

**First Year College Students Perceptions of the Long-Term Effects of Bullying**

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Submitted to the Graduate Department and Faculty of the School of Education of  
Baker University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

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Date Defended: May 8, 2018

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## **Abstract**

Bullying continues to be a problem that plagues schools and students throughout the country. This qualitative study was conducted to understand the perceptions of college freshmen, who self-reported bullying in pre-college educational settings, about the impact of previous bullying on them during their freshman year of college. Seven members of the freshmen class at a Midwestern private university were interviewed. The participants offered their perspectives on bullying's long-term impact on academic success, the likelihood of continuing to the sophomore year of college, engagement in campus life, campus safety, and perceptions of bullying experiences since attending college. Qualitative interview data were gathered and analyzed to determine themes. Five themes emerged which reflected participants' perceptions about the long-term effects of bullying. Themes included the following: (a) bullying has had a long-term impact on first year students' academic achievement; (b) all participants are continuing on to their sophomore year; (c) five of the seven participants are actively engaged in campus organizations/clubs; (d) bullying has negatively impacted all participants' mental health; (e) bullying has had a long-term impact on first year participants' social relationships. There were no emerging themes from participants related to bullying experiences during the freshman year or perceptions about campus safety. The findings present implications for university constituents and researchers interested in knowing the long-term effects of bullying on first-year college students.

## **Dedication**

To my amazing wife, Angela, and all of my children who have always supported me throughout my education journey: I would not have made it this far without them. To my mother and father, for showing me the value of an education, and for inspiring me every day to achieve my doctorate in education.

## **Acknowledgements**

I would not have been able to complete this dissertation without the unending love and support of my family, friends, and classmates. Throughout the entire doctoral program process, they have supported me and encouraged me to always keep moving forward and to never give up.

I especially want to thank my wife, Angela. She has put up with me during this process, encouraged me, supported me, and made it possible for me to go somewhere quiet to write while she took care of the family. I would not be here if it were not for her. My sincerest thanks go to Dr. Tes Mehring, Dr. Cassy Bailey, Dr. Marcus Childress, Dr. Peg Waterman, Ruth Miller, and Dr. Leslie Quinn who pushed me to keep going and who offered honest, constructive feedback. I also want to thank Katie Uhlenhake, Betty Furney, and all the other Baker staff members who went out of their way to help me get reinstated to the doctoral program.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

Bullying is a problem that continues to plague society. Bullying has a negative impact on everyone involved: the victim, the bully, and the bystanders (Victoria State Government, 2013). Studies have shown that students who have been bullied tend to feel disconnected from school, have lower academic outcomes, have low self-esteem, are depressed, have higher levels of anxiety, and have increased risk of substance abuse (Arseneault, 2017; Copeland, 2003; Victoria State Government, 2013). Unfortunately, bullying takes many forms: physical, mental, verbal, emotional, and cyber.

On September, 29, 2017 the world witnessed a suicide by a bullied student. A Lee's Summit North High School senior took her own life while at school (Schwers, McQueen, & Londberg, 2017). This is not the first time this sort of tragedy has happened. On June 1, 2016, a University of California-Los Angeles student killed one of his professors before turning the gun on himself (Lovett, Perez-Pena, & Hauser, 2016). On November 1, 2015, a shooting at Umpqua Community College by a student left nine dead and one wounded (Holmes, 2015). October, 2015 saw another student kill one person and wound three others at Texas Southern University. Similar to the Lee's Summit North High School student who shot herself, all of these shooters shared the experience of having been bullied at a young age, and suffered long-term negative effects from it. The deadliest shooting in U.S history in the 21st century occurred on April 16, 2007 at Virginia Tech University. This shooting, carried out by a Virginia Tech graduate student, resulted in 33 dead and 17 wounded (Massengill et al., 2007). The review panel, appointed by Virginia Governor Tim Kaine to examine the causes of the

Virginia Tech University shooting, determined, among other conclusions, that the shooter, Seung-Hui Cho, was harassed and bullied in his adolescence, particularly in high school (Massengill et al. 2007).

Arseneault (2017) examined the long-term effects of bullying on mental health, physical health, and academic success of bullying victims. Arseneault determined there is a direct link between bullying victimization as an adolescent and the long-term academic success of an adult. Takizawa, Maughan, and Arseneault (2014) concluded “People who were frequently bullied in childhood are more likely to have lower educational levels, with men who were bullied more likely to be unemployed and earn less” (p. 779). Wolke and Lereya (2015) studied the long-term effects of bullying on academic success. Wolke and Lereya concluded, “Victimized children were found to have lower educational qualifications, be worse at financial management, and to earn less than their peers even at age 50” (p. 880).

Research conducted by Pegeuro and Williams (2011) focused on the effect of victimization on minority students. These two researchers studied 2,300 sixth graders in 11 urban public schools and found “a high level of bullying by schoolmates is consistently related to academic disengagement and poor grades” (p. 2). These two researchers concluded,

Stereotypes about Black and Latino youth suggest that they perform poorly in school. High-achieving minorities who do not conform to the stereotype may be especially vulnerable to the effect bullying has on grades. In fact, low-achieving Asian students, also running against stereotype, were especially vulnerable to bullying. (p. 2)

## **Background**

The research completed by Olweus, (1994), Lagerspetz, Bjorkqvist, and Peltonen (1988), Buss (1980), and Feshbach (1978) inspired researchers throughout the world to study bullying and its effects. Arseneault (2017), Copeland, Wolke, Angold, and Costello (2013), Englander (2014), Farrington, Fox, and Ttofi (2012), and Wolke, Copeland, Angold, and Costello (2013) are just a few of the researchers who have conducted studies on bullying and its long-term effects. Arseneault (2017) researched bullying and its impact on children and the long-term impact of bullying victimization on mental health, chronic bullying victimization across school transitions, and how bullying victimization in childhood predicts inflammation and obesity at mid-life. Copeland et al. (2013) studied the adult psychiatric outcomes of bullying in childhood and adolescence. Englander (2014) examined the effects of cyberbullying as an emerging field of bullying and concluded that cyberbullying is just as harmful, or more so, than the more traditional forms of bullying.

A team of researchers contributing to the field of bullying research has been Ttofi, Farrington, Lösel, and Loeber (2012) of the University of Cambridge. These researchers studied bullying and how it can be a predictor of violence later in life, and examined school-based programs aimed at reducing high school violence, the effectiveness of school-based programs to reduce bullying, and bullies and delinquents. Wolke and Lereya (2015) also studied the impact and long-term effects of bullying. Wolke and Lereya examined the association between direct and relational bullying and behavior problems among primary school children in England and Germany and concluded bullying negatively impacts the victim's mental health, physical health, academic

achievement, lifetime earnings, and personal relationships. Wolke et al. (2013) also studied prevalence and school factors associated with adolescent bullying, and adolescents' perceptions of bullying. Additional research focused on what can be done to stop bullying and adult mental health consequences of peer bullying.

Wolke et al. (2013) found that bullying victims suffer from higher rates of depressive disorders, suicidality, anxiety disorders, generalized anxiety, agoraphobia, antisocial personality disorder, alcohol disorders, and marijuana disorders. Wolke and Lereya (2015) determined that:

Children who were victims of bullying are at significantly increased risk of self harm or thinking about suicide in adolescence. Furthermore, being bullied in primary school has been found to both predict borderline personality symptoms and psychotic experiences, such as hallucinations or delusions, by adolescence. (p. 880)

Englander (2014) examined the impact of bullying and harassment in the digital world through studies on cyberbullying and its negative impacts on its victims. Copeland (2003) published numerous articles on adolescent bullying and its long-term effects. Copeland concluded that long-term effects of bullying last into adulthood and are particularly negative for both the bully and the victim.

While there has been a significant amount of empirical research conducted on bullying and its long-term effects on its victims in the areas of mental health, physical health, lifetime earnings, relationships, self-esteem, education achievement and many other areas, a shortage of research still exists on how bullying effects college students, particularly first year students. This study examined the impact of pre-college bullying

on first year college students. The current study investigated perceptions of college freshmen about the impact of pre-college bullying on college academic and social experiences

### **Statement of the Problem**

There has been significant research conducted on the effects bullying on students in K-12 grades, specifically how bullying negatively impacts mental health, self-esteem, social relationships, physical health, and academic success, (Cohn & Canter, 2003; Copeland et al., 2013; Kaplan, 2015; Merrell, Gueldner, Ross, & Isava, 2008; Patrick, Bell, Huang, Lazarakis & Edwards, 2010; Smith, Schneider, Smith, & Ananiadou, 2004; Wolke & Lereya, 2015). Few studies have addressed the long-term effects of bullying on first year college students. In addition, researchers have documented the impact of bullying on child and adolescent mental health, lifetime earnings, and academic success. There is limited research on the long-term effects of pre-college bullying on first year college students.

### **Purpose of Study**

This qualitative study was conducted to understand the perceptions of college freshmen who self-reported bullying in pre-college educational settings, about the impact of previous bullying during their freshman year of college. The first purpose of the current research was to investigate bullying victims' perceptions of the impact of pre-college bullying on academic success (defined as maintaining a GPA of 2.5 or higher) at the end of the freshman year of college. The second purpose of this study was to examine whether pre-college bullying was perceived to have an impact on the likelihood of students' persistence to the sophomore year of college. The third purpose of this study

was to understand the relationship between pre-college bullying and engagement in campus life. The fourth purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions of campus safety of college freshmen who had been victims of pre-college bullying. The final purpose of this study was to understand the perceptions of victims of pre-college bullying about experiences with bullying during their freshman year of college.

### **Significance of the Study**

There are a multitude of studies on the effects of bullying on children and adolescents, but limited research has been conducted on the long-term effects of bullying on students as they enter a university setting. This study contributed to the current body of knowledge about bullying, specifically the perceived long-term effects on first-year college experiences by individuals who self-reported bullying during elementary and secondary school. Elementary and secondary school counselors, teachers, and administrators may be interested in the perceived long-term effects among those who were bullied in pre-college academic settings. University personnel (e.g., student affairs staff, faculty, and administrators) may also be interested in the results of this study. The results of this study could be used by faculty, staff, and university administrators to better-serve those students who have past bullying experiences and as a professional development tool for faculty and staff.

### **Delimitations**

“Delimitations are self-imposed boundaries set by the researcher on the purpose and scope of the study” (Lunenburg & Irby, 2008, p. 134). The following delimitations applied to this study:

1. Interviews were conducted during the 2017-2018 academic year.

2. All subjects in this study attended Midwestern University during their freshmen year.

3. Only individuals who self-reported bullying in pre-college academic settings were included in the study.

### **Assumptions**

Lunenburg and Irby (2008) defined assumptions as “postulates, premises, and propositions that are accepted as operational for purposes of the research” (p. 135). The following assumptions were made for this study:

1. Subjects understood the interview questions.
2. Subjects answered the interview questions honestly.
3. Subjects had pre-college experiences with bullying.

### **Research Questions**

Five research questions guided this study:

**RQ1.** What are the perceptions of college freshmen who self-reported pre-college bullying about its impact on academic success?

**RQ2.** What are the perceptions of college freshmen who self-reported pre-college bullying about its impact on the likelihood of continuing to the sophomore year of college?

**RQ3.** What are the perceptions of college freshmen who self-reported pre-college bullying about its impact on engagement in campus life?

