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Bullying on a College Campus: A Qualitative Study

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Walden University

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Arnita D. Walls-Pickett

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
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the review committee have been made.

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The Office of the Provost

Walden University
2019

Abstract

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by

Arnita D. Walls-Pickett

MS, National Louis University, 2005

BA, DePaul University, 2003

Project Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

September 2019

Abstract

Bullying in higher education has become a global concern on college campuses and is occurring in face-to-face encounters and through social media. Bullying contributes to hundreds of thousands of students dropping out of their higher education programs annually. This qualitative study brings more awareness to the uncivil behaviors occurring on college campuses. The 4th of the Seven Vectors of Identity Development articulated by Chickering and Reisser: developing mature interpersonal relationships, provided the conceptual framework. Two research questions investigated whether bullying took place on a single college campus and how the bullying revealed itself. Eight alumni participated in face to face semistructured interviews on the institution's campus. Findings are based on individual participant perceptions that were analyzed for themes recurring throughout the interviews. Five themes: *bullying*, *campus setting*, *community members involved*, *institutional support*, and *impact* provided insight into the overall campus climate in the local setting as it pertains to bullying activities in a higher education context. The findings revealed that bullying occur on the campus of the institution studied. These findings may contribute to positive social change by encouraging future research and may influence higher education administrators to take steps to mitigate the risks of bullying on their campuses.

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Dedication

I dedicate this work to my beloved mother, Brenda E. Walls (1952–2003). You are no longer here with me on this Earth, but you are still in my heart. It was your words “The sky is the limit” that have driven me to keep pushing, to stay encouraged, and to achieve success. It was our struggles, our talks, our debates, our laughs, and your faith and belief in me that have influenced my journey. Mama, you are gone in the flesh, but your spirit is not forgotten and lives on in me. I am writing this book in your memory and know that you would be most proud of me. I love and miss you dearly.

With all my heart, your Bumpy!

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To my dear Aunt Yolanda Walls-Leftridge, thank you for planting the seed that exposed me to bigger and better things and for your unwavering support and unconditional love all my life. Thank you to my Uncles Renaldo and William, and my Auntie Debra Walls for their commitment to support me and my children over the years. Thanks to the rest of my associates, family, and friends who truly supported me, and a humble thanks to those who did not: Your actions contributed to my success as well.

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As I move on to the next chapter of my life, I want you all to know that I appreciate the unconditional love and support you have given me over these past few years.

Peace and love,

Your wife, mother, relative, colleague, and friend

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Section 1: The Problem

The Local Problem

Bullying is a form of harassment that presents a threat to the health, safety and welfare of others. This behavior is revealed in a variety of environments, including the classroom, social situations, and the workplace (Misawa, 2015a). More specifically, it has been identified as a problem in higher education, and it is increasingly identified as a sensitive subject matter as it relates to students on campus (Lawrence, 2017). Doğrue and Yaratan (2014) described bullying as negative and unwelcomed behaviors that make the persons being bullied unable to protect or defend themselves against the bully. The theological institution at which this study was conducted, referred to by the pseudonym Expert College (EC), is in the upper midwestern portion of the United States and continues to serve as a theological seminary. Officials at EC indicated no formal cases of bullying have been reported in recent years, but given that the institution has no operational definition of bullying on campus and has put little emphasis on dealing with this kind of behavior, the degree to which its experience reflects the extent of the problem is unclear, in the view of the administration (dean of students, personal communication, June 5, 2018).

According to that personal communication from the dean, in 2013 the institution had implemented policies and procedures related only to harassment in general, and sexual harassment in particular, to comply with the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and including the Title IX Higher Education Amendments of 1972 (hereafter referred to as

Title IX). According to the dean, the Title IX training that was put in place to adhere to the Higher Education Amendments was extended to include more general topics relating to harassment, although bullying, specifically for nonprotected class issues, has not yet been included. In addition, training does not yet inform faculty, staff, or students on how best to identify, prevent, and address bullying on the EC campus.

For the campus to endeavor to be bully free, the administration needed and wanted to determine whether a culture of bullying on its campus exists. In addition, the administration was interested in putting in place policies and procedures to prevent and effectively manage this unwelcomed behavior (EC president, personal communication, June 5, 2018), should it be found to exist. More important, it is not clear to the dean of students that all members of the institution's campus community who fall victim to bullying understand that they can report this behavior on campus without fear of retaliation or that problems will not be addressed promptly. To assist with this concern, the campus president and dean of students recently authorized a new page on the college website that allows all members of the campus community to report incidents involving uncivil behaviors. Although different categories of reportable discriminatory and behavioral misconduct are listed in a drop-down, such as sexual misconduct, gender identity, disability, sexual orientation, age, race, and religion, no specific category for bullying is included. Recently, the category of Other was added to the drop-down to provide additional opportunity for students to report misconduct (dean of students, personal communication, June 5, 2018). Therefore, my purpose in this qualitative case

study was to determine if bullying is occurring on a single college campus, identified in this study as EC.

Rationale for the Study

Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level

Although no official reports of bullying behavior on this campus were made in the last decade, administrators at EC suggested that unreported bullying could potentially threaten the institutional enrollment and reputation (dean of students, personal communication, June 5, 2018). As a result, EC's president and dean of students offered support for this study (EC president, personal communication, June 5, 2018), and conversations with the president of EC about surveying students on their experiences with bullying influenced the design of this survey. EC leaders look forward to using the resulting data and potential recommendations to improve their complaint gathering and help to shape how members of the community should respond to complaints of bullying (dean of students, personal communication, June 5, 2018).

Evidence of the Problem From the Professional Literature

According to Cardin (2014), bullying appears to be happening throughout higher education in a variety of ways, in both face-to-face encounters and social media platforms. Cardin described research showing that bullying in higher education is prevalent and contributes to over 100,000 students dropping out of colleges and universities annually. Since the year 2000, there has been a national push to build awareness of bullying and to stop harassment and bullying in public places, including

higher learning institutions (Sinkkonen, Puhakka, & Merlainen, 2014). Lawrence (2017) suggested that educational leadership must first begin to define bullying behaviors to improve its college campus climate. Sinkkonen et al. also suggested that a need exists to add more studies on bullying to the research catalog to help build an awareness of the problem bullying presents within a higher education context. This study supports their research recommendations.

Extant literature indicates a problem on many college campuses, and in this study, I determined the extent of the problem on this local campus. By looking at the local situation and based on the literature indicating that bullying is happening on college campuses, I expected to find specific information that might be used in discussions of the problem on campus to influence policy-making at EC and that could also assist similar institutions with this issue.

According to Salmivalli (2014), another social characteristic of bullying is that bystanders are usually present during incidents of bullying. Salmivalli further described bystanders as individuals who reinforce the behavior of the bully. However, more attention needs to be paid to complete our understanding of how bullying manifests itself and how best to minimize its impact within higher education communities (Giorgi, 2012). Although many consider bullying incidents as one-time events, patterns of bullying in organizations can extend over long time spans. In a study conducted by McKay, Arnold, Fratzl, and Thomas (2008), participants indicated that bullying in the workplace and

college environments had occurred, and that in some specific cases, the behavior had lasted for more than 5 years.

Another study conducted by Keashly and Neuman (2008) reinforced this impression, noting that their sample of faculty, staff, administrators, and others reported that bullying behaviors had gone on for more than 3 years. Indvik (2012) argued that individual bullies are ultimately responsible for their own behavior. However, employers like higher education institutions become complicit if they do not face the issues directly and may face legal ramifications if a pattern of bullying persists that creates a hostile work or study environment.

Regionally, context exists for institutions to begin to address issues relating to bullying. In the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities system (Minnesota State), initiatives are currently in place that require member institutions to implement procedures designed to manage bullying (Minnesota State, n.d.). Minnesota State bullying compliance procedures fall within efforts to control discrimination and harassment and mirror efforts elsewhere to build awareness about and address bullying on college campuses (Giorgi, 2012). Myers and Cowie (2016) described bullying as a power imbalance between the bully and the person being bullied.

Anoka-Hennepin schools in Minnesota have formed an antibullying / antiharassment task force that consists of stakeholders from the school and the community who have been charged with addressing overall harassment complaints made by both parents and students to ensure a healthy and positive environment on their K–12

campuses (Anoka County, 2016). Faucher, Cassidy, and Jackson (2015) reported many “commonalities of experiences” in relation to types of bullying that occur in K–12 schools, at places of employment, and on college campuses.

In this study, I drew on literature relating to bullying in K–12, workplace, and higher education settings to develop a more comprehensive understanding of this phenomenon. I presented additional information for policymaking specifically tailored to help protect EC students, enhance the campus climate, and limit institutional liability. By current law, institutions are required to be transparent to existing and potential stakeholders regarding campus safety (Department of Justice, 2015).

Definitions of Terms

In this study, I have used the following terms:

Bullying: Repeated, unwanted negative behaviors such as threats, intimidation, force, or harm subjected to others that takes place in time (Atkinson, 2014).

Harassment: Discriminatory and/or negative behaviors that are unwelcomed or unwanted that can be physical and/or verbal (Indvik, 2012).

Higher Education Amendments of 1972 (Title IX): A United States federal law that prohibits discrimination based on gender in a federally funded education program or activity. The objective of Title IX is to avoid the use of federal money to fund or support sex discrimination and to provide citizens protection against those practices (Department of Justice [DOJ], 2015).

Mobbing: A specific term used to describe bullying that occurs to an individual by a group or persons (Faucher et al., 2015).

Significance of the Study

My qualitative study is socially significant in its exploration of the effects of bullying behavior at the EC institution of higher education. The study results will help the EC administration better understand the degree to which students have encountered bullying on campus, and when encountered, in what form(s) it occurred. I gathered information from the local site that may be useful to other higher education institutions, and as the literature described, show comparisons to uncivil behaviors in K–12 settings that may transfer to higher education settings. Chappel et al. (2004) suggested that bullying is common in K–12 settings, and that when bullies leave K–12 and move on to higher education, they can take those behaviors with them.

Research Questions

EC has no reports of bullying in recent years, but there is a suspicion based on anecdotes that it may be occurring (dean of students, personal communication, June 5, 2018). The two guiding research questions for this study are based on past research reported in the literature review as well as the stated needs of the institution.

RQ1: What are the EC alumni’s perceptions of the manifestation and pervasiveness of bullying?

RQ2: What perceived influence did bullying have, personally or academically, on alumni who observed or experienced bullying on the EC campus during their studies, and afterwards, and in their careers?

Review of the Literature

This review of scholarly literature reflects material represented in the ERIC, ProQuest, SAGE, and EBSCO databases. In addition, I have reviewed material available in local libraries. These resources have proven to be valuable in laying the framework for this inquiry and for continuing discussions of bullying within higher education contexts. The literature review addressed two components of this study and includes (a) the critical review of the larger problem of bullying to be addressed in the local setting and (b) a description of bullying in the context of higher education. Key words used to search for literature were *uncivil behavior, bullying, harassment, higher education, church, seminary, students, K–12, hazing, workplace bullying, colleges, and universities*.

Conceptual Framework

I used the fourth vector of Chickering and Reisser’s Seven Vectors of Identity Development, *developing mature interpersonal relationships*, to guide this study (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Chickering and Reisser (1993) described this vector as a tool that will promote acceptance, respect difference, and recognize things people have in common. For this study, this vector was useful in analyzing participant responses in terms of whether “intercultural relations,” “appreciation for others,” and “tolerance for those around them” on the EC college campus are important to the institution (see

Chickering & Reisser, 1993). This concept was important to my understanding of the phenomenon and permitted me to provide broader connections to evidence of bullying that exists at EC. The vector was also helpful in increasing my perceptions in terms of the impact of disruptions on the development of identity and social integration of affected (bullied) students.

