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Students' Perceptions of Safety on a Campus in Relation to Firearms

Porfirio Gallegos Jr.

Eastern Illinois University

This research is a product of the graduate program in College Student Affairs at Eastern Illinois University. Find out more about the program.

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Students' Perceptions of Safety on a Campus in Relation to Firearms

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BY

Porfirio Gallegos Jr

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF

Masters of Science in College Student Affairs

IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
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2018

YEAR

I HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THIS THESIS BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING
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ABSTRACT
This study will utilize a qualitative approach to better understand students’ perceptions of safety on-campus in relation to firearms. Results found that participants felt safe on-campus due to its rural setting. Determination of geographical upbringing was noted as influential overall in perceptions of firearms. Participants were more confident with faculty having concealed firearms than students. Results also indicated that students have a lack of knowledge when it came to state legislation, their university’s policies, and the protocol in place at their university in response to a mass shooting. Students reflected Perry’s (2010) multiplicity stage of development appropriate for this age group.
Recommendations to the University Police Department, and University Housing and Dining were provided to gain insight into the challenges and developmental factors that face students who chose to live on campus.

Keywords: Firearms, Participants, Perceptions, On-campus, universities
DEDICATION
This thesis is dedicated to all individuals who have been victims of gun-violence.

And to those who have lost loved ones, parents, significant others, brothers, sisters, and friends. If you are struggling with depression, anxiety, or suicidal thoughts, know that you are not alone in this world, and that it is always darkest before sunrise.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Writing a thesis has been a task that has not only been difficult and daunting, but it has really shown me the importance of sitting down, and getting work done. At the age of 7 my parents were recommended to hold me back a grade in order to continue growing mentally, but my parents refused to hold me back. At the age of 12 I was placed into special education classes because of my failing grades and once again recommended to be held back, but once again my parents refused. At the age of 17, a teacher at my high school told me I would be lucky if I found a job cleaning dishes because of “how stupid I was”. At the age of 22 I graduated with my Bachelors in Law Enforcement and Justice Administration. At the age of 24 I graduated with my Masters in College Student Affairs. Just as my parents refuse to let me settle for the easy route, I refused to not finish my thesis.

To my family, I want you to know that nothing is impossible if you simply keep trying. To my father Porfirio Gallegos, I was to thank you for the countless times you encouraged me to continue getting an education. To my mother, Nelsa Albarran, thank you for showing me the importance of hard work and perseverance. To my siblings, Jenny, Kelly, and Anthony, I want you to know that I could not have finished this without you all by my side, I love you all so much.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The tragic incidents at Sandy Hook Elementary School, Columbine High School, Virginia Tech, Northern Illinois University, and the University of California – Santa Barbra have heightened awareness of firearm use and policy in the United States. Likewise, the number of recent mass shootings have also impacted legislation across the nation (Bramble, 2014). Of these mass shootings, fifteen percent have taken place in educational settings such as elementary, middle & high schools, colleges and universities. In California alone, there have been a total of 21 mass shootings that have occurred in educational settings since 1966 (Berkowitz, Gamio, Lu, Uhrmacher, & Lindeman, 2017).

As a result, law enforcement agencies created procedures and protocols for stopping an “Active Shooter” within school or university campuses. These procedures aim to prepare students for the event of someone bringing a firearm on campus. High schools have adopted lockdown procedures and building modifications to better assist in the event of having an “Active Shooter” (Almeida, 2015). These modifications have led to changes in educational environments such as building thicker doors, eliminating classroom windows that face hallways, and creating larger windows for classrooms that have an exterior view. In Minnesota, one school district spent $25,000 on bulletproof whiteboards for each classroom. Similarly, a Texas school has spent $21.5 million rebuilding a facility with bulletproof glass, 50 security cameras, and emergency response system installed inside their main office (Almeida, 2015).

Along with brick and mortar changes, legislation has also been changed. In 2013, nineteen states created legislation that allowed weapons on college campuses if they were
deemed “concealed carry firearms” and 14 additional states introduced similar legislation as well the following year. Tennessee passed “SB 2376” which allows the following:

[H]andgun permits – as enacted, permits full-time employees of state public colleges or universities who possess handgun carry permit to carry a handgun while on property owned, operated, or controlled by the employing college or university if certain requirements are met. – Amends TCA Title 39 and title 49 (Ebert, 2016)

Along with Tennessee, eight other states have allowed students’ similar rights pertaining to firearms. For example, in 2015 Students’ attending universities in Texas were allowed to carry concealed firearms on campus if they followed a strict protocol and policy put in place by the university.

Some states however, are allowing universities to decide their own stance on the issue of firearms. Ohio Governor Kasich brought into law SB 199, which lifts a ban on firearms on college campuses, allowing colleges and universities to make their own decision regarding firearms. In 2017, Arkansas and Georgia both passed legislation which allowed Students’ and faculty to carry guns on-campus, and in return allowing universities take a stand on student ownership of firearms. In the past five years, campus legislation has been created to reflect that state’s perception of how they view firearms on campus.

Each state provides citizens the opportunity to carry concealed weapons if they meet the state requirements. Of the 50 states, 10 allow concealed weapons on public college campuses. Some states have created provisions for individuals who wish to conceal weapons on public campuses. Utah’s stance on firearms is reflected in naming
colleges and universities public entities without the ability, or authority to ban concealed carry on their campuses. This means if individuals who can legally carry a concealed firearm wish to, they are able to have their firearm on campus. Similarly, legislation created in the state of Kansas, forces colleges and universities to prohibit conceal carry while on campus property. Universities in Kansas have the stipulation of requiring buildings having to meet “adequate security measures” if they wish to allow Students’ to carry concealed weapons. Likewise, Wisconsin legislation created a provision that allows college and university Students’ to conceal carry on campus grounds. Every school in the University of Wisconsin system, including campuses and community college districts, follows this specific state legislation stipulation. Illinois currently falls alongside 16 other states who do not allow carrying a concealed weapon on campus.

Why has gun ownership increased? The most common reason that people advocate for owning firearms is and has always been about protection (Burnett, 2015). Sheley and Wright (1993) conducted a study on juveniles who were incarcerated in maximum security reformatories. They found that the primary reason they carried firearms was the juvenile’s perception of the need to be armed for protection.

The concern for safety has some universities allowing firearms within schools assuming students’ will feel safer when entering campus. For example, Utah currently allows Students’, faculty, and visitors to carry firearms on college campuses if they have permits to carry concealed weapons (Hanford, 2008).

**Purpose of the Study**

The objective of the study is to explore student’s perceptions and concerns safety on campus in relation to firearms. Additionally, the study serves to explore students’ perceptions of current campus policies and procedures related to firearms. The proposed
study, along with prior research on current laws and legislation on firearms, gun mentality, and guns on college campuses. Provided aid to find students’ perceptions of campus safety.

**Research Questions**

To further understand a student’s perceptions of safety in relation to firearms on campus, the research will focus on the following questions to guide the study:

1. What are student perceptions of safety on campus in relation to firearms?
2. In what ways do students’ experience safety in the context of firearms?
3. How do students’ come to know about university polices & procedure concerning safety in relation to firearms?
4. What are student’s recommendations in relation to safety concerning firearms on campus?

**Significance of Study**

A student whose perception of safety is not reflected by their universities policies, protocol, and regulation can impact the individual’s ability to thrive academically, socially, and mentally on campus. The goal of this research is to use qualitative research to understand current student’s perception of safety on campus in relation to firearms. Furthermore, this study will look at how current students believe their safety is created by university policies on firearms, as well as their current state legislation on firearms.

Bouffard (2012) preformed a quantitative study at a university in northern Texas based in a rural setting and found that fifty-three percent of students would feel comfortable allowing their professors and faculty to have concealed weapons. However, since there is little qualitative research on this topic within the Midwest, there is a need to explore student perception on safety in relation to firearms on campus. Furthermore, there needs
to be more assessment of student’s perceptions in relation to their current university’s policies, protocol, and regulation in place.

**Limitations of the Study**

This study proposes to collect data in which participants will be students who are currently enrolled for the 2018 academic semester as full time students. The interviews will be conducted in the spring 2018 academic year. This date allows students to become acclimated to their campus. Data collection proposes that students need to be living on campus to fully assess their perception of how they see safety within their community. The university in which this data was also collected held a national ranking by U.S. & Worldwide Report news as the 2nd safest college campus within the United States.

**Definition of Terms**

Active Shooter – An individual actively engaged in killing or attempting to kill people in a confined and populated area; in most cases, active shooters use firearms and there is no pattern or method to their selection of victims (American Heritage Directory, 2016).

College Campus – The land on which a college or university and related institutional buildings are situated. This includes libraries, lecture halls, residence halls, and student centers or dining halls (American Heritage Directory, 2016).


Firearm – A small arms weapon, as a rifle or pistol, from which a projectile is fired by gunpowder (American Heritage Directory, 2016).

Handgun - A gun designed for use by one hand, especially a pistol or revolver. (American Heritage Directory, 2016).
Mass shooting – A mass shooting is an incident involving multiple victims of firearms-related violence (American Heritage Directory, 2016).

Mental health – a person’s condition with regard to their psychological and emotional well-being (American Heritage Directory, 2016).

Rifle - A gun, fired from the shoulder level, having a long spirally grooved barrel intended to make a bullet spin and thereby have greater accuracy over a long distance (American Heritage Directory, 2016).
CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

A review of literature was conducted to explore gun laws and policies, students’ perceptions of mental health & firearms, as well as current gun regulations related to college campuses.

Gun Laws and Policies

Gun ownership is slowly rising. In 2001, for every 100 people, 84 of them owned firearms. In 2007, for every 100 people, 88.8 now own firearms within their home (Beedy, 2017). The right to purchase them has been a topic of debate for most of the late twentieth century. Few rights are more sacrosanct in our constitutional culture than individuals’ rights to keep and bear arms (Yourish & Buchanan, 2013). In 1934, the ability for American citizens to purchase firearms became more difficult. This was especially true for firearms that were deemed “Gangster weapons” such as the “Tommy Gun”. With increased taxation on weapon sales, the United States began the debate on how or if firearms should be regulated (Clarke & Martin, 2013). Due to mail-order weapon sales, rising urban crime rates, and the assassinations of President John F. Kennedy, Robert Kennedy and civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr, inexpensive hand gun prices quickly rose, making it more difficult to purchase firearms. (Clarke and Martin, 2013).

The Second Amendment creates an individual right to bear arms, which is explicitly guaranteed by the Bill of Rights (McGovern, 2012). The Second Amendment also states that a well-regulated militia is necessary for the security of the Free State. Fleming and McClain (2014) found that current firearm activists equate their 2nd amendment rights with rightness, and they have a right to keep and bear arms. Regulation
was initially crafted by the National Rifle Association (NRA), which started as a hunting, hobbyists, and gun safety organization. Today, the NRA serves as the ardent defender of American Citizens Second Amendment Rights (NRA).

