

# Transitioning to College: The Experience of First-Year Students with a History of Childhood Bullying

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Alberti Conference  
October 19, 2015

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http://www.bu.edu/bullying/

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Social Adjustment & Bullyi...

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About UsResearchResearch Team MembersSchool Partnerships

Boston University School of Education

Social Adjustment & Bullying Prevention Laboratory



## Welcome to the Social Adjustment and Bullying Prevention Lab!

The goal of the Social Adjustment and Bullying Prevention Lab is to better understand and promote healthy social adjustment among youth in order to foster psychological well-being and academic success. This is achieved through research-based school partnerships. By collaborating with schools, we gain valuable information about how individual and contextual factors influence bullying, and about which youth might be at risk for adverse psychological and educational effects of bullying and victimization.

We invite you to explore the lab's website to find out more about our specific research projects and to learn how your school might partner with us.

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100%

# Team

- Dr. Melissa Holt
- Gerald Reid
- Cong Zhang
- Javier Guzmán
- Chelsey Bowman
- Rachel Oblath
- Shannon Gribben
- Claire Brown
- Merry Richter
- Alyssa Murphy
- Asia Alexis
- Noah Segal
- Melody Eaton

# Research Team's Goal

- Understand and promote healthy social and emotional development:
  - Foster psychological well-being
  - Support academic success
- Development
- Diversity
- Context

*School Name*



*Boston University School of Education*

*Survey of Bullying*

Survey Completed: November, 2013

Report Completed: January, 2014

Report Prepared by:

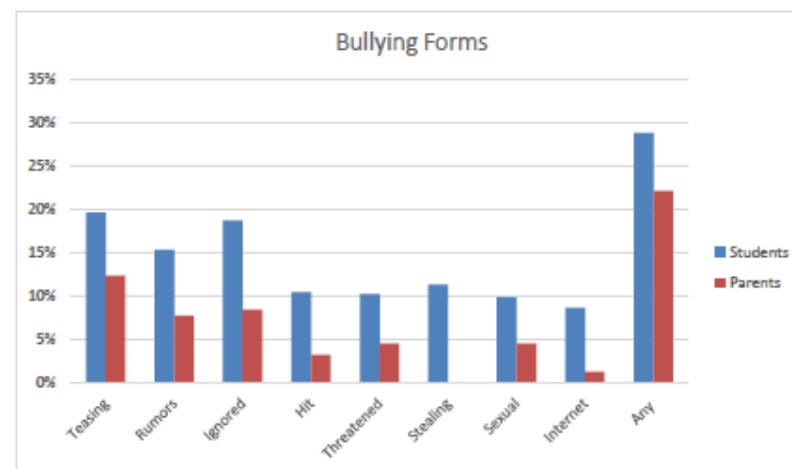
Jennifer Greif Green

Melissa Holt

Gerald Reid



**Figure 2.1 Students and Parents Reporting for Each Form of Bullying (%)**



**Figure 2.2 Teachers' Ratings of Bullying**

Teachers were given a definition of bullying and then asked to provide their initial perceptions of rates of bullying among students with whom they work directly in the school. They were asked, "How many students do you believe have been bullied?" and "How many students do you believe bully others?"

Rating	Bullied	Bully Others
None	25%	29.2%
A few	62.5%	58.3%
Some	12.5%	12.5%
Many	0%	0%
All	0%	0%

# A phone call...



# Overview

- Challenges and opportunities students face in the college transition
- Transition among previously bullied students
- LGBTQ youth
- Implications

# Off to college...

- 58% of US adults attend at least some college
- 29% earn at least a Bachelor's degree  
(US Census Bureau, 2014)







# General college adjustment...Risk

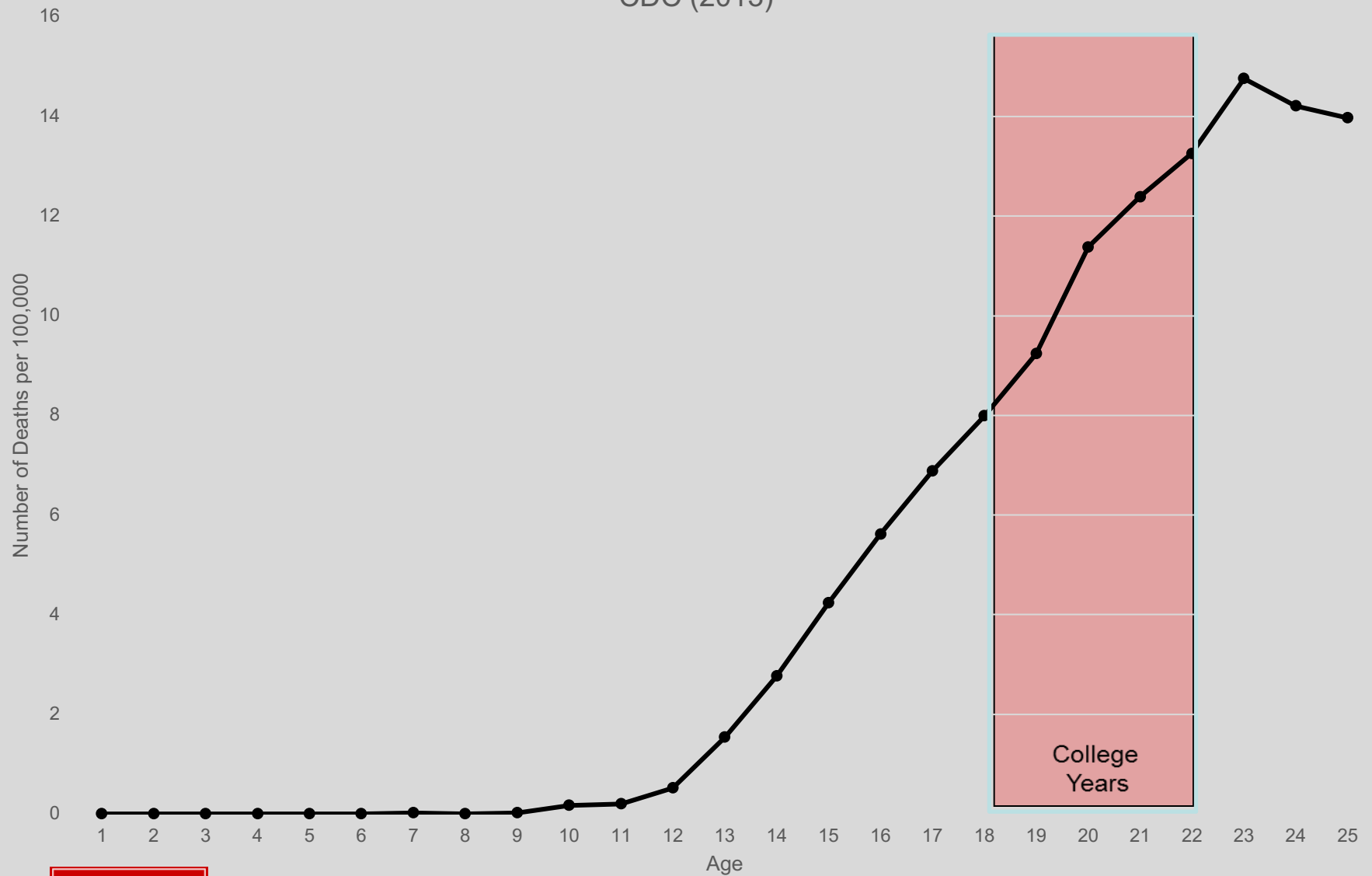
- High depression and anxiety
  - 31% depressed
  - 37% overwhelming anger
  - 51% overwhelming anxiety
  - 57% very lonely

