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Perceptions of Coping Strategies of Young Adults Who Were Bullied as Youth

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Walden University
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Abstract

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MA, Adler Graduate School, 2011

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Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

Victims of childhood bullying often use passive coping strategies and experience depression, substance abuse use, anxiety, and suicidal thoughts. The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to examine adults' lived experiences of coping methods they used as victims of bullies during adolescence. Lazarus and Folkman's transactional theory of stress and coping provided the framework for the study. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 11 young adults who were bullied as adolescents. Coding analysis indicated 7 emerging themes for coping: confrontation, self-controlling, seeking social support, accepting responsibility, escape-avoidance, problem-solving, and positive reappraisal. Participants reported that some coping methods were perceived as effective. The results suggested that self-support and the support of friends and family were key factors in overcoming childhood victimization. Findings may be used by parents, teachers, counselors, and community members to assist bullied or at-risk adolescents in developing coping methods to support their ongoing personal development.

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to God, my family, and those who have been victimized by childhood bullying. Without the loving support of my sister and family, none of this would have been possible. To my sister, Elizabeth, God has truly blessed me to share this educational journey with someone who loves and supports me. Mom and Dad, there are no words for all the things you have sacrificed for me. I thank God every day for you both. Thank you, God, for moving so many obstacles and guiding me through this journey.

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Further thanks to Dr. Donna Heretick for your willingness to serve as a committee member and accepting to help move me along the dissertation process. Your expertise in the subject matter provided valuable insight and enabled me to move forward without any challenges. I truly believe that I have been blessed with you and Dr. Giles to be a part of my committee.

Finally, I would like to thank all participants in my study. Thank you for allowing me to experience your journey through storytelling. Without you sharing these stories, this process would not have been completed. I appreciate your stories and pray for each of you to be whole and healed.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Bullying is a repeated act of aggression that is demonstrated by an individual against another (Buxton, Potter, & Bostic, 2013; Ryoo, Wang, & Swearer, 2015). Childhood bullying is an issue that affects all children including those who are not victims. The effects of childhood bullying can be dangerous to an individual's psychological and physical health (Skrzypiec, Slee, Murray-Harvey, & Pereira, 2011). Some of the effects include poor academic performance, substance abuse, mental health issues, and suicide ideation and behaviors (Seltzer & Long, 2013). Each year, students self-report being victims of bullying. Most of the bullying incidents students experience in school are verbal, physical, and mental (Skrzypiec et al., 2011). The fear of being bullied by peers has many students skipping school. Bullying can occur anytime and anyplace. A lot of bullying activities are now taking place online or on the phone (Garnefski & Kraaii, 2014). Depending on how frequently a victim is bullied as a child, it is likely that the outcome can impact his or her adulthood (Garnefski & Kraaii, 2014). It is important that victims of bullying learn how to cope so that they will be able to deal with stressful situations as adults. Kochenderfer-Ladd (2004) and Tenenbaum, Varjas, Meyers, and Parris (2011) described coping to include social support, problem-solving, externalizing, and distancing/avoiding behavior. Researchers have done extensive work to identify positive coping strategies for adolescents who have experienced childhood bullying victimization (CBV). However, there has been limited research on the effect that CBV has on these individuals as they emerge into adulthood.

Studies on CBV have suggested that victims who engage in externalizing coping behavior increase their chances of future victimization (Visconti, Sechler, & Kochenderfer-Ladd, 2013). Kochenderfer-Ladd (2004) found that when a victim uses conflict resolution approaches, it prevents further bullying situations. Many researchers have examined the psychological and social distress of bullying victims and the effectiveness of coping strategies they used. Children who were bullied as adolescents who used distancing and retaliation coping strategies often reported anxiety and depression issues (Kochenderfer-Ladd, 2004). It is important that researchers continue to discover how children who were bullied as adolescents cope with their past bullying experiences as emerging adults.

Chapter 1 provides an overview of the study. I include a brief background of the problem to inform readers of the need for the study. Also, I present the problem statement, purpose of the study, conceptual framework, research questions, nature of the study, operational definitions of terms, scope and delimitations, assumptions, and limitations of the study. Chapter 1 concludes with the significance of the study and how research on coping with CBV can effect positive social change.

Background

Bullying victims, children, and their families often experience a significant amount of distress. This distress may lead to short- and long-term psychological problems (Connell, Morris, & Piquero, 2016; Lemstra, Neilsen, & Moraros, 2012). Bullying is a problem that affects most school-aged children (Boulton, 2013). Children are likely to experience bullying as a bully, victim, or bystander/witness (Boulton, 2013;

Rivers, Poteat, Noret, & Ashurst, 2009; Waasdorp, Bradshaw, & Duong, 2011; Wolke, Copeland, Angold, & Costello, 2013). School bullying has increased so much that most states have created policies and legislation to address this issue (Lemstra et al., 2012). Research has shown that adolescents who were continuously bullied by their peers tend to experience physical and psychological symptoms that result in adverse outcomes in adulthood (Hoffman, Phillips, Daigle, & Turner, 2017; Kochenderfer-Ladd, 2004; McMahon, Reulbach, Keeley, Perry & Arensman, 2010). Kochenderfer-Ladd (2004) found that most victims of bullying display symptoms of depression, low self-esteem, self-harm, substance abuse, aggressive antisocial behavioral problems, and social stress.

Having a social relationship with peers is very important to adolescents who attend school (Berndt, 1982). Many adolescents describe their social relationships with others as intimate. Early adolescents begin to value the intimate knowledge that they receive from one another (Berndt, 1982). The possibility that CBV is related to negative outcomes has led researchers to investigate how bullying victims cope with bullying (Berndt, 1982). Understanding the relationship between how bullying victims cope with childhood bullying and the potential outcomes may help teachers, parents, and professionals reduce bullying incidents and teach students how to cope with this issue.

Researchers have examined how adolescents who were bullied as children using different coping strategies. For example, bullying victims use coping strategies such as problem-solving, social support, and distraction (Smith, Talamelli, Cowie, Naylor, & Chauhan, 2004; Tenenbaum et al., 2011). Research has also shown that most victims of bullying used conceived coping strategies like aggression and avoidance to deal with

being bullied (Smith et al., 2004; Tenenbaum et al., 2011). According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), people tend to use cognitive and behavioral efforts to help them face/reduce the external and internal demands placed on them. Many adolescents use their advanced cognitive and behavioral skills to help them cope by evaluating, interpreting, and reframing to gain meaning to the situation they face (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). When met with multiple stressors, adolescents will begin to incorporate coping strategies; this can be beneficial or damaging based on how the strategy was used and its effectiveness (Lazarus & Folkman, 1987). The negative impact of CBV can be reduced if the coping strategy that is used by the victim is adaptive (Lazarus & Folkman, 1987). Research suggested that most victims of bullying anticipate that they will cope by seeking advice, getting help from an adult, or reporting the incident (Kristensen & Smith, 2003; Paul, Smith, & Blumberg, 2012; Smith et al., 2004; Tenenbaum et al., 2011). Using adaptive coping methods can be difficult for victims because bullying is a repeated act of aggression (Smith et al., 2004).

Problem Statement

Studies have revealed information about the long-term consequences of victimization by bullies during childhood and adolescence (Boulton, 2013; Hunter & Boyle, 2004). Most researchers who studied this subject used quantitative methods (survey questionnaires, comparative analysis) to investigate emotional and behavioral patterns of childhood bullying victims (Hunter & Boyle, 2004; Tenenbaum et al., 2011). Less is known about the types of coping methods children who were bullied as adolescents used when responding to CBV (Hemphill, Tollit, & Herrenkohl, 2014). Also,

researchers neglected to study the phenomenological experiences of bullying victims. Bullying can occur during elementary, middle school, high school, college, and adult years in the work environment (Hunter & Boyle, 2004). The outcome for most victims are depression, substance abuse use, anxiety, and suicidal thoughts (Seltzer & Long, 2013).

Recent studies have shown that victims of bullying often apply coping strategies that are "passive, emotionally-orientated and avoidant" (Garnefski & Kraaij, 2014, p. 1). Researchers have not examined which coping methods are useful in addressing bullying. There has only been one qualitative study that has addressed the coping strategies of adolescents who were exposed to being bullied as a child. Garnefski and Kraaij (2014) found that the coping strategy participants used were related to their psychological welfare. Researchers have not examined young adult victims of childhood bullying and the relationship between coping strategies and psychological welfare. The purpose of the current study was to examine the coping strategies that victims of childhood bullying used to cope and prevent incidents of bullying.

Purpose of the Study

I sought to add to the existing literature on CBV, most of which was quantitative, by investigating the coping strategies victims used as adolescents and are still using as emerging adults, and by identifying which methods the victims found effective (see Hunter, Boyle, & Warden, 2007; Visconti et al., 2013). The purpose of the study was to describe the coping and bullying experiences of emerging adults who were bullied as adolescents. A qualitative approach was used to identify how adolescents used coping

strategies and the effectiveness of those strategies to understand the process of coping with bullying. Semi-structured interview questions were used to help bullying victims share their stories and explain how they coped with the stress of being bullied as adolescents. I also explored the coping strategies that victims of bullying used in response to life stressors, and their success with such coping strategies. I used a phenomenological approach to examine emerging adult victims' experiences of childhood bullying and how they coped.

Research Question

The primary question for this study was the following: What long-term coping strategies do young adults develop in adapting from being bullied as a teenager? Interview questions were used to elicit data from participants and to discover themes (see Appendix D).

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was Lazarus and Folkman's transactional theory. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) noted that there are two general forms in which coping can take place: emotion focused or problem focused. Emotion-focused coping strategies focus on the internal emotional state of an individual (Bradshaw, Waasdorp, & O'Brennan, 2013a; Danielson & Emmers-Sommer, 2017; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). This form of coping occurs when an appraisal has been made and there is nothing that can be done to change the harmful situation (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). The emotion-focused strategy helps those to manage their negative emotions when stress occurs by distancing themselves from the stressful situation (Danielson & Emmers-

Sommer, 2017; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Problem-focused coping strategies allow a person to learn new skills and find alternative solutions (Danielson & Emmers-Sommer, 2017; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). In using this approach, an individual can sort out the stressful relationship between the self and the problem. For instance, the person can resolve the issue by confronting the person who is causing the stress.

Lazarus and Folkman's (1987) transactional theory was used to evaluate the processes of coping with stressful events. Lazarus and Folkman noted that the stressful experiences of an individual are related to how he or she perceives the stressor in his or her environment. When faced with a stressful situation, a person might evaluate whether the harm is positive, manageable, or challenging (Lazarus & Folkman, 1987). Research has not addressed the effective coping strategies of emerging adults who were bullied as adolescents. Instead, research has focused on adolescents and the outcome of bullying. Lazarus and Folkman's theory focuses on examining the emerging adult's point of view, in addition to strategies applied as a resolution. Lazarus and Folkman's (1987) theory was used to help identify the thoughts and behaviors of an individual as he or she responds to a specific stressor. By collecting these data, researchers can provide coping strategies that are effective to those who are victims of bullying.

Nature of the Study

The nature of this study was qualitative with a phenomenological design. This qualitative approach was appropriate to investigate the coping strategies of emerging adults who had been bullied as adolescents. I focused on learning about the lived experiences of bullying victims and what coping strategies they used to cope with being

bullied as adolescents and still use as emerging adults. I interviewed emerging adults ages 18 to 22 years who were bullied as adolescents to identify which coping methods they found to be most effective as adolescents and adults. By using this approach, I gained a better understanding of the ways in which emerging adults continued to cope after being bullied as adolescents, and their perceptions regarding the strategies they used (see Penner & McClement, 2008).

Operational Definitions

Bullying: A repeated act of aggressive behavior (physical, verbal, social) that is used by those who hold a dominant position over others with the intent to cause harm (Buxton et al., 2013; Ryoo et al., 2015). Bullying can cause a person' social, behavioral, and academic way of functioning to be impacted (Ryoo et al., 2015).

Coping: The thoughts, feelings, and actions that a person uses to manage his or her internal and external stressors and emotions (Lazarus & Folkman, 1987). The effectiveness of how a person copes when faced with a difficult or stressful situation depends on the type of stress he or she faces.

Lazarus and Folkman transactional theory: A two-way coping process (problem focused and emotion focused) that focuses on the stressors of a person's environment and his or her response to the stressors (Lazarus & Folkman, 1987). Lazarus and Folkman (1987) emphasized how the model allows a person to evaluate the harm, threat, and challenges of a stressful event and how they cope. Problem-focused coping consists of using behavioral strategies to help change the stressor (Lazarus & Folkman, 1987).

Emotion-focused coping involves an individual's internal and emotional well-being during a stressful event (Lazarus & Folkman, 1987).

Stress: A response that a person involuntarily or automatically uses when faced with an overwhelming situation. For this study, stress referred to bullying victims' feelings and how they use their emotions to choose what coping method they will use when dealing with stress (see Connor-Smith, Compass, Wadsworth, Thomsen, & Saltzman, 2000).

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of the study included emerging adults between the ages of 18 and 22 who were bullied as adolescents. The participants were limited to former victims of childhood bullying who endured and attempted to cope with being bullied as teenagers. There was a need to learn from childhood bullying victims to determine how they successfully coped with being bullied as adolescents (see Garnefski & Kraaij, 2014). Semi-structured interview data were gathered from a sample of 12 bullying victims. I chose this age group because they were most likely to stay engaged in the interview process and possess the cognitive ability and maturity level to share their bullying experience and coping method. Participants included males and females who were bullied at school. Bullying types included physical, sexual, racial-ethnic, and social.

Assumptions

I assumed that participants would have victimization experiences with being bullied as a child. A phenomenological design was employed to gain insight into the lived, shared experiences of emerging adult bullying victims and the coping strategies

they used. I also assumed that participants who had experienced CBV would perceive themselves as victims. I expected that participants would be able to share their emotions, thoughts, and recollections and would be able to evaluate the coping strategy they used for bullying. Also, I assumed that participants would voluntarily participate in the study and would share their viewpoints on coping with bullying. I assumed that each participant would provide open, honest responses to the interview questions. I bracketed my experiences at the beginning of this study to prevent participants from being influenced by me.

Limitations

This study was limited to emerging adult victims who had experienced bullying during their childhood/adolescence. These individuals voluntarily participated in face-to-face interviews and shared their CBV story. Self-reporting was a limitation in this study. Participants who were bullied as adolescents might not have been willing to share their story, or their memories of the victimization experience might have been inconsistent. Most self-report errors that occur in research include errors of bias and omission (Creswell & Miller, 2000). The use of semi structured interviews may also have been a limitation of this study because of the possibility of influences occurring through the interview process (see Creswell & Miller, 2000). For example, participants might have been inadvertently influenced by me.

Gaining access to participants between the ages of 18 and 22 who had experienced CBV might have been challenging. Therefore, recruitment took place in an organization in Atlanta, Georgia in which bullying victims come to educate other

children about being a victim of bullying. Participants were provided informed consent

forms before data collection began. To address the possibility of distress during the

interview process with bullying victims, referrals to see a mental health professional were

provided. Purposive sampling was employed to identify participants who would provide

rich information regarding the coping methods emerging adults who were bullied as

adolescents continue to use.

I chose the sample population in this study for a purpose. Based on the size of the

sample, I was unable to generalize findings to a larger population. I used thick, rich

descriptions of the coping strategies for childhood bullying to enhance the transferability

and dependability of this findings. The methodology used and the findings gained in this

study may promote further research on the topic.

Significance of the Study

This study added to the existing body of literature on how coping strategies used

in response to CBV during adolescence are likely to predict positive or negative

outcomes of adjustment during early adulthood. Although previous studies addressed the

subject of bullying, minimal research had been done to address how victims who were

bullied as adolescents coped with their experiences as emerging adults (Hemphill et al.,

2014). Little was known about which factors help reduce the harmful effects of CBV as

an adult, such as prevention and intervention programs that may help support bullying

resilience (Hemphill et al., 2014). The childhood bullying experiences of victims and the

coping strategies that helped them to manage and survive bullying may provide

researchers with firsthand knowledge that can be used to help other adolescent victims

who might find themselves in similar bullying situations. Identifying coping strategies that helped prevent further bullying may help potential victims of bullying avoid or prevent the problem.

This study filled a gap in understanding the coping strategies that may increase the likelihood of positive short- and long-term outcomes of victimization during childhood and adolescence. Findings may help professionals, parents, and researchers support adolescents who are at risk or who are victims of bullying during childhood or adolescence. Professionals who work with adolescent victims of bullying may experience increased sensitivity to the needs of this group based on the findings in this study.

For bullying victims who might still be suffering emotionally, their development and well-being might be at risk. The findings in this study may be used to create antibullying programs and interventions for victims who are dealing with bullying. The information that was obtained in this study on coping with CBV may promote new research and provide data for researchers and policymakers in other countries or states who do not access to research.

Summary

Recent research on CBV and stress indicated that bullying can cause many long-term consequences; the nature of its impact depends on how the victim copes. Roth, Coles, and Heimberg (2002) suggested that children who were bullied as adolescents are at risk of experiencing depression, anxiety, and suicide. Although bullying is common in schools, the problem is that it can become severe and can lead to victims committing suicide if they do not learn how to cope with the bullying (Roth et al., 2002). Even if the

bullying situation does not become severe, it can still take an emotional toll on a victim. It is important that adolescents be taught how to deal with bullying effectively because most victims of bullying do not report to an adult. Effective coping strategies are needed to help adolescent victims protect themselves against feelings of helplessness (Roth et al., 2002).

