BULLYING AND FEAR OF VICTIMIZATION

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In recent years, bullying victimization has attracted more attention than ever. While bullying victimization in schools has been a part of the public consciousness for decades, there is growing public sentiment that the issue is no longer "kid stuff." Research in the area of school victimization, specifically bullying victimization, has linked these types of experiences to a broad range of negative consequences (Esbensen & Carson, 2009; Hay & Meldrum, 2010). Bullying victims experience more fear of victimization at school and are at a higher risk of poor school performance, lower self-esteem, fear, depression, and even suicide (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010).

For nearly 40 years, bulling victimization has been a topic of global scholarly research (e.g. Olweus, 1978). However, the majority of this work has been focused on adolescents still in a primary school setting, specifically grade school, middle school, and high school. More recently, research on bullying victimization has expanded into other settings like colleges and universities and the work place (Chapell et al., 2003; Hoel, Rayner, & Cooper, 1999). Over time, the perception that bullying victimization is limited to kids on the playground has faded. Many now accept that bullying can still have an impact as people move through adolescence into adulthood. Growth in the field has led to a more inclusive pattern of research on bullying victimization. Beyond the expansion of research into other settings, an increasing percentage of bullying research is now concentrating on cyberbullying victimization. In fact, beginning in 2005 the federal government has begun including research questions regarding cyberbullying victimization in their own research tool, the National Crime Victimization Survey – School Crime Supplement.

This growth and development has in part been responsible for a number of large national level samples of school age students. Although these samples are useful in answering important questions about types of victimization, they do not always have the power to ground the information. That is, results of a national level study may not apply locally, and thus practitioners, administrators, and victims may not find them useful.

The present study is an examination of the experiences of bullying victimization, perpetration, and fear where the participants were students at SHSU. Some of the advantages of this study relative to the large national level works include our ability to address multiple forms of bullying victimization, including cyberbullying victimization. We are able to explore bullying victimization of college students while also retrospectively addressing bullying victimization that occurred while these participants were in high school. We also asked participants about their experiences in engaging in bullying behavior themselves. This provides depth of understanding far beyond national studies (e.g., NCVS-SCS). Finally, we asked our participants about the consequences of their bullying victimization experiences. This report specifically details students' fear of future victimization and perception of risk of future victimization on campus, at home, and retrospectively during their time in high school. All told, this study provides a rich source of information on bullying victimization and its consequences which is applicable locally and may provide information that practitioners could find useful nationally, and perhaps globally.

Sample

Our sample was drawn from a pool of over 18,000 students who had a valid "shsu.edu" email address, who were over the age of eighteen, and currently enrolled at Sam Houston Sate University (SHSU).

Respondents to the survey included a diverse group of students. Of the 656 respondents, approximately 70% of the sample was White and 7% identified as African American, with 18% of the sample from Hispanic or Latino origin. The remaining five percent of students included Asians (2.3%) and other races (2.3%), with less than one percent of students identifying as Middle Eastern, Native or Hawaiian, or American Indian. In comparison to the most recent demographic data at SHSU, the sample overrepresented Whites (70% compared to 56% at SHSU) and underrepresented African Americans (7% compared to 18% at SHSU); however, the estimates for the remaining racial and ethnic categories were comparable (SHSU, 2014; see Figure 1 for race comparisons).

The age of respondents ranged from 18 to 66 years, with 50% of the sample being 18-22 years and 75% of the sample were between that ages of 18 and 28. Approximately 72% of the sam-
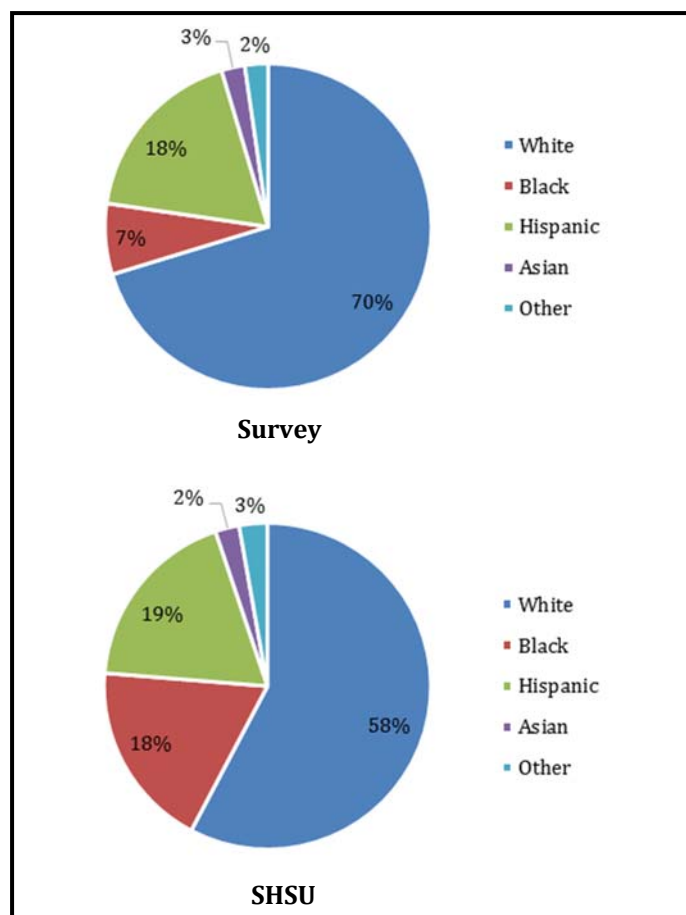
Figure 1. Comparison of Race Categories