# General college adjustment...Risk

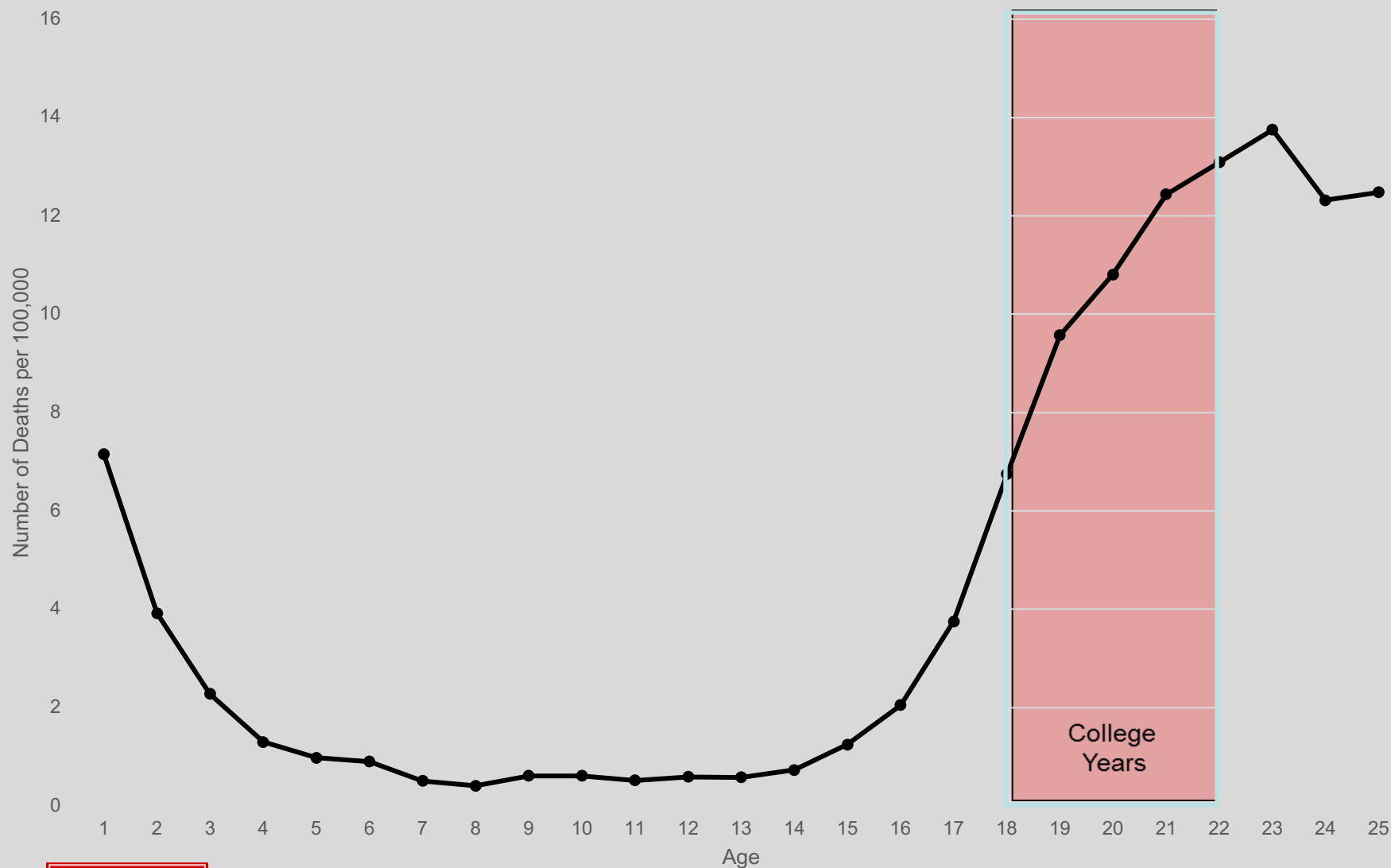
- Most with likely disorders receive no treatment
- Increase in other risky behaviors