**RQ4.** What are the perceptions of college freshmen who self-reported pre-college bullying about campus safety?

**RQ5.** What are the perceptions of college freshmen who self-reported pre-college

bullying about any bullying experiences on the college campus or as college freshmen?

### **Definition of Terms**

There are several terms used throughout this study. The definitions that follow will provide clarification.

**Bullying.** Farrington (1993) defined bullying as the “repeated oppression, psychological or physical, of a less powerful person by a more powerful one” (p. 381).

**Cyberbullying.** Patchin, Schafer, & Hinduja, (2013) defined this term as bullying by use of any electronic communication device through means including, but not limited to, e-mail, instant messaging, text messages, blogs, mobile phones, pagers, online games and websites.

**Academic Success.** For the purposes of this study, the researcher defined the term of academic success as maintaining a GPA of 2.5 or higher.

**Bystander.** A bystander is a person who observes a conflict or unacceptable behavior. (Ancona, Scully, Van Maneen, & Westney, 2004)

**Academic Engagement.** McMullen (2011) defined this term as an indicator that combined academic identification which refers to “getting along with teachers, having an interest in the subject matter, and related behaviors and attitudes) and academic participation” (p. 4).

**Persistence.** Cuseo (2012) applied this term to entering college students who remain, re-enroll, and continue their undergraduate education.

**Victim.** The Kansas State Assembly (2016) defined a victim as “any person who suffers direct or threatened physical, emotional or financial harm as the result of the commission or attempted commission of a crime against such person” (p. 7333).



## **Organization of the Study**

This chapter provided background information on the long-term effects of bullying as well as a statement of the problem, the purposes of the study, and the study's significance to the existing body of knowledge. The research questions and definitions of key terms were also included in Chapter 1. Chapter 2 provides a review of the existing literature on the long-term effects of bullying victimization on direct bullying, indirect bullying, cyber bullying, the mental health impact of bullying victimization, the physical impact of bullying victimization, the impact of bullying victimization on lifetime earnings, the impact of bullying victimization on relationships, and any support services provided to victims of bullying victimization. Chapter 3 details the methodology used to conduct the study, including the research design, selection of participants, measurement, data collection procedures, data analysis, and limitations of the study. Chapter 4 details the results of the research. Finally, Chapter 5 includes an interpretation of the results, summary of the findings in relation to the current literature, implications of the findings, and recommendations for further areas of study.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Review of the Literature**

This chapter summarizes a detailed review of the literature on bullying and the long-term effects of bullying. First, the historical background of bullying is summarized with an emphasis on the typologies of bullying as well as cyberbullying. Second, the definition of bullying as well as the different types of bullying are addressed. Third, the impact of bullying is examined with particular emphasis on school violence and school shootings. Fourth, the long-term effects of bullying are described. Lastly, university support services that are being offered to victims of bullying are discussed.

#### **Historical Background**

Olweus (1994) is regarded as having conducted the first groundbreaking study on bullying in Norway in 1973. This seminal study was conducted as a result of three Norwegian boys who committed suicide while being bullied in high school. His study involved 1,000 boys who were either bullies or victims of bullying. Olweus determined that 7% of the boys were bullies and 9% were victims of bullies. This study led to a generation of researchers across Europe studying bullying and its impact on elementary and high school level students. Archer and Coyne (2005) examined indirect, relational, and social aggression and determined that they are all related and all have long lasting negative effects to the victim. Chapell et al. (2006) studied elementary, high school and college students who were victims of bullying and concluded there is a significant correlation between being bullied in elementary school, high school, and college and future continued victimization. Rothon, Head, Klineberg, and Stansfeld (2011) investigated the extent to which social support can help the adverse effects of bullying as

it relates to educational achievement and mental health of adolescents.

The results of the European research have had a far-reaching impact leading to studies related to bullying in Asia, Australia, and North America (Arseneault, 2017; Bond, Carlin, Thomas, Rubin, & Patton, 2001; Gini & Pozzoli, 2009; Olweus, 1994; Pegeuro & Williams, 2012). Other researchers who conducted far-reaching research in the field of bullying were Lagerspetz et al. (1988) who began conducting research on aggressive children in the 1960's. Lagerspetz et al. (1988) are best known for research on bullying, and indirect aggression. Finnish researcher Buss (1980) and American researcher Feshbach (1978) also conducted extensive early research on bullying, with Buss (1980) receiving credit for coining the phrase "indirect aggression" (p. 834).

The research by Olweus (1994), Lagerspetz et al. (1988), Buss (1980), and Feshbach (1978) inspired researchers throughout the world to study bullying and its effects. Arseneault (2017), Copeland et al. (2013), Englander, (2014), Farrington, Fox and Ttofi (2012), and Wolke et al. (2013), are just a few of the researchers who have conducted studies on bullying and its long-term effects. Arseneault (2017) researched bullying and its impact on children and the long-term impact of bullying victimization on mental health, chronic bullying victimization across school transitions, and how bullying victimization in childhood predicts inflammation and obesity at mid-life. Copeland et al. (2013) studied the adult psychiatric outcomes of bullying and being bullied in childhood and adolescence. Englander (2014) examined the effects of cyber bullying. Tofi et al. (2012) studied bullying and how it can be a predictor of violence later in life, and examined school-based programs aimed at reducing high school violence, the effectiveness of school-based programs to reduce bullying, and bullies and delinquents.

Wolke and Lereya (2015) studied the impact and long-term effects of bullying. Wolke and Lereya examined the association between direct and relational bullying and behavior problems among primary school children in England and Germany and concluded bullying negatively impacts the victim's mental health, physical health, academic achievement, lifetime earnings, and personal relationships. Wolke et al. (2013) also studied prevalence and school factors associated with adolescent bullying, and adolescents' perceptions of bullying. Additional research focused on what can be done to stop bullying, and adult mental health consequences of peer bullying.

Wolke et al. (2013) found that bullying victims suffer from higher rates of depressive disorders, suicidality, anxiety disorders, generalized anxiety, agoraphobia, antisocial personality disorder, alcohol disorders, and marijuana disorders. Wolke and Lereya (2015) determined that:

Children who were victims of bullying are at significantly increased risk of self-harm or thinking about suicide in adolescence. Furthermore, being bullied in primary school has been found to both predict borderline personality symptoms and psychotic experiences, such as hallucinations or delusions, by adolescence. (p. 880)

Englander (2014) examined the impact of bullying and harassment in the digital world through studies on cyberbullying and its negative impacts on its victims. Copeland (2003) published numerous articles on adolescent bullying and its long-term effects. Copeland concluded that long-term effects of bullying last into adulthood, and are particularly negative for both the bully and the victim.

## **Definition and Types of Bullying**

There are a number of definitions of bullying, but the current study used the definition provided by Farrington (1993) who stated that bullying is the “repeated oppression, psychological or physical, of a less powerful person by a more powerful one” (p. 381). Olweus (2007) defined the types of bullying as direct (verbal) bullying, which takes the form of physical or verbal attacks, and indirect bullying, which occurs in relational/social settings in the form of deliberate social exclusion or isolation. Nansel et al. (2001) found that verbal bullying and physical bullying were more common among boys than girls. “Relational (indirect) bullying is more commonly used by females and can come in the form of covert and overt bullying” (p. 2). Patchin, Schafer and Hinduja (2013) defined cyber bullying as the willful and repeated harm inflicted through the use of computers, cell phones, and other electronic devices (p. 1).

**Relational (Indirect).** Crick and Grotpeter (1995) defined relational aggression as behaviors that harm others through damage (or the threat of damage). Archer and Coyne (2005) defined relational aggression in terms of its endpoint, which is to manipulate or disrupt relationships and friendships, and its form can be overt or covert, but is usually covert. Archer and Coyne further explained overt and covert, and the differences between them. Most forms are equivalent to indirect aggression in that they are “behind-the-back,” relational aggression can be overt. [The emphasis is not]

on the form the aggression takes, but on the intention to harm a relationship or group membership. Aggressors may give the “silent treatment” directly to victims or tell them that they will be excluded from the social group unless they do what the aggressor desires. (p. 217)

Archer and Coyne (2005) defined covert forms of aggression in the following manner:

These forms of behavior have been found to be very emotionally harmful to victims. Victims of indirect, relational, and social aggression have been found to be more depressed, anxious, lonely, and to have more negative thoughts in a variety of categories, including physical appearance, romantic appeal, global self-worth, and close friendships. (p. 224)

Atlas and Pepler (1998) defined indirect bullying as behavior that is intended to hurt victims by damaging their self-esteem or social relationships through behaviors such as exclusion from the group, rumor mongering, and giving nasty looks. According to Wolke and Lereya (2015) relational bullying refers to damaged relationships between friends and destroyed status in groups to hurt or upset someone. This type of bullying can take place in the form of being deliberately left out of get-togethers, parties, trips, or groups, being ignored by others, and being the object of lies, rumors, or stories (Wolke & Lereya, 2015). There have been gender differences identified in terms of severity of bullying, with boys using more physical methods and girls using more indirect methods. Fagot (1986) stated, “Although significant advances have been made in our understanding of childhood aggression, one limitation of this research has been the lack of attention to gender differences in the expression of aggression” (p. 432).

Crick and Grotpeter (1995) reported,

Relational aggression appears to be more characteristic of girls than of boys. Results indicated that (1) as a group, girls were significantly more relationally aggressive than boys and (2) when relatively extreme groups

of aggressive and nonaggressive children were identified, girls were more likely than boys to be represented in the relationally aggressive group. (p. 718)

Lagerspetz et al. (1988) identified indirect methods of aggression such as spreading rumors, writing nasty notes, and excluding and ostracizing others are more common to girls. Lagerspetz et al. (1988) further suggested that girls' tighter social structure made it easier for them to exploit relationships and manipulate and harm others in these indirect ways. While there are different definitions of relational aggression, it is clear the intent is to cause damage to someone through manipulation of relationships, usually conducted covertly.

**Cyberbullying.** The U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, annually conducts the Indicators of School Crime and Safety Report to examine the levels of victimization in the nation's schools. The Indicators of School Crime and Safety Report 2016 edition reported that "6.9% of students reported having been cyber-bullied on school grounds" (Musu-Gillette, Zhang, Wang, Zhang, & Oudekerk, 2016, p. 80). According to Patchin et al. (2013), cyberbullying is defined as "willful and repeated harm inflicted through the use of computers, cell phones, and other electronic devices" (p. 1). School grade as well as gender are factors in the rate of cyber-bullying.

According to Luxenberg, Limber, and Olweus (2014), 15% of boys in grades 3-5, 27% of those in grades 6-8, and 31% of those in grades 9-12, were cyber-bullied. These same authors reported that 15% of girls in grades 3-5, 14% of girls in grades 6-8, and 28% of girls in grades 9-12 were cyber-bullied (p. 12). Cyber-bullying can include flaming, harassment, denigration, impersonation, outing, trickery, exclusion, and cyber stalking.

Zweig, Dank, Lachman, and Yahner (2013) studied 5,647 high school aged youth from ten schools in five school districts in three northeastern states, and determined that “cyber-bullying took place in the form of name calling via text messages 11.7%, instant messages or chat messages that were meant to hurt someone’s feelings 10.5%, nasty emails 3.4%, and students creating a false profile page 1.3%” (p. 1).