Current legislation such as The Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act have created guidelines for individuals looking to purchase firearms. The Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act (1968) states that individuals who are found to be “mentally incompetent” by a judge are prohibited from being in the possession of firearms shipped via interstate or foreign commerce. More regulations were swiftly added in the Gun Control Act of 1968 to also include individuals that were “adjudicated as mental defective or [who] has been committed to any mental institution” (p. 12).

The most recent legislation to be passed is the Brady Handgun Violence Prevention Act (1993) which established and regulates national background checks and waiting periods for gun ownership. However, the legislative language is unclear and has minimal impact in practice (McCreary, 2003). Because of this, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF) provided definitions to the language within the Code of Federal Regulations (C.F.R.). The ATF provided that “adjudicated as mental defective” to be interpreted as:

1. A determination by a court, board, commissions, or other lawful authority that a person as a result of marked subnormal intelligence or mental illness, incompetency, condition, or disease:

2. Is a danger to himself or others; or

3. Lacks the mental capacity to contract or manage his/her own affairs

4. The term shall include a finding of insanity by a court in a criminal case; and
5. Those persons found incompetent to stand trial or found not guilty by reason of lack of mental responsibility pursuant to articles 50a and 72b of the Uniform Code Military Justice (Bramble, 2014).

Gun laws relating to mental health however have been unsuccessful due to states not requiring firearm owners to report mental health information to the different agencies that preform the background checks. Thus, with no standards in place for what information is to be reported, legislation is ineffective (Killough, 2013).

States have also created different legislation concerning where those with concealed carry permits are allowed to enter while they are armed. The state of Illinois has recently seen a large rise in “Gun Stickers”. These stickers explain the Firearm Concealed Carry Act (430 ILCS66/65) which prohibits firearms in certain areas unless they are in the possession of law enforcement or those with the appropriate clearance. Businesses or places which are listed as prohibited zones are to be posted by law under the Firearm Concealed Carry Act:

[S]igns stating that the carrying of firearms is prohibited shall be clearly and conspicuously posted at the entrance of a building, premises, or real property specified in this Section as a prohibited area, unless the building or premises is a private residence. Signs shall be of a uniform design as established by the Department and shall be 4 inches by 6 inches in size. The Department shall adopt rules for standardized signs to be used under this subsection (Firearm Concealed Carry Act, 2013).

States also can create their own gun legislation as it relates to mental health as well in addition to participating in the National Instant Criminal Background Check
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System (NICS). The Virginia code for addressing mental health and gun ownership, for example, prohibits possession of a firearm only as related to commitment or orders for treatments (Va.Code, 2016). Based on this code, an individual found by a Virginia Judge to present an immediate danger to himself as a result for a mental illness wouldn’t be disqualified from purchasing a firearm. Texas also does not have a provision regarding dangerousness to oneself (McCreary, 2012). In contrast, other states have attempted to clarify and strengthen firearm regulations as they relate to mental health.

The New York Safe Act of 2013 places the burden on mental health professionals to report a patient to the county governments if they believe that the individual is “likely to engage in conduct that would result in serious harm to one’s self or others” (N.Y., 2013). California’s measures are significantly stricter. A person placed on a seventy-two-hour psychiatric hold in a facility cannot purchase firearms for five years after they’re admitted into a facility (West, 2013). Georgia and Mississippi have gun restrictions which also apply to those who’ve voluntarily committed themselves into mental health facilities (Ga. Code & Miss. Code, 2013).

Similarly, others states such as Maryland have even taken steps beyond that of the federal government concerning firearms. Maryland Governor Martin O’Malley signed the Firearms Safety Act of 2013, which prohibits anyone with a mental disorder who has history of violence, or anyone whose been confined more than thirty days to a mental facility for the treatment of a mental disorder, from owning or purchasing firearms (McCauley, 2013).

Prior to Governor O’Malley signing that act, the 2012 Maryland General Assembly created a task force whose specific goals were to study the access of
individuals with mental illness to regulated fire arms. Their report published on January 2, 2013, focused on the connection between mental illness and violence. This task force found that mental illness alone is not a compelling reason to permanently restrict access to firearms (McCauley, 2013). The task force recommended the following in their 2013 report:

1. Additional research can be conducted on the correlation between mental illness and violence.
2. Mental health professionals, educators, case workers, psychiatrist etc. be required to report verbal or physical actions threatening suicide or threatening behavior,
3. Local law enforcement be required to investigate any reported threats of violence,
4. Law enforcement as well and health professionals should receive training on firearms and mental illness and the current state of law regarding these issues (p. 21).

A formal process should exist for individuals prohibited from possessing or purchasing firearms to petition to have their rights restored (Md Gen. Assemb, 2013).

Being a citizen who chooses to bear arms for his/her own protection has been further explained and defined by *McDonald v. City of Chicago,* and *District of Columbia v. Heller.* Both *McDonald v. City of Chicago,* and *District of Columbia v. Heller* involved interpretations of what the Second Amendment allows United States citizens to do with their firearms. *District of Columbia v. Heller,* a case brought to the Supreme Court, found that a Washington D.C. law banning handguns and mandating other firearms be stored unloaded or locked was unconstitutional (District of Columbia v. Heller, 2007). *District of Columbia v. Heller* found that having stipulations on how firearms are stored placed
citizens in danger and defeated the firearms purpose of “Self-Defense”. The hand gun law sought to stipulate how firearms were to be stored such as storing the firearm unloaded, locked with a gun lock and stored away from ammunition.

Similarly, *McDonald v City of Chicago* (2010) addressed the right of the people to keep and bear arms and how it applies to state, local, and federal government. Duignan (2014) further explained this case with the following:

> [O]tis McDonald, and others filed suit in the U.S. District Court to challenge provisions of a 1982 Chicago law that among other things, banned the registration of handguns and made registration a prerequisite of possession of a firearm (p.234).

It is important to note that both the Heller and McDonald cases helped narrow the gap between gun owners and anti-gun individuals when it comes to gun regulations and polices (Blocher, 2014). Restrictions are now placed on individuals based on their actions, for example, prohibiting possession of firearms by individuals convicted of misdemeanor domestic violence (United States v. Skoien, 2010) and forbidding persons under the age of twenty-one to purchase handguns (NRA v. ATF).

Adams (2013) explained that although we constantly push legislation and policies that help regulate firearms, it seems a question that remains the same in multiple debates is “why do guns end up in the hands of bad people?” Due to the overwhelming series of mass shootings that have involved heavy casualties, the public has created a narrative as to what happens in these situations. Disillusioned loners become violent and decide that this will became their legacy (Friedman, 2013).
A mass shooting is defined by the Federal Bureau of Investigations as “an event in which four or more individuals are killed as a result of another’s actions” (Pg. 25). By 2017, the number of individuals in the United States who have died as a result mass shootings is 948. The youngest to be killed in a mass shooting was eight-month old Carlos Reyes, who alongside his mother Jackie Reyes, where victims in a McDonalds shooting in San Ysidro, California (Berkowitz, Gamio, Lu, Uhrmacher, & Lindeman, 2017). The oldest individual who died as a result of a mass shooting was a 98-year-old women named Louise De Kler, who alongside seven other residents of her nursing home, was shot to death by a man looking for his estranged wife.

In 2017, the largest mass shooting took place in the city of Las Vegas, Nevada. Sixty plus individuals attending a country music concert were shot by a gunman who was less than 1,300 ft away from the front stage. Nancy Pelosi (2017), the US house minority leader at the time, released the following statement in relation to the Las Vegas shooting:

[T]oday, our nation woke up to news of the worst mass shooting in our history, claiming the lives of at least 58 innocent men and women in Las Vegas. Nearly 12,000 Americans have been killed by guns within 273 mass shootings in 2017—one for each day of the year. On average, more than 90 Americans lose their lives to gun violence every day, a daily toll of heartbreak and tragedy in communities across America (Pelosi, 2017).

Since 1966, 134 people have been deemed the “shooters” or perpetrators of mass shootings.

Of these mass shooting perpetrators, most were males between the ages of 20 – 40 years old (Berkowitz, Gamio, Lu, Uhrmacher, & Lindeman, 2017). Ford (2015).
explained that males commit a majority of “mass shootings” as they are often more likely to own a gun, or be perceived as more commonly to own firearms as opposed to women. These men classified as “mass shooters” often also have poor support systems and could be suffering from mental health issues (Ford, 2015). In the United States, males additionally are disproportionally over-represented, with those who have been convicted of murder at ninety percent. Garbarino (2015), believed that some of this appears to lie in the biological vulnerability of males. Thirty percent of males have a form of the MAOA gene, an enzyme that affects the neurotransmitters dopamine, norepinephrine and serotonin within the brain (Powledge, 2016). This genetic invulnerability is thought to impair the individual’s ability to deal effectively and pro-socially within stressful situations.

As a result of incidents such as mass shootings, lawmakers, as well as the general public have since made it their focus to keep firearms out of the hands of those who are deemed unfit to own or handle firearms. One such concern are those individuals suffering from mental illness.

**Mental Health & Firearms**

A large number of deaths by firearms come from those who are suffering from different mental illnesses such as depression, or suicidal ideations. Vars (2015) stated that 20,000 people a year commit suicide utilizing a firearm. Vars (2015) indicated that if legislation were passed to make it more difficult for those suffering from mental illnesses to obtain a firearm, many would survive their attempt at suicide. Studies show, that those suffering from mental illness, or mental health issues are not more violent than other individuals. Stuart (2003) stated the following about those suffering from suicidal
thoughts, “it is always thus, impelled by a state of mind which is destined not to last, that we make our irrevocable decisions” (pg. 7). Vars (2015) suggested that not only should we proceed to remove firearms from those diagnosed with a mental illness, but also to create more self-awareness when it comes to suicidal thoughts and reporting them.

The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF) states that “commitment to a mental institution” is interpreted as the formal commitment of a person to a mental institution by a court, board, commission, or other lawful authority (McCreary, 2012). This would include allowing individuals to add their names, or allowing family members to submit the names of those who’ve have had suicidal ideations, onto an already existing list of people who are not allowed to purchase or own firearms; this is in addition to the current federal background check system. The individual would then have the liberty of removing their name after further examination into their mental illness.

Nestadt (2017) assessed whether the use of firearms in suicides differed between those in urban and rural settings. Through a retrospective analysis on 6196 characterized suicides in Maryland from 2003 to 2015, Neustadt computed rate ratios by using census data and stratifying males vs females in both rural and urban counties. From Nestadt it was found that suicide rates were higher in rural counties when compared to urban counties. However, the higher rural suicide rates were only limited to firearm suicides. Suicides by other methods were not found significantly higher in ether setting. Eighty-Nine percent of suicides by firearms were committed by men. Women were significantly less likely to complete suicide in both rural and urban counties. Nestadts study concluded that males misusing firearms drives the increased rate of suicide in rural areas.
Currently, people who attempt suicide are impulsive. A person who survives a first suicide attempt however, often die at a later time due to other factors such as a natural death, accidents, or diseases (Miller & Hemenway, 2008). Most individuals can make the decision and complete the action within as little as 24 hours (Peterson, 1985). The following case illustrates the sudden death of Jonathan Jacoves:

At age twenty, Jonathan attempted suicide by overdosing on nonprescription medication and was diagnosed with “Major Depression Disorder, recurrent in a schizoid paranoid personality with suicidal potential and ideation.” Prior to his discharge from the hospital, Jonathan entered an agreement and contract with his parents in which he agreed to not commit suicide for four months. Jonathan followed this agreement by stating to his psychiatrist, “He hoped he meant it, but doubted it”. Eleven days after his discharge from the hospital, Jonathan purchased a Rifle from a local sporting goods store and committed suicide with the very same weapon the same day (p. 2).