I sought to identify the coping strategies and experiences of emerging adults who were bullied as adolescents and the coping methods they continued to use as emerging adults. This chapter included the background, problem, purpose, conceptual framework, nature of the study, and significance. In Chapter 2, I provide a review of the literature relevant to the study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter introduces the types of coping strategies that individuals may develop in response to CBV and continue to use as emerging adults (Hemphill et al., 2014). The repeated experiences of victimization can affect how a person chooses to cope as a child and emerging adult (Smithyman, Fireman, & Asher, 2014). Although bullying ends, the pain that bullying victims experience does not (Smithyman et al., 2014). Most bullying victims' lives will be affected for a long time (Smithyman et al., 2014). Bullying incidents that occur over a long period can overwhelm the coping capabilities of bully victims (Garnefski & Kraaij, 2014; Skrzypiec et al., 2011). Also, the type of bullying directed toward bully victims, such as physical bullying, name-calling, or cyberbullying, may influence how some individuals cope (Seltzer & Long, 2013; Skrzypiec et al., 2011). Less is known about what coping strategies are effective in addressing the subject of bullying (Visconti et al., 2013). The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the coping strategies used by emerging adults who were bullied as adolescents.

This chapter begins with a discussion of the research strategies used while conducting the literature search. Factors related to childhood bullying and the way that individuals cope as adolescents were explored. In discussing childhood bullying, I examine components such as Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) transactional coping theory; gender, age, and ethnicity of the bully victim; and stress to gain an understanding of the phenomenon. Lazarus and Folkman's coping theory is discussed as it is related to bullying. The final section of this chapter provides a brief overview of phenomenology as

the chosen research design for understanding the lived experiences of emerging adults who were bullied as adolescents and the coping methods they applied across time into adulthood.

Literature Strategy

The literature search was conducted using multiple sources of information. General search terms and key word combinations were used to search for literature included *bullying*, *coping*, *positive coping strategies*, *victims of bullying*, *coping styles*, *adolescent*, *teenagers*, *evolved adaptation*, *lived experiences*, *peer victimization*, *psychosocial adjustment*, *pure victims*, and combinations of these key words and search operators. I found 2,454 results using these search terms, and the search was narrowed for relevance by specifying peer-reviewed articles and restricting the publication dates. Most of the articles were located through Walden's online library services. Following this process, about 367 peers reviewed articles were retrieved, downloaded, and reviewed. The databases that were used to conduct the literature review included PsychINFO, PsychArticles, Academic Search Complete, ERIC, ProQuest, SocINDEX with full text, and SAGE.

Review of Literature

Being bullied as a child can be one of the most stressful experiences that an individual can face. Adolescents who were bullied in school may become long-term victims because of the ways they cope with the bullying situation (Connell et al., 2016). The way individuals cope has to do with their "well-being and socio-emotional adjustment" (Kokkinos, Panagopoulou, Tsolakidou, & Tzeliou, 2015, p. 1). Bullying

occurs in human relationships and at school (McDougall & Vaillancourt, 2015; Mimi, 2012). Bullying is a phenomenon that affects many people, not just the victim and bully. Research indicated that bullying occurs in every school (Wolke et al., 2013). Bullying is physically, socially, and psychologically damaging not just to the victim but to the bully and bystanders who witness the situation (Boulton, 2013; Rivers et al., 2009; Waasdorp et al., 2011). This literature review provides information long-term coping strategies emerging adults develop after being bullied as a teenager and the theoretical constructs that were used to ground this study.

History of Bullying

To better understand how adolescents cope with being bullied in school and as emerging adults, it is essential to provide some history of school bullying. For decades bullying has been a significant issue in schools (Olweus, 1994). Before the 1970s bullying was barely recognized and understood (Olweus, 1994). Bullying behaviors were viewed as a regular part of an individual's childhood, while today they are considered violent behavior (Olweus, 1994; Sesar, Simic, & Sesar., 2013). Although not well understood initially, over the years several events and research have made a significant impact on bullying and expanded its meaning (Olweus, 1994).

The definition of *bullying* has changed over time. Bullying was viewed as physical or verbal harassment, and it was often linked with isolation in school children (Buxton et al., 2013; Olweus, 1994). No matter what type of aggressive behavior a child was involved in, it was considered mischief and a regular part of childhood. Most people during this time saw bullying as innocent. Ryoo et al. (2015) described bullying as a

"repeated act of aggressive behavior" that is used to hurt others, in addition to a "perceived imbalance of power between the bullies and the victims" (p. 1). Bullying can often cause interference in a person's social, behavioral, and academic way of functioning (Connell et al., 2016; Khamis, 2015; Ryoo et al., 2015; Lee, Liu, & Watson, 2016). Rodkin, Espelage and Hanish (2015) defined bullying as a morally outrageous and chronic aggression that limits an adolescent's ability to adjust, possibly causing maladjustment.

Bullying incidents have been occurring for centuries, and the recent brutality of adolescents being tortured, murdered, and committing suicide has made it one of the most talked about issues in the world (Connell et al., 2016). New laws and school policies have been created in the United States to help prevent bullying (Connell et al., 2016; Espelage, Polanin, & Low, 2014; Jordan & Austin, 2012; Maji, Bhattacharya, & Ghosh, 2016). Policies have been designed to make everyone aware of the issue and how it can be physically and psychologically damaging to the victim and bully (Connell et al., 2016; Espelage et al., 2014; Jordan & Austin, 2012; Maji et al., 2016). Bullying has become more severe compared with what other generations have experienced (Connell et al., 2016). Due to new forms of bullying such as cyberbullying, this issue has become worse over time (Maji et al., 2016). The most common types of bullying are verbal, relational, physical, and cyberbullying (Maji et al., 2016; Ryoo et al., 2015; Turner, Finkelhor, Shattuck, Hamby, & Mitchell, 2015).

Researchers have focused on physical bullying and are now looking at technology and cyberbullying. Rosen, Beron, and Underwood (2013) found a decrease in children

who were physically bullied as he or she continues to grow. Bullying and victimization are more common in middle school students than high school students (Khamis, 2015; Lee et al., 2016). Verbal, social, and online forms of bullying remain popular after middle school (Khamis, 2015; Lee et al., 2016).

In the past, parents often taught their children how to stand up for themselves and handle pressure from being bullied. If a child was being bullied, he or she would inform his or her parents so that they could go to the school and deal with the situation (Turner et al., 2015). Recently, there has been a growing strain in how a child communicates with his or her parents and school (Waasdorp et al., 2011). The information a child receives on how to deal with a bully does not teach him or her how to put things into context and act on it (Turner et al., 2015). In other words, coping methods from the previous generation have not been passed to the next (Turner et al., 2015). Often parents assume that their child will develop their way of surviving, and if the child cannot find a solution he or she will come to them for help (Waasdorp et al., 2011).

Researchers have examined the causes and consequences of and effective interventions for school bullying (Boulton, 2013; Connell et al., 2016; Espelage et al., 2014; Hunter & Boyle, 2004; Hunter et al., 2007; Visconti et al., 2013). These studies have provided insight into the bullying phenomenon and have increased awareness of the negative and long-term consequences to adolescents who were bullied. Few studies have addressed the effective coping strategies emerging adults continue to use after being bullied as adolescents (Espelage & Swearer, 2003; Hemphill et al., 2014; Nansel, Overpeck, Pilla, Ruan, Simons-Morton & Scheidt, 2001).

Homel (2013) examined the developmental process of adolescents and the relationship between bullying and aggression in adulthood. The importance of drinking, work, a person's role as an adult, and their relationship between bullying and aggression was measured (Homel, 2013). There was no significant difference in those who were a part of the in-group when measuring aggression and drinking (Homel, 2013). Self-reports indicated that those who continued to be bullied barely attended and participated in school (Homel, 2013). Those who were bullied on a regular basis self-reported aggression and substance use in their adulthood (Homel, 2013). Bullies experienced an increase in physical aggression whereas bullying victims in adulthood by drinking (Homel, 2013). The results of school and work showed low levels of aggression in adults. Homel did not examine the difference between males and females when measuring bullying and aggression in adulthood. Homel concluded that bullying victims are likely to become physically aggressive in their adulthood.

In another study, Staubli and Killias (2011) investigated the long-term outcomes of bullying during childhood regarding suicide attempts, victimization, and offending later in adulthood. The questionnaire that was given to each participant focused on the life experiences of those during their childhood and teen years, the deviant behavior, and victimization at 18 and 19 years of age (Staubli & Killias, 2011). The findings indicated that bullying victims more often self-reported during childhood that they had attempted to commit suicide compared with those who had never been bullied (Staubli & Killias, 2011). The results revealed that suicide was most common among offenders and bullying

victims. Those who regularly bullied during their childhood were more likely to commit a criminal act during their teens and adulthood.

Wolke et al. (2013) performed a study of 1,420 adolescents to examine how childhood bullying and victimization affected adult outcomes in health, risky behavior, finance, and social relationships. Participants were asked to self-report whether they were a victim or a bully. Wolke et al. did not examine criminal offenses during the follow-up interviews with those who were in their adulthood. The findings revealed different results for victims and bullies regarding family hardships and mental health issues (Wolke et al., 2013). Wolke et al. were able to control for participants' family hardships and childhood psychiatric problems. Chronic victims and bully victims often experienced health, financial, and social problems as adults (Wolke et al., 2013). Most of those who were victims of bullying eventually transitioned into the role of a bully instead of a victim (Wolke et al., 2013). There was no explanation for how some individuals transitioned between being a victim and bully and how it might affect them later. Wolke et al. measured the participants' family hardships and psychiatric problems during their early childhood and adolescent years. However, Wolke et al. were not able to test the differences between race and gender due to the small number of participants in the control groups.

Takizawa, Maughan, and Arseneault (2014) also examined childhood bullying victimization and adult outcomes. The relationship between childhood bullying victims and adult health outcomes and other childhood difficulties were measured using an ordinal logistic regression model. The relationships between bully victims, adult

socioeconomic status, social relationships, and health were also assessed (Takizawa et al., 2014). The findings revealed that childhood bullied victims might experience psychological distress later in their adulthood. Participants who were exposed to bullying on a continuous basis were likely to experience mental health and suicide problems. Takizawa et al. (2014) found that childhood bullying can cause adults to experience problems in their social and economic lives and in their health. Takizawa et al. (2014) concluded that more bullying interventions are needed to address constant bullying and long-term outcomes.

Humans seek to overcome the stressful obstacles that they face (Jordan & Austin, 2012). Bullying is viewed differently today than it was in the past (Jordan & Austin, 2012). It has taken years for the term bullying to be considered as a serious problem (Jordan & Austin, 2012). The way adolescents are being bullied by their peers has also changed over time (Jordan & Austin, 2012). Most adolescents are not taught how to deal with peer pressure and bullying at school (Khamis, 2015). This can lead to depression; loneliness; anger; anxiety; low self-esteem; physical, emotional, and psychological damage; and suicidal actions (Bradshaw, Waasdorp, O'Brennan, & Gulemetova, 2013b; Jordan & Austin, 2012; Khamis, 2015). Many researchers have attempted to gain a better understanding of the issue of bullying (Olweus, 1994; Sesar et al., 2013) to help educators understand the bullying issues that their students face and how they can assist in stopping bullying from occurring in their school.

Coping Strategies of Bullying Victims

The term *coping* refers to ways in which individuals deal with everyday stress by managing their environment and emotions (Lazarus, 2006; Tenenbaum et al., 2011). The ability to cope with stress is essential to a person' psychological and emotional well-being (Lazarus, 2006). Effective coping strategies such as seeking help or support from others can reduce the chances of a victim being bullied by their peers (Tenenbaum et al., 2011). To understand the concept of coping better, Lazarus and Folkman's Transactional Model (1984) and Roth & Cohen's (1986) Approach/Avoidant model was used. The Transactional Model included emotion-focused and problem-focused coping skills. Within the model, Lazarus and Folkman were able to determine the severity of an individual's stress level after assessing available resources, feelings of confidence, and how much control he or she had when faced with a situation (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Roth and Cohen's model (1986) concentrated on how an individual faced and avoided their stressful situation. The approach coping style focuses on a person identifying the stressful problem, seeking support, resolving the issue, working to improve the relationship, and seeking professional and spiritual help (Lodge & Feldman, 2007). Avoidant coping styles involve a person avoiding, ignoring, accepting self-blame, distancing oneself from the problem, and keeping how they feel inside (Lodge & Feldman, 2007). Victims who use this type of coping strategy experience an emotional outburst and struggle to cope (see Bradshaw et al., 2013b; Lodge & Feldman, 2007). Research shows that only victims who incorporate approach coping strategies can function better than those who use avoidant strategies (Lodge & Feldman, 2007). The

reason for this is because victims who use approach coping strategies are seeking to resolve their problem.

Several researchers have identified over time the different coping strategies victims used when addressing a bullying situation (see Andreou, 2001; Bellmore, Chen, & Rischall, 2013; Tenenbaum et al., 2011). One of the most common coping strategies victims report using is seeking support (Andreou, 2001). Problem-solving, tension reduction, distancing, cognitive restructuring, and internalizing behaviors are additional coping strategies adolescents use when bullied (see Bellmore et al., 2013; Skrzypiec et al., 2011; Mahady Wilton, Craig, & Pepler, 2000; Tenenbaum et al., 2011). Kochenderfer-Ladd and Pelletier (2008) found that adolescents who were bullied in school and engaged in problem-solving strategies such as conflict resolution experience a decrease in being a victim. Only those who retaliated experienced an increase in bullying (see Camodeca & Goossens, 2005; Kochenderfer-Ladd & Pelletier, 2008). Adolescents who experienced bullying more often and distance themselves from the bullying incident reported being depressed and anxious (Kochenderfer-Ladd & Pelletier, 2008). The researcher's findings suggest that the use of certain coping strategies and outcomes such as depression and anxiety can vary based on how frequent a person is being bullied (Kochenderfer-Ladd & Pelletier, 2008). Demographic characteristics such as gender, age and ethnicity may influence how an individual copes with being bullied. Further studies have also shown that the perception of how much control one has over the bullying situation and their confidence level can affect which coping strategy he or she uses (Hunter & Boyle, 2004; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Hansen, Steenberg, Palic and Elklit (2012) found that when looking at bullying victims and how they deal with the incident transactional models such as Lazarus and Folkman can help them define and emphasize on the coping strategies they use. By including the appraisal of an individual's bullying situation, one can determine his or her coping response and perception of control (Frydenberg & Lewis, 2009; Hansen et al., 2012). This is important when implementing a coping strategy. Avoidant coping strategies are also often used by victims of bullying (Frydenberg & Lewis, 2009; Hansen et al., 2012). When these strategies are frequently used most victims experience depression, emotional distress, and low self-esteem problems (Forns, Kirchner, Abad, & Amador, 2012; Hansen et al., 2012). Externalizing coping is used more by victims of bullying (Hansen et al., 2012). Even though different coping strategies are being studied by researchers, coping in bullied school-aged children is often studied separately from other psychological factors (Hansen et al., 2012). This makes it difficult for one to understand the effects of individual differences in coping (Hansen et al., 2012).

According to Donoghue, Almeida, Brandwein, Rocha and Callahan (2014), Lazarus and Folkman believed that when children are faced with multiple stressors, he or she will incorporate a coping strategy. Depending on which coping strategy is used and its effectiveness can have a positive or negative effect on the individual (Donoghue et al., 2014). The negative effects of one being a victim of bullying can be reduced when coping strategies are positive (Donoghue et al., 2014). When maladaptive coping is applied, psychological maladjustment, avoidance, substance abuse, and a decrease in academic performance can occur (Donoghue et al., 2014). Prior research suggests that most victims

anticipate that he or she will be able to cope with being bullied by asking a friend for advice, seeking help, or reporting the incident to a teacher (Kristensen and Smith, 2003; Paul et al., 2012; Roth & Cohen, 1986; Tenenbaum et al., 2011). Adaptive coping strategies such as these are often difficult for victims of bullying to carry out.

Hunter & Boyle (2004) assessed adolescents between the ages of 9 and 14 who were frequently bullied for a longer period and applied the avoidance coping strategy. Other research has shown that both the victim and bully had externalized their response when being victimized (Andreou, 2001; Kristensen & Smith, 2003; Waasdorp & Bradshaw, 2011). Due to the emotional responses, a victim of bullying might cope in more than one way at the same time (Compas, 1987; Tenenbaum et al., 2011; Waasdorp & Bradshaw, 2011). Skrzypiec et al. (2011) found that often children who are bullied by their peers are told to resolve their situation by themselves. When being bullied for a longer period, it is difficult for a victim to use avoidance and denial as coping strategies (Skrzypiec et al., 2011). Direct and Approach coping strategies such as seeking support and receiving advice from others were effective while coping by victims that were emotion-focused, like self-blame, was ineffective (Skrzypiec et al., 2011).

Also, Batanova, Espelage and Rao (2014) suggested that victims of bullying often tend to implement non-productive coping strategies such as not seeking help, avoiding the issue at hand, hurting oneself and others, and thinking about committing suicide (Batanova et al., 2014). Most victims of bullying seek to solve the bullying situation, focus positively, and seek support and professional help (Batanova et al., 2014; Greenglass, 2002; Skrzypiec et al., 2011). Kokkinos et al. (2015) identified several

different coping strategies used by both adults and children (Compas, 1987; Frydenberg & Lewis, 2009) when faced with a stressor. These included problem-focused coping, emotion-focused coping, primary and secondary appraisal coping, engagement and disengagement coping, approach/avoidance coping, active and passive coping, and cognitive/behavioral coping (Kokkinos et al., 2015). Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) coping strategies are the most accepted because they are grouped into problem-focused and emotion-focused categories. Both adults and children in the researcher's study adopted a range of these coping strategies.

