Navigating Emerging Adulthood with the Experience of Being Bullied in School

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Abstract

The overall aim of this thesis is to broaden the understanding of long-term outcomes of experiencing bullying victimization in school, related to the developmental period of emerging adulthood as well as how it can be understood in terms of resilience and outcomes of body-related concerns. **Study I** investigated how 15 emerging adults (M_{age}=29.00, *SD*=0.37), subjected to bullying victimization in school and suffering from poor psychological health in emerging adulthood, described their victimization experiences and perceived long-term outcomes of these experiences. The findings related to the time of victimization revealed a long duration of victimization, problems adjusting to the bullying; experiences of not receiving help from school personnel; and depression, anxiety and even suicidal thoughts. The perceived long-term outcomes were: feelings of insecurity; actively avoiding social situations; an identity of viewing oneself as worthless; and body image problems. Together, the long-term negative outcomes were found to have the potential to impair the developmental processes in emerging adulthood. **Study II** investigated how resilience was manifested in the experiences of 15 emerging adults (M_{age}=29.13, *SD*=0.52) with good psychological health despite experiences of childhood bullying victimization. Interviews were analysed, first deductively and then inductively, using concepts from resilience: protective factors and resilience as a dynamic process over time. The findings showed that the participants exhibited agency in handling the victimization, and that they had resources of social support who were prepared to help. As emerging adults the participants had been able to use their victimization experiences to help others, and perceived their experiences of handling the victimization as learning experiences that could be used in difficult situations as emerging adults. These findings indicate that resilience in relation to experiences of bullying victimization is best understood as an evolving process, whereby the individual interacts with their environment in an adaptive process, leading to positive development over time. **Study III** investigated the association between being bullied in school and body-related concerns – body esteem, body shame and body-ideal internalization – in emerging adulthood. The sample comprised 502 individuals (304 women and 198 men) who had participated in a longitudinal study when they were 10, 14 and 28 years old. The results showed that emerging adults who had been subjected to bullying victimization in school at age 10 and/or 14 had a poorer view of their general appearance and weight; they also reported more body shame than non-victimized emerging adults did. The results show that negative experiences of one's body and appearance are still an active agent of negative influence in emerging adults nearly two decades after they were subjected to bullying victimization in school. Taken together, the three studies in

this thesis point to the importance of understanding how experiences of bullying in school are related to the period of emerging adulthood, a time of both challenges and opportunities. This can help us better understand how experiences of being bullied in school can come to be translated into problems later in life, with body-related concerns being an overlooked but important aspect of how experiences of bullying victimization can be engraved on a body that one has learnt to hate and reject. Furthermore, the studies in this thesis indicate that exposure to bullying in school is dependent on the context in which it occurs. Social support from both school and home as well as other social contexts outside school must be recognized as the potential resilience-building structures they are in preventing bullying victimization experiences from leading to negative long-term outcomes.

Keywords: bullying victimization, long-term outcomes, emerging adulthood, resilience, body-related concerns

Sammanfattning (Swedish Summary)

Mobbning i skolan är något alla kan relatera till, oavsett personlig erfarenhet av mobbning eller inte så har de flesta sett mobbning förekomma. Utsatthet för mobbning i skolan har kopplats till flertalet negativa konsekvenser inom områden som till exempel psykisk hälsa, relationer och skolprestationer. Att bli mobbad är dock inte bara något som påverkar den som utsätts vid tidpunkten för själva händelsen utan effekterna av att ha blivit mobbad verkar också kunna dröja sig kvar och påverka livet även efter att själva mobbningen har upphört.

Även om kunskapen om långtidseffekter av att ha utsatts för mobbning i skolan har ökat över tid och kunnat visa på negativa effekter kopplat till bland annat psykisk hälsa, sociala relationer och ekonomisk situation så är det flera kunskapsområden som fortfarande är i behov av att undersökas. Ett sådant område handlar om att bättre förstå hur negativa långtidseffekter av att ha varit utsatt för mobbning i skolan är kopplat till livet som ung vuxen. Denna tid i livet infaller mellan tonår och vuxenår och innebär både utmaningar och möjligheter. Utmaningar under livet som ung vuxen handlar om bland annat identitetsutforskande och instabilitet vad gäller till exempel relationer och yrke. Möjligheter, å andra sidan, handlar om att det är en tid då man kan göra sig fri från tidigare negativa sammanhang och formulera sitt eget fortsatta liv. Att ha varit utsatt för mobbning i skolan riskerar att få en negativ inverkan på en individs utveckling under denna tid i livet. Ett annat område i behov av att belysas är vad som bidrar till att en del individer inte uppvisar negativa långtidseffekter i unga vuxenår, trots att de har varit utsatta för mobbning under skolåren, samt hur detta kan förstås i relation till den utvecklingspsykologiska tiden unga vuxenår. Ytterligare ett område, som nästan inte har undersökts alls, i relation till långtidseffekter av att ha varit utsatt för mobbning är kroppsmissnöje, detta trots att kropp och utseende blir allt viktigare under ungdomsåren och utsatthet för mobbning under denna tid riskerar att leda till kroppsmissnöje över tid. Ett övergripande problem när det gäller förståelsen av långtidskonsekvenser av att ha utsatts för mobbning i skolan är att unga vuxnas egna beskrivningar av sina upplevelser av detta till stora delar har saknats.

Syftet med föreliggande doktorsavhandling är att öka förståelsen av långtidseffekter av utsatthet för mobbning i skolan och hur det kan förstås i relation till negativa effekter kopplat till utmaningar i unga vuxenår, i relation till motståndskraft i att hantera utsatthet för mobbning samt i relation till tankar och känslor om den egna kroppen och utseendet i unga vuxenår. De tre studierna som är grunden för den här doktorsavhandlingen bygger på intervjuer och enkätsvar från den longitudinella forskningsstudien MoS (Mobbning och Skola) som har följt individer i Göteborgsområdet från det att de var tio år gamla till unga vuxenår då de var 28-29 år gamla.

Studie I undersökte hur femton unga vuxna (medelålder = 29,00, standardavvikelse = 0,37), som varit utsatta för mobbning vid tio års ålder, och som led av psykisk ohälsa i unga vuxenår, upplevde den mobbning de utsattes för samt vilka konsekvenser de upplevde att mobbningen hade i deras nuvarande liv. Semistrukturerade intervjuer med frågor om deras mobbningsupplevelser samt eventuella långtidseffekter tematiserades med hjälp av induktiv tematisk analys. Resultaten visade att majoriteten upplevde ett direkt samband mellan den mobbning de var utsatta för i skolan och den psykiska ohälsa de hade rapporterat som unga vuxna. Ett par deltagare gjorde dock inte denna koppling men beskrev ändå att de påverkades av mobbningen på så sätt att de idag var extra sensitiva i sociala sammanhang där någon riskerar att bli utesluten. Resultaten visade att den mobbning som de hade utsatts för hade pågått under lång tid – för många under flera år. De vanligaste formerna av mobbning var de som var riktad mot utseende samt exkludering. Effekterna av mobbningen då den pågick beskrevs av deltagarna i termer av depressivitet, ångest och för en del till och med i termer av självmordstankar. Deltagarna beskrev också att de försökte göra allt möjligt, nästan vända ut och in på sig själva för att anpassa sig till vad de trodde att mobbarna ville att de skulle ändra på för att mobbningen skulle upphöra. Ett anmärkningsvärt fynd är att alla utom en deltagare beskrev att de inte hade fått någon hjälp från skolpersonalen att stoppa mobbningen. Den deltagare som hade fått hjälp beskrev det som en vändpunkt i sitt liv och att han var tacksam för sin lärares ingripande. När det gällde långtidseffekter av mobbningen så beskrev de flesta deltagarna att de som unga vuxna upplevde en konstant känsla av osäkerhet som var sprungen ur deras mobbningsupplevelser. Många upplevde också depression och ångest samt kroppsmissnöje, något som de också beskrev som en direkt effekt av att alltid ha fått höra att de till exempel var fula eller feta. Några deltagare hade till och med utvecklat en ätstörningsproblematik, vilket de beskrev som en effekt av mobbningen. Några deltagare upplevde även att hela deras identitet hade formats av mobbningsupplevelserna och att de nu upplevde sig som värdelösa. Utifrån sina mobbningserfarenheter och de långtidseffekter de upplevde från detta så hade många deltagare utvecklat strategier för att undvika att bli sårade igen. Dessa strategier bestod för många av att undvika sociala sammanhang och vara tillbakadragen och för några innebar det också att de till och med hade undvikit att gå vidare till högre utbildning. När resultaten från den här studien sätts i relation till de utmaningar och svårigheter som är kopplade till unga vuxenåren så framstår det som att många av de långtidseffekter som är sprungna ur mobbningsupplevelser är begränsande för dessa individer när det gäller att interagera med andra individer. Ett stort fokus under unga vuxenår är identitetsutforskande, som också inbegriper en möjligheten att utforska och ändra sin identitet inom ramen för stödjande relationer. Dock finns risken att denna möjlighet kan

begränsas i en situation där långtidseffekter av att ha utsatts för mobbing i skolan också leder till strategier av socialt undvikande, då en sådan strategi kan hindra möjligheten att utforska och ändra sin identitet inom ramen för stödjande relationer. Dessutom finns det en risk att strategier av socialt undvikande skapar mer generella problem för unga vuxna med erfarenheter av att ha utsatts för mobbning i skolan, så som att komma in i olika sociala sammanhang som till exempel i ett socialt sammanhang på en högre utbildning. Det verkar alltså som att långtidskonsekvenser av utsatthet för mobbning riskerar att störa den psykosociala utvecklingen i unga vuxenåren.

I **Studie II** undersöktes på vilket sätt resiliens, det vill säga förmågan att hantera svårigheter och ändå fortsätta att utvecklas, kan förstås i relation till utsatthet för mobbning och potentiella långtidseffekter av mobbningsupplevelser. Studien använde semistrukturerade intervjuer där femton unga vuxna (medelålder = 29, 13, standardavvikelse = 0.52) som dels hade varit utsatta för mobbning när de gick i skolan men som hade en god psykisk hälsa som unga vuxna, intervjuades. Intervjuerna angående deras upplevelser av när mobbningen pågick samt upplevelsen av långtidseffekter av mobbningen, kopplat till unga vuxenår, analyserades med tematisk analys. En deduktiv tematisk analys utifrån begrepp inom resiliensfältet följdes av en induktiv tematisk analys av data inom varje begrepp. De två begreppen som användes vid kodningarna, kopplade till motståndskraft [resilience], var: skyddande faktorer [protective factors], och motståndskraft som en dynamisk process över tid [resilience as a dynamic process over time].

Fynden i relation till begreppet skyddande faktorer [protective factors] visade att deltagarna hade använt flera olika strategier för att hantera mobbningen, till exempel att försvara sig, svara tillbaka, avleda uppmärksamhet eller tillkalla hjälp. Men framför allt att de hade använt de strategier som var möjliga, till exempel använda sin egen inre styrka och säga ifrån eller att, om det fanns lärare som var villiga att hjälpa till så påkallades deras uppmärksamhet. Vad som framgår som viktigt är också att de faktiskt hade stöd från omgivningen som gjorde att de kunde använda olika strategier, som att be om hjälp från lärare. Deltagarna hade alltså både haft inre resurser, egna styrkor, och yttre resurser, individer som stöttade dom, men de hade också haft tillgång till sociala sammanhang utanför skolan där de kunde utvecklas i en positiv miljö.

Resultaten i relation till begreppet resiliens som dynamisk process över tid [resilience as a dynamic process over time] visade att även om deltagarna hade dragit sig undan och undvikit sociala sammanhang i skolan under tiden som mobbningen pågick så hade andra sociala sammanhang utanför skolan, så som olika fritidsaktiviteter, bidragit till att de kunde utvecklas i en positiv miljö där de var fria från mobbning. Vidare så hade sättet de hade hanterat mobbningen på lett till kunskap om hur de kunde göra för att hantera motgångar som unga

vuxna. Resultaten visade också att deltagarna kunde använda sina erfarenheter av att ha varit utsatta för mobbning i att på olika sätt hjälpa andra

Sammanfattningsvis visar den här studien på att motståndskraft, resiliens, kopplat till utsatthet för mobbning är en process som är dynamisk och uppstår i en positiv interaktion mellan individen och dess miljö genom anpassning över tid.

Studie III fokuserade på kroppsmissnöje och analyserade sambandet mellan att ha varit utsatt för mobbning under skolåren och kroppsuppfattning, skam kring den egna kroppen och internalisering av utseendeideal (i vilken grad man har gjort samhällets utseendeideal till sitt eget), i slutet av unga vuxenår. Studien använde data från enkäter besvarade i MoS studien då deltagarna var 10, 14 och 28 år gamla och undersökte sambandet mellan att ha varit utsatt för mobbning när man var 10 år och/eller 14 år i skolan och kroppsmissnöje i unga vuxenår när deltagarna var 28 år. Resultaten visade att de individer som hade varit utsatta för mobbning i grundskolan var mer missnöjda med sitt utseende och sin vikt än de som inte varit utsatta för mobbning. Vidare så visade resultaten också att de individer som hade varit utsatta för mobbning i grundskolan upplevde mer skam kring den egna kroppen i unga vuxenår jämfört med de som inte hade varit utsatta för mobbning i grundskolan.

Att inte långtidseffekter av att ha varit utsatt för mobbning i skolan, kopplat till kroppsmissnöje i unga vuxenår, har studerats mer ingående är anmärkningsvärd i relation till att kropp och utseende har kopplats till psykologiskt välbefinnande och positiv identitetsutveckling samt identifierats som en förlängning av självet i interaktion med omvärlden under unga vuxenår. Att vara fast i ett kroppsmissnöje, dikterat av utsatthet för mobbning i skolan, riskerar därmed att inte bara bli ytterligare en negativ personlig erfarenhet av långtidseffekter av utsatthet för mobbning i skolan. Det riskerar också att bli ett hinder i att navigera genom den utvecklingspsykologiska tiden unga vuxenår där både nya kamratrelationer och romantiska relationer är i fokus och där identitetsutforskande och omformulering av tidigare identitet, baserad på mobbningsupplevelserna, riskerar att försvåras av missnöje med eget utseendet och vikt samt skam kring den egna kroppen. Kroppsmissnöje i unga vuxenår, kopplat till erfarenheter av utsatthet för mobbning i grundskolan riskerar därmed att stå i vägen för möjligheten att lägga sina tidigare negativa erfarenheter bakom sig i en ny och positivt förstärkande miljö under unga vuxenår.

Studierna i denna avhandling belyser flera viktiga aspekter av vad utsatthet för mobbning i skolan och långtidseffekterna av dessa erfarenheter kan innebära för den utsatte. Långtidseffekter av att ha utsatts för mobbning i skolan behöver förstås i relation till den utvecklingspsykologiska tiden unga vuxenår, då långtidseffekter av att ha utsatts för mobbning i skolan på olika sätt kan

inverka på en individs möjligheter att navigera genom denna utvecklingspsykologiska tid. Dessutom behöver betydelsen av långtidseffekter i form av kroppsmissnöje, samt eventuella processer av resiliens kopplat till utsatthet för mobbning i skolan accentueras som viktiga aspekter av dessa långtidseffekter i relation till unga vuxenår. Unga vuxenår är den tid i livet som kommer efter att skolan och eventuella mobbningsupplevelser där har upphört, och det är också en tid i livet som förbereder för vuxenlivet. De tre studierna i denna avhandling pekar på vikten av att förstå hur erfarenheter av mobbning i skolan samvarierar med de utvecklingspsykologiska aspekterna av unga vuxenår. Detta kan hjälpa oss att bättre förstå hur erfarenheter av att ha blivit mobbad i skolan blir översatta till problem senare i livet, där kroppsmissnöje är en förbisedd men viktig aspekt. Vidare indikerar studierna i denna avhandling att utsatthet för mobbning i skolan är avhängig kontexten där den sker. Socialt stöd från både skola, hem och andra sociala sammanhang utanför skolan måste uppmärksammas som de potentiella resiliensbyggande strukturer de är, i att de kan stärka en utsatt individs möjlighet att hantera utsatthet för mobbning i skolan. Det är dock viktigt, i detta sammanhang, att påpeka att det i enlighet med svensk lag råder nollförbud mot mobbning i svensk skola och att skolor är skyldiga att arbeta för att förebygga och förhindra mobbning i skolan. Vidare pekar studierna i denna avhandling på att den möjlighet till resiliens som en dynamisk process över tid har där unga vuxenår är en tid som erbjuder möjlighet att lämna tidigare negativa erfarenheter, så som mobbning, bakom sig ger hopp om en positiv utveckling även för dem som har utsatts för mobbning i skolan. Möjligheten att följa individer över lång tid och få ta del av deras egna upplevelser av att utsättas för mobbning i skolan och hur de ser på långtidseffekterna av detta har fördjupat förståelsen av utsatthet för mobbning i skolan och dess långtidseffekter. Mot bakgrund av dessa insikter så är det möjligt att använda resultaten från denna avhandling både i antimobbningsarbete, arbete i att stärka resiliens samt kliniskt arbete med unga vuxna med mobbningserfarenheter från skolan.

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List of Publications

This thesis is based on the following three papers, which are referred to in the text by their Roman numerals:

I. Lidberg, J., Berne, S., & Frisén, A. (2022). Challenges in Emerging Adulthood Related to the Impact of Childhood Bullying Victimization. *Emerging Adulthood.* https://doi.org/10.1177/21676968211051475

II. Lidberg, J., Berne, S., & Frisén, A. (2023). Bullying Victimization and Resilience – From Childhood Bullying Victimization to Good Psychological Health in Emerging Adulthood. [Manuscript submitted for publication]. Department of Psychology, University of Gothenburg.

III. Lidberg, J., Berne, S., & Frisén, A. (2023). Is bullying victimization in school associated with body-related concerns in emerging adulthood? A prospective study over nearly two decades. [Manuscript submitted for publication]. Department of Psychology, University of Gothenburg.

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Content

Introduction

The long-term outcomes and impacts of experiences of bullying victimization in school are numerous, and have been found to have a negative impact on several different dimensions of life. Interviews with former victims (deLara 2019) as well as findings in quantitative studies (see Arseneault, 2018, for a review) reveal that experiences of being bullied in school can become a life-long burden of negative experiences. However, on the other hand, some studies indicate that the negative effects of being bullied in school are reduced over time, suggesting a process of resilience (Schoeler et al., 2018), which is also identified in interviews with former victims (Pabian & Vandebosch, 2019).

However, referring to findings that some individuals experience resilience is not the same as saying that bullying victimization in school is not problematic in terms of long-term outcomes. One suggested way of overcoming the problems in previous attempts to disentangle the complex process of long-term outcomes of bullying victimization in school has been to take a broader methodological approach and use more qualitative methods and longitudinal data in order to illuminate what has been described as a process of multifinality (Cicchetti & Rogosch, 1996) in relation to long-term outcomes of bullying victimization (McDougall & Vaillancourt, 2015).

The present thesis sets out to do just that, and to broaden the understanding of long-term outcomes of experiencing bullying victimization in school, related to the developmental period of emerging adulthood as well as to how it can be understood in terms of resilience and outcomes of body-related concerns.

In order to pursue this aim, interviews with former victims of bullying are used as a means to get access to the actual lived experience of long-term outcomes of bullying victimization (McDougall & Vaillancourt, 2015), longitudinal data is used to find the most suitable informants to interview, and measurements are used to investigate the under-researched area of how experiences of being bullied in school might be associated with experiences of body-related concerns in emerging adulthood.