Wang, Nansel, and Iannotti (2011) concluded 12-18 year-old victims of cyber-bullying suffered higher rates of depression than traditional victims of bullying. Notably, cyber victims reported higher depression than cyberbullies or bully-victims, which was not found in any other form of bullying. These authors also stated cyber victims may not see or identify their harasser. As a result, cyber victims may be more likely to feel isolated, dehumanized, or helpless at the time of the attack. Of all of the negative effects of cyber-bullying, suicide is the most devastating outcome. There have been numerous cases of victims committing suicide due to being bullied online. The deaths of Megan Meier, Riley Garrigus, and Jessica Logan are three examples. Megan Meier, 13-year-old hanged herself after being viciously bullied online by a neighbor parent using a fake online account (Pokin, 2007); 16-year-old Riley Garrigus of Sedalia, Missouri took her own life in April, 2017 after repeated bullying at Smith-Cotton High School (Lock, 2017); and 18-year-old Jessica Logan hanged herself in May, 2008 after nude photos she sent to her then boyfriend were circulated around school (Celizic, 2009). A new form of cyber-bullying that is growing is the area of sexting. Hinduja and Patchin (2010) defined sexting as “the sending or receiving of sexually-explicit or sexually-suggestive images or video via a cell phone” (p. 1). Hinduja, and Patchin (2010) described the tragic events surrounding the suicide of one such sexting victim. Hope Witsell was 13 years of age



when she sent a topless picture of herself to a boy she liked. The image quickly found its way onto the phones of other students. Her journals indicated the vicious name calling (e.g., “slut,” “whore”) she endured for weeks before it became too much to handle. She ended her life two weeks into her eighth-grade year. (p. 1)

### **Long-Term Effects.**

**School Engagement.** Bullying has been shown to have a negative impact on youth engagement in extra-curricular activities. According to the Australian Government Department of Education, (2018). Bullying impacts include social implications including self-doubt and reluctance to participate in school related group activities. The Nobullying.com website (2015) determined:

A talk with the school teachers will probably reveal a drastic drop in performance both in grades and school activities. This is because the anxiety and emotional distress caused by bullying will make it difficult to concentrate on studying or any extra-curricular activities.

Peguero (2008) studied the likelihood of being bullied while participating in extra-curricular activities and concluded

Students who participated in three or more classroom-related extracurricular activities were more likely to report bullying victimization than students who were not involved in classroom related extracurricular activities. Students who participated in one or two and three or more intramural sports activities had greater odds of being bullied than students who were not involved in intramural sports. (p. 79)

**Mental Health.** Bullying has been shown to have a negative impact on youth mental health development. According to Arseneault (2017), accumulating evidence demonstrated a detrimental effect on youth's mental health and revealed other poor outcomes including low self-esteem, self-harm, and academic failure. Arseneault also noted that studies indicated that young victims of bullying have higher rates of agoraphobia, depression, anxiety, panic disorder, and suicidality in their early to mid-20s compared to those who have not been bullied in childhood. As noted by Bond et al. (2001) up to 30% of student incident symptoms of depression could be attributed to a history of victimization.

Wolke and Lereya (2015) studied the consequences of bullying of individuals 18-50 years of age and determined the victims were at an increased risk or had higher rates of anti-social personality disorder, anxiety, depression, and internalizing problems, psychotic experiences, somatic problems, and suicidality/self-harm. Ttofi et al. (2012) agreed that bullying victimization was a significant predictor of depression up to seven years later. As reported by Zarate-Garza et al. (2017), "Of significant concern are reports from prospective studies that men who were victims of bullying are at 18 times more risk of suicidality than their non-bullied counterparts, while female victims have nearly 27 times more risk for panic disorders" (p. 90). Copeland et al. (2013) determined that out of a population of 305 bullying victims, depressive disorders were experienced "10.2% of the time, suicidality 9%, anxiety disorders 24.2%, generalized anxiety 10.2%, panic disorders 13.1%, agoraphobia 11.1%, antisocial personality disorders 0.5%, alcohol disorders 15.6%, and marijuana disorders 14.7%" (p. 1962). The Greater London Authority (2004) stated, "Bullying and fear of bullying are major issues with effects

including anxiety and depression, absence from school, poor self-esteem, isolation and even self-harm and suicide” (p. 68).

Zarate-Garza et al. (2017) reported 40% of male and 31% of female bullying victims were more likely to develop depression. Anxiety was suffered by 40% of males and 31% of females. In addition, 13% of males and 26% of females developed self-harm while 13% of males and 10% of females developed suicidality issues. Research conducted by Bond et al. (2001) found that 16.9% of victims of infrequent bullying suffered from depression, 25.7% of victims of frequent bullying who were not upset by the incidents suffered from depression, and 53.7% of frequent bullying victims who were upset by the incidents suffered from depression (p. 481). The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2011) Morbidity and Mortality Monthly Report reported that out of a population of 2,888 individuals who were victims of bullying in high school, 44.9% needed to talk to someone other than a family member about feelings or problems within 12 months of the bullying experience. They also determined that 17.2% felt sad or hopeless within 12 months of the bullying experience (p. 486).

Researchers have also examined the cumulative effects of stress caused by bullying victimization. Smokowski, Evans, and Cotter (2017) determined:

Stress, both psychological and physiological, elicits a biological response that, if continued unabated, contributes to allostatic load on the brain and body. Allostatic load provides an index of biological “wear and tear” from cumulative exposure to stress. Over time, this increasing allostatic load accelerates the wear and tear on the body as a result of chronic exposure to fluctuating or heightened neural or neuroendocrine responses

to stress. (p. 1030)

Zarate-Garza et al. concluded in their 2017 study that “under chronic stress, however, homeostatic mechanisms fail, and the individual can experience a state of allostatic overload” (p. 89). The annual report commissioned by the State of London (Greater London Authority, 2004) included evidence that bullying created negative amounts of stress on youth and adolescence. National studies suggest that the incidence of bullying is very high. A recent study with 7,000 young people (Carr-Gregg & Manocha, 2011), found that more than half had been bullied, one in ten severely so, with one quarter saying that bullying was the main cause of stress in their lives.

Ramaprabou (2017) researched the emotional, social, and educational adjustment patterns of high school bullying victims. Ramaprabou concluded, “The students who do severe bullying and those who are highly victimized for bullying show unstable emotion, aggressive behavior, and poor adjustment with curricular and co-curricular programs” (p. 40).

**Physical Health.** Zarate-Garza et al. (2017) indicated there is increasing evidence that chronicity of victimization and also severity are important mediators of long-term health and academic impact. Zarate-Garza et al. concluded:

Through the process of increasing allostatic load, the accumulation of health related risk factors increases an individual’s chances of developing disease. This increasing load, along with eventual allostatic overload, is now well established to be implicated in the development of a variety of diseases, including depression, diabetes, and heart disease. (p. 91)

Gini and Pozzoli (2009) found bully-victims had a significantly higher risk for

psychosomatic problems than uninvolved peers. Another study conducted by Gini and Pozzoli (2013) examined psychosomatic disturbances in bullying victims aged 7-13 and concluded:

The studies reviewed supported the fact that children frequently involved in bullying, particularly victims and bully-victims, suffer from psychosomatic problems. The evidence seems to suggest that these problems occur among children of both genders, of different age groups, and from different countries around the world. (p. 1064)

Sarampote (2013) also researched the effects of bullying and concluded that kids who were bullied report all sorts of psychosomatic symptoms including headaches and stomach aches. Sarampote stated,

Actually there's an interesting body of literature, some supported by NIMH, suggesting that immune system functioning is affected by peer victimization and trauma, so that there may be actual physical real outcomes and immune system functioning can affect a wide of everything from not only your ability to handle colds and to fight off and viruses and things it can also affect your cognitive development and emotional development as well. (p. 3)

Koepfel and Bouffard (2012) examined the risky behaviors of 12-14 year old bullying victim's alcohol use, tobacco use, and violence victimization. Alcohol use was measured by drinks per day and whether the bullying victim had engaged in binge drinking. "Victims of bullying reported drinking an average of 3.16 drinks per day compared to 2.59 drinks per day among those who had not experienced bullying" (p. 2).

“Binge drinking for victims was determined to have occurred 32.8% versus non-victims 28.6%” (p. 2). The rates of tobacco use among bullying victims was determined to be 49.6% compared to 39% for non-victims. “Victims of bullying were more than twice as likely to report experiencing subsequent violent victimization, 10.2% for victims compared to 4.6% for non-victims” (p. 2). Wolke et al. (2013) studied bullying victims aged 9, 11, and 13 years of age and “determined from a population of 79 that 28% of bullying victims reported suffering from substance abuse disorders” (p. 422). Takizawa et al. (2014) concluded that “children who are bullied-and especially those who are frequently bullied, continue to be at risk for a wide range of poor social, health, and economic outcomes nearly four decades after exposure” (p. 777).

In a 2015 study, Baldwin, Arseneault, and Danese examined the physical effects of bullying victimization, particularly on bullying effects on weight gain. “The study revealed that at age 18, these children had a higher body mass index (bmi = 1.11, CI [0.33, 1.88]), waist hip ratio (bmi = 0.17, I [0.008, 0.026]), and were at a higher risk of being overweight (OR = 1.80, CI [1.28, 2.53]) than their non-bullied counterparts” (p. 115). Szumilas (2010) defined the odds ratio (OR) as “a measure of association between an exposure and an outcome”. According to the New York Department of Health (1999) a confidence interval (CI) is defined as “a range around a measurement that conveys how precise the measurement is” (p. 1). Along with studying how victimization affects weight gain, Hunter, Butterworth, Perkins, Bateson, and Richardson (2014) conducted a study to examine how bullying victimization effected sleep patterns. Hunter et al. (2014) determined “Youth who were bullied (OR = 1.72, 95% CI [1.07, 2.75]) and youth who bully (OR = 1.80, CI [1.16, 2.81]) were nearly twice as likely as

youth who were not involved in bullying to experience sleep difficulties” (p. 740).

**Earnings.** As noted by Wolke and Lereya (2015), “victims of bullying were found to have lower educational qualifications, be worse at financial management, and earned less than their peers at age 50” (p. 880). Victims of bullying were also found to have trouble keeping a job and honoring financial obligations. Wolke et al. (2013) found that out of a victim-of-bullying population (n = 86) “29.9% of victims lived in poverty, 33.5% were dismissed from multiple jobs, 20.3% quit multiple jobs, 9.9% failed to meet financial obligations and 16.1% have poor financial management skills” (p. 964). Brown and Taylor (2008) conducted a study focused on the effects of bullying on the educational attainment and lifetime earnings of a sample of individuals drawn from the British National Child Development Study (NCDS). The authors concluded, “Our empirical findings suggest that school bullying has an adverse effect on human capital accumulation both at and beyond school” (p. 16).