The research evidence in Paul et al. (2012) explained why victims rely on different coping mechanisms when faced with a psychologically distressing situation. For example, most victims of bullying report ignoring the bully, asking for help and fighting back; the least reported coping strategy one might use is running away (Fidan, Ceyhun, & Kirpinar, 2011; Latack & Havlovic, 1992; Paul et al., 2012). Andreou (2001) found that victims of bullying often present an emotion-focused response to stress and use internal coping methods. Those who are victims of traditional bullying do not at times seek support from an adult and often show low levels of coping skills (Naylor, Cowie, & Rey, 2001; Paul et al., 2012). Researchers have measured the frequency of coping methods that are used by children, but less information is found on emerging adults and how effectively each can be applied.

Garnefski and Kraaii (2014) observed 582 adolescents who were bullied and the coping strategies they used. Participants were asked to complete an online self-report questionnaire on bully victimization, coping, and depression/anxiety (Garnefski & Kraaii,

2014). The researchers used multiple regression to measure the impact of each predictor in their study. The results revealed a significantly strong relationship between victims of bullying and their symptoms of depression and anxiety (Garnefski & Kraaii, 2014). Only two coping strategies impacted the relationship between bullying and depression; these consisted of rumination and positive refocusing (Garnefski & Kraaii, 2014). The coping strategies that influenced the effect of bullying on those who experienced anxiety symptoms were rumination, catastrophizing and positive reappraisal (Garnefski & Kraaii, 2014). The researchers concluded that the results could provide ways in which they could help victims of bullying, assess coping strategies and obtain new adaptive strategies (Garnefski & Kraaii, 2014). Further qualitative research is needed using in-depth interviews and narratives to help measure the data in this study.

It can be difficult for victims to deal with their bullying incident in an objective manner, especially when they are going through a stressful situation. No victim should ever try to keep their bullying situation to themselves, as this type of stress can cause one to experience negative emotions. Research shows that it is important that victims of bullying tell someone about the problems they face with their peers; they don't necessarily need to speak with an adult (Paul et al., 2012). Limiting one's self from any support does not always resolve the bullying issue, as shown in these studies (Camodeca & Goossens, 2005; Kochenderfer-Ladd & Pelletier, 2008; Kokkinos et al., 2015). This can make things worse and often make the coping strategy a person applies ineffective.

Gender Differences and Coping

Throughout the years, numerous studies have investigated gender differences and their bullying experience with peers. Most of the research evidence regarding how boys and girls experience being victimized by bullies are mixed (Seals & Young, 2003). Despite the type of bullying girls have experienced, they are more likely to report incidents of bullying as compared with boys (Hunter & Boyle, 2004; Kochenderfer-Ladd & Pelletier, 2008; Scheithauer, Hayer, Petermann, & Jugert, 2006; Seals & Young, 2003). In Hunter and Boyle (2004) and Kochenderfer-Ladd and Pelletier (2008), the data on girl victims who had self-reported seeking help experienced lower levels of social stress, while boys had lower peer preference. The findings indicated that boy and girl victims cope differently and that the social consequences of using a specific coping strategy might be different (Kochenderfer-Ladd & Pelletier, 2008).

Research on coping with general stress such as bullying suggests that gender differences exist (Bellmore et al., 2013; Kochenderfer-Ladd & Pelletier, 2008; Kokkinos et al., 2015; Nolen-Hoeksema & Girgus, 1994; Skrzypiec et al., 2011; Tenenbaum et al., 2011). In response to general stress, girls might use problem-focused coping methods more often than boys who are victims of bullying (Kochenderfer-Ladd & Pelletier, 2008). Additional research is needed for researchers to determine whether there are similar differences for coping with bullying. It is to be expected that victims of bullying will face social and psychological difficulties in their peer relationships (Rivers et al., 2009; Waasdorp et al., 2011). Both boys and girls equally experience different forms of bullying in school.

In some cases, girls will become the victim of relational bullying (Athanasiades & Deliyanni-Kouimtzis, 2010; Ryoo et al., 2015; Turner et al., 2015; Waasdorp et al., 2011). For example, a bully might attack the relationships that the victim has established with others in their group (Ryoo et al., 2015). This can be accomplished by one sharing hurtful information about the victim or spreading false rumors (Lodge & Feldman, 2007). Unfortunately, this type of bullying can, at times, be more damaging than physical bullying for girls because they depend on their social group for support (Waasdorp et al., 2011). Boy victims of bullying tend to be more aggressive towards their bullies, while girl victims are passive (Forber-Pratt, Aragon & Espelage; Ryoo et al., 2015; Waasdorp et al., 2015). Girl victims of bullying cope by blaming themselves for the incident (Lodge & Feldman, 2007). Scheithauer et al. (2006) reported that boys are often victims of physical bullying. Other studies have found no differences between boys and girls who were victims of physical bullying (Byrne, Dooley, Fitzgerld, & Dolphin, 2016; Farrington & Ttofi, 2011; Ttofi & Farrington, 2012; Monks & Smith, 2006; Russell, Kraus, & Ceccherini, 2010; Schlieper, 2012).

The researchers in Kochenderfer-Ladd and Pelletier (2008) study addressed three primary issues. First, the beliefs a teacher holds about bullying and the strategies they recommend victims to use based on their gender and grade was examined (Kochenderfer-Ladd & Pelletier, 2008). Second, the researchers investigated the beliefs of the teachers and how it might influence their response towards victims (Kochenderfer-Ladd & Pelletier, 2008). Third, the researchers wanted to determine whether the management strategies the teachers used to address bullying victimization predict self-reports of peer

victimization and how they coped (Kochenderfer-Ladd & Pelletier, 2008). Data were collected from 34 teachers who taught second and fourth grade, and 363 students who were nine (Kochenderfer-Ladd & Pelletier, 2008). The findings indicate that most teachers did not intervene with boy victims being bullied because they tend to be more involved in physical aggression (Kochenderfer-Ladd & Pelletier, 2008). This was viewed as normal by the teachers in the study because boy victims are known for playing rough (Kochenderfer-Ladd & Pelletier, 2008). The teachers in the study believed that boy victims of bullying should be more assertive and independent (Kochenderfer-Ladd & Pelletier, 2008). It was also hypothesized that boys use confrontational coping methods such as fighting (Camodeca & Goossens, 2005; Kochenderfer-Ladd & Pelletier, 2008). Boy victims were advised by their teachers to resolve their bullying problems. When assertion and avoidant coping methods were used, the teachers intervened, lowering peer victimization (Kochenderfer-Ladd & Pelletier, 2008). There were no grade differences found when measuring teachers' views and management strategies, nor gender differences. The results do suggest that teachers' beliefs do predict and determine how one decides whether he or she will intervene when a student is being bullied. The strategies a teacher use was not related to how their students coped as a victim. These findings suggest that it is important when planning a prevention or intervention to help reduce bullying, that one consider a teacher's view about the issue and their strategies (Kochenderfer-Ladd & Pelletier, 2008).

Seeking support was found to be an effective coping strategy for girl victims, whereas confronting the bully was more adaptive for boy victims (Camodeca &

Goossens, 2005; Kochenderfer-Ladd & Pelletier, 2008; Kokkinos et al., 2015). Boy

victims who ask for support are more likely to experience peer rejection (Kochenderfer-

Ladd & Pelletier, 2008; Kokkinos et al., 2015). This type of coping strategy was

ineffective for boy victims. Likewise, girls who use aggressive coping methods are

subject to be at risk for peer rejection (Kochenderfer-Ladd & Pelletier, 2008; Kokkinos et

al., 2015). Kristensen and Smith (2003) found that there is a significant difference

between genders when seeking support, internalizing, and externalizing coping as a

victim. As stated earlier, girls tend to deal with a bullying conflict directly through

problem-solving methods (Mahady Wilton et al., 2000). The coping strategies boys and

girls use are mostly influenced by their social role (Kochenderfer-Ladd & Pelletier, 2008;

Robson & Witenberg, 2013). Girls adopt assertive coping strategies, while boys use

externalizing and ineffective coping strategies (Kokkinos et al., 2015; Robson &

Witenberg, 2013). Most girl victims are raised to reject violence (Kokkinos et al., 2015).

Both emotion and problem-focused coping strategies can help reduce the effects of

bullying victimization and psychological adjustment issues in boys and girls (Kokkinos et

al., 2015; Robson & Witenberg, 2013).

Research by Nickerson and Mele-Taylor (2014) supported how the influences of

others can help shape how different genders behave and act towards others. Social groups

are important at the adolescent stage. Depending on the type of social and peer group a

person is in, it can have a tremendous impact on them as a teen. The researchers in the

study suggest that both genders in both social and peer groups share the same beliefs and

attitude as them (Nickerson & Mele-Taylor, 2014). No matter which group either gender

chooses to be part of, it can affect their aggressive behavior. During the adolescence stage peers and social groups become increasingly important (Forber-Pratt et al., 2014; Ryoo et al., 2015). According to Nickerson and Mele-Taylor (2014), one might even believe that these groups maintain and share the same beliefs and attitude as them. No matter which group an individual chooses to be part of, it can affect his or her aggressive and bullying behaviors. For example, aggressive behavior is accepted from adolescent boys in middle school (Forber-Pratt et al., 2014; Nickerson & Mele-Taylor, 2014; Ryoo et al., 2015).

Some child victims accept a bully taunting them, whereas others respond by confronting them (Camodeca & Goossens, 2005). One might also struggle with fitting into a social group and may frequently be excluded by their peers. Often victims of bullying are unsure how to react when faced with a bully. Young children who are bullied in school do not know at times when they are a victim (Ryoo et al., 2015). For example, it is easy for one to determine if they are a victim by being physically bullied, but it is difficult to detect relational bullying (Camodeca & Goossens, 2005; Kochenderfer-Ladd & Pelletier, 2008). Victims who are more aggressive tend to confront their bully both verbally and physically (Kochenderfer-Ladd & Pelletier, 2008). Those who are bullied for longer periods are withdrawn, isolated, and reluctant to interact with others (Ryoo et al., 2015). It is important that each victim of bullying feels as though someone cares about their well-being.

Age Differences and Coping

These days, children of all ages go through various forms of bullying in a consistent manner (Visconti et al., 2013). The consequences of frequent bullying can

have a major impact on victims and how they cope. Research evidence in Carlisle and Rofes (2007) shows that the age of the victim and the developmental stage he or she is in can often determine how their bullying experience(s) will affect them. Further studies by Boulton (2013) and Carlisle and Rofes (2007) indicated that the outcome of a bullying situation depends on the resources the victims have available to them. Also, several studies have been conducted about childhood bullying concerning school-age children (Carlisle & Rofes, 2007; Waasdorp & Bradshaw, 2011). It is yet to be determined by researchers what happens to victims of childhood bullying once he or she leaves school. More research is needed on whether the experience of one being bullied as adolescents can affect their adulthood (Carlisle & Rofes, 2007; Elledge, Cavell, Ogle, Malcolm, Newgent, & Faith, 2010; Maji et al., 2016; Sijtsema, Rambaran, Caravita & Gini, 2014; Waasdorp & Bradshaw, 2011).

Kochenderfer-Ladd and Pelletier (2008) hypothesized that the age differences of bullying victims play a role in how adults such as teachers respond to them. For example, bullying might be found by teachers to be more normal among children who are young because they are still learning how to interact with their peers socially (Kochenderfer-Ladd & Pelletier, 2008). In comparison, victims who are older must know how to conduct themselves when faced with a bullying situation (Kochenderfer-Ladd & Pelletier, 2008). Teachers view peers who bully their victims to be deviant when they are older (Kochenderfer-Ladd & Pelletier, 2008). Younger victims of bullying need more guidance in how to cope with their peers that bully them (Kochenderfer-Ladd & Pelletier, 2008).

The coping strategies of victims vary by his or her age (Hunter et al., 2007; Kristensen & Smith, 2003) so much that younger school-age children report to an adult about peer victimization more than older school-age children. Recent studies found that older victims cope by avoiding their bullies and are less likely to be more emotional than younger victims (Frydenberg & Lewis, 2009; Hansen et al., 2012; Lodge &Feldman, 2007). When teachers endorse assertion and avoidance as coping strategies to older victims of bullying, he or she is more likely than younger victims to use independent coping strategies (Kochenderfer-Ladd & Pelletier, 2008). For example, one might forget that the incident occurred, and act as if the situation does not bother them (Kochenderfer-Ladd & Pelletier, 2008).

Byrne et al. (2016) argued that there is an age difference in how younger and older victims of bullying understand and define bullying. Researchers Monks and Smith (2006) believed one's understanding of bullying has to do with his or her cognitive development. In other words, the more advanced an individual's cognitive processes are, the better he or she will be able to conceptualize bullying (Monks & Smith, 2006). Other studies that have focused on adolescent definitions of bullying have not included children beyond the age of 14 (Monks & Smith, 2006; Naylor et al., 2001) leaving a gap in the literature on how older victims understand bullying (Byrne et al., 2016). This can limit one's developmental understanding of how the victim's conception of bullying can change from early childhood to late adolescence (Byrne et al., 2016).

Bradshaw et al. (2013a) investigated the difference between adolescents who experienced different forms of bullying by gender and age in those who attend middle

and high school. The results were unclear on whether the different forms of bullying caused internalizing and aggression issues in bullying victims during middle school. The researchers did find that most bullying victims are in danger of having social and emotional problems (Bradshaw et al., 2013a). In fact, one can predict that most of the different forms of bullying he or she might experience are more physical amongst middle school-aged victims than high school children. The findings also suggest that school-aged children who are in high school are victimized online by their peers instead of through physical bullying (Bradshaw et al., 2013a).

Nansel et al. (2001) discussed the differences between bullying victims' experiences based on age. Research by Caravita and Cillessen (2012) concluded that there is a decrease in how adolescents view bullying as they age. The researchers reported that older school-aged children prefer to interact with students who are seeking positive relationships (Caravita & Cillessen, 2012). Positive relationships are important in a bullying victim's life because the peer group they join may protect them from further victimization. In contrast, younger school-aged children self-report liking other students who exert power (Caravita & Cillessen, 2012). These differences indicate that bullying amongst younger school-aged children is socially acceptable (Caravita & Cillessen, 2012). This often leads to a decrease in bullying as one reaches high school (Caravita & Cillessen, 2012).

Guerra, Williams and Sadek (2011) argued that most bullying incidents occur in middle school. The group-focused interviews were conducted on school-aged children who were in elementary and middle school (Guerra et al., 2011). Participants who were

younger self-reported that bullying was less serious than those who were in elementary (Russell et al., 2010). Zimmer-Gembeck and Skinner (2011) examined the coping differences victims use based on their age, and found that most school-aged children cope by using sophisticated and self-dependent methods as they continue to grow. Eschenbeck, Kohlmann and Lohaus (2007) reported the responses of school-aged children to social stress. Participants who were in middle school self-reported using problem-focused coping strategies with bullies instead of avoidance methods (Eschenbeck et al., 2007). As school-aged children age, they tend to handle stress on their own instead of relying on others (Zimmer-Gembeck & Skinner, 2011). Hunter and Boyle (2004) further discuss research on coping and bullying and how victims of bullying in elementary school seek support from adults when compared with middle school children.

Reavis, Keane and Calkins (2010) suggested that many school-aged children will become a victim of bullying at a young age. Several studies have also shown that most young victims will experience a decrease in longer periods of bullying as they continue to go to school (Boivin, Petitclerc, Feng, & Barker, 2010; Kokko, Tremblay, Lacourse, Nagin, & Vitaro, 2006; Lester, Cross, Dooley, & Shaw, 2013). Victims who respond by ignoring or using assertive coping methods are less likely to be bullied later on, whereas children who react or use ineffective coping methods might continue to be bullied (Smithyman et al., 2014).

Many victims across age groups often experience emotional effects after being bullied (Goldbaum, Craig, Pepler, & Connolly, 2003; Naylor et al., 2001). In general, school-aged children who are in high school respond to bullying through anger and

frustration, while elementary students feel sad (Goldbaum et al., 2003; Naylor et al., 2001). This is because younger victims of bullying do not care as much about their social status as older children. Children who are at younger grade levels do not have to prove themselves with different peer groups. Younger children have more of an emotional response to being a victim of bullying (Naylor et al., 2001). Often victims such as these will keep their feelings inside instead of acting out. Regardless of the type of emotional response a victim uses after being bullied, it can lead to profound consequences such as depression and suicide (Goldbaum et al., 2003; Naylor et al., 2001). Also, the inability of bullying victims to find an effective way to cope with their stress can cause one to behave in a deviant manner (Naylor et al., 2001).

Coping Responses of Bullying Victims in Relation to Ethnicity

There is a difference in how different cultures and ethnicities experience bullying in school. One study by Lovegrove, Henry and Slater (2012) indicated that African and Native American students often identify as bullies more than White and Asians. Also, research conducted by Sawyer, Bradshaw and O'Brennan (2008) suggested that children who are from different ethnic groups are frequently bullied by their peers. The self-reports from the victims in the study were assessed by a definition-based single item and behavior-based measure (Sawyer et al., 2008). The ethnicity differences of a sample of 24,345 children and their responses towards bullying were analyzed using a logistic regression (Sawyer et al., 2008). The researchers used two separate analyses on both genders at different school levels (Sawyer et al., 2008). The findings indicated that the prevalence estimates were increased using the behavior-based measure instead of the

definition-based measure (Sawyer et al., 2008). Several ethnic differences emerged using the definition-based measure in African American children who were more likely to be bullied than White victims (Sawyer et al., 2008). Both African girls and Asian American boys reported being a victim of bullying (Sawyer et al., 2008). The behavior-based measure did not show reports of participants being a frequent victim using the definition-based measure (Sawyer et al., 2008). The researchers concluded that the prevalence estimates could vary based on how one assesses victimization. African American children who are victims of bullying under-report their incidents (Sawyer et al., 2008). It is important that bullying studies such as these consider the measures they use when measuring victimization.