The thesis follows an outline whereby the first chapter introduces the concept of bullying and how it can be understood at the time of victimization. Thereafter, previous research on long-term outcomes of bullying victimization is presented, emphasizing the negative effects of bullying victimization in relation to mental health and social interactions. Thereafter, body-related concerns as long-term outcomes of bullying victimization are described, and aspects of body image, body shame and internalization of body ideals are discussed. In the next chapter, the developmental phase of emerging adulthood is addressed. The features of this developmental period, as well as possibilities

and challenges during this time of life, are discussed. Although many (but not all) individuals who have been subjected to bullying victimization experience negative long-term outcomes – which also represents a gap in the knowledge regarding long-term outcomes of bullying victimization – studies are needed in order to enhance the knowledge about resilience in relation to bullying. Therefore, in the last chapter, resilience and central concepts of resilience are presented. Finally, after a summary of the three studies, their main findings are discussed, followed by methodological and theoretical considerations, implications for practice, ethical considerations and conclusions.

Bullying

Although the overall aim of this thesis is to broaden the understanding of long-term outcomes of experiencing bullying victimization, related to the developmental period of emerging adulthood as well as how it can be understood in terms of resilience and outcomes of body-related concerns, the initial experience related to these long-term outcomes – the victimization in school – needs to be addressed first. That is, to better understand the long-term outcomes of bullying victimization in school, the following features of bullying perpetration and victimization will be discussed in the subsequent sections of this chapter: how bullying is defined, how common it is, what the victims' reactions at the time of victimization are, how bullying can be understood as socially constructed, how bullying experiences can influence a person, and finally, what is perceived as having worked in ending the victimization.

Definition and Prevalence

Bullying as an international research field, and its place in today's social sciences, is said to have its origins in Sweden, initiated by Dan Olweus with inspiration from the Swedish physician Heineman, who introduced the concept of bullying in Sweden (Hellström et al., 2021). Olweus defined bullying as follows: 'A student is being bullied or victimized when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on part of one or more other students' (Olweus, 1993a, p. 10). In addition, Olweus described bullying as a type of aggression and explained that it involves an imbalance of power whereby victims have problems defending themselves (Olweus, 1999).

The core of Olweus's definition is the three main criteria of intentional aggression, repetition and imbalance of power. Intentional aggression implies that the perpetrator – the bully – has the intention to harm the victim, meaning that this is a behaviour that is unwanted by the victim. The repetition criterion excludes non-serious negative actions that happen occasionally, and emphasizes that bullying is something that is done repeatedly and over time. Finally, imbalance of power means that the victim is in a helpless situation in which the power imbalance can involve an actual or perceived physical or psychological weakness in the victim, or an imbalance in number whereby the bullies outnumber the victim. The imbalance criterion also excludes conflict or aggression between two individuals with the same physical or psychological strength (Olweus, 1999). Using the criterion of intentionality suggests that bullying is a subtype of aggression (Olweus, 2013), distinguishing it from accidental and unintentional harm, which is important in defining it. The criteria of repetition and power imbalance are important as studies have indicated that

severity, repetition and power imbalance are related to worse outcomes for the victim (Ploeg et al., 2015) and that there is a 'dose effect' in bullying whereby more frequent victimization is connected to a higher risk of adverse outcomes (Klomek et al., 2015). Although these criteria have come under much debate and discussion (see Hellström et al., 2021, for a review) they are accepted, cited and widely used in research on bullying (Hellström et al., 2021). One such area of discussion involves cyberbullying, which is however not addressed in this thesis, whereby the intention criteria can be more difficult to determine due to misunderstandings, for instance because the body language of the person posting a comment or picture is hidden. As for the repetition criteria in relation to cyberbullying, this means that the victim might be repeatedly confronted with the posted comments or pictures, and that these comments and pictures can be spread by others besides the person who originally posted them. In relation to power imbalance, physical strength is not an issue in cyberbullying. However, the bully's anonymity and the fact that the posted material can be spread to anyone lead to a situation in which many victims feel that they cannot defend themselves and thus feel powerless. In this perspective the definition of cyberbullying can be based in the Olweus definition (2013), but adapted and expanded to the reality of cyberbullying.

International studies on bullying show that there is great variation in bullying rates between countries (Bradshaw et al., 2017), and in this international perspective it has been found that Sweden has among the lowest rates of both bullying perpetration and bullying victimization (Craig et al., 2009). However, there are also signs that prevalence rates in Sweden have been increasing in recent years (Bjereld et al., 2020; SCB, 2020).

In a report from the Public Health Agency of Sweden (2018), prevalence rates indicated that 8% of boys and 10% of girls aged seven, and 7% of boys and 9% of girls aged 13, had been subjected to bullying victimization at least two to three times in the prior couple of months. However, despite the low prevalence rates in an international perspective, children in Swedish schools are nonetheless subjected to bullying, an experience that has been found to be connected to several negative outcomes at the time of victimization.

Reactions at the Time of Bullying Victimization

Being subjected to bullying victimization has been found to be connected to a wide range of problems at the time of victimization, and victims have been found to be at risk of developing poor self-esteem (Tsaousis, 2016), sleeping problems (van Geel et al., 2016), poor mental health and feelings of sadness and hopelessness (Stewart-Tufescu et al., 2021), depression (Brunstein-Klomek et al., 2007; Kaltiala-Heino et al., 2000; Moore et al., 2017), PTSD symptoms (Idsoe et al., 2012; Moore et al.., 2017), suicidal ideation and suicide

attempts (Brunstein-Klomek et al., 2007), psychosomatic problems (Gini & Pozzoli, 2013; Kaltiala-Heino et al., 2000; Hellfeldt et al., 2018), negative body esteem (Lunde et al., 2006) and eating disorders (Copeland et al., 2015). On top of these findings, which are in no way exhaustive, there are also findings involving a dose-response relationship whereby more severe and higher frequencies of victimization are connected to an increased risk of adverse outcomes at the time of the bullying (Moore et al., 2017). However, studies have also found that protective factors can reduce possible negative outcomes in a process of resilience (see Ttofi et al., 2014, for a review), further described in the upcoming chapter *Resilience.*

As will be described in this chapter, the negative reactions and problems related to the victimization have been found to have the potential to impact adult life, as the experiences of victimization seem to be of such magnitude that the negative effects become 'stuck' to many people who have been subjected to bullying. Moreover, victimization does not occur in a social vacuum; environmental context needs to be considered in order to understand bullying and bullying victimization.

The Victim as a Social Construction

The initial research by Olweus (1999) has been criticized for focusing too much on individuals and using personality trait psychology (Canty et al., 2016). As described by Thornberg et al. (2011), bullying is a complex phenomenon in which different factors interact in the process, leading to different outcomes. As such, personal characteristics of the bully or the victim have little explanatory value if they are not understood in relation to the environmental context. Different perspectives are needed in order to understand bullying as it is a complex phenomenon (Thornberg, 2015), and qualitative methodology can help shed some light on its complexity (Thornberg, 2011).

Bullying victimization has been described as a process of being marginalized and excluded, leading to a loss of dignity and ultimately 'social death' (Søndergaard, 2012), based on the perspective that we all seek to belong and that bullying can be seen as a process of exclusion (Thornberg, 2015). In interviews with former victims, being bullied has been found to be a process in which the experience of being bullied becomes an internal victimization, meaning that the victim internalizes the socially constructed role of being a victim and acts accordingly (Thornberg et al., 2013). Theoretically, this has been described in a perspective of a diathesis-stress model adopting a social-ecological perspective whereby negative self-schemas are activated for the victim, who ends up taking on the role of victim (Swearer & Hymel, 2015), which can be understood as a social process of creating a victim (Thornberg, 2015)

in line with the odd student repertoire, a process whereby young people describe that bullying occurs because victims have characteristics that others, in some way, find disturbing (Teräsahjo & Salmivalli, 2003).

Bullying Sticks to You

Following schoolchildren aged 9 to 11, Troop-Gordon and Ladd (2005) found that self- and peer beliefs are affected by being victimized, which in turn was related to psychological dysfunction. What this means is that being subjected to bullying leads to more negative beliefs about one's peers and oneself, and is related to both externalizing and internalizing problems, whereby the internalizing problems change one's cognitive representations of oneself and others in a negative way.

Van Hoof et al. (2008), extending the study by Troop-Gordon and Ladd (2005), found that personal identity partly explained the connection between being victimized and depressive symptoms. The authors suggest that peer victimization targets the victim's identity such that the victim becomes more vulnerable to depression as they have problems integrating their different identities (e.g., those at school and home, and during leisure time) into one. Moreover, in their meta-analysis, Reijntjes et al. (2010) found that although internalizing problems predicted victimization, being subjected to peer victimization also caused internalizing problems, which the authors discuss in terms of the internalizing problems becoming solidified in the victim's role as a victim of peer torment, so that their internalization of problems gets worse and it becomes even harder to exit the victimization.

Escaping this collective process of bullying can be difficult, and it is important to investigate the experiences of those who have been subjected to bullying victimization in regard to what actually works in ending the bullying.

Students' Experiences of What Makes Bullying Stop

Studies have found that children avoid disclosing victimization because of a perceived difference between the adult definition of bullying and their own suffering (deLara, 2012). At the same time, teachers do not always perceive a bullying situation as actual bullying and hence neglect to intervene (Yoon & Kerber, 2003). Moreover, findings have also revealed that students attending teacher education feel that they are unprepared for dealing with upcoming bullying situations and lack adequate training (Lester et al., 2018), which might explain teachers' experiences of a lack of self-efficacy to intervene in a bullying situation (Yoon & Bauman, 2014). To the victim, deciding whether or not to disclose also seems to be a continuous process, depending on the school

personnel's reactions and whether or not these reactions lead to trust, whereby distrust might lead to hidden victimization in a process in which the child believes that their only option is to handle the victimization alone (Bjereld, 2018).

In their study, Frisén et al. (2007) found that only 14% of a sample of 119 high school students chose the explanation 'adults intervene' for why the bullying stops. This explanation came in third after 'the bully matures' (24%) and 'the victim stands up for himself/herself' (15%). Notably, those students who had not been subjected to victimization held a stronger belief that victims should stand up for themselves than did those who had actually been subjected to victimization. Focusing specifically on former victims, another study (Frisén et al., 2012) found that those who had been subjected to victimization experienced that interventions by school personnel were the most common way to end the victimization. However, although this was the most common way, only 25% of the former victims reported it as the factor that was responsible for ending the victimization. Almost as many of the former victims, 23%, reported that a transition to a new school or level resulted in an end to the victimization, and 20% described that a change in coping strategies in relation to the bullying had ended it. What is also interesting is that 12% reported that changing their appearance or way of being had been effective in ending the victimization. The authors note that very few, only 4%, reported that help from friends had led to ending the victimization. Support from parents, reported by 12% of the victims as the reason the victimization ended, was more common among those who had been subjected to victimization in lower grades and in relation to a higher frequency of victimization. What these studies suggest is that disclosing victimization can be problematic, at the same time as relying on school personnel to end the victimization might be futile. Many seem to simply have to wait for school to end in order for the victimization to stop, while still others experience a need to change their appearance or way of being in order to handle it. These experiences from children being bullied in school of course reflect a failure, especially since teachers and school personnel are obligated according to Swedish law (Swedish Education Act [SFS, 2010:800]) to intervene and try to stop the bullying.

Failure to intervene and stop bullying can lead to severe negative long-term outcomes. In the next chapter, research on what the long-term outcomes of these experiences might look like will be presented.

Negative Long-Term Outcomes of Bullying Victimization

Bullying victimization in school has been connected to a range of long-term negative outcomes in different dimensions of life. However, what has been missing is the acknowledgment of body-related concerns (further described in the chapter *Body-related Concerns)* and a possible process of resilience (further described in the chapter *Resilience*), as well as an examination of the ways in which long-term outcomes of experiences of bullying victimization in school might be related to the developmental period of emerging adulthood (further described in the chapter *Emerging Adulthood*). Furthermore, another perspective on long-term outcomes of experiences of being bullied in school that has been missing is a closer look at the lived experience of these different long-term outcomes. Therefore, it has been suggested that qualitative methods are needed for a better understanding both of how former victims of bullying experience the effects of these negative outcomes in their lives and of their perceptions of the way these victimization experiences contribute to the negative outcomes (McDougall & Vaillancourt, 2015). In this chapter, research on long-term outcomes of bullying victimization in school will be reviewed in relation to the dimensions of mental health problems and social interaction problems.

Mental Health Problems

One of the most studied long-term outcomes of being subjected to bullying victimization involves mental health problems. Studies in this area have found that long-term outcomes of bullying victimization include anxiety (Copeland et al., 2013; Lereya et al., 2015; Stapinski et al., 2014; Takizawa et al., 2014), self-harm and suicidality (Klomek et al., 2015; Lereya et al., 2015; Takizawa et al., 2014) and higher levels of psychiatric hospital treatment (Sigurdson et al., 2015; Sourander et al., 2009; Sourander et al., 2016).

The most studied of these negative long-term outcomes involving mental health found in relation to bullying victimization is depression (Lee, 2021; Lereya et al., 2015; Lund et al., 2009; Takizawa et al., 2014), which has been found to be a lasting outcome well into adulthood (Lund et al., 2009).

However, some studies have found that when confounding variables are accounted for in terms of childhood socioeconomic position (Due et al., 2009) and supportive family environment (Isaacs et al., 2008), the association between bullying victimization and depression later in life decreases. On the

other hand, studies have also found that the association between childhood bullying victimization and adult depression persists even when childhood risk factors are controlled for (e.g., Ttofi et al., 2011).

Moreover, studies on short- and long-term outcomes of bullying victimization (Schoeler et al., 2018) have also found that the detrimental effects of bullying decrease in the long run. However, as described by Singham et al. (2017), this does not mean that negative long-term outcomes do not exist. They might be found if different kinds of outcome measurements are used, or they might be found in subpopulations.

Furthermore, more qualitative studies in the research area of long-term outcomes of bulling victimization have been called for in order to shed light on the complexity of these long-term outcome processes (McDougall & Vaillancourt, 2015). Looking at the few qualitative studies that have investigated the long-term outcomes of childhood bullying victimization on adult lives, both the magnitude and the complexity of these effects become evident, as these studies show that the impact is not on a single aspect but rather on all dimensions of life (Carlisle & Rofes, 2007; deLara, 2019; Pabian & Vandebosch, 2019). One of these dimensions, besides mental health problems, is social interactions.

Social Interactions

In the social domain, studies have found that childhood bullying victimization is connected to a lack of social relationships (Takizawa et al., 2014), shyness and lower friendship quality and trust (Jantzer et al., 2006), problems keeping friends (Wolke & Lereya, 2015), a poorer relationship with one's partner (Sigurdson et al., 2014), higher levels of social interaction anxiety (Pabian et al., 2021) and problems forming lasting relationships (Wolke et al., 2013) in adulthood.

In a study investigating the connection between different domains of childhood victimization on psychological distress in emerging adulthood, Storch et al. (2004) found that outcomes of being bullied in relation to the performance domain (e.g., being bad at sports, being embarrassed to do things in front of other people etc.) differed from those of being bullied in relation to the social domain (e.g., being shy, looking nervous, not being cheerful etc.). What was found in the study was that being bullied in relation to performance was uniquely connected to a fear of negative evaluation, while being bullied in relation to the social domain was linked to later difficulties involving depression, anxiety and loneliness. The authors discuss that being bullied in relation to the social domain and its broader negative impact on later life might be understood as a process whereby the social domain represents the child's personality, *who I am*, and is hence more hurtful and long-lasting.

Following a similar argument based on research findings indicating that social pain (recalled and relived experience of betrayal by a close friend) is easy to relive while physical pain (recalled in detail and relived experience of physical pain) is not (Chen et al., 2008), McDougall and Vaillancourt (2015) suggest that the ease of reliving the emotions of social pain might explain the process of how school bullying can still be alive in adulthood as physical pain is often short-lived whereas social pain, such as experiences of bullying victimization, can be stuck to the individual for a lifetime.

The long-term negative effect of social pain in relation to experiences of being bullied has been illuminated in interviews with adults who have experienced bullying victimization. Pabian and Vandebosch (2019) found that emerging adults, interviewed about their experiences of bullying victimization and its long-term outcomes, described that it was the experiences of being emotionally hurt in the past that made them avoid social interactions as emerging adults, as they remembered these social interactions as past triggers of bullying. Other qualitative studies have also contributed to the understanding of this process, explaining that the bullying experiences can lead to an avoidant relational style and feelings of stress in interactions with others (Carlisle & Rofes, 2007). DeLara (2019) made similar findings in her interviews with emerging adults who described problems trusting others, even significant others, and said that their ability to trust others was compromised due to their experiences of being mistreated and being helpless in the face of the effects of bullying victimization, leading to adult strategies of isolation and emotionally shutting down in relation to others.

These findings indicate that experiences of childhood bullying victimization can impose a severe negative effect on a person's life. However, while some previous qualitative studies on long-term outcomes of bullying victimization (deLara, 2019; Pabian & Vandebosch, 2019; Thornberg et al., 2013) have used samples of emerging adults, there has not been a focus on how the long-term outcomes of victimization can be understood in relation to the specific opportunities and challenges of this developmental phase, further described in the chapter *Emerging Adulthood*.

First, however, we will turn to another under-researched area of long-term outcomes of being bullied in school: body-related concerns.

Body-Related Concerns

In a systematic review by Day and colleagues (2022) it was found that the relationship between bullying victimization and body-related concerns in a long-term perspective is virtually unexplored. However, looking at the few studies that have been conducted in this research area, it seems that one's body and appearance might be salient aspects of how bullying victimization in school comes to be translated into problems in adulthood (Gattario et al., 2019; Lunde & Frisén, 2011).

It is suggested that features of both victims and aggressors are crucial for understanding why particular students are targeted for victimization (Gardella et al., 2020), and that the peak in bullying victimization coincides with a period in life when children's physical appearance becomes an increasingly salient aspect of their sense of self-worth – the advent of and during adolescence (Lunde & Frisén, 2011). From this perspective it can be argued that appearance and the body are recognized by both bullies and victims during adolescence as 'effective' objects to target, as has been described in focus groups with victims of cyberbullying (Berne et al., 2014). As such, it could be understood as a process of the social construction of a victim, with the bullies deciding what is considered odd and using this to justify the victimization (Thornberg, 2011). Indeed, when adolescents are asked why they have been bullied or why, in general, someone is bullied, body and appearance are repeatedly described as one of the main reasons (Forsberg & Horton, 2020; Frisén et al., 2007; Gardella et a., 2020). Despite these findings, the research on how bullying victimization can be associated with body-related concerns, in both a short- and long-term perspective, is scarce (Day et al., 2022). One explanation for this might be researchers' projections of what they believe are reasons why students are targeted for victimization (Gardella et al., 2020), hence missing the importance of acknowledging the victims' participation and voices in understanding the experiences of this victimization (Spears et al., 2021) and leading the research area away from what seems to be a significantly important aspect of bullying and bullying victimization.

The victims' experiences of bullying directed towards appearance and the body can, as suggested by Forsberg & Horton (2020), be understood as a process whereby a victim of bullying loses their rights over how to relate to their appearance and body, which is instead now dictated by the victimization. From this perspective, when a victim experiences that they are bullied 'because I am me' (Forsberg & Horton, 2020), at the same time as much of the victimization revolves around their appearance and body (Forsberg & Horton, 2020; Frisén et al., 2007; Gardella et a., 2020), we are closing in on the process described in

objectification theory whereby the individual learns to internalize an observer's view of their own body, and body shame arises when the perceived ideals of appearance and body are not met – a dehumanizing process that threatens the holistic development of the self (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; McKinley & Hyde, 1996). In such a process, it is important to note what has been described by Lunde and Frisén (2011) in relation to victimization happening in the advent of and during adolescence: victimization during these years, whether or not it explicitly addresses physical appearance, may impact the way children come to view their bodies, appearance and attractiveness, as this is a time during which children's physical appearance becomes an increasingly salient aspect of their sense of self-worth.

In regard to this perspective, the lack of studies investigating long-term outcomes of being bullied in school associated with body-related concerns in emerging adulthood is problematic. Once again, we seem to encounter the problem in that researcher-generated perspectives on bullying (Gardella et al., 2020) often exclude the voices of the victims (Spears et al., 2021), omitting a salient perspective in the notion that outcomes involving appearance and body might be more important long-term outcomes to investigate than has previously been recognized.

