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# The Correlation Between College Freshmen's Perceptions of School Climate and Instances of High School Bullying

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THE CORRELATION BETWEEN COLLEGE FRESHMEN'S PERCEPTIONS OF SCHOOL  
CLIMATE AND INSTANCES OF HIGH SCHOOL BULLYING

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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December 2015

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Title: The Correlation Between College Freshman's Perceptions of School Climate and Instances of High School Bullying

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The purpose of this quantitative study was to determine if a relationship between college freshmen's perceptions of school climate and instances of high school bullying existed. The college freshmen that participated in this study completed an on-line survey that asked them to reflect upon grades 9 through 12 of their high school experiences, particularly how they described the climate of their high schools, and related instances of bullying. Additionally, this research was used to find the appropriate methods to cultivate a student-centered climate where all students feel connected and safe in an environment where bullying is not tolerated. The researcher addressed these issues by providing the results from this study and recommendations to improve school climate and anti-bullying policies.

Findings from this study found a correlation between school climate and instances of bullying stating that students that perceived their climate as positive had less incidences of bullying. In addition, there was also a significant difference between gender and school climate.

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*“It’s not whether you get knocked down, it’s whether you get back up.”*

***-Vince Lombardi***

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Imagine how it must feel for an adolescent boy or girl to go to school only to be suddenly ignored by fellow classmates, subjected to vicious comments, and even abused physically. When Elizabeth, a 14-year old high school freshman, walked into her new high school on the first day of school, she thought that she would enjoy the same social status that she acquired during middle school. As an eighth grader, she was the captain of her school's cheerleading squad and served as student council president. She had a lot of friends and was considered a member of the "popular" crowd. But, once Elizabeth decided to play sports in high school instead of cheer, her life changed completely. Her friends abruptly began to ignore her, she struggled to find a place to sit during lunch, and soon rumors began to be spread about her. She would walk through the halls only to be met by dirty looks from other girls often accompanied by snide comments. Even at home, she would receive phone calls from other students whom she barely knew only to be informed that no one liked her, or that the outfit she had on that day was ugly, or that everyone thinks she's gay because she plays sports. The anxiety that she began to feel each school day became overwhelming. Oftentimes, she would seek other places to go during her lunch period so that she could avoid being confronted with mean and hurtful comments. In class, she felt awkward and uncomfortable, her grades began to slip, and she was ultimately consumed by a feeling of hopelessness. The hurt and embarrassment that she felt prevented her from telling anyone, especially her parents, though many of her teachers witnessed her being mistreated and yet did not step in to help her. Her school environment did not make her feel safe or accepted, but what if it had?

The aforementioned scenario is not uncommon, as “bullying is of huge national and international concern, and massive efforts are underway to reduce bullying and its consequences” (Mayes et al., 2014, p. 301). Each and every day in schools across the country, students either witness various acts of bullying or experience it firsthand. Oftentimes, victims of bullying have difficulty walking through the hallways because they are in fear of being called names or being physically abused by bullies. Bullying victims tend to wonder if they should tell a friend or adult, if they did something wrong to cause the bullying, or what would happen if they chose to retaliate. Many of these individuals become worried about the next confrontation rather than focusing on subjects such as algebra or science. Research has found that bullying, teasing, and related forms of peer aggression are associated with many negative outcomes for students, including lower academic performance, emotional distress, and long-term emotional difficulties (Swearer, Espelage, Vaillancourt, & Hymel, 2010).

One can hypothesize that these students may not feel connected to their schools, thus creating a climate that enables bullying to take place without notice or consequence. The National School Climate Council defines school climate as the quality and character of school life (Smith, 2012). A positive school climate should produce healthy peer interactions characterized by less bullying and teasing (Thapa, Cohen, Guffey, & Higgins-D’Alessandro, 2013). Bradshaw and Waasdorp (2009) report that students who are involved in bullying as a bully, victim, or both, feel less safe and connected to the school. Students have the right to feel safe and not have to worry about being a victim in school. What if all schools made students feel accepted? Would instances of bullying decrease?

### **Purpose Statement**

Concerns about bullying within public schools' culture is not new, and the complex causes of bullying and its impact on school culture continues to be debated by researchers (Terry, 2010). When students are bullied, it hinders both their success in school and their emotional well-being. Terry concluded that the causes of bullying can be complicated, and recent research is analyzing the connection between bullying and school climate. Research has confirmed that school climate can exert a strong influence on the experiences of students within their school (Smith, 2012).

Health Resources and Service Administration's National Bullying Campaign showed that 25 percent of students in the United States are bullied each year (Thapa, Cohen, Higgins-D'Alessandro & Guffey, 2012), and as many as 160,000 students stay home each day because they fear being bullied (Nansel et al., 2001). Evidence stated that students aged 12 through 18 were more fearful of being hurt during or on the way to school than away from school (Robers, Zhang, Truman, & Snyder, 2010). In addition, the growing trend of cyberbullying invades our students' school lives via cellular phones and computers, which makes the battle against bullying increasingly difficult. According to a report issued by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC, 2012), cyberbullying incidents have increased by 50 percent over the past few years and approximately 21 percent of students are affected by this problem in their lifetimes (Hinduja & Patchin, 2014).

Strong research asserted that positive school climate is associated with reduced aggression and violence in schools (Thapa et al., 2012), especially in academic environments that cultivate a culture of school connectedness. When students believe that the adults in the school care about the quality of education that is being provided to them, as well as their physical and

emotional well-being, a feeling of connectedness is developed. For example, a study of nearly 80 Alabama students showed that strong school connections might be associated with a decrease in bullying behaviors (Sukkyung et al., 2008). However, Thapa and colleagues concluded that bullying behaviors are more prevalent in school environments where a student's feeling of connectedness to the school is low. Gendron, Williams and Guerra (2011) explained that when students who perceive their school to be unfriendly, unfair, and unsupportive, they are less likely to follow the rules, thus causing bullying behaviors to become more widespread because of the lack of connectedness. Therefore, is there a relationship between school climate and bullying? Does a positive school climate reduce bullying behavior?

The ultimate objective of this research was to find the appropriate methods to cultivate a student-centered climate where all students feel connected and safe in an environment where bullying is not tolerated. This study attempted to determine if there was a relationship between perceptions of school climate and bullying. College freshmen participated in this study by completing a survey that asked them to rate their perceptions of school climate and bullying. Survey results helped to determine if a relationship existed between school climate and bullying. A focus on Urie Bronfenbrenner's (1994) ecological approach to understanding human development will be conducted and further explained in Chapter Two.

### **Research Questions**

The surroundings of a school can provide an ideal setting for bullying to occur because students are together in the same social setting on a daily basis (Gendron et al., 2011). For this reason, a suggestion is that a school's climate could either promote or minimize bullying behavior. Therefore, is there a correlation between perceptions of school climate and instances of bullying?

The following questions will be addressed in this quantitative study:

1. What effect do demographic factors, such as a student's gender and the urban/rural/suburban classification of the student's high school, have on the student's perceptions of bullying?
2. What effect do demographic factors, such as a student's gender and the urban/rural/suburban classification of the student's high school, have on the student's perceptions of school climate?
3. What is the relationship between the perceptions of high school climate and instances of bullying?

### **Theoretical Background**

School climate has been identified as an important influence on student adjustment (Aspy et al., 2012; Brand, Felner, Shim Seitsinger, & Dumas, 2003). According to Cohen (2014), a positive school climate includes rules that support safety and respect for all members of the school and includes teacher and staff that model prosocial behaviors for their students. Research suggested a positive school climate may be a defensive component associated with decreased involvement in risk behaviors such as substance abuse and aggressive behavior such as bullying (Aspy et al., 2012; Bond et al., 2007; Battistich & Horn, 1997; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2009, Hawkins, Catalano, Kosterman, Abbott & Hill, 1999; Lerner, Phelps, Forman, & Bowers, 2009; Resnick et al., 1997). In addition, students who have positive perceptions of school climate will be less likely to engage in externalizing or aggressive behaviors (Espelage et al., 2000; Goldweber et al., 2013; Totura et al., 2009). Unfortunately, a majority of this literature was concerned with middle schools and there was little research examining the correlation between student perceptions of high school climate and reports of risk behavior such as bullying

(Aspy et al., 2012; Bond et al., 2007; Wang, Selman, Dishion & Stormshack, 2010). The objective of this study was to determine if there is a relationship between college freshmen's perceptions of school climate and instances of high school bullying.

Robers, Zhang, and Truman (2010) pointed out that 25% of public schools reported that bullying occurred among students on a daily or weekly basis. In recent studies, researchers have begun to look for other avenues to address these bullying issues (Gendron et al., 2011). Although there have been many efforts to prevent school bullying, it is imperative that an emphasis is placed on bullying issues and the prevention of bullying in our schools.

Gendron et al., (2011) suggested that one must analyze the characteristics of the school in order to determine whether there is an increase or decrease in bullying. Is it possible that a positive climate can reduce the occurrences of bullying? Students would no longer walk in fear and would be more inclined to report the incident. Therefore, a sense of connectedness between the students and the school would be evident, thus creating an environment where bullying behavior is not tolerated as acceptable. Hence, this idea creates a full circle environment where positive school climate decreases the levels of bullying and, ideally, promotes the notion of a positive school culture.

### **Literature Review**

School bullying is not a new problem as it has existed in schools for decades; however, the implementation of bullying awareness studies have become more prevalent. With the increase of research on bullying, new considerations and plans are being implemented in connection with bullying occurrences in schools. In order to analyze the data and research of this proposed study, it was important to understand both the levels and roles of bullying and the dynamics of a school's culture. By examining these topics individually, the potential to

recognize the connection between school climate and instances of bullying became clearer. The following sections will briefly describe the topics of bullying, cyberbullying, victimization, and school climate are to provide additional background information.

## **Bullying**

Bullying can be accomplished both directly and indirectly. Direct bullying may include name calling, insulting, harassing, or inflicting physical harm on another person. Indirect bullying typically includes gossiping about others, excluding certain people from groups and activities, and spreading rumors both in-person or via electronic medium. Both direct and indirect bullying can lead to the emotional and psychological damage of the victim (Seale, 2004).

Bullies are those students who physically and/or emotionally harm another student repeatedly over time (Moultapa, Valente, Gallaher, Rohrbach, & Unger, 2004). Moultapa and colleagues found these individuals represent approximately 7 to 15% of the middle school population and have been described as having a strong need to dominate others and have the social skills and understanding of others' emotions to do so. Moultapa and colleagues also discovered that a clear imbalance of power exists between the bully and the victim, with the latter experiencing difficulty defending him/herself from an aggressor. In 2010-2011, 28% of students in grades 6 through 12 experienced bullying (National Center for Education Statistics and Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2011), and 20% of students in grades 9 through 12 experienced bullying nationwide (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2013). It was found that bullies have higher peer-nominated scores on sociability and leadership relative to other students. According to a study by Perren and Alsaker (2006), bullies demonstrated more leadership skills and belonged to more social groups than those that did not participate in bullying. Also, a study

at a middle school found that students rated the bullies as the “coolest” students in school (Juvonen, Graham, & Schuster, 2002).

### **Cyberbullying**

Cyberbullying is bullying that takes place using electronic technology and is done indirectly. Electronic technology includes devices and equipment such as cell phones, computers, and tablets, as well as communication tools including social media sites, text messages, chat, and websites. Examples of cyberbullying include: mean text messages or emails, rumors and lies sent by email or posted on social networking sites, people who pretend to be someone else to trick others, and posting embarrassing, pictures, videos, websites, or fake profiles (Hinduja & Patchin, 2011). Although it does not occur directly, it continues to be psychologically and emotionally damaging to students across the nation.

### **Victimization**

A student who is a repeated target of another student’s coercive behavior becomes a victim of bullying. However, victims can vary substantially in academic, social, mental, physical, and interpersonal characteristics (Phye & Sander, 2004). Solberg and Olweus (2003) administered the Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire which was designed to assess prevalence and types of bullying/victimization to over 5,000 students. Solberg and Olweus were able to establish a baseline determining that students who felt like they were victims of bullying were bullied two or three times a month. The results of the questionnaire allowed them to truly separate events of individual aggression from true bullying, and therefore see peers who were repeatedly being targeted as victims of bullying.

According to Baldry (2004), there are negative long- and short-term consequences on the general health and well-being of the youngsters involved who are bullies or victims. Baldry also

found a poor mental and physical condition might be linked to experiences of victimization at school. Bullying others is an indicator of maladjustment and, therefore, may also be related to poorer health because of the stress attached to it. Experiences of bullying can also lead into adulthood and may include antisocial behavior, violence, depression, and drug and alcohol addiction (Mikulak, 2013).

### **School Climate**

An important component that required investigation for this study was school climate. School climate is defined as quality and character of school life (Smith, 2012). Research suggested that school climate has the ability to have a very strong influence on the experiences of students in school. In fact, students have fewer attendance issues, get better grades, and feel more connected to their school. These same results also affected teachers, where it is evident that they have a more positive job experience and work better collaboratively. Smith concluded that when teachers are optimistic and functioning in a positive environment, it has a direct impact on the students' feelings of connectedness in their school, thus enabling them to feel safe and protected.

Students whose perceptions of their school climate were rated as poor were less likely to tell an adult that bullying was occurring, possibly because they were afraid that they would get in trouble. A study by Urbanski (2007) found that one of the strongest predictors of bullying was a school climate in which students reported that school rules were fair and that students received the same punishment for breaking rules. Urbanski's findings implied that victims may sometimes be unwittingly punished when reporting bullying incidents, thus contributing to a poor school climate. Students in such a school may not feel the same sense of trust or connectedness as do students in schools with a more positively perceived climate. The result is that they remain silent in this negative environment and bullying escalates (Smith, 2012).

Gendron et al. (2011), postulated that students who attend schools with higher rates of conflicts and negative supportive environments were more likely to participate in bullying. Studies, such as this one, have caused state legislatures to get involved in this dilemma. South Carolina was an example of one state that adopted laws to enforce schools to increase positive culture. The South Carolina Safe School Climate Act became a law in 2006, and its objective was to address concerns with climate and bullying. This law defined school climate and bullying, but it did not give a clear cut way to change the culture in schools (Terry, 2010). Many teachers and students have difficulty changing their old habits, and schools have not received input from students, staff, and parents to help adopt a positive climate change.

### **Research Design**

With the approval of Indiana University of Pennsylvania (IUP), 2,000 emails were sent to college freshmen, aged 18 and older, and asked to reflect to grades 9 through 12 of their high school experiences and participate in a web-based electronic survey. An analysis was conducted to determine whether a relationship existed between school climate and instances of bullying.

### **Procedure**

Survey questions were posted on a secure, password protected site maintained by the information technology staff at the Applied Research Lab (ARL) within the institution. Invitations were sent via email to a stratified sample of freshmen students during the Spring Semester of the 2015 academic year. Each invitation contained a unique password for each student to utilize, and access to the site was granted for up to four weeks after the initial invitation. Two weeks after the initial email to complete the survey was sent, two additional follow-up emails were sent to remind students to complete the survey.

## **Survey Instrument**

College freshmen took the 4 point Likert scale survey electronically during the Spring Semester of 2015 (See Appendix C). Students ranked each statement on a scale of one to four (1 = *strongly disagree*, 2 = *disagree*, 3 = *agree*, 4 = *strongly agree*). According to Croasmun and Ostrom (2011), Likert scales provide a range of responses to a statement or series of statements. Maurer and Pierce (1998) explained that Likert rating scale measurements can be useful and reliable instruments for measuring self-efficacy. The School Climate Bullying Survey (SCBS) was the instrument used to gather data for the quantitative component of this study. This survey was chosen because it contains validated items.

Bullying behaviors and applicable characteristics of school climate were assessed (Cornell, 2011). According to Cornell and Sheras (2003), it was designed to measure the environment and occurrence of bullying at school and to analyze specific characteristics of school climate that could improve anti-bullying strategies. Data from this survey were used to determine if there was a relationship between school climate and bullying as perceived by college freshmen.

## **Limitations**

There were several potential limitations for this study. Students who took part in bullying may not have given accurate responses to the survey. In most cases, students do not want to admit that they are being bullied out of fear and at the same time, bullies may not admit that they are bullying their peers. Also, students' perceptions of school climate and bullying may vary greatly based on their actual experience at their school. Another limitation is that the surveys were only given to students and did not include perceptions of teachers, administrators, and other staff members.