Review of the Broader Problem

In the past, most concern has been placed on bullying in the K–12 environment, but recently that concern has expanded to include postsecondary educational environments (Fauscher, Cassidy, & Jackson, 2015). Recent incidents involving suicides of school-aged and college students whose deaths were related to some form of bullying have raised a more global concern about how young people are treated and how they react to this kind of behavior (Washington, 2014). Studies of bullying in organizations within the United States have also become widespread, and increasingly, bullying is viewed as a challenge people face from cradle to grave (Carden & Boyd, 2013). Kohut (2008) suggested that all Americans will experience bullying at some point in their lives and careers, and Washington (2014) explained the importance of building awareness about social bullying and ways to deal with it both on and off campus. Washington also noted that, although bullying is not new to our society, campuses have begun to focus on its effects only within the last 20 years. Druzhilov (2012) stated that bullying, and its effects, began being noticed in the 1960s, but at that time, it was often referred to as *mobbing*. Bullying can be initiated through a wide variety of social contacts, and it relates

to some combination of physical threats, nonverbal and verbal harassment, body language, and cyberbullying (Washington, 2014). More important, Poole (2016) stated that typically students have only a few ways, if any, to protect themselves but may experience retribution and feel punished if they report the behavior.

Misawa (2015a) described three major sources for bullying on campus:

- *Positional bullying*: bullying by a person in a position of power.
- *Counter-positional bullying*: bullying by a person who is in a position of less power. Example: someone who is a peer or external partner.
- *Unintentional conspirative positional bullying*: bullying by a group of two or more people in both superior and subordinate positions of power acting simultaneously and collaboratively, often based on race, gender, or sexual orientation.

These categories illustrate the diversity of types of bullying that have been recognized.

Druzhilov (2012) also described bullying as either *vertical* or *horizontal*. Vertical bullying is initiated by a supervisor or other persons in positions of authority, whereas horizontal bullying is initiated by a peer or colleague. Although that distinction is important, both Druzhilov (2012) and Misawa (2015a) focused more on categories and less on bullying practices and patterns in the behavior of bullies that must be addressed to discourage the practice.

A study conducted at an Italian university (Giorgi, 2012) described how bullying creates a negative environment, and that addressing its effects on those charged with maintaining a positive student experience on campus is necessary. Institutions like EC,

however, have not yet determined if and how bullying affects their students and have not developed policies to combat this kind of behavior.

More studies are needed on bullying within higher education to ensure that this kind of uncivil behavior is detected, reported, and addressed on campus (Giorgi, 2012). Leiber (2010) suggested that leaders are making common mistakes when confronting cases of bullying by ignoring it or discounting it as a rite of passage on campus.

Bullying on Campus

College may be challenging for learners as they seek new ways to engage with new peers on or off campus, adjust to new lifestyle changes, and fulfill the need to express themselves differently in social and classroom settings (Vespone, 2016). A study conducted at a single institution in the Czech Republic indicated that college campuses are being viewed by the general public as places where bullying has become prevalent, where opportunities to bully are plentiful, and where key stakeholders and others working in and served by these institutions are frequent targets (Zabrodska & Kveton, 2013).

Bullying can also occur in other settings. The research of Faucher et al. (2015) showed that bullying of students can occur on or off campus, in classrooms, in residence halls, within campus organizations, or at campus events. Faucher et al. cited examples of someone in a supervisory role (e.g., residence hall advisor, coach, faculty, staff member in a campus office, officer of a student organization, upper class student) targeting students for bullying, either in public or private settings. This same study noted that

bullying in higher education can also reflect multiple peers coming together against another student.

According to Indvik and Johnson (2012), bullies have no specific appearance, shape, religion, or size. They are predators who practice a form of domestic violence while abusing their authority or role. The authors also suggested that bullying occurs without respect to gender or race, and that bullies can best be described as men or women who “walk in on two feet.” Although they found that men are more likely to bully than women, incidents involving people of both sexes are regularly reported, and they found that victims of bullying are not limited to one race or gender. Given that higher education still operates hierarchically, institutional power can be used for ill, leaving students, including those who identify as female, susceptible to being bullied (Ng, 2011). Like Misawa (2015b), I included in this study students who experienced bullying because they were either within protected classes or were a first-year graduate student.

In some cases, the results of bullying can be quite serious and have received national attention. For instance, in an incident that occurred at Florida A&M University in 2011, Robert Champion died during a hazing incident on the marching band bus. Champion’s drum major initiation to the band was completed by his being hit and punched with fists, kicked, and beaten by fellow band members (Mytelka, 2015). The one positive outcome in all of this was that it raised the profile of hazing and other forms of bullying and encouraged institutions across the country to reform institutional policies (Silveria & Hudson, 2015). Blatant cases of hazing on campus are dealt with as they

occur, but they are considered aberrations, and as Leiber (2010) noted, those in charge too often make the mistake of thinking the behaviors will just stop without their intervention.

Bullying Using Social Media

In addition to more traditional kinds of bullying that take place in higher education, bullying on social media platforms, including Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and the like, is now viewed as a growing problem (Washington, 2014). Washington (2014) also reported that social media play a major role in current academic environments and have come to occupy a prominent place in discussions about bullying. Recently, a student at Rutgers University committed suicide in 2012 after his roommate provided a video feed to their college peers of his homosexual activity (NoBullying, 2014). Although this is an extreme case, it clearly demonstrates that cyberbullying can have consequences.

Social media is also increasing awareness among the general public of bullying on campus, making it critical that colleges and universities demonstrate that they can successfully manage all kinds of bullying (Gloor, 2014b). *Cyberbullying* has been defined as the transmission of threats using social media, to include cell phones, text messaging, and other electronic mechanisms, and can contribute to the development and maintenance of a negative environment (Washington, 2014). It can also occur only once or recur. Cyberbullying can be direct or indirect through social contexts, can contribute to physical, social, emotional, and psychological health-related issues (Atkinson, 2014;

Washington, 2014). Therefore, it will be important to educate society on the effects of bullying through social media channels (Smith, Minor, & Brashen, 2014).

Student Retention

Bullying may threaten the success of students as they make the transition from high school to postsecondary institutions and embark upon college life. Sinkkonen et al. (2014) conducted research at a Finnish university on whether students who had experienced bullying would respond in an active or passive way. They found that active students reacted by removing themselves from class to try to avoid encountering the bully, thus disrupting their studies. On the other hand, passive students did nothing and tolerated unwelcome attention only to find later that they were experiencing emotional issues such as depression, low confidence, and even a loss of motivation to continue their studies. Giorgio (2012) explained how bullying within educational systems is most often spoken of within K–12 contexts but noted that it is also common on college campuses. Bullying in any setting, whether in the public or private sector, K–12 or higher education, can have an adverse effect on those students being bullied and lead to retention issues (Atkinson, 2014). Risks to institutions can include low morale, loss of productivity, and poor attendance among its community members, including students and student workers (Lieber, 2010).

A study by Keuskamp, Ziersch, Baum, and LaMontagne (2012) compared the risk of bullying by contract employees with that of bullying by permanent employees. The authors cited several services on campus that had been outsourced to external

organizations and consultants involved in grant-related, mission-based, or project-related work on campus. The outside consultants were not technically employed by the institution but worked directly with student workers. Keuskamp et al. noted that, although consultants are not college or university employees, the institution is still responsible for mitigating risks to students by external partners located on or near the campus or who work under the auspices of the institution.

Managing Complaints of Bullying

King and Piotrowski (2015) asserted that it is not uncommon in higher education contexts that the best course of action is to simply avoid the person who is behaving as a bully. However, this approach can perpetuate the bullying behavior and portray those who encounter bullying as responsible for the bullying or victimization they experienced (Garland, Policastro, Richards, & Miller, 2017).

Carden and Boyd (2013) argued that institutions need to implement a risk management framework to mitigate bullying and institutional liability for it. Developing and implementing a risk management plan will better position EC to manage uncivil behavior in the context of the institutional mission. Gumbus and Lyons (2011) reported that most organizations do not try to eliminate or mediate situations of bullying and noted that bullying on college campuses brought high costs to institutions when the uncivil behavior resulted in loss of productivity, voluntary separations, distractions, and lawsuits.

Myers (2012) noted that it is important that campuses develop a clear definition of bullying in their community and actively call out violators through a complaint and

resolution process. Jenkins (2011) inquired into the use of mediation when addressing bullying, arguing that this can be effective in dealing with the nuances of the problem as people's understanding of bullying changes. The author's conclusions align with those of the other researchers, suggesting that bullying often goes under the radar and should be viewed as a physical and occupational mental health concern whose effects on the health of the community must be understood. Jenkins described mediation as particularly appropriate when addressing the occupational health issues raised by Atkinson (2014), Bano and Malik (2013), and Giorgi (2012).

Occupational Safety

Atkinson (2014) spoke of bullying and harassment as being related to occupational health and suggested that organizations address both uncivil behaviors. However, he noted that while these are age-old problems, insufficient evidence exists in the literature before 2005 about bullying or other forms of harassment. Bullying is negative behavior that can demoralize the students being bullied, taint the college experience, affect student success, and discourage persistence in college. Atkinson further argued that bullying can cause emotional and physical distress to the point of raising mental and emotional issues.

Bullying has been compared to mobbing, or general harassment, when discussed in conjunction with a variety of bullying activities (Branch, Ramsay, & Barker, 2013). According to Haswell (2014), another description of bullying is simply the misuse and abuse of power, like what occurs up through the highest levels in many nations. Celep

and Konakli (2013) argued that mobbing is synonymous with bullying at universities and observed that this behavior has negatively affected the psychological health of victims. Faucher et al. (2015) defined mobbing in a higher education context as multiple people coming against one individual, adding more clarity to the definition, and noting that this type of behavior has been shown to be related to suicide attempts that have led either to death or at least to departure from campus.

Waingurt (2014) pointed out that college administrators, to reduce bullying on their campuses, need to promote an ethical campus environment for faculty, staff, and students. Individuals who have experienced or observed bullying by senior management were studied by Oladapo and Banks (2013). They identified this kind of behavior as an occupational health and safety problem. In their study, Oladapo and Banks described bullying by management as abusing authority by subjecting an individual to negative comments, behaviors, and interactions. This behavior can cause mental and emotional issues that lead to health problems for student workers as well as regular employees, leading some to seek medical treatment or to file worker's compensation claims when they cannot cope with bullying (Gumbus & Lyons, 2011).

Government Compliance

By 2012, all 50 states in the United States had enacted antibullying laws (Tempkin, 2015). As of today, 46 state laws now include cyberbullying (Hindujah & Patchin, 2018). However, as recently as 2018, no federal laws exist that have specifically defined cyberbullying (Stopbullying, 2018).

The Higher Education Amendments of 1972, including Title IX, explicitly state that institutions or colleges that receive federal aid for their students are required to provide training on sexual harassment and prevention to the full community. These institutions are also required to put procedures in place to support investigative processes after concerns are raised. According to the Department of Justice (2015), and depending on the circumstances, bullying can also be a violation under Title IX and the Higher Education Amendments of 1972. If an individual is bullied on a campus that receives federal funding, the institution can be sanctioned for not addressing that complaint of bullying.

In addition, provisions in the 1994 Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) and the Clery Act (1990) require that institutions report all criminal activities on campus that involve safety concerns among students, their parents, and members of surrounding communities to include complaints of bullying.

In Scandinavia, laws address bullying as part of a suite of laws relating to discrimination, sexual harassment, and violence against women. To remove any ambiguity relating to how bullying is viewed in the United States, the United States could learn from global partners such as Scandinavia on how to create laws to protect its citizens from acts of bullying (Reid, 2012).

Institutional Policy

Bullying falls under areas relating to an institution's ethical behavior and harassment policies as stated in faculty, staff, and student handbooks and is, therefore,

important to EC's operation. Based on the fact that human resources (HR) departments oversee most institutional policies involving people on campus, Lester (2013) viewed HR as responsible for measuring and monitoring policies that involve bullying to mitigate institutional risk and observed that this level of oversight may ensure student success when exercised in a partnership with senior administration to provide or allocate appropriate resources to monitor this kind of uncivil behavior. An awareness of how bullying occurs can be used to develop and implement specific policies and procedures to limit the bullying of students on campus and beyond.

Branch et al. (2013) argued that it is important for HR departments and other professionals to implement antiharassment policies prohibiting bullying among all employees, and this holds true when dealing with college students. Implementing these kinds of policies and procedures will help ensure that students and staff have a safe, vibrant, harassment-free campus experience.

Gloor (2014a) also researched workplace bullying in higher education and the growing need for HR to monitor and address this kind of uncivil behavior. Gloor (2014a) concluded that HR can be a collaborative partner in higher education in managing these behaviors. HR business partners, along with academic affairs and student affairs offices, can work closely to bridge any gaps by addressing bullying through a collaborative effort. However, this can only work if institutional administrators commit enough resources to address bullying on campus. Although this relates to employees rather than students being served, the lesson learned is transferable, perhaps requiring only that student affairs

offices be substituted for HR, depending on where responsibility for dealing with these matters is assigned.