The few studies that have been conducted in this area indicate that individuals who were subjected to victimization in childhood (aged 10 years) indeed, as adults, experience poorer body esteem (aged 21 years) (Gattario et al., 2019) and higher levels of body shame (aged 18 years) (Lunde & Frisén, 2011). Poor body image is challenging in itself, and is intrinsically related to an individual's behaviours and feelings. An individual with body dissatisfaction is likely to avoid situations in which more of the body is shown, for instance participating in sports, changing in locker rooms or going to the beach, as well as intimate situations. Body concerns also affect feelings of self-worth and self-esteem (Frisén et al., 2014). Individuals with poor body image have an increased risk of developing severe psychiatric disorders such as eating disorders and depression (Cash & Deagle, 1997; Stice & Bearman, 2001). Thus, research so far indicates that individuals who are victims of bullying in school have the double burden of both struggling with victimization and also struggling with poor body image and a higher level of body shame and its long-term consequences (Gattario et al. 2019; Lunde & Frisén, 2011). The long-term consequences of being bullied in school associated with body-related concerns in emerging adulthood, more closely described in the chapter *Emerging Adulthood*, can be severe. Emerging adulthood is a time at which social interactions become increasingly important, as both old social connections are left behind and romantic relationships and intimacy take a prominent position in emerging adults' lives (Barry et al., 2015; Shulman & Connolly, 2015). At the same time, one's

body and appearance are important aspect of life, as a means to display one's identity in social interactions, as appearance-related interactions reciprocally influence identity, and the body becomes an external representation of who one is in relation to other people and society at large (Kling et al., 2018). And as identity exploration is one of the most important features of emerging adulthood, the connection between identity, the body and appearance, and psychological health (Nelson et al., 2018) indicates that appearance and the body might be a highly important aspect of navigating the developmental processes in emerging adulthood.

In sum, what is needed are studies investigating the association between being bullied in school and body-related concerns in emerging adulthood. Although the findings reported by Gattario et al. (2019) and Lunde and Frisén (2011) are of interest, no research attention has been given to what the association might be between general bullying victimization and specified aspects of body-related concerns over a longer period of time – such as being bullied in school and body-related concerns, in terms of both body esteem and body shame as well as body-ideal internalization – at the end of emerging adulthood.

Body Esteem and Bullying

Body image is described as the psychological aspects of the body, and is generally understood as a person's perceptions, thoughts and feelings about their body (Grogan, 2016). One aspect of body image is body esteem, which in turn can be described as a domain-specific aspect of self-esteem related to a person's body, involving three dimensions: (1) feelings about one's appearance, (2) feelings about one's weight, and (3) beliefs about how others view one's body and appearance (Mendelson et al., 2001). Body esteem has been found to be negatively related to bullying victimization for students aged 10 (Lunde et al., 2006) and in long-term perspectives, from victimization in school up to 21 years of age (Gattario et al., 2019), with differences between boys and girls. However, to disentangle the process of long-term outcomes of bullying victimization, a longer perspective of body-related concerns is needed, as is knowledge about more aspects of body-related concerns, such as body shame and internalization of body ideals.

Body Shame and Bullying

Objectification theory and the constructs of self-objectification (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997) and objectified body consciousness (OBC) (McKinley & Hyde, 1996) describe the process in which the body shifts from being a person's subjective site to being an objective site, meaning that a person internalizes an observer's perspective of them. Body shame arises when people evaluate their bodies relative to some internalized or cultural ideal and are not able to match

these expectations (McKinley & Hide, 1996). OBC has been found to be associated with peer sexual harassment and appearance-related teasing in both girls and boys in adolescence (Lindberg et al., 2006); however, what is missing is a broader perspective on how experiences of bullying victimization in school might be related to body shame in emerging adulthood. The long-term association between victimization and body shame has been identified in a study by Lunde and Frisén (2011), where it was found that being victimized at age 10 was associated with being more preoccupied with one's physical appearance and having elevated levels of body shame at age 18, as compared to non-victimized peers. The study also revealed that victimized girls were more ashamed of their appearance than victimized boys were. However, this connection also needs to be investigated over a longer time in order to identify whether bullying in school is associated with body shame even when former victims are at the end of emerging adulthood.

Body-ideal Internalization and Bullying

Body-ideal internalization refers to the way in which someone has incorporated societal body ideals into their own beliefs regarding physical attractiveness (Cusumano & Thompson, 1997). Another way to describe this process is that body-ideal internalization concerns the extent to which someone has made societal body ideals their own. In relation to cyberbullying (which is however not addressed in this thesis), findings indicate that adolescent victims of appearance-related cyberbullying report more thin-ideal internalization and appearance-related pressure from the media (Frisén & Berne, 2020). These findings suggest that there might be a connection between bullying victimization and body-ideal internalization; however, the long-term perspective of this aspect of body-related concerns from general bullying victimization needs to be investigated and related to the developmental period of emerging adulthood in which body-related concerns associated with experiences of being bullied in school can be an important aspect of understanding how bullying victimization in school comes to be translated into long-term problems.

Summarizing the research findings described so far, it seems that negative long-term outcomes of childhood bullying victimization involve a risk that can affect all dimensions of adult life. However, research on long-term outcomes of experiences of bullying victimization has not investigated the ways in which these experiences might be related to the developmental features of emerging adulthood. Therefore, the next chapter will present research and theory on emerging adulthood, the developmental phase following adolescence, described as a time of both challenges and opportunities (Arnett, 2014).

Emerging Adulthood

To understand the possible long-term outcomes of being subjected to bullying victimization in childhood, one also needs to understand the lived situation in which the outcomes are measured or studied. However, studies on long-term outcomes of bullying victimization have mostly been quantitative (Pabian & Vandebosch, 2019), focusing on specific variables and hence bypassing the lived experience of these outcomes.

Furthermore, although the few qualitative studies that have investigated the lived experience of long-term outcomes of childhood bullying victimization (Carlisle & Rofes, 2007; deLara, 2019; Pabian & Vandebosch, 2019; Thornberg et al., 2013) have extended our knowledge about the impact of long-term outcomes of bullying victimization on adult life, they have not situated these findings in relation to the developmental phase in which they were manifested. This approach might have the potential to even further expand our knowledge regarding the impact of this lived experience.

Emerging Adulthood as a Developmental Phase

Arnett (2000) has suggested that, because of demographic changes in the Western world in the last half-century or so (e.g., increased age at marriage and at first childbirth, and higher levels of education), a period of time between adolescence and young adulthood has been culturally constructed with its own developmental features, distinguished from other developmental periods of life, and suggests the term *emerging adulthood* for this period. In the first theoretical discussions of this developmental phase it was situated between the ages of 18 and 25 years (Arnett, 2000). However, as research has accumulated it has been proposed that emerging adulthood be extended to range between 18 and 29 years, as there is high variability in when people reach adulthood and hence leave emerging adulthood; and the longer age range also has a better international fit outside the USA, where emerging adulthood as a developmental phase was first introduced (Arnett, 2014). Furthermore, it has been suggested that the focus should not be on what emerging adulthood *is* but rather what it *affords,* meaning that what happens, and how, during emerging adulthood is – for good or ill – related to how adulthood will be, and that the opportunities inherent in emerging adulthood – for good or ill – will affect the trajectories from there on (Nelson, 2021; Wood et al., 2018).

So, what are the features that are most salient to the developmental period of emerging adulthood? The most prominent feature of emerging adulthood, as described by Arnett (2014), is *identity exploration,* which can be manifested

in the search for meaning in work, relationships and ideologies in which previous commitments, values and ideas are reflected upon and one engages in experimentation with various roles and plans for the future. Connected to identity exploration is the feature of *instability*, which in many ways is incorporated in most things that happen during this developmental phase, such as deciding where to live, whom to date, where to work, whether or not to attend university and more – generally, deciding on a plan for the future. Emerging adulthood is also described as a time in life of enhanced *self-focus.* This self-focus arises as one leaves the organized conditions of home, mostly dictated by one's parents, and enters a phase in which one must figure out how to organize one's life by oneself while simultaneously figuring out and exploring one's identity. As emerging adulthood is situated between adolescence and young adulthood, the feature of *feeling in-between* might come as no surprise: emerging adults have left adolescence, but before they reach the adulthood markers of accepting responsibility for oneself, making independent decisions and becoming financially independent, they continue to feel somewhat in-between. Finally, emerging adulthood is described as a time of *possibilities/optimism,* with high hopes and great expectations and with unchallenged dreams for the future (Arnett, 2014). Furthermore, as described by Arnett (2014), although the possibilities to change one's life that are inherent in the developmental phase of emerging adulthood are not unlimited, this phase of life is the time at which these changes are the most possible.

Challenges and Opportunities in Emerging Adulthood

Moving on from the understanding of emerging adulthood as a time of life when things can go both right and wrong and have an impact on the adulthood years, what are these challenges in relation to what can go wrong, and the opportunities in relation to what can go right?

Emerging adulthood can be both a time of opportunities to change as well as a developmental phase during which any previous positive development is solidified (O'Connor et al., 2015). However, it is also a time of life when mental health problems are common (Arnett et al., 2014). These challenges and opportunities can be related to a shift from a relatively structured, contained role as an adolescent to a situation in which a lack of structure or institutional support is more significant in emerging adulthood (O'Connor et al., 2015). Moreover, the developmental features themselves might cause a strain on the individual, which must be understood as both a necessary developmental process and a possible cause of mental health problems (Arnett et al., 2014). It has been suggested that mental health in emerging adulthood can be better under-

stood from a developmental perspective, meaning that mental health in emerging adulthood needs to be understood in relation to the unique challenges of this time of life (Tanner, 2015).

Previous research has described the associations between identity exploration and identity distress (Berman et al., 2004), and between identity distress and increased psychological symptoms (Wängqvist & Frisén, 2011). In relation to mental health in emerging adulthood, Arnett et al. (2014) have noted that it might be difficult for mental health professionals working with emerging adults to distinguish a process of identity exploration from pathological anxiety. However, mental health problems in emerging adulthood are not necessarily a function of the possible strain from the developmental features of the period itself. Rather, it is more often a case of spillover from previous problems with an onset in childhood or adolescence (Kessler & Wang, 2008; Tanner, 2015). Looking at psychopathology as an outcome of development suggests that prior adaptation in an individual's developmental history offers the possibility to understand that pathology is a process whereby the totality of adaptation up to a certain point reflects the person's pathology rather than defining it as something the person *has* (Sroufe, 1997). This suggests that, although mental health problems in emerging adulthood might be explained by childhood onset – for instance involving bullying victimization in school – a new developmental phase, for example emerging adulthood, might represent change for the better or the worse (Masten et al., 2004; Arnett, 2014).

As suggested by Klimstra and Denissen (2017), identity and psychopathology should not be viewed as separate constructs because they risk becoming interwoven as psychopathology might become part of a person's identity content. This means that if one's identity has already been formed by previous negative experiences, such as being bullied in school, these experiences might become consolidated in emerging adulthood if the exploratory part of emerging adulthood – that is, opportunities to renegotiate one's identity – cannot change this situation (Klimstra & Denissen, 2017). What this means is that identity exploration and development do not happen in a vacuum; the identity-explorative process happens in relation to other challenges in emerging adulthood. From this perspective, identity exploration in emerging adulthood has been found to be connected to body esteem (Nelson et l., 2018; Wängqvist & Frisén, 2011) and body-ideal internalization (Wängqvist & Frisén, 2011) as well as psychological health (Nelson et al., 2018; Wängqvist & Frisén, 2011).

Emerging adulthood is also a time of integrating career paths and life plans, along with processes of finding and sustaining a relationship with a romantic partner (Shulman & Connolly, 2015) and moving towards independence and agency at the same time as one moves away from institutional and family sources of support (Wood et al., 2018). In this process, emerging adulthood is

a time of developing ones self in relation to others in a social-cognitive process, in which recalibrating self-other perspectives is a crucial aspect of navigating the challenges of emerging adulthood (Lapsley & Woodbury, 2015). 'Other orientedness' and perceptions of others' regard are important features of the identity-explorative process of emerging adulthood (Skulborstad & Hermann, 2016), and as such, social networks and close relationships become important to the totality of emerging adulthood as a developmental phase (Barry et al., 2015). In the same process, romantic relationships and intimacy take a prominent position in emerging adults' lives (Barry et al., 2015; Shulman & Connolly, 2015); and, as described earlier, all these aspects of emerging adulthood need to be understood in a situation in which body and appearance is an externalization of the self (Kling et al., 2018), hence highlighting the importance of acknowledging these aspects of the self while navigating this developmental phase.

Finally, it needs to be recognized that the presentation and suggestion of emerging adulthood as a developmental period (Arnett, 2000) has not passed without criticism. The main criticism has been that emerging adulthood only applies to certain people and that its generalizability beyond highly industrialized societies, as well as within these societies, is problematic (Côté, 2014; du Bois-Reymond, 2016). However, despite this criticism, looking at emerging adulthood as a distinctive developmental period of its own, its developmental features offer a perspective for better acknowledging, recognizing, and understanding the variance in trajectories through this time of life (Nelson, 2021).

Moreover, emerging adulthood is described as a turning point in that difficulties from earlier life can be redeemed or, alternatively, life can become more troubled (Arnett, 2014). As such, it is a process that may apply to any life stage after adolescence; however, it is likely that emerging adulthood is the first time a redirection of one's life course presents itself—for better or worse (Schwartz, 2016). From this perspective, and as suggested in this thesis, it also represents a vital part of our understanding of the process behind long-term outcomes of experiences of bullying victimization in school.

Next we will discuss resilience, the capacity for positive development despite significant risk (Cutuli et al., 2021), and how it can be related to experiences of bullying victimization in school as well as to the developmental period of emerging adulthood.

Resilience

As described in previous sections, the negative long-term outcomes of being subjected to bullying victimization in school are numerous. However, not all individuals subjected to bullying victimization display negative long-term outcomes; some exhibit a lack of such outcomes, displaying positive adaptation and development despite the inherent risk in bullying victimization, hence suggesting a possible process of resilience. These individuals' experiences are important for enhancing the knowledge about resilience in relation to bullying victimization, a research field described as being in its infancy (Guzman-Holst & Bowes, 2021) and in which the long-term outcomes of this possible process of resilience need to be investigated (McDougall & Vaillancourt, 2015).

Although the concept of resilience has been much debated over the years (see Cutuli et al., 2021; Kuldas & Foody, 2021; Masten & Cicchetti, 2016, for reviews), it can be broadly defined as the capacity for maintaining or recovering functioning in the context of exposure to significant risk (Masten, 2019; Ungar, 2019). However, a great deal of focus has been on the individual perspective, which risks placing the responsibility of 'being resilient' on the individual, downplaying the quality of the individual's social environment (Ungar, 2019). At the same time, it has been stressed that resilience, as a process, occurs both within an individual as well as between individuals and in interaction with their environment, a process involving different interacting systems whereby the adaptation can be understood as developing at different levels over time (Masten & Cicchetti, 2016).

Understanding resilience involves considering the question 'what makes a difference?' (Cutuli et al., 2021); that is, what makes a difference in relation to experienced risk that can be understood in relation to an identified positive outcome despite this risk? From the previous chapter *Bullying*, we understand that being subjected to bullying victimization entails a risk (Ungar, 2019) as it has been connected to an abundance of negative outcomes; and as described in the chapter *Negative Long-Term Outcomes of Bullying Victimization*, we can understand that one of the most well-established negative long-term outcomes of being bullied is mental health problems, especially depression. Furthermore, a process of resilience is also defined by its positive outcome, one that is better than that of other individuals subjected to similar risk (Rutter, 2012; in this sense it can also be the reduction or avoidance of a negative outcome (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005). Hence, emerging adults with good psychological health despite experiences of being bullied in school could qualify as a group exhib-

iting resilience. However, identifying a resilient group is not the same as identifying what made a difference, which is at the core of understanding resilience (Cutuli et a., 2021; Ungar, 2019).

Although resilience has attracted increased interest and led to new research areas in recent years (Mahdiani & Ungar, 2021), it has not yet attracted much attention in the field of research on bullying (Guzman-Holst & Bowes, 2021; Moore & Woodcock, 2017). In those studies that have been conducted on bullying and resilience, findings indicate that protective factors that interrupt continuity from being bullied to later problems overlap with the broader field of positive youth development (see Ttofi et al., 2014, for a review) in terms of developmental assets, building blocks, significant for positive development such as agency, family support and community factors (Benson et al., 2012). However, how these findings might relate to understanding resilience in regard to long-term outcomes of being bullied has only recently started being investigated. The few studies that have investigated resilience as a process in relation to long-term outcomes of experiences of bullying victimization (e.g., Pabian et al., 2021; Pabian & Vandebosch, 2019; Schoeler, et al., 2018) indicate that some former victims retrospectively perceive positive impacts of their victimization experiences on their concurrent life situation as emerging adults (Pabian et al., 2021; Pabian & Vandebosch, 2019). However, such experiences need to be further investigated in relation to the unique developmental phase of emerging adulthood. As described in the chapter *Emerging Adulthood*, this period is a developmental time that involves preparing for adulthood, and is a possible turning point at which difficulties from earlier life can be cut off or seen from a new perspective (Arnett, 2014). It is also a time when secure social structures are left behind and new relationships and social contexts need to be found (Barry et al., 2015; Shulman & Connolly, 2015; Wood et al., 2018). Moreover, emerging adulthood is also a time of constructing and internalizing a self-defining life story in which the past and imagined future can explain who one is (McAdams, 2015). In this process, identifying previous negative experiences and challenges in terms of turning points, growth and meaning-making is connected to better mental health, well-being, and maturity (McAdams & McLean, 2013); as such, understanding resilience in relation to long-term outcomes of bullying victimization could be enhanced by situating such a process in relation to the developmental features of emerging adulthood.

Furthermore, as previously mentioned, much of the research on resilience has focused on the individual (Ungar, 2019). This perspective is also found in studies on resilience and bullying, in which conceptual understandings of resilience have been in the form of personal resilience (Lin et al., 2020) or scales measuring the tendency to be resilient (Ganotz et al., 2021). Such approaches, however, risk placing the responsibility for dealing with bullying on the victim,

leaving it to them to be resilient and neglecting the factor of environmental support (Sims-Schouten & Edwards, 2016). Moreover, the field of research on resilience is mostly built on quantitative studies (Ungar & Liebenberg, 2011). Although these studies have successfully identified different factors that are of importance to resilience, the mechanisms and processes involving what makes these factors protective in the general field of resilience (Rutter, 2007) and in relation to bullying (Bowes et al., 2010; Ttofi et al., 2014) need to be better understood. It has been suggested that these mechanisms and processes can be illuminated through qualitative research (Rutter, 2007; Ungar, 2003; Ungar, 2019), a suggestion also made in relation to enhancing the knowledge regarding how some individuals manage to overcome negative experiences from childhood bullying victimization in their adult life (McDougall & Vaillancourt, 2015).

Together, this suggests that the next step in advancing the field of research on long-term outcomes of bullying victimization in school related to resilience in emerging adulthood would be to use qualitative inquiry and explore how resilience is perceived by emerging adults who were subjected to bullying victimization in childhood and have good psychological health in emerging adulthood. As described by Ungar (2019), understanding resilience involves understanding what protective factors and processes are important to a specific risk related to outcomes that are of importance to the studied group, with resilience understood as a dynamic process over time.

Protective Factors

When investigating resilience, the core aspect is to consider the question 'what makes a difference?' (Cutuli et al., 2021); that is, what makes a difference in relation to experienced risk that can be understood in relation to an identified positive outcome despite this risk? Protective factors are those that are to be identified and are those that have a special effect when risk is high, as they might *only* work under risk (like an airbag in an automobile) or because they are of more importance for an outcome when risk is high compared to when risk is low (Cutuli et al., 2021; Rutter, 2012). Moreover, Ungar (2019) argues that investigations of resilience must be contextually sensitive, adapt a socio-ecological perspective (Ungar, 2012) and address the processes of adaptation between individuals and their environments (Ungar, 2019). This means defining specific risks connected to important outcomes and investigating those factors and processes that are of the most importance to a group subjected to the specific risk and defined as resilient, based on important outcomes related to the risk.