# Suicide Death Rate Among Youth CDC (2013)

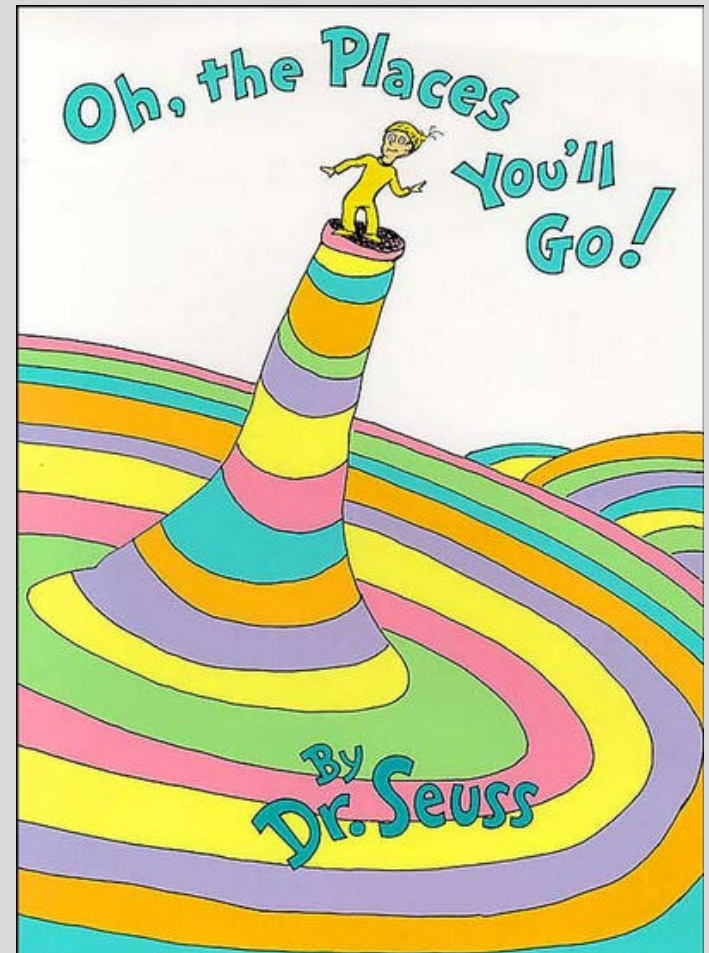


# Homicide Death Rate Among Youth CDC (2013)



# General College Adjustment...Opportunity

- Educational
- Social
- Occupational





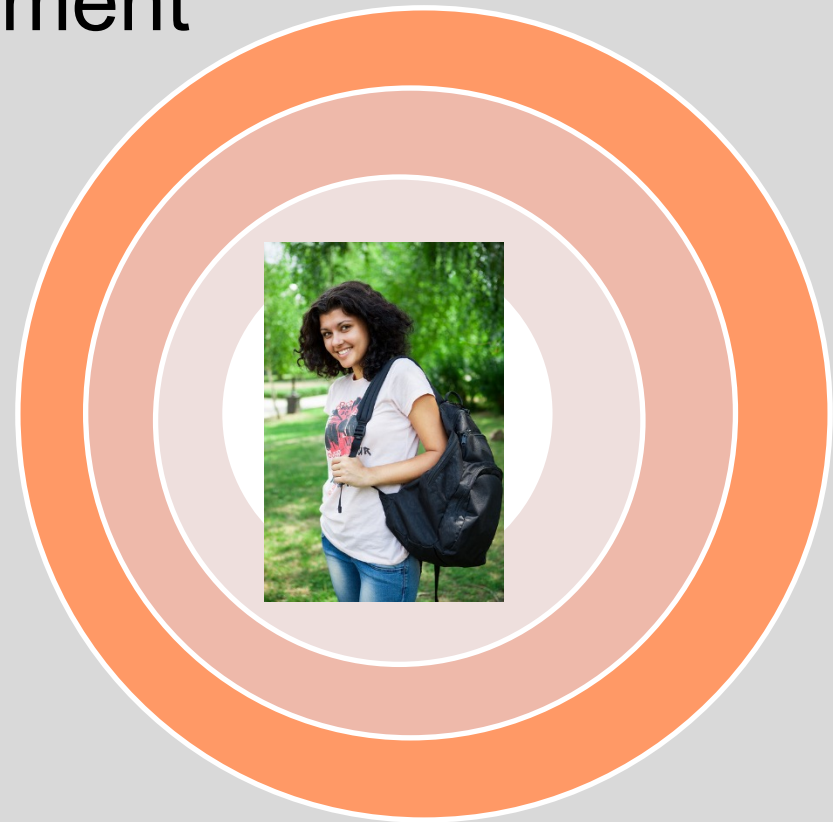
# Understanding College Transition

- Academic performance
- Mental health
- Financial resources
- Family education



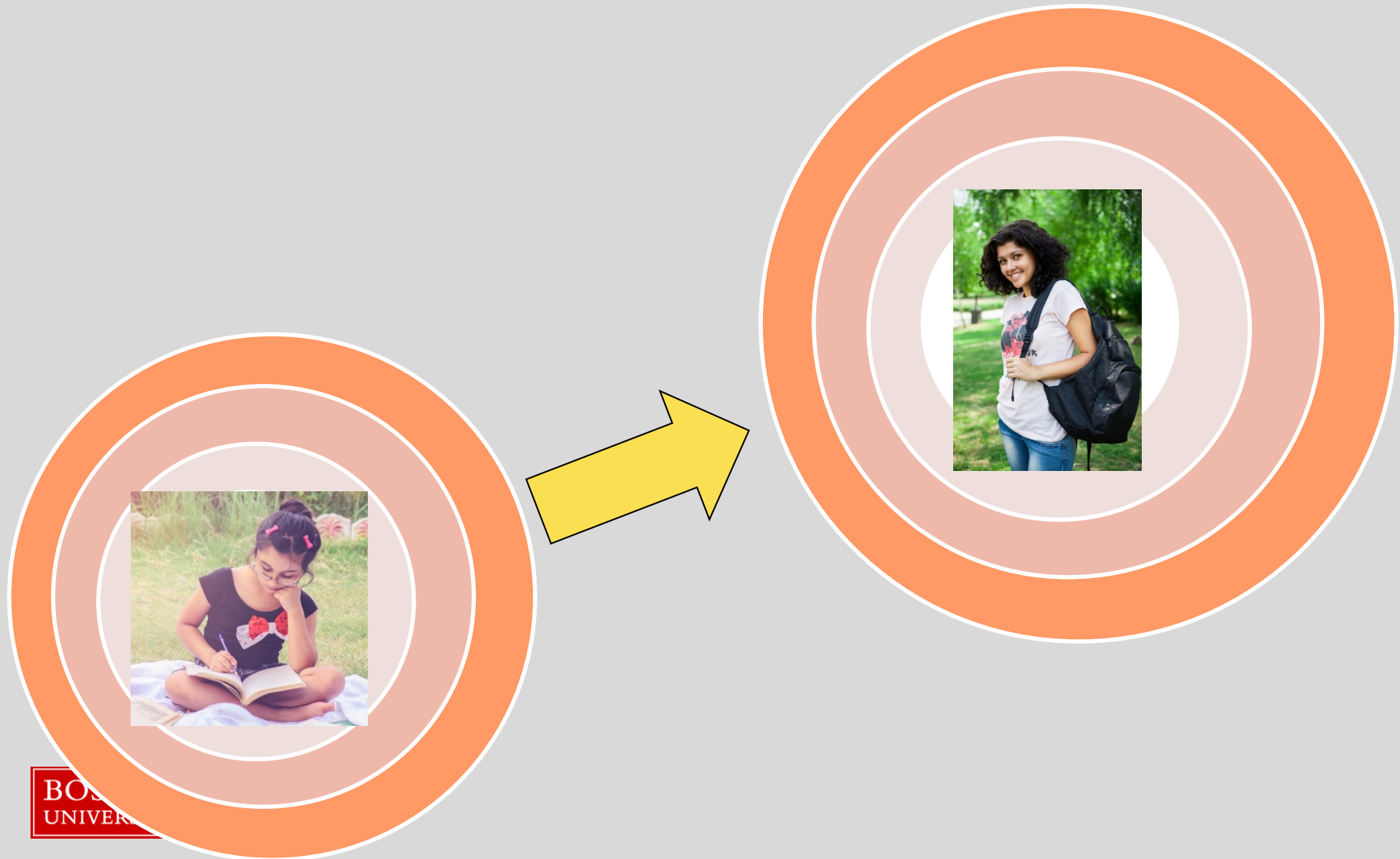
# Building a Model of Institutional Action

- Institutional commitment
- Expectations
- Support
- Feedback
- Involvement





# How Might This Look for Bullied Youth?



# Long-term effects of bullying

- Victims
  - Increased anxiety
- Bullies
  - Increased antisocial personality disorder
- Bully-victims
  - Increased depression, anxiety, suicidality

# Bullying is linked to local & state context

- Bradshaw, Sawyer, O' Brennan (2009)
  - Surveyed 22,000+ students in 95 schools
  - School-level factors significantly associated with bullying attitudes and behaviors
- Hatzenbuehler et al. (2015)
  - 16 key DOE components of bullying legislation.
  - Students in states with DOE components had 24% reduced odds of bullying

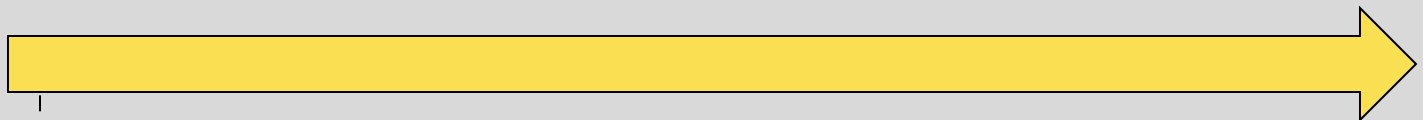
# What we don't know...

- Studies on cumulative trauma suggest that bullied students have more trouble with adjustment than their peers
- Ecological framework suggests that new college environment might be protective



# Pilot study (Holt, Green, et al., 2014)

- 413 students, one-time online survey
- Measured:
  - Previous bullying
  - Current adjustment
  - Bullying since college arrival



# Measuring previous bullying

- The tricky thing about retrospective measures...
- California Bullying Victimization Scale
  - Assess 3 core concepts of bullying
    - Intentionality
    - Repetition
    - Power Imbalance
  - Does not use word “bullying”



# Pilot study (Holt et al., 2014)

## ■ Results

- Past bullying = worse mental and physical health
- Past bullying  $\neq$  college social life, ratings of college experience, academic performance, bullying at college

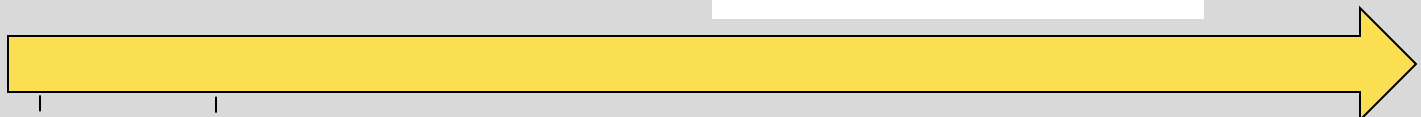


# Cross-site Research Team

- Boston College
  - Paul Poteat
- University of Illinois, Urbana Champagne
  - Dorothy Espelage
- University of California, Santa Barbara
  - Michael Furlong
  - Erika Felix
  - Jill Sharkey



Spr 2012 Pilot Study    Fall '12  
Baseline





# Fall Sample

School	N	% Response
UCSB	620	13.3
UIUC	397	39.7
BU	264	10.7
BC	56	16.8
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1337</b>	<b>15.9</b>

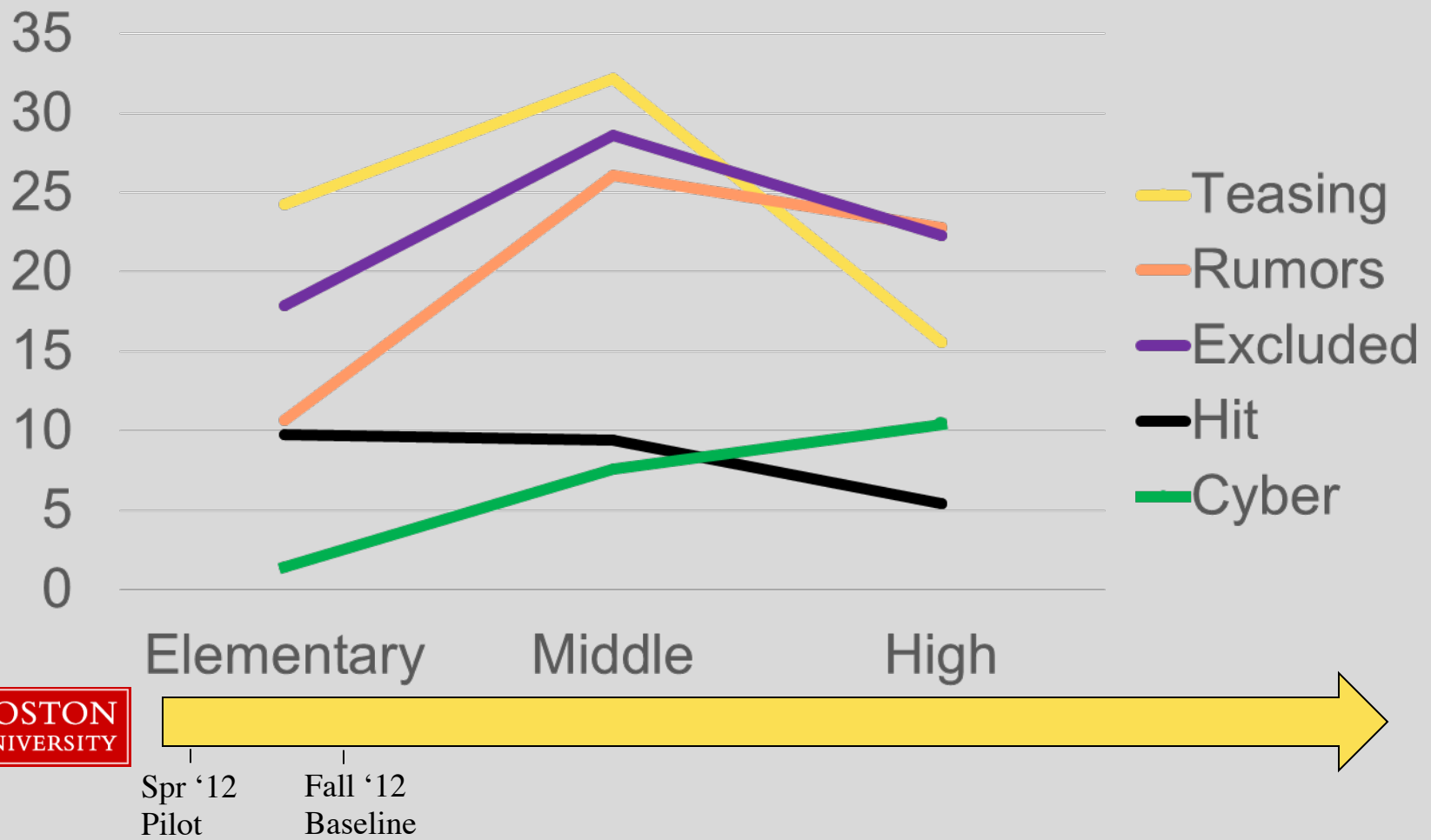


# Measures

- *California Bully Victimization Scale* (CBVS; Felix, Sharkey, Green, Furlong, Tanigawa, 2011)
- *Patient Health Questionnaire* (PHQ-9; Kroenke, Spitzer, Williams, 2001)
- *Generalized Anxiety Disorder Scale* (GAD-7; Spitzer, Kroenke, Williams, Lowe, 2007)
- *Juvenile Victimization Questionnaire* (JVQ; Finkelhor, Hamby, Ormrod, & Turner, 2005)
- *Psychological Sense of School Membership* (PSSM; Goodenow, 1993)
- *General Self-Efficacy Scale* (GSE; Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 2010)