ple was female, and about 75% of the sample reported being single (never married). The majority of respondents had begun their academic careers at SHSU (37% were transfer students). Respondents considered themselves to be full time students (81%). Finally, 22% of respondents reported that they currently live on campus. All told, the sample of students who completed the survey could be considered a fair reflection of the student population with exceptions for the over representation of female and white respondents. That is, the majority of respondents appear to be traditional, full time students at SHSU.

Experiences of Victimization

While fear of further, or future, victimization is one of the many negative consequences of experiencing bullying victimization, there are a number of other meaningful instigators of fear. Like experiencing victimization of any kind, fear of victimization also has a variety of negative impacts on the lives of those experiencing it. This survey addresses respondents' fear of victimization and perception of risk of victimization both on and off campus. We accomplish this by addressing the respondents' assessment of their own fear of victimization, as well as their views on risk of victimization. Finally and somewhat uniquely, we include an often missing component of fear: the respondents' exposure to crime and victimization.

A majority of the respondents to this survey have experienced no direct criminal victimization. Direct personal exposure to

victimization simply means that the respondent has indicated they have not been the victim of any crime, of any type. As noted in Table 1, the largest category of exposure to direct personal victimization is among high school students relating their experiences over a four year time period. Among these individuals, 35% of respondents, or roughly 216 students, had personally experienced a minor type of victimization (including items such as minor theft and vandalism), and 11% (roughly 64 students) had experienced some form of major victimization over their high school career.

Table 1. Exposure to Victimization		
Type of Victimization	High School	College
Direct Personal Exposure		
Minor	35%	24%
Major	11%	7%
Vicarious or Indirect Exposure		
Minor	57%	44%
Major	38%	25%

The survey also asked respondents about their exposure to another persons' victimization, referred to as vicarious victimization, which can be a source of stressors like fear of future victimizations. As one might expect, across both high school and college experiences, a larger percentage of respondents indicated some experience with vicarious victimization. In fact, over half of the respondents noted having known someone who experienced some form of minor victimization during their time in high school, and nearly half of all respondents knew someone in college who had experienced some form of minor victimization.

Perceptions of Risk and Safety

Whether with personal or vicarious victimization, the majority of students reported that their views of safety did not change throughout high school. Table 2 demonstrates two notable patterns in terms of changing perceptions. First, the majority of respondents held a consistent view of risk and safety across time. Second, the more commonly occurring change in both high school and college was negatively oriented. More specifically, a greater percentage of respondents indicated that over time they felt they were at greater risk of victimization and had more negative views related to school safety. Interestingly, Asian students report the lowest perception of risk while African American students consistently report the highest with all racial/ethnic categories reporting experiencing some perception of risk.

Fear of Victimization by Race and Ethnicity
FEAR IN HIGH SCHOOL

In addition to asking survey participants about their direct and indirect exposure to crime, students were asked how fearful they were that someone would attack or harm them (violent crime) at school/home or purposely damage their belongings

Table 2. Changing Perceptions of Risk and Safety		
	High School	College
Did perceptions of risk change?		
Yes (View Higher Risk)	21%	27%
Yes (View Lower Risk)	8%	16%
No, my views haven't changed	70%	57%
Did perceptions of safety change?		
Yes (Positive Views of Safety)	11%	21%
Yes (Negative Views of Safety)	24%	29%
No change in views	65%	50%

(property crime) at school/home. Figure 2 displays the proportionate responses to each of the 'fear of victimization' questions across major racial categories. The bars represent the percent of respondents who indicated they were fearful 'occasionally' or 'regularly.' A cross race examination (see Figure 2) suggest that Hispanic high school students report fear of victimization at home (Fig 2; Q2 & Q4) at greater rates than the other displayed groups, and white students report being more frequently fearful at school (Fig. 2; Q1 & Q3).