In conclusion, this study was only conducted at one college, and of only freshmen students who were asked to reflect to their high school years which they may not remember. Additional studies would need to be conducted at varying age levels and geographic locations to determine if a relationship exists between perceptions of school climate and bullying nationwide.

### **Operational Definitions and Terms**

**Bullying:** an imbalance of power between two individuals, where the stronger person causes harm, albeit mental, emotional, or physical, to the weaker person repeatedly (Olweus, 2003).

Bullying is characterized by three criteria (Olweus, 1993):

1. It is aggressive and intentional behavior
2. It is carried out repeatedly; and
3. It occurs within an interpersonal relationship characterized by an imbalance of power.

**Cyberbullying:** the willful and repeated harm inflicted through the use of computers, cell phones and other electronic devices (Hinduja & Patchin, 2011).

**Victims:** those students who are frequent targets of aggressive, hurtful actions, and provide little defense against their aggressors. Health Resources and Service Administration's National Bullying Campaign showed that 25 percent of U.S. students are bullied each year (Thapa et al., 2012).

**School Climate:** a complex concept that has been a topic of debate for some time, but not until recently has the research shifted to school climate in association with levels of bullying. School climate is the quality and character of school life (Smith, 2012). School climate is categorized into four classes:

1. Safety: physical, social, emotional safety

2. Teaching and learning: quality instruction, social, ethical, academic learning, leadership, and professional development
3. Relationships: positive relationships across the school community, open communication and collaboration
4. Environment: clean, well-maintained school, adequate space and resources

### **Summary**

Bullying is an important issue and a concern that will not go away without a thorough and comprehensive plan. It is imperative that school districts increase their efforts to promote a positive climate in which all types of bullying are less likely to occur. Research supports that a positive climate promotes cooperative learning, group cohesion, respect, and mutual trust that directly improves the learning environment (Ghaith, 2003; Kerr, Ireland, Lopes, Craig & Cleaver, 2004; Finnan, Schnepel, & Anderson, 2003). The improvement of a school's climate can be accomplished by promoting an environment where students feel safe and connected to their school. When a feeling of safety has been established, students will develop positive relationships with their peers and teachers. Therefore, this positive environment will have a decreased effect on school bullying and lead to benefits for all stakeholders.

The research from this study may be used to formulate long-term prevention strategies against bullying. Establishing a relationship between student perceptions of school climate and bullying will assist educators to reduce the number of bullying incidents and help improve the well-being of schools. Research has shown that in schools where students perceive a structural disciplinary system and more positive student-teacher relationships, there were lower associations with the "probability and frequency of subsequent behavioral problems" (Wang, Selman, Dishion, & Stormshak, 2010; Gregory & Cornell, 2009).

Chapter Two consists of the existing literature related to Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory. Also discussed in this chapter are bullying research, effects of victimization, school climate, and alternative findings. Concluding this chapter is information about the programs and policies, the importance of knowing the target audience, effective methods of ways to address anti-bullying and promote positive school climates, and the effectiveness of these programs as they relate to school climate and bullying.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The purpose of this quantitative study was to determine if there is a correlation between college freshmen's perceptions of school climate and instances of bullying. If this study established that a relationship existed between school climate and bullying, then anti-bullying efforts made by schools could focus toward improving school climate. If the research showed little or no relationship between school climate and bullying, then schools could focus on increasing the consistencies of their anti-bullying policies. The college freshmen that participated in this study completed a survey that asked to reflect on their experiences in grades 9 through 12, particularly how they described the climate of their high schools as they related to instances of bullying. This research was conducted with a focus on the ecological approach to research.

#### **Ecological Theory**

Bronfenbrenner (1994) developed the theory of using an ecological approach to understand human development. In his research, he stated that "ecological models encompass an evolving body of theory and research concerned with the processes and conditions that govern the lifelong course of human development in the actual environments in which human beings live" (p. 37). Along with development in language, cognition, social competence, and physical integrity, children also adapt to their immediate social and physical environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). Bronfenbrenner conceptualized that human development occurs within a system made up of five subsystems, including the microsystem, of which the school is a part:

A microsystem is a pattern of activities, social roles, and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person in a given face-to-face setting with particular physical, social, and symbolic features that invite, permit, or inhibit engagement in

sustained, progressively more complex interaction with, and activity in, the immediate environment. Examples include such settings as family, school, peer group, and workplace. (Bronfenbrenner, 1994)

Bronfenbrenner's ecological approach to research on human development and education sought to study human development in the environment in which it takes place in order to observe the subjects' interaction with the environment and people in the environment, rather than to study subjects in an isolated lab setting without context to provide insight to the subjects' development.

This study included elements of an ecological approach in that school factors that included interactions between living organisms (students, teachers, peers) and non-living entities (school rules, policies, and procedures that relate to student interactions) were the focus of this research. Gendron, et al., (2011) state:

In addition to addressing the ecology of the school in a single study, examining interactions between school and individual characteristics is also important. That is, do individual characteristics linked to bullying behavior have different effects on actual behavior contingent on the nature of the school context...A comprehensive understanding of bullying requires the identification of how student and school characteristics interact.

(p. 152)

The focus areas of the survey were students' perceptions of interactions between students, interactions between students and teachers, and interactions between students and school policies that addressed bullying and school climate. Rating students' perceptions resulted

in varied observations, even of the same school, since each student perceived the school climate through the lens of his or her own experiences.

### **Bullying Research**

Bullying has been a persistent problem in public schools and an ongoing problem worldwide. As a result, extensive research has been done on bullying and anti-bullying plans are being implemented. To help analyze the data and research of this proposed study, it was necessary to understand the levels and roles of bullying, as well as the dynamics of school culture. An examination of bullying, cyberbullying, and school climate was done individually to determine the connection between school climate and instances of bullying.

### **Bullying**

Dan Olweus stated that bullying occurs when a student is “exposed repeatedly and over time, to negative actions by one or more other students” (Olweus, 1994, p. 27). Traditional bullying at school can occur directly or indirectly (Espelage & Swearer, 2003). Direct bullying is done face-to-face, and indirect bullying can take place behind someone’s back. Bullies are those who cause harm, albeit mental, emotional, or physical, to the weaker person repeatedly (Olweus, 2003), and represent approximately 7 to 15% of the middle school aged population (Moultapa et al., 2004). Data from the National Crime Victimization Study stated that 28% of students aged 12 through 18 reported being bullied at school during the school year (Robers, Kemp, & Truman, 2013). These concerns make bullying an important research topic in today’s society.

### **Cyberbullying**

Cyberbullying is done indirectly through the use of electronic technology. The profiles of cyberbullies differ slightly from students who exhibit bullying behaviors “in-person.” More

females than males tend to engage in cyberbullying, and females typically report more often using cyberbullying to exact revenge on another student, whereas males tend to cyberbully mostly in a “joking” manner (Englander & Muldowney, 2007).

According to Englander and Muldowney (2007) of the Massachusetts Aggression Reduction Center:

Cyberbullying- the abuse of choice of the Cyber Immersion Generation – is the perfect bullying crime. It is very hurtful, yet (generally) does not kill its victims; it is extremely simple and easy; it does not require significant planning or thought; it similarly does not require self-confidence or social finesse; and the perpetrator is extremely unlikely to be caught or disciplined. The Cyber Immersion Generation ensures that the victim will be accessible, and the generation gap ensures likewise that the oversight of adults will be sporadic or absent. Technological advances designed to prevent cyberbullying are often easily circumvented (e.g. school computer system filters) and adults are so out of touch that they are often unaware of the frequency of cyberbullying or the types that exist – never mind being unaware of how to control or reduce it. (p.85)

A student who is a repeated target of another student’s coercive behavior (whether in an online or face-to-face situation) becomes a victim of bullying. However, victims can vary substantially in academic, social, mental, physical, and interpersonal characteristics (Phye & Sanders, 2004). Solberg and Olweus (2003) administered the Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire which was designed to assess prevalence and types of bullying/victimization to over 5,000 students. Solberg and Olweus were able to establish a baseline that determined that students who felt like they were victims of bullying were bullied two or three times a month. This questionnaire’s results

allowed students to accurately separate events of individual aggression from true bullying, and therefore see peers who were repeatedly being targeted as victims of bullying.

In a national study of over 15,000 students in grades 6 through 10 in both public and private schools, “A sizable number of students reported both bullying others and being bullied themselves. Of the total sample, 29.9% reported some type of involvement in moderate or frequent bullying, as a bully (13.0%), a target of bullying (10.6%), or both (6.3%)” (Nansel et al., 2001). Nansel and colleagues also found that males were more likely to be victims and perpetrators than females, and discovered that more bullying occurs in grades 6 through 8 than grades 9 through 10.

A meta-analysis of data from the 2005 School Crime Supplement by Dinkes (2007) reported similar rates of bullying frequency and showed that “About 28% of students surveyed reported experiencing at least one type of bullying victimization during the previous 6 months” (p. 72). Dinkes also found that girls were more likely to report being the subject of rumors, and that Hispanic students were more likely than either White students or Black students to report bullying.

### **Effects of Victimization**

Although some studies suggested that there is decline of bullying, various types of peer victimization remain to be a serious problem today (Finkelhor, Turner, Ormrod, and Hamby, 2010). Research indicated that approximately 28% of United States adolescents reported bullying victimization at school (Robers, Zhang, Turman, & Snyder, 2012). Victimization from bullying has received a lot of attention because it involves repeated, intentional victimization by an aggressor who has power or dominance over the victim (Gladden, Vivolo-Kantor, Hamburger, & Lumpkin, 2014; Olweus, 1991). Being a victim of bullying has been associated

with a host of maladaptive outcomes including externalizing (aggression) and internalizing problems (anxiety, depression, withdrawal, avoidance) (Espleage and Swearer, 2003; Fitzpatrick, Dulin, & Piko, 2010).

There are harmful long- and short-term effects on the general health of a student who is either a bully or a victim. Peer victimization can have a traumatic impact on adolescent development, disrupting the individual's self-concept and trust in others, and leading to avoidant behavior and withdrawal (Carney, 2008; Garbarino, 2001; Siegel, La Greca, & Harrison, 2009). As indicated by Branson and Cornell (2009), self-reported bullying victimization was correlated with depression, negative school perceptions, and lower grade point average, and researchers suggest that these effects are increased through cyberbullying such as anxiety, social withdrawal, depression, and suicidal ideation (Citron, 2009; Perren, Dooley, Shaw, & Cross, 2010).

A meta-analysis of multiple longitudinal studies indicated that bullying double the risk for depression an average of 7 years later, even after controlling for numerous other risk factors (Trofi, Farrington, Losel, & Loeber, 2011). Additional longitudinal studies found that victims of bullying and peer aggression experienced emotional problems and became fearful for their safety, less engaged in the classroom, and more likely to avoid school (Buhs, Ladd, & Herald, 2006; Esbensen & Carson, 2009; Juvonen, Nishina, & Graham, 2000; Smith, Talamelli, Cowie, Naylor, & Chauhan, 2004). In addition, Schnieder, O'Donnell, Stueve, and Coulter (2012), reported that self-injury and depression were highest among students who were victims of both bullying and cyberbullying. According to Hinduja and Patchin (2009, 2010), students who committed suicide experienced social and emotional issues as a result to bullying. Research indicated that students who were bullied during middle or high school continued to feel the effects of bullying and continued to be victims in college where they experienced a difficult time

making friends and responding to social situations that lead to loneliness and isolation (Adams & Lawrence, 2011).

With reference to physical health, Vernberg, Nelson, Fonagy, and Twemlow (2011) found that involvement in aggressor-victim interactions as an aggressor, victim, or both, was associated with increased somatic, illness, and injury complaints to the school nurse.

Bully/victims experienced worse physical health overall, compared to students not involved, with females reporting more problems than males. Bullies are as vulnerable to feelings of depression as victims (Demanet & Van Houtte, 2012). One can ascertain that bullying and victimization affect the social life of those involved.

According to Demanet and Van Houtte (2012), victims of bullying felt less at home while at school, and these students who do not fit in became victims. Damanet and Van Houtte also found victims of bullying had a harder time with social relationships. Therefore, positive parenting can help eliminate or reduce the mental and physical anguish that bullied and troubled children experience both direct and indirectly. As indicated by Harvey, Pearrow, and Seaver (2010), parents and educators can foster resiliency in students by developing positive attitudes through encouragement and teaching problem-solving strategies, loving and supporting them, and encouraging them to appropriately express all emotions even the negative ones. At home, the responsibility to foster a child's ability to develop positive social relationships and how to appropriately respond to negative situations lies with the parent. However, once the child goes

to school it is then the responsibility of his or her educators to create an environment in which the child will thrive.

### **School Climate**

School climate was the second integral component of this study and, therefore, required further investigation. School climate can be “patterns of people’s experiences of school life and reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures...It is more than an individual experience: It is a group phenomenon that is larger than any one person’s experience” (Cohen, McCabe, Michelli, & Pickeral, 2009, p. 1). The National School Climate Council (2007) recommended that school climate be defined the following way:

A sustainable, positive school climate fosters youth development and learning necessary for a productive, contributive, and satisfying life in a democratic society. This climate includes norms, values, and expectations that support people feeling socially, emotionally and physically safe. People are engaged and respected. Students, families and educators work together to develop, live, and contribute to a shared school vision. Educators model and nurture an attitude that emphasizes the benefits of, and satisfaction from, learning. Each person contributes to the operations of the school as well as the care of the physical environment. (p. 4)

This broad definition of school climate has resulted in research that analyzes many different influences on school climate as it relates to bullying. For example, research on school climate has analyzed factors such as quality and quantity of peer relationships, quality and quantity of adult-student relationships (Urbanski, 2007), social support, group control, and incidences of violence (Hurford et al., 2010). Others added assessments of students’ perceptions of home

involvement, sense of belonging, and sense of worry (Pintado, 2006). Another studied the relationship between bullying and school climate as it pertained to three concepts: “The pervasiveness or teasing and bullying among students; student attitudes that encourage and value aggressive behavior; and student willingness to seek help from school staff members for peer aggression” (Klein, Cornell, & Konld, 2012, p. 155).

Other research studies have taken a slightly different approach to analyzing school climate. A study of the relationship between school climate and bullying in middle schools classified the school climate of the participating schools to be either positive or negative overall, based on a defined set of characteristics. Schools that were classified as having a positive school climate had in common a supportive, collaborative environment “in which students feel safe and free to learn.” Schools that were classified as having a negative school climate were those in which one of the following existed: lack of opportunity for parent involvement, lack of collaboration between teachers, lack of administrative support, or an environment in which students felt unsafe (Douglass, 2009, p. 4).

Finnish researchers Konu and Rimpela (2002) sought to define a conceptual model for developing and measuring well-being in schools, which is another perspective on school climate. In their research, “the concept of well-being has been divided into four categories: school conditions (having), social relationships (loving), means for self-fulfillment (being), and health status (health)” (p.84). A study by Cornell (2011), used three domains that were relevant to bullying and peer aggression: (1) the pervasiveness of teasing and bullying among students; (2) student attitudes that encourage and value aggressive behavior; and (3) student willingness to seek help from school staff members for peer aggression. Multiple studies have demonstrated a consistent association between these aspects of school climate and the extent of bullying at

school (Bandyopadhyay, Cornell, & Konold, 2009; Brockenbrough, Cornell, & Loper, 2002; Williams & Cornell, 2006).

The sheer number of variables studied in different research projects on school climate suggests that school climate is not easily defined, but rather consists of the relationship between a number of variables, both tangible and intangible, in a school's environment and culture. This study sought to assess school climate based upon students' perceptions of student to student interactions, student to teacher interactions, and student interactions with school policies and procedures as they related to bullying behaviors or school climate.