The use of firearms has increased the risk of suicide more than any other method (Miller, 2012). Waiting periods on the other hand, have reduced the amount of suicides by firearms since certain states have adopted a “Cool Down Period” (Ludwig & Cook, 2000). This typically requires a person to wait twenty-four hours for rifles, and sixty hours for handguns, before they are given full ownership of a firearm. At this time the National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NCIS, 2006) is the primary database for tracking criteria that would qualify someone to be unqualified to have ownership or purchase a firearm.
Meszaros (2017) argued that the decline in the access to long-term, mental health services (e.g. State mental hospital systems) have a negative impact on firearm-related deaths and possibly influenced the rise of mass shooting events. Through his study, Meszaros explained that perpetrators of mass shootings had significantly higher rates of mental illness than the general population. In addition, Meszaros’s results demonstrate that increasing the number of state psychiatric hospital beds is associated with lower rates of homicide. In conclusion, Meszaros found that shrinking number of mental health facilities in the United States has had many negative consequences, including rise in gun violence, and higher rates of firearm homicide.

**Gun Control on College Campuses**

Birnbaum (2013) explored the difference between two competing perspectives American citizens have on gun ownership. The first perspective supports a robust gun culture. Those who advocate for lesser gun regulations even go as far as to state that the blood of victims who’ve perished because of mass shootings lie within their own hands (Hunter, 2013). This same perspective believes with the creation of regulations such as gun-free zones, schools have become targets for madmen to create mayhem without fear of themselves being shot. LaPierre (2012), of the National Rifle Association, has also made multiple arguments for the arming of schools, stating that “It would be better to have people in schools armed rather than leaving them vulnerable” (p. 2).

The second perspective supports stricter gun-control policies. In response to gun incidents that have made national news, the current generation of college students have been impacted by images of guns on campus (Dahl, Bonham, & Reddington, 2016). The Second Amendment solidifies the right to carry a firearm publicly for self-defense, college’s incorporation of laws such as 430 ILCS 66/55, which prohibits firearms from
entering specific prohibited areas, show legislations adaption to current perceptions of firearms. A study conducted in partnership between the Secret Service and the Office of Education yielded the following results.

Analyzing 272 incidents of targeted violence on college campuses that occurred between 1990 and 2008. Guns were used in 54 percent of the reported cases, and almost 60 percent of fatal violent incidents were instigated against someone previously known to the assailant (Drysdale, Modzeleski, & Simons, 2010).

Reviewing the current data on crime within college campus shows what crimes are committed more than others. The Student Right to Know and Campus Security Act of 1990, formally known as “The Clery Act”, requires that each institution discloses and reports the number of incidents involving criminal activity on each individual college campus to local police departments. The Clery Act enables the Office of Education to collect and analyze incidents of crime that happen on college campuses across the United States (Birnbaum, 2013). The 2010 data stated that of the 32,174 crimes reported, 20.8% were deemed as “Violent Crimes”. Of these, murder accounted for .05%, robbery accounted for 4.6%, and aggravated assault accounted for 7.18% of the total crimes. Crimes involving campus murder and manslaughter are rare and make them harder to predict (Taleb, 2009).

Similar data is found when we examine student populations within universities themselves. Siegel (1993) stated that students are responsible for 80% of campus crimes not involving a firearm. Researchers from Towson’s State Campus Violence Prevention Center stated the following in a response to a survey sent out to 1,800 college students from the entire nation:
[A]Buse of alcohol was heavier among victims and perpetrators than the rest of their college population. A later study found more than 13,000 students corroborated those results, adding that students who used drugs are were likely to be among the perpetrators and victims as well. Perpetrators reported using intoxicants more often that did victims. In turn victims reported heavier drinking habits than the rest of campus (p.34) (Siegel, 1994).

What would be the impact if students were allowed carry a firearm on campus? Currently, the general consensus is that the public is in favor of stricter policies concerning gun control (Moore & Newport, 1994; PR Newswire, 2000).

Payne (2002) studied students who were criminal justice majors and non-criminal justice majors at a medium sized southern university. His results found that Criminal Justice majors were less in favor of stricter gun control measures than non-criminal justice students. Payne’s study also found that students who were criminal justice majors felt more comfortable with their universities allowing students to have concealed carry weapons on campus.

Bouffard (2012) conducted research on 419 students from a medium sized university about their views on gun control. The study found that of the students who participated in the survey, fifty-four percent felt that military assault weapons should be banned on campus. This includes weapons such as automatic rifles, large caliper rifles, and high capacity magazines. Fifty-three percent of the students however felt comfortable if their own professors where allowed to have a concealed weapon.

**Influencing Factors on Perception of Firearms**

Bouffard (2012) found that contributing factors that lead to gun violence among students were as follows: gang involvement, bullying, decline in parenting and family
values, and easy access to firearms. Males are more likely to oppose gun control than females, white students are more likely to oppose gun control efforts than students of color, and those who live in urban areas are more likely to oppose gun control than students who come from rural areas. (Payne, Riedel, Brennan, Lizzotte & McDowall, 2002)

Gender is also a factor in the perception of those who own firearms. Annual background checks for those purchasing firearms has increased from roughly 11.2 million in 2007 to 23.1 million in 2015 (NCIS, 2016). Over this same period, the number of concealed carry permits increased from 4.6 million to 12.8 million. This boom is largely attributable to an increase in women purchasing firearms and applying for concealed carry permits. Texas, in 2002 issued 8,994 concealed carry permits to women (Texas Concealed Handgun Licensing Bureau, 2002). By the year 2014, that number has increased to 65,691 (Texas Concealed Handgun Licensing Bureau, 2014). Women are currently obtaining concealed carry permits at twice the rate of men, which makes twenty-five percent of permit holder’s women (Mayo, 2014).

Many women see the opportunity of concealing a firearm as an equalizer in terms of self-defense (Swift, 2013). The possession of a firearm increases a women’s’ ability to defend herself from a possible attacker and give her greater freedom in terms of ensuring her own safety (Ritz, 2013). Restricting concealed carry however, negates the benefits of carrying a firearm for women. Fifty to ninety percent of women who carry a firearm do so concealed (Ziralski, 2015). Legislation much like 430 ILCS 66/55 however, not only impacts women, but also minorities who are also licensed concealed carry firearm owners.
In 2007, Texas issued concealed carry permits to 6,677 African Americans; by 2014 this number was up to 17,594 (Texas Concealed Handgun Licensing Bureau, 2014). Race additionally plays a role in how people can view gun control (O’Brien, Forrest, Lynott, Daly, & American, 2013). The percentage of minorities who’ve received concealed carry permits increased from fourteen present to sixteen percent.

National Election Study (ANES) Data was used to test the possible relationship between racism, gun ownership, and the opposition to gun control in the United States. The ANES panel studied various constructs and attitudes in monthly waves from a sample of US voters. “The variables include demographic details, such as age, gender, education, income” (pg. 2). Their results found, that after accounting for all of the explanatory variables for each one-point increase in racism, there was a fifty-percent increase in the odds of having a gun within the home (Bastian, 2013). After accounting for having a gun in the home, there was still a twenty-eight percent increase in support for permits to carry concealed handguns for each one-point increase in racism. The relationship that was found between racism and opposition to banning hand guns in the home, was reduced to a non-significant number after accounting for having a gun in the home. This represents self-interest in retaining firearms (O’Brien, Forrest, Lynott, Daly, & American, 2013).

A similar study was conducted on United States Latino citizens within Miami, Florida. Amie, Ramiro, and Richards (2005) compared race, ethnicity and violence looking into the ethnic differences in firearm use, injury, and lethality in assaultive violence within the city of Miami. The research compared Latinos to Non-Latino African Americans, and also Non-Latino White. They found that firearm use has bigger and
similar effects on event lethality for Latino and Non-Latino African American offenders, but no significant effect for Non-Latino Whites. However, Latino, African American, and White attackers are as equally likely to use a gun during violent encounters (Amie, Ramiro, and Richards, 2005). Implications of event lethality in terms of perceptions of concealed firearms show that people of color have bigger effects on event lethality when compared among Latinos to Non-Latino African Americans, and also Non-Latino White.

Easy access to firearms by minors impacts the misuse of firearms nationwide. Zun & Downey (2003) conducted a study with a sample of 100 youths to determine their accessibility to weapons. The results found that 12% to 42% of high school students have accessibility and ownership of firearms in their home. Fifty-one percent said that they have held a gun, 4% said that they carried a gun at school, 13% had carried a weapon at one-point in a fight, and 10% had pulled out a firearm in attempt to let someone know they were armed (Zun & Downey, 2003). Similarly however, 55% of these students said they have had a friend or family member who was injured or died from the use of a firearm, as well as 72% of them have heard gunfire in their neighborhood at night. However, Farley (2012) stated that because of the rise of people owning and having accessibility to guns, this itself has served as a deterrent for those looking to commit crimes against legally armed citizens.

Lott (2010) argued that by introducing more firearms into the community, firearms simply add fuel to a burning fire. Lott (2010) stated, “Allowing citizens to carry concealed handguns reduces violent crimes, and the reductions coincide very closely with the number of concealed-handgun permits issued” (pg. 5). Bouffard (2012) took this
statement further by using a sample of undergraduate classrooms from five different academic buildings, all from a public university in Texas.

This study examines the potential impact of lifting the concealed handgun ban on the likelihood that a given classroom would contain at least one legally carried handgun. Results reveal that the impact of the potential policy changes in this area vary based on the building under consideration and the measure of potential handgun prevalence (p.325).

Within the 5 buildings there are 38 classes representing 26 separate class start times and 1,396 total students that were surveyed. The following data also takes into account a 40% daily carry rate that students might abide by. In “Building A” 18% of students would have their concealed carry permit and would have a firearm in class. Thirty eight percent said that they would want to obtain a concealed carry permit and plan to carry in class. “Building B” found similar results in that 20% of students would have their concealed carry permit and carry in class, however if allowed, 40% would apply and carry their concealed weapon. “Building C” only had 13% of students who possess their concealed carry permit and would carry in class. While surprisingly, 40% of the students said that they would apply and plan to carry their firearm to class. “Building D” had the highest percentage of students who already have their concealed carry permit and would carry to class with 33% of its students. While similar to other buildings, 40% of its student would plan to obtain and carry a fire arm if they possessed their concealed carry permit. Lastly, “Building E” reported the lowest number of students who currently have a concealed carry permit. Students’ who carry to class were only 4% of students. Overall, 32% of students stated they would obtain and carry a concealed firearm during class (Bouffard,
The different courses that are taught in these buildings also plays a key role into what types of students are present. For example, “Building C” is predominantly students who are criminal justice majors and would be more comfortable around firearms. Bouffard's study allows us the opportunity to see not only how students believe they would carry if they were given the opportunity to, but more importantly gives us statistics about the number of people who would further seek out the opportunity to conceal carry firearms.