FEAR IN COLLEGE

What we can take away from the figures representing fear of victimization while at college is the distributions of type of fear. Very few respondents indicated fear of attack or harm in the

residence halls (Fig. 3, Q2). Even concern over property damage or theft in the residence halls was reported infrequently. In Figure 3, the most stable estimates are those for white and Hispanic students as they were the groups with the largest number of survey contributors. In both cases, you can see – like in high school – that concern over property victimization is more prevalent, and in most cases the fear of any type of victimization is less prevalent when the respondent is reflecting on college.

Fear of victimization at college is likely to be lower for a variety of reasons, but there is one element of this study that can be misleading. In asking our respondents about fear of crime and exposure to crime, we ask them to look back on their years in high school. In some respects this could be inflating the amount of exposure and fear reported relative to college simply because of opportunity. That is, while all of our respondents completed high school which traditionally is four academic years of schooling, our respondents were all currently college students and in many cases had only been in college 1.5 to 2.5 years. Simply put, our respondents had more time in high school to experience something negative than they would have in college.

Additionally, when interpreting percentages we should keep in mind the raw number of individuals responding to the questions asked. For example, in Figure 3 above, we see that black students would appear to be experiencing fear of being attacked or harmed at school at an alarming rate. However, the 33% fearful respondents in this column reflects the responses of 3 of 9 respondents. Thus, in this instance 3 of 9 responding students indicated that they had been fearful of attack or harm
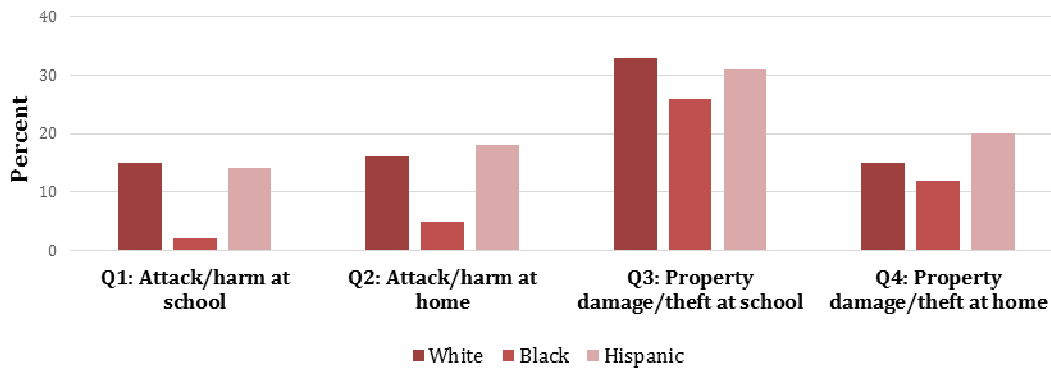

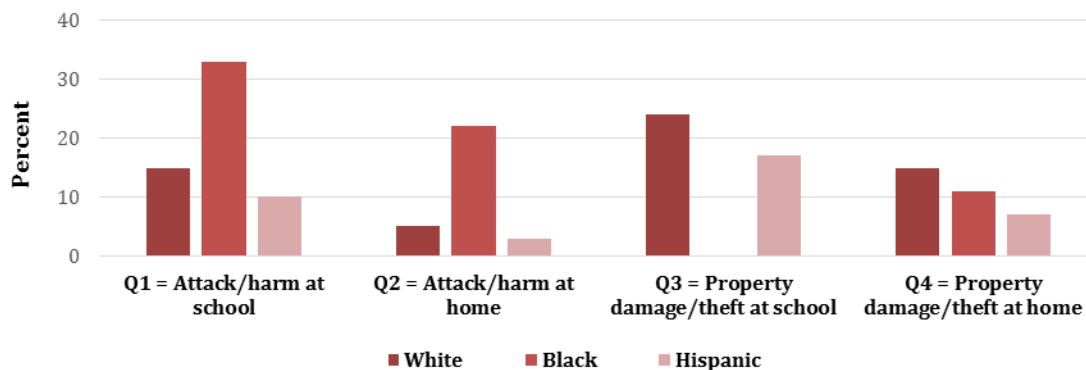**Figure 2. Percent fearful during high school**

Figure 3. Percent fearful during college

on campus. While it is important to know that students are reporting being fearful on campus, it should be taken with an appropriate degree of caution when attempting generalization to the entire student population.