Only a few studies using ethnically diverse samples across all school levels have been conducted (Sawyer et al., 2008). The prevalence estimates for children who are frequently bullied by their peers across race, gender, and developmental level can vary based on how one assesses bullying (Sawyer et al., 2008). Regarding ethnicity, using a definition-based measure, the researchers found no significant difference in Hispanic, African American, and white youth victims being frequently bullied (Sawyer et al., 2008). Seals and Young (2003) also used a behavior-based measure and found no significant difference between African and White American children being frequently bullied. The ethnic differences of bullied victims can change over time and by grade level (Seals & Young, 2003). Most of the inconsistencies concerning ethnicity for victimization deals with the way in which bullying is measured. Self-report measures of bullying suggest that ethnic and cultural factors often influence how an individual

perceives the term bullying: this contributes to their response on the behavior-based versus definition-based measures (Sawyer et al., 2008). Although there have not been many studies on how different ethnic groups cope with bullying, the impact of culture on coping has been examined (Low & Espelage, 2013). Past studies have demonstrated that differences in victim coping were related to a collective culture, such as Asian, as they do not seek support from others like other cultures (Sawyer et al., 2008).

The culture of an individual plays a role in how he or she responds to stress. A recent study by Lee, Soto, Swim and Bernstein (2012) compared the cultural differences between African and Asian Americans responding to stress. When comparing the two minority groups, the researchers found that African Americans engaged in confrontational coping strategies more than Asian Americans when faced with racism (Lee et al., 2012). Instead, the Asian American group self-reported avoidance coping strategies when placed in a stressful situation (Lee et al., 2012). Although these studies do not specifically address bullying, it does provide information on how one might respond to social stress. Additional, research is needed to determine the differences in how different ethnic groups cope with bullying.

Interestingly, Ma and Bellmore (2016) demonstrated the differences and similarities in victims' coping responses to bullying, and how culture plays a role in which coping methods they choose. A mixed methods design was used to measure a sample of 731 Taiwanese and 470 American youths (Ma & Bellmore, 2016). These self-reports of how participants coped to being bullied were measured using hypothetical situations and structured open-ended questions (Ma & Bellmore, 2016). Participants who

were Taiwanese reported seeking adult support, while American victims of bullying reported more problem-solving and social cognition coping approaches (Ma & Bellmore, 2016). Differences in how both Taiwanese and American victims cope with being a victim were found when each participant faced a hypothetical victimization scenario and real-life victimization experience (Ma & Bellmore, 2016). The inconsistency in the researcher's results compared with previous studies is derived from how stress is being measured (Ma & Bellmore, 2003). The two cultures in the study are subject to perceive being a victim of bullying more harmful than interpersonal stress (Ma & Bellmore, 2016). It is important to deal with the problem and incorporate coping strategies such as problem-solving and seeking support. Both the real-life and hypothetical situation revealed similar results for both cultural groups (Ma & Bellmore, 2016). Taiwanese adolescents were less likely to solve their bullying problems (Ma & Bellmore, 2016). The coping responses of problem-solving and seeking support demonstrated more cultural meaning to victims than did the coping responses of distancing and internalizing in the study (Ma & Bellmore, 2016).

The coping strategies a bullying victim uses are culturally shaped by their behavior (Lam & Zane, 2004). Culture is a crucial factor in how one copes because one is often expected to adopt coping strategies that are common and appropriate within their culture (Lam & Zane, 2004). By understanding the cultural differences and similarities in bullying victims' coping, one can inform diverse cultural intervention programs that target school bullying (Ma & Bellmore, 2016).

Bullied Victims and Stress

Adolescence is a time in which one might experience changes in their physical, cognitive, emotional, and social lifestyle as they move towards adulthood (Compas, Connor-Smith, Saltzman, Thomsen, & Wadsworth, 2001). According to Erikson (1968), during the developmental stage of adolescence, one must work to create a sense of self, identity, increased autonomy, and peer relationships outside of their immediate family. Many children who are approaching the adolescent stage experience an increase in daily stressors (Frydenberg & Lewis, 2009; Konishi & Hymel, 2009). The type of stressors adolescents face are interpersonal, peer relationship and social issues (Frydenberg & Lewis, 2009; Konishi & Hymel, 2009). Most of the stress experienced by adolescents today comes from whom they are involved with and their environment. The way adolescent victims choose to deal with stressful situations can affect how they adjust, grow, and transition into adulthood (Compas et al., 2001; Erickson, 1968).

Williamson, Birmaher, Ryan, Shiffrin, Lusky, Protopapa and Brent (2003) designed an interview instrument to assess the stressful life events of children and adolescents in school. A sample of 60 participants self-reported fights and arguments with peers, and being bullied as a stressful life event (Williamson et al., 2003). They also reported bullying and social conflict as a high stressor (Williamson et al., 2003). It is important that researchers and professionals understand how victims cope with being bullied and identify the strategies and skills that were used to overcome the stressor. This can help reduce the risk bullying victims experience later in life of psychological, social,

and health problems that are related to not coping with the bullying (Compas et al., 2001; Wolke & Lereya, 2015).

Childhood bullying is a major cause of stress that leaves many victims feeling hurt, angry, and depressed (Konishi & Hymel, 2009; Rigby, 2000). Often bullying victims are afraid, isolated, ashamed, and made to feel as if the bullying incident is somehow his or her fault. Bullying can cause extremely high stress levels and symptoms that are both physical and psychological (Rigby, 2000). Victims who are repeatedly bullied as a child face significant amounts of psychological distress and functioning problems such as depression and low self-esteem (Rigby, 2000). The physical health of a bullying victim is likely to be at risk depending on how significant the stress is. Bullying victims might also be at risk of developing mental health problems if the bullying incidents continue.

Griffin and Gross (2004) found that about one-third of school-aged children are stressed by being bullied. This stressor has caused many teenage victims to commit suicide, emotional and behavioral problems (Griffin & Gross, 2004). Bullying has become both universal and dangerous in that many are now seeking to understand how to help adolescent victims cope. No matter what the stressor is, victims can manage their experience with bullying by using different coping strategies. Only a handful of studies have shown that using the support of a friend or adult as a coping strategy can reduce the impact of bullying on psychological distress (Newman, Holden, & Delville, 2005; Rigby, 2000). The research on coping with bullying also suggests that victims of bullying sometimes select coping strategies that do not match the situation they are facing

(Lazarus, 2006; Roth & Cohen, 1986). There have been many studies on bullying and coping, but none on coping with the long-term effects of stress. Boulton and Smith (1994) suggested that school bullying decreases as a child age. Newman, Holden and Delville (2011) reported that the stress symptoms of both middle and high school students were high for those who have been repeatedly bullied.

Landstedt and Gadin (2012) examined the perceived stress in Swedish adolescents. In this cross-sectional study, the researchers collected data through surveys and questionnaires to measure the stress levels of participants (Landstedt & Gadin, 2012). Female participants were more stressed than males (Landstedt & Gadin, 2012). The researchers found that males reported more perceived stress than females when it came to relationships with friends (Landstedt & Gadin, 2012). Most of the stressors that were self-reported by participants were identity, autonomy, and social issues (Landstedt & Gadin, 2012). The ability to manage stress and adversity is important to one's development (Compas et al., 2001; Konishi & Hymel, 2009). To successfully cope with stress, one must manage their emotions, thoughts, and behaviors to help limit their stress (Compas et al., 2001; Konishi & Hymel, 2009). Early childhood bullying can have a huge impact on a victim later in life. For example, one might experience depression, relationship and substance abuse issues from the results of bullying. By managing the stressful situation early, one might escape long-term consequences. This all depends on the social support system a bullying victim has in place to help them avoid the symptoms above. The way a victim copes with a stressful situation, whether successfully or unsuccessfully, has a lot to do with them. How successfully an individual deals with a

stressful situation can change their outcome. If the stressful situation is not dealt with properly, it can wear an individual down.

Lazarus and Folkman Transactional Theory

Lazarus and Folkman (1984) defined coping as a process in which one's "cognitive and behavioral efforts are continuously changing to manage a specific external or internal demand that is appraised as taxing" (p. 141). Coping is a set of strategies that can be used to match specific situations (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). There are two general forms in which coping can take place: emotion-focused and problem-focused. Emotion-focused coping strategies focus on the internal emotional state of an individual (Bradshaw et al., 2013a; Danielson & Emmers-Sommer, 2017; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). This form of coping occurs when an appraisal has been made, and there is nothing that can be done to change the harmful situation (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). The emotion-focused strategy helps those to manage his or her negative emotions when stress occurs by distancing themselves from the stressful situation (Danielson & Emmers-Sommer, 2017; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Problem-focused coping strategies allow one to learn new skills and find alternative solutions (Danielson & Emmers-Sommer, 2017; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). In other words, the approach helps one to sort out the stressful relationship between the self and problem. For instance, one can resolve their problem by confronting the person who is causing the stress.

Children who are victims of bullying must decide how he or she will handle the situation. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) suggest that the stress level of an individual reveals how one cognitively processes their experience and gives meaning to it. Once an

event has been experienced, primary appraisal occurs, which involves one evaluating the event (Danielson & Emmers-Sommer, 2017). Next, secondary appraisal occurs, which is when an individual examines the conditions of their environment and whether they can successfully cope or if it is a threat that cannot be controlled (Danielson & Emmers-Sommer, 2017). Stress can take place when an event is perceived by an individual to be negative, and the demand to address the issue goes beyond his or her ability to accomplish it (Lazarus, 2006; Lazarus & Folkman, 1987).

Lazarus and Folkman's Transactional theory was used to evaluate the processes of coping with stressful events (Lazarus & Folkman, 1987). The stressful experiences of an individual are related to how he or she perceives the stressor in their environment. When one is faced with a stressful situation, they will begin to evaluate whether the harm is positive or manageable (see Lazarus & Folkman, 1987). Current research does not address the effective coping strategies of emerging adults who were bullied as adolescents. Instead, research has focused on adolescents and the outcome of bullying; this theory examines the adult point of view, in addition to strategies applied as a resolution. Lazarus and Folkman theory helped identify the thoughts and behaviors of individuals as they responded to a specific stressor. By collecting these data, researchers can provide a guide that can help prevent, reduce and offer support as well as coping strategies that are effective to those who are victims of bullying.

Phenomenology

Qualitative research aims to understand the first-hand experience of how individuals construct meaning and how it influences their behavior (Patton, 1990). In

other words, the meaning emerges from the participants in the study. As the research progresses, concepts, data collection tools and methods can be adjusted (Patton, 1990). This study is a phenomenological research design. The goal of qualitative phenomenological research is to describe the lived experience of participants and how they apply effective coping strategies after a perceived experience of childhood bullying, into young adulthood (see Moustakas, 1994). A researcher who uses this approach is focused on meaning, the meaning of the participant's experience and behavior in the situation as they occur in the course of one's daily life (Moustakas, 1994). Participants are viewed as co-researchers. The methodology of phenomenology should only be used to understand the meaning of one's experience, and to explore concepts from a new perspective (Moustakas, 1994). Researchers can use this approach to reveal the essence of things and provide insight into the phenomenon that is being studied.

Bullying can occur in one's early adolescence and cause negative outcomes. There is little understanding of what coping methods are effective after being bullied as a child into adulthood. This study attempts to describe in detail each participant's experience of being bullied using phenomenology (Creswell, 2013). The basic characteristics of each participant's experience itself will be examined. According to Creswell (2013), the basic components of the concept of bullying must be identified by a researcher examining the lived experiences of those who are bullying victims. By exploring the shared experiences of a bullying victim in their own words, phenomenology can help a researcher to uncover the answers to their question about aggressive bullying.

It is important that the researcher conducting a phenomenological study set aside all prejudgments, bracketing his or her experience. One must also continue to review their data. Data are collected from individuals who have experienced the phenomenon. Typically, data in phenomenology are collected through interviews (see Creswell, 2013). The interview attempts to expose the perceptions, recollections, and personal understanding of an individual's bullying experience (Creswell, 2013). Within the data analysis, the researcher continues to read and reread their data to arrive at themes in order to devise a general description of the experience (Creswell, 2013). It is through this process that the researcher can construct the meaning of the situation and gain an understanding of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013).

Summary

A review of the current literature has shown that more research on coping with bullying can help prevent short- and long-term impacts of victimization during childhood and adolescence. The findings provided in this literature review indicate that based on the age differences of a victim; he or she may not understand whether they are being bullied by their peers. Unfortunately, the coping responses of victims can often be delayed if he or she does not recognize the different forms of bullying. Bullying victims might also grow up with their emotions surrounding childhood bullying bottled up; this can present many unhealthy issues, such as depression and anxiety for them later as an adult. Regardless of whether one is a child or an adult, he or she is still susceptible to stress because of being bullied in school. It is important for studies on childhood bullying victims to identify the different effective coping strategies that children use when faced

with a bullying situation. This can help many victims deal with the issues of being bullied early so that he or she does not become affected as they grow up. There is substantial evidence on how childhood bullying can negatively affect the well-being and social functioning of victims throughout his or her adolescence into adulthood (see Nansel et al., 2001). The current literature on bullying lacks what effective coping strategies are used by adult victims after being bullied as a child. Most of the gaps in the research regarding coping with bullying found mixed results when analyzing bullying victims' gender, age, and ethnicity.

Recent studies on bullied victims and stress conducted over the last few years suggest that although bullying can present many long-term negative outcomes, the nature of its impact depends on how one learns to cope. Also, victims of childhood and adolescent bullying are at risk of experiencing depression, anxiety, and suicide (see Roth, Coles, & Heimberg, 2002). More studies on how the stress of victims being bullied might lead to negative outcomes, in the long run, are being investigated. Findings from these studies, such as Roth et al. (2002), suggest that the bullying experiences of victims are associated with adults experiencing anxiety, depression, and loneliness later in life. Adolescents with a history of victimization self-report an increase in stress and using avoidant coping strategies, due to not dealing with stress (see Roth et al., 2002). This lasting impact is based on how bullying victims learn to cope with being bullied as a child.

In some studies, bullying victims who seek support from adults did not experience any negative outcomes of being bullied as a child (see Newman et al., 2011).

Kochenderfer-Ladd (2004) reported that the emotional reactions victims had towards being bullied in their study determined how he or she chose a coping strategy. Bullying victims who reported being fearful of their peers coped by seeking support, this decreased further bullying (see Kochenderfer-Ladd, 2004). Those who responded with anger self-reported coping by seeking retaliation, which increased their bullying experience (see Kochenderfer-Ladd, 2004). Newman et al. (2011) found that using avoidant coping strategies partially resolves the bullying victim's history and present stress, suggesting that those who are bullied for longer periods, stress will continue if he or she do not learn how to effectively cope. Victims of bullying who learn how to cope using problem or emotion-focused strategies can avoid being victimized and experiencing additional stress (see Newman et al., 2011). These studies suggested that coping strategies can have a direct impact on the outcome for victims of bullying.

Chapter 3 provides more detailed information about the research methods used to conduct this study, and why a qualitative phenomenological inquiry was the best approach for this study. Also, the sample population, data collection techniques, data analysis plan, and the role of the researcher is discussed.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

This chapter includes details about the design of the study, the sample, data collection methods, analysis procedures, and the ethical protection of participants. A qualitative approach and a phenomenological design were used to guide the study. This study contributed to the existing literature by addressing the coping strategies of emerging adults (18-22 years old) who had experienced bullying during their adolescence, who had self-reported being a victim of bullying, and who were willing to share their lived experiences as a victim. A phenomenological design was used to examine the lived experiences of emerging adults who self-reported being a victim of bullying during childhood/adolescence and the ways that they had attempted to cope with this stress.

Qualitative methodology allows researchers to bring their worldviews, paradigms, and sets of beliefs to their study (Anderson, 2017; Creswell, 2007). Researchers use interpretive and theoretical frameworks to shape a qualitative study. A qualitative researcher focuses on examining participants in their natural settings to make sense of or interpret the phenomenon based on the meaning of each participant's lived experience (Creswell, 2007). In the current study, participants shared their story and explained how they survived being bullying as a child. A qualitative approach was appropriate because it focused on the experiences and outcome of the phenomenon. According to McCusker and Gunaydin (2015), qualitative methods can help researchers gather data from those who are unable to respond to a more structured environment.

Qualitative research can also add depth to the instruments one uses and influence his or her research design, data analysis, and the generation of participant insight (Patton, 2002). Qualitative methodology also enables researchers to closely examine what is important to the participants because it focuses on participants' voice and language (Patton, 2002). The true picture of the participant's experiences and perceptions are revealed when this occurs. The information that can be gained from qualitative research may help participants understand why they responded in the manner that they did (Anderson, 2017; Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). In the current study, to better understand the lived experiences and coping strategies among emerging adults who were bullied as adolescents, qualitative methods were applied.

In Chapter 3, I provide a rationale for using qualitative research as opposed to quantitative. I also justify the selection of phenomenology as the research design. The chapter presents the research methodology and design, the study sample, instruments, research questions, ethical protection of participants, procedures, data analysis, and verification of findings.

