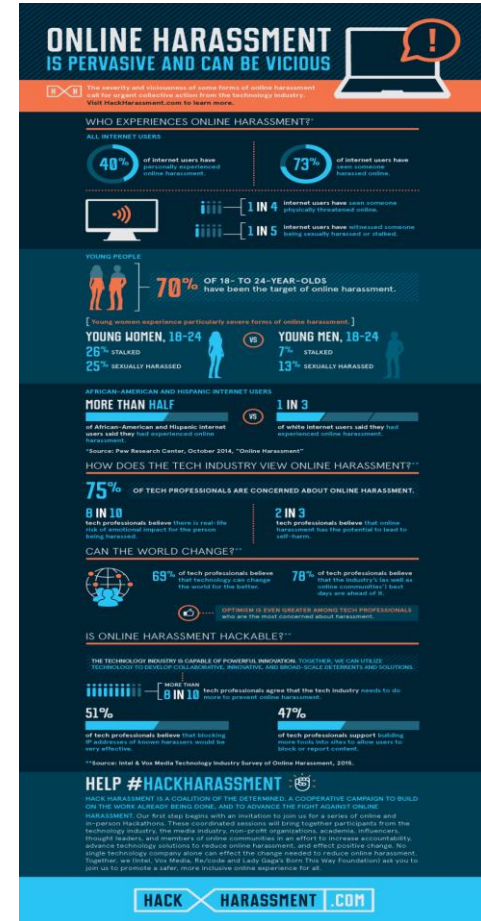
<http://www.channelkindness.org>



# The Empowerment Initiative



[www.hackharassment.com](http://www.hackharassment.com)



 **InspirED: <https://inspired.fb.com>**





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