**Relationship to bullying.** Previous research has supported the theory that school climate has the ability to have a very strong influence on the experiences of students in their schools. Individual aspects of school climate have also been shown to have an effect on bullying. Group Control Factor, defined by Hurford et al., (2010) as whether "the school environment created by the adult administration and teachers seems to foster either an equitable group atmosphere or a detrimental one" (p. 68), contributes to the perception of bullying at school. If one group is perceived to be favored by teachers and administrators, it can be perceived as license by the administration for one group of students to control another:

The results indicate that the higher the Group Control factor score the less safe the student feels at school, the more likely that the student feels that bullying is a problem at his or her school, and that someone that he or she knows has been threatened by a weapon at his or her school. (p. 68)

The goal of this study was to find a correlation between perceptions of individual aspects of school climate and instances of bullying as reported by first-year college students. Pintado (2006) documented this relationship in a study of middle school students. In her research, she

found a correlation between students' perceptions regarding school climate and self-reported bullying victimization. Gendron et al. (2011) tested the hypothesis that if the school climate is perceived as supportive, the frequency of bullying will be lower. They also tested the idea that bullying behavior will be more frequent if the bullying behavior is normatively approved (non-supportive school climate). Their research found a correlation between school-climate and bullying behavior:

As expected, individual perceptions of self-esteem, school climate, and approving normative beliefs were relevant predictors of subsequent bullying behavior...youth who reported approving beliefs about bullying behavior and who held more negative perceptions of school climate were more likely to report bullying perpetration one year later. (pp. 160-161)

Another study of middle school students (Simons-Morton, Crump, Haynie, & Saylor, 1999) examined the relationship between student-school bonding, arguably a part of school climate, and problem behavior prevention. The authors of the study included fighting, bullying, truancy, vandalism, and substance use as examples of problem behavior. According to the research, "The findings indicated that while school bonding, perceived school climate and school adjustment were positively associated, each of these variables was negatively associated with problem behavior." This is further evidence that students' positive perceptions of school climate, in this case in relationship to school-bonding, negatively affects the frequency of problematic behaviors such as bullying.

Simons-Morton et al. (1999) and Pintado (2006) also both reported that students' perceptions of school climate and connection to school decreased as students got older. Eighth

graders in both studies were less likely than students in other grades to report positive perceptions of school climate or a feeling of school bonding.

### **Racial Climate**

Racial climate was another area of concern that needed addressed. Direct and indirect forms of bullying and harassment are most often based on perceived differences of sexual orientation, ethnicity, social class, and gender, alerting educators to the need for diversity education as well as violent prevention (National School Climate Council, 2007). Shirley and Cornell (2012) found that African American youth are more likely to experience bullying related to their clothing and physical appearance, more likely to perceive the peer climate as supportive of aggressive behaviors, and less likely to seek help from adults when bullied. African American students were also more likely to experience depression as a result of being a victim of bullying (Fitzpatrick, Dulin, & Piko, 2010).

A study by Mattison and Aber (2007) used data from 382 African American and 1,456 European American students. Results from the study showed positive perceptions of racial climate were associated with higher student achievement and fewer discipline problems, and racial differences in students' grades and discipline outcomes were associated with differences in perceptions of racial climate.

### **High School Structure and Support**

Additional studies from the Virginia High School Safety Study supported school climate by showing how structure and support were related to safety outcomes. The studies demonstrated effects across a large and diverse group of schools including demographics, ethnic/race composition, and percentage of socio-economically disadvantaged students. In a sample of 290 Virginia High Schools, student survey measures of structure and support were

associated with less bullying and teasing, as well as other forms of peer victimization (Gregory, Cornell, Fan, Sheras, & Shih, 2010). A subsequent report found that structure and support were associated with lower levels of teacher victimization, such as being attacked, threatened, or verbally abused by students (Gregory, Cornell, & Fan, 2012). The last report found that high schools low on structure and support had high school wide suspension rates (Gregory, Cornell, & Fan, 2011).

### **Alternative Findings**

Not all studies of school climate and bullying reported correlations between the two factors studied. Douglass (2009) found no significant correlation between junior high/middle school climate and incidences of bullying, but cautioned that lack of a correlation in the study should not preclude schools failing to focus on improving school climate or schools failing to investigate other steps they could take to address bullying. Evidence from this study posited that bullying may occur more often than teachers believe, and these findings also implied that perceptions of school climate should not be the only reliable source to determine if incidences of bullying took place. Douglass recommended that adults are visible and available to students at all times so that students are discouraged from harassing each other throughout the day. Additionally, this study recommended that schools should aim to create an environment where all individuals experience a sense of safety, thus cultivating a clearer and stronger sense of community.

Even Gendron et al. (2011) reported that “no evidence was found that school climate moderated the relationship between approving normative beliefs and bullying perpetration” (p.161). This study included 7,299 ethnically diverse students in 5<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, and 11<sup>th</sup> grades across the state of Colorado. Though Gendron and colleagues reported a relationship between negative

perceptions of school climate and increased frequency of bullying incidents, this relationship occurred when students felt that bullying behaviors were also accepted in the school environment. Perceiving the school climate as positive did not change the frequency of bullying behaviors when the bullying behaviors were perceived as accepted.

A study conducted in Canada by Ryan (2009) sought to determine the effectiveness of implementing a school climate improvement/anti-bullying program in two elementary schools, and also led to mixed results about the correlation of school climate to frequency of bullying. In the study, a survey to determine school climate and incidents of bullying was administered in two schools that implemented the program for differing amounts of time. The author found no significant difference in school climate between the two schools. However, the author did report a statistically significant difference between reports of bullying in the two schools. This leads one to question whether there is a relationship between school climate and bullying at all.

The results of the current research in this area suggested that there is a correlation, but perhaps not a causative relationship between school climate and bullying. Or, it may simply illustrate the fact, as mentioned earlier, that there are many different definitions of school climate used by many different researchers. Some researchers may have included acceptance or approval of bullying behaviors by the school community as an aspect of school climate, rather than a separate factor to be studied independently of school climate. Since this study aimed to discover whether a direct correlation between school climate and bullying, specific definitions were provided on the survey taken by college freshmen to eliminate potential confusion.

### **Programs and Policies**

While some studies have failed to find a correlation between school climate and bullying, many have found a relationship between them. According to Gendron et al. (2011), students

attending schools with higher rates of conflicts and negative supportive environments were more likely to participate in bullying. Studies such as this have caused state legislatures to get involved in this dilemma.

South Carolina was one of the states that adopted laws to enforce schools to increase positive culture. The South Carolina Safe School Climate Act became a law in 2006, and its objective was to address concern with climate and bullying. This law defined school climate and bullying, but it did not give a clear cut way to change the culture in schools (Terry, 2010). Many teachers and students remained in their old habits, and schools have not received input from students, staff, and parents to help adopt a positive climate change. Research on school climate and its effect on bullying suggested that bullying may be an issue of school organization and school policy (Pintado, 2006).

A study by Roberge (2011) analyzed the content of policies that were developed in two Canadian provinces to address bullying concerns and/or to improve school climate. The study analyzed many aspects of the anti-bullying policies, one of which was whether the policy contained criterion to establish a positive school climate. Roberge reported, "Both provinces scored high on policies mentioning the promotion of positive and collaborative behaviors and improving the school climate" (p. 10). This report suggested that schools are beginning to address the issue of school climate at a policy level.

Though many schools are now addressing the issue of school climate, there are as many ways to deal with this issue at a policy level as there are definitions of school climate itself. Roberge (2011) reported that some of the policy requirements for improving school climate in the schools in her study included requiring an anti-bullying plan; a plan to improve school climate; the incorporation of social education or strategies; the opportunity to participate in

bullying intervention training for both students and staff; the availability of training for parents on bullying; and assessment of school climate through student, staff, and parent surveys.

Successful policy development and implementation requires extensive knowledge of the target audience, a cohesive plan for identifying and addressing the problem, reputable prevention programs that correlate with the main components and goals of the policy, and methods to measure program effectiveness.

### **Policy Development**

Many researchers agree that student, staff, and community input should help to drive policy development and implementation. Surveys of student and community perceptions of school climate and bullying could play an integral part of creating school policy. According to Douglass (2009), “It is important that school administrators have an understanding of how school climate is perceived by parents and students along with how the issue of the bullying is perceived within the community” (p. 87). By reviewing information gathered from surveys, administrators can make informed decisions about practices to decrease bullying. According to Roberge (2011), “Diagnostic assessment followed by remedial action seems to be a common, and effective, trend in education when working towards educational change” (p. 12).

In addition to school members and students, parents and community members must also be invested in improving school climate. Englander and Muldowney (2010) say, “Adults need to be sensitized to the issue of cyberbullying, to the reality of the school day, to the limitations schools face, and to their own responsibilities at home and in the community. It is easy to list these needs and very difficult to fulfill them” (p. 10). Once community members and parents have a clear understanding of school climate and student perceptions, a healthier opportunity of success for students should exist.

### **Knowing the Target Audience**

Knowledge of what age groups are likely to bully may play a role in the development of bullying policies, as well (Douglass, 2009). Research suggested that bullying intervention programs should be targeted at younger students, as bullying appears to be a learned behavior. Pintado's research found younger girls were more likely to participate in bullying, explaining that "This indicates that there may be a critical grade level in which schools should address bullying among female students" (2006, p. 131). A nationwide research study conducted in 2001 to determine the prevalence of bullying in the United States also found that bullying occurred more often among middle school students than among high school students (Nansel et al., 2001). This supports the idea that bullying programs and policies should be targeted towards students in elementary school and early middle-school.

### **Addressing the Problem**

While anti-bullying and positive school climate plans are on the rise, innovative ways to address the problems of bullying and poor school climate are lacking. Research on prevailing interventions to reduce bullying in California schools determined that the three interventions most widely available in schools included in the study were: "whole school no tolerance policy (79%), communication (70%), and school climate interventions and small group social skills training designed to teach positive peer interaction skills (59% each)" (O'Malley, 2009, p. 49). O'Malley concluded these practices may be the easiest to implement in school districts affected

by budget cuts and increased pressure from standardized testing, yet they do not include the vital elements of parental involvement and staff and student anti-bullying training.

School climate and anti-bullying strategies also need to take into account proactive and reactive responses to bullying. A study of Texas middle school principals' perceptions of bullying in school reported that:

Principals acknowledged that staff training, teachers discussing bullying with their classes, more supervision by the staff and developing policies that focus on what the school will do to decrease bullying are all proactive ways of decreasing bullying on their campuses. (Harris & Hathorn, 2006, p. 65)

However, the principals also felt that disciplinary action was necessary to curb bullying along with proactive measures. "Most principals believed that to decrease bullying on their campuses, some form of punishment should be applied immediately and automatically to the bully" (Harris & Hathorn, 2006, p. 65). For that reason, clear policies and bullying prevention programs should be designed to inform students that bullying will not be tolerated in school.

### **Prevention Programs**

Many pre-packaged anti-bullying programs exist that could be implemented in a campaign to improve overall school climate. To successfully choose and implement such programs, Dake, Price, and Telljohann (2003) identified areas where more research is needed:

First, we need more research to determine if the epidemiology and consequences of bullying are similar in the United States as in other countries where research already exists. Second, we do not know the level of preprofessional preparation of elementary school teachers regarding bullying prevention. Third, we need to identify methods of preprofessional teacher education regarding bullying that prove effective in getting

teachers to implement appropriate interventions in their classrooms. Finally, we need to assess perceptions, barriers, and activities of the appropriate school personnel, such as principals and teachers, regarding school-based bullying prevention activities. (p. 179)

These findings reinforce the idea that while many schools are beginning to implement school improvement and anti-bullying policies, the question of what adequate measures should be included in these policies and which measures can actually be effectively implemented in schools requires more research and discussion.

### **Program Effectiveness**

At least one study conducted among students in grades K through 5 to determine the effectiveness of a school-wide program aimed at improving school climate and social interactions between students and thus decreasing the incidences of bullying found that the program reduced self-reported victimization reports by 19% in grade K through 2, but reported no statistically significant reduction in self-reported victimization reports by students in grades 3 through 5. However, self-reported acts of aggression decreased by 40% in grades K through 2 and 23% in grades 3 through 5 (Orpinas, Horne, & Staniszewski, 2003). The results of the research of Gendron et al., (2011) suggested that:

Preventive interventions must address more than proximal, personal characteristics, such as self-esteem. They must also address more distal contextual aspects, such as perceived respect from the adults in their school and the feeling that one's school is a good place to be. (pp. 161-162)

Dinkes (2007) stated, "Because students who are victims of different types of bullying are unlikely to have a teacher or friend to trust, it is crucial that bullying prevention programs focus more on teacher intervention and less on student reports of victimization" (p. 74).

Another program called *Tribes* is a “way of learning and being together” (Gibbs, 2001). This program is used to improve academic success and address social concerns such as behavior, bullying, and low self-esteem. It is accomplished by teaching collaborative skills and strategies by creating a caring, student-centered community. A study conducted by Ryan (2009) in two Canadian schools who had both implemented *Tribes* in an effort to improve school climate and reduce bullying also reported mixed effects. In school A, the *Tribes* program had been in place for more than three years. In school B, the *Tribes* program had been in place for approximately six months. A survey used to determine how students perceived their school climate at the time of the study found no statistical difference between the two schools on measures of school climate. There was, however, a statistically important difference between the levels of reported bullying at the two schools, because of school rules and parental involvement, which lead to varying conclusions about the effectiveness of the program.

While the effectiveness of programs to improve school climate still needs more research, many programs are being developed, such as *Going Places*, a problem behavior prevention project detailed over a decade ago in a 1999 study by Simons et al. have components that address teacher involvement, student involvement, and parent involvement. The program explained that “Schools can compete for students’ affiliation by teaching social skills, improving classroom climate, modifying school environment, and enlisting active involvement and support by parents” (p. 106).

Through their research, the creators of these programs recognized something that many teachers and administrators have suspected all along: that improving school climate can only be accomplished when major stakeholders in the school are involved in the process.

## Summary

The literature review presented examples of scholarly research which included evidence of studies that showed a relationship between school climate and bullying, as well as research that did not support this theory. One concept that was certain was that school safety is paramount in today's society. Safety must be the first area that is addressed in every school, but school climate research indicated that the best way to address safety concerns was by building strong school communities with respectful and trusting relationships among and between teachers and students with parents, school staff, and the surrounding community (Cohen, 2012). Research found evidence that schools with high relational trust (good social relationships among members of the school community) are more likely to make changes that improve student achievement (Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, & Easton, 2010).

This study will add to the body of research that attempts to establish a relationship between perceptions of school climate and instances of bullying behaviors. It tested the hypothesis that students' reports of bullying behavior were related to school climate at their high schools. One can theorize that an improved school climate would decrease bullying or violent behavior. If this study proves that a relationship between a school's climate and bullying, school districts may work more diligently towards creating a positive culture in which students are safe and free of bullying and violent behaviors. When parents, students, teachers, and community members work together towards the specific goal of improving school climate, then instances of bullying could be addressed and reduced. Chapter Three contains a description of the research design, research methods, participants, instruments, and data collection procedures used to study the framework.

## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

In recent years, many researchers and educators have studied the causes of bullying in schools and have recognized the importance of a K-12 school climate (Thapa et al., 2012). This research study continues in this vein to determine whether a correlation between student perceptions of school climate and instances of bullying in their high schools existed. If this research found a relationship between positive school climate and bullying, it could have implications for schools as they set policies that will assist in the development of positive school climate and reduce instances of bullying.

The following information will explain the purpose of the study and how the cross-sectional design was implemented. A strong focus was to collect participant data through surveys to determine if a relationship between school climate and bullying existed. A discussion is included to explain how quantitative research was collected to provide data, and the conclusion of this chapter explains the methods used to analyze the quantitative data.

#### **Statement of the Problem**

Research suggested that the more exposure youth have to environmental assets, the less likely they are to engage in risky behaviors and the more likely they are to engage in healthy and positive behaviors (Perkins & Borden, 2003; Scales, Benson, Leffert, & Blyth, 2000). Positive school climate has been repeatedly identified as a key asset and target for intervention to have broad impact on students (Perkins & Borden, 2003). Therefore, the intent of this study was to expand on the current research related to school climate and bullying. Furthermore, the researcher analyzed data to determine how the participants perceived school climate and bullying in their high schools.

### **Research Questions**

After reviewing the literature and analyzing a variety of instruments which measure bullying and school climate, the following questions were formulated for this study:

1. What effect do demographic factors, such as a student's gender and the urban/rural/suburban classification of the student's high school, have on the student's perceptions of bullying?
2. What effect do demographic factors, such as a student's gender and the urban/rural/suburban classification of the student's high school, have on the student's perceptions of school climate?
3. What is the relationship between the perceptions of high school climate and instances of bullying?