Implementing an institution-wide bullying policy can focus attention on the problem of bullying and encourage the development of effective efforts to manage it (Wozencroft, Campbell, Orel, Kimpton & Leong, 2015). Woodrow and Guest (2013) suggested that it is more effective for HR partners to revisit the institutional processes used in designing and implementing policies to increase the influence across the community and ensure that policies they develop can be managed. Through partnerships, vetting, and collaboration, HR and department administrators can define and effectively manage bullying on college campuses. Campus administrators would benefit by developing antibullying policies (Washington, 2014). In addition to the need to create policies, it is necessary to develop definitions, examples of this behavior, disciplinary actions that will be enforced if policies are not adhered to, and avenues to report incidents confidentially.

Legal Ramifications

Gloor (2014a) argued that bullying in higher education deserves more attention if we expect to close gaps in the literature about its effects on campus and appropriately manage those effects. It seems clear from Gloor's report that the presence of hazing, harsh words, and other forms of bullying can no longer be dismissed as just teasing, as these acts can create a hostile environment that impedes academic achievement or leads to legal action against professors and the institution. Furthermore, inappropriate conduct

such as bullying may be viewed as unlawful victimization and harassment that will find its way into court (Reid, 2012). Institutions may also experience an increase in harassment and discrimination complaints that lead to lawsuits and Office of Civil Rights sanctions (Indvik & Johnson, 2012; Lieber, 2010). These studies suggested that bullies represent walking lawsuits, even though there are currently no federal laws in the United States that specifically prohibit this kind of behavior. These researchers also noted that although no bullying laws exist, there are many organizations that conduct advocacy work on the subject. Indvik and Johnson (2012) argued that a bully on campus can bring many risks, including an impact on the institution's reputation, and this kind of behavior has been shown to have other unfortunate consequences.

If a student becomes a victim of bullying and chooses to bring forward a legal complaint, there can be financial implications for institutions and for the bullies themselves. Depending on the outcome of the bullying behavior, criminal charges can also be filed against the bully. Although bullying can happen in several ways, it constitutes unwelcome behavior, and institutions can be sued if they are not proactively working to prevent or control it (Indvik, 2012). As an example, the bullies in the Robert Champion incident at Florida A&M were charged, convicted, and sentenced. More important, litigation is not limited to incidents involving death, but is an option in all cases where individuals believe they have been harmed. In the case at FAMU, the victim was a student.

Bullying in Ministerial Contexts

Mallory (2016) reviewed the research of Finlan (2015), who described bullying in the church as a weapon used for competition to attain “power and prestige” (p. 156).

Finlan argued that clergy and laypeople abuse their power within the walls of the congregations. Mallory also noted that Finlan’s research described a bully in the church as someone who is a narcissist and who does not accept or understand that Christianity is about transformation.

Finlan’s (2015) research is valuable to this study in that the students on the EC campus are trained to go out into the community and into congregations to minister. These students could possibly have been damaged by bullying behaviors that occurred while attending EC and which then follow them into the church as clergy members. More important, Finlan suggested that the solution to bullying in the church could be found in the love of Jesus, which is what the church proclaims. The love that Finlan describes has a direct connection to the conceptual framework of the fourth vector in Chickering and Reisser’s Seven Vectors of Identity Development, developing mature interpersonal relationships, that was used in this study. It was my belief when I designed the method of data gathering from EC alumni that the Chickering and Reisser model best supported efforts to better understand bullying and to obtain rich descriptions of individual students’ interpersonal experiences with this phenomenon on the EC campus.

Implications

In addition to assisting EC with increased awareness of the possible incidence of bullying on its campus, the results may provide guidance to other institutions with similar missions in addressing the issue on their campuses. This study contributes to the currently lean body of literature about bullying in higher education, and specifically in religious institutions. Studies on bullying performed by McKay, Arnold, and Fratzl (2008) and Keashly and Nueman (2008) each contributed significantly to our understanding of bullying while citing the need for more study in this area. McKay et al. noted that their study represents a beginning, and that it is important to continue to work to determine how best practices used elsewhere apply locally to lay a foundation for policies and programs that can meet the need to minimize bullying of students studying on any campus. I also seek through the current study to bring more awareness of bullying on college campuses to the global higher education community.

Summary

The data gathered in this study draw attention to training and development for leadership on how to respond to bullying on campus. Specifically, I designed this study to expand EC administrators' understanding of how bullying on their campus may be negatively affecting students' lives and their later ministry as they begin to serve in congregations. My study will assist EC in mitigating the risk of unfavorable publicity that may influence employment and student recruitment and retention and create legal

exposure. It will also communicate to the campus leadership ways to recognize the phenomenon of bullying and its effects on the EC campus.

In Section 1, I described bullying as a high-profile problem on some college and university campuses (Gloor, 2014a). In this section, I reviewed historical information for EC and discussed the definition of bullying as well as the various types of bullying. In addition, I reviewed current literature that described bullying in the United States and worldwide locations.

Section 2: The Methodology

Introduction

My goals in this study were to learn from the data collected from participants whether bullying takes place on the EC campus and to identify common themes and establish patterns of behavior. In this section, I provide an introduction and explanation of the methodology that I used to gather information and to analyze that information. A qualitative approach best served this study in its goal of describing experiences of participants for examination (see Lodico et al., 2010). More important, Lodico et al. assert that qualitative research seeks to better understand a central phenomenon. Accordingly, this study will inform the EC campus leaders as they seek to understand and address the phenomenon of on-campus bullying. I chose a phenomenological research approach to examine personal experiences of alumni in their own words and to listen to those stories in order to draw inferences from the literature review.

Although I considered a quantitative or mixed-methods approach to conduct this study, I opted instead for the opportunity to listen to rich stories of actual participants to better understand the personal experiences on the EC campus. The opportunity to use this type of feedback is not present in the use of quantitative survey instruments, including triangulation of qualitative and quantitative data using mixed methods to provide rich data collection. Therefore, to answer the RQs and for participants to answer the open- and closed-ended interview questions in their own voices, I deemed a qualitative research study, using a phenomenological approach, to be the most effective.

Three closed-ended demographic questions were used to obtain the alumni academic certificate and degree program of choice and learner type (distance, commuter, or on campus), and four open-ended questions (Appendix D) provided data for the guiding research questions identified in this study, as described in Sections 1 and 2:

RQ1: What are the EC alumni's perceptions of the manifestation and pervasiveness of bullying?

RQ2: What perceived influence did bullying have, personally or academically, on alumni who observed or experienced bullying on the EC campus during their studies, and afterwards, and in their careers?

Research Design and Research Approach

In this study, I documented individual alumni experiences with bullying while attending EC during the academic years of 2010 to 2015. These years were chosen based on a window of time that was most appropriate—years in which I had no contact with the institution as a member of the community. I gathered data through one-on-one, teleconference interviews with alumni. During interviews, I documented alumni perceptions and gathered rich descriptions based on their direct experience with bullying while attending the institution.

Participant Population

Creswell (2012) stated that participants in qualitative studies should be selected purposefully. The population this study interviewed were alumni who had matriculated and graduated from EC during the years 2010 to 2015 and indicated they experienced

bullying on the EC campus by responding to the solicitation to participate in this confidential study.

Sample and Access to Participants

The screening to meet the criteria to be a member of this study resulted in a pool of 197 eligible alumni. I interviewed eight participants face to face or via Skype audio conference or phone interview. In accord with Lodico et al. (2010), I concluded that interviewing eight to 12 participants would be a solid representation of student alumni who might be able to provide detailed information on their perception of bullying on the EC campus. If more than the desired range of alumni had responded to the invitation to be interviewed, given the nature of the information needed and importance to EC, every attempt would have been made to accommodate the greater numbers.

Included in the email sent to the participant pool was an introduction to the researcher, which included a description of the nature and intent of the study, along with an informed consent form and instructions on how to respond to the invitation. The informed consent form explained that participation in the study was voluntary, outlined the participant's rights to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence, and explained the potential risks involved. After 1 week, a follow-up email was sent asking them to respond to the invitation.

Two weeks later, I sent another email encouraging those who had not yet responded to do so. This helped to increase the response rate. If the individual chose to participate, I assumed that he or she had read the email invitation and had voluntarily

chosen to participate. Over a 2-month period, I conducted eight semistructured interviews with the participants who had submitted a signed consent form.

Protection of Participants

I ensured the integrity of this qualitative study and protected the identity of the participants. Upon approval from EC and Walden's IRB to collect data, I sent an email to alumni and indicated my commitment to the safeguards outlined in this proposal to ensure that they were able to participate comfortably in the confidential research process. Also, this allowed participants to provide the honest, in-depth responses required to develop an accurate description of any experience with bullying on the EC campus.

To protect the identity of participants, the data collected were saved electronically on my personal computer and locked in a password-protected file accessible only to me. All data is confidential, reported in aggregate, secured for a minimum of 5 years, and destroyed thereafter, per Walden University guidelines. It was important for the participants to know that their participation was voluntary and not required.

Role of the Researcher

As the director of human resources at EC and a researcher, I hold no relationship with participants in this study. The students who were invited attended the institution prior to my arrival in 2015. As an HR leader and professional, I have more than 18 years of experience developing policies and procedures to manage complaints of bullying, harassment, and sexual misconduct that fall under the Higher Education Amendments Act, including Title IX.

Setting

The institution at which I conducted this study is a theological institution situated in an urban community in the upper midwestern United States. EC offers three master's level degree program areas of study, graduate certificate programs in five concentration areas, one doctoral-level program, and several lifelong learning courses. The areas of study are Bible, Children, Youth and Family, Christian Ministry, Congregational Mission and Leadership, History of Christianity, Justice and Reconciliation, Leadership and Innovation, Spanish Language for Ministry, Systemic Theology, Congregational and Community Care, Lutheran Ministry, Methodist Studies, New and Old Testaments, and Pastoral Theology and Ministry. The entire faculty holds terminal degrees, the average class size is 16, and the student to faculty ratio is 14:1.

Data Collection Integrity

Creswell (2012) emphasized the importance of the investigator being self-reflective instead of showing bias. For this case study, a re-examination of the data gathered from the interviews was used to reaffirm the integrity of the data collection. A member check form was obtained from each participant to verify the accuracy of their responses made during the interview; revisions were made, and more content was added to participant responses with their instruction.

Limitations

The case study method has potential limitations. The first limitation is that I gathered the data from a single theological institution. Another limitation is that I have

not experienced bullying as a student on a college campus, which may have limited my empathy with the experiences of the interviewees. A third limitation is that I was seeking only to interview past students and therefore cannot speak to experiences of students enrolled in the current academic year. A final limitation is that a participant potentially may have been reluctant to discuss personal experiences in detail.

Data Collection Methods

In this study, I identified the RQs needed to reveal a better understanding of the possible existence and nature of bullying on the EC campus. The qualitative data collection provided a foundation for developing an understanding of the scope and character of bullying phenomena on the EC campus, with the goal of exploring the personal experiences of EC alumni with on-campus bullying during their period of attendance. I developed the research instrument to collect descriptive data in the form of answers to open-ended questions. The interview questions were based on previous research that I described in Section 1 that recommended further inquiry into bullying in higher education contexts.

On December 18, 2018, the Institutional Review Board reviewed and approved the interview questions at the research site, and Walden University's Institutional Review Board approved the interview questions on January 29, 2019.

My goals in this the study were to learn from the participants whether bullying takes place on the EC campus and to identify common themes and establish patterns of behavior from the data collection. To examine the individual perceptions of participants, I

reviewed the data gathered prior to transcribing it for the participants' review. My method consisted of recording notes of what was shared during the interviews. Any emerging understandings or reflections on the conversations were reserved until the interpretive data analysis was performed. Eight 15-minute, one-on-one, telephone or teleconference interviews were scheduled, including one Skype audio call (with the participant's permission) on the EC campus. I conducted the interviews in a private conference room, with no audio recording, only the taking of interview notes. The open-ended questions were used as a guide, but I reserved the right to deviate from them as needed to follow the flow of the conversation by asking follow-up questions. To eliminate bias, the interview notes were recorded in the actual words of the participant.