Research on protective factors that interrupt the continuity from being bullied to later problems indicates that protective factors in such a perspective

include, for instance, having good performance at school and good social skills, coming from a stable family, being attached to one's parents, and having prosocial friends (see Ttofi et al., 2014, for a review). However, as described by the authors (Ttofi et al., 2014), although such factors have been identified this says nothing of their mechanisms, why they work. Additionally, it does not inform us as to how such protective factors are related to different long-term outcomes (Pabian & Vandebosch, 2019). Moreover, factors similar to those in the review by Ttofi et al. (2014) have been identified as *developmental assets*, whereby a higher number of assets has been connected to more positive development in youth (Benson et al., 2012) even over time (Scales et al., 2006), but it is not necessarily the same developmental assets that are important in younger ages compared to emerging adulthood (Scales et al., 2016).

Furthermore, it has been suggested that the mechanisms and processes of resilience – that is, what makes a difference – can be better illuminated using qualitative inquiry (Rutter, 2007, 2012; Ungar, 2003, 2019), even in relation to long-term outcomes of bullying victimization (McDougall & Vaillancourt, 2015). What this suggests is that the investigation of long-term outcomes of bullying victimization in relation to resilience could be advanced by incorporating the aspects of how resilience as a process of these long-term outcomes can be understood in relation to the developmental period of emerging adulthood. But such an investigation must be sensitive to what were perceived as protective factors at the time of victimization in relation to the risk of bullying victimization and outcomes of good psychological health in emerging adulthood; that is, what the lived experience is, from the perspective of good psychological health in emerging adulthood, regarding what made a difference at the time of victimization.

Resilience as a Dynamic Process over Time

Resilience is not something that is fixed to a certain person, place or time but is rather a dynamic process that evolves over time. It is a balance between a person and their context, with vulnerability and resilience shifting during this person's developmental life (Werner, 1989). This also means that a process of resilience might not be fully understood if the question of change over time is not addressed (Ungar, 2019). One of the most well-known and referenced longitudinal studies on resilience over the life course is the Kauai Longitudinal Study, which followed all children born in 1955 on a Hawaiian island from birth to adulthood (Werner, 1993). The study's findings indicated some common factors in the group of resilient individuals. They were likeable as infants and tended to use whatever skills they had in an effective way as children. By the end of high school, they had developed an internal locus of control and a positive self-focus. Importantly, it was also found that they sought and found

emotional support outside their family if it was not available there, and had at least one close friend. They were also found to have a supportive network around them, to which they turned in times of crisis. Activities outside school with peers were found to have been important to these children. It was also found that the more the risks and stressful events there were in a child's life, the more protective factors were needed. When these children were interviewed and followed up as adults (30 years of age), it was found that they were achievement-oriented and had continued to higher education after high school, most had advanced professions, and many were in romantic relationships (Werner, 1989).

Moreover, it was found that, when entering their 20s and 30s, several individuals had positive turning points in their lives as they were able to use the opportunities of adulthood, with their skills in turning life around springing out of a confidence that previous adversity could be overcome. However, despite these turning points that were found, the major conclusion from the study was that it was the experiences from these individuals' early life that had the most impact on their adult outcomes (Werner, 1993).

The findings regarding turning points in life described by Werner (1993) are related to 'late-emerging resilience', found in longitudinal studies (Masten et al., 2004). Findings involving late-emerging resilience indicate that, although success in developmental tasks in adulthood is most often related to resources and competence from childhood, adaptation that is contextually related to developmental tasks in emerging adulthood has significant predictive value in explaining successful transition into adulthood on its own (Masten et al., 2004). As previously described, emerging adulthood is a time of possibilities and change (Arnett, 2014) as well as new social contexts and social relationships (Barry et al., 2015; Shulman & Connolly, 2015; Wood et al., 2018), in which previous negative experiences and challenges can be part of a life story in terms of turning points, growth and meaning-making, connected to better mental health, well-being and maturity (McAdams & McLean, 2013). Focusing on the developmental period of emerging adulthood could be a key to advancing our understanding of resilience in relation to long-term outcomes of bullying victimization.

Resilience and (Absence of) Long-Term Negative Outcomes of Childhood Bullying Victimization

Research on what is protective in relation to bullying has been described as a field that should be situated in the theory of resilience (Ttofi et al., 2014). However, despite the underuse of this theoretical approach in the field of research

on bullying (Moore & Woodcock, 2017; Sapouna & Wolke, 2013), some studies do exist. For instance, studies have found that personal resilience, together with social support and self-efficacy, mediated the connection between victimization experiences and well-being and mental illness later in life (Lin et al., 2020). Moreover, maternal warmth, sibling warmth, and a positive home atmosphere have been associated with positive adjustment in both bullied and non-bullied children, with a stronger effect for bullied children (Bowes et al., 2010). However, a focus on individual factors such as personal resilience and self-efficacy ignores the importance of environmental factors (Ungar & Liebenberg, 2011), which could illuminate the circumstances under which such individual factors are part of a process of resilience rather than inferring them as stand-alone core aspects of resilience, which risks a situation in which it is believed that resilience is a trait and that anyone who is unable to overcome experiences of bullying has not 'been resilient enough' (Sims-Schouten & Edwards, 2016). Although illuminating factors of a positive home environment is part of a broader ecological understanding of resilience (Ungar, 2012), the mechanisms of these factors need to be illuminated in the process of resilience (Bowes et al., 2010). Moreover, as resilience is to be understood as a dynamic process over time (Masten, 2019; Masten & Cicchetti, 2016), studies need to move beyond a short time span and investigate what the effects of different protective factors are in relation to long-term outcomes of bullying victimization when it comes to the developmental time of emerging adulthood. Furthermore, qualitative methods for investigating former victims' experiences of how bullying victimization has affected their current life as emerging adults have been suggested (McDougall & Vaillancourt, 2015). Qualitative studies on the long-term outcomes of bullying victimization experiences have indeed found that adults with childhood bullying victimization experiences describe a redemptive process in having surmounted the difficulties and made the best of a difficult situation (Carlisle & Rofes, 2007). Emerging adults with victimization experiences have also described having acquired life skills from the bullying experiences, such as navigating social life, understanding human interactions and reading moods (Thornberg et al., 2013). Other emerging adults with victimization experiences have described how coping with victimization has led to skills in handling conflicts as adults as well as enhanced levels of empathy and resilience (Pabian & Vandebosch, 2019), paying attention to others, valuing friendships more, being better at defending themselves and others, and being stronger (Pabian et al., 2021).

Situating such findings in relation to the theory of resilience and emerging adulthood might reveal more information on how these experiences can be understood as positive outcomes in a process of resilience in connection to expe-

riences of bullying victimization in school. The next step in understanding resilience in relation to long-term outcomes of childhood bullying victimization would be to investigate how experiences of these long-term outcomes are situated in the theory of, and related to concepts of, resilience.

General Aim

The overall aim of this thesis is to broaden the understanding of long-term outcomes of experiencing bullying victimization in school, related to the developmental period of emerging adulthood, as well as how it can be understood in terms of resilience and outcomes of body-related concerns. Special attention is given to the victims' lived experience of long-term outcomes. The thesis sets out to explore the lived experience of long-term outcomes of bullying victimization in school among emerging adults with poor psychological health, and to situate these perceived experiences in the context of emerging adulthood as a developmental phase. Furthermore, the thesis investigates how resilience is manifested in the perceived long-term outcomes of experiences of bullying victimization in school among emerging adults with good psychological health. Finally, the thesis also investigates the under-researched area of associations between experiences of victimization in school and body-related concerns in emerging adulthood.

Summary of Studies

The summary of studies follows an outline in which the longitudinal research project MoS (Mobbning och Skola [Bullying and School]) will be described first, followed by a presentation of Study I, a qualitative study in which emerging adults who were subjected to bullying victimization in school and had poor psychological health in emerging adulthood were interviewed about their experiences of bullying victimization and the ways in which these experiences were related to their concurrent life as emerging adults. Thereafter will follow a discussion of Study II, also a qualitative study but here involving interviews with emerging adults who were subjected to bullying victimization in school and had good psychological health in emerging adulthood. Concepts from research on resilience were used in order to illuminate how a possible process of resilience may be related to long-term outcomes of bullying victimization situated in the developmental period of emerging adulthood. Finally, Study III will be described. This study investigated the association between bullying victimization in school and body-related concerns in emerging adulthood. The outcome measures focused on body esteem, body shame and internalization of body ideals.

The MoS (Mobbning och Skola [Bullying and School]) Study

The longitudinal research project MoS (Mobbning och Skola [Bullying and School]) was initiated by Professor Ann Frisén in 2000, when 967 ten-year-olds from 53 schools located in different socioeconomic areas of Gothenburg (Sweden's second largest city) participated in the first wave of data collection.

At the onset of the study in the year 2000, a total of 967 ten-year-olds (520 girls and 447 boys) participated in the first wave, after which there have been six waves with the participants at ages 14, 16, 18, 21, 24 and 28 years. Rates of attrition have been low overall, with 90% (n=875) of the original sample participating at age 14, 78% (n=757) at 16, 74% (n=712) at 18, 63% (n=607) at 21, 56% (n=545) at 24, and 53% (n=511) at 28. Additionally, there have been three interview follow-ups with smaller participant groups. These were carried out when the participants were 14 and 25, respectively, with a focus on body image; and when they were 29, with a focus on long-term outcomes of bullying. The third set of interviews was used in Studies I and II.

In the initial data collection for the MoS longitudinal research project in 2000, school principals from 30 public schools in Gothenburg were contacted with a request for participation. The 967 participants were surveyed via a pen-and-paper questionnaire (see Lunde et al., 2006, for a full description of the

procedure at Wave 1) (part of Studies I, II and III). At the data collection for the second wave in spring 2003, as many as possible of the participants from the first data collection were located and asked to fill out the questionnaire according to the same procedure used in the first data collection (see Frisén et al., 2008, for a full description of procedure at Wave 2) (part of Study III). As for the data collection at Waves 6 (part of Studies I and II) and 7 (part of Studies I, II and III), participants were sent letters via e-mail or the post with participation invitations containing a link to an internet questionnaire created using Qualtrics software. Those who consented to participate answered an online survey. All participants received a movie or lottery ticket, which was posted to them upon completion of the study.

Study I

The first study in the thesis is qualitative. It involved interviews with emerging adults who were subjected to bullying victimization in school and had poor psychological health in emerging adulthood, regarding their experiences of bullying victimization and the ways in which these experiences were related to their concurrent life as emerging adults.

Aim

The aim of this study was to explore how emerging adults who had experiences of bullying victimization during their school years and were suffering from poor psychological health as emerging adults describe their experiences of victimization, as well as whether, and if so how, these experiences have had consequences in their lives as emerging adults.

Three main research questions guided the study: Do individuals who were subjected to victimization during their childhood school years and who have poor mental health as emerging adults perceive a direct connection between the schoolyears bullying and the poor psychological health they currently suffer from? How did they experience their victimization when the bullying occurred? What perceived outcomes do they describe that the victimization has had on their lives as emerging adults?

Method

Participants

The participants, nine women and six men (M_{age}=29.00, SD=0.37), were recruited from the MoS longitudinal study and were selected based on: (a) having reported on the questionnaire at the first wave of the longitudinal study when they were ten years old that they were bullied, measured using the Victimization Index (Rigby, 1999); and (b) having the poorest psychological health in emerging adulthood, measured using the Brief Symptom Inventory 18 (BSI-

18) (Derogatis, 2000) at Waves 6 and/or 7 at ages 24 and/or 28. The reason for using reports of psychological symptoms for both ages 24 and 28 was that some participants only answered these questions at one of the study waves. For those who had participated in both Waves 6 and 7, a mean of the two scores was used.

Following this purposive sampling procedure, eligible participants were those who had reported being bullied at age ten and had measurements of psychological symptoms at ages 24 and/or 28. In order to recruit the participants with the most psychological symptoms at ages 24 and/or 28, a list in descending order was made.

Based on the list, the participants with the highest levels of psychological symptoms were contacted first. If someone declined participation, the next person on the list was contacted. This process continued until the goal of including the 25% of the sample (of those eligible for the study) with the poorest psychological health in emerging adulthood was achieved. The rationale behind this procedure was to select those participants who could provide the most information in relation to the study aims. However, before the goal of including the participants who suffered the most from poor psychological health had been reached, eight participants were approached but were unable to be reached, one was deceased, and one withdrew before the data collection; these participants were therefore removed from the list.

Measures

Bullying victimization at age ten was measured using a self-report measure called the Victimization Index (Rigby, 1999), in which participants answer how often they have been bullied in school during the current year. The response options on this measure were *every day*, *most days*, *one or two days a week*, *about once a week*, *less than once a week*, and *never*. In the present study, *victims* were those who had been bullied weekly or more often.

Psychological symptoms (somatization, depression and anxiety) were measured using the BSI-18(Derogatis, 2000), which consisted of a 5-point Likert scale on which participants indicated their agreement from *not at all* (0) to *extremely* (4).

Procedure

Eligible participants first received a written letter with information about the study, in which they were also reminded that they had reported being victimized on the questionnaire at the first wave (when they were 10 years old). A week later, they were contacted by text message and thereafter (if needed) by telephone to be asked whether they would agree to take part in the interview. As an incentive, participants were offered a gift card. Most of the participants (n=8) were interviewed at the Department of Psychology, University of

Gothenburg, Sweden, while three were interviewed via telephone, two in their homes, one in a public place (a hotel lobby), and one via Skype. Written consent was obtained from each participant before the interview. Interviews were audio-recorded and lasted approximately an hour. After the interview, participants were asked how they had experienced the interview and were able to ask questions about the study.

A semi-structured approach was used whereby participants were directly asked about the phenomena of interest, with these questions followed up with other questions to probe and further explore their experience. The interview guide that was used included the following topics: experiences of bullying victimization during childhood, long-term outcomes of bullying victimization, long-term outcomes of bullying victimization on psychological health, and long-term outcomes of bullying victimization on body image.

Data Analysis

The interviews were transcribed, and thematic analysis following the guidelines by Braun and Clarke (2006) was used to analyse the interviews. As this research area is under-researched and the study design was exploratory, analyses were based on data rather than theory and were hence inductive (i.e., codes and themes are strongly linked to what was said in the interviews). With this said, the analysis was conducted with an awareness of possible preconceptions from previous research on outcomes of bullying and the developmental phase of emerging adulthood, and was therefore supplemented with continuous discussion among the researchers.

Main Findings

Most participants did indeed perceive a direct connection between the bullying victimization in school and their poor psychological health as emerging adults. Two of them did not perceive such a connection but, despite this, perceived that they had been affected by their bullying experiences in how they handled social situations, and as emerging adults had become sensitive to others being excluded in social situations. Importantly, one of these two was the only participant in the study to report having received help from a teacher, who intervened and managed to end the victimization. See Table 1 for themes and frequency.

Table 1. Frequency of themes in Study I.

	Themes	Frequency
1	A Perceived Connection Between School Bullying and Poor Psychological Health in Emerging Adulthood	13
2.	The Participants' Experience of Victimization during Their School Years	15
2.1.	The Bullying Went on for a Long Time	14
2.2.	Types of Bullying	13
2.2.1.	Bullying Directed at One's Appearance	12
2.2.2.	Exclusion	8
2.3.	Reactions When the Bullying Occurred	12
2.3.1.	Depression, Anxiety and Suicidal Thoughts	11
2.3.2.	Adaptation to the Victimization	8
2.4.	No Help from School	11
3.	Perceived Consequences of Childhood Victimization in Emerging Adulthood	15
3.1.	Perceived Negative Consequences in Emerging Adulthood	13
3.1.1.	A Constant Feeling of Insecurity	6
3.1.2.	Identity Formation: I Am Worthless	4
3.1.3.	Body Hatred	12
3.1.4.	Anxiety and Depression	11
3.1.5.	Anger Towards School Personnel Who Were Perceived as Not Intervening	6
3.2.	Strategies to Protect Themselves in Emerging Adulthood	9
3.2.1.	Avoiding Social Situations	9
3.2.2.	Avoiding Higher Education After Elementary School	3

Note: The table displays the number of interviews in which each theme was found.

Most participants described that their bullying victimization had gone on for a long time: typically several years, and for some, the entire time they were in school. In many cases, it had been a daily experience.

Two of the most prominent types of victimization were found to be bullying directed at one's appearance and exclusion. In terms of appearance, this could be anything that the bullies defined as odd, but usually involved bullying directed at body size and being called 'fat'. Many participants also described being socially excluded, which could sometimes even mean that the whole class excluded them. However, some participants had also had friends who were helpful and inclusive despite the victimization by the bullies.

Participants described their reactions at the time of victimization in terms of depression, anxiety and even suicidal thoughts. Importantly, they also described a process whereby they tried to adapt in all ways possible to please the

bullies' demands in order to end the victimization, but because nothing helped, many turned to isolation and became lonely.

Something that the participants returned to and emphasized at the end of the interviews was the perceived experience that no one in school had tried to help them, or had seen or understood that they were in need. The single exception to this was one participant's teacher actually having intervened and stopped the victimization, leading to a positive change in the participant's life.

The perceived negative long-term outcomes in emerging adulthood of the victimization were numerous. For most of the participants, a feeling of insecurity in social relations was an integrated part of them, perceived as a consequence of their previous victimization. Depression and anxiety were also described as outcomes, as were problems in relation to their own body. Many described the outcomes involving their body as being directly due to always being told they were 'fat' and 'wrong', and for some participants this had even led to eating disorders. Some even perceived that the experiences of being victimized in school had formed their identity into a feeling that they were worthless.

Not surprisingly, these long-term outcomes in emerging adulthood had in turn led to the development of various strategies for protecting themselves from further pain, such as avoiding social situations and higher education, which impaired their life rather than being protective. However, some participants were engaged in romantic relationships, and some had attended higher education.

Seen in relation to the developmental features of emerging adulthood of identity exploration, instability, self-focus, feeling in-between, and possibilities/optimism (Arnett, 2014), it seems that it can be a problematic endeavour to navigate this time of life with the influence of experiences of bullying. As the participants described it, their bullying experiences had affected their identity in a negative way, and feelings of insecurity had made them use strategies of social avoidance. Such experiences risk impairing the developmental processes in emerging adulthood.

Study II

The second study in this thesis is also qualitative, using semi-structured interviews with emerging adults who were subjected to bullying victimization in school. However, this study's participants were sampled based on having good psychological health in emerging adulthood. An approach of both deductive and inductive thematic analysis was adopted in order to investigate the ways in which main concepts from research on resilience were manifested in the participants' stories, in order to illuminate how a possible process of resilience

may be related to long-term outcomes of bullying victimization situated in the developmental period of emerging adulthood. These main concepts were:

- *Protective factors,* described as factors or processes that 'makes a difference' (Cutuli et al., 2021; Ungar, 2019); that is, what makes a difference in relation to experienced risk, understood in relation to an identified positive outcome despite this risk.
- *Resilience as a dynamic process over time*, meaning that resilience is a process happening both within an individual as well as between individuals and in interaction with their environment, as a process developing over time (Masten, 2019; Masten & Cicchetti, 2016).

Aim

Based on previous research on resilience, this study investigated the following research question: What attributes of protective factors and resilience as a dynamic process over time can be found in emerging adults' stories of their experiences of being bullied as children and having good psychological health as emerging adults?