Research Methodology and Rationale

Qualitative methodology was selected to carry out this study. Creswell (2007) suggested that qualitative studies are used when variables cannot be identified. Qualitative research is appropriate when a researcher wants to understand the contexts or settings in which participants address an issue (Creswell, 2007). Researchers cannot separate what participants say from the context in which they say it (Creswell, 2007). Qualitative research can be used to follow up quantitative research and explain the

mechanisms in theories (Creswell, 2006). These theories provide a picture of trends and relationships, but they do not indicate why participants respond as they do, the context in which they respond, or the thoughts and behaviors that directed their responses (Creswell, 2006). Qualitative research is used to develop theories when partial or little information exists for certain populations. When quantitative research and statistical analyses do not fit the issue at hand, qualitative research should be applied (Creswell, 2007). For example, the interaction among participants is difficult to capture in quantitative research. The uniqueness of participants in the study might be overlooked if a researcher tried to reduce them to a statistical mean (Creswell, 2007).

Kochenderfer-Ladd (2004) and Tenenbaum et al. (2012) reported coping strategies for victims of bullying that included seeking advice, problem-solving, externalizing, and distancing behavior. Many researchers have attempted to identify the effectiveness of coping strategies that will help reduce bullying victimization (Andreou, 2001; Cowie, 2000; Kochenderfer-Ladd, 2004). For example, victims who engage in externalizing behavior will increase their chance of future victimization (Kanetsuna, Smith, & Morita, 2006; Mahady Wilton et al. 2000; Visconti & Troop-Gordon, 2010), while those who applied conflict resolution coping strategies reduced their victimization (Kochenderfer-Ladd, 2004; Salmivalli, Karhunen, & Lagerspetz, 1996).

In conducting a qualitative study, I examined how adolescents used coping strategies and the effectiveness of those strategies in coping with bullying. I endeavored to gain a rich understanding of the bullying culture of each participant in the study (see McCusker & Gunaydin, 2015; Opsal, Wolgemuth, Cross, Kaanta, Dickmann, Colomer,

& Erdil-Moody, 2016). Once a rich understanding was gained, I was able to understand the meaning of the incident and interaction of an individual in a bullying situation (see McCusker & Gunaydin, 2015). In qualitative research, words are used rather than numerical data (McCusker & Gunaydin, 2015. Qualitative methodology allows the researcher to be involved in all stages by designing, conducting interviews, and reporting (McCusker & Gunaydin, 2015). Qualitative methods are appropriate when a researcher wants to know why participants behaves the way that they do (McCusker & Gunaydin, 2015). The objective of the current study was to learn what coping strategies emerging adults continued to use as they coped with their experience of CBV. The following research question guided this study: What long-term coping strategies do young adults develop in adapting from being bullied as a teenager?

Research on what coping strategies are effective in addressing the subject of bullying is limited. Only one qualitative study addressed the coping strategies of adolescents who were bullied and indicated that the strategies described by participants were related to their psychological welfare (Garnefski & Kraaii, 2014).

Research Design

I aimed to gain insight into the different coping strategies and experiences of emerging adults who were victims of bullying during their adolescence. I investigated this phenomenon by seeking to understand the bullying victims' lived experiences. A phenomenological approach was the appropriate research design for answering the research question. Phenomenology is used to gain insight into an individual's experience and interpretations of the world. A researcher seeks to understand how the world appears

to others (Creswell, 2007). According to Creswell (2007), it is important to fully

understand the psychological, emotional, and physical responses of an individual. The

phenomenological approach allows participants to share their point of view and meaning

about the bullying experience (Creswell, 2007). Also, phenomenological methods are

used to gather an accurate account of participants' lived experiences while revealing their

understanding of the situation (Grossoehme, 2014; Moustakas, 1994).

When selecting an appropriate research method, researchers should review their

research question, current literature, and available data (Howard-Payne, 2016).

Researchers must also consider the benefits and limitations of selecting a research

method and what each consists of (Howard-Payne, 2016; McCusker & Gunaydin, 2015).

Other qualitative methods were considered but were deemed less effective in providing

the insight that was necessary to understand the lived experiences and coping strategies

of emerging adults who were bullied as adolescents.

Ethnographic researchers focus on studying and interpreting a cultural group

within the cultural environment (Creswell, 2007). The most common data collection

methods researchers use as part of their field research are face-to-face interviewing and

participant observations (Creswell, 2007). Using this approach, researchers become

actively engaged as participants in the culture they are studying and record extensive

field notes (Creswell, 2007). The ethnographic approach was not appropriate for the

current study.

According to Yin (2009), a researcher can gain detailed information about the

how or why of a contemporary event within its real-life context. Case studies are

appropriate when the phenomenon and context boundaries are well defined and numerous

sources of evidence are used (Yin, 2009). Case studies can be used to describe and

explain what is already known about a case that is relevant to a phenomenon. This design

was inappropriate for the current study because it does not address individuals' lived

experiences. Instead, it focuses on detailed information regarding situations and their

relationships (Yin, 2009).

The narrative approach focuses on participants' life story and experiences (Patton,

2002). Using this method, researchers are unable to derive meaning from participants'

experience. This research design is used to understand the life story and culture of an

individual (Patton, 2002). The what and how are narrated by the researcher in this

approach. Pure descriptions of the lived experiences of individuals and in-depth

interviews are acceptable data collection methods in narrative research (Patton, 2002).

Most researchers who use this approach embrace the life story of an individual and

explore the significance of his or her experiences. Narrative research was inappropriate

for the current study because it allows both the researcher's views and the participant's

views to create a collaborative narrative (Patton, 2002).

In grounded theory, there is no limitation of what will be observed (Creswell,

2007). Grounded theory is a research method used to develop a theory when none existed

(Creswell, 2007). Participants in this research method are selected because of their

knowledge of the subject being studied. Grounded theory focuses on the development of

a theory derived from the data (Creswell, 2007). A researcher can understand the

behavior of individuals based on their everyday social life in which the phenomenon

occurs. In-person data can be collected at the same time a researcher begins to analyze the data. This allows researchers to continuously review their data as many times as they like. When comparing data, a grounded theorist can see the social patterns and structures of their research (Creswell, 2007; Grossoehme, 2014). The grounded theory approach is appropriate when there is no hypothesis for a researcher to test (Creswell, 2007; Grossoehme, 2014). Grounded theory also focuses on experiences of the researcher and participants, as well as their values (Chan, Yeh, & Krumboltz, 2015; Creswell, 2007; Ralph, Birks, & Chapman, 2015; Wong, Cheng, & Chen, 2013). To generate a meaningful theory, a researcher must understand the participants and setting of the study.

Phenomenology was chosen because it allows a researcher to obtain rich descriptions of a small number of participants' lived experiences who share the same issue. This approach allows for the development of patterns, themes, and relationships of meaning (Moustakas, 1994). Although grounded theory and phenomenology are used to examine real-life situations, grounded theorists compare and analyze data from different sources. Phenomenology was appropriate for the current study because it allowed me to collect data from individuals and describe their experiences.

The qualitative method of phenomenology was appropriate for examining the experiences of victims of childhood bullying to explain how emerging adults respond to a similar phenomenon. Most victims of bullying experience a decrease in psychological, social, and physical adjustment, and little is known about whether these issues will continue later in life (Smithyman et al., 2014). Studies indicated that victims of long-term bullying may suffer from a higher level of depression, anxiety, and suicidal thoughts as

they grow into adults (Smithyman et al., 2014). It is not easy for most children to grow out of the pain of being bullied as a child (Smithyman et al., 2014). Those who are bullied by their peers have been found to be less mentally healthy in adulthood (Smithyman et al., 2014). Research showed that most bullying victims have low self-esteem and struggle with academic performance in school (Smithyman et al., 2014). According to Smithyman et al. (2014), most studies that focused on the long-term effects of bullying addressed childhood, not adulthood. By conducting a phenomenological study, I was able to provide a better understanding of participants' lived experiences and the coping strategies they used as they moved into adulthood.

Role of the Researcher

I served as the primary instrument for collecting and analyzing data for this study. In being involved step-by-step throughout the research process, the researcher must mitigate personal bias that may influence the findings (Patton, 2002). Therefore, I intend to apply the same consistency in my work ethic throughout the research process as displayed in the research design. I will refrain from imposing or allowing my assumptions, experiences, views, or bias to affect the data collection process or overall results of the study (Patton, 2002). Instead, I will assume the role of a neutral yet objective participant promoting an understanding of coping strategies used to adapt from being bullied as a teenager (Patton, 2002).

To eliminate bias found in most research studies, researchers often use a strategy called triangulation (Ji Young & Eun-Hee, 2014). This particular strategy limits the likelihood of information being misinterpreted when findings are examined against other

sources of data and perspectives presented in research (Ji Young & Eun-Hee, 2014).

Before beginning the study, I identified and acknowledged my own bias to avoid

hindering the level of interaction established between myself and the participants of the

research study (Evans, 2013). By thoroughly assessing the phenomenon at hand, I was

able to concentrate on my pre-understanding, preconceptions, and bias about the topic

before the study began. I spoke with my chairperson and mentor to discuss the reasoning

behind the selection of the topic being studied, in addition to my role in the study. The

potential issues were eliminated through my involvement in the study. Being involved

enables me to develop my theory and gain knowledge about the phenomenon first-hand

as opposed to past data. Furthermore, I received advice and guidance in how to properly

communicate with the population selected for my study and become a part of the

phenomenon to form a personal experience. I set aside all possible issues by conducting

this research and gathering data through articles that are both scholarly and peer-reviewed

once the in-person portion of the study was concluded. Nearly all researchers feel

inclined to follow past data using it as a guide in current research, unaware that changes

have occurred over a period of time. Researchers can conduct additional research on past

topics that share similarities to their study, but it is advised that they abstain from relying

entirely on it. By connecting with a community partner, the possible issues will be

eliminated because the researcher will discuss and review them before the start of the

study. In turn, this process enables the researcher to see the phenomenon from another

person's perspective separate from their own. Structured data collection, analysis, and

procedures were used to establish trustworthiness, accuracy, and balance in the study

(Patton, 2002). All ethical issues were addressed, including receiving permission for each part of the research process (Creswell, 2007). Participants who self-report coping experiences on being a victim of bullying as a child were accurately recorded (Creswell, 2007).

Methodology

Research Setting

Participants were recruited through an organization that promotes anti-bullying in Atlanta, Georgia. Walden University's participant pool were also used to draw volunteers that aligned with a set of criteria for this study. In meetings with the community partner, information as to the nature of the study were provided and a request for assistance in recruiting participants was made. Recruitment was approved by the community partner (postings flyers, announcements on a web page, etc.) and an arranged meeting with I and potential participants to discuss the nature of the study. Discussing the nature of the study with an anti-bullying organization provided an avenue to identify emerging adults who were bullied as adolescents and encourage their participation. Data was collected by semi-structured interviews. The interview conversations between the participant and researcher were conducted behind closed doors in a private space where no one else could have interrupted the interview process. This was to ensure that participants felt comfortable within the setting that the interview took place.

Participants of the Study

The sample population in the study included both female and male emerging adults who were bullied as adolescents, ranging from age 18 to 22. These individuals

must have experienced some form of bullying (physical, sexual, racial/ethnic, or social) during his or her childhood but have learned how to adjust with time from the traumatic experiences that they endured. The bullying experience of each participant must have occurred during adolescence (between ages 12-18). Participants must have been willing and able to share their bullying experiences through age 17, and interpersonal experiences with bullying since 18.

Sampling Procedures

Flyers and an announcement about the study were posted on the community partner's website and Walden University participant pool to help recruit participants. This included the researcher's contact information and the number of volunteers needed for the study. Once participants responded to the flyers or the announcement, he or she was contacted by phone and email to participate in the study. Each participant was given a date, time and location of where to meet for the study. Before the screening process occurred, I provided additional information about the study, risks/benefits, right to decline and informed consent. There were no volunteers who responded to the flyer and announcement of the study from Walden University participant pool. Participants were screened in person to see if he or she met the criteria for the study. Those who did not meet the research study criteria were informed by the researcher. For participants who met the criteria and were willing to be a part of the study, he or she needed to sign an informed consent before being interviewed. To gain insight and rich information into the coping strategies of emerging adults who were bullied as adolescents, purposive sampling was selected (Patton, 2002). Open-ended questions were asked to address both the past

and present status of the phenomenon that was studied. These semi-structured interview questions allowed participants to speak in an open and free manner about the topic. Member checking was used to help clarify participants' responses and to assure that accurate information was gathered.

Sample Size

The sample size consisted of a minimum of 12 or more participants, with more having been added if necessary in order to reach saturation. To achieve a rich description of an individual's experiences in a phenomenological study, Moustakas (1994) believed that there must be 8 to 10 or more participants until saturation is reached. Purposive sampling was applied to help select participants and research sites. This type of sampling method allows the researcher in the study to focus on a particular characteristic of a population of interest that will best answer the research question. According to Patton (2002), purposive sampling in qualitative research is commonly used to help researchers identify and select information that is rich. It includes one identifying and selecting participants that are knowledgeable about or have experienced a phenomenon of interest (Creswell, 2007). Also, the participant's availability and willingness to participate in the study, and reflectively communicate their experiences, is also crucial (Creswell, 2007). No other sampling strategy was necessary because purposive sampling provided the required number of participants for the study.

Consent Process

A consent form was provided to each participant in the study explaining the nature of the research in full, as well as the role of the researcher and the expectations of

participants. The consent form was written in a language that is understandable to the participant population. Before participants can make an informed decision about voluntarily participating in the study, he or she must first be made aware of certain information (APA, 2010). For this study I addressed how the information was obtained from participants and used, the anticipated duration, procedure, any risks/ benefits, the right to decline to participate and withdraw without penalty, privacy and confidentiality rights including limitations, and whom participants should contact if they had any questions about the study or regarding their rights in participating. The informed consent served as a signed written agreement between the participant and I that he or she understood in full the parameters and documents their willingness to participate in the study (APA, 2010). It also involves participants asking questions and speaking with the researcher to make sure that he or she fully understands what they agree to (APA, 2010). I included in the consent documents a sample of their interview questions to potential participants and community partner. Participants knew what questions I will ask regarding how they coped with being bullied as an adolescent, and how they selected the coping strategy they used, and how successful they employed the coping strategy. By providing a sample of the interview to potential participants early, it allowed them to reflect on their experiences of coping with being bullied as a child before the interview.

Interviews

The primary source that was used to collect data from participants in the research study was semi-structured interviews, which consisted of open-ended questions. During the interview, participants were asked in-depth questions about their past and present

status of the phenomenon being studied. To do this, member checks were conducted

during each interview and participants' self-reported responses of their experiences were

summarized (Thomas, 2017). The interview took no longer than 1hr to complete. If more

time was needed, I scheduled additional time. In Chapter 4, I further discuss the specifics

of the interview process, data collection, and data analysis.

Instrumentation

Due to participants being young adult victims of childhood bullying, it was

important that I structured my interview questions accordingly. Each interview question

was presented to participants in a language that is understandable and worded in a way

that did not lead the participants. To ensure that participants did not experience any

discomfort, I designed interview questions that were open-ended, with the interviews

being conducted in a safe, friendly environment. Patton (2002) found that by researchers

creating a safe environment for participants to respond, it allows them to relax and focus

more on the topic that is being studied. This is important as young adults who were

victims of bullying during their adolescence might feel uncomfortable sharing their story.

To avoid participants viewing me as an authority figure in the study and feeling pressured

to provide an answer to the questions that are asked during the interview, I designed

open-ended questions to help encourage a full, meaningful response using the

participants' own knowledge and feelings (Creswell, 2007).

<div align="center">Research Questions</div>

The purpose of this qualitative study was to provide knowledge on the coping

experience of emerging adults who were bullied as adolescents. For this particular study,

the term victimization was described as the experience of having a crime inflicted on an individual or an actual attempt in committing the crime against oneself (NOVA, 2009). The primary research question was, "What long-term coping strategies do young adults develop in adapting from being bullied as a teenager?" Stemming from the primary question, a complete list of interview questions were presented to the participants and were employed to discover the themes are provided in Appendix D. Following this, Appendix E is a list of bullying resources that was provided to participants in the research study. A qualitative design was applied during the interview process with emerging adults who have reported being victims of bullying as an adolescent. Semi-structured interview questions delved into the participants' recollections of their bullying experiences, with interest in stress reported as an experience based on the victimization and ways used as an attempt to cope with this stress as emerging adults. Also, this study explored each participant's descriptions of coping strategies used in response to life stressors and their self-reported success in applying such coping strategies.

Ethical Protection of Participants

Permission was obtained from the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) before recruiting participants and collecting data in the study. Walden's approval number for the study is 07-24-18-0323606 and it expires on July 23, 2019. Individuals participating in this study must have voluntarily agreed, and the researcher did not directly approach, solicit, or recruit anyone to participate (Appendix A). Harm was not expected for those serving as participants. However, if participants at any point expressed and reported experiencing difficulty, referrals to see a mental health professional were

drafted. All participants were required to provide their signatures on the Informed Consent form supplied before the interviewing process (Appendix C). Informed Consent forms, detailed notes, audio tapes, and transcripts will be kept in a secured filing cabinet in my office at home, and passwords will be created for all computer files as protection. No other persons will be given permission or access to the documents or files saved on my computer. All data collected will be preserved for approximately five years then destroyed. No specific identifiers were recorded in the transcripts; instead, pseudonyms will be used allowing participants to remain anonymous throughout the study.

The population selected needed to be described in a clear and concise manner stating what I wished to include or exclude from the study (Knapp, Gottlieb, & Handelsman, 2015). This is an essential part of the research because researchers are required to include and represent populations composed of women and those who are of minority groups, such as individuals with intellectual disabilities in their protocols (Knapp et al., 2015). For this research study, it was in my best interest to provide all participants with an informed consent to protect his or her well-being and maintain autonomy (Knapp et al., 2015). One potential challenge that I may have faced in employing primary selection is the reluctance in ethics committees when asked for permission to recruit potential participants regarding certain studies being conducted.