Theoretical Framework

William Perry's theory of intellectual and ethical development is based on his studies of the cognitive and ethical development in undergraduate students. His theory states that individuals go through four stages of mental and moral development. The four stages are dualism, multiplicity, relativism, and lastly commitment. The first stage is dualism, which is often composed of people who are young or adolescent. Dualism is the belief that every problem is solvable, that individuals are to learn the right answers, and that one must obey authorities. For example, in this stage one might tell children that lying is wrong. Those in Perrys’ dualistic stage see things as very black and white, they see a clear distinction between right and wrong, and one is ether telling the truth or lying. Individuals in this stage of development might view firearms in the home as dangerous and are to be avoided, or that firearms are good and could be used in the protection of one’s property and home.

The second developmental stage is known as multiplicity. In this stage individuals begin to see that problems are somewhat now complex and solvable, but there are also problems where the answer is not known yet. In addition, in this stage, students put trust in their own inner voice. An example of this would be a student who sees that firearms
could in fact be used for safety purposes, such as keeping a concealed carry firearm in their purse or pocket. But they may also understand that they are unable to bring weapons into specific buildings. This same student also sees that mass shootings are an issue, but does not know the answer of how to solve or stop them. Those who are looking to follow their own voice are students who’ve possibly come to form their own opinion on owning firearms. If a student sees or perceives the answer to stopping mass shootings is to have less firearms, they will not purchase and own them.

Relativism is the third stage. During this stage, individuals who understand that all solutions to problems must have reasonin and be viewed within a specific context. The basis for this stage is that every issue must be evaluated because everything is contextual. For example, a student sees there is no student community or organization and seeks to create one. They can understand that all problems have solutions and that one must take in to account all impacting factors. In terms of firearms, these are students who have formed opinions and solutions to how they see firearm ownership.

The last developmental stage is commitment, the stage where there is an acceptance of uncertainty as part of life. During this stage, students use the combination of personal experience and evidence learned from outside sources to arrive at conclusions. For example, students in this stage are able to articulate their feelings on firearm ownership, as well as connect the knowledge of current events and politics to their own personal views on firearms. Students’ in this stage will also be able to state their own stance on firearms on college campuses, and compare it to the current policies and protocols their university has in place in case of a mass shooting.
Chapter 3

Methodology

This chapter outlines the qualitative methodology that will be used to explore perceptions students have of safety in relation to firearms and firearm policies on campus. Qualitative research is done by face-to-face interviews or interactions with a specific population in order to collect data pertinent to the study (Schensul, 2012). Qualitative research is a data collection method conducted through interviews in order to collect the interviewee’s feelings, emotions and insights on a specific topics and issues. The research questions were developed to explore a student’s perception of how they interpret their own particular safety on campus. The research questions were:

1. What are student perceptions of safety on campus in relation to firearms?
2. In what ways do students experience safety in the context of firearms?
3. How do students come to know about university policies & procedure concerning safety in relation to firearms?
4. What are student’s recommendations in relation to safety concerning firearms on campus?

Design of Study

The study utilized a qualitative approach. One-on-one interviews allow for the researcher to improve services, formulate interventions, examine the effects different policies, and when examining the unknown (Schensul, 2012). A phenomological approach will be utilized in this study, which refers to a perspective that allows researchers to recognize and explore everyday experiences without having a prejudgment of knowledge of the experiences (Converse, 2012). The interviews will consist of evaluating student perceptions and thoughts concerning safety. The data collected from
participant interviews will be transcribed and coded to locate both similarities as well as differences that each participant may describe.

Participants

Participants will include six enrolled students who live on campus and have different demographical backgrounds consisting of racial identity, gender, and high school geographical location. The participants will be gathered using a self-volunteered survey, which will allow students to enter their demographical information voluntarily. Six participants will then be asked to participate in a one-on-one interview with the Principle Investigator (PI).

Participant 1. Participant 1 was a 21-year old, Caucasian female whose hometown setting was that of a small rural town with a population of approximately 2,000 people. Participant 1 was a senior at the institution whose major was Communication Disorders and Sciences, Participant 1 also had a minor of Neurological Science and Psychology.

Participant 2. Participant 2 was a 19-year old, African American male whose hometown setting was Rural. His hometown setting has a population of approximately 10,000 individuals. Participant 2 was a sophomore at the institution whose major is Political Science and his minor is pre-law. Participant 2 was the only participant who lived in the all-male residence hall at the institution. Participant 2 was also an ROTC cadet at the institution.

Participant 3. Participant 3 was a 20-year old, Caucasian female whose hometown setting was Suburban. Her hometown setting had a population of approximately 74,000 individuals. Participant 3 also stated that her birthplace was
Georgia and that her family moved after her birth. Participant 3 was a sophomore elementary education major.

**Participant 4.** Participant 4 was a 22-year old, Caucasian male whose hometown setting was Suburban. His hometown had a population of approximately 50,000 individuals. Participant 4 was a junior at the institution, and was a Psychology major. Participant 4 had also previously gone through “Active Shooter” training as a requirement of a previous employer.

**Participant 5.** Participant 5 was a 21-year old, African American female whose hometown setting was Urban. Her hometown had a population of approximately 147,000 individuals. Participant 5 was a senior at the institution, and was a Health and Business Administration major. This participant during the course of our interview disclosed that she had been present during a shooting that occurred at an off-campus apartment at her institution.

**Participant 6.** Participant 6 was a 20-year old, African American male whose hometown setting was Urban. His hometown had a population of approximately 234,000 individuals. Participant 5 was a sophomore at the institution, and was also a Construction Management major. During the research conducted, Participant 6 stated that he has family in law enforcement which gave him some prior disposition to laws surrounding firearms.

**Researcher**

As a member of the campus population, the PI will conduct research to gain a better understanding of student perceptions of safety in relation to firearms on-campus. The PI’s experience within a college campus for the last five years has been influenced by their sense of safety in relation to not being in possession of a firearm. Within their
home, they own firearms for both protection as well as for sporting purposes. At the age of 18 the PI applied and received a Firearm Owner’s Identification card which allowed them to purchase rifles. At the age of 21, the PI then received a concealed carry license which allowed them to purchase and carry handguns. It is important to recognize the PI’s personal bias based on the research the PI will be looking into. All interview questions will be planned prior to the subject’s individual interviews.

**Data Collection**

Six separate semi-structured interview sessions were conducted. With the permission of each participant, each interview was videotaped. Participants were selected in mid-Spring 2018 Semester, interviews took place at mid-Spring 2018 semester. This allowed students to gain a sense of community. After each of the interview sessions were completed, the researcher transcribed the videotape and then coded the transcription of the interviews into themed categories. The researcher has a goal of collecting all data within a five-week time span. After all the interviews were completed, the researcher provided a 5-dollar gift card to Jimmy Johns for the participants who volunteered for the one-on-one interview with the researcher. Research was stored within a flash drive in possession of the researcher and will be saved according to IRB protocol.

**Research Site**

The interviews took place at a mid-sized Midwestern University with a current student body population of 7,415, located in a rural community of approximately 19,000 residents when school is in session. The interview locations were in a quiet location on the campus, allowing the interviewer and participant to have a private interview setting. Participants were from urban, suburban and rural hometowns and participants were male and female, and their ethnicity was taken into account.
Instruments

As previously stated, all students currently living on campus received a demographic questionnaire. Dependent on the demographic questionnaire the PI selected participants for the current study. The PI served as the primary instrument in data collection. For the study, the PI conducted 6 interviews of the participants individually (i.e, two participants representing each different geographical location urban, suburban, and rural). The interviews focused on each participant’s perception of his or her safety on campus in relation to firearms. The interviews took approximately 1 hour; interview questions are opened ended and were pre-determined. All interviews took place in meeting rooms located in the university union. The interviews were video recorded, which were transcribed after each interview took place. Coding of the transcriptions took place upon the completion of each individual interview; to codify is to arrange things in a systematic order to make each item a part of a system or classification. This serves as a process in which data is divided, grouped, reorganize, and linked in order to consolidate meaning and develop explanation (Grbich, 2013). Participant’s names were not transcribed, but replaced with a specific pseudonym.

Demographic Questionnaire

Specific demographic information was obtained from the participants on gender, age, class standing, major, race, hometown geographical location, and also number of semesters lived on campus. The demographic questionnaire was created through an online survey instrument, survey monkey. All information was stored through this online instrument as well.
Chapter 4

Results

The objective of the current study was to analyze student’s perception of safety on-campus in relation to firearms at a mid-sized Midwestern University. Additionally, this study explored students’ perceptions of current campus policies and procedures related to firearms. The purposed study, along with prior research on current laws and legislation on firearms, gun mentality, and guns on college campuses, could help aid a student’s perception of campus safety. In chapter 4, the various main themes that emerged through a qualitative analysis from one-on-one interviews with six participants of this study are presented. Many themes were found, but only the most frequent ones are reported. Multiple themes for each research question were further explored from the diverse experiences that each participant shared in the semi-structured one-on-one interviews. All themes in this chapter are organized by research question.

Research Question #1: What are student’s perceptions of safety on-campus in relation to firearms?

Three themes emerged from the first research question: the current perception of individual safety on-campus, the safety concerns of firearms, and the perception of firearms on-campus

Current Perception of Individual Safety On-Campus

Each participant reported feeling safe and comfortable on-campus, in their residence halls, and walking around campus. Participant 1, a 21-year old female senior, stated: “I feel very safe on-campus. I know when I first came to school, my dad wanted me to carry pepper spray around. But quickly I said I wouldn’t do that, because I feel safe here”. Participant 5, a 21-year old female senior, shared similar feelings about her
perceptions of her safety on-campus in comparison to her hometown: “In my hometown you’ll never catch me walking the street past 8:pm at night. On campus I walk home late at night all the time. I’ll go to the 24-hour lounge and I will leave at 2:00am. I’ll walk home and I won’t feel like I’m not safe at all”.

Participant 3, a 20-year old sophomore, felt similar in that she felt safe on-campus, but not its surroundings. Her statement was as follows: “I would say that I believe it is pretty safe on-campus, as long as you’re on-campus. Once you get a little bit off-campus during night, it might be a little unnerving but I wouldn’t say its unsafe.”

Participant 2, a 19-year old sophomore, went into more depth of his own perception of safety on-campus, stating it served as a motivating factor when choosing colleges as follows:

I feel pretty safe here on-campus, which is actually one of the reasons I decided to come to this university. I feel and because of the home family orientation, which is what pushed me to come here.

Participant 2 also knew their universities reputation as one of the safest college’s towns within the state as well stating the following:

The city is deemed as one of the safest college towns and I think people show that without showing that by how they freely express themselves by traveling around campus at all hours.