# Prior Bullying

- 23% of respondents reported prior bullying



# Power Difference

- More Popular (42%)
- Stronger (35%)
- More athletic (31%)
- Has more money (28%)
- Better looking (24%)
- Older (13%)
- Smarter (6%)



# Who bullied you?

- Classmate (82%)
- Former friend (47%)
- Current friend (17%)
- Dating/romantic partner (8%)
- Sibling (6%)
- Neighbor (6%)



# Who bullied you?

- Classmate (82%)
- Former friend (47%)
- Current friend (17%)
- Dating/romantic partner (8%)
- Sibling (6%)
- Neighbor (6%)



# Why were you targeted?

- I was smart (47%)
- I was shy (46%)
- My physical appearance (44%)
- How I dress (37%)
- Race/ethnicity (16%)
- My family (14%)
- I cried a lot (13%)
- I get angry a lot (10%)
- They thought I was LGBTQ, but I am not (8%)
- My religion (6%)
- Language I speak (4%)
- Country I am from (5%)
- My sexual orientation (5%)
- I have a disability (1%)
- I receive special education services (1%)



Adapted from Swearer & Cary (2009)

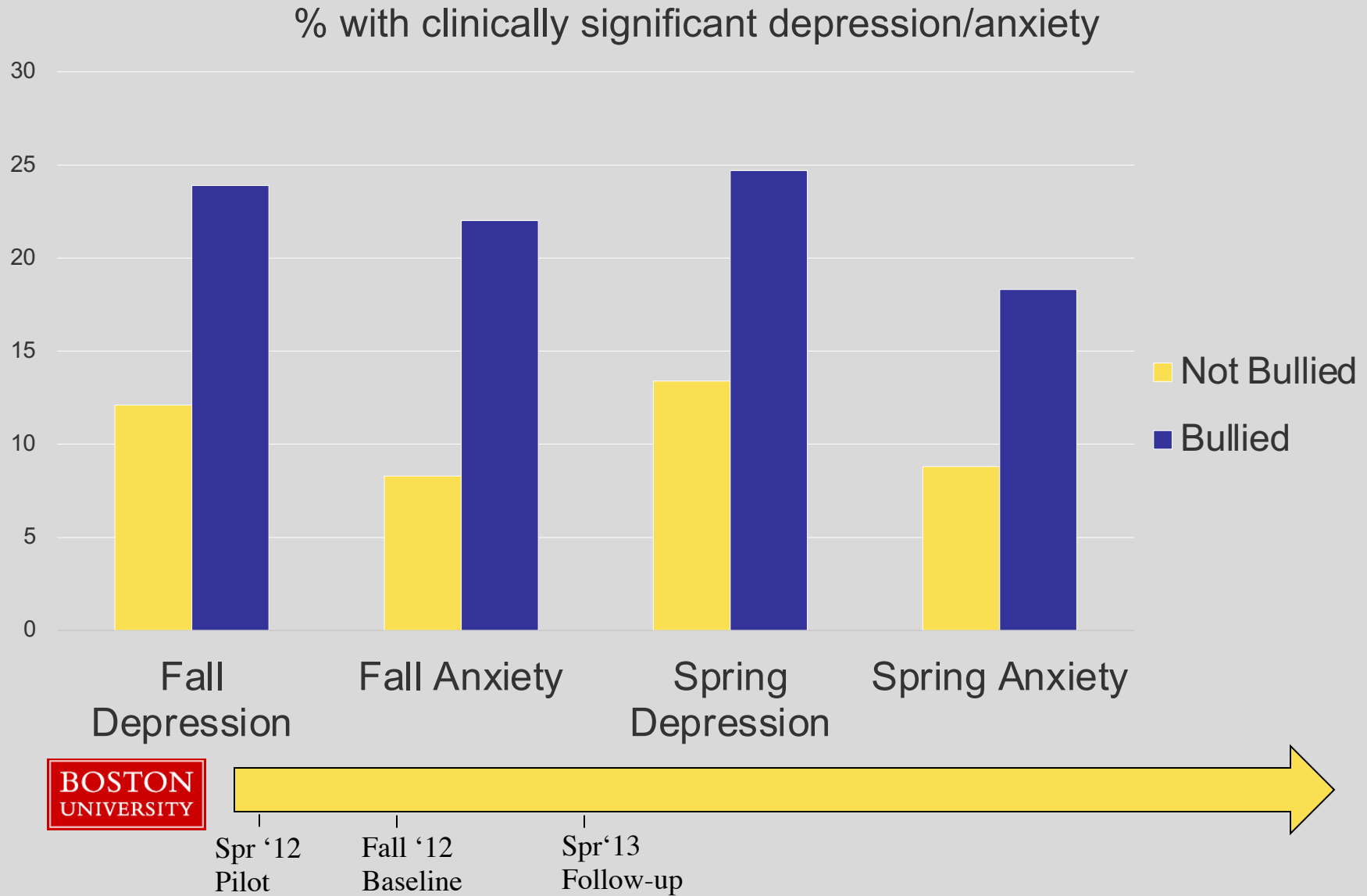
# Spring Sample

School	N	% of Fall
UCSB	247	39.8
UIUC	77	19.4
BU	90	34.1
BC	21	37.5
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>435</b>	<b>32.5</b>