The interview needed to be conducted in an environment that was both neutral and safe for all participants in the study. This particular sampling design was not open to everyone. The purpose of the interview was explained in detail to participants in a clear and concise manner in order to protect against the development of any

misunderstandings. Misunderstandings in what should or should not be shared during an interview can cause participants to recall and begin to share traumatizing events. I must ensure that each participant's confidential information remained protected in the study. I was responsible for informing participant's that he or she has the right to discontinue any time during the study. I was also responsible for selecting participants that were appropriate for the study being conducted. The identity of the participants, such as their name, will remain anonymous in the study as mentioned, to protect his or her right to privacy.

Participants had the right to decline, not respond to questions and withdraw from the study at any time that he or she chooses. I did not engage in any acts of unfair discrimination concerning one's gender, age, ethnicity, race, culture, religion, sexual orientation, or disability (APA, 2010). This research did not pose a potential psychological risk to any participants in the study. All information collected throughout the study remains. The names of each participant were coded, and the data obtained stored in a file that is locked and carefully managed. The data collected from each participant will be destroyed after seven years. All data collected will only be used solely for research analysis. No incentives were offered, and the study remained voluntary. As addressed in the APA (2010), I provided all participants with my contact information; so that he or she can ask any additional questions or express concerns about the research and their rights.

Procedures

The research study procedural steps were outlined concerning the recruitment process, participant informed consent procedures, collecting and analysis of the research data and validation of the findings. There was no coercion of research participants by the researcher, with all ethical guidelines having been followed when conducting this research. To recruit participants, a flyer was used to describe the nature of the study and with participant criteria posted in the community partner's organization and announcements made on a web page. The Walden University Participant Pool was also used to post the flyer and announcement of the study. Participants who were recruited from Walden University Participant Pool were met through Skype.

Potential participants in the study that responded to the flyer in the community partner's organization were able to contact me by phone and email. Participants were provided a date, time and location of where to meet, and additional details about the study and informed consent. The meeting with potential participants helped me explain in detail about the informed consent process; potential risks/benefits, and allowed the potential participant a choice in declining or continuing participation. Participants were given adequate information and time to make an informed decision about their voluntarily participation in the study (APA, 2010). For those who wanted to participate in the study, they were required to sign the informed consent document before the interview.

Epoche is a step that occurs before one's interview (Moustakas, 1994). Before the data collection, I bracketed my experiences throughout the research process, setting aside

any preconceptions, values, interests, emotions, assumptions, and biases to help focus on understanding each participant's lived experiences of coping with being bullied (Creswell, 2006).

Data Collection

I used semi-structured face-to-face interviews to collect data from participants in the study. Moustakas (1994) believed that note taking is an important part of a researcher's interview process. The reason why this process is important is that it enables a researcher to remember the details of the interview that might be lost or biased based on their memory (Moustakas, 1994). The field notes and the self-reported responses of the population sample to the interviews was an important part of the analysis process; these things helped provide rich detail on each participant's bullying experience. A phenomenological study must consist of a sample of 8 to 10 participants (Creswell, 2006). The method generally calls for in-depth interviews. To reach data saturation in a phenomenological study, one must have a maximum number of 10 participants (Moustakas, 1994). Credibility can be achieved when a phenomenological researcher uses triangulation and member checking as methods (Lincoln & Guba, 1988; Thomas, 2017). This was achieved by comparing notes from the individual interviews, and participants being provided a copy of the transcript of the interview to help ensure the level of accuracy of their self-reported experiences. These steps helped to maintain the credibility of the findings in this phenomenology study.

Data Analysis

I used a digital recorder to record each participant's interview in the study. With a recording, I can concentrate on listening and responding to the participant, without writing extensive notes. Once participants interviews were digitally recorded, I loaded the recorded files into a foot pedal and Express Scribe software that plugs into my computer. The Express Scribe and foot pedal software were used to transcribe all interviews. Once the data from participants is organized, I can understand what type of information the data provides in the study. I carefully read each transcript in its entirety and gained an understanding of the information provided to help understand the meaning of the participant's bullying experience. I also re-read the interview transcript to divide the data into more meaningful sections (Creswell, 2007). In a qualitative study, the phenomenological data analysis often includes coding, categorizing, and making sense of the meanings of the phenomenon that is being studied (Creswell, 2007). As a researcher I went over the rich descriptive data in the study to find common themes. This requires that I was immersed in the analysis process to ensure that pure and thorough descriptions of the phenomenon are made (Creswell, 2007). Also, I must begin to highlight statements that have specific relevance to the phenomenon being studied. In this case, the study attempts to extract meaning to help understand how emerging adults who were bullied as adolescents cope.

Verification of Findings

Lincoln and Guba (1988) stated that in qualitative research, trustworthiness is only established through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability

(Creswell & Miller, 2000). The sources of data such as the participants' rich descriptions and individual interviews helped to achieve triangulation; while using member checking to ensure that participants lived bullying experiences were accurately accounted/interpreted, and represented (Creswell & Miller, 2000). I provided accurate and clear detailed descriptions of the setting and sample of emerging adults (18-22 years old) who were bullied as adolescents, to help establish transferability within the sample. Face-to-face interviews helped establish dependability and credibility in the study. Parts of Lazarus and Folkman's coping theory informed the theoretical lens of the study. Lazarus and Folkman's theory established the adequacy of the self-reported responses of participants according to coping category (Neuman, 1991).

Summary

In this chapter, I discussed the qualitative methods and processes used in this study. An in-depth description of phenomenology was provided to examine the lived experiences of the phenomenon on emerging adults who were bullied as adolescents and the continued coping method they used. Additional discussions on the research design, sample population, research questions, instrumentation derived from the analysis process, and, sections on procedures, data collection, data analysis and verification of findings were included in the study. The following chapters will report on the data collection through face-to-face interviews and findings gained through the analysis process.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the lived experiences of participants and the impact of bullying in their lives with an aim of gaining insight into the coping strategies they adopted during adolescence. Previous researchers had not used a qualitative approach to understand how bullied individuals coped with their circumstances, making the current study a novel addition to previous research. Previously, researchers suggested the importance of understanding how individuals respond to their circumstances (Creswell, 2007). The phenomenological approach supported coming to a better understanding of such responses (see Grossoehme, 2014; Moustakas, 1994). Due to the nature of the qualitative study and the lack of an attempt to determine correlation or causation, neither variables nor hypotheses were proposed. The study focused on a central research question: What long-term coping strategies do young adults develop in adapting from being bullied as a teenager?

Chapter 4 includes the setting, a discussion of the study's demographics, the narratives that made up the study, and the thematic findings that emerged from an analysis of those narratives. Analysis of the narrative responses included the coding and categorization of recurring themes to make sense of the phenomenon being studied. This form of content analysis allowed for a natural emergence of themes that typified the experience of the participants. The thematic findings best characterized the experiences of those involved in the study. Also, the data collection procedures and the methods used for locating participants are discussed in Chapter 4. Research questions and participant

responses are reported. Evidence of trustworthiness and the methods I used are addressed. Chapter 4 concludes with a summary.

Initial Steps Prior to Conducting Research

Participant Recruitment

The recruitment process began after I received approval from the Walden University IRB to conduct this study. Recruitment began in July 2018 and ended in September 2018, lasting a total of 2 months. The following are the strategies that were used to recruit participants:

- An anti-bullying organization was contacted for permission to post the study announcement and flyer on its social media.

- A letter of cooperation was given to the community partner. In addition, consent to use the Walden Participant Pool was obtained from the IRB.

- An announcement and flyer for the study (see Appendix A and B) were provided to the community partner and the Walden Participant Pool to post on their websites.

Young adults who responded to the posted announcement and flyer, and who were interested in participating in the study, contacted me by e-mail for more information. During the e-mail exchange, I determined whether each participant met the criteria for the study based on the announcement and flyer in Appendix A and B. To maintain protocol and avoid coercion, I avoided personally soliciting participants for the study. Participants who met the criteria were provided a date, time, and location of where to meet and were given additional details about the study and informed consent.

Participants who were recruited from the Walden University Participant Pool were contacted through Skype. No participants responded to the announcement and flyer on the Walden University Participant Pool. The recruitment process yielded only 13 participants from the community partner's social media. However, only 11 participants participated in the study.

Although I did not obtain the planned minimum of 12 participants, I made the decision to end the recruitment process. I felt that data saturation was achieved at 11 participants and that no new findings were likely to emerge in the study (see Moustakas, 1994). Through the analysis of the data, I was able to confirm that data saturation had been met.

Selection of Participants

Eleven participants met the following criteria for participating in the study: they were (a) 18-22 years old, (b) a victim of childhood bullying between the ages of 12 and 18 years, (c) bullied (physical, sexual, racial/ethnic, or social) during adolescence, and (d) willing to share their bullying experiences and how they overcame CBV.

Sample Demographics

I used pseudonyms to protect the privacy of each participant in the study. Demographic data and contextual information are presented in the Table 1.

Table 1

Sample Demographic Profile

#	Gender	Age	Ethnicity	Education	Environment	Bullying Timespan	Bullying Timeframe
1	M	22	Black	Fulltime College	Suburban	Short-term	Middle School and High School
2	M	18	Italian	Some College	Suburban	Short-term	Middle School and High School
3	M	22	Black	Bachelors	Urban	Short-term	Middle School
4	M	22	White	Bachelors	Suburban	Short-term	High School
5	M	21	White	Student	Suburban	Long-Term	All
6	F	22	Black	Bachelors	Suburban	Short-term Periodically	Middle and High School
7	F	22	Black	Student	Urban and Suburban	Short-term Periodically	Middle and High School
8	F	22	White	Student	Suburban	Long-term Periodically	Elementary through High School

9	F	22	White	Student	Suburban	Short-term Periodically	Middle and High School
10	F	22	Black	Master's	Suburban	Short-term	Middle and High School
11	F	19	White	Student	Suburban	Short-term	Middle and High School

Process of Conducting the Study

Information Reviewed With Participants

All 11 participants entered into the interview understanding the parameters of the study. Participants were informed early on about the types of questions they would be asked regarding their CBV, the amount of time for the interview, their right to end the interview, and that they would be presented with a summary of the results from their interview. In addition, participants were reminded before the interview to focus on their experiences in coping with CBV and not to revisit the actual bullying incident itself.

Prior to Conducting the Research

Before I conducted the interviews with participants and before analyzing the data, I bracketed my experiences throughout the research process by setting aside any preconceptions, values, interests, emotions, assumptions, and bias of which I was aware in my notes. This was important before I began to collect data because I transcribed the interviews myself. The bracketing process included listing in my notes all personal

assumptions, biases, beliefs, opinions, and experiences regarding CBV and coping that might have influenced the study. The list included the following:

- As a family mediator, I was familiar with CBV and how it affects adolescents' emotional and social well-being.

- I researched the topic of CBV and learned how children coped based on research studies.

- I expected there to be a difference in how males and females chose and used certain coping strategies to overcome CBV.

- I talked with friends and professionals about CBV to learn how to protect adolescents from bullying in school, and how to support those who experienced bullying.

To set aside my beliefs and opinions, I used the above checklist when structuring and conducting the study. I also did this when analyzing and interpreting the data. For example, I focused only on what each participant expressed during the interview and nothing beyond what the person shared. I did not base my interpretation of each participant's experience concerning how they overcame being bullied as a child on what I learned from prior research on coping with childhood bullying. Instead, I made certain that the findings focused on the lived experiences and perceptions of each participant who coped with CBV.

Data Collection

The semi-structured interviews with each of the 11 participants were the source of data for the study. The purpose of data collection was to represent the coping experience

of emerging adults who were bullied as adolescents. Specifically, the focus was on how

participants continued to cope with the stress of being bullied and victimized as an adult.

All participant interviews were conducted in the Georgia area over a 9-week period

during July and September 2018. To protect the confidentiality of participants, I replaced

their names with unique identifiers. The interviews were conducted in a local library

inside a private meeting room. The duration of the interview was 1 hour. Interviews with

each participant were set up by e-mail. Participants were provided with detailed

information about the purpose of the study and the informed consent process before and

during the interview. Next, I thoroughly explained to participants the recording and

questioning process. The interview began after participants stated that they understood

the study and signed the consent form. Participants were advised to respond to the

questions being asked, but no pressure was applied if they did not respond to any

question. Most of the participants were very talkative and expressed the need to share

their CBV stories to help other victims. The interview times were designated by

participants. I used a digital voice recorder to record each participant's interview. I

loaded the recorded file into a foot pedal and Express Scribe software plugged into my

computer to transcribe the interviews.

Data Maintenance and Security

I made certain throughout each stage of the data collection and analysis process to

keep the data secure. All data were properly stored and locked in a filing cabinet at my

home office when not in use. I saved all data files, notes, interview transcripts, and audio

recordings on a password-protected personal computer. A folder was created for each

participant's files (transcription and digital voice file). No other person had access to any of the data. I removed all identifying information to ensure the privacy of each participant before I transcribed and analyzed the data. Pseudonyms were used when reporting the findings of the analysis. I also checked to see if all quotes used during the write up did not identify the participants' personal data.

Interview Questions

To provide a thorough description of each participant's CBV, I used the following interview questions:

1. Can you recall the first time you were bullied? What happened?

2. What form (s) of bullying did you experience as a child? (physical, emotional, verbal, social, or cyber bullying).

3. Could you describe a situation in which the bullying incident occurred?

4. How did you cope as an adolescent when being bullied (emotionally, avoidant, or problem-focused)?

5. What were you doing as adolescents and how does it relate to how you are doing today?

6. How do you as an adult treat others? Do you tend to try to dominate, submit, or avoid in personal or work relationships?

7. What personality changes, if any, have you experienced since being bullied as a child?

8. Have you been bullied as an adult? How have you handled it?

9. Have you developed any specific way to deal with bullies as a result of your childhood experiences?

10. What advice do you have for those who are experiencing as adolescents some form of bullying?

11. How did family, teachers, and community members support your experience of being bullied? Did you receive counseling?

12. How do you view bullying now that you are an adult?

Transcription of Participant Interviews

I began the transcription process by playing back the audio files of all 11 interviews to help develop familiarity and accuracy. Each participant's interview was transcribed verbatim, including any pauses, hesitations, or emphases that were recorded during the interview. I checked all transcriptions against each participant's audio recording until I was convinced it was accurately transcribed.

Data Analysis Framework

I chose Creswell (2007) as my data analysis framework to answer my research question. This method of analysis was chosen because I was able to extract meanings from critical statements made during the interviews to create themes. All seven themes in the study represent what was learned from participants based on their response to each interview question.

In the study, I produced 11 hours of digitally recorded interviews, which I transcribed verbatim into 33 pages. All information was supplemented by my field and journal notes. The coding process began at the time of the interview. Interviews were

recorded for future transcription. Once a transcript was available, I reviewed the data several times. During each pass through the data, I reviewed the transcript for recurring phrases and concepts. These phrases and concepts are highlighted and coded for easy future reference. Recurrent coded data is then drawn into groups and reviewed to ensure consistency in the grouped data and adherence to a specific theme. Multiple themes emerged, and I then reviewed the data to identify themes where overlap and similarity made certain themes too similar to one another. These overlapping, redundant themes were then collapsed into single thematic categories, leaving several categories that addressed the research question. The statements that were assigned to these thematic codes allowed for the emergence of a narrative pertaining to CBV.

Personal Narratives

The narratives collected from the participants were collected using a 12 question interview that explored the coping mechanisms of those who were bullied. These questions explored the experiences of the participants in different areas, such as the first instance of bullying to whether the participants felt they were still bullied as adults. Content analysis was performed on the subsequent narrative responses to identify the commonalities between the participants' narratives.

Following content analysis, seven major themes emerged from the narratives. These themes were not always entirely distinct from one another and there was occasional overlap between the themes. These themes included the following: *confrontation, self-controlling, seeking social support, accepting responsibility, escape-avoidance, problem-solving,* and *positive-reappraisal.*

The theme of *confrontation* dealt with how the participants confronted their bullies. The theme of *self-controlling* dealt with how participants asserted control over their lives in various ways as a means of coping with bullying. The theme of *seeking social support* was characterized by individuals finding help from others. The theme of *accepting responsibility* referred to individuals accepting responsibility over their lives as demonstrated by purposeful decisions and shifts in mindset as the participant grew. *Escape-avoidance* was a theme that referred to avoidant behavior in which participants attempted to avoid their bullies.

Problem-solving was a theme that had significant overlap with other themes, but also distinguished itself in several respects. It referred to the many ways that participants attempted to solve their bullying issues. Finally, the theme of *positive-reappraisal* referred to how individuals reframed the circumstances of their bullying, to view those circumstances in a positive light. The seven themes that were arrived at for the study are explored in further detail in the following section.

Findings by Themes

Confrontation

One of the themes that emerged from the narratives was that of confrontation. Individuals were often confrontational with their bullies, although those confrontations could take different forms. One of those forms was physical confrontation. As Participant 2 said, When I was a kid I loved martial arts when I was getting bullied I was taking martial arts. I defended myself if they touched me I was not a push over.

Participant 2 was not the only individual willing to physically confront their

bullies. In some cases, physical retaliation occurred when individuals reached a breaking

point. Participant 7 touched on this, saying,

> One day I got ready to get on the bus from the school and then these two girls
>
> started calling me names, so I hit one of them. White people liked to use the "N"
>
> word. I spent a lot of time from 14 until I graduated for fighting back against
>
> bullying.