Participant 4, a 22-year old junior, stated very similar responses about his own perception of how he feels safe on-campus:

“I would say that I feel very safe on-campus whether its late night midnight or 1pm I still feel safe. I know the stickers on the doors for firearms not being
allowed in the dorms or buildings I have never had any problems with feeling that my safety is jeopardized.”

Participant 6, a 20-year old sophomore, also shared similar feelings as Participant 2 about his safety in regards to any time of the day and similar to Participant 2 knew about their universities positive safety reputation: “I feel the campus is pretty safe no matter what time of day it is. I also want to say that it is one of the safest campuses in the state that’s what I first heard when I came down here.”

**Safety Concerns of Firearms.**

Each participant stated different safety concerns regarding firearms. These different concerns came from the participant’s interpretations of their own safety or the concern of others safety. Participant 1, who comes from a rural hometown, stated the following about her safety concerns of firearms:

I think it’s just whose is in control of them. Like I don’t have a problem with firearms because of my family. I grew up with guns and stuff. I grew up around hunting. My dad owns a firearm, a hand gun that he concealed carries. I think being aware of it, like understanding. I know how to use a gun so I know how it’s supposed to be held. I know how it works and everything. Being comfortable around one. But also knowing that I would never carry a concealed carry just because I don’t feel comfortable carrying one.

Participant 2, whose hometown was described as rural, had similar safety concerns when it came to both individuals in control of firearms and the accessibility they have to buildings on-campus: “Firearms in the hands of certain individuals could be a dangerous situation, especially on-campus where you sometimes have access to all buildings.”

Participant 3, whose hometown was described as suburban, went into detail about safety
concerning firearms, with questioning an individual’s ability to legally obtain a firearm, as well as their reasoning behind needing it:

Whether or not they have them legally. Or what process they went through to get them, and then the reason of why they have them. I would say that people don’t need them, and I would feel safer if people didn’t have them. Even if you had it and you’re safe with it and you have everything you need in order to hold that firearm. You don’t know who could somehow get a hold of it, or do something that they shouldn’t do with it.

Participant 5 and Participant 6, who both described their hometowns as urban, shared identical viewpoints that a major safety concern with firearms for them came from their lack of trust in their peers. Participant 5 stated:

My personal thought of safety when it comes to firearms it really just depends who is behind the pistol. Who’s pulling the trigger? What is it for because of that you know unfortunately there are people who do own firearms and they carry them at all times even I know this goes on at this institution they carry them to parties.

Participant 6 shared that while he does believe that those carrying concealed firearms are doing so for their own protection, he believes that the lack of trust in his peer’s actions is a major safety concern he has on firearms:

If you have a gun, you’re going to protect yourself and others but that’s pretty much all I can say about that. Protecting yourself, that’s the first thing I think about, somebody who has a firearm, they’re looking out for themselves or others. I don’t even think they’re really looking to kill anybody but I just think safety.
You don’t show it off, you don’t need to show the people that are inside your house where the gun is, or what kind of gun you have. You don’t really go out and like tell people you have a gun.

**Perception of Firearms on-campus.**

Participants provided very different perspectives when it came to their perception of bringing firearms to campus. Participant 3 stated the following: “I would like to believe that they’re not on-campus. But I would say if it happens it is very rare. But, I don’t think that they should be on-campus. I don’t think there is a reason for them to be on-campus, because it is a safe campus.” Participant 4 shared similar insights when asked about his own perception of firearms being brought to campus, but felt the university police department’s visibility counter acts that of his peers:

> I think it’s just a possibility that people are concealing firearms. The police should also have firearms. I’m sure they do. I just don’t know what kind. But for me to feel safe with the police would have to have firearms and they would have to be in areas where they can easily access a situation that goes wrong.

Participant 6 felt that his perception of firearms being on-campus had a direct correlation with the visibility of the University Police Department and their visibility on-campus: “I would say the police are around doing those tickets even though I think it’s bad, there always around on those tickets and we got blue machines if you have an emergency. So that’s what makes me feel safe”. Participant 5, gave great insight into her own perception of firearms being on-campus:

> I have seen it happen in action. Somebody was too drunk to fight, and pulled out a pistol. Last year when I was at a party and someone was drunk with a gun. I believe that was the scariest thing because he was so drunk that he was shooting
and not looking where he was shooting. Unfortunately he did shoot someone and they died.

Research Question #2: In what ways do students experience safety in the context of firearms?

Each participant reported gaining experience in relation to firearms in one way or another. This came from firsthand experience because of their close relationship or family members who owned firearms or due to the portrayal of firearms within the news or media outlets. After asking the participants how they experienced safety around firearms at all, this was followed up by who or what leads them to have or not have experiences with firearms?

Family members

Participant 1 explained that she was exposed to firearms at an early age. Her father specifically stressed the importance of handling firearms, as well as being respectful of the seriousness surrounding firearms as well:

I think being exposed to so much as I was growing up and stuff like I was always aware of gun safety. I went to a safety course, especially because they were in our house. Just being exposed to that, and my family telling me that you know it’s not a toy you definitely don’t play with it. So yea I think my family influenced me a lot. I went to a gun safety class when I was younger like maybe 12 or so because I was going to go hunting. Also, my brother is in the army and so like you know when he comes home he would like have his gun because he and my dad would go shoot the guns in the backyard. So he would show me how to like take it apart and how to clean it.
Participant 5 shared a similar experience as Participant 1 in that she experienced safety in relation to firearms due to her easily accessible locations, as well as her family members who possess a firearm. Participant 5 gave an example the first time she held a firearm:

I have two cousins who are in the police department of my hometown and one time they were like doing some paint job for my mother, and one of my cousins left his firearm at my house. It was just sitting there. I said let me put this up and unfortunately the safety wasn’t on and I almost shot myself and I was like oh my God.

Participant 5 further went on to explain that she experienced safety in relation to firearm due to the relationship that she has with her boyfriend: “I would definitely have to say that my boyfriend is number one. He is from the south side of Chicago and is someone who has a firearm. At first I was honestly about to be done. But for him, as a black male, it is kind of needed.”

Similarly, Participant 6 stated that his only experience with safety concerning firearms comes from a family member who also serves as a law enforcement officer. Through this relationship, he gained his experience of what safety around of a firearm is, but also what safety legality’s come with owning a firearm as well:

My uncle being a cop and always teaching us, the whole family get your FOID card or like; if you want to be safe go and get a gun but make sure it’s registered so you don’t have any problems with it, and if you use it use it wisely. So, he is always telling me if you’re ever going to pull out a gun you better use it for the right reason, because if you bring it out you can ether go to jail. or the other
person is shooting you right away. You must be cautious what you do with it, but
hopefully it’s for the right reasons.

Participant 2, who also identifies his hometown as a rural area, stated that he gained his
experience of safety in context to firearms from his close family, as well as his
involvement within the ROTC program:

I am currently in ROTC so I am familiar with firearms in that regard. I do also
have my FOID card, and I have taken a concealed carry class. I developed this
definition through my years of experience. I started off learning about guns from
my grandpa who is a veteran. Definitely my grandpa, and my uncle also is an avid
forearm user, very safe when doing so also ways practicing proper safety and
what to do in those situations.

Similarly, to Participant 2, Participant 4 also gained experience in safety with firearms
because of his involvement on and off campus. Participant 4 was a member of the Boy
Scouts of America, an organization in which he was able to fire small caliber rifles at a
young age: “I was in boy scouts and held a 22. Boy Scouts had a huge impact on my
understanding the safety of firearms and why as long as you’re safe with it, it is a good
activity if you learn how to be safe with it.”

Participant 4 however does not have any immediate family who own any
firearms. He gained his experience by having a close friendship in school that allowed
him to gain more experiences with firearms, but also be able to experience safety in a
closed firing range:

My family members have never owned a firearm. But I did do a firing range I see
it as a fun thing. It is an activity that can be a hobby. I’ve seen plenty of things in
the news where if someone hadn’t had a firearm then the situation would be being escalated significant quicker. I have one friend that’s father brought him hunting frequently and I had never held a gun other than that. So being at the firing range all the rules and things that they have you do, makes it seem like it can be very safe if you make it safe.

Media

Participant 3 stated that while she does have family members who own firearms, her own experience concerning firearm safety came from recent events in her life and through the media, as well as experiences through her Elementary Education major:

I would say a little bit my family. I’m from Georgia so my grandparents live in a very rural area. So I was surrounded by many people with firearms and I know that they’re a little bit more laid back with how they carry them and how they perceive firearms. I don’t have any experience with firearms. Just because none of my direct family has a firearm so I never really had the opportunity to be around them. I would say that probably just from watching the news, and paying attention to what’s going on in the world. And being aware of the people who may have them, who should not have them. I should say that mainly the school shootings since I am going into education that’s a huge factor for me, knowing that I will be in a school and children should be safest in school.

School shootings were brought up by Participant 1, Participant 2, Participant 4, and Participant 5. By mentioning how they perceive “bad” people get their hands on firearms, Participant 4 stated the following concerning mass shootings portrayal in the media: “I understand there should be no guns allowed, I understand why they aren’t, because of all the things in the media with shootings. And the history of shootings it is a
very scary history.” Participant 5 also brought up a recent school shooting which took place in Florida: “Where the dangers come in just like I believe they had a shooting in Florida. Seventeen people were killed because of a boy who has mental health issues had a firearm so that’s what I believe on firearms.” Additionally, Participant 1 mentioned her knowledge of the mass shooting in Florida: “Know especially with like what just happened in Florida I don’t know I’m kind of torn between however I think the right people should have them on-campus but how are we to judge who is right and wrong”.

**Research Question #3: How do students come to know about university polices and procedure concerning safety in relation to firearms?**

All participants were current students who live within the residence halls on-campus. Due to this, the participants signed and agreed to abide by the Student Code of Conduct, as well as University Housing and Dining’s Policy’s within the residence halls. This research question served to explore if participants knew policies and protocols surrounding firearms at the research institution. The following themes were identified: visible stickers, lack of understanding of policies, lack of known state legislation, and perception of active shooter training.

**Visible Stickers on Doors**

Participants stated that while they did not know the specific policies surrounding firearms, the participants did recognize that each entrance going into a building on-campus had a pertinent to 430 ILCS 66/1 gun sticker on it. This statue states that only those who are law enforcement officers on duty, or have a state accreditation firing certification are allowed to have firearms in the building. Participants took these as a simple way to show that there are no firearms allowed in the buildings. Participant 1 stated the following on the visible stickers on building entrance doors: “I think the only
thing I know is no guns in the buildings because of the stickers I see all the time walking in”. Participant 2 went further in-depth about his own interpretation of these visible stickers:

I know that they are not allowed which is why whenever you walk into all the buildings you see a 4x6 sign that has a gun the red kind of no gun policy which is standard on all public institutions.

Participant 4 was the only other participant who noted the visible stickers, but also stated that he has never actually read them: “I know the stickers on the doors are for firearms not being allowed in the dorms or buildings. I have never had any problems with feeling that my safety was jeopardizes.”