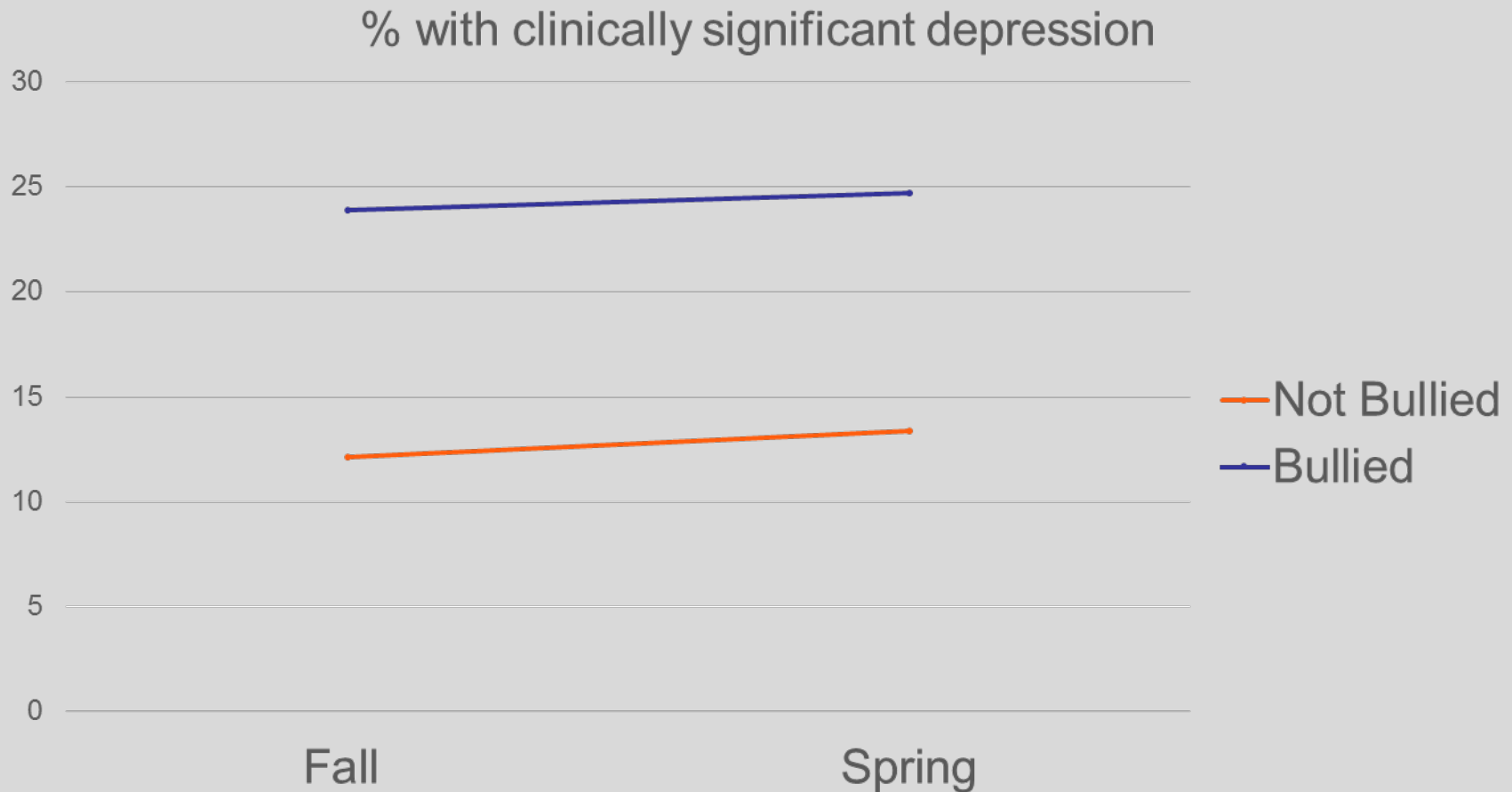




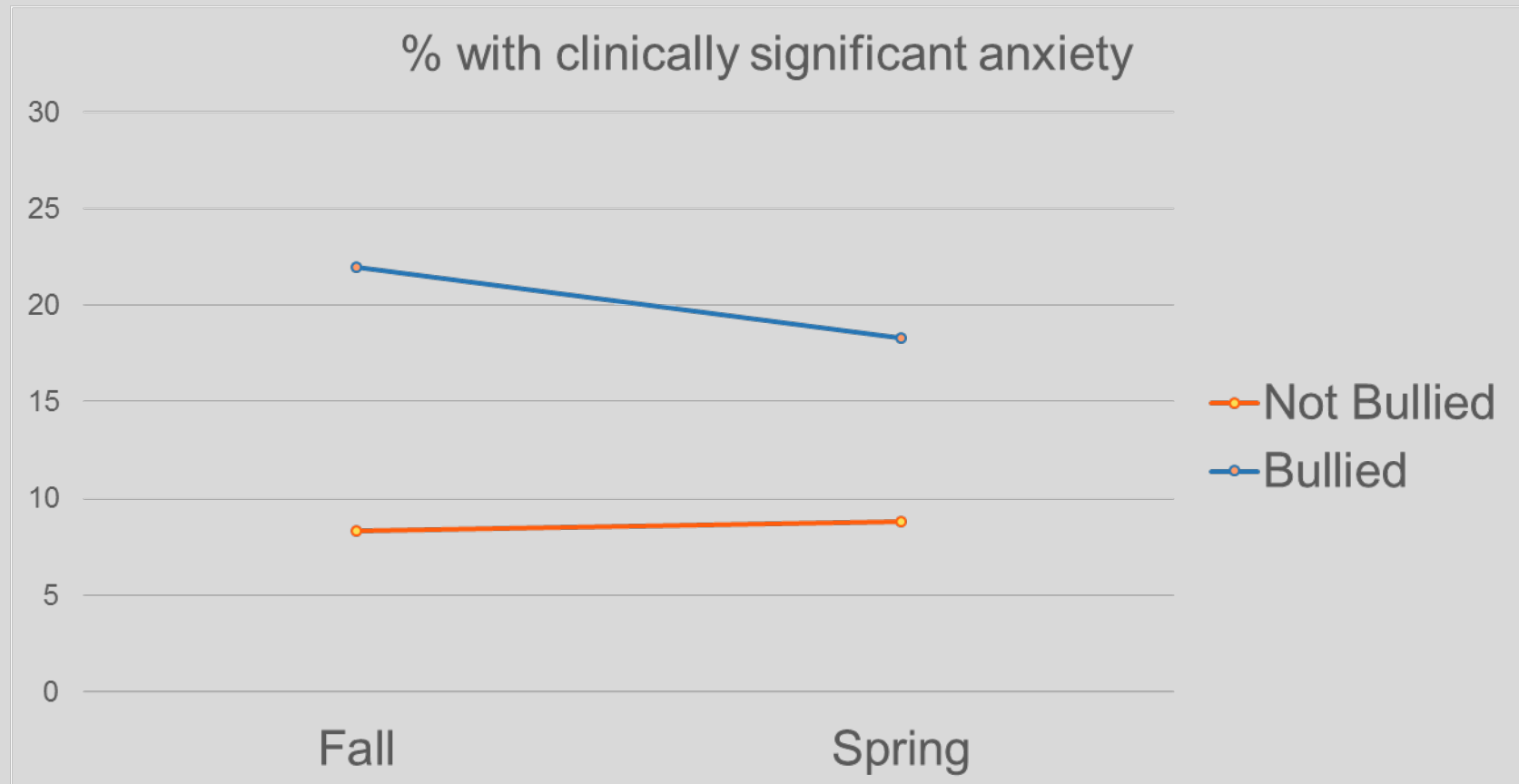
# Is Being Bullied Associated with Poor MH?



# Do MH problems get worse over time?



# Do MH problems get worse over time?



# Are previously bullied students at risk for other victimization at college?

	<b>Bullied</b>	<b>Non-Bullied</b>	<b>OR (CI)</b>
College bully victimization	11%	4%	OR=3.1 (CI=1.3-7.4)
Attempted rape	14%	6%	OR=2.9 (CI=1.4-6.4)



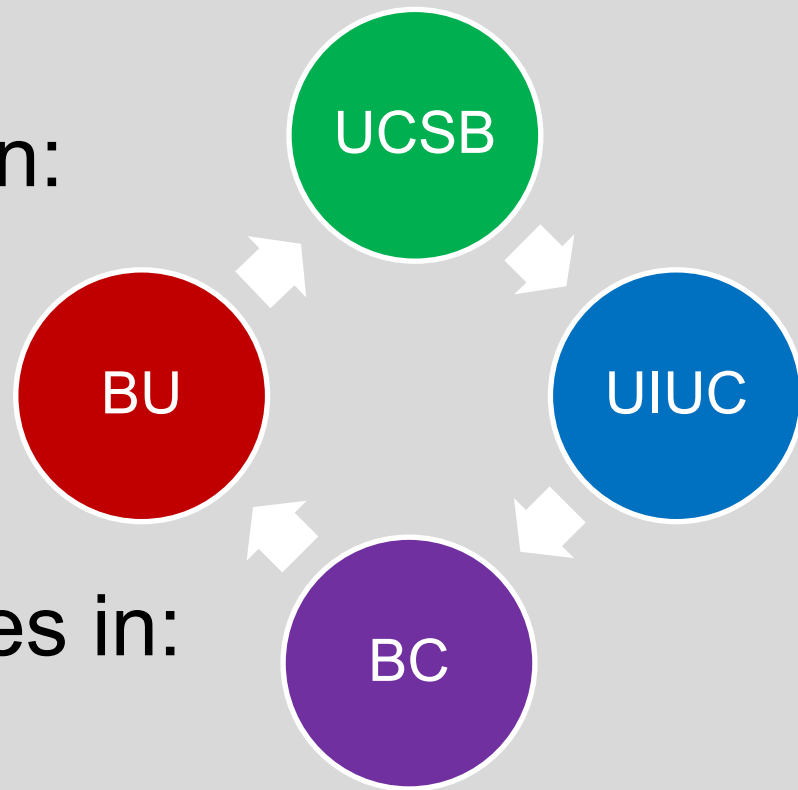
# Is being bullied related to academic performance?

- Previously bullied students report significantly lower high school average grades than their peers ( $B = -.06$ ,  $p = .038$ )
- But in the spring, previously bullied students report a fall term GPA that is equivalent to their peers