**Relationships.** The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) conducted a study in 2016 titled *The Experiences of Peer Bullying among Adolescents and Associated Effects on Young Adult Outcomes: Longitudinal Evidence from Ethiopia, India, Peru and Viet Nam*. The results of this study indicated bullying was corrosive to social relations. The UNICEF study also cited qualitative evidence and suggested that children who are bullied find it difficult to seek help from peers, teachers, and parents, often fearing harsher punishment. The authors cited quantitative analysis links and concluded,

Children who are bullied find it difficult to seek help from peers, teachers and parents, often fearing harsh punishment. Quantitative analysis links children who were made fun of or bullied at age 15 had poorer relations

with their parents at age 19 in Viet Nam and Peru. (p. 7)

According to Wolke and Lereya (2015) victims of bullying have more trouble making and keeping relationships. “Victims were also reported to have more trouble making or keeping friends and to be less likely to live with a partner and have social support” (Wolke & Lereya, 2015, p. 880). Wolke and Lereya (2015) stated, “Frequently victimized children had trouble making or keeping friends and were less likely to meet up with friends at age 50” (p. 882). Wolke et al. (2013) found that 5% of bullying victims were involved in a violent relationship, 27.3% had a poor relationship with their parents, 24% lacked a best friend or confidante, and 8.4% had problems making or keeping friends. Not only does being a victim of bullying affect being in a relationship but it also impacts social support for the victim. Wolke and Lereya (2015) found that bullying “victims were also reported to have more trouble making or keeping friends and to be less likely to live with a partner and have social support” (p.880). Social relations were found to also suffer due to bullying. Bullying is corrosive to social relations.

**Academic Success.** Peer victimization is a common problem among youth (Nansel et al., 2001; Storch & Ledley, 2005). Nansel et al. (2001) demonstrated associations among physical health problems, emotional and behavioral difficulties, problematic social development, and poor academic achievement. Victims of bullying are at increased risk of adverse outcomes in childhood, including physical health problems, emotional, and psychological problems (Reijntjes, Kamphuis, Prinzie, and Telch, 2010), and reduced academic achievement (Arseneault et al., 2006). Brown and Taylor (2008) determined, “Children who were bullied at age 7 and 11 had significantly lower wage earnings and growth in earnings over the life course” (p. 390). Wolke and



Lereya (2015), determined “victimized children were found to have lower educational qualifications, be worse at financial management and to earn less than their peers at age 50” (p. 880). Wolke and Lereya (2015) stated,

Frequent victimization by peers was associated with poor academic functioning (as indicated by grade point averages and achievement test scores) on both a concurrent and predictive level. Pure victims also showed poor school adjustment and reported a more negative perceived climate compared to bullies and uninvolved youth. (p. 881)

Ponzo (2013) investigated the effects of bullying on Italian pupils at ages 9 and 13 and “found that at both ages bullying was associated with significantly lower scores in reading, math, and science, with the effects being larger at age 13 for children who were bullied repeatedly” (p. 1069). A 2013 study by Wolke et al. examined the long-term effects of bullying on adult health, wealth, crime, and social outcomes and determined that out of a population of 335, “bully victims with no college education accounted for 53.3%, while those who were not victimized accounted for 43.7%” (p. 1964).

Juvonen, Wang, and Espinoza (2010) concluded,

Projecting this effect on just one of the academic subjects included in the GPA, this means that peer victimization can account for up to an average of 1.5 letter grade decrease in one academic subject (e.g., math) across the 3 years of middle school. (p. 167)

Pegeuro and Williams (2012) examined the effects of bullying on high achieving minority students and concluded, “But for Black students who started high school with a 3.5 GPA and were bullied in 10th grade, grades declined six times as much as compared

to white students. Their average GPA dropped by .3 to 3.2 by the 12th grade” (p. 2). Hispanic students were found to fare even worse than Black students. “For Latino students, it was worse still, with high-scoring students dropping from 3.5 to 3.0 by the end of high school, even after the researchers accounted for family background, previous grades, and other factors” (p. 2).

Regardless of the point in a person’s academic journey, being a victim of bullying has been shown to have a negative effect on academic achievement. “Whether it is across the kindergarten year or further into the early grades, children who are chronically victimized through the first years of elementary school are less happy in school” (McDougall & Vaillancourt, 2015, p. 301), and understandably, avoid high school. Buhs, Ladd, and Herald (2006) and Kochenderfer and Ladd (1966) also reported that individuals who are bullied in elementary school avoid school. The National Education Association (NEA, 2012) concluded, “bullied students tend to have lower grades and achievement scores than non-victimized students, and that high-achieving Black and Hispanic students are particularly vulnerable to long-lasting effects” (p. 2). The NEA also concluded “33% of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender students missed at least one day of school in the past month because they felt unsafe, compared to less than 5% of all students” (p. 2). Kann et al. (2016) expanded on the 2012 NEA study when they concluded “The prevalence of having not gone to school because of safety concerns was higher among black (6.8%) and Hispanic (7.6%) than white (4.2%) students and higher among Black male (6.9%) and Hispanic male (7.6%) than white male (2.9%) students” (p. 10).

Schwartz, Gorman, Nakamoto, and Toblin (2005) concluded, “Frequent

victimization by peers was associated with poor academic functioning (as indicated by grade point averages and achievement test scores) on both a concurrent and a predictive level” (p. 433). McDougall and Vaillancourt (2015) concluded,

Impact of sustained victimization shows up in poor academic performance (e.g., grade point average, teacher reports, national tests), challenges in school adjustment (e.g., not following rules), negative views about school climate (e.g., lack of teacher support), and heightened perceptions of being at risk in school. (p. 301)

**Support Services.** Various services exist at universities to support victims of bullying. These include university Title IX coordinators, department heads, tutors, university policies, and bullying/harassment advisors. One example of bullying support exists at the University of Nebraska-Omaha. This institution provides a variety of services online and in person, including links to people such as the Title IX coordinator, the university’s director of Student Conduct and Community Standards Office, as well as links to university policies, state laws, civil rights laws, and phone numbers including members of the university’s bullying response team (University of Nebraska-Omaha, 2017). Another university that provides support services to student victims of bullying is King’s College London (King’s). King’s provides a number of services that include: the Local Rape Crisis Centre-The Havens, Metropolitan Police, King’s College London Student Union Advice Service, Student Welfare and Advice Services, Student counselling Service, Halls of Residence Manager, Chaplain, King's Health Centre, and the Student Conduct and Appeals Office (King’s College London, 2017).

## **Summary**

Chapter 2 summarized the historical background of bullying research and how it has created a generation of researchers. This chapter defined the different types of bullying and how they affect victims. Research on pre-college bullying victims suggests that direct, indirect, and cyber-bullying all produce negative long-term effects on victims' mental health, physical health, lifetime earnings, relationships, and academic success. Finally, Chapter 2 discussed the support services available on two university campuses for bullying victims. While research has documented the effects of bullying during elementary and secondary school as well as long term impact, no studies have been conducted on college freshmen who experienced pre-college bullying. The current study focused on effects of pre-college bullying on the academic success, persistence, campus engagement, perceptions of campus safety, and reports of bullying in college freshman. Chapter 3 describes the methodology of this study including the research design, selection of participants, measurement, researcher's perspective, data collection procedures, limitations, and data analysis and synthesis.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Methods**

The first purpose of this study was to investigate bullying victim's perceived long-term effects on academic success, defined as maintaining a cumulative GPA of 2.5 or higher. The second purpose of this study was to examine perceptions of college freshmen regarding the impact pre-college bullying has on persistence to the sophomore year of college. A third purpose of this study was to understand the relationship between pre-college bullying and engagement in campus life. The fourth purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of self-reported bullying victims about campus safety at a Midwestern college campus. The final purpose of this study was to understand pre-college bullying victims' perceptions about bullying during their freshman year of college.

### **Research Design**

A qualitative design was selected to examine the perceptions of self-reported victims of pre-college bullying about the long-term effects during their freshman year. According to Creswell (2014), "Qualitative research is a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem" (p. 4). The researcher chose to use phenomenological research as the specific strategy for this study. Lunenburg and Irby (2008), concluded that "Deep and rich descriptions of the phenomenon or phenomena are usually gathered through inductive, qualitative methods such as interviews, focus group discussions, and participant observation" (p. 90). In order to better understand the specific phenomena studied, the researcher used the interview technique. Kvale (2006) explained, "The interview, both factual and

meaningful, seeks to describe the meanings of central themes in the life world of the subjects. The main task in interviewing is to understand the meaning of what the interviewees say” (p. 458). The use of interviews allowed the researcher to gain insight into the phenomenon of bullying.

### **Selection of Participants**

The population for this study included all first-year college students who have experienced pre-college bullying. The sample included freshmen who attended a Midwestern university during the 2017-2018 academic year who experienced pre-college bullying. The researcher used purposive sampling as the method to define the research sample. To obtain participants for the study, the researcher contacted the Dean of Students at Midwestern University (Appendix A). After consultation with the Registrar at Midwestern University, the Dean of Students indicated that she would contact first-year students requesting their participation (Appendix B). The Dean of Students forwarded an email from the researcher to freshmen students who met the criteria for inclusion in this study (Appendix C). The study included those students who agreed to participate in an interview, met the necessary requirements, and who gave their consent to be included in the study.

### **Measurement**

A demographic inquiry and an interview protocol were developed (Appendix D) to assist the researcher in collecting data from each of the participants. The demographic protocol was used to gather informational data and to ensure each respondent met the requirements to participate in the study. The following questions were asked as part of the demographic inquiry:

1. Have you been a victim of bullying prior to attending college? If so, was the type of bullying experienced verbal, non-verbal, or cyber?
2. What was the size of the population of the community you grew up in?
3. What was the size of high school you attended?
4. What were some of the activities you participated in during high school?

The interview protocol included a format similar to that recommended by Creswell (2014):

- A heading (date, place, interviewer, interviewee).
- Instructions for the interviewer to follow so that standard procedures are used from one interview to another.
- The questions (typically an ice-breaker question at the beginning followed by 4-5 questions that are often the sub-questions in a qualitative research plan, followed by some concluding statement or a question, such as, "With whom should I visit to learn more about answers to my questions?")
- Probes for the 4-5 questions, to follow up and ask individuals to explain their ideas in more detail or to elaborate on what they have said.
- Space between the questions to record responses.
- final thank-you statement to acknowledge the time the interviewee spent during the interview. (p. 183)

The following research questions and interview protocol guided this study:

**RQ1. What are the perceptions of college freshmen who self-reported pre-college bullying about its impact on academic success?**

**IQ1(a)** How do you think being bullied has affected your ability to do well academically during your freshman year?

**IQ1(b)** What was your GPA after the first semester of college?

**RQ2. What are the perceptions of college freshmen who self-reported pre-college bullying about its impact on the likelihood of continuing to the sophomore year of college?**

**IQ2(a)** What are your college plans for next year?

**IQ2(b)** How do you think being bullied prior to coming to college has affected your plans for continuing college?

**RQ3. What are the perceptions of college freshmen who self-reported pre-college bullying about its impact on engagement in campus life?**

**IQ3(a)** Describe your involvement in student organizations, clubs, athletics, or fraternity/sorority organizations at X University.

**IQ3(b)** What, if any, impact do you think your experience with bullying has had on your involvement in student activities at X University.

**RQ4. What are the perceptions of college freshmen who self-reported pre-college bullying about campus safety?**

**IQ4(a)** What concerns, if any, do you have about campus safety?

**IQ4(b)** What suggestions do you have for improving campus safety – especially for students who may have experienced pre-college bullying?

**RQ5. What are the perceptions of college freshmen who self-reported pre-college bullying about any bullying experiences on the college campus or as college freshmen?**

**IQ5(a)** Describe any bullying you have experienced since coming to X University.



**IQ5(b)** What kinds of support or resources do you think a university should provide to students who have experienced pre-college bullying?