Lack of Understanding of Policies

Each participant had current knowledge of their school’s policy in regard to firearms on-campus, except Participant 2, who failed to know exactly what the policy states. The policy at the participants’ university stated the following: “The university enforces state laws and related university policies. Including those prohibiting the following activities on-campus: A. providing alcoholic beverages to individuals under 21 or possession or consumption of alcoholic beverages by individuals under 21. B. distribution, possession, or use of illegal drugs or controlled substances. C. possession of firearms or other dangerous weapons.” (University, 2017). Following this each participant was asked about how they perceived their current policy.

Participant 2 knew the policy and felt it did not specifically cover enough of what “perceived weapons” could be: “I think that people really don’t understand their laws when it comes to what you can and can’t have on a college campus, say pepper spray is now a very common item that enhances safety but can also be a weapon.” Participant 4
felt similar to Participant 2 in that the weapons policy was not clear enough. Participant 4 also vocalized his uncertainty over his own stance in regards to the current policy in place:

Yea I don’t know why I think they should be allowed. Just to protect yourself, but is that really the tool that needs to be used to protect and then if it was just being used as a hobby, where can you keep it if you live in the residence halls? I understand there should be no guns allowed. I understand why there aren’t because of all the things in the media with shootings.

Similar to Participant 2 and Participant 4, Participant 5 agreed with the policy due to the uncertainty in security within her residence hall room:

I can see why some people would have it. I mean just because you live on-campus doesn’t mean you shouldn’t be allowed to have it stored away. But I mean you can go back and forth because anybody can get their hands on the gun people come and go and somebody might take it and use it.

Both Participant 3 and Participant 6 not only agreed with the policy, but felt that students followed it. Participant 6 stated: “I think it’s pretty straight forward. I think we should keep that policy, because I think we should not divide that we should have guns on-campus yet.” Participant 3 went further into detail about her interpretations, as well as her fellow students following this policy:

All I know is that they can’t be in certain places. Like I know they’ve really been implementing the no gun, or firearms at schools or near schools but other than that I’m not sure. Well I support it, I think that it’s at least with the firearms. I believe that it’s pretty well followed and respected by others.
Lack of Known State Legislation

During interviews, all participants aside from Participant 2 and Participant 6, failed to know the state legislation in relation to firearms, which includes the FOID card process, as well as how purchasing a firearm is allowed within the State of Illinois. The following was read to each participant prior to questioning:

To purchase a firearm a buyer is required to show his Firearms Owners Identification Card (FOID) when purchasing any firearms or ammunition. Any seller is required to withhold delivery of any handgun for 72 hours, and of any rifle or shotgun for 24 hours, after the buyer and seller reach an agreement to purchase a firearm. The waiting period does not apply to a buyer who is a dealer, law enforcement officer, or a nonresident at a gun-show recognized by the State Police. The seller must retain for 10 years a record of the transfer including a description of the firearms (including serial number), the identity of the buyer, and the buyers FOID number.

Participants 2 and Participant 6 both knew what the current state’s legislation was and felt similarly in their interpretation of this legislation. Participant 6 stated: “I think it’s pretty good. Actually I didn’t know that but we should keep it up.” Participant 2 stated the following: “I know that to get a FOID card you must now be 21 instead of 18 which I believe you now have to have a parent. I also touched on concealed carry which you have to be 21 to be able to carry and hand gun which I believe to be a good age.” While these two participants knew the legislation, Participant 1 stated that she felt as though the state was taking the appropriate measures to ensure firearms by not being giving to those who do not understand the responsibility that comes with owning a firearm:
I think that’s good but I don’t know, I feel like you go through a background check in the process anyway but I don’t know just more in depth with it just because we are seeing especially in the news were seeing so many ugly like people just able to go get guns.

Similarly, Participant 3 felt the FOID application process further strengthened the state’s ability to make sure that those who should not have firearms are not able to purchase them:

Applying through the police I feel like that’s a good thing, and I feel a little safer knowing that. Because I believe that in Georgia it’s a lot easier to get a firearm which is not necessarily a good thing. I feel like compared to other states it seems to have a good process and application system to like into people’s backgrounds. Especially with the FOID cards.

Participant 4 also shared his confidence in the state’s ability to control and measure individual’s ability to purchase a firearm, while also making sure they’re adhering to the waiting period before receiving their firearms:

It seems like the state is taking some good procedures and protocols to at least make the waiting period long enough and the policies strict enough where if you are depressed or crazy, they have some things in there that they could have some time to think about it before they just get a gun and go.

**Perception of Active Shooter Training.**

During the one-on-one interviews, participants were informed of the University Police Department’s purpose and the training that police officers provide to the University Housing and Dining department, as well as the Office of Admission. Each participant felt this training was necessary in today’s culture surrounding firearms and
educational settings, but many did not know the University Police Department conducted training for departments on-campus. Participant 1 stated the following about the active shooter training provided by the University Police Department:

I think it’s a good one, especially with teaching the RAs active shooter thing because like as much as we don’t want that to happen its very real possibility. I think that’s a good protocol to have I mean I feel safe when I see UPD walking around campus or they’ll just be parked and go check the building so I think they’re doing very good.

Participant 2 felt comfortable knowing that the University Police Department was acting prior to an event happening:

After hearing that the university police officers are being prepared, I think those are good measure to enhance their skills. It is always good when you can enhance your skills and awareness. Action beats reaction.

Participant 3, Participant 5, and Participant 6 also felt that these extra trainings provided by the University Police Department gives students an opportunity to experience what an active shooter situation could be like and how to best act in the moment. Participant 3 stating the following:

I feel safe knowing that they do the ALICE training. Going back to talking about the school’s shootings I know that in high schools, and the younger schools their starting to really implement that. Knowing that they do that here and the people here are properly trained is good.

Participant 6 felt that due to this training being offered, conversations with other students would allow the opportunity for students to gain insight on what to do if a school
shooting occurred: “I think it’s good because not many people know what to do in situations like that so if you teach one person they can pass it on I mean it’s a pretty small campus as it is like the word would get around pretty quickly in my opinion.” Participant 5 further explained how she felt with the following:

I like that they give RAs the instinct of what to do in that situation because you know everyone is from a different community. Some people don’t know what a gunshot sounds like. I was almost in that situation, and I didn’t know what to do. I think that it is great for the RAs to have that opportunity because for some residents they come from all over.”

Participant 4 was the only participant that had already experienced prior active shooter training:

I think that the training everyone should be trained and I work at Home Depot and we did had to take an active shooter course so year that’s one thing I find really useful for people and at community colleges or the groups of people administrators that are situations where that could be a possibility I think that’s very important.

**Research Question #4: What are student’s recommendations in relation to safety concerning firearms on-campus?**

This research question was to gauge how participants felt about their safety in relation to firearms on-campus. This question also allowed the PI to see student’s perceptions of how they feel if their fellow students could carry firearms, as well as their professors. The major themes identified were safety on-campus in relation to firearms and students vs professors having firearms.
Safety in Relation to Firearms on-campus

Each participant stated that they felt safe on-campus in relation to firearms.

Participant 1 stated: “I feel very safe yea I don’t have a problem. I feel completely safe with it.” Participant 2 said: “Current safety here I feel pretty safe. The residences halls all have key access where you can only get into the building with your specific keys. The RAs’ which conduct rounds and monitor what goes on as well as suspicious behavior.”
Participant 3 felt that their safety was directly correlated to the University Police Department and how well trained they are in their positions: “I would say that I feel very safe. Knowing that the people are trained and that they aren’t supposed to be on-campus and all of that.”

Participant 4 went further into detail about his own perception of his safety in relation to firearms on-campus with the following: “I didn’t feel unsafe before but I can say I feel safer knowing the state legislation now. I think that I would say I never really felt unsafe, but I would say it seems that there doing the right thing enough to at least be thinking about it.” Participant 6 felt as though their safety on-campus in relation to firearms was a result of the University Police Department’s efforts: “I feel like the safety on-campus is good I haven’t had a problem with safety on-campus so I’m trying to keep it that way whatever they’re doing a good job at it. Participant 5 also felt that she had no issues with her safety on-campus in relation to firearms: “I would have to say I’m pretty safe on-campus I haven’t run into anybody with a gun or firearm on-campus or have heard anything like somebody brought a firearm to campus.”

Students’ with Weapons

Each participant, aside from Participant 4, identified that they felt uncomfortable with the idea of students being given the opportunity to carry a firearm on-campus.
Participant 1 stated that residents who are living on-campus should not be able to have firearms due to the students close proximately to one another: “I just don’t think on-campus residents should if you live on-campus. I don’t think you should be allowed to have it just because of the concern with people who come into your room or just never know you can’t be prepared for that situation because you can’t plan for everything.” Participant 3 also felt that due to residents close proximately to one another while living on-campus, it would be very difficult to make sure that student’s firearms were secure and stored properly at all times due to the high traffic that some resident’s rooms could receive: “I would say that I feel safe if they went through the proper requirements and they went through everything. But at the same time, I’m not sure because going back there could be someone else who could get ahold of that. And something could go wrong. And I don’t they they’re necessary on-campus.” Participant 2 stated that he feels similarly to Participant 3 that firearms are unnecessary on-campus do to the safety that already exists: “I believe that to be more of a values question. To ask that I believe that certain students may feel they want to carry a firearm but don’t really feel the need to carry a firearm on-campus is present.” On the other hand, Participant 4 felt as though he was comfortable with the idea of students being able to carry firearms on-campus if they had the ability to:

Yes because if someone in my class had a concealed carry and someone was trying to shoot up the school I mean I don’t what that to be necessary for them to have to step in and do something if the police are there but if someone could do something I think that would make me feel more safe.
Professors with Weapons

Participants felt their professors would be more qualified to handle firearms on-campus, which stemmed from a trust difference that was seen from the maturity of the professor position itself. Participant 1 stated the following: “If they pass all of the requirements I don’t have a problem with that. I think especially with what just happened in Florida like I think if a teacher is comfortable carrying one and felt that they could have potential to save students’ lives if that what you know it came down to.” Participant 4 furthered his statement about allowing students to carry firearms with his confidence in professor’s leadership abilities simply because of the role they take on as professors.

Well I mean the fact that I am ok with students having them, and in my opinion as you get older you more or much they have maturity. I’m sure that professors have difficult days sometimes but when there is an active shooter, if the professor in the classroom had one then I would once again feel safer.

Participant 6 explained that he did not believe his peers were responsible enough to understand the importance of what having a firearm in the classroom could do, but felt different about professors:

Students’ I don’t know it’s just like you really have to trust somebody. I think I would trust my professor more than I would trust an individual in a class. The professor would know when there is an active shooter but I can’t see other people wouldn’t know either but there it just a trust difference between students and teachers.
Chapter 5

Discussions, Recommendations, and Conclusion

The current research utilized a qualitative approach to gain insight regarding students’ current perception of safety on-campus in relation to firearms at a mid-sized Midwestern University. Additionally, this study served to explore students’ perceptions of current campus policies and procedures related to firearms. Students’ perceptions of their own safety were identified as playing a key role into students’ success while they lived on campus within the residence halls. Therefore, the following research questions were asked: (1) What are student perceptions of safety on-campus in relation to firearms?; (2) In what ways do students experience safety in context of firearms?; (3) How do students come to know about universities policies & procedure concerning safety in relation to firearms?; (4) What are students recommendations in relation to safety concerning firearms on-campus? In the following chapter, the results found in the current study are discussed and recommendations are offered for the University Police Department, University Housing and Dining Services, and future researchers.