Method

Participants

As in Study I, the participants, ten men and five women (M_{age}=29.13, *SD*=0.52), were recruited from the MoS longitudinal study . For Study II, however, they were selected based on: (a) having reported on the questionnaire at the first wave of the longitudinal study when they were ten years old that they were bullied, measured using the Victimization Index (Rigby, 1999); and (b) having the *highest* levels of psychological health in emerging adulthood, measured using the BSI-18 (Derogatis, 2000).

The same purposive sampling procedure as used in Study I was followed. However, in Study II the goal was to recruit participants with the highest levels of psychological health. As in Study I a descending list was created, but in Study II the list was based on the goal to include 25% of those participants, eligible for the study, who had the highest levels of psychological health. Before this goal was achieved, however, seven participants were approached but were unable to be reached, eight declined participation, and one was removed as his psychological health had significantly declined since being measured.

Procedure

This study followed the same procedure as Study I. Participants were also interviewed using the same semi-structured interview guide as in Study I, which included the following topics: background questions, experiences of bullying

victimization during childhood, long-term outcomes of bullying victimization, and long-term outcomes of bullying victimization on psychological health.

Ten participants were interviewed at the Department of Psychology, University of Gothenburg, Sweden, while three were interviewed via telephone and two in a public place (a hotel lobby).

Data Analysis

As in Study I, thematic analysis (Braun & Clark, 2006) was used. However, the analysis in Study II was conducted in two steps, the first of which employed a deductive approach using the two main concepts of resilience. In the next step, data within each deductive coding concept was inductively coded. The identified themes were to reflect the ways in which the participants' described experiences could be understood in terms of protective factors, and resilience as a dynamic process over time.

Main Findings

The themes found in relation to each coding concept are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Deductive coding concepts and the themes related to each concept.

Deductive Coding Concept	Themes	Frequency
1. Protective Factors	1. 1. Experiences of agency in relation to being bullied	9
	1. 2. Using Social Resources to Stop the Victimization	12
	1. 3. Inner Strengths in Handling the Bullying Victimization	5
	1. 4. Having Family, Friends, and Others as Support during Bullying Victimization	8
	1. 5. Handling Bullying Victimization by Participating in Other Social Contexts	8
2. Resilience as a Dynamic Process over Time	2. 1. Adaptation in Relation to the Bullying	14
	2. 1. 1. During Bullying – Life on Hold	
	2. 1. 2. Bullying Stopped – A Time of Insecurity	
	2. 1. 3. After Bullying – Living Fully	
	2. 2. Learning from Successful Strategies in Dealing with Bullying Victimization	11
	2. 3. Getting Tougher from the Experience of Handling Bullying Victimization	8
	2. 4. Doing Better than Expected Despite Experiences of Bullying Victimization	6
	2. 5. Enhanced Empathy an Outcome of the Experiences of Bullying Victimization	6
	2. 6. Using the Bullying Experiences in a Positive Way	5

Note: Frequency shows how many participants coded to each theme.

Considering the *protective factors* – in other words, those factors that make a difference in relation to experienced risk, understood in relation to an identified positive outcome despite this risk – it was revealed that most participants described having used several different strategies in their interaction with the bullying victimization. Many described experiencing, from their perspective of being emerging adults with good psychological health, that at the time of victimization they had been assertive in different ways and used resources including teachers, parents, and siblings to either end the victimization or get help in defending themselves. These findings show that these participants used

the resources that were available to them, and importantly, that they had access to support thanks to these resources as they were helpful when called upon. Moreover, it was found that most participants indeed had access to both internal resources (things within the individual, e.g. coping skills) and external resources (things outside the individual, e.g. supportive parents). Support from parents, teachers and friends constituted what some participants described as a supportive network around them. Importantly, other social contexts outside school were perceived as safe havens where positive development was possible, in contrast to the school context where the participants were exposed to bullying victimization.

The analysis, based on the coding concept *resilience as a dynamic process over time* – referring to a process developing between the individual and the environment over time – revealed that an adaptation process in relation to the bullying victimization followed a pathway whereby some participants had withdrawn and shut down during victimization, followed by a period of insecurity after the victimization had ended, and finally a period when they could set themselves free when they were sure the victimization was over. One particularly interesting aspect is that they described that participation in extracurricular activities created a forum where they could preserve and even develop a positive identity despite the victimization.

Moreover, many participants perceived that their experiences in successfully handling the victimization had led to integrity, an ability to stand up for themselves and be selective in their choice of relationships, as emerging adults. Related to this, but in a more fostering than learning process, participants described how the bullying victimization had been an unpleasant but strengthening process, making them better prepared to handle difficulties as emerging adults. Furthermore, many participants experienced having a good life despite the negative experience of bullying victimization in school, and also described being able to use their victimization experiences in different ways, such as helping others.

Findings from the thematic analysis indicated that resilience in relation to bullying victimization is best understood as a dynamic process evolving over time, in which the participants used the resources that were available to them.

Study III

The last study in this thesis is longitudinal, investigating the association between bullying victimization in school and body-related concerns in emerging adulthood. The outcome measures were focused on body esteem, body shame and internalization of body ideals.

Aim

The aim of Study III was to investigate the relationship between bullying victimization in school and body-related concerns in emerging adulthood. It was hypothesized that bullying victimization in school would be related to poorer body esteem, more body shame and more internalization of body ideals in emerging adulthood. It was also hypothesized that bullying victimization in school would be related to more body-related concerns for women, as compared to men, in emerging adulthood.

Method

Participants

As in Studies I and II, the participants were sampled from the MoS study. The participants eligible for Study III (*n*=511) were those who had participated in the first, second and seventh waves of data collection. Nine participants were removed from the sample as they had not answered the questions related to the scales used in the present study, leaving a final sample of 502 participants, 304 women and 198 men. Wave 1 (bullying victimization) M_{age}=10.35, *SD*=.52. Wave 2 (bullying victimization) *Mage*=13.55, *SD*=.56. Wave 7 (body esteem, body shame and internalization of body ideals) M_{age}=28.06, *SD*=.46.

Measures

Gender

The independent variable, Gender, was retrieved from the answer in the questionnaire in Wave 1 in which participants indicated whether they were a boy or a girl. Their answers were dummy coded into 0=girl and 1=boy.

The Victimization Index

Experience of bullying victimization was measured using a self-report measure called the Victimization Index (Rigby, 1999). This index is a single-item measure, asking 'How often have you been bullied during the last year?' The response options are 1 (*every day*), 2 (*most days*), 3 (*one or two times/week*), 4 (*approximately once a week*), 5 (*less than once a week*), and 6 (*never*). For the analyses in the present study, the frequencies were collapsed into *weekly or more* (1) (response alternatives 1, 2, 3 and 4) and *never* (0) (response alternatives 5 and 6), meaning that it was those who had been bullied weekly or more often who were regarded as victims. Furthermore, as Study III used the self-reported experience of bullying victimization from both Waves 1 and 2 from the MoS study, when participants were 10 and 14 years of age, respectively, the process described above was applied to data from both Wave 1, when the participants were 10 years old, and Wave 2, when participants were 14 years

old. Thereafter, the collapsed frequencies from Waves 1 and 2 were dummy coded into 1=*have been subjected to bullying victimization at age 10* (Wave 1) *and/or age 14* (Wave 2) or 0=*have not been subjected to bullying victimization at either age 10* (Wave 1) *or age 14* (Wave 2).

The Body Esteem Scale for Adolescents and Adults (BESAA)

The BESAA (Mendelson et al., 2001) measures body esteem and consists of 23 items divided into three subscales: Appearance (appearance-based body esteem, e.g. 'I like what I look like in pictures'; 10 items), Weight (weight-based body esteem, e.g. 'I really like what I weigh'; 8 items) and Attribution (evaluations attributed to others about one's body and appearance, e.g. 'Other people consider me good looking'; 5 items). Respondents indicate the degree to which they agree with each statement on a scale ranging from 0=*never* to 4=*always*, with lower scores indicating greater dissatisfaction within each body-esteem dimension. A mean was calculated for each of the subscales. The BESAA had previously been translated into Swedish (Erling & Hwang, 2004). Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the BESAA subscales in Study III were .93 for the Appearance subscale, .95 for the Weight subscale, and .72 for the Attribution subscale.

Body Shame

Body shame was measured using the Body Shame subscale of the Objectified Body Consciousness (OBC-Y) scale (Lindberg et al., 2006). This subscale, comprised of five items (e.g., 'I feel ashamed of myself when I have not made an effort to look my best'), is answered on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Higher mean scores indicate greater body shame. For the purposes of Study III, individual mean scores (ranging from 1 to 7) were calculated and subsequently used in the analyses. Cronbach's alpha for the scale in this study was .86.

The Sociocultural Attitudes Towards Appearance Questionnaire-3 (SATAQ-3)

The Internalization General and Internalization Athletic subscales of the Social Attitudes Towards Appearance Questionnaire-3 (SATAQ-3) (Thompson et al., 2004) were used in Study III. The subscales, measure (1) general body-ideal internalization (Internalization General, e.g. 'I compare my appearance to the appearance of people who appear in magazines'; 9 items); and (2) the internalization of athletic body ideals (Internalization Athletic, e.g. 'I wish I looked as athletic as sports stars'; 5 items). Participants indicate their state of agreement on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (*definitely disagree*) to 5 (*definitely agree*), with higher scores indicating greater internalization. Negative items were reversed, and a mean for each subscale was calculated. Cronbach's alpha

coefficients for the SATAQ-3 subscales in Study III were .91 for the Internalization General subscale and .76 for the Internalization Athletic subscale.

Data Analysis

In order to test potential differences in body-related concerns between participants who had been subjected to bullying victimization at age 10 and/or 14 and those who had not, taking gender into account, two MANOVAs and one ANOVA were carried out. In the first 2 (bullied vs. not bullied) x 2 (gender, women vs. men) MANOVA, the dependent variables were the three BESAA subscales: Appearance, Weight and Attribution. In the (bullied vs. not bullied) x 2 (gender, women vs. men) factorial ANOVA the dependent variable was the Body Shame subscale of OBC-Y, and in the second 2 (bullied vs. not bullied) x 2 (gender, women vs. men) MANOVA the dependent variables were the two SATAQ-3 subscales Internalization General and Internalization Athletic.

Main Findings

Body Esteem

In relation to body esteem, the results showed that being bullied in school was associated with lower body esteem in emerging adulthood than among those who had not been bullied in school. More specifically, participants who had been bullied in school had a poorer view of their general appearance and were more dissatisfied with their weight in emerging adulthood than those who had not been bullied in school. However, there were no significant differences in terms of evaluations attributed to others in regard to one's body and appearance between participants who had been bullied in school and those who had not. No significant interaction effects were found for the combination of gender and bullying victimization on body esteem, meaning that men and women did not differ in relation to the association between being bullied in school and level of body esteem in emerging adulthood.

Body Shame

In relation to body shame, the results showed that emerging adults with bullying victimization experiences suffered from body shame to a greater extent than emerging adults with no experiences of bullying victimization in school. No significant interaction effects were found for the combination of gender and bullying victimization on body shame, meaning that men and women did not differ in relation to the association between being bullied in school and level of body shame in emerging adulthood.

Body-Ideal Internalization

As for body-ideal internalization, the results in Study III showed that being bullied in school was not associated with higher levels of body-ideal internalization in emerging adulthood. Moreover, no significant interaction effects were found for the combination of gender and bullying victimization on body-ideal internalization, meaning that men and women did not differ in relation to the association between being bullied in school and level of body-ideal internalization in emerging adulthood.

General Discussion

The overall aim of this thesis is to broaden the understanding of long-term outcomes of experiencing bullying victimization in school, related to the developmental period of emerging adulthood as well as how it can be understood in terms of resilience and outcomes of body-related concerns. By focusing on these aspects, which had not previously been addressed in relation to long-term outcomes of bullying victimization in school, the complex web of how experiences of bullying victimization in school come to be translated into different outcomes later in life could be illuminated.

The general discussion follows an outline in which findings on the lived experience of being bullied in school and long-term outcomes in emerging adulthood will be discussed first. Following this will be a presentation of findings on how manifestations of resilience can be understood in relation to the lived experience of long-term outcomes in emerging adulthood following experiences of bullying victimization in school. Thereafter, findings on the associations between being bullied in school and body-related concerns in emerging adulthood will be discussed. This will be followed by methodological considerations, theoretical considerations, implications and ethical considerations, and finally conclusions.

Navigating Emerging Adulthood with Experiences of Childhood Bullying Victimization

The findings in Study I indicate that experiences of bullying victimization in childhood have the potential to cast a shadow over a person's life in emerging adulthood. The participants in Study I perceived that their experiences of childhood victimization were directly connected to several negative outcomes that, in turn, were related to the developmental features of emerging adulthood – identity exploration, instability, increased self-focus and a feeling of being in-between (Arnett, 2000) – indicating that being bullied in school might be a potential risk factor impairing the developmental processes in emerging adulthood.

The Experience of Victimization

The experiences the participants described from the time of their victimization revealed that they had been victimized for a very long time, a finding that resonates with a process of a small but stable group of victims being subjected to victimization over a long time, while the general trend is that victimization declines as children get older (Salmivalli, 2018). This finding is important, as it has also been found that there is a dose-response relationship whereby a

longer and more intense victimization is connected to higher levels of negative outcomes later in life (Wolke et al., 2013).

Moreover, in trying to make the victimization stop, the participants made efforts to adapt to what the bullies said and tried to change themselves, which was however unsuccessful and resulted in loneliness, adding to an already problematic situation in which reactions to the victimization included depression, anxiety and suicidal thoughts. Together with what the participants described as the bullies dictating what was wrong with them and using this to justify the victimization, a situation arises in which the participants had to adjust to a *victim career,* a socially constructed and incorporated victim image (Thornberg, 2011), as the bullies labelled them as deviant in a process described as the *odd student repertoire*, referring to the explanation among young people that bullying occurs because victims have characteristics that others find disturbing in some way (Teräsahjo & Salmivalli, 2003). In this process of the social construction of a victim (Thornberg, 2011), the participants were forced into a role dictated by the bullies.

Based on all these described negative experiences, it is not strange that the participants were still, as emerging adults, angry about what they perceived as the school personnel not having intervened in their victimization. As a teacher neglecting to intervene can be perceived as silent approval of the continued victimization (Yoon & Bauman, 2014), this might explain why the perception that school personnel had not intervened still made the participants angry. The impact of teachers' refusal to intervene is strengthened by the finding that one of the participants who did not perceive a direct connection between the victimization experiences and poor psychological health in emerging adulthood had indeed received help from a teacher in ending the victimization. This participant described the intervention as a turning point in their life, and praised the teacher for his actions.

The Impact of Negative Long-Term Outcomes of Bullying Victimization on Emerging Adulthood as a Developmental Phase

The negative long-term outcomes of the victimization, found in the interviews with the participants in Study I, were described as having an impact on most dimensions of their lives as emerging adults. All but two participants also described perceiving a direct connection between the experiences of bullying victimization in school and the poor psychological health they exhibited as emerging adults.

This indicates that the outcomes of victimization can be understood in relation to emerging adulthood as a developmental phase, in which outcomes of victimization impose a negative effect on life at a time when mental health problems peak (Arnett et al., 2014; Henin & Berman, 2016). The mental health

of emerging adults has been said to be poorly understood in relation to the specific challenges of this developmental stage (Tanner, 2015) and often misinterpreted by healthcare providers (Arnett et al., 2014). Moreover, assessment and clinical practice concerning experiences of bullying victimization comprise an underdeveloped area (Samara et al., 2017). Together, this implies that carrying the negative effects of bullying victimization into emerging adulthood poses a risk for these emerging adults as their problems might not be properly addressed in psychological treatment, meaning that the negative effects of bullying experiences in school enhance the risk of mental health problems that is inherent in the strains of the developmental phase of emerging adulthood itself.

Study I also expanded findings from previous qualitative studies on long-term outcomes of bullying victimization. In a retrospective study by Pabian and Vandebosch (2019), former victims described that the victimization had influenced who they are as emerging adults; and in a study by deLara (2019), participants described how the victimization experiences had a significant influence on their adult life. Study I extended these findings by situating them in the developmental period of emerging adulthood. The participants' explicit descriptions of how the victimization had impacted their identity, so that they viewed themselves as worthless, is important for understanding the outcomes of victimization as it relates to one of the main features of emerging adulthood, identity exploration (Arnett, 2000). From this perspective, an identity of viewing oneself as worthless based on victimization experiences might have a negative impact on the identity-explorative process of emerging adulthood. It is recommended that future studies investigate the role of identity development as a mediator in relation to bullying victimization and long-term outcomes of mental health.

Furthermore, although this finding is important on its own, it needs to be noted that the participants described experiences both of the victimization having impacted their identity so that they viewed themselves as worthless, as well as of strategies of socially avoidant behaviour. Taken together, the explanatory value of these findings is enhanced when they are situated in relation to the developmental features of emerging adulthood, as the identity-developmental process of emerging adulthood has been found to be connected to psychosocial functioning (Schwartz et al., 2011; Wängqvist & Frisén, 2011). From this perspective, the suggested integration of identity and psychopathology (Kaufman et al., 2014; Klimstra & Denissen, 2017; Verschueren et al., 2020) – whereby the two might become intertwined as a function of psychopathology, development and social context – becomes interesting in relation to the findings in Study I. That is, the outcomes of victimization might be difficult to change, as a positive change in psychopathology connected to identity problems is dependent on the renegotiation of individuals' self-view in relation to their social

context (Klimstra & Denissen, 2017). This points to the possibility that developing an identity of being worthless, formed out of bullying victimization experiences together with socially avoidant behaviour in emerging adulthood, might be a situation in which bullying victimization experiences in school become entrenched.

Furthermore, the described complexity and interconnectedness between identity, psychopathology and social context also needs to be understood in the context of the norms and society in Sweden, where this study was set. Sweden's welfare system has been said to foster emancipated, autonomous individuals and individualistic values (Trägårdh, 2018). The findings in Study I, in which negative long-term outcomes of being bullied in school are described as leading to socially avoidant behaviour in emerging adulthood, might then increase the risk of social isolation as Swedish young people, who leave their home the earliest in all of Europe (Wängqvist & Frisén, 2015), also leave behind their supportive social structures (Arnett, 2011).

In Study I, participants described avoidant social behaviour and an avoidance of higher education as strategies for protecting themselves from further harm. These findings imply that outcomes of bullying victimization might also hinder emerging adults from achieving the adulthood markers of accepting responsibility for themselves, making independent decisions, and becoming financially independent (Arnett, 2011). This situation further highlights how negative long-term outcomes of bullying victimization might be related to the developmental features of emerging adulthood and may help us understand how experiences of being bullied in school can lead to negative long-term outcomes.

What the findings in Study I indicate is that the developmental phase of emerging adulthood can have explanatory value in understanding long-term outcomes of being bullied in school. Emerging adulthood is a transitional period during which one shifts from a relatively structured, contained role as an adolescent (O'Connor et al., 2015) to a time of integrating career paths and life plans, along with finding new social contexts and sustaining a relationship with a romantic partner (Shulman & Connolly, 2015), preparing for adulthood (Arnett, 2014). From this perspective, it might also be a sensitive time for the manifestations of long-term outcomes of bullying victimization in school. As an example of this, Kretschmer et al. (2018) found that experiences of being bullied in school did not have an effect on normative developmental tasks, such as having a romantic partner or being in work or education, at ages 19 and 22. However, Brimblecombe et al. (2018) found that experiences of bullying victimization in childhood were connected to a lower likelihood of being in employment, less accumulated wealth in the form of home ownership, lower in-

dividual earnings from paid employment, and higher societal employment-related costs for men and higher health service costs for women at age 50. The participants in the Kretschmer et al. (2018) study were entering emerging adulthood, while those in the Brimblecombe et al. (2018) study had long since passed this stage. What could be argued is that the participants in the Kretschmer et al. (2018) study had not yet had to struggle with the challenges and strains of carrying the burden of bullying victimization experiences when integrating career paths and life plans, along with finding new social contexts and sustaining a relationship with a romantic partner in emerging adulthood. Those in the Brimblecombe et al. (2018) study, on the other hand, had already passed emerging adulthood which, if resolved successfully, prepares one for the process of reaching the adulthood markers of accepting responsibility for oneself, making independent decisions, and becoming financially independent (Arnett, 2011). But for the participants in the study by Brimblecombe et al. (2018), the negative outcomes might reflect a situation in which the challenges of emerging adulthood had been problematic to handle, influenced by their experiences of bullying victimization.