Shenton (2004) discussed trustworthiness when he stated “researchers must satisfy four criteria; credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability in pursuit of trustworthy study” (p. 64). Shenton stated that credibility is established by ensuring the findings are congruent with the reality, in this case the reality of the interviewees. Shenton iterated that transferability is concerned with the extent to which the findings of one study can be applied to other situations. Shenton detailed how dependability is met by ensuring the work, if repeated in the same context, with the same methods and with the same participants, would obtain the same results. Lastly, Shenton discussed how conformability is the researchers concern for objectivity. This is accomplished by ensuring the findings are the result of experiences and ideas of the informants, rather than the characteristics and preferences of the researcher.

### **Researcher’s Perspective**

Bias can be present during any phase of the research. Creswell (2014) suggested a technique to combat bias is to “clarify the bias the researcher brings to the study. This self-reflection creates an open and honest narrative that will resonate well with readers” (p. 202). Factors which could have resulted in researcher bias in the current study included the following:

1. The researcher’s daughter was extensively bullied in a pre-university setting.
2. The researcher’s wife is a clinical therapist who specializes in youth who have been victimized by traumatic events such as bullying.

The researcher ensured that he was aware of the possibility of bias and actively

guarded against it to ensure the credibility of the measurement, data collection, and data analysis.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

Before data were collected, a Proposal for Research was submitted to the Baker Institutional Review Board (IRB) requesting approval for the study (Appendix E). The IRB form was submitted on February 1, 2018 and approval (Appendix F) was granted on February 2, 2018. The current study was conducted at Midwestern University, a 4-year private university in the Midwest. In order to contact all first-year students at the Midwestern University a request was sent to the Dean of Students at a Midwestern university on February 6, 2018 seeking the email addresses of all freshmen students (Appendix A). After discussion with the Dean of Students and the Registrar of a Midwestern university it was determined the best course of action would be for the Dean of Students to email first-year students requesting their participation and have the potential participants then email the researcher (Appendix B). The Dean of Students on February 4, 2018 sent an email from the researcher to freshmen who met the criteria (e.g., had been bullied pre-college) introducing the study and seeking participation (Appendix C). The email included a paragraph explaining that participation in the interview was voluntary, the interview would last approximately 60 minutes, would be conducted face-to-face, the interview would be audio recorded with their permission, and that all names would be kept confidential through assigning a pseudonym to every participant.

Students interested in participating in the study were asked to contact the researcher using an email address by a specified date. A second email invitation to

participate in the study was forwarded to freshmen who had not responded to the initial email one day after the response date specified in the original contact (Appendix G). The researcher allowed five business days for potential participants to respond. Individuals who indicated an interest in participating in the study were contacted immediately and an interview date, time, and place were selected. Rubin and Rubin (2005) defined an interview for a qualitative study as a “conversation in which a researcher gently guides a conversational partner in an extended discussion. The researcher elicits depth and detail about the research topic by following up on answers given by the interviewee during the discussion” (p. 4).

In preparation for the interview the researcher followed the steps as outlined by Valenzuela and Shrivastava (2008),

Choose a setting with the least distraction, explain the purpose of the interview, address terms of confidentiality, explain the format of the interview, indicate how long the interview usually takes, provide contact information of the interviewer, allow interviewee to clarify any doubts about the interview, prepare a method for recording data, e.g., take notes.  
(p. 10)

On the day of the scheduled interviews the researcher travelled to the Midwestern university to conduct the interviews. Each interview was scheduled to last 60 minutes and was conducted in a quiet and private setting that allowed for both parties to be comfortable. Before the interview began, the researcher asked the participant to sign a consent form (Appendix H) that explained participation in the interview was voluntary, and that all names would be kept confidential and would only be reported in the study by

use of a pseudonym. The consent form stated that the participant could refuse to answer any question that was objectionable, and that the participant could withdraw from the interview at any time. The interviews included a combination of demographic questions to ensure the correct population was being interviewed, and open-ended questions were used to capture as much information as possible related to the research questions for the current study. This allowed for more engagement on the part of the researcher as well as a more comfortable environment for the interviewee. Once all interviews were completed, a certified court stenographer transcribed each audio recording. The transcriptions were analyzed to determine central themes. Once the transcripts had been created, the researcher utilized the Dedoose software to process the data.

The researcher utilized member checking as part of the interview protocol. Koelsch (2013) described member checking as a process in which participants are provided relevant sections of their interview to review for accuracy. Upon completion of transcription of the interview, the researcher sent a copy of the transcription to each of the participants as an attachment to their university email address. These copies were provided in an effort to allow the participant to review the interview, clarify any answers, and to make any further comments they desired. Participants reviewed the interview transcripts and made clarifications to four interview questions, and added comments to an additional three questions. Participant Lea clarified that while crowds of people do still make her anxious, she is not as anxious as she was before. Participant Jasmine clarified that she was institutionalized for almost five months, instead of four months. Participant Leo added comments to his answer about self-harm. He added that he would punch himself until he started to bleed. Participant Jayden added that being bullied made him

feel worthless, stupid and weak.

Member checking was also used to “determine the accuracy of the qualitative findings through the final report or specific descriptions or themes back to participants and determining whether participants felt that they are accurate” (Creswell, 2014). Bloomberg and Volpe (2012) stated that to provide “a further indication of validity, where possible, researchers should document feedback on their interpretation of data from study participants.” (p. 110). According to Guion (2002), validity, in qualitative research, relates to whether the findings of a study are true and certain. ‘True’ suggests the findings accurately reflect the real situation. ‘Certain’ ensures communicating the findings are backed by evidence. ‘Certain’ means that there are no good grounds for doubting the results - the weight of evidence supports the conclusions.

In an effort to ensure the findings of the study were true and certain the researcher met with two external professionals to review the resulting themes. The first external person is a high school vice principal with 15 years of experience in education, and the second is a licensed clinical therapist who specializes in treating child and adolescent trauma. Both of the professionals were given the audio recordings and the transcripts of the interviews to ensure that the researcher’s findings accurately reflected the interviews, and to ensure the evidence was supported by the results. A thank you letter (Appendix I) was sent to all participants one week after the completion of the interview.

### **Data Analysis and Interpretation**

Bloomberg and Volpe (2012) addressed the idea of dependability when they stated that in qualitative research “the goal is not to eliminate inconsistencies, but to ensure the researcher understands when they occur” (p. 126). The transcribed interviews

were uploaded into the Dedoose software program for further analysis. The researcher used coding as a method of data analysis, using the transcriptions of each of the interviews. The procedures suggested by Zickmund (2008) and Sandelowski (1995) were followed to ensure the coding of the data from the participants was properly determined. Procedures described by Sandelowski were used to ensure any themes were identified. According to Zickmund (2008), the initial process of coding involves a) reading/listening to the texts, and b) completing at least 20% of cases for the initial open coding construction period. Zickmund stated that the “goal is to record topics that come up frequently and that are important to the researcher” (p. 20). Zickmund explained the next steps for the researcher were “to refine the coding of data by reading the next 20% of the cases, keep (for now) all codes, note which ones remain constant across cases (constant comparison), are important and new, and repeat as needed for refinement” (p. 20).

Sandelowski (1995) observed that analysis of texts begins with proofreading the material and simply underlining key phrases “because they make some as yet inchoate sense” (p. 373). Bogdan and Bilken (1982) suggested reading over the text at least twice. “Whether the data come in the format of video, audio, or written documents, handling them is always helpful for finding themes” (p. 165). Content analysis was used to determine consistencies or differences across and between the interview in participants responses. The researcher followed the procedures outlined by Zickmund (2008) and Sandelowski (1995) in order to accurately code and analyze the data.

According to Vogt (2005), listening to the recordings or reading the transcripts allows for the identification of a “natural meaning units” (p. 150). Vogt further stated, “In the right margin of the transcript adjacent to each meaning unit, assign an idiographic

theme that is as concise as possible. These themes should represent the essence of the participants' meaning units" (p. 150). Vogt (2005) defined idiographic as "individual, singular, unique, or concrete" (p. 150).

Themes identified from the interview transcript analysis, as well as a summary of interview consistencies and differences, were forwarded to two peer reviewers to be analyzed. Peer review was discussed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) as a means of looking for variation in the understanding of the phenomenon and seeking instances that might challenge the researcher's expectations or emergent findings. Peer reviewer #1 was a high school Vice Principal with more than 15 years of experience in education who was employed by the Platte County School District. Peer reviewer #2 was a Licensed Clinical Therapist specializing in child and adult trauma, family relationships, anxiety, depression, and women's issues. The researcher provided these two individuals with copies of the transcripts, the audio recordings of the interviews, and all notes, to review and conclude if the results determined by the researcher were accurate and not biased. The peer reviewers met separately with the researcher to discuss the data. The peer reviewers concluded that the researcher's results were accurate and there was minimal bias by the researcher. It was the intent of the researcher to eliminate any potential bias in order to not ruin the objectivity of the analysis and reporting of both the data and the results. Once the interviews were analyzed and coded, all information obtained was securely stored for a minimum of five years.

### **Limitations**

Lunenburg and Irby (2008) defined the limitations of a study as "factors that may have an effect on the interpretation of the findings or on the generalizability of the

results” (p. 133). This study had the following limitations:

1. The size of the incoming freshmen class of 275 may have limited the number of individuals qualified to participate in the study.
2. The length of time since the participant was bullied may have been a factor in recollection of information of the pre-college bullying experience.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to determine the long-term effects of self-reported pre-college bullying on first-year college freshmen. Specifically, the study focused on the perceptions of college freshmen about the impact pre-college bullying had on academic success, persistence to the sophomore year, engagement in campus life, views about campus safety, and bullying experiences during the freshman year. To collect the data, the researcher utilized face-to-face interview techniques. The researcher recorded and transcribed the interviews with the permission of each participant. Recorded interviews and transcripts were reviewed by the researcher and two peer reviewers. The results of data analysis and interpretation are discussed in Chapter 4.



## Chapter 4

### Results

The purpose of this qualitative study was to determine the long-term effects of self-reported pre-college bullying on first-year college freshmen. The researcher sought to understand perceptions about the long-term effects of bullying on academic success during the first year of college, persistence to the sophomore year of college, engagement in campus life, the perceptions of campus safety, and bullying experiences during the freshman year at the Midwestern University. The researcher collected data from seven current first-year students who agreed to share their experiences on the long-term effects of bullying. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. For example, interviewee #2 was a female student who was assigned the pseudonym of Jasmine. The following descriptors provide characteristics of the participants represented in this study:

- a. Age: Participants ranged from 18 to 19 years of age.
- b. Gender: Five participants were male and two were female students.
- c. Bullying exposure: Participants initial exposure to bullying occurred between the fourth grade and high school grades.
- d. Types of bullying exposure: All seven of the participants were victims of physical bullying.

Qualitative data from the participants' responses to open-ended interview questions were analyzed to gain a deeper understanding of:

- a. The perceptions about the long-term effects of bullying's impact on academic success during the first year of college.

- b. The impact on the likelihood of continuing on to the sophomore year of college.
- c. The impact on engagement in campus life.
- d. The perceptions of campus safety.
- e. The perceptions of first year students bullying experiences since attending the Midwestern University.

Five themes emerged from the interviews of first-year college students:

- a. Bullying has had a long-term impact on first year students' academic achievement.
- b. Participants are continuing on to their sophomore year.
- c. Participants are actively engaged in campus organizations/clubs.
- d. Bullying has negatively impacted participants' mental health.
- e. Bullying has had a long-term impact on first year participants' social relationships.