The theme of having to respond to bullies through physical altercation was among

the most commonly cited forms of coping with bullying conditions. In many cases,

participants had to respond physically. As Participant 3 stated, In high school I did not fit

in, so bullies would pick on me and I would have to fight sometimes to protect myself.

The response of Participant 3 was yet one more response that indicated that participants

felt the need to physically respond to their bullies. It should be noted that for participants,

standing up to bullying sometimes had further negative consequences for them. As

Participant 6 mentioned,

> I got sick of the bullying and I got mean and got an anger problem. I said alright
>
> you want to be mean I can be mean I retaliated. At 14 years old I was problem-
>
> focused and I would cuss people out and I spent a lot of time in detention.

Physically confronting bullies was often something that participants felt they had

to do. However, doing so sometimes had negative outcomes for them. This made

physically responding a potentially harmful act for the participant. Not all forms of

confrontation were physical, however. In some cases, those confrontations were

discussions. Participant 2 mentioned that in at least one case, he attempted to address the bullying. Speaking about this, he said, I talked to two of my bullies and one decided to listen and the other wanted to fight and when I stood up for myself he backed off.

Confrontations were therefore a blend of physical and verbal actions meant to stop the bullying directed at the participants. Another example of verbally confronting bullying was mentioned by Participant 5. However, in his case, the bullying was complicated by the fact that it was occurring within the family. As he said,

> The way that I have handled it is by being more direct with my family um…. like I said earlier, but that holds a lot of negative comments people get upset when you call them out for their bull crap. I would say to my brother hey that was incredibly rude, but my family will say why should I apologize, how dare you insult me for being rude. You know when that happens I just keep confronting them and being direct.

The final image that emerged of how people dealt with bullying was through a mix of both physical and verbal confrontations. However, there was little in the literature that pointed to confrontation as a coping method (Camodeca & Goossens, 2005; Kochenderfer-Ladd & Pelletier, 2008; Lee et al., 2012). What little existed in the literature indicated that males (Camodeca & Goossens, 2005; Kochenderfer-Ladd & Pelletier, 2008) and African Americans (Lee et al., 2012) were more likely to engage in confrontation as a coping strategy. Evidence from the current study suggested that participants did engage in confrontation as a means of addressing their bullying. However, for those who physically confronted their bullies, there was the potential for

negative outcomes as a punishment. This potential for negative outcomes was not present in the existing literature, which indicated that this specific finding represented a new entry to the literature. The findings pointed to the complicated ways that participants had to navigate their circumstances to resolve the bullying that was happening to them.

Self-Controlling

The second theme that emerged from the narratives was that of exhibiting self-control. Over time, individuals began to exhibit a type of control over their own emotional responses that allowed them to move beyond the bullying. Participant 3 said, I've experienced the thing where I can take it mentally nothing can get to me I don't show any emotion at all. If you want to put hands on me then that's a different story.

Participant 3 felt that they were able to hold on to what made them unique rather than change in response to the bullying. Others took control of their lives in other ways. Participant 10 spoke about this, saying,

> Being bullied as a child it wears on you. My mother was light skinned and my
>
> father was dark skinned. As a child, I heard people say you should have come out
>
> lighter. As I grew up and having to grow up with these standards with how you
>
> look. I left home at 17 I knew that I could make my own decisions. I don't care
>
> it's just background noise you are not for me you are against me.
>
> For Participant 10, the breakthrough was realizing they could move on and be in

control of their own life, without caring about what people said about them. Participant 8 also indicated that she made an effort to remain true to herself despite the bullying she faced. Even in adulthood, she felt bullying hadn't changed her much. As she said,

I think I'm much more confident and secure in myself than I was before. I don't

think that I did anything it just changed over time. I was outspoken as a kid and

very social, but also weird because I had an accent and was a different culture.

I'm still an extrovert and outspoken.

Participant 11 responded in a way that demonstrated a tendency to compensate for

previous bullying by becoming a more dominate individual, saying, I definitely I think I

um tend to try to dominate, um I try to be the best at everything and when I'm not the

best at something I kind of sometimes want to stop it.

The response by Participant 11 could potentially be interpreted negatively, given

the emphasis on needing to be the best at all things done and abandoning tasks when that

doesn't occur. The broad mix of findings demonstrated a wide range of attempts at

controlling one's own life that participants engaged in. In some cases, those responses

could be interpreted positively. Individuals sometimes indicated that they were able to

continue behaving as they traditionally had when they were adolescents. These positive

responses also indicated that some of these individuals became mentally tougher.

However, the potential to overcompensate as a response to bullying suggested that there

might be negative outcomes as individuals attempted to assert control over their lives. A

review of the literature did not demonstrate findings related to self-control, making this a

novel addition to the existing research.

Seeking Social Support

A third theme that emerged from the narratives was the search for social support.

Although only lightly addressed, there were some mentions of social support. Participant

4 pointed out a specific program meant to help them with bullying, saying, They had a very well-known special program that served as a support system. For Participant 4, the social support came from a program designed to help them. For Participant 11, this support came from family. She said,

> I actually got uhm an eating disorder for it, so I would say probably emotional, mental uhm; it lasted about a year.… I did I went to the therapist for a couple of months and um… she definitely helped me, but my mom was definitely the biggest support system.

Seeking support was among the most highly present themes in the existing research (Andreou, 2001; Lodge & Feldman, 2007; Tenenbaum et al., 2011), and the current study reinforced the importance of this tactic for victims of bullying. Previously, the literature indicated that seeking social support was a common strategy (Andreou, 2001) and that it helped prevent being continuously bullied (Tenenbaum et al., 2011). Previous research indicated that friends could act as a social support (Nickerson & Mele-Taylor, 2014), but there was no presence in the literature of family as a social support. The current study indicated that social support could be created through programs or through family, which represented a unique addition to the literature. However, it should be noted that the lack of further comments on social support by participants made it one of the more weakly supported themes in the narratives.

Accepting Responsibility

Yet another theme that was found was that of accepting responsibility. Over time, individuals found different ways of becoming responsible for their circumstances and

asserting responsibility over their own lives. These individuals often took on new behaviors as a way of responding to their circumstances in a way that was beneficial for them. As Participant 7 said, I was quiet and shy as an adolescent; I was an introvert. Today, I am not so quiet I stand up for myself. I got to the point where I said that I am not taking it no more."

Participant 7 moved forward and made decisions to stand up for herself. Participant 11 also demonstrated increased confidence with time. As she said,

I'm a lot stronger because of it and I've kind of gotten over that and what people think of me and stuff. And as an adult, I felt like I'm confident and strong and I feel like I've gone through a lot more than other people so therefore I'm capable of more than some people are.

Both Participant 7 and Participant 11 progressed beyond the bullying they received. Instead, they decided that they would ignore what people said about them. Rather, they made choices to be more confident in themselves and even view themselves in ways that demonstrated increased confidence. Participant 6 added the following:

At 18 and 22 if someone rubbed me the wrong way I would just drop them. I would cuss them out then drop them. I'm not dropping no one now. Now today I calmed down to the point where I can take an one hour or two then talk to someone. You have to take bullying head on I burned bridges, but you cannot do that.

This statement indicated that Participant 6 acknowledged and took responsibility for her past response to bullying. Moving forward, she realized that her old patterns of

behavior were inappropriate and perhaps damaging. As such, she took charge of her life and made changes to improve her responses to bullying-type behavior. Staying with the theme of taking responsibility over one's life, Participant 4 said,

> For me my thing for coping was sports specifically wrestling. I lost a lot of weight um……..because that is something that is very important weight management and having that kind of self-confidence feel like I could protect myself in the event someone would potentially harm me. Wrestling was the biggest coping and helped me forget for a while. Physical activity something that was able to distract me challenging enough and stimulating enough to be able to take you away for a few hours was the biggest coping for me.

There wasn't much in the literature that strongly supported the concept of accepting responsibility. The concept of standing up for one's self was present to a limited degree in the idea of confronting bullies (Camodeca & Goossens, 2005; Kochenderfer-Ladd & Pelletier, 2008; Lee et al., 2012). There was little that indicated that some individuals outright ignored their victims, with the evidence framing their responses as simply accepting the bullying (Camodeca & Goossens, 2005). As such, the theme of accepting responsibility represented a largely new theme in the literature. For Participant 4, taking responsibility meant taking a stand for himself. Despite naturally being inclined to be an introvert, Participant 7 felt it was necessary to no longer accept the actions taken toward her. The picture portrayed in the theme of Accepting Responsibility was characterized by people making choices to change, asserting a degree of control over their lives and attitudes moving forward. For some, that meant no longer

making negative, harmful responses to bullying. For others, that meant making a choice

to stand up for themselves, which supported the limited evidence in the literature that

some people responded to bullying with a confrontation (Camodeca & Goossens, 2005;

Kochenderfer-Ladd & Pelletier, 2008; Lee et al., 2012). In all cases, individuals took

responsibilities for how they responded to bullying and made new choices about how to

do so.

Escape-Avoidance

A fifth theme that emerged was that of escape-avoidance, the opposite of

confronting bullies. Both during the time they were bullied and in later years, some

participants demonstrated avoidant behavior. As Participant 6 said, I spent a lot of time to

myself, I just got smarter than everyone else. As a child, I read a lot of books and got

smart. I was also avoidant as a child. Participant 10 also referenced this tendency to avoid

their circumstances, saying, I would cope by ignoring and avoiding the situation.

There were negative outcomes for those who engaged in avoidant behavior.

Although such behavior may have helped to avoid bullying, it had negative outcomes in

other instances. In at least one case, it had a negative impact on schooling. As reported by

Participant 8,

> I was more avoidant. I was also bullied on the school bus and I remember not
>
> wanting to go to school. My parents encouraged me to come with comebacks and
>
> stand up for myself. My parents helped me find ways to approach the bullying
>
> problem.

However, avoidant behavior did not necessarily end with the bullying. In later years, some of the participants noted that their avoidant behavior continued. As Participant 1 said, I stay to myself and pick and choose who I open up to. I'm still quiet and people do not understand me. Staying to myself and avoiding conflict. It causes a problem with my communication skills. Participant 9 stated, As an adolescent I coped with being bullied emotionally and avoidant. I still stayed friends with the same people even though they bullied me. I thought that it would go away.

Escape-Avoidance behavior was one of the most strongly supported themes in the narratives. Avoidance was also strongly present in the literature (Frydenberg & Lewis, 2009; Hansen et al., 2012; Lodge &Feldman, 2007). The literature suggested that older victims responded with avoidance more often (Hansen et al., 2012). This was supported by findings that middle school students were less likely to use avoidance methods to address their bullying (Eschenbeck et al., 2007). However, the existing literature was also informed by the current study. Every participant noted that they avoided their circumstances to some degree, making avoidant behavior the most commonly cited behavior in the narratives. The findings of the current study indicated that even if individuals later adopted different coping strategies, avoidant behavior occurred at some point, indicating that avoidance may overlap with other coping strategies. The nature of avoidant behavior meant that in some cases, it had negative outcomes in other areas of a participant's life. For some, it had negative effects in school. For others, the repercussions lasted into adulthood.

Problem-Solving

To deal with their behavior, participants sometimes attempted different ways to solve their problems. Elements of the problem-solving theme overlapped with other themes. For instance, Participant 2 attempted to talk with his bullies, an attempt to take a new approach to dealing with them: I talked to two of my bullies and one decided to listen and the other wanted to fight and when I stood up for myself he backed off.

However, there were other ways that participants attempted to problem solve. As Participant 4 said,

I learned somewhere around 15 or 16 with self-defecation. Learning how to take the power out of the abuser's hand. When the bully says you break everything you're such a klutz and saying yea I am. Taking the power away from them and not showing them that it upsets you.

For Participant 4, removing the power of his bullies was the solution, which was accomplished in a few days. Others considered fighting as the solution to their problem, again overlapping the problem-solving theme with other themes in the narratives. As Participant 7 said about problem solving, I fight back and I try to solve the problem myself without telling anyone or getting anyone involved. I problem-solve situations myself.

Problem-Solving as a theme therefore had significant overlap with the Confrontation theme, though the two were not identical. Individuals found other ways of problem solving that did not involve directly confronting their bullies.

Positive Reappraisal

The theme of positive-reappraisal involved reframing circumstances in such a way that those circumstances had a positive outcome. This was lightly addressed in the narratives, but involved discussion of how positive outcomes could emerge even when bullying occurred. As Participant 1 said, If you're strong minded, stay focused and stay positive things will work itself out.

Participant 10 addressed the theme a little more strongly, elaborating in greater detail how they responded to their circumstances. In the case of Participant 10, the reframing of their bullying occurred in a way that positioned them in a place to succeed, while their bullies failed. As she said,

> I was about 13 or 14 years old and when I would hear someone verbally bully me I would say it is funny almost as funny as you think it is. I figured these are the best years of their lives and they feel that they get to shine, until they grow up and get stuck in the same town. I would say laugh it up because you only have 3 years of high school left and then you're done.

Problem-solving happened in a number of ways in the narratives, and could potentially include a number of strategies found in the literature, including seeking social support (Andreou, 2001; Lodge & Feldman, 2007; Tenenbaum et al., 2011) and confronting bullies (Camodeca & Goossens, 2005; Kochenderfer-Ladd & Pelletier, 2008; Lee et al., 2012). The broad nature of the category meant that a number of responses could fit within it. Within the context of the current study, the ability to reframe negative experiences in a way that was positive was not mentioned much in the narratives.

However, as indicated by Participant 10, it could involve projecting how current behaviors may negatively impact bullies in the long-term, while allowing for the success of the participant. With these things having been said, this theme was among the most weakly supported, given the lack of response that clearly fell into the category of positive-reappraisal.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

According to Lincoln and Guba (1988), trustworthiness can only be obtained through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability in a qualitative study (Creswell & Miller, 2000). A qualitative approach was chosen to gain a rich understanding of the phenomenon being studied. The evidence of trustworthiness helps one to examine the quality of a phenomenological study (Lincoln & Guba, 1988). The following elements were employed to ensure trustworthiness in the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1988).

Credibility

Member checks were conducted during the interviews. The self-reported responses of participants were summarized and verified to ensure accuracy after each interview. In essence, the way I interpreted the reports was provided to the participant in order for them to check the validity and authenticity of the interpretation. Participants confirmed whether I was accurate and clarified their answer to the interview question.

Transferability

Transferability was established by collecting rich data, descriptive statements and transferring them into similar contexts. Direct quotes from the participants' interviews

were used to provide meaningful results to add to the knowledgebase of CBV. By providing accurate and clear, detailed descriptions of the setting and sample population, I was able to establish transferability within the study.

Dependability

I was able to establish dependability by accurately capturing the context in which the study occurred. In addition, the consistency and process were thoroughly examined to establish dependable results. Face-to-face interviews helped establish dependability and credibility in the study.

Confirmability

I was able to ensure that all seven themes and meaning units were accurately captured by documenting the procedures for checking and rechecking data throughout the study. Bias was minimized and acknowledged prior to conducting the study and throughout the bracketing process.

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Summary

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In chapter 4, I discussed the setting, sample demographics, narratives, thematic findings, data collection, findings and evidence of trustworthiness. Eleven participants were asked to answer 12 interview questions based on their coping and CBV experiences as an adolescent. This phenomenological study generated seven primary themes: (a) confrontation, (b) self-controlling, (c) seeking social support, (d) accepting responsibility, (e) escape-avoidance, (f) problem-solving, and (g) positive-reappraisal. The outcome of this research is based on a compiled comparison of the lived experiences shared by participants.

The findings for this study's research question provided information about the different coping strategies that young adults used as adolescents who were victims of bullying. Advice was given by each participant for those who might be experiencing childhood bullying currently and the lessons they learned based on their bullying experience. Many of the participants in the study used multiple coping strategies to cope with being bullied as a teen. Based on the data, most of the coping strategies derived from each participant's own personal way of approaching their situation, which included the consideration of his or her experience and the suggestions shared by others on how to handle bullying. Most of the participants found that their coping strategy did not work, while others were successful. Chapter 5 includes the interpretation of the findings, theoretical framework, limitations of the study, recommendations, implications for social change and reflections of the findings.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

Chapter 5 includes a discussion of the study's purpose, problem, research question, and methodology. In addition, the interpretation of the findings, theoretical framework, implications for social change, recommendations for further study, and critical reflections are included. Chapter 5 begins with a discussion of the method of inquiry and the intent of the study.

Overview

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand the lived experiences of childhood bullying victims and the coping strategies they adopted during adolescence. Also, the coping strategies bullying victims were still using as emerging adults to cope with past CBV were studied. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect each participant's data. All interviews were analyzed and compared with the coping strategies discussed by Lazarus and Folkman through the use of a qualitative, phenomenological approach. The analyses of these data was intended to determine the differences in coping strategies used and the effectiveness or success of these strategies to answer the research question. In this study, I examined the different coping strategies former victims of CBV used to manage and overcome being bullied. The following research question guided my selection of using a qualitative, phenomenological approach to understand the lived experiences of participants' CBV: What long-term coping strategies do young adults develop in adapting from being bullied as a teenager?