## 4 Colleges

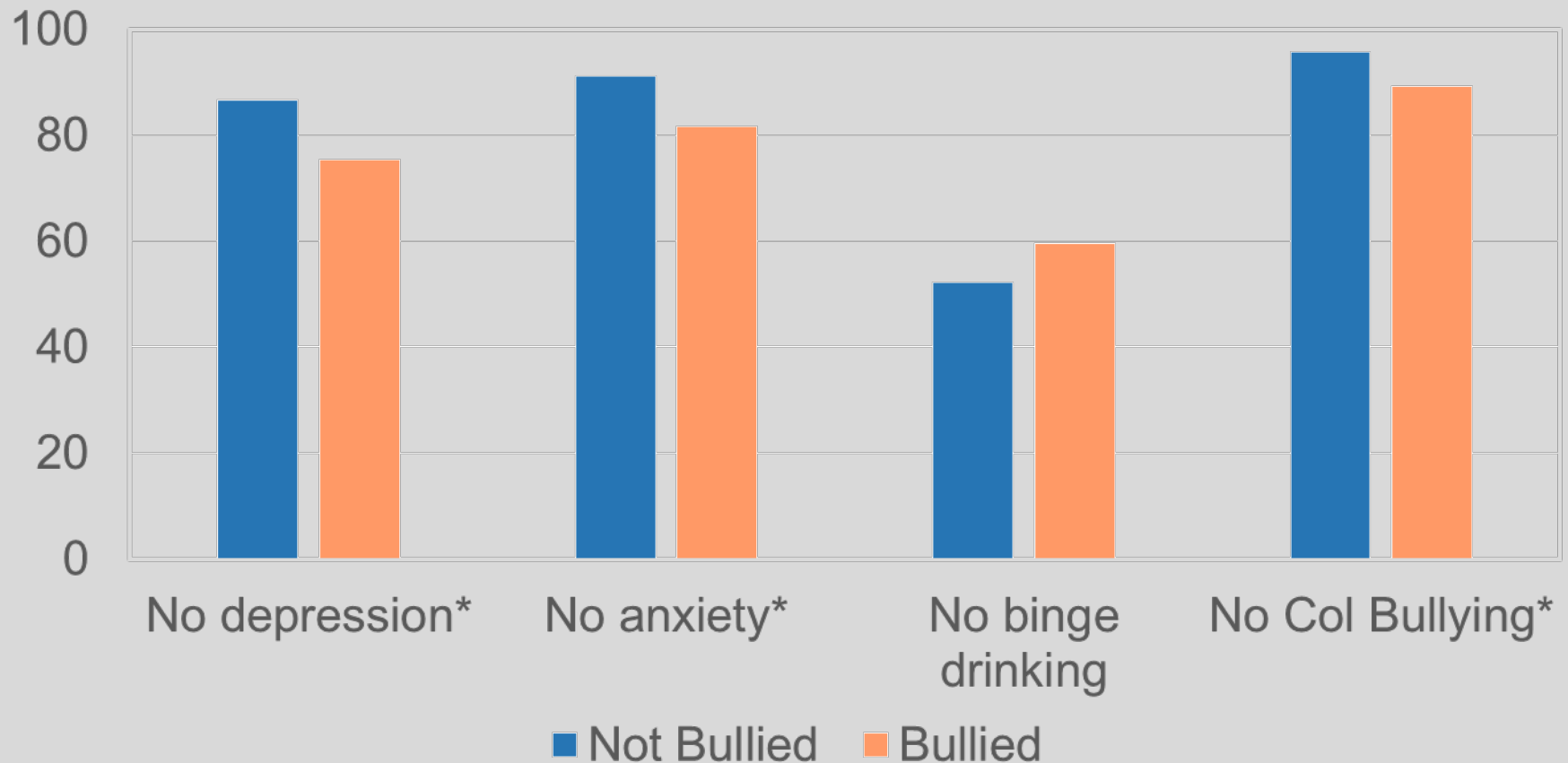
- Significant differences in:
  - Fall college belonging
  - Fall depression and anxiety
  - Spring hazing
- No significant differences in:
  - Fall childhood bullying
  - Spring college bullying
  - Spring college belonging
  - Spring depression and anxiety



# Are some students excelling?

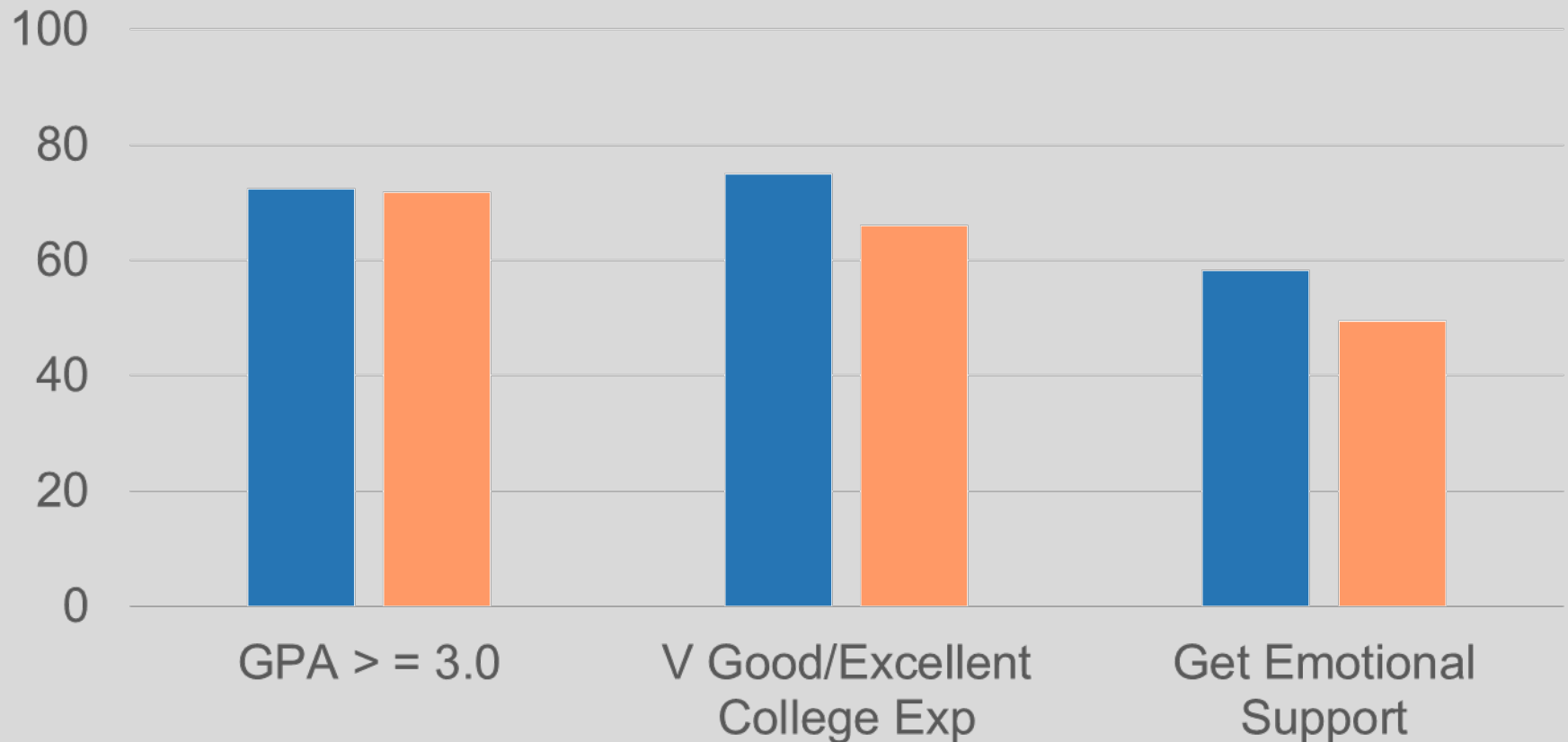
Experience	%
Fall GPA $\geq 3.0$	72.1
College experience very good/ excellent	72.7
Get emotional help from social network most of time or always	55.9
Not clinically significant dep	83.9
Not clinically significant anx	89.1
Not binge drinking	53.9
No bullying at college	94.4

# Bullying Victimization and Excelling





# Bullying Victimization and Excelling



All strengths: 12.9% bullied students, 15.2% non-bullied

# Who are the bullied students who excel?

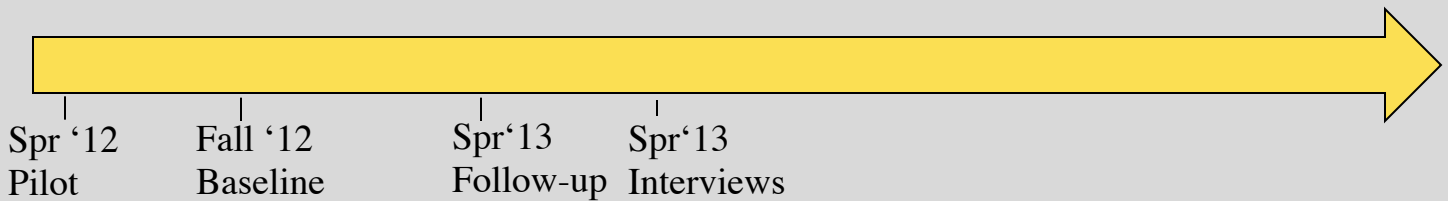
- Gender
- LGBTQ
- Fall depression
- Fall anxiety
- Fall alcohol use
- Rating overall high school experience
- Grades in high school
- Total forms of bullying victimization experiences
- Emotional support from social network
- Help with a problem or worry
- College connectedness

# Who are the bullied students who excel?

- Gender
- GLBTQ
- Fall depression
- Fall anxiety
- Fall alcohol use
- Rating overall high school experience
- Grades in high school
- **Total forms of bullying victimization experiences**
- Emotional support from social network
- Help with a problem or worry
- College connectedness

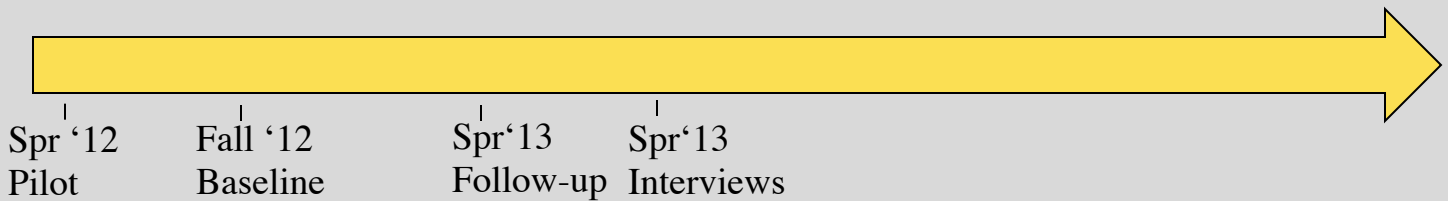
# Qualitative Interviews (Zhang et al.)