Bullying Victimization in High School and College

Given our focus on the type and frequency of bullying victimization, students were asked to reflect on their time in high school and college and to indicate the nature and extent of their victimization experiences. The type of bullying was assessed through four behavioral measures including relational (name calling, teasing), physical (pushing, hitting, tripping), purposeful exclusion (intentionally leaving someone out), and online/cyber (Facebook, texts, instant messaging) forms of bullying. Respondents rated each experience as occurring "never," "once or twice ever," "once or twice a year," "one or twice a semester (quarter)," "once or twice a month," "once or twice a week," or "almost every day/every day." Because bullying by definition refers to a repeat course of conduct, students were identified as "bullied" if they indicated experiencing any of the four forms of bullying more than "once or twice ever."

Figure 4 below provides a representation of the percentages of students reporting any of the respective modes of bullying victimization. While this figure indicates that a large proportion of our sample had some experiences with bullying victimization over time, there are reasons this may occur. Most probable among potential explanations is that we ask college students to reflect back on their entire high school experience. Digging deeper into the responses, we see that 62.5% of respondents had bullying experiences that lasted a few days or less. Categorizing these individuals as limited experiencers of victimization reveals that 37.5% of the sample experienced lasting, persistent bullying victimization in high school, where 24.3% of respondents indicated that the victimization persisted for 'years.' When asked why they believed the victimization stopped, the most common response was "graduation" (reported by 75 respondents). Another 261 respondents did not provide a reason, perhaps suggesting the victimization continued. Among college students responding to bullying victimization items, 81.4% indicated that they had only experienced 'limited' victimization lasting only days, another 18.6% indicated "persistent" victimization lasting weeks or more. Finally, 3.5% of respondents indicated victimization lasting "years."
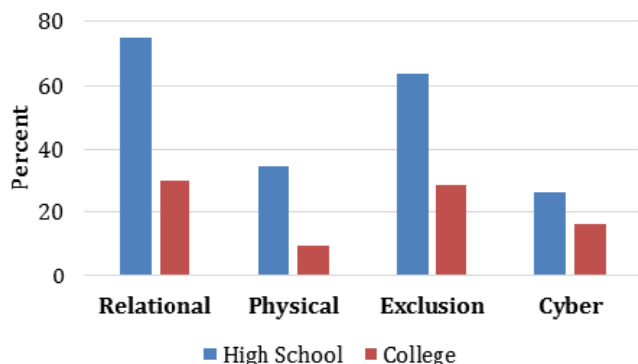

Figure 4. Bullying victimization by type

Consistent with prior research (Rospenda, Richman, Wolff, & Burke, 2013), respondents experienced bullying more frequently in high school than in college. Overall, relational victimizations (HS vs. College: 75% and 30%) and purposeful exclusions (HS vs. College: 64% and 29%) were the most common forms of bulling experienced in both high school and college. In regards to high school experiences only, physical bullying occurred at a higher rate than online/cyber victimizations (34% vs. 26%, respectively). However, the opposite was true with students' experiences in college. Indeed, 16% of respondents experienced online/cyberbullying in college, while only about 10% experienced physical bullying.

It is also the case here, as is consistent with the existing research, that a very large portion of the students reporting victimizations identify more than one type of victimization. In particular, prior research on cyberbullying victimization suggests that only a small percentage of students who report cyberbullying report experiencing cyber bullying only. In other words, most victims of bullying experience multiple forms of victimization. While less is known about bullying in the college setting, we find that our respondents indicated much less bullying victimization. In this case, the largest proportion of respondents indicating any victimization at college is approximately 30%, and they are reporting relational and exclusionary bullying (two forms of bullying that often go hand-in-hand). Equally interesting is the rise in percentage of respondents indicating having experienced cyberbullying and the sharp decline in physical bullying.