Interview Notes

I logged interview notes of participants' responses within 2 days into a Microsoft Excel document and electronically saved them in a password-protected file on my personal computer. Once the data were reviewed, I provided a copy of the interview notes to each participant, along with a member check form (Appendix E) requesting that they review their responses to ensure that the interview notes accurately reflected the interview (see Lodico, et al., 2010). If a participant misrepresented something during the initial interview, they could modify their notes to reflect only what they were comfortable reporting. Furthermore, the member check forms were used to reinforce the interview notes and to record accurate notes of the interview for further analysis. Each participant received their member form within 1 week of completing an interview session.

Coding

Lodico et al. (2010) described coding as “the process of identifying different segments of the data that describe related phenomena and labeling these parts using broad category names” (p.183). For a qualitative study, Creswell (2012) and Saldana (2009) suggested the *in vivo* coding method. This method allowed me to use the participants’ own words to develop codes and later categorize the codes into more collective ideas, known as themes (Lodico, p. 244). Once I received the acknowledgment of transcript accuracy from the interviewees as a part of the analysis, the data gathered were reviewed multiple times to gain a deeper understanding of the participant responses (see Creswell, 2012).

Lodico et al. (2010) recommended creating up to eight broad themes that can accurately describe the data. Based on similarity of participant responses and how the data collected responded to the two guiding research questions, the data were placed into common themes (see NVivo Basics, 2017). Walden University (2017) referred to this process as *creating nodes*. A node is a single theme, concept, or idea that assists in identifying theories and patterns of the data collected. The use of nodes supports the more subjective data analysis of participant responses in this study.

Theme Development

Saldana (2009) stated that there are two cycles to the coding process. Accordingly, during the first cycle of the analysis process, I used notes taken during the interviews to create 13 initial themes. An automatic coding technique was available

through the data analysis software tool and was selected to automatically generate these 13 nodes, based on words that could be categorized and coded as follows:

1. member
2. student
3. male
4. behaviors
5. employee
6. session
7. marriage
8. experience
9. international student
10. divorce
11. text
12. someone
13. part time teacher.

Codifying the data assisted in explaining them more accurately because it allowed me to arrange the data more systematically (Saldana, 2009). More important, the 13 themes enhanced the experience of the participant responses and influenced the final themes that were created.

Due to commonalities of participant responses, I anticipated ordinary theme development that would show similar responses and reflect the data more accurately (see

Creswell, 2012). During the second cycle of data coding, and reflected in this study, the results led to refining the original themes. Creating themes was essential to responding to the two guiding research questions and providing an understanding of the central phenomenon occurring on the EC campus. The responses to the guiding questions led to the development of five themes. The criteria for developing themes involved responding to the two guiding research questions for this study.

Qualitative Analysis and Findings

The data analysis revealed that 75% of the participants had a personal and direct experience with bullying, whereas the other 25% indicated that they were bystanders and only observed bullying. After refinement of the original 13 themes, five themes resulted:

2. bullying
3. campus setting
4. community members involved
5. institutional support
6. impact.

These were based on any connections appearing in the responses that could be linked together using short phrases and similar themes or words, and they were attached to the nodes. Upon completion of matching responses to the nodes, the data were reexamined to look for other considerations or explanations that may have been important to note or to code. Also, after looking for redundancies, the five themes from the nodes were reported in the final analysis and in Table 1.

Table 1

Qualitative Themes From Data Analysis

Bullying	Institutional support
Campus setting	Impact
Community members involved	

The findings for this study are presented in a narrative format that describes participants' perceptions identified and related to the themes (see Creswell, 2012). A narrative format allows the details and descriptions to be reported directly in the voice of each participant. The participants were able to share their experiences and perceptions on how they experienced bullying on the EC campus (whether as an actual victim or as a bystander), how bullying affected their decision to continue their studies, and how their experience affected their career in their parish, congregation, and community. Although the primary focus was their direct experience with bullying, some participants described concerns about bullying that occurred in their local churches. Other participants revealed that they had experienced bullying in their own homes while enrolled.

All eight participants in the study met the selection criteria for this study, having matriculated and graduated during the academic years of 2010 to 2015. In addition, each participant was a graduate-level student identified by a pseudonym to protect their identity and assure confidentiality. The participants were international or domestic students who commuted, lived on campus, or were distance learners at EC. Although the

selection criteria did not include gender or sexual identities, several students shared their concern about bullying toward specific groups regarding gender identity.

Each of the themes identified in Table 1 was able to capture the important perceptions of each of the participants regarding their personal experience with bullying while attending EC. In addition, each theme fully represented the participants' perceptions about the personal impact the bullying behavior had on them during their enrollment and later, when they graduated and went off to their communities, parishes, and congregations. As a result, the five themes identified in Table 1 give insight into the uncivil behaviors that occurred on campus and demonstrate the need for the inquiry into this topic.

The participant interviews were the only instrument used to collect the data, and the responses were used to develop codes and themes and to prepare the data analysis. During the participant interviews, the guiding research questions were answered in detail:

RQ1: Describe a time when you experienced bullying on the EC campus. What did you do in response to the incidence, if anything?

RQ2: How would you describe the experience and its impact on you and your studies? Describe how this experience may have affected your work in your community, parish, or congregation.

Regarding Table 2, it should be noted that the two guiding research questions influenced the actual interview questions. Therefore, the data was rich and represents the participants' comments directly from their perspective.

Table 2

Responses to RQ1 and RQ2

Research questions	Interview questions
RQ1	Describe a time when you experienced bullying on the EC campus. What did you do in response to the incidence, if anything?
RQ2	How would you describe the experience and its impact on you and your studies? Describe how this experience may have affected your work in your community, parish, or congregation.

Bullying Theme

There was a consensus by the participants that bullying did occur on the EC campus during the academic years of 2010 to 2015. Cyberbullying was not described as prevalent on the EC campus and so was not central to the way the data analysis responded to RQ1, What were the EC alumni’s perception of the manifestation and spread/pervasiveness of bullying? Answers to this interview question revealed that six participants described having direct experience with bullying while on the EC campus. Two other participants agreed that they too had experienced bullying, but as a bystander—witnessing bullying of others while on the EC campus. One participant stated, “I was bullied by a professor on campus.” This participant described a face-to-face encounter with a professor who did not agree with the student’s feedback during class. The participant said they were “very uncomfortable from that point on.”

Another participant echoed the same sentiment: “My experience at EC reminds me of how not to mistreat people and that everyone deserves respect no matter what their backgrounds are.” This participant described how a professor used critiquing and grading to bully students whose performance in class was less than favorable.

Campus Setting Theme

According to participant perceptions, bullying predominantly occurred when students were on campus and in the classroom. Two participants described their direct experience with bullying taking place off campus, before and after classes. Overall, the predominant response among participants was that their bullying experience occurred on campus during instructional time.

The data analysis also responded to RQ1 regarding the manifestation of bullying. One participant reported that while on campus during a winter intensive, they observed a female student being bullied in the classroom in front of the professor and the entire class. Another participant shared a similar experience at EC that made them more aware of bullying, saying “bullying takes place in the church” and “attention needs to be paid to the issue.”

Community Members Involved Theme

The data analysis for this section responded to RQ1 regarding the pervasiveness of bullying on the EC campus. It was clear from the participant responses that the bullying was widespread on and off the campus and involved professors, students, and family members. More specifically, six participants shared that the community members

who were doing the bullying were professors and students. One of those participants reported that they observed a female student being bullied by a male student in class. The participant also stated that the male student regularly exercised bullying behaviors against other students, many of whom were female or in a protected class such as a racial, ethnic, or minority group. Another participant reported a case where the bully was a family member who did not attend the institution.

Institutional Support Theme

None of the participants described knowing how to report bullying or if there was a policy to address bullying. The participants' perceptions were that previous complaints made to the student affairs department were swept under the rug and that it was not clear who else they could seek out for support. The participants who were enrolled in the Master of Arts (MA) degree program described being treated less favorably compared to the Master of Divinity (MDiv) students. Also, the participants described feeling that the MDiv program was spoken of more highly by professors and other administrators. A participant reported that "MA students were treated poorly and that professors and the institution did not keep all students in mind."

Another participant shared that they "felt like what they were doing in the program was not worth as much as an MDiv student."

A third participant reported that they were approached by an EC employee who asked how they were doing. The participant stated that they replied to the employee that they were being bullied by a family member. Shortly after the participant shared their

experience with the employee, the employee connected them to the institution's employee assistance counseling services. The participant said they "received five free counseling sessions, but after the fifth session could no longer afford to continue the services."

Thus, the data analysis revealed two significantly different perceptions regarding support. It also revealed that participants did not know of any direct policy or person to seek out to address concerns of bullying.

Impact Theme

The data analysis for this interview question responded to RQ2, What perceived influence did bullying have personally or academically on alumni who observed or experienced bullying on the EC campus during their studies, and afterwards, and in their careers? One participant described how they "had become less engaged" and "hoped that they did not have to take more courses with that professor." This participant also stated that their experience "raised their awareness about how easily someone can disrupt someone's journey."

Another participant stated that their experience affected them in several ways:

"I removed myself from the space to avoid further altercation or any impact to my studies. I stopped engaging in the professor's class and sat in the rear of the class for the rest of the semester. I became very disconnected from the institution and only wanted to finish the program and get the hell out of there."

Another participant shared that they will forever remember their experience at the

institution and that they “would never recommend any person of color to attend the institution.” This participant went on to say, “the institution did not have any policies in place to appropriately address bullying or the mistreatment of students of color.”

Finally, the data analysis revealed that participants’ experiences with bullying made them want to withdraw from the institution. Other participants had these comments: “I kept pushing and just focused on getting out of that place as soon as possible.” “The institution reminded me of how not to treat people and that everyone deserves respect no matter what their backgrounds are.” “It was a terrible experience.”

The data analysis revealed how the participants’ experience with bullying at EC may have affected their work in their community, parish, or congregation. The participants were careful in reviewing their member check form to ensure the accuracy of all their responses to the interview questions.

Summary

In Section 2, the methodology used to support this study was described. The argument for using qualitative methods was presented, and reasons for other methodologies not being chosen were described. Participants, population, sample size, setting, access to participants, and limitations of the study were also described. Most important, the data collection and analysis were reported in this section.

Overall, the data analysis revealed that bullying occurs in the classroom at this theological institution. Furthermore, the analysis revealed that professors were most responsible for the classroom bullying, and similarly, male students were bullying their

female student peers while on campus. The analysis confirmed the conclusions of the literature review in Section 1 and described student experiences with bullying in higher education contexts. More important, this qualitative case study provided an understanding of bullying on a single college campus, identified in this study as EC.

At the request of the institution, the results of the data gathered during the study will be shared with EC administration in a written evaluation report with aggregate responses of individual participants to ensure the anonymity of students. In answering the research questions, this study provides a better understanding of bullying on the EC campus, and information upon which a coherent institutional policy can be developed, if needed, to address this kind of behavior at EC.

Section 3: The Project

Introduction

In Section 3, I present descriptive details of the project study findings that culminated in an evaluation report. Included in this section are project description, goals, and rationale, as well as a review of selected phenomenological research studies and how they relate to this project study. In Section 3, I also include the project implementation, evaluation, and implications, including effects on projected social change at the local level. I will use EC throughout Section 3 to refer to the partner institution.

Project Description and Goals

Based on the literature reviewed, my goal in this evaluation report was to encourage the development of specific policies and procedures that can influence a safe and bully-free campus environment. An evaluation report is a critical piece of work that is the outcome of an evaluation of a product, designed to bring transparency to assist the reader in decision-making as it relates to policies and procedures and making improvements (University of Southern California, 2019), and it acts as an artifact (Walden University, 2019). My goal in this project was to provide EC with data that reveal the culture of bullying on its campus and the influence that this behavior has on the student experience. Specifically, I will provide a mechanism for attention to be given to bullying on the EC campus. I will provide the partner institution's administration with information that may guide and influence the development of best practices to mitigate bullying of students on its campus. More important, I based my project on the responses

to the RQs and will satisfy my goal through an evaluation report that will be presented to the EC administration as a white paper.