### **Population, Sample, and Participants**

The purpose of this quantitative study was to analyze the relationship between perceptions of school climate and bullying at the high school level among college freshmen. In this study, a freshman student was defined as a student who entered the university in the fall after he or she graduated from high school. During the Spring Semester of 2015, approximately 2,000 Indiana University of Pennsylvania freshmen students, aged 18 and older, were the targeted population asked to participate in a web-based electronic survey disseminated via student email. These students were selected because they recently graduated high school and represented a diverse population from high schools across the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, as well as other states. The survey participants' perceptions and experiences in high school were used to determine if a relationship between school climate and bullying existed.

Indiana University of Pennsylvania (IUP) is a public university that was founded in 1875. It is located 55 miles northeast of Pittsburgh and sits on 374 acres of land. With 56% of the population being female and 44% being male, IUP has over 14,000 students, offers over 140 undergraduate majors, and approximately 70 graduate programs (IUP, 2014). It represents a diverse population with 44 attending states and 66 attending countries. A majority of its students have a grade point average of 3.2 or better and score 1000 or higher on their SAT (IUP, 2014).

The researcher chose to survey college freshmen because a majority of bullying research was done in middle schools. This survey was unique because it asked college freshmen to reflect to grades 9 through 12 of their high school years to determine if they experienced a relationship between bullying and school climate. Since the researcher was able to identify college freshmen and sample participants directly, a single-stage sampling procedure was used (Creswell, 2009). A stratified sample was used since the characteristics of both males and females were represented in the sample, and the sample reflects the true proportion in the population of individuals with certain characteristics (Fowler, 2002). An analysis was conducted to determine whether a relationship existed between school climate and bullying.

### **Procedure**

With approval from the university, a stratified sample of 2,000 emails were sent to college freshmen. Survey questions were posted on a secure, password-protected site maintained by the information technology staff at the Applied Research Lab (ARL) within the institution. Invitations were sent via email to freshmen students during the Spring Semester of the 2015 academic year (See Appendix D). Each invitation contained a unique password for each student. Students were granted access to the site for up to four weeks after the initial invitation. The instructions provided to students explained that all information collected was strictly confidential

and students were permitted to stop the survey at any point. To help remind students to complete the survey, two follow-up emails were sent after the initial survey. Due to concerns of low response rates, participants taking the survey were eligible to enter a drawing for a \$100 gift card.

### **Pilot Survey**

Two pilot studies were conducted to address reliability and validity. Research suggested that a pilot study was used to increase reliability, increase clarity of directions, and increase clarity of questions (Fowler, 2009). According to Schwandt (2001), reliability is a measurement concern generally associated with the credibility of research findings or interpretations of research findings. The researcher used reliability of measures in various ways. To eliminate discrepancy, definitions of the following were provided to the participant before the related questions to make sure the participant taking the School Climate and Bullying Survey (Cornell, 2012) understood what the researcher meant when asking about the various types of bullying:

**Physical bullying:** involves repeatedly hitting, kicking, or shoving someone weaker on purpose.

**Verbal bullying:** involves repeatedly teasing, putting down, or insulting someone on purpose.

**Social bullying:** involves getting others repeatedly to ignore or leave someone out on purpose.

**Cyberbullying:** involves using technology (cell phone, email, internet chat and posting, etc.) to tease or put down someone.

Additionally, definitions of rural, urban, and suburban were provided so the participant understands the questions related to demographics:

**Rural:** relating to the countryside other than the town or city.

**Urban:** relating to the town or city.

**Suburban:** relating to an outlying part of the town or city.

Also, survey questions were based on information found in the literature formulated to answer the research questions. After receiving feedback from the participants, the survey was revised accordingly to increase validity and to make sure the data responses received measured what the researcher intended to measure. Finally, criterion related validity was used to compare the results of the revised Likert scale to the results of the previous instrument (Creswell, 2009).

A pilot study using the School Climate and Bullying Survey (Appendix A) was conducted at a high school located in Southwestern Pennsylvania consisting of 424 student participants from grades 9 through 12. The data were collected during the fall and winter months of 2014-2015, and was comprised of 112 ninth graders, 80 tenth graders, 136 eleventh graders, and 96 twelfth graders. The high school students completed the School Climate Bullying Survey (SCBS) online under staff supervision and made aware that their answers were confidential and they could stop taking the survey at any time. Staff members proctored the survey by reading the directions and assisting students when necessary. The SCBS was entered into the computer program SurveyMonkey and descriptive data were retrieved from this program. Students completed the survey in approximately 15 minutes or less. Upon completion of the survey, a randomly selected group of 20 students were questioned to determine how they rated each question of the survey based on confusion and difficulty, and asked to provide recommendations for improving the survey. Of these twenty students, few were unsure how to classify their race, and some students were uncertain of how to classify their high school demographically. Several students commented “why” the validity questions such as, “I am telling the truth on this survey” and “I am not paying attention to how I answer this survey,” were included during the survey.

The modified SCBS (Appendix B) was given to nineteen college freshmen students, ages eighteen and above at a public university in Southwestern Pennsylvania. The researcher

explained the directions of the pen/paper SCBS and reiterated that their answers were confidential and they could stop taking the survey at any time. The students took between 10 to 15 minutes to complete the survey. Upon completion of the survey, students were permitted to provide feedback on any concerns he/she had regarding confusing questions or suggestions for the survey. The concerns of the survey were as follows: Of the two validity questions “I am telling the truth on this survey” and “I am not paying attention to how I answer this survey,” several of the participants felt these questions would be better at the end of the survey or not included at all. Additionally, the respondents wanted to share their experiences with bullying and cyberbullying. As a result, the researcher determined that an open-ended question would be added at the end of the survey, and the validity questions would be eliminated. The data from this survey was entered into SurveyMonkey and descriptive data were retrieved from this program.

To test reliability and validity of the pilot study among high school students, the results were compared to a previous study using the same valid and reliable School Climate and Bullying Survey that was given to a separate group of Virginia high school students in grades 9 through 12. According to Creswell (2009), reliability is concerned with establishing consistency within repeated measures. When both studies were compared, the researcher found a correlation between school climate measures and student risk behaviors. The pattern of both surveys was consistent with the interpretation that school climate may influence risk behavior. Students who displayed attitudes supportive of aggression also reported higher levels of risk behavior. Both studies exhibited a strong correlation that students with perceptions of bullying are strongly associated with risk behavior. Additionally, students that were more willing to seek help from a teacher were less likely to engage in risk behaviors.

### **Instrument Development**

The School Climate Bullying Survey (SCBS) was the instrument used to gather data for the quantitative component of this study because it contained validated items which increased the reliability and validity of the study. With permission from the creator of the SCBS, Dr. Dewey Cornell, the researcher modified the SCBS for this study (See Appendix E).

The SCBS (Cornell & Sheras, 2003) is a survey used to measure attitudes and behaviors associated with school climate and bullying, and was developed to assess the important features of school climate with three scales: Prevalence of Teasing and Bullying, Aggressive Attitudes, and Willingness to Seek Help. It represents a combination of questions related to bullying and school climate and has been used in studies to evaluate the effect of bullying prevention programs (Brokenbrough, 2001) and to examine behavioral and attitudinal characteristics of students identified as bullies (Cornell, Sheras, & Cole 2006; Thunfors & Cornell, 2008). The survey developed by Cornell and Sheras also asked participants about their demographic background and if they have been victims or perpetrators of physical, verbal, or social bullying, as well as whom, if anyone, participants have told that they were being bullied.

The SCBS has been used primarily with students in grades six through nine (Bandyopadhyay et al., 2009) and has been investigated using construct validity for the survey's three bullying school climate scales by using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) in a sample of 3,635 ninth through twelfth grade students. The validity of the SCBS has also been examined, specifically the school climate portion of the survey and relationship between school climate and external measures of school disorder. The study used factor analyses to investigate the construct validity of three school climate scales in a sample of 2,111 middle school students divided into two subsamples. According to Bandyopadhyay and colleagues, the structure of the survey was

investigated through exploratory factor analysis in one subsample and cross-validated through confirmatory factor analysis in the second subsample. Each of the school climate scales made a statistically significant independent contribution to the prediction of the dependent measures.

A School Climate Bullying Survey Matrix (Table 1) was used to let the reader distinguish what survey question was linked to the specific research question. The SCBS (Appendix A) was used to assess bullying behaviors and relevant aspects of school climate (Cornell, 2011). A modified version of this survey (Appendix B) was given to college freshmen as a pilot, and Appendix C was used for this study after additional modifications were made. According to Cornell & Sheras (2003), it was designed to assess the nature and prevalence of bullying at school and to measure specific aspects of school climate that could guide bullying prevention efforts. This 4-point Likert-type scale offered answer choices ranging from (1 = *strongly disagree*, 2 = *disagree*, 3 = *agree*, 4 = *strongly agree*). According to Croasmun and Ostrom (2011), Likert scales provide a range of responses to a statement or series of statements. Maurer and Pierce (1998) explain that Likert rating scale measurements can be useful and reliable instruments for measuring self-efficacy.

Table 1

*School Climate Bullying Survey Matrix*

<b>Research Question</b>	<b>Survey Question Number</b>
What effect do demographic factors, such as a student's gender and the urban/rural/suburban classification of the student's high school, have on the student's perceptions of bullying?	1-10, 32-33
What effect do demographic factors, such as a student's gender and the urban/rural/suburban classification of the student's high school, have on the student's perceptions of school climate?	11-33
What is the relationship between the perceptions of high school climate and instances of bullying?	1-35
<i>Survey Data Matrix Comparison of Gender and Demographics on School Bullying</i>	<i>Survey Instrument Questions</i>
Research Question #1  What effect do demographic factors, such as a student's gender and the urban/rural/suburban classification of the student's high school, have on the student's perceptions of bullying?	<p>I have been bullied at school.</p> <p>I have bullied others at school.</p> <p>I have been physically bullied or threatened with physical bullying.</p> <p>I have physically bullied or threatened to physically bully another student.</p> <p>I have been verbally bullied.</p> <p>I have verbally bullied another student.</p> <p>I have been socially bullied.</p> <p>I have socially bullied another student.</p> <p>I have been cyberbullied.</p> <p>I have cyberbullied another student.</p>

<p><i>Survey Data Matrix</i>  <i>Comparison of Gender and Demographics</i>  <i>on School Climate</i></p>	<p><i>Survey Instrument Questions</i></p>
<p>Research Question #2</p> <p>What effect do demographic factors, such as a student's gender and the urban/rural/suburban classification of the student's high school, have on the student's perceptions of school climate?</p>	<p>Bullying was a problem at my high school.</p> <p>If another student was bullying me, I would tell one of the teachers or staff at school.</p> <p>Students at my high school often got teased about their clothing or physical appearance.</p> <p>If another student brought a gun to school, I would tell a teacher or staff member.</p> <p>If you fight a lot, everyone will look up to you.</p> <p>Students at my high school got put down because of their race or ethnicity.</p> <p>Teachers made it clear to students that bullying was not tolerated.</p> <p>If another student talked about killing someone, I would tell one of the teachers or staff at school.</p> <p>Sometimes you only have two choices – get punched or punch the other person first.</p> <p>Students at my high school tried to stop bullying when they saw it happen.</p> <p>Teachers made it clear to students that bullying is not tolerated.</p> <p>If I told a teacher that someone bullied me, they would do something to help.</p> <p>There were adults at my school that I could go to if I had a personal problem.</p> <p>Students told teachers when other students were being bullied.</p> <p>If you were afraid to fight, you didn't have many friends.</p>

	<p>Students told teachers when other students were being bullied.</p> <p>The teachers at my school genuinely cared about me.</p> <p>If someone threatens you, it is okay to hit that person.</p> <p>There were a lot of teasing about sexual topics at my high school.</p> <p>Students who are bullied or teased mostly deserved it.</p> <p>Bullying in school was sometimes fun to do.</p> <p>Students at my school belonged to groups that didn't get along with one another.</p>
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### **Research Design**

A cross-sectional survey design was used to determine if a relationship between school climate and bullying exists. According to Creswell (2009), cross-sectional studies focus on data collected at one point in time. This quantitative research survey was sent to 2,000 college freshmen. Revised by the researcher, the survey used for this study contained questions from a validated School Climate Bullying Survey (SCBS). Survey methods are appropriate for asking individuals to self-report about particular behaviors, beliefs, attitudes, opinions, characteristics, expectations, self-classifications, and knowledge (Neuman, 2004). The purpose of this survey method was to generate quantitative or numerical data about students' perceptions that could later be statistically analyzed (Fowler, 2002). Prior to sending out the electronic survey, a pilot study was conducted. Feedback from the pilot was used to make changes to the survey. After the survey was completed, data were entered into Statistical Package for the Social Sciences

(SPSS) for analysis. SPSS used descriptive and inferential statistics to report the data (Creswell, 2009).

### **Quantitative Research**

This study utilized a quantitative survey because it provided a numeric depiction of perceptions of a population (Creswell, 2009). According to Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004), “the strengths of quantitative research include: 1) it provides accurate, numerical data, 2) the results of the research are independent of the researcher, and 3) it focuses on deduction and explanation through statistical analysis.” Through this quantitative survey, students’ perceptions of school climate and bullying were measured to determine if a relationship exists. Data for this study were collected by using a survey comprised of Likert scale and demographic questions.

Descriptive and inferential numeric analysis were used for this study. According to Creswell (2009), “Descriptive statistics refers to the frequency, mean, and standard deviation of the data, and inferential statistics refers to significances where one variable has a statistical significance with another variable.” By using these two types of statistics, the researcher was provided results that were interpreted to formulate conclusions.

Upon completion of the survey, the researcher transferred the data from Qualtrics into SPSS. This computer software allowed the researcher to conduct descriptive and inferential statistical analysis. The mean, frequency, and standard deviation from the Likert scale questions determined descriptive statistics (Creswell, 2009; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). An analysis of each demographic question was completed to determine frequency.

### **Reliability**

According to Schwandt (2001), reliability is a measurement concern generally associated with the credibility of research findings or interpretations of research findings. The researcher

used reliability of measures in various ways. First, to eliminate discrepancy, a definition of physical, verbal, social, and cyberbullying was provided before the related questions to make sure the participant taking the survey understood what the researcher meant when asking about the various types of bullying. Second, definitions of rural, urban, and suburban were provided so the participant understood the questions related to demographics. Third, survey questions were based on information found in the literature formulated to answer the research questions. Fourth, each survey question included clear and consistent directions so the participant could easily understand them. Finally, each question was re-examined to avoid multiple components in a single question (Fowler, 2009).

### **Validity**

According to Fowler (2009), validity is increased when the instrument questions are reliable. To test for validity and improve questions and format, a pilot study was conducted. Feedback from the pilot study was used to realign the questions to increase validity. Therefore, validity for this study was increased from the feedback of the pilot and survey.

### **Analysis**

Analysis for this study used both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics were used for each survey question. An analysis was utilized with the Independent Variables of gender and demographics and perceptions of school climate and bullying as the Dependent Variables. An analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to determine if the survey instrument delineated that demographic and gender differences among participants exist. Inferential statistics were used to compare groups in terms of variables (Creswell, 2009). The goal of this targeted sample was to have all freshmen students complete the online survey to help determine if a relationship existed between school climate and bullying.

## Summary

The purpose of this study was to determine if there was a relationship between students' perceptions of their high schools' climates and students' reports of bullying in their high schools. Participants of this study consisted of college freshmen and surveys were completed online. The online survey measured if a relationship existed between school climate and bullying. Likert scale questions were used for this survey and converted into SPSS to develop descriptive and inferential statistics.

A conclusion was made to determine if students came from a school with positive or negative climate and bullying through the use of the School Climate Bullying Survey (SCBS). The research from this study may be used to formulate long-term prevention strategies against bullying by improving school climate. If this research finds a negative relationship between positive school climate and bullying, it could have implications for schools as they set policies concerning developing positive school climate and bullying. Chapter 4 will provide the results from the School Climate Bullying Survey. The data from the survey were summarized by the researcher.