Bullying Perpetration in High School and College

Students were also asked to reflect on any bullying behaviors in high school or college in which they were the aggressor. Consistent with the reported victimization experiences, overall rates of bullying perpetration were higher in high school than college. When unpacking bullying behaviors, Figure 5 presents the percent of those who reported bullying by each type of behavior. College students who engage in bullying tend to engage in either exclusion or relational, while high school kids are more "well rounded" perpetrators. While relational and purposeful exclusions were the most common form of bullying perpetrated in both high school and college, respondents who bullied engaged in purposeful exclusions (HS vs. College: 74% and 16%) at a slightly higher rate than relational perpetrations (HS vs. College: 73% and 13%). Rates of physical and online/cyberbullying were almost seven times higher in high school than college. While over one-fourth of respondents engaged in physical bullying in high school, this was true for only 4% of students in college. Moreover, one in five students engaged in online/cyberbullying in high school, while only 3% of respondents perpetrated this behavior in college.

Figure 6 displays individual versus group perpetration for bullying in high school and college. In high school, bullying perpetration was carried out at a higher rate in a group than individually (76% vs. 58%, respectfully). Rates of bullying perpetration in college were carried out in both groups and individually somewhat equally (13% vs. 12%, respectfully).
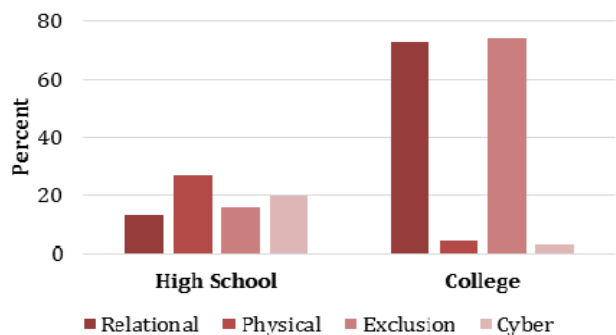
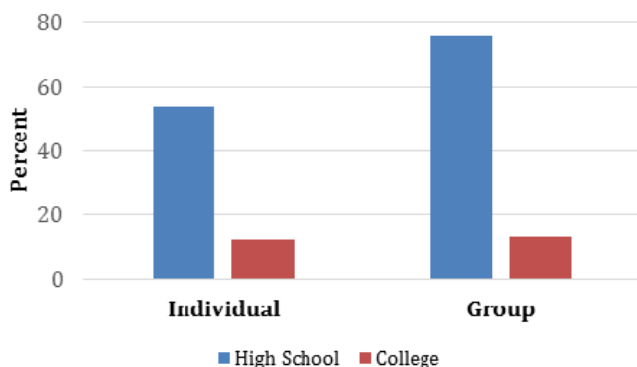**Figure 5. Bullying perpetration by type**

Figure 6. Bullying perpetration comparison

Perpetration of bullying both in high school and college is a somewhat sensitive issue as the research is contingent upon those perpetrating being both aware that what they are doing is bullying and being willing to disclose their perpetration to researchers. Here we find that that there are a number of respondents willing to disclose their role as a perpetrator. As much as 13% of respondents felt they had engaged in some form of bullying behavior in college, and as many as 76% felt that during their time in high school they had participated in some form of bullying at some point. In reflecting on high school bullying participation, 27% of those responding reveal a role in physical bullying in high school. Another 20% of respondents disclose a role in cyberbullying in high school. In general, perpetration in high school was more diverse than in college. A far fewer number of respondents disclosed bullying perpetration in college, and among those who did it seems that there was little preference for either individual or group perpetration. However, in college we find that he majority of perpetration is in the form of relational or exclusion bullying behavior.

Conclusion

The patterns reported here are a reflection of our current students' views of their past and present experiences both in high school and here at SHSU, and they are revealing and informative. Victimizations and fear of future victimizations, regrettably, are a fact of campus life. While we can be comforted by knowing that serious criminal victimizations affect a small portion of students, we must accept also that victimization in gen-

eral affects more students than we might think. Fear and victimization have a variety of sources and can take a number of forms. We reported here that nearly 75% of all respondents indicated having at least some experience with bullying victimization during their time in high school. Fewer students have had experiences with criminal victimizations either directly or indirectly, but still 57% of the sample reported some vicarious exposure to victimization in high school. And finally, fewer still are regularly fearful of victimization now that they are college students.

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Resources

Texas Education Agency

http://tea.texas.gov/Texas_Schools/Safe_and_Healthy_Schools/Coordinated_School_Health/Coordinated_School_Health_-_Bullying_and_Cyber-bullying/

Texas Anti-Bullying legislation

http://www.statutes.legis.state.tx.us/Docs/ED/htm/ED.37.htm

National School Climate Resource Center

http://www.bullybust.org/

U.S Dept. of Health and Human Services

http://www.stopbullying.gov

LIFELINE at 1-800-273-TALK (8255)