Project Rationale, Genre, and Content

The rationale for this project was the need to address the problem of bullying on a single college campus. In Section 1, I documented that bullying is a problem in higher education contexts and is a form of harassment (Branch, Ramsay, & Barker, 2013) as well as an abuse and misuse of power (Haswell, 2014). Furthermore, I chose an evaluation report as the genre to report on the problem of bullying because that format allows for the articulation of the data gathered in a comprehensive and reader-friendly manner. In addition, the evaluation report provides a data analysis and summary of personal experiences of alumni that administrators, should they choose, can use as a guide to establish best practices for new policies and procedures.

In Section 1, in the literature review, I described bullying on campus, the effects that this behavior has on students, and potential risks for the institution and members of the campus community if bullying is not addressed. Therefore, it is important that college administrators are educated and understand the multiple ways to mitigate the bullying of their students, on or off campus (King & Piotrowski, 2015). I have described previous research on undetected or unreported bullying that takes place in a higher education context. In addition, this project provides a statistical analysis to shed light on any bullying that is taking place at the partner institution's campus. Last, I described the

climate and culture for alumni and their experiences of bullying on the partner institution's campus, also identified in Section 2.

Because the participants in this study shared their personal and professional concerns regarding bullying in the church and in the classroom, the research findings were instrumental in influencing the genre for this project. As described in Section 2, the data analysis answered RQ1 with a response rate of 75% for participants describing a direct experience with bullying on the partner institution's campus. The data analysis revealed that bullying caused students to consider dropping out of their program or at least created the desire to hurry up and complete the program to remove themselves from the bullying environment. In addition, the data analysis revealed that female students were more likely to be bullied than male students. Magsi, Agha, and Magsi (2017) conducted a study at an institution to research the causes and effects of bullying on female populations in a Pakistani context. However, the study was not clear about why bullying had a stronger effect on females.

Although lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and asexual (LGBTQIA) students and other minority student populations attended EC during 2010 to 2015, they were not specifically identified in the analysis. Therefore, an evaluation report rose to the top as the appropriate mechanism to report the findings and make future recommendations for study. Based on the data analysis, bullying did take place on the EC campus, and it is anticipated that a physical copy of the evaluation report may provide a

reader-friendly version for EC's administration to use a guide as they review the findings in the report.

I used participants' perceptions and data analysis to guide the development of this project. The most important findings of the analysis were that bullying occurred more in the classroom, and that the professors were bullying students more than students were bullying their peers. Both findings influenced the content of the evaluation report that will be shared with administration at the partner institution. This is in accord with the literature reviewed in Section 1 that encourages institutions to pay attention to bullying behavior (Waingurt, 2014).

Review of the Literature

This review of scholarly literature related to the project study of mitigating bullying in higher education included key search words such as *bullying in higher education*, *bullying on college campuses*, *religious uncivil behavior*, *mitigating bullying*, *combating bullying*, and *bullying at universities*. In the review, I present material found in the ERIC, ProQuest, SAGE, and EBSCO databases.

In Section 1, the literature that I presented described bullying as a global matter and talked about the need to bring more awareness of bullying in a higher education context. In Section 3, the literature that I present influenced the decision to produce an evaluation report that I seek to use to offer recommendations for mitigating risks on the campus of the partner institution. Last, I do three things in the literature review in Section 3: (a) affirm that bullying is a problem in a higher education context, (b) provide program

recommendations for institutions, and (c) describe the project that will result from the findings of this study.

Reid (2015) conducted a research study on bullying at a Christian university that connects directly to the institutional context that this study refers to. The findings in Reid's research are like that of this study regarding the variety of tensions that students being bullied face on and off campus. More important, Reid's research study is an excellent demonstration of the ways other religious institutions are experiencing bullying on their campuses and the fact that they are also interested in learning how to combat this negative behavior. Both the literature discussed in Section 1 and the data analysis reported in Section 2 influenced the design of this project. Both sets of data points may influence this study's institutional partner to invest in establishing policies and procedures to ensure all its members understand how to seek support if bullying is experienced.

Slovak, Crabbs, and Stryffeler (2015) noted in their report that there was only one study that could be found specific to religion and cyberbullying—examination of the “effect of faith” and traditional bullying is simply scarce. They stated that the impact of faith has been demonstrated in other examples of behavioral problems from adolescence that may be transferring into the higher education context. According to the data analysis of the current study, participants stated that bullying did occur in religious organizations and needs attention.

In another study on bullying in the pulpit, Dowd (2015) reported findings that described the importance of the involvement of a religious entity in detecting and preventing bullying, as well as the need to counsel and promote healing to all stakeholders. Dowd also stated that the efforts described must be above and beyond things such as group outings, youth events, or “just another sermon about bullying.” Efforts must be sustainable and multipronged to minimize student doubt of administration’s support.

Luker and Curchack (2017) noted that technology has advanced and has brought many challenges to educational systems. It must be acknowledged that social media have positive uses in allowing instant connection to family, friends, college community, and academics. However, Rowe (2014) argued that, despite all the positive effects social media bring, they are also used to harm others by damaging reputations and causing distress in student life, which jeopardizes the integrity of academe.

Savage, Deiss, Roberto, and Aboujaoude (2017) described cyberbullying as a form of bullying that has very limited methods available to confront it. Their study tested a persuasion method that influenced students to abstain from retaliation against the bully by alerting authorities, seeking social support, and retaining evidence. This method may be another mechanism that institutions could incorporate into a possible antibullying campaign. In relation to cyberbullying as discussed by Savage et al. as a public health concern, this evaluation report describes participant experiences on the campus selected for this study that are relevant and necessary to communicate to the administration.

Again, I anticipate that the partner institution administration will consider establishing policies and procedures to minimize bullying on its campus.

According to Ozgur (2015), male students are more likely than female students to be engaged in cyberbullying and cyber victimization, and more frequently. Based on the participants' perceptions and the data analysis performed in the Ozgur study, it is likely that males were most responsible for the bullying at EC. Furthermore, their study revealed that students recognize that bullying is occurring but are unsure of how to address the behavior properly. The current study also revealed that students do not actually know where to seek support. A relevant study by Marraccini, Weyandt, and Rossi (2015) expressed the need for administration to properly address bullying behavior to protect its student members. This study echoed the need to provide a report of the research findings that reflects participants' perceptions of the bullying they face on the partner institution's campus.

Elci and Seckin's (2019) study on cyberbullying raised concerns for institutions and students to begin to mitigate negative behaviors such as cyberbullying. Further, they noted that institutions should take a more sensitive approach when notified of an incident of bullying and have policies and procedures in place to handle bullying.

Ertesvag (2015) noted that for institutions to become more inclusive, they need to be consistent and provide a safe space for all students. Ertesvag said that it is paramount that social and academic potentials of all learners are attended to by academe, and more important, institutions need to invest in well-implemented strategies of bullying

prevention. Ertesvag's statements dovetail into the overarching global concern of bullying. This project study reported participants' perceptions that may also have reference to the global higher education community.

Lewis and Ericksen (2016) stated that it is imperative that institutions offer adequate training to faculty members that may provide them with the knowledge and skills necessary to have awareness regarding the campus climate. Their research mirrors the findings in the current study, as the data analysis showed that 75% of the bullying taking place on the college campus was committed by its faculty. Therefore, the findings of this study are supported by current literature that may influence religious institutions like the one in this study and other academies to implement appropriate training to their teaching staff.

In another study, Early (2014) reported a need for state agencies to play a role in addressing bullying at institutions. However, their study also reported that it may be considered unconstitutional to silence people who have negative or mean things to say because they still have a right to free speech. Keener (2017) argued that administrative leadership is responsible for fostering safety on campus and that safety policies are necessary to improve campus safety for all stakeholders of the campus community. Both of those studies, and the current study, seek to influence changes that will mitigate bullying on college campuses, indicating a desire for diverse ways to mitigate bullying behaviors. Bultena, Ramser, and Tilker (2015) have encouraged employers such as higher education institutions to offer the possibility of court mediation as an alternative to

entering formal and public litigation on matters related to bullying. They reported that mediation has been successful in states like Oklahoma and Nebraska, which report an 80% settlement and resolution rate for a win–win situation.

Metzger, Petit, and Sieber (2015) introduced the hypothesis that mentoring and bullying in academe are connected and spoke of the importance of mentoring being used as a weapon against uncivil behaviors such as bullying. The written report from the current study describes strategies that will be a tangible artifact that the local site can refer to if they decide to design and implement a policy and procedure for mitigating bullying. The more diverse the mitigation resources institutions have access to; the more equipped administration will be when preparing to combat bullying and other harassment on campus. Merilainen, Puhkka, and Sinkkonen (2015) conducted a survey to seek recommendations from students on ways to eliminate bullying on college campuses. Their study echoed other literature in that there was a significant emphasis placed on bullying prevention by surveyed students, which may call institutions to act.

Flannery et al. (2016) conducted research on bullying prevention, in which several recommendations were made. One of the recommendations described the need to define bullying to prevent confusion and to improve the understanding of bullying behavior and its prevalence. Therefore, their research contributed to the project design for this study based on their recommendation for institutions to understand the importance of defining bullying on campus. The lack of understanding of the term *bullying* became evident in the current study during initial conversations with participants. In Section 1 of

this study, I presented a significant amount of literature to help define bullying in a higher education context. Therefore, an evaluation report will lift potential recommendations to the local site's administrative leadership.

Coker et al. (2016) conducted a study that focused on sexual violation, in which they found that a bystander intervention program may reduce violent or uncivil behaviors such as bullying. Doane, Kelley, and Pearson (2016) studied the effectiveness of prevention and intervention programs to increase knowledge of cyberbullying. Their study revealed the effectiveness of having multicultural and internationally focused intervention programs. The findings of both Coker et al. and Doane et al. suggested that institutions like EC must establish resources for students who witness bullying that will empower them to help to get rid of this uncivil behavior.

Dieterich, DiRado, Snyder, and Villani (2015) conducted their research on students who were bullied in the K–12 setting. In Section 1, I reported the research of Chappel et al. (2004) that described how, when bullies leave K–12, they take those behaviors with them into higher education. Therefore, and based on the qualitative findings in this study, this project raises awareness of how students on campus from all populations and educational contexts may benefit from a bully-free campus environment.

Rycik (2015) discussed the topic of continuous improvement in American secondary schools in an editorial, stating that adequate support for student success in higher education is also needed. Rycik noted the need for students from underrepresented backgrounds to have good relationships with professors, staff, and counselors, adding that

it was most important to their success. Rycik also asserted that bullying is “rooted in social norms” that separate the “valuable” from the “worthless,” and that a safe school environment, free of bullying, is the way forward for all students. Another research report regarding students who were afraid to report bullying (Anonymous, 2016) reiterated the importance of conducting interventions at the ground level to combat bullying.

Snell (2017) conducted a study on combating bullying, concluding that bullying in higher education has traditionally been between a teacher versus student and less regarding student versus student or teacher versus administration. Snell suggested that institutions need strategies to reduce the obvious teacher and student bullying and any other outlier bullying behaviors. These strategies may come in the form of using anecdotal methods for the classroom, and current literature that may influence recommendations for the strategies and design appropriate for the entire campus.

Holt et al. (2014) reported that new college students may have a history with bullying, and it is important for institutions to consider providing supportive relationships to empower students arriving on their campus and ways for the students to manage bullying with resilience. They noted that this would require conducting studies that seek to determine student experiences within K–12 settings. Based on findings of previous literature presented in this study, this project makes recommendations to the partner institution regarding tools that may inform leadership on how to mitigate bullying on its campus.

Project Implementation

The evaluation report was based on the analysis of the project study data and was delivered in an executive summary format. This project was presented as a contribution to the area under study that provides an understanding of participants' experiences. A copy of the evaluation report was prepared in a Microsoft Word document and presented to leadership at the partner institution at the completion of this study. I hope that the project generated awareness on the topic of bullying on the campus of the partner institution and triggered its administration to consider implementing a policy and procedure to minimize uncivil behaviors such as bullying on its campus (see King & Pitrowski, 2015).

Potential Resources and Existing Supports

The only resource needed to implement the project was an opportunity to present the evaluation report to executive leadership at the local site. The resources recommended in the report were based on the design and implementation of policies and procedures to report and mitigate bullying on this campus. The literature discussed in Section 1 and Section 3 spoke to the possibility of doing more faith-based and grassroots efforts to gain the trust of students. Other investigators have invited institutions to consider mediation through the courts (Jenkins, 2011). At the local site, I anticipate that administrators would continue to use any existing tools, mechanisms, and policies in addition to those recommended by the current study.