### **Impact of Bullying on Academic Achievement**

Each of the seven interviewees described the impact bullying has had on academic achievement. The participants were split with four saying that bullying has negatively impacted their academic achievement, while three participants said that it has made them stronger academically. Participant Jasmine stated

I wasn't ever really bullied or made fun of in college but being bullied in high school definitely made me nervous to go to my classes for the fear that all eyes would be on me, or that I wouldn't know what I was doing. Because I didn't go to my classes as often as I should've, I've done poorly academic wise my freshman year.

Not all of the participants were negatively impacted by bullying. Participant Leo noted how “being bullied forced me to turn and focus on my studies and not worry about what others were doing”. Participant Jayden stated “I did poorly academically because I could not concentrate out of fear of being beaten up in school”. Participant Dexter echoed Participant Jayden’s comments when he said “My grades were terrible because all I could think about in school was not getting beat up again”. Participant Gabriel stated “I honestly gave up on school and my grades because of being constantly bullied”.

### **Retention to the Sophomore Year**

The second prominent theme that emerged within each of the seven interviews was that all of the participants intend to continue on to their sophomore year. The participants were in agreement with their love for Midwestern University and how they all were going to continue their studies there. Participant Leo explained that he was registered for the pre-nursing program with the intention of becoming a Registered Nurse. “My dream has always been to become an RN and help people in that way”. Participant Jasmine noted, “I want to be an elementary school teacher and the Education department here has a great program for me to accomplish my goal”. Jasmine went on to say “I want to be that teacher that helps their students become the best person they can be”. Participant Ross spoke of “how incredible the faculty of Midwest University is and how he loves the school”.

### **Impact of Bullying on Engagement in Campus Organizations/Clubs**

The third prominent theme discussed by five of the participants was how they are active in university clubs and activities. Participant Leo stated that he was involved in the student activities council, improvisation troupe, concert choir and chapel

ambassadors. Participant Gabriel also stated that he was actively participating in the concert choir. Participant Jayden stated that he was actively engaged with the university football team. Participant Ross stated that he was participating in one of the fraternities on campus. Participants Lea and Jasmine both stated that they were not involved in any activities due to their fear of being judged by others. Participant Jasmine discussed not being involved in clubs. “I think being bullied when I was younger kept me from joining activities because I was afraid of judgement”. When asked to expand on her statement Jasmine stated,

I was not involved in any sports, clubs, or activities during my time at school. I think I would've been more successful in my classes if I had been though, because it could've given me the chance to get out of my shell and have the courage to go to class and participate.

Participant Lea explained her non-participation by stating,

I believe that it has kept me from joining in activities. I didn't play sports in high school because of bullying and from that I also didn't play and sports or join in activities in college. Staying away from people kept me from being bullied by the people in those groups or organizations. It wasn't worth it to me at the time but I regret it now as I wish I would have participated in more activities to help me in college.

### **Impact of Bullying on Mental Health**

The fourth and most prominent theme was the negative long-term effects bullying victimization has on victims' mental health. Five subthemes emerged within this theme: bullying impacted self-esteem, anxiety, depression, self-harm and suicidal

ideation.

**Self-esteem.** Participant Jayden stated that the bullying he suffered caused him to “Feel worthless, stupid and weak”. Participant Lea stated that “She was frightened of everything in her life, she would try to hide herself from everybody, be invisible, get lost in a crowd and make herself inconsequential”. Lea stated. “Making decisions is very scary. I have a lack of courage and fear criticism in everything I do”. Participant Ross described how his bullying experiences effected his self-esteem when he noticed that he “Is usually unable to say ‘No’ to anybody, and I do not assert myself to others or stand up for my rights”.

**Anxiety.** Participant Lea stated “I still suffer from severe anxiety due to being bullied. Crowds of people still make me anxious. Participant Jasmine also stated “I have to talk myself into going to class or places where there are going to be lots of people because of my anxiety”.

**Depression.** All participants reported suffering from depression as a result of pre-college bullying. Participant Jayden told of how he still suffers from bouts of severe depression caused by bullying in high school. “I initially became very depressed as a freshman in high school when the bullying started, it got so bad that I dropped out of school and had to be home schooled by my mom”. Jayden continued, “I lost interest in anything that had to do with school; sports, classes, concert choir, even my friends”. Participant Ross described his experience with depression as one of irritability and anger. “I started off feeling agitated towards everybody I had to deal with, then I quickly became violent. I couldn’t stand being around family or friends for very long, I had a very short temper, and everything just pissed me off”. Ross went on to say that “nobody

understood why I was so angry all the time, it took me years to realize that being severely bullied caused this to happen”.

**Self-harm.** Four of the seven participants reported self-harming behavior.

According to participant Jasmine “I was institutionalized in a treatment facility for four months for harming myself. I’m sure I would not have done this if I had not been bullied so terribly”. Jasmine went on to say engaging in self-harm was a way “to control what I was feeling”. Participant Lea echoed Jasmine’s statement that “self-harm was a way to control the situation”. Lea continued on by saying “I do not believe I would have ever engaged in cutting myself, destructive behaviors or abusing drugs had I not been bullied so severely”. Participant Leo stated “I would self-harm myself by punching myself repeatedly until I bruised myself and started bleeding. This was my way of getting out my anger so I did not hurt myself even more”. Participant Dexter stated “I used to punch holes in the walls of my bedroom because I was so angry. I thought nobody cared about me being bullied”

**Suicidal ideation.** Five of the seven participants reported suicidal ideation. As stated by participant Dexter, in reference to the September, 2017 suicide by a bullied Lee’s Summit North High School senior. “There is a high probability of this happening again, it’s only a matter of time”. Dexter described his experience with suicidal ideation, “I considered suicide throughout most of my time in high school. I even had a plan of how I was going to do it. I was bullied every day and nobody believed me. I thought if I killed myself then maybe somebody would listen”.

Participant Gabriel mirrored Dexter’s statement when he spoke of his own experiences with suicidal ideation. “I was so depressed from being constantly bullied

that I thought the only way out was to kill myself. The fact that nobody believed me made it even more worse”. In addition to the participant descriptions related to the negative impact on mental health, one participant, Gabriel stated that for years he suffered from agoraphobia brought on by his bullying victimization. “I was paralyzed to go certain places, mainly school hallways in between classes, because it made me feel trapped, this brought on panic attacks that only embarrassed me and made things worse”. Participant Dexter declared that he still “suffers from severe anxiety when he is in crowds and large classrooms”. Participant Jasmine stated “I was bullied for so long and nobody seemed to be able to stop it. If I killed myself that would stop the pain”. Participant Lea echoed Participant Jasmines statement “Killing myself would make the bullying stop”.

### **Impact of Bullying on Social Relationships**

The last theme that emerged from the research was the collective opinion that bullying has had a negative long-term effect on victims’ ability to form and maintain social relationships. Three subthemes emerged within this theme: Participants reported difficulty trusting others, forming friendships, and forming lasting social relationships.

**Difficulty trusting other people.** All of the participants indicated the ability to trust other people has been severely damaged because of their bullying victimization. Participant Dexter explained, “After being bullied for so long and not having my parents or teachers believe me it just shattered my trust in other people”. Participant Ross stated “Why trust people when they are just going to hurt you anyway”.

**Difficulty forming friendships.** All participants agreed that another negative long-term effect of bullying was the difficulty in forming friendships. Participant Ross explained his difficulties in forming friendships of any kind. “I constantly worry that

people are judging me” participant Jasmine stated, “I continue having trouble forming friendships with other women (I was mainly bullied by girls), maintaining trusting relationships is very difficult for me”. Jasmine went on to explain, “I ended up in some very destructive friendships throughout high school because I thought that’s what friendships were”. Participant Dexter explained, “In high school, I just went to class and did the work without socializing. Having had so many negative friendships, what was the point in trying to make any friends”.

**Difficulty forming intimate relationships.** The last negative long-term effect of bullying expressed by all participants was the difficulty in forming intimate relationships. Participant Lea stated, “After a while you just think you don’t deserve anything better. You don’t deserve a good relationship with anybody”. Participant Jayden noted, “After so many people bullied me, or just watched it happen I couldn’t see myself wanting to have a relationship with anybody in my school”. Jayden went on to note, “This has definitely affected my ability to want to have any kind of relationships”. Participant Dexter explained, “Every relationship I’ve had, I keep expecting that person to judge me or find something wrong with me and leave”.

### **Campus Safety.**

The researcher asked participants about their perceptions related to campus safety and if they had experienced any incidences of bullying since attending Midwestern University. All participants responded that Midwestern University was a safe and inclusive learning environment. Participant Leo stated “I feel very safe on campus, coming from a small town I feel right at home here”. Participant Gabriel echoed Participant Leo’s comments, “I feel totally safe here. Everybody knows everybody



here.”

While participants indicated that they have observed bullying taking place at Midwestern University, all participants responded they had not experienced any incidences of being bullied. Participant Lea stated, “I have not been bullied since coming to campus, it is so refreshing not to have to worry about somebody bullying me I actually cried”. Participant Jasmine stated “I do not worry about being bullied on campus, I can actually be a student again and not a victim”.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to determine the long-term effects of self-reported pre-college bullying on first-year college freshmen. The researcher sought to understand perceptions about the long-term effects of bullying’s impact on academic success during the first year of college, the impact on the likelihood of continuing on to the sophomore year of college, the impact on engagement in campus life, the perceptions of campus safety, and if any first-year students have experienced bullying since attending the Midwestern University. Chapter 5 provides an interpretation of the data analysis results, discussion of implications for action, and recommendations for future research.

## Chapter 5

### Interpretation and Recommendations

This qualitative study was conducted to understand the perceptions of college freshmen who self-reported bullying in pre-college educational settings, about the impact of previous bullying during their freshman year of college. The researcher sought to understand the perceptions of the impact of pre-college bullying on academic success (defined as maintaining a cumulative GPA of 2.5 or higher) at the end of the freshman year of college. The researcher also examined whether pre-college bullying was perceived to have an impact on the likelihood of students' persistence to the sophomore year of college. The third purpose of this study was to understand the relationship between pre-college bullying and engagement in campus life. The fourth purpose of this study was to understand the perceptions of campus safety of college freshmen who had been victims of pre-college bullying. The final purpose of this study was to understand the perceptions of victims of pre-college bullying about their experiences with bullying during their freshman year of college. An overview of the problem, purpose statement and research questions, review of the methodology, and major findings are summarized in this section.

#### Study Summary

**Overview of the problem.** Bullying is a problem that has been well-researched. Studies have demonstrated that bullied victims tend to feel disconnected from school, have lower academic achievement, low self-esteem, higher levels of anxiety and depression, and increased risk of substance abuse (Arsenault, 2017; Copeland, 2003; Victoria State Government, 2013). Arsenault (2017) determined long term effects of

bullying can include lower earnings and higher rates of unemployment. Bullying can impact victim's mental health, physical health, academic achievement, and personal relationships (Wolke & Lereya, 2015). While there has been a significant amount of empirical research conducted on bullying and its long-term effects on its victims in the areas of mental health, physical health, lifetime earnings, relationships, self-esteem, education achievement and many other areas, a shortage of research still exists on how bullying affects college students, particularly first year students. The current study examined the impact of pre-college bullying on first year college students.