- More deeply understand adjustment experiences of previously bullied students
- Re-contacted students reporting bullying
- N = 26
- Semi-structured interviews



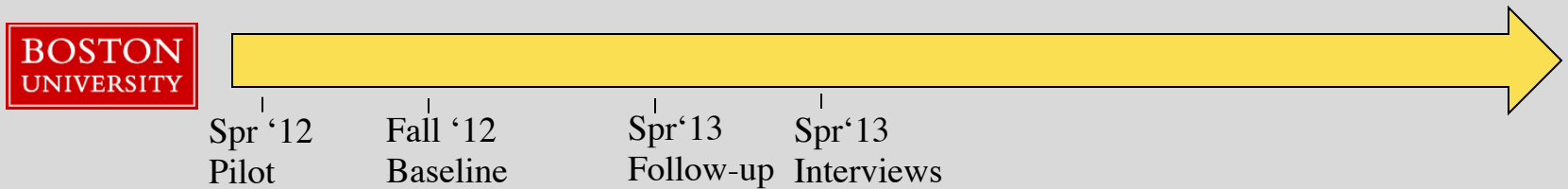
# Qualitative Interviews: Themes

- Risk: Negative effects of prior bullying
  - “I’d say it definitely did a lot to my confidence. You know it made me pretty insecure that people were treating me that way. It made me feel like people didn’t like me as much as they actually did.”
  - “I had a dream the other day that I punch him [the bully] in the face. It was awesome, and I haven’t seen him in years. But um, no he’d say really mean things.”



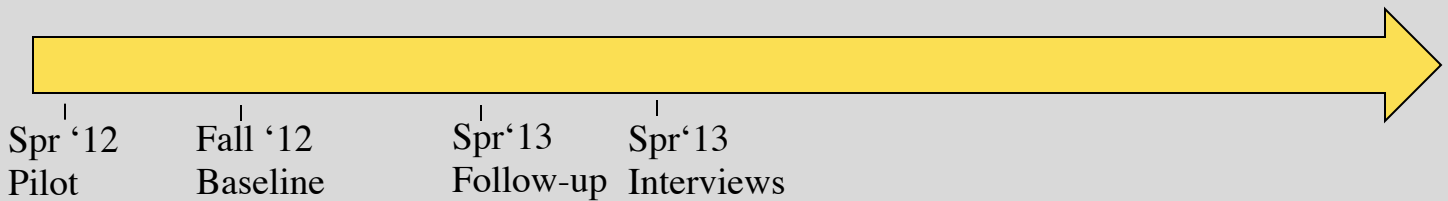
# Qualitative Interviews: Themes

- Resilience: College as a new opportunity
  - “I think it [being bullied] made me more willing to come in with a fresh slate, to really just try and embrace myself like put it in the past because it was the past. You know this is a new phase of my life so I might as well start over, forget about it and accept myself for who I am.”
  - “I was expecting the same maybe to happen in college but it was really nice...people abandoned clichés and kind of just really got out to know people and that’s really refreshing.”



# Qualitative Interviews: Themes

- Resilience: Positive growth
  - [being bullied] made me more comfortable with myself, so like if someone is being like unfriendly in some way, I don't take it personally ...I'm better at resolving conflict because of that.”
  - “For better for worse, I think that although I was bullied and it sucked, I wouldn't be who I am today...it's been able to give me the confidence to be who I am”



# LGBQ students

- Student population identifying as LGBQ (8%)
- More likely to report prior bullying (34%) than their peers (23%)
  - Hit/pushed/shoved (39% vs. 24%)
  - Threatened (38% vs. 28%)
  - Sexual jokes/comments/gestures (43% vs. 32%)



# LGBQ students

- Relationship with bully?
  - Dating/Romantic relationship (18% vs. 7%)
- Why did it happen?
  - Because of my sexual orientation (36% vs. 1%)

# LGBQ students

- Other aggression
  - Hit or attacked because someone thought you were gay (even if you are not)? (8% vs. 1%)
  - Someone said mean things or kept you out of group because they thought you were gay (even if you are not)? (27% vs. 3%)

# LGBQ student high school experience

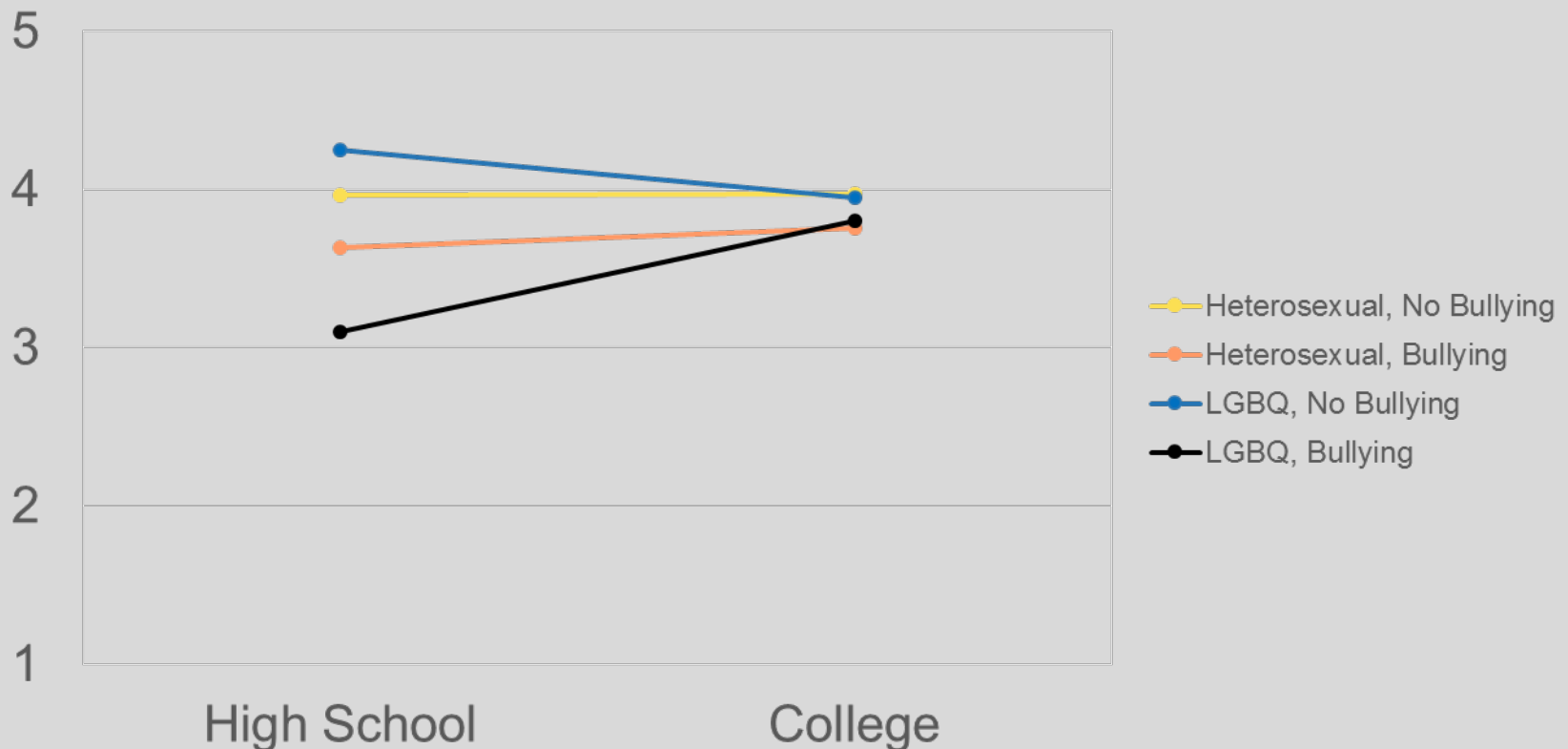
	Heterosexual (n = 1112)	LGBQ (n = 97)
Overall HS experience	3.9	3.8
Social life	4.0	3.8
Family relationships	3.9	3.5*
Physical health	3.9	3.6*
Mental health	3.9	3.5*
Dating relationships	3.0	2.7

# Student overall experience

	<b>Heterosexual (n = 396)</b>	<b>LGBQ (n = 30)</b>
Overall HS experience	3.89	3.87
Overall college experience	3.92	3.90