Potential Barriers

One barrier might be the refusal by the administration of the local site to read and respond to the evaluation report. Another could be resourcing and staff capacity to implement a new program. Presently, the local site's HR department establishes, oversees, and enforces institutional policies and procedures related to behaviors in the workplace (dean of students, personal communication, June 5, 2018). Therefore, this study recommends that the administration of the partner institution ensure their HR experts have capacity to take on the task of developing the policy on bullying to include the mechanisms to report and combat, as discussed by Lester (2013).

Proposal for Implementation and Timetable

In the evaluation report, there are tools and mechanisms described by current literature regarding options for combating bullying on campus. The study makes recommendations that the leadership at the local site, upon receiving the written report of the findings of this study, set a meeting with the campus HR and student affairs leaders to have a planning discussion to gain their support on this important matter. I anticipate that the administration will design and draft a policy and procedure with appropriate outcomes and then identify a timeline for the rolling out of a campus-wide initiative to combat bullying, as suggested by Lawrence (2017).

Roles and Responsibilities of Students and Others

As described in Section 1, the local site created a way to report some uncivil behaviors, but it does not have an actual bullying policy. Therefore, I suggest here that the roles and responsibilities of past and future students include the use of reporting tools the institution currently has available to empower them to report general harassment. The dean of students at the local site has confirmed that the student affairs department and administration are responsible for encouraging students to support one another and to participate in the investigative procedures that can bring about resolutions for all parties involved in a complaint or grievance (dean of students, personal communication, June 5, 2018). Also, it is important that students are willing to trust the institutional processes and adhere to the policies and procedures that will allow the institution to respond to a complaint of bullying. Other roles and responsibilities fall to administrative leadership at the local site, specifically the dean of students and dean of academic affairs, whose roles include the promotion and advocacy of a safe campus environment for all students (Washington, 2014).

Project Evaluation

After 1 year, I intend to check in with the administration at the local site to inquire as to whether a policy has been established and published in their faculty, staff, and student handbooks. After another year, I hope that progress will have been made in terms of tools and mechanisms to report bullying made available to the campus community (see Rycik, 2015). Unfortunately, the partner institution will not be able to share specific

outcomes, or the number of complaints made through any mechanisms of reporting, based on the requirements of FERPA, the Federal Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (DOJ, 2015). However, I hope that administrators at the partner institution will be willing to share whether they have surveyed the campus on the antibullying program and to share aggregate feedback on efforts that were implemented.

Project Implications, Including Social Change

Local Community

The current project has implications for social change in the way it seeks to address the needs of learners in the local community by putting the administration of the partner institution on notice about the climate of bullying on its campus. Furthermore, this project may encourage the EC administrators to empower their learners and provide a mechanism to combat and minimize bullying on campus (Keuskamp et al., 2012). The local site is currently in a shared work relationship with another local institution concerning innovative and strategic work. Perhaps institutions like the local partner for this study and its higher education constituencies may benefit from mutual adaptation of bullying policies and procedures among themselves (see Reid, 2015).

To recap, this project reported on the need to employ a bullying policy that may empower faculty, staff, and students at the local site and incite them to share best practices with their student peers attending other institutions. Specifically, this project sought to educate and equip this study's partner—its faculty, students and their families, staff, administrators, and community partners—because academe must respond and

commit to action that will address the health and welfare of its community members and their campus life (see Atkinson, 2014; Washington, 2014).

Far-Reaching Implications

Section 1 and Section 3 described bullying as a global matter that has always been more acknowledged in the K–12 settings (Anoka County, 2016). In addition, the literature in Section 1 reminded us that bullies do not simply graduate from high school and then never bully again. Bullying goes with the person who behaves this way, wherever they go, including into a higher education context and the workplace (Holt et al., 2014). Therefore, this important study adds to the presently lean catalog of research on the topic of bullying in general and the ways it shows up in religious organizations, bringing more awareness at the global as well as the local level (see Dowd, 2015).

Summary

Section 3 consisted of a detailed description of the project that originated from the findings of this study on student experiences with bullying on a single college campus. This section also included the project goals, rationale, and review of the scholarly literature and an explanation of any possible and unforeseen barriers. More important, this section further affirmed the need to bring more awareness to this important topic and the proposition that a tangible report would be most valuable to present to the EC administration.

Section 4 reports on my individual reflections as a project developer and scholar, as well as the strength of the evaluation report and future recommendations, with the

hope that this will build more awareness of best practices that mitigate risks of bullying on college campuses.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

Introduction

In this section, I discuss the strengths and limitations of this project study and my reflections on the research conducted. Specifically, I address the description of the experience of the scholar, practitioner, and project developer. In addition, I report on the importance of this study and its positive social influence. Finally, I include closing reflections and recommendations for future research on the topic of bullying in higher education institutions. Again, I use the pseudonym EC in Section 4 to refer to the partner institution.

Project Strengths and Limitations

The strength of the evaluation report is the description of the overall student alumni experience with bullying at the partner site that could be generalized to other higher education contexts. More important, the evaluation report describes students' experiences using their own words in relation to this study's two research questions. As a result of this study, EC has partnered in a research study that provides a working document that describes common trends or themes that were revealed during the study's interviews of ways bullying shows up on its campus. According to Ertesvag (2015), this document may become a tool that influences the local site's design and implementation of antibullying strategies.

One limitation of this study is that the administrators at the local site may not understand the importance of implementing antibullying policies that have clear and

specific guidelines on how and whom to report (Wonzencroft et al., 2015). Another limitation of the project is that this study did not provide the institution with a training program or a sample policy and procedure that could be used on its campus. This project simply shares the findings in an evaluation summary. Therefore, the institution can continue to rely on its current internal resources to develop its own programs, policies, and procedures. Elci and Seckin (2019); Ertesvag (2015); and Marraccini, Weyandt, and Rossi (2015) have stated that it is critical that institutions invest in strategies and best practices for mitigating risks of bullying on campus. Although an institution may benefit from having a training program designed for it, the evaluation report functions as a tangible artifact for the local site's administration to use as a guide if they choose to develop an antibullying program for their campus.

Recommendations for Alternative Approaches

The barriers outlined in Section 3 outlined risks to the local site after implementing antibullying policies and procedures. To remediate limitations, it will be important that the partner institutions' administration share the findings of the data collection from the participant interviews with key stakeholders. Last, the partner institution may consider contacting the Department of Justice to request an aggregate report of complaints of bullying shared by higher education institutions in their annual campus safety reports (see Department of Justice, 2015).

Scholarship, Project Development, and Leadership and Change

With more than 18 years of experience as an HR practitioner and work in higher education, I provide in this research study a clear understanding of what scholarship means. Furthermore, my research skills were enhanced through the journey of completing a rigorous Doctor of Education degree program. A greater level of confidence in conducting doctoral-level research projects and a deeper understanding of how to collect and evaluate data using ethical research standards practices ensued as the project developed. By the same token, selecting a project design to support this study based on the perceptions and responses of its participants was integral to the success of the project. In so doing, this project study brings appropriate change to the higher education community, both locally and globally, by contributing to the global research catalog. I anticipate a change that may rid college campuses of bullying and restore faith in higher education and create a climate of mutual respect among faculty, staff, and students (Slovak et al., 2015).

Reflections on the Importance of the Work

Moreover, this qualitative study proved to be important in that it reported participants' perceptions in a written format for the EC administration. It is hoped that, throughout the research process, my tenacity in data collection will be taken seriously by the partner site. For this scholar and higher education leader, conducting scholarly research required listening to participants and gathering and analyzing data that was reported to the local site in a narrative format. Through this research study, as the project

developer, I demonstrated the ability to apply research standards and best practices necessary to a successful culmination of the project.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

This potential influence of my project study on social change is that it will not only contribute to the presently lean catalog of research on the topic of bullying, but that it will put the partner institution's leadership on alert to the problem of bullying occurring on its campus. More important, it may compel the institution to establish antibullying programs to mitigate bullying on its campus (see Metzger et al., 2015). The major implication that this study may have is the building of global awareness on the topic of bullying that can bring change to academe and rid it of this uncivil behavior altogether (see Merilainen et al., 2015). I recommend future research that can influence higher education institutions that are ready to take on the topic of bullying by collaborating and sharing resources with other institutions (see Bultena et al, 2015).

In the meantime, higher education institutions that are willing to support future research on bullying, and administrators who are not afraid to face the reality of their campus climate, may consider starting a partnership with state agencies to continue this important work (see Early, 2014). A show of unity to combat bullying on college campuses in the United States may create the awareness necessary to bring immediate social change across the globe (Washington, 2014). It should be noted that this study did not specifically seek to interview LGBTQIA students and other minority student populations; however, there were participants who gave testimony about their

observations of bullying on the EC campus as it pertained to members of the LGBTQIA and other minority student populations. A research project that makes inquiry into bullying of LGBTQIA students and other minority student populations on its campus may be beneficial for EC. Therefore, I recommend a more intentional study take place that will help academic leadership learn from specific minority community members about their personal experiences with bullying on campus. More important, it is hoped that other higher education institutions will support research studies like this one on the topic of bullying in a higher education context (see Merilainen et al., 2015).

Summary

As a project developer, scholar, and practitioner, I am thrilled to have contributed scholarly research on bullying in a higher education context to the research catalog. The experience of creating a project that may influence decisions in a local higher education setting, and perhaps globally, is a great honor and privilege. The project genre selected for this study is an evaluation report that describes the participants' experiences with bullying on the EC campus, and it demonstrates the importance of institutions having policies and procedures in place to address this uncivil behavior. Although EC has a mechanism to report unwelcome behaviors, and some programs and policies in place to address harassment, there is nothing to address bullying specifically (dean of students, personal communication, June 5, 2018).

As a result, I sought through this project to explicitly respond to the lack of such programs and policies and to advise and encourage EC to implement best practices to

mitigate risks of bullying of its constituents and stakeholders. In short, this project study confirmed through personal interviews that bullying occurs in the local setting, and that attention is needed to the topic of bullying in the overall church, as reflected in the findings described in Section 2 of this study.

Last, in this study, I did not explore minority group member experiences with bullying on the EC campus. Therefore, I encourage the advancement of research and further inquiry into LGBTQIA and other minority student populations and their experiences with bullying on the EC campus.

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Appendix A: Project Study

Bullying on a College Campus: A Qualitative Study.

Prepared by Arnita D. Walls

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Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the administrators of the participating institution for their eagerness to support this study by extending access to participants and for their willingness to listen and learn together based on the personal experiences described in this project study.

Project Study Description

The rationale for this project study was the need to address the problem of bullying on a single college campus. The literature used to support this project study documented that bullying is a problem in higher education contexts and is a form of harassment (Branch, Ramsay, & Barker, 2013) as well as an abuse and misuse of power (Haswell, 2014). Furthermore, an evaluation report was chosen as the genre to report on the problem of bullying because that format allows for the articulation of the data gathered in a comprehensive and reader-friendly manner. This evaluation report provides a data analysis and summary of personal experiences of alumni that administrators, should they choose, can use as a guide to establish best practices for new policies and procedures. This project study reports on how the literature showed a variety of ways institutions are experiencing the problem of bullying on their campuses and describes the extent of this problem at the local level. Based on the literature reviewed, the goal of this evaluation report is to encourage the development of specific policies and procedures that can influence a safe and bully-free campus environment at a single institution.

An evaluation report is a critical piece of work that is the outcome of an evaluation of a product, designed to bring transparency to assist the reader in decision-making as it relates to policies and procedures and making improvements (University of Southern California, 2019), and acts as an artifact (Walden University, 2019). Another goal of this project is to provide the partner institution with data that reveal the culture of bullying on its campus and the impact this behavior can have on the student experience.

Specifically, this project acts as an artifact for attention to be given to bullying on the EC campus. Lastly, the project provides the partner institution's administration with information that may guide and influence the development of best practices to mitigate bullying of students on its campus. More important, the project was based on the responses to the RQs and satisfied its goal through an evaluation report that was presented to the EC administration as a white paper.