## CHAPTER 4

### DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

The purpose of this quantitative study was to determine if a correlation existed between college freshmen's perceptions of school climate and instances of bullying. This study gathered data from college freshmen through the use of a survey. An analysis was completed by the researcher of the acquired data to determine if a correlation between school climate and instances of bullying was evident. This chapter will discuss the quantitative research results guided by each research question.

#### **Setting**

College freshmen at Indiana University of Pennsylvania were asked to complete a survey through the use of Qualtrics to obtain information about their high school bullying and school climate experiences. With the assistance of the Applied Research Lab (ARL), 2,000 surveys were emailed to a stratified sample of college freshmen, aged 18 or older. Emails were sent during the Spring Semester of the 2015 academic year. Each invitation contained a unique password for each student. Students were granted access to the survey for up to four weeks after the initial invitation. Two weeks after the initial email to complete the survey was sent to the participants, two additional follow-up emails were sent to remind students to complete the survey.

#### **Research Instrument**

After permission was given by the creator, Dr. Dewey Cornell (Appendix E), a modified School Climate and Bullying Survey (SCBS) instrument was used to gather data for this quantitative study. This survey was chosen for this study because it contained validated items. The SCBS (Appendix C) was used to measure attitudes and behaviors associated with school

climate and bullying, and was developed to assess the important features of school climate with three scales: Prevalence of Teasing and Bullying, Aggressive Attitudes, and Willingness to Seek Help (Cornell & Sheras, 2003). It represents a mixture of questions related to bullying and school climate and has been used in studies to evaluate the effect of bullying prevention programs (Brokenbrough, 2001) and to examine behavioral and attitudinal characteristics of students identified as bullies (Cornell, Sheras, & Cole 2006; Thunfors & Cornell, 2008). Additionally this instrument was used to ask participants about their demographic backgrounds and if they had been victims or perpetrators of physical, verbal, or social bullying, as well as whom, if anyone, participants had told that they were being bullied.

The purpose of this survey instrument was to examine student perceptions using a Likert-scale. The survey instrument consisted of 35 questions that were directly related to the research questions. The first section of the survey consisted of 10 questions related to bullying, while the second section consisted of 21 questions that was designed to elicit responses about school climate. Additionally, 4 demographic questions were provided at the end of the survey to gather information about high school demographic location, gender, age and ethnicity. Lastly, an open-ended question was used to give participants the opportunity to share their personal experiences related to bullying and gave the researcher an opportunity to gain more in-depth information about the perceptions students experienced.

Results from the surveys were transferred from Qualtrics into Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) for analysis. SPSS used descriptive and inferential statistics to report the data (Creswell, 2009). The mean, frequency, and standard deviation from the Likert scale questions determined the descriptive statistics (Creswell, 2009; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). An analysis of each demographic question was done to determine frequency.

### **Demographics of the Sample**

College freshmen, aged 18 or older at Indiana University of Pennsylvania (IUP), were asked to complete a survey through the use of Qualtrics to obtain information about their high school bullying and school climate experiences. The School Climate and Bullying Surveys were emailed to 2,000 college freshmen during the Spring Semester of 2015. Of the college freshmen that were emailed the survey, 442 (22%) opened it, 177 out of the 442 (40%) started it, and 154 out of 177 (87%) completed it. Demographic data for this study included gender, age, ethnicity, and the demographic location of his/her high school (urban, rural, or suburban).

#### **Gender and Age**

A majority of students that completed the survey were female (approximately 75%) and 25% were male (Table 2). Only freshmen students that were aged 18 to 21 were permitted to complete the survey. If a participant was not in the age requirement, Qualtrics eliminated him or her from the survey. Of the 154 participants who completed the survey, 88% of the respondents were aged 18 to 19. Approximately 6% were 20 years old, and 4.9% were 21 years old or older (Table 2). The information collected regarding the gender and age of the survey participants confirmed that a majority of the students were the correct age to take this survey since most students who graduate from high school are 18 or 19 years of age.

#### **Demographics of High School**

Participants were given a definition of each level of demographics (urban, rural, and suburban) and asked to select their high school's demographic location based on the definition to best describe the high school they attended. Of the responses, 38.2% were suburban, 36.8% were rural, and 25% were urban as shown in Table 2.

Table 2

*Sample Demographics*

Demographic Variable	Percent (N=144)
Age	
18	42.4
19	46.5
20	6.3
21+	4.9
Gender	
Male	25.7
Female	74.3
Ethnicity	
White	79.9
Hispanic or Latino	4.9
Black or African American	9.0
Asian/Pacific Islander	4.9
Other	1.4
High School Location	
Rural	36.8
Urban	25.0
Suburban	38.2

*Note.* Not all participants answered the demographic questions.

### **Bullying Survey Responses**

The following tables were analyzed in reference to questions 1 to 10 related to bullying. Table 3 demonstrates the participant data collected related to their experiences with bullying in high school as victims, and Table 4 demonstrates the participant data collected related to their experiences with bullying in high school as perpetrators.

#### **Experiences with Bullying in High School as Victims**

Table 3 illustrated the data that represented various participants' experiences with bullying in high school as victims. Within this table, of the 154 respondents, 53.2% of the students said they were never bullied in high school while 35.7% said they were bullied once or twice during their high school careers, and 7.8% said they were bullied about once per week.

Only 3.2% of the respondents said they were bullied several times per week. It appears that more than half (53.2%) of the survey population were not affected by bullying in high school and only a small percentage (11%) of the survey population were victims of bullying on a weekly basis.

In regards to the survey question that concerned being physically bullied or threatened by physical bullying, the response data in Table 3 indicated that 84.4% said they were never physically bullied, 14.9% said they were bullied once or twice, and .6% said they were physically bullied about once per week. This suggests that a majority (84.4%) of students were never physically bullied in high school and only a miniscule (.6%) amount of participants were physically bullied during high school on a weekly basis.

Furthermore, participants' responses to being verbally bullied indicated that 35.7% were never verbally bullied, 46.1% once or twice, 9.1% about once per week, and 9.1% have been verbally bullied several times per week. According to the data, a majority (81.8%) of the participants were verbally bullied never or once or twice during high school, while approximately 20% of the participants were verbally bullied once or several times per week.

An analysis of the responses from the 154 survey participants indicated that 48.7% have never been socially bullied, 35.7% have been socially bullied once or twice, 9.1% about once per week, and 6.5% several times per week as delineated in Table 3. It would appear that approximately half (48.7%) of the participants were never socially bullied while the other half (51.3%) admitted to being victims of social bullying at least once or twice and sometimes several times per week.

Lastly, when participants were asked about being cyberbullied by others, 68.2% were never cyberbullied, 27.3% once or twice, 3.2% about once per week, and 1.3% have been

cyberbullied several times per week. It is clear, therefore, that a majority (68.2%) of the population were never cyberbullied even though today's world is technology driven thereby enabling cyberbullying to occur through easily accessible social networking platforms. Based on the data shown in Table 3, only two (1.3%) participants were cyberbullied several times per week.

Table 3

*Experiencing Different Types of Bullying in High School as Victims*

Type of Bullying	Frequency (N=154)			
	Never	Once or Twice	About once per week	Several times per week
I Have Been Bullied at School	53.2	35.7	7.8	3.2
I Have Been Physically Bullied or Threatened	84.4	14.9	.6	0
I Have Been Verbally Bullied	35.7	46.1	9.1	9.1
I Have Been Socially Bullied	48.7	35.7	9.1	6.5
I Have Been Cyberbullied	68.2	27.3	3.2	1.3

**Experiences with Bullying in High School as Perpetrators**

In response to the question represented in Table 4, 68.8% of the 154 respondents reported that they never bullied anyone in high school, 27.3% reported that they bullied someone else once or twice over the course of their high school career, 1.9% reported that they bullied others about once per week, and 1.9% said they bullied others several times per week. Therefore, the data results make it appear that only a small percentage (3.8%) of participants bullied others on a weekly basis.

Additionally, in reply to the survey question pertaining to physically bullying or threatening others by physical bullying, 92.2% said they never physically bullied others, 7.8% said they bullied others once or twice. These statistics led to the supposition that a large portion (92.2%) of the participants never physically bullied another student, while only a small portion (7.8%) physically bullied another student once or twice during high school.

Participants were asked to rate the frequency, if any, of which they verbally bullied others. Students responded with 61% of never bullying others, 31.2% once or twice, 5.8% about once per week, and 1.9% have verbally bullied others several times per week. These results indicated that a majority (61%) of participants have never verbally bullied another student, but 39% of participants admitted to verbally bullying another student.

In answer to socially bullying others, 76% of the 154 respondents said they have never socially bullied another person, 20.1% have socially bullied someone once or twice, 3.2% about once per week, and .6% several times per week according to Table 4. Evidently, a majority (76%) of the population surveyed never socially bullied another student. Only one (.6%) participant admitted to socially bullying another student several times per week.

Finally, student responses to cyberbullying others are represented in this table. Participants responded with 87% of never cyberbullying others, 11% once or twice, and 1.9% have cyberbullied others about once per week. This data would suggest that cyberbullying was not that great of a concern to the participants in this survey. For this study, only approximately 2% of the survey population reported being cyberbullied about once or twice per week.

Table 4

*Experiencing Different Types of Bullying in High School as Perpetrators*

Type of Bullying	Frequency (N=154)			
	Never	Once or Twice	About once per week	Several times per week
I Have Bullied Others	68.8	27.3	1.9	1.9
I Have Physically Bullied or Threatened to Physically Bully Another	92.2	7.8	0	0
I Have Verbally Bullied Another	61.0	31.2	5.8	1.9
I Have Socially Bullied Another	76.0	20.1	3.2	.6
I Have Cyberbullied Another	87.0	11.0	1.9	0

**Research Questions**

Three research questions were used for this quantitative study. Each research question was related to the survey that was completed by college freshmen. Research question one was connected to survey questions 1 to 10. Research question two was related to survey questions 11 to 31. Research question three was linked to all survey questions and responses. The following questions were formulated for this study:

1. What effect do demographic factors, such as a student's gender and the urban/rural/suburban classification of the student's high school, have on the student's perceptions of bullying?

2. What effect do demographic factors, such as a student's gender and the urban/rural/suburban classification of the student's high school, have on the student's perceptions of school climate?
3. What is the relationship between the perceptions of high school climate and instances of bullying?

### Research Question One

What effect do demographic factors, such as a student's gender and the urban/rural/suburban classification of the student's high school, have on the student's perceptions of bullying?

Table 5

#### *Mean Score of Experiences of Bullying by Gender*

Gender	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Male	37	1.47	.481
Female	107	1.41	.385

*Note.*  $t(142) = .788, p = .438$

Table 6

#### *Demographic Comparison of Bullying*

Demographics	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Rural	53	1.32	.380
Urban	36	1.48	.463
Suburban	55	1.48	.392
Total	144	1.42	.411

*Note.*  $F(2, 141) = 2.519, p = .084$

An independent t-test was conducted to evaluate the impact of gender on the perceived level of bullying in high schools (Table 5). The variability in perceived bullying levels was similar for males (SD = 0.481) and females (SD = 0.385). Therefore, no statistically significant difference ( $p > .05$ ) was found in perceived level of bullying between males (M = 1.47) and females (M = 1.41).

A one-way analysis of variance was conducted to find the differences between perceived demographic comparisons of bullying. Suburban (SD = .392), rural (SD = .380), and urban (SD = .463) standard deviations of perceptions of bullying were demonstrated in Table 6. The variability in perceived demographic levels were similar for rural (M = 1.32), urban (M = 1.48) and suburban (M = 1.48) mean scores. According to the data, there was no significant difference because the  $p$  value (.084) was greater than .05.

Table 7

*Analysis of Three Demographic Settings*

		Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	$p$	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Rural	Urban	-.158	.088	.173	-.3658	.0499
	Suburban	-.157	.078	.113	-.3426	.0279
Urban	Rural	.158	.088	.173	-.0499	.3658
	Suburban	.001	.087	1.000	-.2058	.2069
Suburban	Rural	.157	.078	.113	-.0279	.3426
	Urban	-.001	.087	1.000	-.2069	.2058

Note. \* $p < .05$  \*\* $p < .01$  \*\*\* $p < .001$

An analysis was completed by using an Anova test to compare the means of the three demographic settings. According to the data, urban (M = .158), suburban (M = .001), and rural (M = -.158) were described in Table 7. The results of this test demonstrated that the differences were not significant ( $p > .05$ ).

## Research Question One Analysis

The first part of the survey consisted of 10 questions related to bullying. College freshmen were asked to reflect on their high school years and provide their perceptions about bullying. Gender and demographics were the included variables correlated together. There was no significant correlation between the participants' high school demographics or gender related to bullying. This study will continue to the results of the survey for the school climate portion of the study.

### School Climate Survey Responses

The following tables were analyzed in reference to questions 11 to 31 related to school climate. These tables were categorized into three separate categories. Table 8 demonstrates the perceptions to seek help from teachers or peers. Table 9 was used to show high school perceptions of teasing and bullying and Table 10 displays high school perceptions of aggressive attitudes.

Table 8

#### *High School Perceptions of Teachers and Peers*

School climate indicators	Percentages (N=154)			
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
If Another Student was Bullying Me, I Would Tell One of the Teachers or Staff at School	16.6	42.1	31	10.3
Students Tried to Stop Bullying when They Saw it Happening	15.2	42.8	37.9	4.1

If Another Student Brought a Gun to School, I Would Tell One of the Teachers or Staff at School	1.4	4.1	13.8	80.7
Teachers Made it Clear to Students that Bullying was Not Tolerated	6.9	20.0	41.4	31.7
If Another Student Talked about Killing Someone, I Would Tell One of the Teachers or Staff at School	2.1	13.1	35.9	49.0
If I told a teacher that someone was bullying me, the teacher would do something to help	4.8	16.6	54.5	24.1
There were adults at my school I could go to if I had personal problems	4.8	6.9	49.7	38.6
Students would tell teachers when other students were being bullied	11.0	41.4	37.9	9.7
The teachers at my school genuinely cared about me doing well	3.4	12.4	47.6	36.6

Table 8 provided the statistical results of participants' responses of their high school perceptions of teachers and peers. In reply to the statement described when participants were asked if they felt comfortable telling an adult when they were being bullied, 16.6% strongly disagreed, 42.1% disagreed, 31% agreed, and 10.3% strongly agreed. The implication of the data presented in Table 8 is that a majority (58.7%) of the participants did not feel comfortable telling an adult that they were being bullied.

In regards to whether participants would try to stop bullying if they saw it happening in their high school 15.2% strongly disagreed, 42.8% disagreed, 37.9% agreed, and 4.1% strongly agreed as presented in Table 8. It is clear, therefore, that a majority (58%) of students who witnessed bullying did not try to stop it when it was occurring. Furthermore, this table showed that 1.4% of the participants strongly disagreed, 4.1% disagreed, 13.8% agreed, and 80.7% strongly agreed when asked if another student brought a gun to school, they would tell a teacher or staff member. Since approximately 95% of the population agreed or strongly agreed, it would suggest that a high percent of participants felt comfortable telling a teacher or staff member that another student brought a gun to school.

When participants were asked if teachers made it clear that bullying was not tolerated in their high school, 6.9% strongly disagreed, 20% disagreed, 41.4% agreed, and 31.7% strongly agreed as reported in Table 8. Evidently, a majority (73.1%) of participants agreed or strongly agreed that teachers made it clear to students that bullying was not tolerated.

This table also provided participants' responses in regards to if another student talked about killing someone, he/she would tell one of the teachers or staff at school in their high school. The results indicated that 2.1% strongly disagreed, 13.1% disagreed, 35.9% agreed, and 49% strongly agreed. Since approximately 85% of the participants agreed or strongly agreed

that they would tell a teacher or staff member about a student talking about killing themselves, this statistic indicated that a majority of respondents felt comfortable talking to a staff member or teacher.

When asked if they told a teacher that someone was bullying them, the teacher would do something to help in their high school, 4.8% of participants strongly disagreed, 16.6% disagreed, 54.5% agreed, and 24.1% strongly agreed. This data would lead one to form the conclusion that a majority (78.6%) of the participants would tell a teacher and feel confident that the teacher would do something to help.