**Purpose statement and research questions.** The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand the perceptions of college freshmen who self-reported pre-college bullying about its impact on academic success (defined as maintaining a 2.5 cumulative GPA or higher) in college, the likelihood of continuing to the sophomore year of college, engagement in campus life, views about campus safety, and bullying experiences on the campus. Five research questions guided this study:

**RQ1.** What are the perceptions of college freshmen who self-reported pre-college bullying about its impact on academic success (defined as maintaining a 2.5 cumulative GPA or higher) in college?

**RQ2.** What are the perceptions of college freshmen who self-reported pre-college bullying about its impact on the likelihood of continuing to the sophomore year of college?

**RQ3.** What are the perceptions of college freshmen who self-reported pre-college bullying about its impact on engagement in campus life?

**RQ4.** What are the perceptions of college freshmen who self-reported pre-college

bullying about campus safety?

**RQ5.** What are the perceptions of college freshmen who self-reported pre-college bullying about any bullying experiences on the college campus?

**Review of the methodology.** Upon receipt of the approved Baker University IRB letter on February 2, 2018, the researcher emailed the Dean of Students at Midwestern University to request the email addresses of all first-year students in an effort to contact them and request participation in the study. After discussion with the Dean of Students and the Registrar of Midwestern University it was determined the best course of action would be for the Dean of Students to email first-year students who met the criteria (e.g., had been bullied pre-college) requesting their participation and have the potential participants contact the researcher if willing to participate in the research. The email sent to the prospective research participants included the study overview including purpose and significance statements, and a consent form. After 5 days, the researcher contacted each member and established a meeting time, and location for the interview. Each participant completed a consent form prior to the interview. The consent form insured confidentiality, stated the participant could withdraw at any time, and that the audio recording of the interview would be erased upon transcription. Each interview lasted approximately sixty minutes. The interviews were audio recorded and included a combination of demographic and open-ended questions related to bullying experiences and their long-term effects. Once all interviews were completed, a certified court stenographer transcribed each audio recording. The Dedoose software was used to analyze interview transcriptions to determine central themes. Once transcriptions were complete and data analysis was completed, two external reviewers validated the themes

and subthemes that emerged. All original transcripts were maintained in a secure location for five years.

**Major findings.** Analysis of data collected from the interviews identified five emerging themes: (a) Bullying has had a long-term negative impact on first year students' academic achievement; (b) all participants are continuing on to their sophomore year; (c) five of the seven participants are actively engaged in campus organizations/clubs; (d) bullying has negatively impacted all participants' mental health; (e) bullying has had a long-term impact on first year participants' social relationships. The participants indicated a strong belief in the long-term negative effects of bullying. Although the participants believed that bullying exists at Midwestern University none of the participants have experienced any forms of bullying. The participants indicated that Midwestern University has a very safe campus and they do not fear for their safety.

### **Findings Related to the Literature**

Ponzo (2013) researched the impact of bullying on Italian pupils at ages 9 and 13 and “found that at both ages bullying was associated with significantly lower scores in reading, math, and science, with the effects being larger at age 13 for children who were bullied repeatedly” (p. 1069). Wolke et al. examined the long-term effects of bullying on adult health, wealth, crime, and social outcomes and determined that out of a population of 335, “bully victims with no college education accounted for 53.3%, while those who were not victimized accounted for 43.7%” (p. 1964). The results of the current study found that all study participants suffered academically due to their bullying experiences.

McDougall and Vaillancourt (2015) concluded that bullying victims tend to have a negative view about school. The results of the current study did not agree with

conclusions drawn by McDougall and Vaillancourt. All participants in the current study stated they were continuing on to their sophomore year.

According to the Australian Government Department of Education (2018), bullying results in social implications including self-doubt and reluctance to participate in group activities. Peguero (2008) concluded students who participated in three or more classroom-related extra-curricular activities were more likely to report bullying victimization than students who were not involved in classroom related extracurricular activities. Students who participated in one, two, three or more intramural sports activities had greater odds of being bullied than students who were not involved in intramural sports.

According to Arseneault (2017), accumulating evidence demonstrated a detrimental effect on youth's mental health and revealed other poor outcomes including low self-esteem, and self-harm. Arseneault also noted that studies indicated that young victims of bullying have higher rates of agoraphobia, depression, anxiety, panic disorder, and suicidality in their early to mid-20s compared to those who have not been bullied in childhood. As noted by Bond et al. (2001) up to 30% of student incident symptoms of depression could be attributed to a history of victimization. Wolke and Lereya (2015) studied the consequences of bullying of individuals 18-50 years of age and determined the victims were at an increased risk or had higher rates of anti-social personality disorder, anxiety, depression, and internalizing problems, psychotic experiences, somatic problems, and suicidality/self-harm. Ttofi et al. (2012) agreed that bullying victimization was a significant predictor of depression up to seven years later. All participants in the current study reported suffering from mental health issues such as depression, anxiety,

and suicidality.

According to Wolke and Lereya (2015) victims of bullying have more trouble making and keeping relationships. “Victims were also reported to have more trouble making or keeping friends and to be less likely to live with a partner and have social support” (Wolke & Lereya, 2015, p. 880). Wolke and Lereya (2015) stated, “Frequently victimized children had trouble making or keeping friends and were less likely to meet up with friends at age 50” (p. 882). Wolke et al. (2013) found that 5% of bullying victims were involved in a violent relationship, 27.3% had a poor relationship with their parents, 24% lacked a best friend or confidante, and 8.4% had problems making or keeping friends. Not only does being a victim of bullying affect being in a relationship but it also impacts social support for the victim. Wolke and Lereya (2015) found that bullying “victims were also reported to have more trouble making or keeping friends and to be less likely to live with a partner and have social support” (p.880). Social relations were found to also suffer due to bullying. Bullying is corrosive to social relations. All participants in the current study reported having trouble making and keeping friends, suffered trust issues, and commented about difficulty in social relationships.

## **Conclusions**

Findings from the current research represented perceptions of seven first-year college students attending a Midwestern university concerning the long-term effects of bullying. Five major themes were identified as a result of interviews with the seven participants. The five emergent themes included the following: (a) bullying has had a long-term negative impact on first year students’ academic achievement; (b) all participants are continuing on to their sophomore year; (c) five of the seven participants

are actively engaged in campus organizations/clubs; (d) bullying has negatively impacted all participants' mental health; (e) bullying has had a long-term impact on first year participants' social relationships. The seven participants agreed that bullying had its greatest impact on mental health. In addition, the impacts of bullying were found to have manifested in almost every area of interview participant's lives regardless of the duration of the bullying victimization. Participants did not report any concerns about campus safety and none reported any incidents of being bullied during the freshman year, although they acknowledged that bullying is present at the college campus.

**Implications for action.** The current study's findings present implications for students, parents of current and future students, employees, and patrons of Midwestern University. Continued support needs to be provided to students who have experienced bullying. Universities should consider developing training opportunities that will better educate faculty, staff, administration, and students on the universities' mission and values statement, with particular emphasis on teaching personal and professional responsibility. These educational sessions should be designed to increase university constituent understanding about the long-term effects of bullying on its survivors. Finally, participants acknowledged the importance of sharing the university mission statement with campus constituents. The participants suggested that this could be a part of a new student orientation program. It will be important for universities to share institutional policy about bullying or student violence with constituents and provide details related to support services to those who want it.

**Recommendations for future research.** The current study findings suggested additional opportunities for future research. This study was limited to one



Midwest university. Future studies could include participants from a wider variety of universities (e.g., community colleges, private institutions, technical colleges, and for-profit higher education institutions). Participants in this study included only those who self-identified as having been bullied in a pre-college setting. Future studies could focus on perceptions of the long-term effects of bullying from the perspective of university counselors, residence hall directors, Deans of Students, medical personnel, or others who interact directly with students. The current study could also be expanded to determine perceptions of bullying victims based on geographic regions instead of within one state. The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand the perceptions of college freshmen, who self-reported bullying in pre-college educational settings, about the impact of previous bullying during their freshman year of college. Future research could examine the perceptions of the college freshmen once they have completed their sophomore year of college. Another option for additional research would be to examine the perceptions of recent college graduates who self-report pre-college bullying.

**Concluding remarks.** There has been significant research conducted on the effects of bullying on students in K-12 grades, specifically how bullying negatively impacts mental health, self-esteem, social relationships, physical health, and academic success. Few studies have addressed the long-term effects of bullying on first year college students. In addition, researchers have documented the impact of bullying on child and adolescent mental health, lifetime earnings, and academic success. There is limited research on the long-term effects of pre-college bullying on first year college students. The results of this study demonstrated that students who were bullied pre-college have ongoing challenges related to academic success, continuing on to the

sophomore year, engagement in organizations and clubs, mental health, and difficulty with personal and intimate relationships once they matriculate to a university setting.

Faculty, student affairs staff, and counseling staff may benefit from professional development about the long term effects of pre-college bullying on college students.

Support services should be available and broadly shared with all undergraduate students.

Higher education institutions should be vigilant in articulating bullying policies and promote conversations about bullying and bullying prevention throughout the campus.

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## Appendices



**Appendix A: Email to Dean of Students Requesting Participation**

## Email Requesting Participation

Dear Dr. XXXX,

I am writing you in regard to my doctoral dissertation. As part of my research for my dissertation I would like to interview those first-year students who have identified as having experienced bullying in a pre-college setting. I have provided a brief overview of the research questions and interview protocol so that you can have a better understanding of my proposed research.

I am requesting that your office please provide me the email addresses of all first year students so I may send them an email requesting their participation in the interview. If it is not possible to provide the email addresses' then I can provide the email to be sent to all first-year students. Thank you for any assistance your office is able to provide me.

Please contact me at my Baker email, martinjclark1@stu.bakeru.edu if you have any questions. I look forward to hearing from you.

Best regards,  
Martin Clark

**Appendix B: Email from Dean of Students**

**Email from Dean of Students**

Hi Martin,

Thank you for your email. I am copying Ruth Miller, Registrar, on this request. In consultation, we believe the best process would be for us to email the students and ask them to respond directly to you.

Does that sound good?

## **Appendix C: Email Requesting Participation**

## **Email Requesting Participation**

Greetings,

I am a Doctoral student at Baker University and am conducting research on the long-term effects of bullying on first year college students. If you are an individual who experienced pre-college bullying and are willing to be interviewed about how this may have impacted your college experience I would appreciate your participation in an individual interview that will not last longer than one hour. Your identity will be guaranteed by assigning you a pseudonym, and any information you share with me will be kept strictly confidential. Some of the information you share with me may be included in my dissertation but will only be identified by the pseudonym assigned to you.

The interview will last approximately 60 minutes and will be conducted on the Baker campus. If you decide to participate in the interview, you may withdraw at any time or choose not to respond to any question that might make you feel uncomfortable. All interviews will involve only you and I and will be conducted in a private setting on campus.

Please contact me at my Baker email, [martinjclark1@stu.bakeru.edu](mailto:martinjclark1@stu.bakeru.edu) to indicate your interest in participating in this important study and to schedule the interview. I look forward to hearing from you. If you would like to participate in an interview please respond to this invitation to participate by XYZ

Best regards,  
Martin Clark

**Appendix D: Demographic Inquiry and Interview Protocol**

## Demographic Inquiry and Interview Protocol

### Demographic Questions

1. Have you been a victim of bullying prior to attending college?
2. What was the size of community you grew up in?
3. What was the size of high school you attended?
4. What were some of the activities you participated in during high school?
5. Do you know of any students who are being bullied in a university setting?