In sum, the findings in Study I imply that negative outcomes of bullying victimization might impair the developmental processes in emerging adulthood and result in a situation in which these negative outcomes become entrenched and part of the former victim's continued life course.

As a continuation of the findings in Study I, it would be interesting for future research to follow former victims of bullying through and beyond emerging adulthood in order to illuminate the ways in which problems attending to the developmental features of emerging adulthood, based on experiences of bullying victimization in school, translate to outcomes beyond this developmental period.

Bullying Victimization and Resilience

In Study II, concepts from the theory of resilience were used in the thematic analysis of the interviews with the study's participants.

The findings illustrate that resilience, in relation to bullying victimization and the developmental period of emerging adulthood, is best understood as a dynamic process evolving over time in which participants used the resources available to them and, importantly, the mere fact that they had access to resources. From the perspective of being emerging adults with good psychological health despite experiences of being bullied, the participants described using their victimization experiences to help others. Many of them also related that they perceived their experiences from handling the victimization as learning experiences that they could use in difficult situations as emerging adults.

The findings in Study II are discussed in relation to each of the deductive coding concepts: protective factors and resilience as a dynamic process over time.

Protective Factors

First, we turn to the findings related to the coding concept of *protective factors* in Study II – those factors that make a difference when it comes to experienced risk, understood in relation to an identified positive outcome despite this risk. In relation to protective factors as a coding concept, it was found that the participants had used several different strategies in their interaction with the bullying victimization. Many of these emerging adults, with good psychological health despite experiences of victimization, described that at the time of victimization they had been assertive in different ways and had used, or rather activated, social resources in terms of parents, teachers, friends and siblings.

From the participants' stories in Study II, it seems that the most important aspect was not the specific strategy they used but rather agency in using whatever methods worked, a feature of resilience that has been identified in other high-risk groups of children (Werner, 1993). In relation to bullying victimization, it is vital to note that this approach of using different strategies, as described by the participants in Study II, also extended to using parents, siblings, friends and, most importantly, teachers. This is important, as many victimized children find it difficult and emotionally demanding to disclose their victimization (Bjereld, 2018), and teacher intervention is unfortunately not the approach that most commonly ends victimization (Frisén et al., 2012). Moreover, these experiences of using parents, siblings, friends and teachers illustrates what has been described as *developmental relationships* (opportunities provided by others), found to be connected to fostering empowerment and agency (Scales et al., 2016). In relation to the time of victimization as well as to positive experiences incorporated into these emerging adults' possibilities to navigate emerging adulthood, with positive growth and well-being, the findings in Study II indicate that developmental relationships might have been helpful to these participants in developing trust in others (Scales et al., 2016), contrasted with how the participants in Study I had developed socially avoidant behaviour. Furthermore, these experiences of developmental relationships in relation to experiences of bullying victimization, described by the participants in Study II, might also have led to strengths in seeking help from friends in emerging adulthood, which is an important part of navigating this phase of life (Barry et al., 2015), a possible source contributing to good psychological health at this time.

What needs to be emphasized in these findings is the combination of using whatever strategy that worked and the fact that teachers intervened, as described by the participants. These findings illustrate how resilience is a process

that can be co-created between teacher and child (Theron & Engelbrecht, 2012) in a way that makes the school situation a resilience-building system (Masten & Cicchetti, 2016). The descriptions by the participants in Study I, of being angry at school personnel who they perceived as not intervening, are in stark contrast to what the participants in Study II described in terms of experiencing a social network of people around them who were ready to step in and help when activated. These differences illustrate the positive power of well-functioning schools (Modin et al., 2017), classrooms (Thornberg et al., 2018) and teachers (Yoon & Bauman, 2014; Theron & Engelbrecht, 2012) in relation to bullying victimization. Moreover, the different experiences of the participants in Studies I and II, in how they perceived either not getting help or having a network of support, also illustrate the findings described in an unpublished master's thesis by Teräsahjo (1997, as cited in Salmivalli, 2014, 2018) in which adults with experiences of bullying victimization in school perceived that what was the most distressing – even more than the victimization itself – was the fact that no one cared. This resonates well with the overall findings in Study II, in which the participants had good psychological health despite experiences of victimization: although they were being bullied in school, they also had people around them who cared.

Moreover, what the findings in Study II suggest is that, in order to understand resilience in relation to bullying victimization from the perspective of being an emerging adult with good psychological health despite such experiences, we need to consider the environmental context (Ungar, 2012) as a vital part of the process. While personal qualities – which have been the focus in much previous research on resilience and bullying victimization (e.g., Ganotz et al., 2021; Lin et al., 2020) – are important, the findings in Study II indicate that without social resources these personal qualities might be useless. As illustrated by the findings in Study I, the participants tried to do what they could to end the victimization but did not receive any help in this process. That is, a possible process of resilience will disappear in a context in which no, or poor, support is offered (Egeland et al., 1993).

Furthermore, the participants in Study II described that they had used other social contexts during the victimization. From their perspective as emerging adults with good psychological health despite experiences of bullying victimization, these out-of-school activities had served as safe havens, where they were able to develop in a positive and supportive environment during the victimization when their possibility for healthy development in school was impaired by the restraints of the victimization. This is an important finding as it illustrates how extracurricular activities, found to be an important factor in previous research on resilience (Cutuli et al., 2021; Werner, 1993) and a positive

social resource in research on bullying (Bjereld et al., 2015), can be a mechanism of resilience for those who are subjected to bullying victimization. And importantly, from the perspective of having good psychological health in emerging adulthood despite victimization experiences, it was perceived as part of a positive development extending into emerging adulthood. As a continuation of these findings, it would be valuable for future research to conduct ethnographic or interview studies in the social milieu of extracurricular activities with participatory designs (Spears et al., 2021) in order to gain a deeper understanding of the resilience-enhancing processes inherent in these contexts.

It is important to note that the emerging adults in Study II described a number of developmental assets – building blocks for successful development – both internal (such as agency and inner strength) and external (support from school, home and community in extracurricular activities), as one's total number of assets is connected to well-being (Scales et al., 2016) longitudinally as well (Scales et al., 2006). Related to emerging adulthood, research has identified that resilience in emerging adulthood may also have roots in early psychosocial functioning (O'Connor et al., 2015; Masten et al., 2006). From this perspective, the findings in Study II suggest possible targets for intervention, allowing young people to not only handle bullying victimization but also build up strong capacities and skills, which prepares them for handling the challenges of the period of emerging adulthood (O'Connor et al., 2015).

The numerus developmental assets (Benson et al., 2012) and the agency in using whatever resources are available (Werner, 1993) described by the emerging adults with good psychological health in Study II stand in contrast to the experiences of the participants in Study I, who were subjected to bullying victimization for a long time, perceived that school personnel did not intervene, and had to adjust to a victim career (Thornberg, 2011). The participants in Study I perceived that their experiences at the time of victimization were directly related to their poor psychological health in emerging adulthood, as well as feelings of insecurity and problems with identity formation and social interactions. What the participants in Study II described in relation to being emerging adults, on the other hand, is rather a continuation of an initiated process of resilience experienced at the time of victimization.

Resilience as a Dynamic Process over Time

To better understand how resilience can be understood as a process over a person's life course, the coding concept *resilience as a dynamic process over time* was used. Using this coding concept revealed a sequential process of adapting to the victimization that was successful with the help of positive contexts outside school. Moreover, the participants in Study II said they perceived that ex-

periences of what had made a difference at the time of victimization were transferred into their emerging adulthood. As emerging adults with good psychological health despite experiences of being bullied in school, they described what can be seen as a cascading effect of their successful handling of the victimization becoming strategies for, and strengths in, handling difficulties in emerging adulthood. In relation to this, they also described how they were able to use their experiences of bullying victimization in school in different positive ways in emerging adulthood.

It is interesting to note that the participants in Study II describe a process of adaptation during victimization, as this illustrates how handling victimization might be misinterpreted as maladaptation. They described shutting down and withdrawing from social interactions in school in order to avoid the victimization, which could be interpreted as maladaptation, as it was for the participants in Study I. However, the participants in Study II also said they thrived in other social contexts outside school, and that when the victimization ended they had a feeling of being free, being able to bloom and become who they actually were. It is important to understand that in this process, risk can be compensated for by resources from other systems (Ungar, 2016). In such a perspective, resilience is sometimes only seen if it is studied over a longer period of time (Cutuli et al., 2021), with the seemingly maladaptive behaviour having been the best option when the risk was present (Ungar, 2019). This finding also shows that the perspective of lived experience included in Studies I and II can add knowledge about how the long-term process of bullying victimization, investigated from the perspective of emerging adulthood, can advance our understanding of what processes might have contributed to different outcomes.

The sequential process of adapting to the victimization described by the participants in Study II can also be seen as a turning-point experience, something that has been related to a process of resilience connected to emerging adulthood (Masten et al., 2014). Although the described turning-point process mostly involved the school years, such an experience might still have been influential to the participants in relation to being emerging adults. Emerging adulthood is an important time for the construction and internalization of a self-defining life story in which the past and imagined future can explain who one is in relation to one's identity development (McAdams, 2015), with identity exploration being a defining feature of emerging adulthood as a developmental phase (Arnett, 2014). In this sense, turning-point experiences are not only related to resilience itself in emerging adulthood (Masten et al., 2014) but are also part of a process of finding redemptive meanings in suffering and adversity in one's life story, which in turn is related to higher levels of mental health, well-being and maturity (McAdams & McLean, 2013).

Furthermore, the participants in Study II described integrity, standing up for themselves, being selective in their choice of relationships, and feeling confidence in handling difficulties as emerging adults. They also described how they had learnt these strengths and positive strategies for handling situations in emerging adulthood through successfully handling the victimization. These experiences resonate with a snowball effect of developmental cascades, whereby success in one domain of adaptation can spread and influence other domains of adaptive functioning (Masten & Cicchetti, 2010). From the perspective of life authorship in emerging adulthood, such an experience relates to agency (McAdams & McLean, 2013) and identity formation in emerging adulthood (Schwartz et al., 2005), suggesting that the participants in Study II could use their experiences of handling difficulties during the time of victimization as an enhanced capacity to navigate the developmental features of emerging adulthood.

In the same manner as these developmental cascades, but involving more of a fostering process, the emerging adults in Study II also explained that the victimization had been a toughening experience which they perceived had made them better prepared to handle concurrent difficulties, much like a steeling effect, whereby exposure to risk decreases vulnerability and increases resistance in the presence of new risk (Rutter, 2012). Such an experience, as part of an emerging adult's life story, creates meaning in previous adversity and is in itself also a process of resilience in emerging adulthood (Masten & Cicchetti, 2016) and growth, related to generativity and optimism during this phase of life (McLean & Pratt, 2006). This indicates that it might have been the way the emerging adults in Study II framed the victimization experiences that had been helpful to them in a continued process of resilience, reflecting how resilient emerging adults have experienced difficult times without letting themselves be defined by their adversity (Burt & Paysnick, 2012).

Moreover, the emerging adults in Study II also described using their victimization experiences in different positive ways to help others, working towards social inclusion, and talking about victimization experiences with others. Such aspects of responsibility and empathy are significant aspects of social competence, which in turn is related to positive functioning and resilience during emerging adulthood (O'Connor et al., 2015).

What also needs to be considered is that establishing oneself as well adjusted in emerging adulthood, in terms of agency in handling difficulties and caring for others, could in itself be a process of cutting off one's experiences of adversity (Rutter, 2012) and using the possibilities of emerging adulthood as a means to make a new start in life (Arnett, 2014). From this perspective – with the findings in Study II indicating that the victimization experience had not led to the negative outcomes found in other studies (see Arseneault, 2018,

for a review), and the emerging adults using their experiences in a positive way – this suggests that they had created meaning from experienced adversity (McAdams & McLean, 2013). This implies that situating long-term outcomes of bullying victimization in relation to a process of resilience might enhance our understanding of such a process when relating these experiences to the developmental period of emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2014). It also illustrates that it is important to consider subjective perceptions of the impact of bullying victimization experiences in relation to long-term outcomes of bullying victimization (Pabian et al., 2021).

The findings in Study II suggest that resilience in relation to long-term outcomes of bullying victimization can be a dynamic process of interaction between the individual and the environmental context over time. They also illustrate how the process of navigating emerging adulthood can be a helpful perspective in understanding why it is not everyone who is subjected to bullying victimization in school who suffers from negative long-term outcomes.

Body-Related Concerns in Emerging Adulthood Associated with Experiences of Bullying Victimization in School

The results in Study III, discussed here together with the findings concerning problems related to body and appearance from Study I, showed that individuals who were subjected to bullying victimization in school, compared to those who were not, suffered from a poorer view of their general appearance, were more dissatisfied with their weight and suffered from more body shame in emerging adulthood. Furthermore, the results showed that individuals subjected to bullying victimization in school were not more negatively affected from an internalization of body ideals or evaluations attributed to others about one's body and appearance than their non-bullied peers were. The results also showed that there were no gender differences in relation to victimization on any of the outcome measures: body esteem, body shame or body-ideal internalization.

Body Esteem and Long-Term Outcomes of Bullying Victimization

Those emerging adults, in Study III, who had been subjected to bullying victimization in school had a significantly poorer view of their general appearance and weight compared to their non-victimized peers. Previous research has demonstrated a connection between appearance esteem, weight esteem, identity development and psychological functioning (Nelson et al., 2018). This is interesting in relation to the findings in Study III, in which emerging adults

with victimization experiences suffered from both a poorer view of their general appearance and a poorer view of their weight than did those who were not bullied in school. What is suggested is that these emerging adults might be struggling not only with a poorer view of their general appearance and their weight in association with their victimization experiences, but also with problems involving identity formation and psychological health. Such a situation is indeed what the emerging adults in Study I describe, suffering from problems related to both their bodies and mental health as well as to identity formation, all of which they perceived as being negative long-term outcomes of being bullied in school. Together, the findings in Studies I and III illustrate how body-related concerns might be a much more important aspect of long-term outcomes of bullying victimization than has previously been acknowledged. If the body and appearance comprise the space where experiences of bullying victimization are received and remembered, it is also possible that the body and appearance become a vessel for transferring experiences of bullying victimization in school into negative long-term outcomes. Furthermore, one's body can be described as an external representation of who one is (Kling et al., 2018) and, as illustrated in the findings in Study I, long-term outcomes of experiences of bullying victimization in school might interfere with the developmental features of emerging adulthood. In such a situation, having a negative view of one's appearance and weight might lead to socially avoidant behaviour, as with the participants in Study I, leading to problems in finding and sustaining new social and romantic relationships, which is an important part of navigating emerging adulthood (Barry et al., 2015; Shulman & Connolly, 2015). Based on the findings in Studies I and III, it is suggested that future studies incorporate aspects of body-related concerns in relation to long-term outcomes of experiences of bullying victimization, as this seems to be a more important part of this process than previously recognized (Day et al., 2022).

The long duration between victimization and a negative view of one's appearance and weight – nearly two decades – adds to previous findings that, for both men and women, higher levels of victimization in school were connected to negative body esteem from the time of victimization up to the age of 21 (Gattario et al., 2019). The findings in Study III show that negative body esteem can have an impact on former victims' lives even when they are as old as 28 (and even 29 as in Study I), at the end of emerging adulthood. It thus seems that poor body esteem might be a negative consequence of bullying victimization impacting a person's life for a long time.

Body Shame and Long-Term Outcomes of Bullying Victimization

The results in Study III revealed that although it had been almost two decades since the victimization was reported, these individuals who were victimized in

school suffered significantly more from body shame in emerging adulthood than did those who were not subjected to bullying victimization in school.

Body shame, the affective component of objectified body consciousness, occurs when people evaluate their bodies relative to some internalized or cultural ideal and the result does not match these expectations. It is described as a construct so closely connected to a person's identity that negative feelings about one's body are also negative feelings about oneself (McKinley & Hyde, 1996). The association found in Study III between being bullied in school and body shame nearly two decades later indicates that what happens in the process of being bullied can become part of how the victim, all the way up to at least the end of emerging adulthood, relates to his or her body in a negative way. Such a situation might not only impose constraints on how a person relates to him- or herself but also to others, as one's behaviour and identity are part of the experienced body shame whereby one only exists as an object to oneself and presenting oneself to others invokes negative feelings towards the self (McKinley & Hyde, 1996). In this sense, body shame might lead to a situation in which a person becomes psychologically restrained in taking part in society, as the body is an external representation of the self (Kling et al., 2018) and presenting oneself invokes anxiety. The lived experience of this process is described by the participants in Study I as their victimization experiences having led to intimacy problems and disordered eating, as well as severe problems in relating to their own bodies. As the focus on romantic and sexual relationships tends to increase during emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000), feelings about one's body and appearance become important during this time of life. From such a perspective, body-related concerns associated with being bullied in school might impair the developmental processes in emerging adulthood.

Furthermore, it is interesting to look at the process of 'other orientedness' and the perception of others' regard that are found to be prominent features of the identity-explorative process of emerging adulthood (Skulborstad & Hermann, 2016) in relation to the findings in Studies I and III. In Study III, body shame was found to be associated with victimization experiences in school. In relation to the described socially avoidant behaviour and feelings of insecurity in Study I, a situation could be suggested in which the body is rejected but is still an external representation of the self (Kling et al., 2018) in social interactions. This means that body-related concerns might play a vital part in former victims' work to achieve a stable identity in emerging adulthood. A stable identity is connected to positive psychosocial functioning (Schwartz et al., 2011), and problems in this process might potentially even lead to psychopathology (Klimstra & Denissen, 2017), which connects to the previously described findings of a connection between appearance and weight esteem, identity develop-

ment and psychological functioning (Nelson et al., 2018). Body shame, associated with experiences of being bullied in school, might be an important aspect to consider in future studies on long-term outcomes of bullying victimization, as it might not only be a negative experience on its own but may also be connected to problems of identity exploration in emerging adulthood.

The findings in Study III add to previous findings (Lunde & Frisén, 2011) that body shame is a negative long-term consequence of bullying victimization that persists, affecting former victims' lives for a long time, nearly two decades later. The findings in Study III suggest that experiences of being bullied in school can be an influential experience that affects the person through the whole developmental period of emerging adulthood, and all the way up to age 29 as in Study I. Emerging adulthood is described as a time of life that involves challenges but also offers possibilities for positive development in new relationships and social contexts (Arnett, 2014), as illustrated by the findings in Study II. However, the findings in Study III seem to indicate that the possibilities for positive development in emerging adulthood can be overrun by the negative power that being bullied in school can have on body shame, as it is still associated with this bullying even at the end of emerging adulthood for the participants in Study III. In this sense, experiences of body shame might explain the developmental processes that translate bullying victimization experiences in childhood into negative outcomes up into adulthood (Arseneault, 2018).