An analysis of participants' results when asked if there were adults a student could go to if he or she had personal problems indicated that 4.8% strongly disagreed, 6.9% disagreed, 49.7% agreed, and 38.6% strongly agreed. Since approximately 88% of the participants agreed or strongly agreed, the data suggest the participants felt comfortable going to an adult if they had personal problems.

Additionally, the data provided in Table 8 illustrates that when participants were asked if students would tell teachers when other students were being bullied in their high school, 11% strongly disagreed, 41.4% disagreed, 37.9% agreed, and 9.7% strongly agreed. This would indicate that a majority (52.4%) of participants disagreed or strongly disagreed to telling a teacher when another student was being bullied.

Moreover, when participants were asked if teachers at their school genuinely cared about them doing well as illustrated in this table, 3.4% strongly disagreed, 12.4% disagreed, 47.6% agreed, and 36.6% strongly agreed. It would appear that a majority (84.2%) of the participants felt that the teachers genuinely cared about their success in high school.

Table 9

*High School Perceptions of Teasing and Bullying*

School climate indicators	Percentages (N=154)			
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Bullying Was a Problem at my High School	9.1	35.1	37.0	13
Students at my High School Got Teased About Their Clothing or Physical Appearance	8.3	18.6	48.3	24.8
Students at my High School Got Put Down because of their Race or Ethnicity	29.7	43.4	20.7	6.2
There was a lot of teasing about sexual topics at my school	8.3	37.9	40.0	13.8
Students in my high school belonged to groups that didn't get along with one another	15.9	24.1	46.2	13.8

Table 9 encapsulated participants' responses to varying statements concerning their high school perceptions of bullying and teasing. As shown in this table, when participants were asked if bullying was a problem in their high school, 9.7% strongly disagreed, 37.2% disagreed, 39.3% agreed, and 13.8% strongly agreed. These statistics may signify that depending on the individual, about half (53.1%) of the participants felt that bullying was a problem and the other half (46.9%) felt that it was not a problem at their high school.

When participants were asked if students were teased about their clothing or physical appearance 8.3% strongly disagreed, 18.6% disagreed, 48.3% agreed, and 24.8% strongly agreed as represented in Table 9. Since approximately 73% of the participants agreed, it would suggest that appearance and clothing were major indicators as a result of bullying and teasing.

In addition, when participants were asked if students got put down because of their race or ethnicity in their high school, 29.7% strongly disagreed, 43.4% disagreed, 20.7% agreed, and 6.2% strongly agreed. It would appear that race or ethnicity was not a major indicator of bullying since 73.1% of students strongly disagreed or disagreed as reported.

In response to whether there was a lot of teasing about sexual topics in their high school, 8.3% of participants strongly disagreed, 37.9% disagreed, 40% agreed, and 13.8% strongly agreed as described. The implication of this data presented in Table 9 is that a majority (53.8%) of the participants agreed or strongly agreed that there were a lot of teasing about sexual topics during high school.

Furthermore, the data in Table 9 indicated that when participants were asked if students in their high school belonged to groups that didn't get along with one another, 15.9% strongly disagreed, 24.1% disagreed, 46.2% agreed, and 13.8% strongly agreed. This data would suggest that a majority (60%) of the participants surveyed felt that students in their high schools belonged to groups that didn't get along with one another.

Table 10

*High School Perceptions of Aggressive Attitudes*

School climate indicators	Percentages (N=154)			
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Students who were bullied or teased mostly deserved it	54.5	40.0	4.1	1.4
It felt good if I hit someone	67.6	24.8	6.2	1.4
If you fought a lot, everyone would look up to you	62.1	29.0	6.9	2.1
Sometimes you only had two choices – get punched or punch the other person first	52.4	31.0	12.4	4.1
If you were afraid to fight, you didn't have many friends	64.8	29.0	5.5	.7
If someone threatened you, it was ok to hit that person	46.2	37.2	15.9	.7
Bullying was sometimes fun to do	63.4	29.7	5.5	1.4

Participants were asked to provide their perceptions of aggressive attitudes in their high school by responding to how and/or why they engaged in various aggressively charged situations as delineated in Table 10. This table illustrated that when participants were asked if students who were bullied or teased mostly deserved it in their high school, 54.5% strongly disagreed,

40% disagreed, 4.1% agreed, and 1.4% strongly agreed. Since approximately 95% of participants strongly disagreed or disagreed, it would suggest that a majority of participants perceived that students who were bullied or teased did not deserve it.

When participants were asked if it felt good to hit someone in their high school, 67.6% strongly disagreed, 24.8% disagreed, 6.2% agreed, and 1.4% strongly agreed. It would appear that only a small percent (7.6%) of the participants felt good if they hit someone. Approximately 92% of the population strongly disagreed or disagreed that it made them feel better if they hit someone.

Within Table 10, when participants were asked if fighting would result in others looking up to the person fighting, 62.1% strongly disagreed, 29% disagreed, 6.9% agreed, and 2.1% strongly agreed. This would give the impression, since approximately 91% of the population strongly disagreed or disagreed, that everyone would look up to an individual that fought frequently.

Additionally, when participants were asked if only had two choices were available – get punched or punch the other person first their high school, 52.4% strongly disagreed, 31% disagreed, 12.4% agreed, and 4.1% strongly agreed. This data would propose that a majority (83.4%) of the participants strongly disagree or disagree with the survey question of two choices – get punched or punch the other person first.

In response to whether a fear of fighting led to fewer friends in their high school 64.8% strongly disagreed, 29% disagreed, 5.5% agreed, and .7% strongly agreed according to the information in Table 10. It would appear that only a small percent (6.2%) of the population surveyed felt that if you were afraid to fight, you didn't have many friends. Almost 94% of the

participants strongly disagreed or disagreed that if you were afraid to fight, you didn't have many friends.

Likewise, when participants were asked if being threatened warranted hitting that person in their high school, 46.2% strongly disagreed, 37.2% disagreed, 15.9% agreed, and .7% strongly agreed. It would appear that a majority (83%) of the participants strongly disagreed or disagreed that it was okay to hit the person that threatened you.

Finally, the data shown in Table 10 indicated that when participants were asked if bullying was sometimes fun to do in their high school, 63.4% strongly disagreed, 29.7% disagreed, 5.5% agreed, and 1.4% strongly agreed. It would give the impression that a majority (93%) of the participants strongly disagreed or disagreed that bullying was sometimes fun to do.

### **Research Question Two**

What effect do demographic factors, such as a student's gender and the urban/rural/suburban classification of the student's high school, have on the student's perceptions of school climate?

Table 11

#### *Mean Score of Experiences of School Climate by Gender*

Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Male	37	2.88	.421
Female	107	3.05	.354

*Note.*  $t(142) = -2.38, p = .018$

In Table 11, an independent t-test was completed; it demonstrated that females ( $M = 3.05$ ) perceived school climate to be more positive than males ( $M = 2.88$ ) because their mean score was higher. According to the data, there were a significant difference in scores for males and females because the  $p$  value (.018) was less than .05.

Table 12

*Demographic Comparison of School Climate*

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Rural	53	2.99	.331
Urban	36	3.01	.395
Suburban	55	3.01	.414
Total	144	3.00	.378

Note.  $F(2, 141) = .059, p = .942$

A one-way analysis of variance was completed to find the differences between perceived demographic comparisons of school climate. As a result, urban ( $M = 3.01$ ), suburban ( $M = 3.01$ ), and rural ( $M = 2.99$ ) students demonstrated very close mean scores. Table 12 displayed urban ( $SD = .395$ ), suburban ( $SD = .414$ ), and rural ( $SD = .331$ ) perceptions of school climate according to standard deviations. According to the data, there was no significant difference because the  $p$  value (.942) was greater than .05.

Table 13

*Analysis of Three Demographic Settings*

		Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	$p$	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Rural	Urban	-.025	.082	.949	-.2199	.1693
	Suburban	-.020	.073	.959	-.1937	.1531
Urban	Rural	.025	.082	.949	-.1693	.2199
	Suburban	.005	.082	.998	-.1881	.1982
Suburban	Rural	.020	.073	.959	-.1531	.1937
	Urban	-.005	.082	.998	-.1982	.1881

Note. \* $p < .05$  \*\* $p < .01$  \*\*\* $p < .001$

An Anova test was used to compare means of the three demographic settings to climate in Table 13. This table demonstrated that participants were more consistent when analyzing demographics of school climate than bullying because the standard deviations were smaller. The 95% confidence interval was extremely close stating there was minimal variance between demographics and climate. The results from this table confirmed that there was not a significant difference of how students felt about climate demographically because the  $p$  value (.942) was greater than .05.

### **Research Question Two Analysis**

The second part of the survey consisted of 21 questions related to school climate. College freshmen were asked to reflect on their high school years and give their perceptions in regards to bullying. The variables that were correlated consisted of gender and demographics. As a result of the survey, no significant correlation existed between the participants' high school demographics and school climate ( $p > .05$ ). However, there was a significant difference in gender because females perceived their school climate to be more positive than males ( $p < .05$ ). This study will continue to examine the results of the survey to determine the relationships between school climate and bullying.

### **Research Question Three**

What is the relationship between the perceptions of high school climate and instances of bullying?

Table 14

*Correlations between Bullying and School Climate*

	Bullying	Climate
Pearson Correlation	1	-.254
p (2-tailed)		.002
N	154	145

*Note.* Correlation was significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

**Research Question Three Analysis**

A 2-tailed t-test was utilized to determine the relationships between school climate and instances of bullying. According to the survey results of Items 1 through 35, there was a significant difference between school climate and bullying because the  $p$  value of .002 obtained was less than .05 as described in Table 14. A Pearson Correlation Coefficient test was performed and a negative correlation resulted of -.254. The results of this data demonstrated that schools with better school climates tended to have lower incidences of bullying.

**Reliability of the Study**

Table 15

*Evaluation of Survey Internal Consistency via Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha*

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.845	10

In Table 15, a Cronbach's Alpha test was completed to determine reliability of the first 10 questions of the survey related to bullying. The analysis demonstrated an acceptable reliable scale (Cronbach's = .845). This test was considered reliable because the results were .845 and above .70.

Table 16

*Evaluation of Survey Internal Consistency via Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha*

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.715	21

A Cronbach's Alpha test was completed to determine the reliability of questions 11 through 31 of the survey related to school climate. The analysis demonstrated an acceptable reliable scale (Cronbach's = .715). In Table 16, since the results were .715 and above .70, this test was considered reliable.

### **Open-Ended Survey Responses**

The modified SCBS concluded with an optional open-ended question. This open-ended question gave the researcher an opportunity to gain more in-depth information about the participant's perceptions of school climate and bullying. The question asked "If you have experienced bullying in high school and would like to share your personal experiences, please do so in the box below." Of the 154 participants that answered the survey, 18 (8.5%) answered the open-ended question. These responses consisted of the following:

- "After being dumped by my high school sweet heart, I lost most of my old friends who I just hadn't seen much of while we dated. Everyone ignored me and spread rumors and I sat alone at lunch every day. There was one guy in my grade who told everyone that I was gay and would follow me down the halls yelling and threatening me. Teachers in the hallway just watched and did absolutely nothing to stop it. I hated high school, and my grades, which had been exemplary up until that point, fell off some. I was depressed and afraid to go to school most days. This all happened my senior year of high school. Before that, I was pretty well liked by students and staff and involved in activities."

- “Bullying was not a huge problem. Only a few students, those usually seen as the clowns, often verbally bullied others.”
- “During my High School career I was mostly bullied for being really nice to girls. The guys enjoyed pointing, calling me a faggot, etc., for the way I dressed and treated girls. Though I am not gay, and had a girlfriend majority of the time I was in school, the teasing still really got to me and hurt me; I still get this in college now.”
- “I am a deeply disturbed human. I suffer from multiple psychological disorders, was bullied as a child, and was abused until I moved out. Sometimes I lash out emotionally or physically at others, and it makes me feel better in the moment, but I regret hurting people, and I want to stop. I want to feel okay for once in my life. I wish I could forgive myself for my mistakes. I wish I could make it all better.”
- “I couldn't go to high school football games. The student section chanted insults at me until I cried and went home. I wanted to die. High school was the worst experience of my life.”
- “I got bullied by teachers.”
- “I knew a few students in high school who were threatened to a point at which they felt more comfortable attending cyber school. I also took part in mild bullying via Facebook with a few friends in ninth grade, and although I've apologized since with sincere remorse, I still feel terribly that I contributed to making jokes in such a way that I belittled someone else. I feel that the cyber component to bullying exists as a huge problem as it creates a sense of anonymity and security to the bully. I hope the state of the way we treat each other improves.”
- “I was bullied for dating a kid that I really liked, and they didn't.”

- “I was bullied in middle school because I dated the girl's sister's ex-boyfriend.”
- “I was cyberbullied in 5-7th grade. The girl for whatever reason didn’t like me. It was a hard time. My friends were friends with the girl so I didn't have anyone who stood up for me.”
- “I was just socially and verbally abused that’s all it used to get to me and distract me from just being myself mainly because I thought that I had to be a certain way to be accepted and that’s not true if you accept yourself for who you are then what other people think will be irrelevant.”
- “I was never bullied in high school. The first time I faced severe bullying was in college, not only my roommates bullied me, but so did my teammates. I was verbally and physically bullied throughout my first year of college.”
- “I was picked on a lot for being "too sensitive" so every time I would get upset about something or sad and want to cry people would start to tease me for it so I had to act like everything was okay even if it wasn’t.”
- “In elementary school I was called a "slut" because I was pretty and everyone knew I got my period before all the other girls and I guess the people assumed that would define me as a "slut" in 5th grade. In middle school I gained weight and was overweight I was told I would be "hot" if I wasn't so fat. I became too afraid to eat in public. In 7th and 8th grade I began self-harming to "release the pain." By 9th grade not only did I self-harm, but I also began starving myself to try and lose weight because was tired of the negative comments about my body. In 10th grade I wasn't invited to any parties with my friends because I was told I wasn't "popular “enough and if they brought me it would make them look less cool. By the time I was a junior and senior I had accepted the fact you cannot

please everyone and as long as I am making myself happy then I don't care what others think. I was still left out of everything, but it didn't affect me as much.”

- “In high school the bullying I experienced didn't truly affect me but generally it was related to sexual things. Women at my high school were harassed based on body shape and sexual activity.”
- “In high school...no, not really. I mean, there were a few times, but where I went (Northmont High School), there was....social division, per se? The most intellectual students, those in classes like AP Calculus II and AP Chemistry, they didn't really associate with the really sporty or really apathetic people, and the option was mutual. So situations for bullying never came up, just because of the stratification.”
- “Only bullying I received was because these two guys didn't like how this one girl "changed" because she liked me. I found out it was mostly because she only saw them as a friend while they saw her as more than a friend. But I was often threatened by them just because I was liked by a girl.”
- “There are a lot of different kinds of bullying, but the kind of bullying I experienced was not usually what people think of when one hears the word "bullying". I was never physically harmed on purpose by any of my peers ever. However, the social bullying as something I dealt with on a daily basis. It wasn't an event-for-event experience for me, but was a way of life. I chose to be strong and tolerate it rather than making a big deal out of it. Making a point of it and seeking out help from the school would have made my situation worse, so it was better to deal with it instead of waste stress, time, and energy on further degrading my reputation by acting like a baby about it. High school isn't like Kindergarten; the students aren't just going to comply if the teacher says "Okay, boys

and girls. Play nice and include everybody." There were some instances in Elementary and middle school when my mom tried to step into the situation and help, but it always made it worse. So, by the time I got to high school I had learned my lesson to just keep quiet deal with it. I knew where I stood among my peers, so I knew how to interact (or not) in order to keep out of trouble and minimize stressful situations. A lot of social bullying, for everybody involved, had to do with how important and/or how valuable a person was. The idea was, "How can being friends with this person benefit me, or better my own social position". I had nothing to bring to the table for my peers. I'm a skinny, uncoordinated girl, which makes me last picked to gym teams and not taken seriously in other ways. Athletes were strong, and were perceived as more capable, presenting people like me to be invalid somehow. Another factor was money. My parents couldn't afford to keep me decked out in "Swag" or name brand clothing, and I couldn't afford to go out with friends or attend social gatherings that required money (just about everything). There was an observed lack of legitimacy for students who came from lower-class."