Evidence of Bullying From the Literature

Bullying has been described as a form of harassment and threatens the quality of life in a variety of spaces, including the workplace (Misawa, 2015a). *Bullying*: unwanted, repeated negative behaviors such as intimidation, threats, force, or harm that others are subjected to taking place over time (Atkinson, 2014, p. 2). More specifically, bullying is taking place in higher education contexts and has raised concerns about campus life for all college students (Lawrence, 2017). Doğru and Yaratana (2014) described bullying as negative and unwelcomed behaviors that make the persons being bullied unable to protect or defend themselves against the bully. A study conducted by Reid (2015) inquired into bullying in a Christian university context, and this study has a direct correlation to this study and the institution studied for this project.

Giorgio (2012) described how bullying has been spoken of most often in the context of K–12, and that this behavior can threaten success of students as they make their transition to higher education contexts. Bullying in all settings, be it private or public sector, higher education or K–12, can affect student retention and create an

adverse student experience for students who undergo bullying on campus (Atkinson, 2014). In the end, bullying poses a great risk to higher education institutions like the partner institution of this study and may create a presence of “low morale, loss of productivity, and poor attendance among its community members, including students and student workers” (Lieber, 2010, p. 93).

Researchers such as Lawrence (2017) have suggested that institution leaders should define bullying on their campus, and what bullying behaviors may look like to its members, in order to improve the climate of the college campus. According to Carden (2014), bullying is happening in a variety of ways on campuses, in face-to-face encounters and through many social media outlets. Carden’s research also revealed how prevalent bullying is in higher education and how it is a major contributor to over 100,000 students dropping out of college annually.

Although a great concern has been placed on bullying in the K–12 setting, more recently concern has been placed on the higher education context (Fauscher et al., 2015). As early as the year 2000, interest was evident around building more awareness to stop bullying and harassment that takes place in public spaces, including postsecondary learning institutions (Sinkkonen et al., 2014). However, as noted by Washington (2014), bullying is a more familiar topic in our society today than it was in the previous 20 years; campuses have only begun to focus on its impact within the last 20 years. Keashly and Neuman (2008) noted that in their sample of administrators, staff, and faculty, along with others, bullying behaviors that were reported had taken place for more than 3 years.

Another phenomenon concerning bullying is that bystanders are present and are also affected by the behavior. Bystanders are described as individuals who stand by, witness bullying of people, and reinforce the bully's behaviors (Salmivalli, 2014). Accordingly, this project points out the fact that patterns of bullying can span over a student's academic career and post career. In addition, this project emphasizes that more attention should be paid to enlighten institutions on how bullying manifests and ways to minimize such behaviors in college communities (see Giorgi, 2012).

Bullying behavior is negativity that impacts student life; students who are bullied can feel demoralized, have a tainted college experience, and become discouraged and lose interest in their studies (Atkinson, 2014). More important, students are limited in ways to seek support to protect them from their bullies and typically tend to fear some form of retribution (Poole, 2016). Research has stated that bullies are accountable for their own behavior; however, higher education institutions are complicit when they choose not to confront this important issue directly and could face possible legal consequences when patterns of bullying behavior exist that may create a hostile study environment or workplace (Indvik, 2012).

According to Misawa (2015a), three common on-campus bullying postures have been recognized:

- *Positional bullying*: bullying by a person in a position of power.
- *Counter-positional bullying*: bullying by a person who is in a position of less power.

Example: someone who is a peer or external partner.

- *Unintentional conspirative positional bullying*: bullying by a group of two or more people in both superior and subordinate positions of power acting simultaneously and collaboratively, often based on race, gender, or sexual orientation.

Bullying has also been described as either *vertical* or *horizontal* (Druzhilov, 2012). Vertical bullying is when a supervisor or other person in a position of authority initiates the uncivil behavior, and horizontal bullying is when a peer or colleague initiates bullying. Although categories are important, both Misawa (2015a) and Druzhilov (2012) focused less on practices, the bully's patterns of behavior that need to be attended to in order to minimize bullying altogether.

Bullying in ministerial contexts has also been documented. According to Mallory (2016), Stephen Finlan noted that bullying in the church is a weapon used to compete and to maintain power and privilege. In addition, laypeople and clergy abuse their individual power while in congregational contexts, and bullies in the church tend to be individuals who are narcissist and do not embrace Christianity as a form of transformation. Finlan's statements are valuable to the current study in that the participants in this study were trained at the institution of the study's partner site. The participants of this study were trained to minister in their communities and within their congregations. These participants described the personal impact of being bullied while attending the partner institution and noted that attention needs to be directed at the bullying taking place in the church. More information about these testimonials is presented in the data analysis sections of this evaluation report.

Guiding Research Questions

RQ1: What are the EC alumni's perceptions of the manifestation and pervasiveness of bullying?

RQ2: What perceived influence did bullying have, personally or academically, on alumni who observed or experienced bullying on the EC campus during their studies, and afterwards, and in their careers?

To better understand the participants' academic certificate and degree program of choice and learner type (distance, commuter, or on campus) three closed-ended demographic questions were asked, and four open-ended questions were used for this project study. Therefore, to answer the RQs and for participants to answer the open- and closed-ended interview questions in their own voice, a qualitative research study, using a phenomenological approach, was most effective.

In addition, Chickering and Reisser's Seven Vectors of Identity Development (Chickering & Reisser, 1993) were selected for this project study to establish a connection between participant responses. The vector that was chosen for this project was *developing mature interpersonal relationships*. This vector is described as a tool that respects difference, appreciates commonalities, and promotes acceptance (Chickering and Reisser, 1993). More important, this vector made a direct connection to the responses of participants of this study to help demonstrate "intercultural relations," "appreciation for others," and "tolerance for those around them." It will also be useful to emphasize importance of this project study to the partner institution. The direct connection is

important for understanding the phenomenon of bullying and the demonstration of a much broader connection to the problem of bullying that occurred at the partner institution, as reported in the findings of this study. In addition, the vector allowed the reporting of participants' perceptions of the disruptions and the impact of those disruptions on the social interactions of those students affected by bullying.

Data Analysis and Findings

The participant interview was the only instrument used in this study to collect data. As a result, the codes and themes identified were used to assist with analyzing the data. During the participant interviews, the following interview questions were answered in detail:

RQ1: Describe a time when you experienced bullying on the EC campus. What did you do in response to the incidence, if anything?

RQ2: How would you describe the experience and its impact on you and your studies? Describe how this experience may have affected your work in your community, parish, or congregation.

The data analysis for this project study was presented in a narrative format to describe the perceptions of the participants who were identified in this study. A narrative format allowed this study to report the details and descriptions directly in the voice of each participant. The participants shared their experiences and perceptions on how they experienced bullying on the EC campus, whether as an actual victim or as a bystander, or how bullying affected their decision to continue their studies and how their experience

affected their career in their parish, congregation, and community. Although the primary focus was their direct experience with bullying, some participants described concerns for bullying that is occurring in their local churches. The findings revealed that 75% of the participants had a personal and direct experience with bullying, and the other 25% revealed that they were bystanders and observed bullying.

All eight participants in the study met the selection criteria for this study, having matriculated and graduated during the academic years of 2010 to 2015. In addition, participants were graduate-level students identified by a pseudonym to protect their identity and assure confidentiality. The participants were international and domestic students, who commuted, lived on campus, or were distance learners of EC. Although the selection criteria did not include gender or sexual identities, several students shared their concern about bullying toward specific groups regarding gender identity.

Furthermore, after refinement of the original 13 themes, review of redundancies resulted in five themes that were reported in the analysis, as follows: (a) bullying, (b) campus setting, (c) community members involved, (d) institutional support, and (e) impact and were based on any connections that showed up in the responses that could be linked together using short phrases and similar themes or words, and were attached to the nodes. Upon completion of matching responses to the nodes, the data were reexamined to look for other considerations or explanations that may have been important to note or to code.

Each of the five themes identified captured the important perceptions of each of the participants regarding their personal experience with bullying while attending EC. In addition, each theme fully represented the participants' perceptions about the personal impact the bullying behavior had on them during their enrollment and when they graduated and went off to their communities, parishes, and congregations. As a result, the five themes gave insight into the uncivil behaviors that occurred on campus and demonstrate the need for the inquiry into this topic.

Themes Identified From Data Collection

Bullying Theme

There was a consensus by the participants that bullying did occur on the EC campus during the academic years of 2010 to 2015, although cyberbullying was not described as very prevalent at that time. The findings of the data analysis responded to the research question, What were the EC alumni's perception of the manifestation and spread/pervasiveness of bullying? This interview question revealed that six participants described having direct experience with bullying while on the EC campus. Two other participants agreed that they too experienced bullying, but as a bystander—witnessing bullying of others while on the EC campus. One participant stated, “I was bullied by a professor on campus.” This participant described a face-to-face encounter with a professor who did not agree with their feedback during class. The participant said they were “very uncomfortable from that point on.”

Another participant, echoed the same sentiment: “My experience at EC reminds me of how not to mistreat people and that everyone deserves respect no matter what their backgrounds are.” This participant described professors using critiquing and grading to bully students who had a less than favorable standing in class.

Campus Setting Theme

According to participant perceptions, bullying predominantly occurred when students were on campus and in the classrooms. although two participants described their direct experience with bullying taking place off campus, before and after classes. Overall, there was an overwhelming response among participants that their bullying experience occurred on campus during instructional time.

The findings of the data analysis also responded to RQ1 regarding the manifestation of bullying. One participant reported that while on campus during a winter intensive, they observed a female student being bullied in the classroom in front of the professor and the entire class. Another participant shared a similar experience at EC that made them more aware of bullying, saying that “bullying takes place in the church” and that “attention needs to be paid to the issue.”

Community Members Involved Theme

The findings of the data analysis for this section responded to RQ1 regarding the pervasiveness of bullying on the EC campus. It was clear from the participant responses that the bullying was widespread on and off the campus, and involved professors, students, and family members. More specifically, six participants shared that the

community members who were doing the bullying were professors and students. One of those participants reported that they observed a female student being bullied by a male student in class. The participant also stated that the male student regularly exercised bullying behaviors against other students, many of whom were female or in a protected class such as a racial, ethnic, or minority group. Another participant reported a case where the bully was a family member who did not attend the institution.

Institutional Support Theme

None of the participants described knowing how to report bullying or if there were a policy to address bullying. The participants' perceptions were that previous complaints made to the student affairs department were swept under the rug and that it was not clear who else they could seek out for support. The participants who were enrolled in the Master of Arts (MA) degree program described being treated less favorably compared to the Master of Divinity (MDiv) students. Also, the participants described feeling that the MDiv program was spoken more highly of by professors and other administrators.

A participant reported that "MA students were treated poorly and that professors and the institution did not keep all students in mind."

Another participant shared that they felt that "what they were doing in the program was not worth as much as an MDiv student."

A third participant reported that they were approached by an EC employee who asked how they were doing. The participant stated that they shared with the employee

that they were being bullied by a family member. Shortly after the participant shared their experience with the employee, the participant shared that the EC employee connected them to the institution's employee assistance counseling services. The participant said they "received five free counseling sessions, but after the fifth session the participant could no longer afford to continue the services."

Thus, the data analysis revealed two very different perceptions regarding support. The data analysis did reveal that participants did not know of any direct policy or person to seek out or to contact to address concerns of bullying.

Impact Theme

The data analysis for this interview question responded to RQ2: What perceived influence did bullying have personally or academically on alumni who observed or experienced bullying on the EC campus during their studies, and afterwards, and in their careers? Finally, the data analysis revealed that participants' experiences with bullying made them want to withdraw from the institution. The data analysis revealed how the participants' experience with bullying at EC may have affected their work in their community, parish, or congregation. One participant described how they "had become less engaged" and "hoped that they did not have to take more courses with that professor." This participant also stated that their experience "raised their awareness about how easily someone can disrupt someone's journey."

Another participant stated that their experience affected them in several ways. ...

I removed myself from the space to avoid further altercation or any impact to my studies. I stopped engaging in the professor's class and sat in the rear of the class for the rest of the semester. I became very disconnected from the institution and only wanted to finish the program and get the hell out of there.

Another participant shared that they will forever remember their experience at the institution and that they “would never recommend any person of color to attend the institution.” This participant went on to say, “the institution did not have any policies in place to appropriately address bullying or the mistreatment of students of color.”