Internalization of Body Ideals, Body Esteem (Attribution Esteem) and Long-Term Outcomes of Bullying Victimization

The results in Study III also revealed that internalization of body ideals and evaluations attributed to others about one's body and appearance did not differ between those emerging adults who had been bullied in school and those who had not. At first glance these findings seem surprising, as it would be intuitive to think that people who were subjected to bullying victimization in school would be more susceptible to media influence and cultural standards concerning how one is supposed to look, as well as to evaluations attributed to others about one's body and appearance. However, internalization of body ideals is a construct that measures more of an external influential factor derived from media and athletic societal ideals, as opposed to appearance esteem, weight esteem and body shame, which are constructs of internal emotional and psychological aspects relating to one's self and identity. Looking at the results from such an angle would suggest that experiences of bullying victimization in school, associated with body-related concerns in emerging adulthood, entail a process more in line with how the body and appearance are connected to one's identity (Nelson et al., 2018) rather than an increased risk of being negatively

affected by external influences related to media and athletic societal ideals. Moreover, it is possible that the more external process of others' opinions concerning how one looks, later in life in emerging adulthood, comes to be subordinated to the extremely negative view that a former victim of bullying has already incorporated as a psychological 'truth' about him- or herself. This means that one already views one's body and appearance as 'wrong', as illustrated in the experiences described by the emerging adults in Study I, and therefore that others' assumed opinions about one's body and appearance are insignificant in relation to one's own body hatred. Participants in Study I described this situation, in which they perceived the victimization as being connected to how they, as emerging adults, had problems relating to their own bodies or even feeling at home in their own bodies. It is thus possible that being bullied in the advent of and during adolescence is such a powerful interpersonal negative experience during this highly sensitive developmental period (Troop-Gordon, 2017) that, developmentally, it overrides other sources of influences – at least those from media and athletic societal ideals – and finds a direct link to those body-related concerns that are internalized psychological understandings of oneself as being a body that is rejected. According to the participants in Study I describing this experience, although the victimization had happened so long ago, it kept returning in the form of feeling ashamed of one's own body and appearance.

Lack of Interaction Effects with Gender

No interaction effects were found between gender and experiences of bullying victimization in school for any of the outcome variables. Previous research has shown that bullied girls generally suffer more from poor body esteem, concurrently, than bullied boys do (Lunde et al., 2006), and that girls victimized at age ten experience higher levels of body shame at age 18 than victimized boys do (Lunde & Frisén, 2011). However, this gender difference seems to disappear over time as negative body esteem associated with victimization at age ten was not found in the trajectories up to age 21 in the study by Gattario et al. (2019) or in Study III. These results are of importance in clinical work with emerging adults, as a history of bullying victimization can be equally damaging to both women and men in terms of their view of their appearance and weight and their problems with body shame.

Overall, the findings in Study III indicate that living with a body and appearance defined by experiences of bullying victimization in school is not only a negative experience on its own but might also interfere with the developmental features of emerging adulthood. These findings can help us to better understand how children's experiences of bullying victimization can come to be translated into lifelong problems.

Methodological Considerations

Methodological considerations are always important as research is complex; this is especially true of psychological research, which offers a messy reality with the great complexity of human behaviour (Rohrer, 2018). In the following sections, we will address the methodological considerations that are relevant to the three studies in this thesis.

Long-Term Outcomes of Being Bullied in School – Causality and the Voice of Lived Experience

The term *outcomes* is used in this thesis to describe the ways in which experiences of being bullied in school might have long-term effects and impact one's life during emerging adulthood. In this way, the word *outcome* might be interpreted as suggesting a causal inference between bullying in school and the various outcomes described in the three studies in the thesis. However, although the findings in the three studies contribute important knowledge to the research field on long-term outcomes of bullying victimization in school, they do not reflect causality. Causality was famously described by John Stuart Mill as follows: a causal relationship exists if (1) the cause preceded the effect, (2) the cause was related to the effect, and (3) we can find no plausible alternative explanation for the effect other than the cause (Shadish et al., 2002). While causality can be inferred through conducting an experiment (Shadish et al., 2002), an experiment on bullying with children that involves assigning them to being bullied or not is of course not one that could or should be conducted (Volk et al., 2017). However, in Studies I and II the participants describe, in their opinion, a direct connection between being bullied in school and outcomes in emerging adulthood. Although these described and perceived experiences are not the same as to infer causality, they are descriptions of how being bullied in school is *perceived* to have a direct impact on outcomes in emerging adulthood: the lived experience of long-term outcomes of being bullied in school. Recruiting participants to take part in a qualitative study and share difficult information, and then not accepting their statements, would not only be a waste of time for both participants and researchers but also highly unethical. The use of the word *outcomes* in this thesis and Studies I and II is to be regarded as a reflection of how the participants in these studies describe a lived experience and of the ways in which they perceive the connection between being bullied in school and these experiences has influenced their subsequent lives as emerging adults.

Furthermore, although Studies I and II used longitudinal data from the MoS study to conduct a purposive sampling procedure (Schwab & Syed, 2015), the

two studies used retrospective data as the informants were asked to recall previous experiences of being bullied as well as to describe the ways in which they perceived that these experiences were perceived to influence their current lives as emerging adults. Previous research on long-term outcomes of bullying victimization in school (Olweus, 1993b) has found that victims of school bullying have a stable and realistic view of their victimization experiences, when their self-reported victimization from the time of victimization was compared to peer nominations at the time of victimization and retrospective self-reported experiences of previous victimization in emerging adulthood. However, some problems have been noted with respect to retrospective data, for instance that adults with mental health problems such as depression might exhibit difficulties with memory and attention compared to healthy adults (Brewin et al., 1993) and that depressed adults might remember more negative vs. positive childhood memories whereas mentally well adults might exhibit the opposite trend (Widom & Morris, 1997. However, as elegantly put by Miller and Vaillancourt (2007) in their study on the relation between childhood peer victimization and adult perfectionism, 'Although our current study may be biased toward negative self-perceptions of victimization, it is precisely this bias we want to measure. If their perception of past victimization is so salient to them now, these perceptions are "what matter most" with respect to their current level of functioning' (pp. 238). This statement mirrors the aims of Studies I and II of exploring the perceived experiences of being bullied in school and perceived long-term outcomes in a group of emerging adults subjected to bullying victimization in school and suffering from poor psychological health in emerging adulthood (Study I) or exhibiting high levels of psychological health in emerging adulthood (Study II). It is believed that with the chosen methodological approaches in Studies I and II, although not to be considered a participatory design in which knowledge is co-constructed with the participants (Spears et al., 2021), the lived experience of the emerging adults, however, offered insights to inform both bullying prevention (Study I) and resilience enhancement (Study II). This emphasizes the relevance of contexts and variations in students' needs in tailoring initiatives to combat bullying in school (Spears et al., 2021) as well as enhancing resilience for those at risk and offering support to those who suffer from negative long-term outcomes of being bullied in school. Moreover, the discussion of the findings in Study I together with those in Study III exemplifies how different methodological studies can be triangulated with each other in order to develop a more coordinated, coherent knowledge base (Green et al., 2022). Used in this way, the statistical findings in Study III could be illustrated by the lived experiences described by the participants in Study I. The experiences described by the participants in Study

I, concerning long-term outcomes of being bullied in school in relation to different forms of body-related concerns in emerging adulthood, inform the quantitative findings in Study III regarding how the lived experience of the association between being bullied in school and body-related concerns in emerging adulthood can be understood.

Change over Time – Longitudinal Studies

A major concern in longitudinal studies is attrition (Grammer et al., 2013). The samples in Studies I, II and III in this thesis were recruited from the MoS longitudinal study , an ongoing study that began in 2000. An attrition analysis, conducted in relation to Study I (also relevant to Study II as this attrition analysis was conducted on the whole sample recruited for the interviews in Studies I and II), revealed that rates of attrition were overall low in relation to the whole MoS study, but with higher attrition in later waves. Over the years only ten participants had ever declined further participation, but there were also variations in which waves participants did or did not take part in.

The attrition analysis showed differences in how large a portion of the sample had experienced bullying victimization between the original sample and those who took part in the study at Wave 6 $\chi^2(1)=4.73$, $p=.03$ and Wave 7 $\chi^2(1)=15.34$, $p < .001$ (the two waves used for selection based on psychological health in emerging adulthood for Studies I and II), with fewer of those at later waves reporting bullying victimization. In relation to Study I (and II), this means that there is a risk that potentially important experiences were left out that might otherwise have contributed to a deeper understanding of the process of long-term outcomes of bullying victimization (and resilience in Study II). However, the information retrieved from the participants who were recruited was believed to be sufficient for the two studies' aims.

In both Studies I and II, the aim was to include those individuals who were closest to the endpoints of the inclusion criteria for each sample; that is, those with the poorest psychological health for Study I and those with the highest levels of psychological health for Study II. In both studies, there were participants who could not be reached or who declined participation. However, it is believed that the information retrieved in both studies nonetheless had high informative value and information power (Malterud et al., 2016), and that the findings in the two studies reflected the participants' experiences of being bullied in school related to poor psychological health (Study I) and good psychological health (Study II) in emerging adulthood.

Measuring Bullying Victimization

Studies I and II applied a purposive sampling procedure (Schwab & Syed, 2015), with the initial requirement for selection that the participant had reported being bullied at age ten. The design of Study III was also built on the predictor of bullying victimization, which in this study was measured at age 10 and/or 14. The measurement used for this was the Victimization Index (Rigby, 1999), a single-item measure that asks children to indicate how often they have been bullied in school during the current year. The response options were *every day*, *most days*, *one or two days a week*, *about once a week*, *less than once a week*, and *never*. In line with previous research (Sweeting & West, 2001), *victims* were those who had been bullied weekly or more often.

However, there has been controversy regarding measuring bullying, revolving around validity and whether or not a definition of bullying should precede the actual questionnaire (Volk et al., 2017), with either the presentation of a definition or the participants' own definition laying the foundation for the study (deLara, 2012). When the *Olweus Bully/Victimization Questionnaire (BVQ)* is used a definition is presented (Green et al., 2013), while the *Victimization Index* (Rigby, 1999) asks for frequency.

In the first and second waves of data collection in the MoS study, which are the waves in which bullying victimization was measured for the three studies in this thesis (Wave 1 in Studies I and II and Waves 1 and 2 in Study III), a definition was not offered as one of the main aims was to identify the ways in which children themselves define bullying (Erling & Hwang, 2004). However, to ensure that Studies I and II investigated bullying and not peer victimization, a definition was presented to the participants at the interviews with the criteria from Olweus's (1999) definition (intentional aggression, repetition and imbalance of power). In relation to Study III, the rationale for using the Victimization Index (Rigby, 1999), without a definition of bullying, was based on the fact that the study used a Swedish sample; and as bullying is a familiar concept to Swedish children and is used in everyday speech, it could be argued that it was not necessary to provide a definition prior to the bullying measure(Bjereld et al., 2015). Furthermore, previous studies using data from the MoS study, and specifically Wave 1 when the participants were ten years old, have shown that 11% of the boys and 13% of the girls reported having been bullied at least once a week in fourth grade (Erling & Hwang, 2004), based on answers from the Victimization Index (Rigby, 1999). This frequency is well in line with the results in a report from the Public Health Agency of Sweden (2018), in which prevalence rates indicated that 8% of boys and 10% of girls at age 7, and 7% of boys and 9% of girls at age 13, had been subjected to bullying victimization at least two to three times in the last couple of months. As indicated by the overlap between the prevalence rates found in relation to the measure used

(Erling & Hwang, 2004) and the results reported by the Public Health Agency of Sweden (2018), the one-item measure used (Rigby, 1999) was believed to be sufficient to infer experiences of bullying victimization in the three studies in this thesis.

Measuring Psychological Health

In Studies I and II participants were recruited based on having reported bullying victimization at age ten, with Study I including those with the poorest psychological health in emerging adulthood and Study II those with the highest levels of psychological health. The variable of psychological health was measured using the Brief Symptom Inventory 18 (BSI-18, Derogatis, 2000), which is a shortened version of the Brief Symptom Inventory (Derogatis & Melisaratos, 1983). The BSI-18 captures psychological functioning based on complaints/symptoms of anxiety, depression and somatization. The measure is constructed with ratings on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*) based on questions of whether the participant has experienced symptoms such as 'faintness or dizziness' or 'nervousness or shakiness inside' in the last seven days. The measure is widely used in research, but does not include cut-off levels as, for instance, the HADS does (Snaith, 2003). However, as the BSI-18 is found to be an instrument that can be used to reliably assess psychological distress in the general population (Franke et al., 2017), it was considered suitable for the selection criteria for Studies I and II. Furthermore, the sampling procedure of choosing those with the lowest vs. the highest levels of psychological health was considered to be the best approach in regard to the aims of the two studies, meaning that the focus was not on clinical aspects of mental health but rather finding those with the lowest (Study I) and highest (Study II) levels of psychological health in the subpopulation of the group of people who had been subjected to bullying victimization in school. In this sense, the BSI-18 was well suited as a measure considering the study design.

Measuring Body-Related Concerns

In Study III the aim was to investigate long-term outcomes of bullying victimization in school and their association with body-related concerns in emerging adulthood. The chosen measurements of body-related concerns were: the Body Esteem Scale for Adolescents and Adults (Mendelson et al., 2001), the Sociocultural Attitudes Towards Appearance Questionnaire (Thompson et al., 2004) and the Body Shame subscale of the OBC-Y scale (Lindberg et al., 2006). In their review of studies identifying whether teasing and bullying victimization were associated with increased risks of eating disorders and body image disturbance among adolescents, and possible long-term outcomes, Day

et al. (2022) conclude that there is a considerable diversity of measures in this research area. All in all, Day and colleagues (2022) identified 18 different victimization measures and more than 40 measures of body image and disordered eating, many of which were author-derived. It is believed that the measures chosen and used in Study III contribute to more precision in this research field.

In Study III it was only the Body Shame subscale of the OBC-Y scale that was used, although this scale also contains the subscales Body Surveillance and Appearance Control Beliefs; and in relation to the SATAQ-3, which consists of four subscales (Internalization General, Internalization Athlete, Pressures, and Information), the study only used the first two of these. Using all the subscales of the OBC-Y and SATAQ-3 might have offered a fuller picture, with all the dimensions of the construct. However, excessively long and time-consuming questionnaires can tire out participants, likely resulting in many missing values. Thus, for Wave 7 of the MoS (part of Study III, as well as Studies I and II with regard to the BSI-18), which included several different measures, some parts of the questionnaire needed to be shortened in order to keep it at a reasonable length. Although some subscales had to be removed, it is believed that the core of the concepts sought in Study III was found and measured.

Furthermore, the alpha coefficients measuring internal consistency for two of the subscales in Study III were somewhat low: .72 for the BESAA Attribution subscale and .76 for the SATAQ-3 Internalization Athletic subscale. However, as for the BESAA Attribution subscale, the original article of this scale (Mendelson et al., 2001) indicates that the Attribution subscale has lower internal consistency than the other two subscales; thus, the lower alpha value found in Study III for the Attribution subscale in relation to the other two BESAA subscales is in line with what can be expected, a pattern also identified by Kling et al. (2019) in a systematic review of body image measures. As for the SATAQ-3 Internalization Athletic subscale , although the original article (Thompson et al., 2004) indicated high internal consistency for all subscales, Internalization Athletic was found to have a somewhat lower alpha level than the others, so the lower alpha level found in Study III for the Internalization Athletic subscale also follows a previously identified pattern, found in studies on college women (Forbes et al., 2006) and undergraduate students of both genders (Langdon et al., 2016).

Qualitative Methods

Bullying is described as a research area that is mainly investigated using quantitative research methods (Maran & Begotti 2021). Although these studies have provided important information and results concerning a vast area of issues related to bullying, the over-reliance, as Maran and Begotti (2021) describe it,

on quantitative methods has prevented a more in-depth understanding of certain aspects of the phenomenon of bullying. It has been suggested that it could be beneficial to also use qualitative methods in order to better understand the complex pathways from bullying victimization to later outcomes, as these methods have the possibility to reveal how former victims themselves describe the process from victimization to later outcomes, shedding light on the underlying mechanisms of this process (McDougall & Vaillancourt, 2015). What is described as missing in previous bullying research is the 'voice' of the young people who own the experiences being investigated (Spears & Kofoed, 2013). Previous research has mostly seen informants as objects that the researchers 'do' research 'on' or 'to'. However, the voices of the individuals who own the studied experiences are central to the understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Spears & Kofoed, 2013). The suggestion that it would be better to use qualitative research has also been made in relation to resilience, as qualitative methods can be used to unpack the mechanisms and processes of resilience and how they work in different contexts, to better understand how certain risk factors (e.g., bully victimization) are related to specific processes of resilience, and to better account for how positive outcome is understood in the lived experiences of those who are subjected to specific risks under certain conditions (e.g., school bullying) (Ungar, 2003). The developer of the theory of emerging adulthood, Jeffery Arnett (2000), has described qualitative data as the flesh to the bones of quantitative data, which is necessary for describing the wholeness of the human being, but adds that too much focus on quantitative data risks reducing the studied object to mere numbers (Arnett, 2005).

However, qualitative studies do not offer information on causal relationships or directions of statistical significance but are rather theory and hypothesis generators. One such example is that the findings in Study I indicate that identity might be a potent variable to investigate in order to understand long-term outcomes of bullying victimization, as participants described how their identity had been formed out of their victimization experiences. The connection between identity and psychopathology (Klimstra & Denissen, 2017) and the identity exploration as a silent process of emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000), as well as previous research findings regarding the connection between bullying and identity (van Hoof et al., 2008; Thornberg et al., 2013), suggest that the findings reported in Study I might be informative in designing quantitative studies on long-term outcomes of bullying victimization. Altogether, qualitative methods have great informative value regarding complex processes, but are limited in the possibility for generalization. However, as the various research fields addressed in this thesis stand today, it is believed that the exploration of hidden, unknown processes illuminated in Studies I and II using qualitative methods was beneficial.

Furthermore, an inductive approach is often described as the method to use in qualitative research in psychology (Willig, 2008). This approach to data analysis in qualitative research entails the researcher coding the data without trying to fit it into an already existing coding frame or analytic preconception (Braun & Clarke, 2016). Deductive qualitative analysis, on the other hand, can be used to enhance knowledge in an already existing theory and uses a conceptual model as its starting point (Gilgun, 2005). In Study II, the conceptual model was built on research on resilience and was used to learn more about how victims of bullying describe a possible process of resilience from their bullying experiences up into their lives as emerging adults. It is possible to question the use of a deductive approach, like in Study II, as it might unconsciously direct the researcher towards certain findings (Crabtree, 1999). However, as described by Schwab and Syed (2015), qualitative inquiry is a process of interpretation and researchers always need to be aware of their own preunderstandings of the area of study and reflect upon this as a possible influential factor in the data analysis. Moreover, researchers cannot completely free themselves from theoretical understandings (Braun & Clarke, 2006), and no matter what methods are used in a qualitative approach the flexibility in the reporting also needs to be presented with clarity (Levitt et al., 2018), which is a principle that guided the methodological approach in Study II as well as Study I.

Another important aspect of qualitative research is reflexivity (Berger, 2015; Levitt et al., 2018; Braun & Clarke, 2022), meaning that the researcher's values, choice of methods and academic discipline become part of shaping the research process. In qualitative research this is not seen as something that is problematic or that should be ignored, but is rather acknowledged as something the researcher has to be aware of in designing, conducting and reporting the research, thereby adding to its quality and credibility (Braun & Clarke, 2022). In relation to Studies I and II there were several aspects that might have, and likely did, influence and shape the way the researchers approached and engaged with the data, analysis and results. One such aspect is the academic discipline of psychology, to which all the researchers in Studies I and II adhere, enabling them to see and pick up on aspects that were relevant for understanding the psychological issues addressed in the studies. However, it is also possible that researchers from other academic disciplines might have been able to see other aspects of long-term outcomes of bullying in the data. Moreover, all the interviewers were clinical psychologists, which is believed to have been helpful in conducting the interviews. However, it is also possible that these circumstances might have influenced the interviews and analysis in a more clinical perspective than if the interviews had been conducted by interviewers with other professions and expertise. Furthermore, as different theories and perspectives were used to shed light on the complexity of long-term outcomes

of bullying victimization, emerging adulthood (Study I) and emerging adulthood and resilience (Study II), it is possible that these theories and perspectives came to influence the researchers in different ways in the data analysis, as described in previous sections. In order to address these aspects of situatedness, the researchers met continuously to discuss the analysis and test alternatives. The analysis and research process was also discussed with other researchers at seminars in order to elaborate on the analysis and receive input, and it is believed that both these discussions among the researchers as well as the input from other researchers was helpful in illuminating the researchers' situatedness within their own research process and enhancing the quality of the analyses and results in Studies I and II.