### **Summary**

An analysis of the quantitative data were completed for the School Climate and Bullying Survey collected from 154 respondents. All survey questions were related to the three research questions that guided this study. At the end of the survey, an open-ended question was added to give the researcher a more in-depth perspective about the participants' perceptions of bullying. Of the 154 respondents, 18 answered the open-ended questions.

This study was conducted to determine if a correlation of school climate and bullying existed. In response to the first research question regarding what effect do demographic factors,

such as a student's gender and the urban/rural/suburban classification of the student's high school, have on the student's perceptions of bullying; the quantitative analysis of the responses to Items 1 through 10 regarding bullying displayed no significant difference among gender and the high school demographic location of students.

The second research question regarding what effect do demographic factors, such as a student's gender and the urban/rural/suburban classification of the student's high school, have on the student's perceptions of school climate; the quantitative analysis of the responses to Items 11 through 31 showed there was a significant difference among gender, but no significant difference among high school demographic location of students.

Lastly, the third question asked what the relationships were between the perceptions of high school climate and instances of bullying. After reviewing the quantitative analysis by using Items 1 through 35 of the survey, a significant correlation existed among the means of the survey responses between school climate and bullying. The results from this study indicated that schools with better school climates tended to have fewer incidents of bullying.

This chapter presented and analyzed data to determine if a correlation of school climate and bullying existed. A summary and discussion of the data collected will be presented in Chapter 5. It will also identify limitations and recommended future research areas based on this study.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSIONS

Bullying is an issue that has plagued society for decades; however, it has become more severe and increased in frequency in recent years (CDC, 2012). It has now become a persistent problem in public schools and a continuous dilemma worldwide. As a result, many individuals have completed extensive research on the causes and effects of bullying and cyberbullying, yet little research has been done to determine if school climate has an effect on the instances of bullying, particularly in grade levels 9 through 12. This study was designed to obtain information from college freshmen about their perceptions of their high school climate and observed instances of bullying, analyze this information through quantitative data analysis, and make inferences about the relationship between school climate and bullying. The primary objective of the study was to determine if there is a relationship between perceptions of school climate and bullying, and ultimately discover the appropriate methods to cultivate a student-centered climate where bullying is not tolerated and all students feel connected and safe.

The first section of this chapter provides an overview of the survey instrument used and how it was disseminated to participants. A summary of the major findings of the study will be described in the second section, followed by a discussion of the results as they relate to Bronfenbrenner's ecological model in the third section. The fourth section will discuss the study limitations followed by future recommendations. Lastly, a final summary of the study and reflection will be provided.

#### **Methodology**

In order to gather data for this quantitative study, College freshmen at Indiana University of Pennsylvania (IUP) were asked to complete a survey through the use of Qualtrics to collect

information about their high school bullying and school climate experiences. A sample of 2,000 college freshmen, aged 18 or older, were sent emails with the assistance of the Applied Research Lab (ARL). Freshmen received an email invitation during the Spring Semester of the 2015 school year through which they could access the survey by utilizing a unique password that was created for each participant. After the initial invitation was sent, freshmen had access to the survey for up to four weeks. To help remind students if they had not completed the survey, two additional emails were sent.

The School Climate and Bullying Surveys were emailed to 2,000 college freshmen during the Spring Semester of 2015. Of the college freshmen that were emailed the survey, 442 (22%) opened it, 177 out of the 442 (40%) started it, and 154 out of 177 (87%) completed it. The results of this study were reported and summarized as they related to each of the research questions.

1. What effect do demographic factors, such as a student's gender and the urban/rural/suburban classification of the student's high school, have on the student's perceptions of bullying?
2. What effect do demographic factors, such as a student's gender and the urban/rural/suburban classification of the student's high school, have on the student's perceptions of school climate?
3. What is the relationship between the perceptions of high school climate and instances of bullying?

### **Summary of Research Findings**

The School Climate and Bullying Survey (SCBS) consisted of 35 questions that were directly related to the research questions. The first section of the survey consisted of 10 questions

related to bullying, while the second section consisted of 21 questions that were designed to elicit responses about school climate. Additionally, 4 demographic questions were provided at the end of the survey to gather information about high school demographic location, gender, age and ethnicity. Lastly, an open-ended question was used to offer participants the opportunity to share their personal experiences related to bullying, and gave the researcher an opportunity to gain more in-depth information about the perceptions students experienced. Data collected from participants were used to conduct a descriptive statistical analysis of the students' perceptions of high school bullying and school climate.

### **Summary of Research Question One**

What effect do demographic factors, such as a student's gender and the urban/rural/suburban classification of the student's high school, have on the student's perceptions of bullying?

Questions on the modified survey were developed to obtain college freshmen's perceptions of school climate and bullying. The questions were based on a 4-point Likert-type scale and offered answer choices ranging from (1 = *strongly disagree*, 2 = *disagree*, 3 = *agree*, 4 = *strongly agree*). This scale was utilized to determine the perceptions of questions 1-10 of the survey related to bullying.

After students were given a definition of bullying, more than half (53.2%) of the survey population were not affected by bullying in high school and only a small percentage (3.2%) of the survey population were victims of bullying several times per week. However, over 30% of the population admitted to bullying others during their high school careers. Participants responded to the survey question concerning being physically bullied or threatened by physical

bullying, and the response data indicated that 84.4% said they were never physically bullied during high school, and 92.2% said they never physically bullied others.

Approximately 65% of the population admitted to being victims of verbal bullying in high school while almost 40% confessed to verbally bullying others. When participants were asked if they have ever been socially bullied, approximately half (48.7%) of the participants were never socially bullied while the other half (51.3%) admitted to being victims of social bullying at least once or twice and sometimes several times per week, and a majority (76%) of the population surveyed never socially bullied another student. Unpredictably, in the technology driven society in which we live, a majority (68.2) of the population were not cyberbullied and 87% of the participants responded that they never cyberbullied another student during their high school career. Surprisingly these statistics are accurate, as a 2013 Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance survey indicated that only 15% of 9 through 12 grade students reported that they were cyberbullied (CDC, 2013). This is remarkable given how the rapid increase of technology in today's society enabled bullying to easily occur in an online rather than face to face environment (Raskauskas & Stoltz, 2007).

The data results in the category of gender showed that 74.3% of the respondents in this study were females versus only 25.7% males. However, when an independent t-test was used to assess for an equality of means, there were no statistically significant differences between males and females. Therefore, the results displayed that no significant difference ( $p>.05$ ) took place among participants for gender in items 1 through 10.

When participants were given a definition of their demographic location of urban, rural, or suburban, and asked to choose their high school's demographic location, 38.2% were suburban, 36.8% were rural, and 25% were urban. According to the Anova test that was used to

compare the means of the three demographic locations, the differences were not significant ( $p>.05$ ). In conclusion, a quantitative analysis of the responses to Items 1 through 10 regarding bullying displayed no significant difference among high school demographic location of students.

### **Summary of Research Question Two**

What effect do demographic factors, such as a student's gender and the urban/rural/suburban classification of the student's high school, have on the student's perceptions of school climate?

Survey questions for the modified SCBS were developed to obtain college freshmen's perceptions of school climate and bullying. A 4-point Likert-type scale was used and offered answer choices ranging from (1 = *strongly disagree*, 2 = *disagree*, 3 = *agree*, 4 = *strongly agree*). Student perceptions of questions 11 through 31 related to school climate were utilized with this scale.

Over half (53.1%) of the participants in this study felt that bullying was a problem in their high school. A majority did not feel comfortable telling an adult that they were being bullied (58.7%) or tell a staff member if another student was getting bullied (52.4%). According to the data, it was clear that a majority (58%) of students that witnessed bullying did not try to stop it as it occurred.

Fortunately, 95% of the students felt comfortable telling a staff member if a student brought a gun to school, and 85% said they would agree to tell a staff member if another student talked about killing themselves. Approximately 72% of the population agreed that teachers made it clear that bullying was not tolerated and 78% agreed that if they told a teacher they were being bullied they felt confident that the teacher would do something to help. Nearly 88% of the data

suggests the participants felt comfortable going to an adult if they had personal problems.

Approximately 84% of the population felt that teachers genuinely cared about their success in high school.

A large portion of the population (73%) felt that appearance and clothing were major indicators as a result of bullying and teasing. Over 73.1% of the participants did not feel race or ethnicity was a major indicator of bullying, but 60% felt that students in their high school belonged to groups that did not get along with one another. A majority (53.8%) of the participants agreed or strongly agreed that there was a lot of teasing about sexual topics during high school, and almost 95% of participants perceived that students that were bullied or teased did not deserve it.

Over 93% disagreed that bullying was sometimes fun to do. When students were questioned about violent behavior, 92% said it did not make them feel good when they hit someone in high school, and 91% of the population strongly disagreed or disagreed, that everyone would look up to you if you fought a lot. When participants were asked if they only had two choices - get punched or punch the other person first, over 83% disagreed to punching first and the same amount of students said that if someone threatened you, it was okay to hit that person first.

As previously reported for question one regarding gender, the results for question two were different. Only 25.7% of the respondents that answered the survey were male and 74.3% were female. When an independent t-test was completed, the mean scores indicated that school climate was perceived more positively by females than males. After a quantitative analysis was completed for Items 11 through 31, there was a significant difference ( $p < .05$ ) among participants regarding gender and school climate.

In terms of demographics, the data results showed that of the population surveyed, 38.2% were suburban, 36.8% were rural, and 25% were urban. When an Anova test was used to determine the differences between demographics, the results were not significant ( $p > .05$ ).

Therefore, when determining the potential effect of participants' demographic factors, specifically whether their high school was urban, rural, or suburban, as they related to participants' perceptions of school climate, a quantitative analysis of the responses to Items 11 through 31 showed there was no significant difference ( $p > .05$ ) among the high school demographic location of students.

### **Summary of Research Question Three**

What is the relationship between the perceptions of high school climate and instances of bullying?

Survey questions for the modified SCBS were developed to obtain college freshmen's perceptions of school climate and bullying. A 4-point Likert-type scale was used and offered answer choices ranging from (1 = *strongly disagree*, 2 = *disagree*, 3 = *agree*, 4 = *strongly agree*). Student perceptions of questions 1 through 35 related to school climate were utilized with this scale.

A quantitative analysis was completed by using Items 1-35 of the survey. According to a 2-tailed t-test that was used, there was a significant correlation between the means of the survey responses of school climate and instances of bullying since the  $p$  value of .002 obtained was less than .05. As a result, this data validated that a significant correlation occurred between school climate and bullying, and schools with better school climates are perceived to have fewer incidents of bullying.

Although the data indicated that the demographic correlations were not significant, it did show that participants who attended an urban school had the best perceptions of their school climate, yet responded with the highest instances of bullying. Participants from a suburban area experienced the second highest amount of bullying and perceived their school to have the poorest climate, while respondents from the rural setting had the second best perception of climate and the least amount of bullying incidents.

The majority (53.2%) of the participants in this study reported that they were never bullied in high school and that a greater part (84.2%) of their teachers genuinely cared about their success, thus leading to the conclusion that school climate can have a significant impact on the instances of bullying. Therefore, perhaps the high schools in which the students of this study attended had a climate that was perceived as positive, which reduced and potentially eliminated bullying concerns. Interestingly, the data from this study indicated that participants had a significant amount of trust in their teachers by reporting that they believed if their teachers were made aware of a bullying situation it would be handled quickly and appropriately. Surprisingly, however, almost 60% of the surveyed population would not tell a teacher if someone was bullying them. These responses could indicate that bullying is so commonplace in today's society that most students have been conditioned to simply accept it. However, educators must continue to encourage our students to "speak up" and tell a trusted adult before the problem gets worse.

### **Summary of Open-Ended Responses**

If participants finished the entire 35 question survey, they then had the option to complete the following open-ended question: "If you have experienced bullying in high school and would like to share your personal experiences, please do so in the box below." Upon reviewing the

responses to the open-ended question, it was clear that the most common and consistent theme related to dating or relationships that incited bullying. One individual described in detail the aftermath of a breakup that resulted in bullying. This person wrote:

After being dumped by my high school sweet heart, I lost most of my old friends who I just hadn't seen much of while we dated. Everyone ignored me and spread rumors and I sat alone at lunch every day. There was one guy in my grade who told everyone that I was gay and would follow me down the halls yelling and threatening me. Teachers in the hallway just watched and did absolutely nothing to stop it. I hated high school and my grades, which had been exemplary up until that point, fell off some. I was depressed and afraid to go to school most days. This all happened my senior year of high school. Before that, I was pretty well liked by students and staff and involved in activities.

Another person indicated that the individual that he or she dated caused the bullying to occur by writing, "I was bullied for dating a kid that I really liked, and they didn't." A third person responded, "I was bullied in middle school because I dated the girl's sister's ex-boyfriend."

Lastly, a participant responded:

Only bullying I received was because these two guys didn't like how this one girl 'changed' because she liked me. I found out it was mostly because she only saw them as a friend while they saw her as more than a friend. But I was often threatened by them just because I was liked by a girl.

These responses may indicate that bullying can typically occur as a result of a break-up, or a relationship that elicit a negative reception from others because of various factors, particularly jealousy. Furthermore, through these responses one can gather that bullying could potentially be a result of friends defending one another in regards to dating and relationships.

### Theoretical Discussions

This section will focus on the Urie Bronfenbrenner's (1994) ecological approach to understand human development. Bronfenbrenner stated that "ecological models encompass an evolving body of theory and research concerned with the processes and conditions that govern the lifelong course of human development in the actual environments in which human beings live" (p. 37). Along with development in language, cognition, social competence, and physical integrity, children also adapt to their immediate social and physical environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). With that said, this study made a connection between Bronfenbrenner's ecological model to students' social and physical environment.

In this study, it was interesting to see how respondents perceived their social environment as it related to school climate and bullying. When participants in this study were asked if they have been socially bullied, approximately half (48.7%) of the participants were never socially bullied while the other half (51.3%) admitted to being victims of social bullying at least once or twice and sometimes several times per week. A majority said they never socially bullied anyone throughout their high school careers. In response to the open-ended portion of this study, one participant commented:

I was just socially and verbally abused that's all it used to get to me and distract me from just being myself mainly because I thought that I had to be a certain way to be accepted and that's not true if you accept yourself for who you are then what other people think will be irrelevant.

Another participant detailed the social bullying that he or she endured by writing:

There are a lot of different kinds of bullying, but the kind of bullying I experienced was not usually what people think of when one hears the word "bullying." I was never

physically harmed on purpose by any of my peers ever. However, the social bullying was something I dealt with on a daily basis. It wasn't an event-for-event experience for me, but was a way of life. I chose to be strong and tolerate it rather than making a big deal out of it. Making a point of it and seeking out help from the school would have made my situation worse, so it was better to deal with it instead of waste stress, time, and energy on further degrading my reputation by acting like a baby about it. High school isn't like Kindergarten; the students aren't just going to comply if the teacher says "Okay, boys and girls. Play nice and include everybody." There were some instances in Elementary and middle school when my mom tried to step into the situation and help, but it always made it worse. So, by the time I got to high school I had learned my lesson to just keep quiet deal with it. I knew where I stood among my peers, so I knew how to interact (or not) in order to keep out of trouble and minimize stressful situations. A lot of social bullying, for everybody involved, had to do with how important and/or how valuable a person was. The idea was, "How can being friends with this person benefit me, or better my own social position?" I had nothing to bring to the table for my peers. I'm a skinny, uncoordinated girl, which makes me last picked to gym teams and not taken seriously in other ways. Athletes were strong, and were perceived as more capable, presenting people like me to be invalid somehow. Another factor was money. My parents couldn't afford to keep me decked out in "Swag" or name brand clothing, and I couldn't afford to go out with friends or attend social gatherings that required money (just about everything). There was an observed lack of legitimacy for students who came from lower-class. These statements may seem to suggest that social bullying may be a part of society and

everyone handles them differently. It also seems like the participants seemed to accept social bullying.