### Interview Questions

**IQ1(a)** How do you think being bullied has affected your ability to do well academically during your freshman year?

**IQ1(b)** What was your GPA after the first semester of college?

**IQ2(a)** What are your college plans for next year?

**IQ2(b)** How do you think being bullied prior to coming to college has affected your plans for continuing college

**IQ3(a)** Describe your involvement in student organizations, clubs, athletics, or fraternity/sorority organizations at X University.

**IQ3(b)** What, if any, impact do you think your experience with bullying has had on your involvement in student activities at X University.

**IQ4(a)** What concerns, if any, do you have about campus safety?

**IQ4(b)** What, if any, impact has your experience with pre-college bullying had on your perceptions about campus safety at X University?

**IQ5(a)** Describe any bullying you have experienced since coming to X University.

**IQ5(b)** What kinds of support or resources do you think a university should provide to students who have experienced pre-college bullying?



**Appendix E: Baker University Institutional Review Board Proposal for Research**

## Baker University Institutional Review Board Proposal for Research

IRB Request

Date: Feb 1, 2018

IRB Protocol

Number

(IRB use only)

**I. Research Investigator(s)** (students must list faculty sponsor)

Department(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Name	Signature
1. Martin Clark	Principal Investigator
2. Tes Mehring	X Check if faculty sponsor
3. Margaret Waterman	Check if faculty sponsor
4.	Check if faculty sponsor

Principal Investigator  Check if faculty sponsor  Check if faculty sponsor

Principal investigator contact information  
5054

[martinjclark1@stu.bakeru.edu](mailto:martinjclark1@stu.bakeru.edu)

**Note:** When submitting your finalized, signed form to the IRB, please ensure that you cc all investigators and faculty sponsors using their official Baker University (or respective

Phone (816) 830-  
Email

Address 15330 NW 125th st  
Platte City, MO  
64079

Phone 1236

Email [tmehring@bakeru.edu](mailto:tmehring@bakeru.edu)

**Expected Category of Review:** Exempt  Expedited  Full  Renewal

### II. Protocol Title

First Year College Students Perceptions of the Long-Term Effects of Bullying

### III. Summary:

The following questions must be answered. Be specific about exactly what participants will experience and about the protections that have been included to safeguard participants from harm.

A. In a sentence or two, please describe the background and purpose of the research. The purpose of this qualitative study is to determine the long-term effects of bullying on first year college students. Specifically, this study examined how pre-college bullying effects academic success, likelihood of persistence to the sophomore year of college, engagement in campus life, perceptions of campus safety and the perceptions of college freshman who self-reported pre-college bullying and experiences with bullying in a university setting.

B. Briefly describe each condition, manipulation, or archival data set to be included within the study.

There are no conditions, manipulation or archival data included in this study.

#### **IV. Protocol Details**

A. What measures or observations will be taken in the study? If any questionnaire or other instruments are used, provide a brief description and attach a copy.

Each participant will be asked to describe how their experiences as a victim of pre-college bullying affected their first year of college. The participants will also be asked their perceptions of past bullying on academic success, retention, campus engagement, safety on campus and experiences with bullying since coming to college.

B. Will the subjects encounter the risk of psychological, social, physical, or legal risk? If so, please describe the nature of the risk and any measures designed to mitigate that risk. The researcher does not anticipate the participants will encounter any psychological, social, physical, or legal risks. The identity of each subject will remain confidential by the use of a pseudonym in order to protect their privacy.

C. Will any stress to subjects be involved? If so, please describe. The researcher does not foresee the participants having to endure any form of stress during the data collection phase of this study.

D. Will the subjects be deceived or misled in any way? If so, include an outline or script of the debriefing.

The researcher will not deceive or mislead the subject in any way.

E. Will there be a request for information which subjects might consider to be personal or sensitive? If so, please include a description.

The researcher does not believe there will be a request for information in which the subjects may consider the information to be personal or sensitive.

F. Will the subjects be presented with materials which might be considered to be offensive, threatening, or degrading? If so, please describe.

Subjects will not be presented with any materials in this study.

G. Approximately how much time will be demanded of each subject? Subject will spend approximately 60 minutes for the face-to-face interview.

H. Who will be the subjects in this study? How will they be solicited or contacted? Provide an outline or script of the information which will be provided to subjects prior to their volunteering to participate. Include a copy of any written solicitation as well as an outline of any oral solicitation.

The subjects for this study will be those students who identify as victims of bullying in a pre-college setting. The researcher will solicit participants for this study by obtaining the

student email address' from the Dean of Students and contacting them to ask for their participation.

The initial contact email soliciting student participants is provided below.

Greetings,

I am a Doctoral student at Baker University and am conducting research on the long-term effects of bullying on first year college students. If you are an individual who experienced pre-college bullying and are willing to be interviewed about how this may have impacted your college experience I would appreciate your participation in an individual interview that will not last longer than one hour. Your identity will be guaranteed by assigning you a pseudonym, and any information you share with me will be kept strictly confidential. Some of the information you share with me may be included in my dissertation but will only be identified by the pseudonym assigned to you.

The interview will last approximately 60 minutes and will be conducted on the Baker campus. If you decide to participate in the interview, you may withdraw at any time or choose not to respond to any question that might make you feel uncomfortable. All interviews will involve only you and I and will be conducted in a private setting on campus.

Please contact me at my Baker email, martinjclark1@stu.bakeru.edu to indicate your interest in participating in this important study and to schedule the interview. I look forward to hearing from you. If you would like to participate in an interview please respond to this invitation to participate by XYZ

Best regards,  
Martin Clark

I. What steps will be taken to ensure that each subject's participation is voluntary? What if any inducements will be offered to the subjects for their participation?

Prior to the start of the interview, each subject will be asked to sign a consent form. The researcher does not foresee offering any inducements to participate in this study.

J. How will you insure that the subjects give their consent prior to participating? Will a written consent form be used? If so, include the form. If not, explain why not.

K. Will any aspect of the data be made a part of any permanent record that can be identified with the subject? If so, please explain the necessity.

L. Will the fact that a subject did or did not participate in a specific experiment or study be made part of any permanent record available to a supervisor, teacher, or employer? If so, explain.

M. What steps will be taken to insure the confidentiality of the data? Where will it be stored? How long will it be stored? What will be done with the data after the study is completed?

N. If there are any risks involved in the study, are there any offsetting benefits that might accrue to either the subjects or society?

O. Will any data from files or archival data be used? If so, please describe.

**Appendix F: IRB Approval**

## Baker University Approval

Baker University Institutional Review Board

February 2nd, 2018

Dear Martin Clark and Tes Mehring,

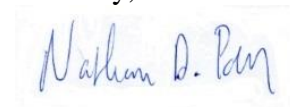
The Baker University IRB has reviewed your project application and approved this project under Expedited Status Review. As described, the project complies with all the requirements and policies established by the University for protection of human subjects in research. Unless renewed, approval lapses one year after approval date.

Please be aware of the following:

1. Any significant change in the research protocol as described should be reviewed by this Committee prior to altering the project.
2. Notify the IRB about any new investigators not named in original application.
3. When signed consent documents are required, the primary investigator must retain the signed consent documents of the research activity.
4. If this is a funded project, keep a copy of this approval letter with your proposal/grant file.
5. If the results of the research are used to prepare papers for publication or oral presentation at professional conferences, manuscripts or abstracts are requested for IRB as part of the project record.

Please inform this Committee or myself when this project is terminated or completed. As noted above, you must also provide IRB with an annual status report and receive approval for maintaining your status. If you have any questions, please contact me at [npoell@bakeru.edu](mailto:npoell@bakeru.edu) or 785.594.4582.

Sincerely,



Nathan Poell, MA  
Chair, Baker University IRB  
Baker University IRB Committee

Scott Crenshaw  
Jamin Perry, PhD  
Susan Rogers, PhD  
Joe Watson, PhD

**Appendix G: Second Email Requesting Participation in Interview**



## Second Email Requesting Participation in Interview

Greetings,

I am a Doctoral student at Baker University and am conducting research on the long-term effects of bullying on first year college students. If you are an individual who experienced pre-college bullying and are willing to be interviewed about how this may have impacted your college experience I would appreciate your participation in an individual interview that will not last longer than one hour. Your identity will be guaranteed by assigning you a pseudonym, and any information you share with me will be kept strictly confidential. Some of the information you share with me may be included in my dissertation but will only be identified by the pseudonym assigned to you.

The interview will last approximately 60 minutes and will be conducted on the Baker campus. If you decide to participate in the interview, you may withdraw at any time or choose not to respond to any question that might make you feel uncomfortable. All interviews will involve only you and I and will be conducted in a private setting on campus.

Please contact me at my Baker email, [martinjclark1@stu.bakeru.edu](mailto:martinjclark1@stu.bakeru.edu) to indicate your interest in participating in this important study and to schedule the interview. I look forward to hearing from you. If you would like to participate in an interview please respond to this invitation to participate by XYZ

Best regards,  
Martin Clark

**Appendix H: Consent Form**

## Consent Form

### Consent Form

Please consider this information carefully before deciding whether to participate in this research.

**Purpose of the research:** To understand the long-term effects of pre-college bullying as it relates to the impact of academic success during the first year of college, the likelihood of continuing to the sophomore year of college, impact on campus activities, perceptions of campus safety, and any bullying experiences on the college campus or as college freshmen.

**What you will do in this research:** If you decide to participate in this research study, you will be asked to participate in one interview. You will be asked several questions. A pseudonym will be assigned to your responses to insure your confidentiality. Your audio recording of this interview will only be identified using the same pseudonym. While quotes from this interview may be summarized in the dissertation, only the pseudonym will be used. With your permission, I will audio record the interview so I don't have to make so many notes.

**Time required:** The interview will take approximately 1 hour or less.

**Permission to Audio Record:** I acknowledge and allow my interview to be audio recorded to ensure accuracy. The recording will be erased upon completion of the transcription and uploading of finished assignment.

**Risks:** No risks are anticipated. If you feel uncomfortable answering any of the questions, we will skip them.

**Benefits:** This is a chance for you to tell about your experiences with being bullied and how it has affected you in the long-term. Your responses to the interview will contribute to what is known about the impact of pre-college bullying on college freshmen.

**Participation and withdrawal:** Your participation in this study is completely voluntary, and you may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time. You may withdraw by informing the experimenter that you no longer wish to participate (no questions will be asked).

**To Contact the Researcher:** If you have questions or concerns about this research, please contact: Martin Clark at (816) 830-5054 or via martinjclark1@stu.bakeru.edu. You may also contact the faculty member supervising this work: Dr. Tes Mehring, Professor, Baker University, 913.344.1236, tmehring@bakeru.edu.

Agreement:

The nature and purpose of this research have been sufficiently explained and I agree to participate in this study. I understand that I am free to withdraw at any time without incurring any penalty.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name (print): \_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix I: Thank You Letter**

## Thank You Letter

Dear XXXX:

I would like to take this time to thank you for allowing me to interview you. Your insight into the experiences of bullying victims has helped my research enormously. As I stated in my initial email you will be assigned a pseudonym and all information that you shared with me will remain confidential.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any additional information you would like to add. Again, thank you very much.

Sincerely,  
Martin Clark  
martinjclark1@stu.bakeru.edu