Discussion

In Chapter 4, four research questions and themes were further identified using six individual one-on-one interviews. The main themes of the first research question (What are student perceptions of safety on-campus in relation to firearms?) included current perceptions of individual safety on-campus, safety concerns of firearms, and perception of firearms on-campus. The second research question (In what ways do students experience safety in context of firearms?) included family members and the media. The third research question (How do students come to know about universities’ policies & procedure concerning safety in relation to firearms?) identified visible stickers on door,
lack of understanding of policies, lack of known state legislation, and perception of active shooter training. The fourth research question (What are student’s recommendations in relation to safety concerning firearms on-campus?) identified safety in relation to firearms, students with weapons, and professors with weapons. Discussion of the themes in comparison to the literature review, recommendations for the University Police Department, recommendations for the University Housing and Dining Services, and recommendations for future research are discussed in chapter 5.

**Research Question 1. What are student perceptions of safety on-campus in relation to firearms?**

The main themes of the first research question included current perceptions of individual safety on-campus, safety concerns of firearms, and perception of firearms on-campus.

**Perception of safety on-campus.**

During the one-on-one interviews, the participants all felt they had developed a sense of safety on-campus either through their day-to-day accumulated experience or because they already assumed the community was safe before enrolling. These findings were similar to those found by Talebs (2009) who reported that violent crimes committed on college campuses is low compared with overall crime. No participant brought up crimes committed on campus during the course of our interviews or even mentioned a previous crime that occurred on campus such as theft or assault. Participant 6 stated the following when asked about his own perception of safety on campus, “I feel the campus is pretty safe no matter what time of day it is. I also want to say that it is one of the safest campuses in the state.” Prior research (Mayo 2014) indicated gun ownership among women is on the rise due to safety concerns. However, the female participants stated that
they not only felt safe walking around campus during the day time, but also walking around campus late at night. Participant 5 stated “in my hometown you’ll never catch me walking the street at 8pm at night, but I do here at my university. I’ll go to the 24 hour lounge, leave at 2am and I’ll walk home and I won’t feel like I’m not safe at all.”

According to Swifts (2013), “Many women see the opportunity of concealing a firearm as an equalizer in terms of self-defense”. However, the female participants did not feel the need to acquire more protection than their male peers. Likewise, Ritz (2013) argued that females’ possession of firearms increases their ability to defend themselves which in turn strengthens their feelings of safety on campus. However, without possessing a firearm, Participant 3 stated “I would say that I believe it is pretty safe on campus.” Participant 1 stated the following concerning her safety on campus “I feel very safe on campus. I know when I first came to school, my dad wanted me to carry pepper spray around. I said I wouldn’t do that, because I was like I feel very safe on campus.”

Male participants also felt safe on-campus. As pointed out by two participants, the university where the research took place was deemed the second safest college town by SafeWise.com (Nolen, 2017).

This sense of safety also applies to minority students. O’Brien, Forrest, Lynott, Daly, & American (2013), found that the percentage of minorities who’ve received concealed carry permits increased from fourteen present to sixteen percent. However, of the three participants of color, only 1 stated that they had the ability to conceal carry a firearm.

**Safety concerns of firearms.**

Current study participants shared that they developed their ideas about firearms either through firsthand experience, the demographics of the town they grew up in, or
through exposure to media exposure. This exposure also helped shaped their ideas about firearms in relation to safety. Participant 1 stated that at the age of 12, she took a hunting safety course, which allowed her to learn about proper shooting techniques and firearm awareness. She gave a very descriptive example of the seriousness of firearms in her household: “I think it’s just whose is in control of them. Like I don’t have a problem with firearms because of my family. My dad owns a firearm, a hand gun that he concealed carries.” Participant 2 also stated that he had previously taken safety courses, but that he had also been certified to conceal-carry a weapon if he so chooses to do so.

Both Participant 3 and Participant 4, who both come from suburban hometown settings, gave very different experiences when it came to safety concerns of firearms. Participant 3 stated the following when asked about the perception she has about firearms being brought on-campus. “I would like to believe that they are not on-campus, but I would say if it happens it is very rare. I don’t think that they should be on-campus.” Similarly, Participant 4 shared that he felt students carried firearms more often than not, but felt the University Police Department gave him a sense of security by having shorter response times.

I think it’s just a possibility that people are concealing firearms. The police should also have firearms. I’m sure they do. I just don’t know what kind. But for me to feel safe with the police would have to have firearms and they would have to be in areas where they can easily access a situation that goes wrong.

It’s possible their suburban upbringing gave them less direct exposure to firearms so neither is comfortable with the notion of concealed carry by students. Participant 4 is
okay with Police carrying a firearm perhaps due to media portrayals normalizing police using them.

Participant 5 and Participant 6 both came from urban settings and feel that their safety is directly impacted by themselves and by those who surround them. This shared a common belief that if students were allowed to have firearms on-campus, they would worry about their peers not acting responsible with them and potentially using them while intoxicated. Participant 5 gave an example of an incident in which she saw this happen in person:

I have seen it happen in action somebody was too drunk to fight, and pulled out a pistol. Last year when I was at a party and someone was drunk with a gun. I believe that was the scariest thing because, you know he was so drunk that he was shooting and not looking where he was shooting and unfortunately, he did shoot someone and they died so. It was crazy because at first, he was shooting and he was not looking where he was shooting so he could’ve shot anybody.

In comparison to the other participants, only Participant 5 and Participant 6 thought about their peers in relation to firearms.

**Perception of firearms on-campus.**

In the course of the current study participants were asked about their perception of the number of firearms that are brought on campus by their peers. Participants were clearly divided on the frequency they perceived firearms are brought to campus by their peers. Participant 4 stated he believes his peers bring firearms to campus. “I think that people have firearms on campus. I don’t know how frequently. I was thinking maybe if I had to guess maybe every dorm building probably has between 1-3 people that are concealing a firearm that people do not know about.” Participant 3 stated that she feels
that firearms are rarely brought to campus by her peers: “I mean I would like to believe that they’re not on campus. I would say if it happens it was very, very rare. I don’t think that they should be on campus, I don’t think there is a reason for them to be on campus because it is a safe campus.” Given the prior research by Drysdale (2010), one would say that Participant 4 would be correct. Drysdale stated “Analyzing 272 incidents of targeted violence on college campuses that occurred between 1990 and 2008. Guns were used in 54 percent of the reported cases, and almost 60 percent of fatal violent incidents were instigated against someone previously known to the assailant”. Participant 3 statement, however, is also further explained by Stegel (1993) who stated that students are responsible for 80% of campus crimes that do not involve a firearm.

**Research question 2. In what ways do students experience safety in context of firearms?**

The main themes of the second research question included family members and Media’s effect on experience or lack thereof.

**Family members or close relationships.**

In the current study the majority of participants who felt comfortable around firearms stated that this was because their close friends or family members owned a firearm. The participants were exposed early and often to firearms and felt more comfortable in both safety, and the handling of a firearm. Participant 5 stated: “I have two cousins who are in the police department and one time they were doing some paint job for my mother, and one of my cousins left his firearm at my house. It was just sitting there and I will go let me put this up and unfortunately the safety wasn’t on and I almost shot myself and I was like oh my God.” She further went into detail about her boyfriend who is also a firearm owner and the experiences with him that have led her to continue
developing her perception of safety in relation to firearms. “I would have to say that my boyfriend is from the Southside of Chicago and he is someone who has a firearm and at first I was honestly about to be done, but for him as a black male it is kind of needed.” Participant 2 went in-depth about a conversation he had with his uncle and grandfather regarding firearms:

I am currently in ROTC so I am familiar with firearms in that regard. I do also have my FOID card, and I have taken a concealed carry class. I developed this definition through my years of experience I started off learning about guns from my grandpa who is a veteran. Definitely my grandpa, and my uncle also is an avid firearm user, very safe when doing so also ways practicing proper safety and what to do in those situations. Not all experiences come from immediate family.

Participant 4 stated his family did not own any firearms but he was able to gain experience by attending a firing range with a close friend and his father. Participant 4 stated the following regarding the importance of safety in relation to firearms.

My family members have never owned a firearm. But I did do a firing range I see it as a fun thing. It is an activity that can be a hobby. I’ve seen plenty of things in the news where if someone hadn’t had a firearm then the situation would be being escalated significant quicker. I have one friend that’s father brought him hunting frequently and I had never held a gun other than that. So being at the firing range all of the rules and things that they have you do, makes it seem like it can be very safe if you make it safe.

Participant 1 also stated that due to her parents, specifically her father’s expectations of safety around firearms, she was taught from an early age the importance of firearm
safety. Participant 1 stated the following “I think being exposed to so much as I was growing up and stuff like I was always aware of gun safety. I went to a safety course, especially because they were in our house. Just being exposed to that, and my family telling me that you know it’s not a toy you definitely don’t play with it.”

Participant 3, who was not exposed to firearms, stated that because of her lack of immediate family who were firearms owners and her lack of opportunity to be around firearms, she lacks the experience to handle them safely: “I actually don’t have any experience with firearms. Just because none of my direct family, no one of my direct family has a firearm so I never really had the opportunity to be around them.”

The current study found that either through family participation with firearms or through a friend’s use of them, participants became use to the idea of gun ownership and use. Participant 4 stated that although his immediate family did not own firearms, he was still able to gain experience with them due to his involvement in Boy Scouts of America, and a friend whose father regularly took them to a shooting range:

One friend whose father brought him hunting frequently and I had never held a gun other than that. I was in Boy Scouts I held a .22 and .308. Boy Scouts had a huge impact on me understanding the safety of it and why as long as you’re safe with it is a good activity if you learn how to be safe with it.

Media.

In this current study participants stated that they have learned and built some perceptions about safety on campus in relation to firearms as a response to viewing a mass shooting or a response to a mass shooting within the media. Participant 3, an education major, stated that because of recent portrayals and reactions by the media to mass shootings, she has been hyper aware of the negative aspects of gun ownership and
use. This shaped her own perception of safety on campus in relation to firearms. “From watching the news, and paying attention to what’s going on in the world. And being aware of the people who may have them, who should not have them”. Likewise, Dahls (2016) stated that students’ perceptions are impacted by media portrayal. “In response to gun incidents that have made national news, the current generation of college students have been impacted by images of guns on campus” (p1).

**Research Question 3. How do students come to know about universities policies & procedure concerning safety in relation to firearms?**

The main themes of the third research question included lack of understanding of both current state legislation, and policy of firearms being brought to campus.