The role of a phenomenologist is to understand and accurately describe how a person experiences a situation (Moustakas, 1994). When using a phenomenological approach, a researcher must focus on the meaning of an individual's lived experience as it occurs (Moustakas, 1994). Although previous research had been conducted on CBV coping strategies, little work had been done on how those who were bullied as adolescents continued to cope as emerging adults with the victimization that they experienced (Hemphill et al., 2014), and a phenomenological approach had not been used. I decided to use a phenomenological approach to fill this gap in the literature to explore and better understand the strategies that participants who were childhood victims of bullying used to cope. Purposive sampling was used to recruit participants. Inclusion criteria (young adults between the ages of 18 and 22 who were victims of childhood bullying between the ages of 12 and 18 and were residing in Atlanta, Georgia) were forwarded to the community partner's social media and the Walden Participant Pool website via an announcement and flyer (Appendix A and B) with the intent of recruiting participants. To ensure that the criteria were met, I reviewed the informed consent to make sure participants understood the nature of the study. Eleven participants were willing to discuss their CBV experiences during a 1-hour recorded interview.

Coping With Childhood Bullying Victimization

The findings in this study supported those from previous studies on CBV. Previous research indicated that long-term bullying can reduce the ability of victims to cope (Garnefski & Kraaij, 2014; Skrzypiec et al., 2011). A gap that this study was intended to fill was the effectiveness of different coping strategies with regard to bullying

(see Visconti et al., 2013). Individuals' ability to cope with stress is necessary for the maintenance of their psychological and emotional well-being (Lazarus, 2006), and positive coping strategies have been associated with a lower likelihood of being continuously bullied by peers (Tenenbaum et al., 2011). Additionally, researchers found that victims who used approach coping strategies functioned better than those who used avoidance strategies, as approach coping strategies involve working toward the resolution of their problem (Lodge & Feldman, 2007). This was supported by the current study's results.

Different coping strategies used by victims of bullying have been identified in the literature (Andreou, 2001; Bellmore et al., 2013; Tenenbaum et al., 2011). One common approach consists of seeking support (Andreou, 2001), and other approaches consist of problem-solving, tension reduction, distancing, cognitive restructuring, and internalizing behaviors (Bellmore et al., 2013; Mahady Wilton et al., 2000; Skrzypiec et al., 2011; Tenenbaum et al., 2011). Coping strategies that are nonproductive are also commonly used by bullying victims, which can include not seeking help, avoiding the issue, hurting themselves and others, and suicidal ideation (Batanova et al., 2014). Not all of the strategies discussed in previous studies were found in the current study.

The use of problem-solving strategies among bullied adolescents such as conflict resolution had been found to be associated with a reduction in bullying (Kochenderfer-Ladd, 2004; Kochenderfer-Ladd & Pelletier, 2008; Salmivalli et al., 1996), and retaliation had been associated with an increase in bullying (Camodeca & Goossens, 2005). Externalizing behavior had also been associated with an increase in bullying (Kanetsuna

et al., 2006; Mahady Wilton et al., 2000; Visconti & Troop-Gordon, 2010). Additionally, those who coped by distancing themselves from the bullying incident were also more likely to report as being depressed and anxious (Kochenderfer-Ladd & Pelletier, 2008). These outcomes, along with self-esteem, were also the result of avoidant coping strategies (Forns et al., 2012; Hansen et al., 2012). Direct and approach coping strategies, such as seeking support and receiving advice from others, had been found to be effective, and self-blame or other emotion-focused strategies were largely ineffective (Skrzypiec et al., 2011). Internal coping methods were common among victims of bullies (Andreou, 2001). Adaptive coping strategies, such as asking a friend for advice, seeking help, or reporting the incident to a teacher, were frequently difficult for bullying victims to implement. Additionally, bullying victims implemented multiple coping strategies simultaneously (Compas, 1987; Tenenbaum et al., 2011; Waasdorp & Bradshaw, 2011). The pattern of positive and negative results was mirrored in the present study, in addition to the use of multiple coping strategies.

The victim's choice of strategy can lead to either positive or negative results (Donoghue et al., 2014). The choice of strategy depends on factors such as the frequency with which one is bullied (Kochenderfer-Ladd & Pelletier, 2008), the perception of the amount of control the victim has over the bullying situation, and his or her confidence level (Hunter & Boyle, 2004; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). However, there is frequently a mismatch between the coping strategy and the situation (Lazarus, 2006; Roth & Cohen, 1986), and some researchers found coping strategy to be associated with psychological welfare (Garnefski & Kraaii, 2014).

Interpretation of the Findings

The findings in this study were derived from interviews with young adults who had experienced CBV during adolescence. The results in this study were derived from an analysis of each participant's response to interview questions, the researcher's notes, the literature review on CBV, and the study's theoretical framework. The analysis conducted for this study indicated seven major themes: confrontation, self-controlling, seeking social support, accepting responsibility, escape-avoidance, problem-solving, and positive reappraisal. Although confrontation focused on how participants confronted their bullies, the self-controlling theme related to how participants reasserted control of their life. Seeking social support focused on finding help from others, and accepting responsibility relating to the acceptance of responsibility by making purposeful decisions and changes in mind-set. Escape-avoidance related to avoidant behavior. Problem-solving focused on how participants attempted to end bullying, while positive reappraisal related to the reframing of circumstances of bullying to view them more positively.

With regard to confrontation, this was frequently physical, and at times produced further negative consequences for the victim. This form of coping was found to be common among victims of bullying, and could also take the form of verbal actions or the combination of physical and verbal confrontations. With regard to self-controlling, victims eventually began to control their emotional responses, which allowed them to transcend their experiences of bullying. In this way, this strategy was not specifically focused on reducing bullying, and in many cases this response appeared to be positive. In some cases, this strategy was indicative of the respondent having become mentally

stronger. However, the possibility of overcompensation associated with this strategy may have resulted in negative outcomes. Seeking social support, which consisted of programs as well as family support, was not used frequently by participants in the current study. The minimal use of this strategy precluded conclusions regarding its effectiveness. With respect to accepting responsibility, some individuals found methods by which they took on greater responsibility for their circumstances and for assuming responsibility in their lives. This new way of responding to their circumstances was viewed as being beneficial, having such effects as increased confidence, changing poor patterns of behavior, and standing up for themselves. This strategy also included transitioning from negative and harmful responses to bullying to positive ones.

With respect to escape-avoidance, some participants mentioned that their avoidant behavior continued years after the bullying stopped. This behavior was mentioned frequently, with every participant mentioning some degree of avoidance. This strategy was also associated with negative outcomes in other areas of life, including school, and some negative effects lasted into adulthood. Problem-solving, which overlapped with other themes, included attempting to talk to bullies, removing the power of their bullies, and elements of confrontation. Positive reappraisal focused on reframing circumstances so that they had a positive outcome, but this strategy was minimally addressed in the qualitative data. This strategy included framing how positive outcomes could emerge in the face of bullying, as well as reframing the situation so that the victim was in a place to succeed. This strategy was also mentioned minimally by participants; however, this appeared to be an effective approach.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical and conceptual framework used in this study was Lazarus and Folkman's (1987) transactional model of stress coping. In this model, coping is categorized as either emotion focused or problem focused, with emotion-focused coping focusing on the individual's internal emotional state (Bradshaw et al., 2013a; Danielson & Emmers-Sommer, 2017; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) and negative emotions being managed by individuals distancing themselves from their situation. Alternatively, problem-focused coping methods allow for the learning of new skills and allow a person to find alternative solutions to a problem (Danielson & Emmers-Sommer, 2017; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). In this approach, the self and the problem are both considered. The effectiveness of coping strategies was analyzed in this study through the framework of Lazarus and Folkman's transactional theory, and the study's results generally supported the theory.

Lazarus and Folkman's (1987) transactional model of coping was useful in this study to explain how emerging adults developed their coping strategies and overcame CBV. Some of the strategies that were developed and used by emerging adults who were bullied as teens reflected Lazarus and Folkman's primary and secondary appraisal. Emerging adults in the study assessed their environment and took control of their bullying situation to determine whether they should respond (Lazarus & Folkman, 1987). The outcome showed that many of the participants relied on themselves to handle bullying incidents in school. Participants in the study shared their strategies for coping with CBV. Some of the coping strategies addressed in Chapter 2 were described by

participants during the interviews. Not all of the coping strategies reported by participants were considered effective.

Limitations of the Study

The scope of this study was limited to emerging adult victims who experienced bullying during adolescence. Because of this delimitation, the results are not generalizable beyond this particular sample. The extent to which the results are applicable for any other population is unknown, including children, adolescents, or adults who are actively being bullied.

Second, purposive sampling was used in this study. Purposive sampling produces a nonrandom sample, which limits the extent to which the results found in the study can be generalized to a larger population (Patton, 2002). Although the results reflected the small sample of respondents interviewed for this study, the generalizability of these results is unknown.

Additionally, self-reporting was a limitation in this study. Specifically, individuals who are bullied as adolescents might not want to speak about their experiences being bullied. Specific instances of having been bullied may have been omitted or changed during the interview process. Additionally, participants' memory of the events that took place as adolescents might not have been completely accurate. Self-report errors frequently occur in research of this type, which can include errors of bias and omission (Creswell, 2000). Self-report of previous CBV experiences was a limitation to this study because it introduced the possibility of bias and omission in the data collected and analyzed. I used bracketing procedures (a journal) to reduce the risk of researcher bias.

Additionally, the use of semi-structured interviews may also have been a limitation of this study due to the possibility of influence that may have occurred during the interview process (see Creswell, 2000). Specifically, individuals who took part in the study might have been influenced by the me during the interview process. In the semi-structured interview format, participants were able to share their CBV experiences and how they coped.

Some of the limitations that were anticipated and presented in Chapter 1 did not occur within this study. To ensure privacy and confidentiality amongst participants, I provided a list of resources in the event they became distressed in sharing their CBV experiences in the interview. I did not experience any difficulty in receiving signed consent forms for each participant included in this study. By implementing a number of procedures, including member checking, collecting rich data, pattern matching, bracketing my personal biases, and using thick descriptions, I was able to increase the credibility, transferability, confirmability, and dependability of my study. The findings in my study will provide a basis for further research on CBV and how an individual copes with being bullied.

Implications

The results of this study carry a potential positive impact for social change at the individual, family, and organizational and societal levels. Having a better understanding of what coping strategies work in terms of reducing bullying, as well as what strategies have positive effects, allows individuals to use these specific coping strategies, and to avoid those having negative or no effects when encountering bullying. By distributing

this information through the organization of the school, families can inform their children of how to better deal with bullying. This would then have positive effects for the organization of the school as well as society, as individuals would suffer fewer ill effects of bullying.

The results of the study also support the theoretical and conceptual frameworks which were relied upon, providing support for Lazarus and Folkman's Transactional theory (1984). Methodologically, the results of the study suggest the value of taking a phenomenological, qualitative approach in the study of this area. This would suggest the further value of additional research being conducted in this area that takes a similar approach.

Recommendations

A number of recommendations for future research can be provided based on the limitations of the present study, along with its strengths, and the literature reviewed in Chapter 2. First, regarding the study's limitations, future research could expand upon this area of literature by expanding the scope of the sample beyond emerging adult victims who experience bullying during their adolescence. Future research could also examine children and adolescents who are currently undergoing bullying, as well as adults who are currently experiencing bullying. Future research could also examine samples taken from other countries in order to determine whether the patterns found here hold in these other samples. Future studies could also potentially take random samples of specific populations such that the results obtained would have greater external validity and generalizability to this larger sample. Regarding self-reporting and issues of memory, one

way in which to overcome this limitation would be to examine individuals who are currently undergoing bullying and asking them about their experiences and coping strategies that they are presently using. While this would not account for self-reporting bias, this would provide more accurate data.

Overall, this study has provided this area of literature with a stronger foundation by which to understand coping strategies in relation to bullying. Future studies, potentially using a larger sample of respondents, could provide further detail with regard to specific coping strategies, and potentially find other strategies that victims of bullying also use in order to cope. Further detail would help to understand the interplay between these different coping strategies as well as their positive and negative effects. Additionally, the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 further suggests the importance of studying this area in additional detail due to the lack of research conducted up to this point.

Dissemination of Findings

The goal in collecting and analyzing these data consisted of improving the understanding of the ways in which emerging adults continue to cope after having been bullied as well as how they perceive their own coping strategies. The findings in the study can be used to assist adolescents who are being bullied or who are at risk for bullying through the assistance of professionals, parents, and researchers. I aimed to produce findings which could be used to help create anti-bullying programs and interventions for those being bullied, as well as to provide some guidance as to the effectiveness of various coping strategies. I plan to disseminate my findings through

various avenues such as publishing in academic journals, educational seminars, and periodicals. In addition, I also plan to disseminate these findings by attending speaking engagements at local academic conferences.

Researcher's Critical Reflections

CBV is a phenomenon that many children and adolescents will experience, and is one that is often not addressed in research. This research as well as continuing study in this field will help us understand the coping strategies of emerging adults who were bullied during adolescence. The distress experienced by the victims of bullying can frequently lead to short- as well as long-term psychological problems (Connell et al., 2016; Lemstra et al., 2012), with adverse outcomes often experienced in adulthood (Hoffman et al., 2017; Kochenderfer-Ladd, 2004).

Knowing that there are young adults between the ages of 18 and 22 who found ways to cope with their CBV experience and continue with their lives can help current victims to not feel alone. By providing advice on CBV, adolescents can better relate to the bullying experiences of emerging adults. In addition, it is important that school officials become better equipped with how to help adolescents cope effectively with being bullied. This is important when a student does not have anyone else such as a family member or friend to help them cope with CBV. The seven themes that emerged from the interviews; confrontation, self-controlling, seeking social support, accepting responsibility, escape-avoidance, problem-solving, and positive-reappraisal, revealed several different ways in which one copes with CBV.

Researcher's Experience With Conducting This Study

I was aware of my personal biases and the need to separate them from my data. A journal was kept so that I could separate my feelings and viewpoint about coping with CBV. I had a general interest in CBV and how emerging adults coped. As a family mediator, I worked with many children and their families. I was familiar with CBV and how it affects the emotional and social wellbeing of youth.

Many of my close friends and family members were victims of bullying. I had no preconceived notions of how participants would respond about coping with CBV as emerging adults. During the interview, I was surprised by the impact CBV has on emerging adults and the coping methods they chose. When conducting interviews for this project, the experiences of participants' CBV as adolescents were emotional at times and hard to listen to. During the interview, many participants shared the painful experiences of their past CBV. Their stories of CBV painted a picture of what it is like to be isolated and alone as a teenager.

Conclusion

In conclusion, by examining the coping strategies of emerging adults who experienced CBV during adolescence, I was able to determine which coping methods were effective and ineffective. As participants shared their CBV coping experiences, I was able to understand their thought process, decisions-making skills, and actions when coping. The use of coping strategies that helped each participant overcome their bullying incident was influenced by their age, experience, and maturity level. I found that coping strategies each participant used to help them overcome CBV depended on the type of

bullying situation. The participants in the study showed that it is possible to overcome CBV successfully and to continue to live a healthy life. Most of the emerging adults in the study stated that their success in coping with CBV was partially based on their own support for themselves, along with the support of friends and family members.

This study filled an important gap in the literature by determining the coping strategies used by emerging adults who were bullied in their adolescence as well as the positive and negative effects of these coping strategies and their effectiveness. If implemented, the results found in this study can be used in order to help children and adolescents cope with bullying in an effective way, and in a way in which positive results are obtained in the future. While the study incorporated a series of limitations, future studies could help to overcome these limitations as well as continue to expand upon this important area of research.

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Appendix A: Recruitment Flyer

Childhood Bully Victims

Walden University Doctoral Research Study

Did you experience Bullying as a child?

Would you be willing to talk about it?

All participation in this research study is voluntary

If you:

Are 18 -22 years old (6 Male & 6 Female)

- Were a victim of childhood bullying.

- Were bullied (physical, sexual, racial/ethnic, or social) during adolescence at (12-18 years old).

I would like to interview you!!

If you meet these criteria, please contact the researcher for this study. Please remember that you have the right as a participant to withdraw at any time in this study.

Appendix B: Announcement of Study

Coping with Childhood Bullying Victimization

Walden University Doctoral Research Study

Were you a victim of bullying as a child?
Would you be willing to talk about it?

All participation in this research study is voluntary

If you:

Are 18 -22 years old (6 Male & 6 Female)

- Were a victim of childhood bullying.

- Were bullied during adolescence at 12-18 years old (physical, sexual, racial/ethnic, or social).

I would like to interview you!!

All participation is voluntary. Participants can withdraw from the study any time. If you meet these criteria and are interested in being a part of this study, please contact the researcher of the study.

Appendix C: Interview Questions

1. Can you recall the first time you were bullied? What happened?

2. What form (s) of bullying did you experience as a child? (physical, emotional, verbal, social, or cyber bullying).

3. Could you describe a situation in which the bullying incident occurred?

4. How did you cope as an adolescent when being bullied (emotionally, avoidant, or problem-focused)?

5. What were you doing as adolescents and how does it relate to how you are doing today?

6. How do you as an adult treat others? Do you tend to try to dominate, submit, or avoid in personal or work relationships?

7. What personality changes if any have you experienced, since being bullied as a child?

8. Have you been bullied as an adult? How have you handled it?

9. Have you developed any specific way to deal with Bullies as a result of your childhood experiences?

10. What advice do you have for those who are experiencing as adolescents some form of bullying?

11. How did family, teachers, and community members support your experience of

being bullied? Did you receive counseling?

12. How do you view bullying now that you are an adult?

Appendix D: Bullying Resources

Crisis Call Center-

Website: http://crisiscallcenter.org

Call 1-775-784-8090 the organization offers 24/7 phone and chat support for victims.

Kooth –

Website https://kooth.com/ it is an online counseling service provider for victims of bullying.

Stomp Out Bullying –

Website: www.stompingoutbullying.org

Call 1-877-602-8559 or chat live with a professional.

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline –

Website: https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/

Call 1-800-273-8255 it is a 24hr hotline for victims.