Another aspect of qualitative research is the quality of data. Malterud et al. (2016) have proposed the term 'information power' as a means to establish sample sizes for qualitative research. The basic idea is that the higher the quality of data the more information power it holds and the smaller the sample size needs to be. In this sense, the items in the guide by Malteruds et al. (2016) can help in describing the quality of data in qualitative research. For instance, 'sample specificity' means that participants holding characteristics that are highly specific to the study's aim increases its information power and quality. Furthermore, 'quality of dialogue' means that a clear communication between researcher and participants adds quality to the process of co-constructing data in their interaction. As both Studies I and II employed a purposive sampling procedure (Schwab & Syed, 2015) it could be argued that the sample specificity was high, ensuring information power and quality of the data. Moreover, as the interview guide had been pilot-tested and the interviewers were trained at conducting interviews and were also clinical psychologists, it is believed that the quality of dialogue was good and ensured the analytical value of the retrieved data.

Furthermore, as described by Levitt et al. (2018), member-checking or participant feedback on findings is an aspect of quality and methodological integrity in qualitative research. In relation to the interviews conducted in Studies I and II, at the end of each interview every participant was asked if they believed the questions were adequate for investigating the research area of long-term outcomes of bullying, and if there were any aspects they believed had been missed in the interview guide or during the interview itself. The participants described that the interviews had targeted the adequate areas of interest, and said they experienced that they had been able to provide the information they considered important for understanding long-term outcomes of bullying. This process of member-checking and feedback (Levitt et al., 2018) is believed to have contributed to the quality of data in Studies I and II.

Finally, in regard to trustworthiness and rigour of data analysis and findings for Studies I and II, consensus reliability was applied during the data analysis, meaning that disagreements among the authors in the descriptions of the participants' experiences were discussed and resolved among the authors until consensus was reached (Syed & Nelson, 2015). In relation to Study I, interrater reliability was calculated based on the agreement of all themes across all interviews, resulting in an interrater agreement of 97% with a Cohen's Kappa of .93 $p < .000$, indicating that the researchers had a high degree of agreement on how the data and themes were related.

Theoretical Considerations

Research in the field of bullying is sometimes said to lack theoretical focus (Canty et al., 2016; Volk et al., 2017). However, work has recently been done in order to suggest various theoretical models to better understand bullying from a fuller perspective, such as ecological perspectives (Thomas, 2021), evolutionary perspectives (Al-Jbouri & Volk, 2021) and sociocultural/sociological perspectives (Schott & Søndergaard, 2021). However, such theoretical discussions are mostly related to the time of victimization and are aimed at a better understanding of interventions and enhancing anti-bullying programmes; in relation to long-term outcomes, the theoretical connections are sparse. It has been suggested, however, that victimization experiences be related to a developmental perspective (Troop-Gordon, 2017), which arguably should also be applied to the process of long-term outcomes.

The findings in the three studies in this thesis indicate that it was useful to employ the theory of emerging adulthood as a unique developmental period (Arnett, 2014) to enhance the understanding of long-term outcomes of bullying victimization. In relation to Study I, using the theory of emerging adulthood opened a perspective in which the impact of perceived experiences of long-term outcomes of being bullied in school, described by the participants, could be better understood when related to the features of the developmental period of emerging adulthood. This approach was also found to be beneficial in Study II, especially in relation to how the process of resilience can be understood in terms of outcomes and as a dynamic process over time, whereby the possibility to use the opportunities of emerging adulthood to leave negative experiences behind and take on a new direction in life (Arnett, 2014) could offer information on the participants' process of resilience. Furthermore, in relation to Study III, the features of emerging adulthood as a developmental phase could be used to inform a deepened understanding of how body-related concerns associated with experiences of bullying victimization in school might affect a person's life in emerging adulthood. However, the theory of emerging adult-

hood as a developmental period (Arnett, 2000) has been criticized with assertions that it only applies to certain people and that its generalizability beyond highly industrialized societies, as well as within these societies, is limited when it comes to different classes (Côté, 2014; du Bois-Reymond, 2016). With this said, emerging adulthood has been described as a turning point at which difficulties from one's earlier life can be redeemed or, alternatively, at which life can become more troubled (Arnett, 2014); and as the first time in a person's life when a redirection of their life course presents itself—for better or worse (Schwartz, 2016). This suggests that emerging adulthood also represents a vital part of understanding how experiences of bullying victimization in school can lead to long-term outcomes. Based on the positive experiences from the work on the studies in this thesis, using the theory of emerging adulthood to broaden the understanding of long-term outcomes of experiences of bullying victimization, it is suggested that future studies of long-term outcomes of bullying victimization, in the same manner, relate the outcomes that are found to the specific developmental period under study.

Moreover, Study II used the theory of resilience (Masten, 2001) to investigate how long-term outcomes of bullying victimization can be better understood. The findings in this study suggest that it is a useful theory for enhancing the knowledge about why some individuals who have been subjected to bullying victimization do not end up with negative long-term outcomes. Research and theory on resilience have developed over a set of four different waves (Masten & Cicchetti, 2016), a development that has also included much debate over definitions and how to situate resilience in the lived experience of someone subjected to risk (Kuldas & Foody, 2021). As most of the research in the field of resilience has been quantitative (Ungar & Liebenberg, 2011), most of the models and concepts in the theory of resilience are sprung out of how they have been found in relation to different models. However, it has been suggested that qualitative methods can help in better understanding the process of how these different concepts work, or why a certain factor is protective (Rutter, 2012; Ungar, 2003). These recommendations were picked up in Study II and were found to be useful in illuminating the dynamic process of resilience in relation to bullying victimization.

Furthermore, experiences of bullying and its long-term outcomes could be considered to be experiences of trauma (Carlisle & Rofes, 2007; Pabian et al., 2022). However, the benchmark for understanding traumatic events in childhood and its negative long-term consequences, adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), includes sexual abuse, physical abuse, neglect, and domestic violence by adults as adverse childhood experiences (Felitti et al., 1998) but omits bullying experiences. Meanwhile, studies have found that experiences of bullying victimization have the same or worse negative effects as ACEs do, even in

relation to long-term outcomes (Lereya et al., 2015; Sweeting et al., 2020). Moreover, it has been pointed out that experiences of childhood bullying victimization should be regarded as part of an extended understanding of ACEs (Karatekin & Hill, 2019) and that the long-term outcomes of ACEs should be investigated in relation to transitional periods of life as these are potent periods for ACE effects (Crandall et al., 2020), for instance emerging adulthood (Davis et al., 2018). It is therefore recommended that future research include the perspective of ACE in relation to bullying, as this is a field of great information that could help to situate and expand the understanding of long-term outcomes of bullying, especially for children suffering from multiple sources of maltreatment.

Implications for Practice

Several of the findings in the three studies in this thesis are important in relation to practice, not only when it comes to bullying intervention and work on enhancing resilience among children subjected to bullying victimization in school, but also in regard to clinical work with emerging adults.

Regarding bullying victimization, the findings in Study I illustrate the importance of school personnel being attentive to possible bullying and intervening when indications of it are presented. This is already established in Swedish law (Swedish Education Act [SFS 2010:800]). However, as described by Yoon and Bauman (2014), it is important to educate teachers in understanding and recognizing bullying so that they feel competent in intervening, as neglecting to intervene risks being interpreted as an approval of continued victimization. This is vital, as teachers are the people who are closest to the victimization and those who are to actually implement the anti-bullying activities. Teachers' awareness and knowledge, as well as their own norms and social understanding of bullying as a phenomenon, might impact their self-efficacy in how and when they decide to intervene, which is important for reducing bullying (Verseveld et al., 2019). This relates to findings of how students attending teacher education feel they are unprepared to deal with upcoming bullying situations and lack adequate training for such situations (Lester et al., 2018), which might lead to a lack of self-efficacy in intervening in a bullying situation (Yoon & Bauman, 2014).

Moreover, the findings in Study II indicate that teachers have the possibility to become resilience-enhancing adults when they are attentive to victims' needs and offer help in a process of co-creating resilience with them (Theron & Engelbrecht, 2012). In this process, it is vital to distinguish between a situation in which factors protect against being subjected to victimization at all (see Zych et al., 2019, for a review) and one in which factors are protective in relation to a negative outcome from being subjected to bullying victimization

(see Ttofi et al., 2014, for a review). This distinction is important, as it has been found that teachers might have problems differentiating between 'at-risk' children who exhibit resilience and children who only display competence, meaning that they are thriving although they have not been subjected to any risk. If true resilience-enhancing implementations are to be successful it is important for teachers to be able to identify resilience as a process related to risk, as this is different to competence on its own, without risk (Green et al., 2007). Furthermore, it is important that resilience be understood as a process dependent on both inner capacities and social resources, as shown in Study II; otherwise, there is a risk that resilience will be seen as a trait rather than dependent on a supportive social environment, and anyone who is unable to overcome experiences of bullying as not having been able to 'man up' or 'be resilient' enough (Sims-Schouten & Edwards, 2016). Such perspectives will sink any chances of enhancing resilience.

Furthermore, the findings in Study II indicating that extracurricular activities can serve as safe havens and offer a context for positive development for those subjected to bullying victimization in school point to the importance of offering and sustaining extracurricular activities for children in the community. Moreover, the suggestions by Arseneault (2018) to address bullying in resilience-enhancing programmes in terms of giving tips to children who are at risk for how to make and keep friends (Harmelen et al., 2017) and to involve families (Bowes et al., 2010) are strengthened by the findings in Study II. However, it is important to emphasize that bullying is prohibited in Swedish schools and that interventions aimed at stopping bullying in the first place should be prioritized.

Moreover, the findings in Study I indicate that clinicians working with emerging adults suffering from poor psychological health need to be aware of any possible history of bullying victimization in school, as such experiences might be related to mental health problems in this group of individuals. A history of bullying is not an uncommon experience for people in therapy (Miehls, 2017). However, in the absence of assessment and treatment protocols in relation to adults with experiences of bullying (Samara et al., 2017) – although some exist for children and adolescents (Byers et al., 2019) – it has been suggested that as trust in others and social commitments are some of the main issues to address in counselling with former victims of bullying, sensitivity to relationship-building in working with these clients is of utmost importance (Jones, 2020; Miehls, 2017). Moreover, subjective perceptions of the impact of being bullied have been shown to be important for understanding the long-term impact of bullying victimization, with emerging adults who perceive a negative impact of adolescent bullying victimization reporting poorer mental health and well-being while emerging adults who perceive a positive impact of

adolescent bullying victimization report better mental health and well-being (Pabian et al. 2021). These findings indicate that there might be aspects of how a person perceives and creates meaning from past negative events (McAdams & McLean, 2013), as discussed in relation to the findings of Study II, that could be important to address when working with emerging adults with experiences of being bullied in school who are having problems with mental health and well-being in emerging adulthood. In a highly informative clinical vignette, Miehls (2017) presents experiences with psychotherapeutic work (a combination of psychodynamic and cognitive-behavioural therapy) with a man with bullying victimization experiences. The vignette offers insights into the psychotherapeutic processes of helping a former victim regain body-related self-confidence, working with social anxiety and relational issues. The therapeutic process also helps the former victim gain access to a positive identity, with the problematic identity formed out of the victimization experiences being confronted and questioned. In the described clinical case, achieving a new, positive, physical self was a core part of the therapy, as much of the victimization had revolved around the body and masculine norms of physical strength. From this perspective, the results in Study III indicating that body-related concerns have a long-term association with experiences of bullying victimization in school as well as the described experiences of problems with both social interactions and identity formation as well as body-related concerns in Study I are illustrative findings of promising aspects to address in clinical work with former victims of bullying. The findings in these studies offer insights into the long-term outcomes of bullying, and present information regarding the recommendation that clinicians need to have a deep understanding of what bullying is and how it works in order for therapeutic relationships to be successful (Jones, 2020). Furthermore, it has been suggested that it is useful to conceptualize clients' experiences of bullying victimization as having experienced some form of traumatic event (Miehls, 2017; Pabian et al., 2021) and to adopt a trauma-informed framework (Harris & Fallot, 2001) and address these issues in terms of best practices for trauma survivors, such as phase-oriented trauma therapy (Basham & Miehls 2004; Herman 1992). Such suggestions are strengthened when they are related to the lived experiences shared by the participants in Study I.

Furthermore, the findings in Studies I and III indicate that long-term outcomes of victimization might lead to body image problems, and even eating disorders as in Study I. These findings are informative for clinicians working with adults suffering from such problems, suggesting that a possible history of bullying victimization might need to be addressed when working with these patient groups. Special attention to appearance-related bullying is warranted, as the impact on body image and the connection to identity might indicate a

complex pattern in which body image, socially avoidant behaviour and identity might be intertwined in a pattern of psychopathology for these individuals. However, and alarmingly, the findings in Study III indicate that general bullying victimization is associated with body-related concerns far into emerging adulthood; thus, it might be the case that it is not only those who have been subjected to appearance-related bullying but rather anyone who has been subjected to bullying victimization in general is at risk of developing adult problems in relation to their body and appearance. In the clinical vignette, Miehls (2017) described that it was successful to address positive physical self-development as part of the therapy. Related to the findings in Studies I and III, such interventions can be understood as important aspects to work with in relation to previous experiences of bullying victimization. It has been found that body satisfaction, in studies on body functionality, can be enhanced by encouraging a functionality-based focus on the body (Alleva et al., 2015); and based on the findings in Study I in which the participants in different ways described not feeling at home in their own bodies, a functionality-based focus could be a way forward to enhance body satisfaction among these individuals. Moreover, in a study investigating developmental journeys from negative body image in early adolescence to positive body image in emerging adulthood (Gattario & Frisén, 2019) it was found that some of the interviewed participants had experienced bullying victimization in school. The findings revealed that, generally, the change from negative to positive body image could be found at three different turning points: finding a new social context, experiencing agency and empowerment, and using cognitive strategies to improve one's body image. What the authors suggest is that a process addressing change from negative to positive body image should not only focus on aspects related to the physical body but also address questions related to a general sense of acceptance, belonging, agency and empowerment.

Ethical Considerations

The collection of the data for Wave 6 in the MoS study, used in Studies I and II in this thesis, was approved by the Regional Ethical Review Board in Gothenburg, Sweden (T446-15). The collection of the data for Wave 7, used in Studies I, II and III, was approved by the Regional Ethical Review Board in Gothenburg, Sweden (T1063-17). The data collection for the interview Studies I and II was approved by the Regional Ethical Review Board in Gothenburg, Sweden (T446-15.2.3).

The ethical considerations related to Studies I and II primarily involved the possible discomfort of awakening distress from memories and recollections of being exposed to bullying victimization and experiences of psychological problems. The participants had been part of the MoS longitudinal study for

several years and data collection waves, and may have felt obligated to participate in the follow-up Studies I and II. In order to address these ethical considerations, participants were repeatedly informed that their participation was voluntary and that, if they chose to participate, they could end their participation at any time without further explanation. This information was provided in the initial contact letter and the contact via telephone with those who consented to participate, as well as at the interview. Participants could also ask questions about the study during the initial telephone call and the interview, and were encouraged to contact any of the researchers after the study. Moreover, they were informed that the material from the interviews would be treated confidentially and that the results would be presented in such a way that their anonymity was preserved.

Another ethical consideration was that participants might be at risk of feeling discomfort during the interviews, which consisted of questions probing into experiences of bullying victimization, psychological health and body image. Besides informing them that they were free to skip questions or end the interview at any time without giving a reason, the interviewers were all educated in clinical psychology and were experienced interviewers, trained in handling difficult emotions that could potentially be triggered by the interviews. During the interviews, the interviewers were attentive to the participants' reactions, ensuring that they were comfortable proceeding with the interview. After the interview, participants were offered the possibility to talk about whether it had caused them any discomfort; however, no participants reported discomfort due to the interview. Participants were also given a list of phone numbers and contact information for healthcare services and non-profit organizations, which could be used if the interviews triggered potentially disturbing memories later.

When an interview ended it was assigned a number to ensure that anonymity would be preserved, and the interviews were kept in secure storage accessible only by the researchers, separate from the participants' contact information to ensure that the interviews could not be connected to specific individuals.

In relation to the results presented in Studies I and II, in order to maintain the participants' anonymity, any identifying information in the quotes and case descriptions was removed or changed to something similar but not identical.

As for Study III (and Studies I and II, as these also used data collected at Waves 6 and 7), in relation to the surveys of Waves 6 and 7 using online questionnaires, the risk of injury, discomfort or breach of privacy was assessed to be very low. However, there was a risk that some of the participants would find it difficult to answer issues around, for example, bullying and mental illness. This risk was managed first and foremost by informing the participants in the information letter, and also at the beginning of the form, that they could skip

parts of the form or individual questions if they found them difficult to answer. The form also included fields for any additional comments. In addition, after completing the surveys, participants received information about where to turn if they experienced, for example, body dissatisfaction, disordered eating, depression or anxiety.

Taken together, it is believed that these considerations and adherence to the ethical recommendations by the American Psychological Association (2020) have ensured the participants' safety and privacy.

Conclusion

The overall aim of this thesis was to broaden the understanding of long-term outcomes of experiencing bullying victimization in school, related to the developmental period of emerging adulthood as well as how it can be understood in terms of resilience and outcomes of body-related concerns.

Study I reveals how experiences of bullying victimization were perceived to be directly connected to the poor psychological health reported by the emerging adults in the study, as well as several other negative outcomes. The findings in Study I indicate that emerging adults with experiences of bullying victimization in school might not only suffer from negative long-term outcomes on their own but carry the double burden of also experiencing problems in attending to the developmental features of emerging adulthood.

Study II, on the other hand, illustrates how social resources and personal agency enable a process of resilience in relation to bullying victimization and long-term outcomes. This study also shows how the ability to use one's experiences of bullying victimization in a positive way are related to resilience as a dynamic process over time, whereby the opportunities inherent in the developmental phase of emerging adulthood might reinforce a process of resilience over time that has already begun.

Study III, in which body-related concerns were found to be a salient factor nearly two decades after the experienced victimization, suggests that experiences of bullying victimization entail a process that interacts with an individual's core self and identity whereby the experience of being bullied comes to be attached to their appearance and body, which they learn to hate and reject. As emerging adulthood is a time when social interactions, romantic relationships and intimacy become increasingly important, from this perspective problems of body-related concerns associated with experiences of being bullied in school might not only be a negative experience on their own but may also add to the burden of navigating the developmental phase of emerging adulthood.

In conclusion, the combination of the three studies in this thesis has contributed to an understanding of the complexity of long-term outcomes of bul-

lying victimization in school. The lived experiences of former victims, combined with longitudinal data, revealed that being bullied in school can involve an identity-forming adaptation to the victimization when there is a lack of support and help from school personnel in stopping it. As being bullied in school also coincides with a time of life when one's appearance and body become increasingly important, the body and appearance can be one of the spaces on which these experiences of victimization are engraved. However, an interactive process between a child's agency and inner strength on the one hand and social resources in the environmental context on the other suggests that with social support, negative long-term outcomes of bullying victimization can be avoided in a process of resilience. Emerging adulthood – a unique transitional period between adolescence and adulthood characterized by identity exploration, instability, self-focus, feeling in-between, possibilities/optimism and a significant development of one's sense of self – was found to have important explanatory value in understanding how bullying victimization experiences in school can come to be translated into negative outcomes up into adulthood.

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Appendix

I. Lidberg, J., Berne, S., & Frisén, A. (2022). Challenges in Emerging Adulthood Related to the Impact of Childhood Bullying Victimization. *Emerging Adulthood.* https://doi.org/10.1177/21676968211051475

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III. Lidberg, J., Berne, S., & Frisén, A. (2023). Is bullying victimization in school associated with body-related concerns in emerging adulthood? A prospective study over nearly two decades. [Manuscript submitted for publication]. Department of Psychology, University of Gothenburg.