Other participants stated that they “kept pushing and just focused on getting out of that place as soon as possible.” “The institution reminded me of how not to treat people and that everyone deserves respect no matter what their backgrounds are.” “It was a terrible experience.” The participants were careful in reviewing their member check form to ensure the accuracy of all their responses to the interview questions.

Overall, the data analysis revealed that bullying occurs in the classroom at a theological institution. Furthermore, the analysis revealed that professors were most responsible for the classroom bullying, and similarly, that male students were also bullying their female student peers while on campus. The findings in this analysis support the literature review in Section 1 and describe student experiences within bullying higher education contexts. More important, this qualitative case study provides an understanding of bullying on a single college campus identified in this study as EC.

Impact of Bullying on Campus

Bullying contributes to a negative campus environment, and it will be important to address the impact of this behavior with those in charge of ensuring that all students have a positive student experience while on campus (see Giorgi, 2012). Slovak, Crabbs, and Stryffeler (2015) stated that behavioral problems of adolescents transfer into the higher education context. The literature supports the assertion that bullying is taking place in the K–12 setting, and that bullies often enter postsecondary institutions bringing this uncivil behavior with them. Although the partner institution is primarily a graduate-level institution, according to the data gathered in this project study, bullying is still prevalent among second-career students and long-time teaching professionals.

Bullying has many legal ramifications. Bullying behaviors may bring a variety of threats to the reputation of an institution. Although there are currently no bullying laws, this inappropriate behavior can lead to other negative consequences for academe. When bullying does occur on campuses like the partner institution, there is the possibility of complaints of harassment and discrimination, which may lead to sanctions from the Office of Civil Rights or to lawsuits (Indvik & Johnson, 2012; Lieber, 2010).

It is clear from the literature that the presence of harsh words, hazing, and other bullying tactics is no longer able to be dismissed as simply a matter of teasing—this type of behavior actually creates a hostile environment that can impede a student’s academic progress and achievement and possibly lead to students taking legal action against the institution (Gloor, 2014b). Furthermore, inappropriate bullying conduct may constitute

unlawful harassment and victimization that may land college and university administrators in the courtroom (Reid, 2012). Should a student decide to move forward with a legal complaint, there is a strong possibility of financial impact to the institution and charges of criminal behavior against a bully.

Recommendations

In higher education contexts, it is not unusual to approach bullying by simply ignoring it or avoiding the person who is the bully (King & Piotrowski, 2015). Studies have shown that this approach may perpetuate bullying behaviors and the victimization personally experienced by students (Garland et al., 2017). Therefore, this evaluation report names mechanisms and levers described in current literature for the purposes of identifying options that will assist an institution with combating bullying behaviors on campus. Moreover, in this section I reviewed current literature and best practices to address the topics of the antibully campus; bullying policy and procedures; resources for administrators, faculty, and staff; and local partnerships that will be instrumental in achieving a successful campaign to rid a campus of bullying.

Antibully Campus

This project study describes multiple ways for an institution to become an antibully campus. According to Mallory (2016), Stephen Finlan suggested that one solution to combating bullying in religious entities is rooted in the love of Jesus Christ, which after all is what the church is proclaiming. It will be important for religious institutions like the partner site to have effective tools in place to detect and prevent

bullying, as well as to be prepared with counsel and healing for all stakeholders affected by bullying on campus (Dowd, 2015).

The literature has suggested that efforts must be more than your typical employee and student outings or church-related events or Sunday sermons on the topic of bullying (Dowd, 2015). To that point, an antibully campus environment would require multipronged and sustainable efforts that will ensure students receive the administration's support. As a next step, partner institutions must establish a timeline to draft a policy and procedure, with clearly defined protocols, for reporting and combating bullying campus-wide, as recommended by Lawrence (2017).

Policy and Procedures

Specific policies and procedures may spark an awareness that bullying occurs on campuses like the partner institution and may help to limit bullying of students and other stakeholders, on or off campus. To assist with establishing policy and procedures, it will be important for institutions like the partner institution to draft a clear definition of what is considered bullying on its campus and in its community (Myers, 2012).

Lastly, the partner institution may consider contacting the Department of Justice to request an aggregate report of complaints of bullying shared by higher education institutions in their annual campus safety reports (Department of Justice, 2015). To minimize possible barriers to the implementation of policy and procedures, it will be important that the partner institution's administration share with key stakeholders the findings of the data collection from the participant interviews. The administration will

need to invest in ethical oversight of antibullying policies and procedures to ensure student success and allocate appropriate resources for this campaign to ensure appropriate oversight of bullying or other forms of harassment on its campus (Lester, 2013).

Community Resources

According to the literature, institutions must promote an ethical college campus for all stakeholders (Waingurt, 2014). Therefore, training for administrators, including faculty and staff, will need to take place to establish ethical and sensitivity practices to ensure students feel comfortable when reporting incidents to administration. The more consistently institutions demonstrate practices to make their campus safe, the more students may perceive an inclusive environment. Also, it will be paramount that academic and social potential for student learners be attended to by the institution, and it must invest in effective strategies that will prevent bullying on its campus (Ertesvag, 2015). The faculty will need training to provide them with the skills and knowledge necessary to be more aware of the climate of the campus (Lewis & Ericksen, 2016).

Findings from both Coker et al. (2016) and Doane et al. (2016), as reported in this project study, suggest that institutions like the partner institution establish resources for those who have witnessed bullying and empower them to report these uncivil behaviors. First-year students may already bring some experience with bullying, and it will be important for administrators to have resources in place for those students to feel empowered in the new learning setting and find ways for them to be resilient and manage bullying through proper channels (see Holt et al., 2014).

Court mediation has been used at higher education institutions as an alternative in states like Nebraska and Oklahoma, which encourage institutions like the partner site to consider the possibility of entering litigation on matters of bullying. The literature has reported that mediation has been successful, and a resolution and settlement rate of 80% in win-win situations (Bultena, Ramser, & Tilker, 2015).

Local Partnerships

There is also the potential of partnering with state agencies such as departments of human rights to participate in on-site training for faculty, staff, and students (Early, 2014).

Summary of Recommendations:

1. Launch a campaign for an antibully campus to build more awareness. The findings indicate that there currently is not a set of specific policies to report bullying.
2. Define bullying for the campus community. This can be done, along with sharing the findings from this study, to bring even more awareness directly to the faculty, staff, and student members.
3. Develop an antibully policy and procedure to assist with mitigating bullying behaviors on campus. Establish a task force team to be a part of this important work and set a timeline to implement.
4. Provide sensitivity training to administrators to ensure they are equipped to deal with the confidentiality and ethical expectations of managing a complaint of bullying. The

- findings indicate that students may not know who to seek support from, and it would need to be someone they can trust.
5. Set up resources with local authorities and state agencies and other partner institutions for faculty, staff, and students who may need external tools to report incidents and to seek support.
 6. Conduct a bullying survey of current faculty, staff, and students every 2 years for comparison. This will provide the administration with current data on the campus climate and reveal possible bullying behaviors.
 7. Administer a bullying survey to specifically to capture the experience of minority populations and protected class members on campus to include: LGBTQ, persons of color and those with disabilities.
 8. Partner and share resources with similar institutions in order to build awareness and continue to give attention to the uncivil behaviors that go undetected on campus.

Conclusion

After reaching out to 22 colleges and universities, there were 3 colleges that expressed an interest to partner with me on this important topic and to learn what their campus climate is like for its students and key stakeholders. Of the three schools, I chose a theological institution, where bullying would be least expected to occur. Overall, this evaluation report provides a narrative of this research study and reports on the important data analysis used for this project. The participants' willingness to openly discuss their perceptions of their experience with bullying at a religious institution richly contributed

to the evaluation to determine if bullying takes place in higher education contexts. This report also provides a better understanding of bullying on college campuses through current literature and the rich data collected upon which a reasonable institutional policy may be developed. Also, this project brings attention to the training needs for administrators to be able to respond to complaints of bullying on college campuses. More specifically, this project is enlightening the partner institution on how bullying on its campus has negatively affected previous students and may be affecting current student life as well as the ministry of graduates when called to congregations.

Although this report in general recognizes the bullying phenomenon and the effects of this uncivil behavior on the campus of the partner institution, the analysis revealed that teachers were the primary community members responsible for bullying on campus, and also, that the source of bullying of female students on campus is their male student peers. This disclosure of negative experiences for students pursuing careers in the ministry, and the recommendations for policy development, building more awareness on campus, and literature recommendations to combat bullying, seem to indicate that the onus lies with administrators.

It is clear from the literature that bullying is rooted in social and cultural norms, and an institution that is a bully-free and safe learning environment seems to be the best way forward for all students (see Rycik, 2015). Therefore, a response from the academic community to commit to action to address the welfare and safety and health of all campus

community members and the campus life they deserve is appropriate (see Atkinson, 2014; Washington, 2014).

Appendix B: Initial Introductory Email Invitation for Students

Dear [respondent],

I am a doctoral student at Walden University. As part of my studies, I am examining if bullying takes place at [REDACTED]. You were selected as a possible participant because of your current status as an alumnus who matriculated and graduated during the years of 2010–2015. I obtained your email address information via the Office of Technology and [REDACTED] offices at your institution. In addition, I also currently serve as [REDACTED] at the [REDACTED]. More important, this study is separate from my role at the institution and seeks to interview alumni who attended the institution during a time when I was not employed by the [REDACTED].

If you have experienced or observed bullying while attending the [REDACTED] and agree to be in this study, you will be asked to participate in a face, phone, or Skype audio interview. This interview should take 45 minutes at the most. The date, time, and location will be determined to meet your convenience. You will also be asked for permission by the researcher to audio record the interview, and you will be allowed to review what has been transcribed, which may take 30 minutes. Your total time of participation for this study would be 1 hour and 15 minutes. All data will remain confidential and only be used for the purposes of this research project. You are free to decide not to participate or to withdraw at any time without negatively affecting your relationship with me or the institution. Your participation is strictly voluntary.

Please read the attached consent form, and I would appreciate your response to the invitation by [deadline]. Also, please print/keep a copy of this invitation for your records.

If you have any questions, call me at 952-923-3187 or email me at arnita.walls@waldenu.edu

Sincerely,

Arnita D. Walls

Appendix C: Alumni Interview Questions

By agreeing to participate in the Skype, face-to-face, or phone interviews, I understand that I am free to share as much or as little about my student experience as I feel comfortable.

I. Participant Demographics

If possible, please share which certificate program you attended.

Which program did you graduate from?

Which type of learner were you while attending your institution?

II. Student Experience With Bullying While Enrolled at EC:

The copy of the signed consent form was given to the interviewee.

Describe a time when you experienced bullying on the EC campus.

What did you do in response to the incident, if anything?

How would you describe the experience and its impact on you and your studies?

Describe how this experience may have affected your work in your community, parish or congregation.

Appendix D: Member Check Request Form

Date

Good morning (or afternoon): Please find attached the completed transcriptions of our interview session. At your convenience, please read through and add, delete, or expand on your comments as necessary. Let me know the changes, and I will update the information promptly. Again, it was a pleasure to speak with you, and I sincerely appreciate your participation in the study.

Arnita D. Walls

Walden University Doctoral Candidate

Appendix E: Participant Email First Reminder

Date

Good morning (or afternoon): This email is a reminder that you are still eligible to participate in the study on bullying in a higher education context. Please find attached the consent form for your review and consent.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please print the attached form, sign and date below, and email to me at arnita.walls@waldenu.edu. Also, please keep a copy of the consent form for your records.

Arnita D. Walls

Walden University Doctoral Candidate

Appendix F: Participant Email Second Reminder

Date

Good morning (or afternoon): This email is a reminder that you are still eligible to participate in the study on bullying in a higher education context. Please find attached the consent form for your review and consent.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please print the attached form, sign and date below, and email to me at arnita.walls@waldenu.edu. Also, please keep a copy of the consent form for your records.

Arnita D. Walls

Walden University Doctoral Candidate

Appendix G: Participant Email Third Reminder

Date

Good morning (or afternoon): This email is a reminder that you are still eligible to participate in the study on bullying in a higher education context. Please find attached the consent form for your review and consent.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please print the attached form, sign and date below, and email to me at arnita.walls@waldenu.edu. Also, please keep a copy of the consent form for your records.

Arnita D. Walls

Walden University Doctoral Candidate