**Lack of understanding.**

The current study noted a common theme while conducting each participant’s one-on-one interview concerning their lack of knowledge regarding both state legislation and policy at their university. With the exception of Participant 2, each participant stated that they did not know their state legislation, the policies in place at their university, as well as the precautions that are taken by their University Police Department. This lack of knowledge is in spite of four of the six participants having access to firearms within their home. Participant 5 stated that while she did not know specifics about state legislation concerning the purchase of firearms, she felt as though the mental health screening is not as rigorous as she would like it to be. “I believe that people should have a mental health screening because we don’t know who is behind the gun and who is going to be pulling the trigger.” Given prior research, we can see that background checks, which include a screening of past mental health issues has been increasing in rigor. The NCIS (2016)
studies showed the following: Annual background checks for those purchasing firearms has increased from roughly 11.2 million in 2007 to 23.1 million in 2015.

Participant 3 and Participant 6, whose direct family did not own firearms, were the only participants who stated that due to their families’ lack of access to firearms, they were uneducated when it came to firearm safety. Participant 6 stated: “I don’t even think my dad has a gun in the house because we live in somewhat of a nice neighborhood where we don’t have to worry about that situation but that’s pretty much it. But my parents don’t have one so I don’t think the need or want to have one when I get older at this point.” Similarly, Participant 3 stated: “I actually don’t have any experience with firearms. no one in my direct family has a firearm so I never really had the opportunity to be around them.” Comparing their statements to prior research, the Texas Concealed Handgun Licensing Bureau (2012) found a large influx of women applying to purchase firearms, and applying for concealed carry permits. “This boom is largely attributable to an increase in women purchasing firearms and applying for concealed carry permits. Texas for example, in 2002, issued 8,994 concealed carry permits to women (Texas Concealed Handgun Licensing Bureau, 2002). By the year 2014, that number has increased to 65,691 (Texas Concealed Handgun Licensing Bureau, 2014)” (p.3) We can see in relation to Participants 1,3, and 5, none of the participants who identified as female stated their intent to purchase, or own a firearm.

Research question 4. What are student’s recommendations in relation to safety concerning firearms on-campus?

The main themes of the fourth research question included recommendations for the university police department, university housing and dining, and recommendations for further research.
Recommendations for the university police department

Within the current study the participants’ university police department created a sense of physical security for Participant 1, Participant 2, Participant 5, and Participant 6. During my one-on-one interviews, it was stated multiple times that simply seeing the presence of the university police department officers gave students the sense that the University Police Department would be able to respond quickly to an incident. Participant 5 stated that she felt there should be more information on how University Police respond in cases involving a shooting on campus: “I would say that it is really important to inform what to do if there was an ever a gun brought on-campus, what does a gun sound like and things like that.” Participant 1 also stated that she would like safety courses to be offered by the university police department, to create a better sense of self-advocacy in relation to one’s own safety: “Maybe just having like safety courses. Or just awareness courses so that students who maybe aren’t going to carry but feel more comfortable.” Participants also stated that they would encourage more programs to be administered by their university police department to allow students the opportunity on what to do in response of a mass shooting occurring.

Recommendations for university housing and dining

The current study found that all participants felt their university housing and dining office created a safe environment. Participant 2 specifically noted the impact that having locked doors and a key system has on the safety within his own residence hall. Participant 2 additionally noted the positive impact that resident assistants created by conducting building walkthroughs. Participant 5 made the following recommendation concerning mass shooting response: “I think that you know housing and dining has a lot of stuff about safe sex and eating right and exercising Well I think that [mass shooting
response] should be involved to because it does happen and unfortunately it comes out of the blue and you would rather be prepared instead of unknown.”

Given the current research conducted, a recommendation the PI found was the participants’ university housing and dining office should provide more programming that teaches students about safety around firearms. Specifically, they should discuss things such as what active shooter protocol is, advocating for community policing, and speaking out when you hear even small rumblings of situations that could occur on campus.

**Developmental Theory**

William Perry’s theory of intellectual and ethical development was used as a framework to conduct the study. Perry’s Theory is based on his studies of the cognitive and ethical development in undergraduate students. His theory states that individuals go through four stages of mental and moral development. The four stages are dualism, multiplicity, relativism, and finally commitment (Evans et al., 2010). Participants discussed their relationship to firearms was either based on familiarity due to family and friends or they had no familiarity because they had limited exposure growing up, primarily through media. Five of my participants were in Perry's second developmental stage known as multiplicity. In this stage individuals begin to see that problems are somewhat more complex and are solvable, but there are also problems where the answer is not yet known. Participants are able to recognize that students may choose to carry firearms to protect themselves but that also others with ill intent have access to weapons.

Participant 3, was the only participant who was possibly in Perry's first stage of intellectual and ethical development, Dualism. Dualism is the belief that every problem is solvable, that individuals are able to learn the right answers, and that they must obey authorities. Participant 3 stated that not only did she feel as though we didn’t need
firearms on campus, but that no student should need a firearm to feel safe on campus. She also was able to clearly distinguish how appropriate it was for the university police department to have firearms, but not her peers. Participant 3 stated the following concerning students having firearms on campus “I would say that people don’t need them and I would feel safer if people didn’t have them.”

Recommendations for Future Research

The current study focused on six participants who live on-campus, were from rural, suburban, or urban hometown settings. The following recommendations are proffered for future research in this area:

- Survey and interview participants from across all on-campus residence halls, including university apartments and Greek houses.
- Include individuals who come from hometown settings that are currently seeing an influx of population increase, or decrease as this could affect their perceptions of the changing community of their hometown setting.
- Conduct the on-on-one interviews during the first semester of school to gauge students’ immediate perceptions of how they feel when they arrive on-campus. Conducting the student in the spring semester allowed students to not only find a community in which they feel safe, but also gives them the opportunity to move communities.
- Conduct a large scale quantatative study with a questionnaire sent to students who live on-campus. This allows the researcher to expand the sample size and increase generalizability.
- Conduct a longitudinal study to gauge evolving perceptions concerning gun laws and policies on campus.
• Conduct a similar study in a different region of the country to expand beyond a Midwestern mentality that might be different than coastal living students.

Conclusion

The current study utilized a qualitative approach to better understand student’s perceptions of safety on-campus in relation to firearms. Results found that each of the participants felt safe on-campus and felt safe in relation to firearms on-campus. Results also indicated that students have a lack of knowledge when it came to state legislation, their university’s policies, and the protocol in place at their university in response to a mass shooting. Through this research, most of the students were in the Perry’s (2010) multiplicity stage of development appropriate for this age group. Recommendations to the University Police Department, and University Housing and Dining were provided to gain insight into the challenges and developmental factors that face students who chose to live on campus.
References


Appendix A

Interview Protocol
Demographic Questions
1. Age and year in school
2. Major/minor
3. Race
4. Gender
5. Hometown setting (Rural, Urban, or Suburban)

Research Question 1: What are student perceptions of safety on campus in relation to firearms?
1. How do you describe your current perception of your own safety on campus?
2. What are some perceptions of safety you have concerning firearms?
3. What is your personal definition of safety in relation to firearms?
   a. How did you develop this definition?
   b. What are some experiences that influenced your ideas about safety in relation to firearms?
   c. Who are some people that influenced your ideas about safety in relation to firearms?

Research Question 2: In what ways do students experience safety on campus in relation to firearms?
1. What are your thoughts about firearms in relation to safety on campus?
2. What experience if any do you have with firearms?
   a. What has led you to have or not have experiences with firearms?
3. What is your current perception of firearms being on campus?
   a. Do you believe it happens? If yes, how often?

Research Question 3: How do students come to know about university policies & procedure concerning safety in relation to firearms?
1. Do you know your university's current policies on firearms here on campus?
   a. What is your current perception of the current policy in place in relation to firearms on campus?
2. Do you know your current states legislation in relation to firearms?
   a. What is your perception of the current state legislation in relation to firearms?
3. Do you know the protocol in response to firearms being brought to campus?
   a. What is your current perception on the protocol in place at your university?
4. What are your thoughts concerning university police trainings and preparedness in relation to firearms?

Research Question 4: What are student’s recommendations in relation to safety concerning firearms on campus?
1. How do you feel in regards to your current safety on campus in relation to firearms?
2. Would you feel comfortable allowing students to conceal carry firearms if they had the ability to?
3. Would you feel comfortable allowing professors or faculty to conceal carry firearms if they are giving the opportunity to?
4. What recommendations if any do you have for the university police department in relation to firearm safety on campus?
5. What recommendations, if any do you have for the university housing and dining department in relation to firearms on campus?
Appendix B

Consent to Participant in Research
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

A Students Perception of Safety on Campus in Relation to firearms on Campus

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Porfirio Gallegos and Dr. Richard Roberts (faculty sponsor) from the Counseling and Student Development department at Eastern Illinois University.

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Please ask questions about anything you do not understand, before deciding whether or not to participate.

You have been asked to participate in this study because you identify as a student who is currently living on campus through the University Housing and Dining Department.

• PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The objective of the study is to explore student’s perceptions and meaning-making concerning safety on campus in relation to firearms. Additionally, the study serves to explore students’ perceptions of current campus policies and procedures related to firearms. The proposed study, along with prior research on current laws and legislation on firearms, gun mentality, and guns on college campuses, could help aid a student’s perception of campus safety.

• PROCEDURES

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to:

Participate in a one-on-one interview with the researcher that will last approximately one hour. During the interview, you will be asked questions about your experiences and your perception concerning safety in relation to firearms on campus. Your interview will be audio recorded and stored on the researcher’s computer.

• POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts that will arise from participating in this study.

• POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY

This study will also benefit universities housing and dining, and the university police department and athletic departments; data collected from the study may give these institutions more insight on the experiences and thoughts of their safety on campus in relation to firearms.

• INCENTIVES FOR PARTICIPATION
Participants selected for this study will be entered in a drawing for $15 visa gift cards. Two participants will win the gift cards. The gift cards will be distributed after all interviews have been completed. The researcher will contact the winners via email and have them pick up the gift cards at his office.

- **CONFIDENTIALITY**

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained by removing identifying information, particularly names, from the interview transcripts. Participant names will not be present on any transcript materials, nor will they be in the final research report. Only the researcher and faculty advisor will have access to transcripts and recorded interviews. The audio recording files of the interviews will be kept for 3 years and then destroyed, as required by the IRB.

- **PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL**

Participation in this research study is voluntary and not a requirement or a condition for being the recipient of benefits or services from Eastern Illinois University or any other organization sponsoring the research project. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind or loss of benefits or services to which you are otherwise entitled.

There is no penalty if you withdraw from the study and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer.

- **IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS**

If you have any questions or concerns about this research, please contact:

Porfirio Gallegos, Principal Investigator  
217-581-5553  
pgallegos@eiu.edu

Dr. Richard Roberts, Faculty Advisor  
217-581-2400  
rlroberts@eiu.edu

- **RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS**

If you have any questions or concerns about the treatment of human participants in this study, you may call or write:

Institutional Review Board  
Eastern Illinois University  
600 Lincoln Ave.  
Charleston, IL 61920
You will be given the opportunity to discuss any questions about your rights as a research subject with a member of the IRB. The IRB is an independent committee composed of members of the University community, as well as lay members of the community not connected with EIU. The IRB has reviewed and approved this study.

I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue my participation at any time. I have been given a copy of this form.

Printed Name of Participant