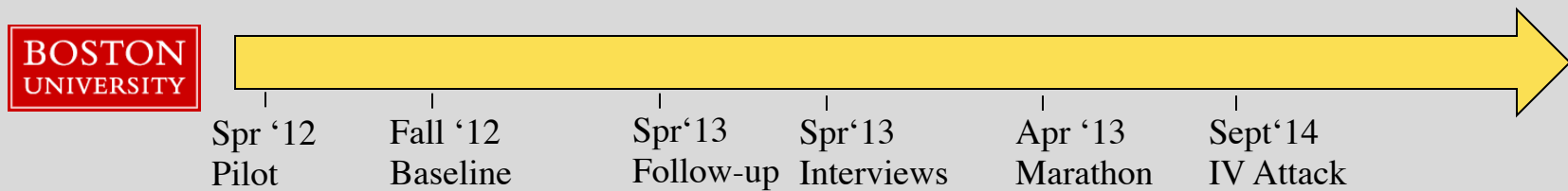
	<b>Not bullied (n = 326)</b>	<b>Bullied (n = 100)</b>
Overall HS experience	3.98	3.58*
Overall college experience	3.97	3.76*

# Ratings of High School and College



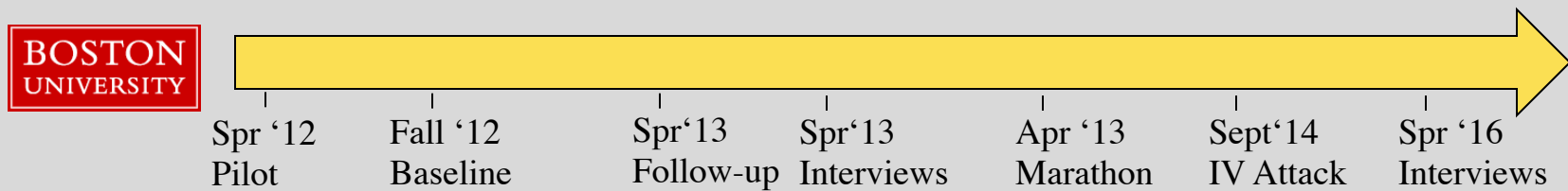
# Additional Follow-Up

- Two subsequent events impacted students in our study
  - 2013 Boston Marathon bombing
  - 2014 attack in Isla Vista, CA



# Next Steps

- Senior year interviews this spring



# Summary

- Previously bullied students are at greater risk
- But these risks do not appear to increase over their first year and, in some cases, they decline
- Many previously bullied students also experience college as a new opportunity and describe personal and social growth



# Implications

- Previously bullied students might need additional support in their college transition
- Outreach is challenging
- Interventions are possible, but resources limited
  - Orientation
  - Advisement
  - Behavioral health services

# Legislation


- All 50 states have bullying prevention legislation
- Applies to K-12 settings, not colleges and universities
- Bullying in colleges/universities may fall under harassment laws

# Taking a comprehensive approach

- Identify students with social-emotional challenges
- Provide peers, staff, and faculty tools to refer students when concerned
- Increase campus-based resources for students

← → [http://www.hcp.med.harvard.edu/wmh/college\\_student\\_survey.php](http://www.hcp.med.harvard.edu/wmh/college_student_survey.php) The World Mental Health S...

**THE WORLD MENTAL HEALTH** Survey Initiative



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› [The World Mental Health Composite International Diagnostic Interview](#)

› [National Comorbidity Survey](#)

› [World Health Organization Health and Work Performance Questionnaire](#)

› [The WHO World Mental Health Surveys International College Student Project \(WMH-ICS\)](#)

› The first volume in our Cambridge University Press WHO World Mental Health Surveys book series. To see more or to order the book, click the cover below.



## The WHO World Mental Health Surveys International College Student Project (WMH-ICS)

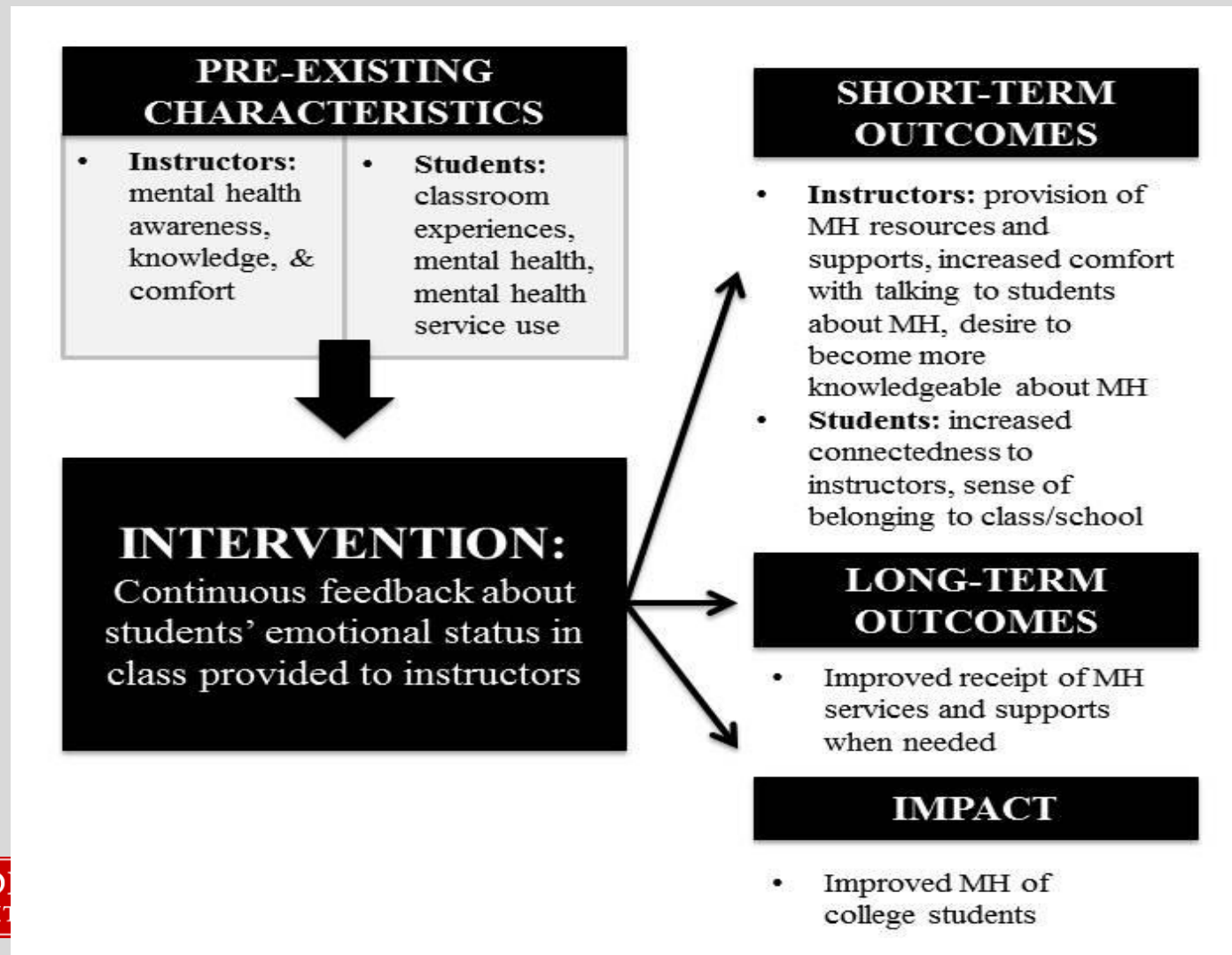
The college years are a crucial time period when students make the transition from late-adolescence to adulthood. Importantly, this transition takes place during an extremely sensitive part of the life cycle for the onset of emotional problems and mental disorders. Approximately 75% of all lifetime mental disorders have their onsets prior to the age of 24. These early-onset cases have greater delays in seeking treatment as well as poorer clinical and functional outcomes than later-onset cases. Mental disorders are more prevalent among students than among adults who have completed their educations. In addition, suicide is the second leading cause of death among university students. The college years are also associated with a significant increase in risky health behaviors, such as excessive alcohol and cannabis use. These disorders and behaviors are associated with low academic attainment as well as with a range of adverse outcomes in the domains of health and role functioning subsequent to leaving college.

### AIMS

The WHO World Mental Health Surveys Initiative International College Student Project (WMH-ICS) aims to obtain accurate longitudinal cross-national information about the prevalence and correlates of mental, substance, and behavioral disorders among college students worldwide with the goals of assessing unmet need for treatment, targeting students in need of outreach, and evaluating model preventive and clinical interventions. The initial phase of the initiative will carry surveys with representative samples of college students in order to estimate the prevalence of mental disorders, associated impairments, adverse social and academic consequences, and patterns of help-seeking. Later phases of the initiative will use the protocol developed for implementing these surveys to target students in need of outreach and will evaluate the effects of interventions implemented based on this targeting.

The initial phase of the WMH-ICS, which is the current focus of the project, is designed to create a flexible and cost-effective college student survey data collection instrument and protocol that will enable us to (1) generate reliable screening estimates for a broad range of mental disorders (e.g. Major Depressive Episode, Generalized Anxiety Disorder, Panic Disorder, Bipolar Disorder, adult ADHD, substance abuse and dependence, and suicidal behaviors), (2) test the predictive validity of new methods of screening for risks of suicidal behaviors and other behavioral/mental health and academic

# Classroom-based intervention



# Contact

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