Research suggested that a positive school climate may be a protective factor associated with decreased involvement in risk behaviors such as substance abuse and aggressive behavior such as bullying (Aspy et al., 2012; Bond et al., 2007; Battistich & Horn, 1997; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2009, Hawkins, Catalano, Kosterman, Abbott & Hill, 1999; Lerner, Phelps, Forman, & Bowers, 2009; Resnick et al., 1997). In addition, students who have positive perceptions of school climate will be less likely to engage in externalizing or aggressive behaviors (Espelage et al., 2000; Goldweber et al., 2013; Totura et al., 2009). The population surveyed in this study did not indicate that the physical environment as it relates to physical bullying was a concern. Most of the questions for this study asked about violent behavior such as hitting or physically fighting with other students. As a result, over 90% of the population stayed away from or were not victims of physical violence.

Bronfenbrenner's ecological approach to research on human development and education sought to study human development in the environment in which it takes place in order to observe the subjects' interaction with the environment and people in the environment. This study incorporated elements of an ecological approach of school factors that include interactions between living organisms (students, teachers, peers,) and non-living entities (school rules, policies, and procedures that relate to student interactions) and was the focus of this research. Gendron, et al., (2011) state:

In addition to addressing the ecology of the school in a single study, examining interactions between school and individual characteristics is also important. That is, do individual characteristics linked to bullying behavior have different effects on actual

behavior contingent on the nature of the school context...A comprehensive understanding of bullying requires the identification of how student and school characteristics interact.

(p. 152)

### **Microsystem**

Bronfenbrenner conceptualized that human development occurs within a system made up of five subsystems, including the microsystem, of which the school is a part:

A microsystem is a pattern of activities, social roles, and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person in a given face-to-face setting with particular physical, social, and symbolic features that invite, permit, or inhibit engagement in sustained, progressively more complex interaction with, and activity in, the immediate environment. Examples include such settings as family, school, peer group, and workplace (Bronfenbrenner, 1994).

The microsystem is made up of how an individual acts with peers and school within their environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). Responses from the survey were collected from students' perceptions of the microsystem level.

The first level discussed for this study was the influence of teachers or staff members on the student. According to the survey responses, a strong majority of the population felt comfortable going to a teacher regarding another student bringing a gun to school (94.5%), another student killing themselves (84.9%), or if they had a personal problem (88.3%). In relation to bullying, 72% of the population agreed that teachers made it clear that bullying was not tolerated and 78% agreed that if they told a teacher they were being bullied they felt confident that the teacher would do something to help. Most importantly, 84% of the population felt that teachers genuinely cared about their success in high school.

The ways in which students interacted with their peers was discussed in the second level of this study. First and foremost, about half (53.1%) of the population in this study felt that bullying was a problem at their high school, which can ultimately have a significant impact on how an individual would rate his or her peers. A majority (73.1%) of the participants felt that students were not put down based on their race or ethnicity. Rather, when participants were asked if students got teased about their clothing or physical appearance, approximately 73% of the participants agreed that appearance and clothing were major indicators as a result of bullying and teasing by their peers.

Several of the open-ended responses to this survey strongly illustrated how many students were treated poorly by their peers, whether for their appearance or simply because they were selected as a target. One individual described an experience with bullying in part because of his appearance. In his response, he said:

During my High School career I was mostly bullied for being really nice to girls. The guys enjoyed pointing, calling me a faggot, etc., for the way I dressed and treated girls. Though I am not gay, and had a girlfriend majority of the time I was in school, the teasing still really got to me and hurt me; I still get this in college now.

Another respondent detailed her bullying experiences that started as early as fifth grade because of her appearance. She wrote:

In elementary school I was called a “slut” because I was pretty and everyone knew I got my period before all the other girls and I guess the people assumed that would define me as a “slut” in 5th grade. In middle school I gained weight and was overweight I was told I would be “hot” if I wasn't so fat. I became too afraid to eat in public. In 7th and 8th grade I began self-harming to “release the pain.” By 9th grade not only did I self-harm, but I

also began starving myself to try and lose weight because was tired of the negative comments about my body. In 10th grade I wasn't invited to any parties with my friends because I was told I wasn't "popular" enough and if they brought me it would make them look less cool. By the time I was a junior and senior I had accepted the fact you cannot please everyone and as long as I am making myself happy then I don't care what others think. I was still left out of everything, but it didn't affect me as much.

Another individual commented, "I couldn't go to high school football games. The student section chanted insults at me until I cried and went home. I wanted to die. High school was the worst experience of my life," although a specific reason for the bullying is not identified. Lastly, another person highlighted the ease of cyber-bullying and how it can easily enable the bully.

This respondent said:

I knew a few students in high school who were threatened to a point at which they felt more comfortable attending cyber school. I also took part in mild bullying via Facebook with a few friends in ninth grade, and although I've apologized since with sincere remorse, I still feel terribly that I contributed to making jokes in such a way that I belittled someone else. I feel that the cyber component to bullying exists as a huge problem as it creates a sense of anonymity and security to the bully. I hope the state of the way we treat each other improves.

As previously mentioned, the second level of this study focused on students' interactions with their peers. The data from the quantitative survey indicated that 73% of the participants believed that clothing or physical appearance was a factor that contributed to incidents of bullying. It is clear that the open-ended responses discussed in this section correlate with the data, as participants reported being bullied for their physical appearance.

The third level discussed in this study focused on school policies. Although there were not a significant number of survey questions related to school policies, several were posed to participants to answer. One question in particular elicited a response that indicates a potential disconnect between the bullying that actually occurs versus what is perceived to occur. When participants were asked if their teachers made it clear that bullying was not tolerated, over 73% of the respondents agreed. However, this statistic was relatively high when considering that half (53.1%) of the participants in this study felt that bullying was a problem in their high school. Therefore, the data may suggest that teachers and administrators are unaware of the existing bullying problems within their schools.

### **Study Limitations**

Several limitations were present during the course of this study. To begin, the study was limited to the freshmen population of one public university in Northwestern Pennsylvania and asked these individuals to reflect on their high school years of which they may have had difficulty recollecting. However, because freshmen are older, they may have been able to reflect to their high school years in a mature manner and put their experiences into perspective. Additionally, the size of the actual surveyed population was limited and may not represent the entire freshmen population. Furthermore, out of the 154 participants that completed the survey, 10 did not answer the demographic questions.

Also, participants of this survey may not have answered honestly because they were uncomfortable with the topic and it was too painful to reflect upon their own personal experiences or perceptions. However, students' perceptions of school climate and bullying may vary greatly based on their actual experience at their school. Another limitation was that

participants may have rushed through the survey and not answered honestly in order to be eligible for the drawing for the \$100 gift card.

Finally, there was not an appropriate balance of gender and ethnicity in the surveyed respondents, as 74% of the respondents in this study were females versus only 25.7% males. Additionally, an ethnicity concern also arose considering a majority of the respondents were White (79.9%), which demonstrates an underrepresentation of other ethnicities. Further studies would need to be conducted at varying age levels and geographic locations to determine if a relationship exists between perceptions of school climate and bullying nationwide.

### **Future Recommendations**

This study showed that a significant difference was found between school climate and bullying, yet there are several recommendations that can be utilized for future investigation of this topic. First, a larger sample of college freshmen may have shown an even stronger relationship between school climate and bullying. A recommendation of future research suggests that a study should be conducted at multiple universities in different locations throughout the United States.

The second suggestion for exploration of this issue would be to conduct a study with high school students during their high school years and compare results by grade level. Students who are currently victims or perpetrators in high school may have an easier time expressing their feelings or concerns as opposed to college freshmen that needed to reflect to their high school years. The data of grades 9 through 12 should be analyzed separately to determine any bullying or school climate patterns. If any patterns are detected, interventions could be implemented by school districts based on grade levels.

Third, even though this study offered an open-ended question, it would be beneficial to interview these students to gain a more in-depth outlook of their perceptions of bullying for future research. Although it is sometimes easier to express one's feelings in writing, the researcher would be able to capture the emotional journey of the victims or perpetrators through interviews. It would also be beneficial to ask the victims why they didn't tell someone, considering 58.7% of the population for this study strongly disagreed or disagreed that they would tell a teacher if they were getting bullied. Therefore, a mixed methods approach would be recommended for further studies.

Fourth, a few of the respondents to the open-ended questions said they were bullied in high school and in college. Another participant stated that he or she was not bullied in high school but he or she is being bullied in college. Future research would recommend asking participants if they were bullied in high school, then college, and later in the work place to determine if any patterns exist as to why these people suffer from bullying throughout their lives.

Lastly, it would be important to hear the teachers' perspectives of bullying and school climate. Teachers play a huge role in the success of all students and have a major influence in the framework of school climate. For future research, it would be interesting to hear if they feel they have the support from administration with bullying policies, as well as provide their personal perspectives of school climate.

### **Summary and Reflection**

Having students feel comfortable and safe in schools is imperative for their success. Strategies and policies can be implemented to do so, but a majority (58.7%) of the respondents for this study did not "speak-up" and let an adult know that bullying or concerns were existing. According to Olweus and Limber (2010), not telling anyone is a trend that becomes more

pronounced as students get older (18% in 3rd grade to 47% in 12th). After a bullying incident has occurred, 40% of students notified an adult and only 26% after a cyberbullying incident took place (Robers, 2013). In a previous study, when students were asked why they do not tell anyone, they responded because of “fear or retaliation,” “didn’t want to be a ‘snitch or tattler,’” or they “didn’t think anything would be done by staff members” (Kowalski, 2012). In a district or individual school, it is difficult to make change or implement a policy if the decision-making parties are unaware that negative behaviors and issues are occurring due to a lack of communication.

This study indicated that there was a significant correlation between school climate and bullying, which makes it essential for any school to continually strive to cultivate an environment in which all parties involved feel welcome, safe, and secure. School districts cannot give up on the fight against bullying. Unfortunately a majority of teachers’ time is dedicated to statewide assessments, and school bullying continues to hinder the learning process of many students. To help recognize bullying and for teachers to take a more proactive approach, a focus should continue on anti-bullying strategies with an emphasis on social awareness to help students “fit in.” All staff and faculty members (teachers, guidance counselors, security guards, etc.) should receive professional development to model respectful behavior and positive interactions among students.

Staff members should be cognizant of the characteristics of bullying and cyberbullying so they are able to recognize the behaviors that can arise from students who are either perpetrators or victims. They also need to be aware of school rules and policies and how to enforce them effectively. To help improve school climate, staff members should develop a line of respect, and rapport that motivates all students to be themselves. Students need to feel

respected, connected, and engaged to their environment. Positive interactions should be encouraged and rewarded among students. Depending on funding, professional development should be implemented annually or reviewed throughout the year during department or principal meetings.

Based on this study, staff members should be trained to be aware of bullying in areas such as hallways, cafeterias, and sporting events; not just in the classroom. These preventive methods can be accomplished by being visible and available to students and looking for certain signs such as social concerns, body language, and facial expressions. In particular, the lines of communication must continuously remain open and developed in a way so that each individual has the confidence to voice his or her concerns or opinions. Once this is accomplished, then students can develop a positive relationship with their administrators, teachers, staff members, and each other in order to seek help, advice, or simply have someone to confide in to make their overall scholastic experience comfortable, valuable, and safe. With the proper techniques and consistency of having all stakeholders involved, positive interactions are more likely to occur which will help decrease bullying in schools across the nation and give all students a sense of security.

In conclusion to the introduction of this study, Elizabeth was a victim of bullying during her high school years. She was made fun of, embarrassed, and did not enjoy or want to go to school. Her grades began to drop, as well as her sense of safety and comfort. Even though some of the teachers knew that this was occurring, she should have kept telling someone until something was done to make her feel comfortable again. She should have explained to her parents how she felt and what was happening to her on a daily basis. No student deserves to be

treated the way that Elizabeth was, and more students need to speak up for themselves to help eliminate these problems.

According to this study, there was a correlation between school climate and bullying and school climate does have an effect on bullying. Students who perceive their school climate as positive have less instances of bullying. Perhaps a lack of trust between the staff and students at Elizabeth's school made it difficult for her to feel comfortable enough to speak up about how she was treated. It is likely that a poor school climate contributed to her sense of unease to share her concerns. Had she been connected to a school with a positive climate, she could have easily put an end to being negatively treated, especially if there were staff members available and willing to listen and take action.

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## Appendix A

## The School Climate Bullying Survey

## Description and Research Summary

Dewey Cornell

May 22, 2012

The purpose of the School Climate Bullying Survey (SCBS) is to assess bullying behaviors and relevant aspects of school climate in school settings, typically to help guide intervention efforts. The full version of the survey is designed for students in grades 6-12 and the shorter version is designed for students in grades 3-5.

The SCBS can be administered on an individual or group basis in approximately 20 minutes. The SCBS can be scored by hand, but it is preferable to use a scannable form or computer administration. The timeframe for bullying questions is the past month in order to identify current bullying and to monitor changes over the course of the school year.

## School Climate Bullying Survey©

Items	Item Content
1-10	Frequency of bullying or being bullied by others generally and by physical, verbal, social and cyber methods in the past month
11-15	Whom the student told about being bullied
16-24	Locations where bullying occurs
25-47	School climate scales Willingness to Seek Help (26, 29, 30, 33, 34, 37, 38, 40, 41) Prevalence of Teasing and Bullying (25, 28, 32, 44; additional item 47) Aggressive Attitudes (27, 31, 35, 39, 43, 45, 46)
36, 42	Validity items
48-52	Demographics of gender, age, grade, and ethnicity/race
54	Identification of bullied peers Student suggestions
55	

Do not write your name on this survey, so that your answers remain private and confidential. Your teachers will turn in the surveys without reading them. The results of this survey will be used to improve how students get along with one another at our school. *Please answer these questions honestly.*

<b>Definition of Bullying:</b> Bullying is defined as the use of one's strength or popularity to injure, threaten, or embarrass another person on purpose. Bullying can be physical, verbal, or social. It is <i>not bullying</i> when two students who are about the same in strength or power have a fight or argument.	Never	Once or twice	About once per week	Several times per week
1. By this definition, I have <i>been bullied</i> at school in the past month.	A	B	C	D
2. By this definition, I have <i>bullied others</i> at school in the past month.	A	B	C	D
<b>Physical Bullying</b> involves repeatedly hitting, kicking, or shoving someone weaker on purpose. During the past month (30 days) at school:				
3. I have been physically bullied or threatened with physical bullying.	A	B	C	D
4. I have physically bullied or threatened to physically bully another student.	A	B	C	D
<b>Verbal bullying</b> involves repeatedly teasing, putting down, or insulting someone on purpose. During the past month (30 days) at school:				
5. I have been verbally bullied.	A	B	C	D
6. I have verbally bullied another student.	A	B	C	D
<b>Social bullying</b> involves getting others repeatedly to ignore or leave someone out on purpose. During the past month (30 days) at school:				
7. I have been socially bullied.	A	B	C	D
8. I have socially bullied another student.	A	B	C	D
<b>Cyber bullying</b> involves using technology (cell phone, email, internet chat and posting, etc.) to tease or put down someone. During the past month (30 days) at school or home:				
9. I have been cyber bullied.	A	B	C	D
10. I have cyber bullied another student.	A	B	C	D

<b>11.</b> Have you told anyone that you were bullied in the past 30 days at school?	
A. I have not been bullied.    B. I have been bullied, but I have not told anyone.    C. I have told someone.	
If you told someone that you were bullied in the previous question, whom did you tell? (Note: If you choose A or B as your answer in Question 11, you should answer "No" to questions 12, 13, and 14.)	
<b>12.</b> A. No    B. Yes, I have told a friend.	<b>13.</b> A. No    B. Yes, I have told a teacher or other adult at school.
<b>14.</b> A. No    B. Yes, I have told a parent.	
<b>15.</b> What is the main reason why you didn't tell anyone you were bullied?	A. It was not that serious. B. I can handle it myself. C. I did not think anyone could help. D. I did not want others to think I was a snitch. E. The person would hurt me even more. F. Some other reason (write in _____)
<b>16.</b> Does bullying take place anywhere at school?    A. No    B. Yes    Check where it occurs below.	
<b>17.</b> A. No    B. Yes    Going to/from school	<b>21.</b> A. No    B. Yes    Cafeteria
<b>18.</b> A. No    B. Yes    Hallways	<b>22.</b> A. No    B. Yes    Gym/locker room
<b>19.</b> A. No    B. Yes    Classrooms	<b>23.</b> A. No    B. Yes    Outside (parking lot, play field, etc.)
<b>20.</b> A. No    B. Yes    Restrooms	<b>24.</b> A. No    B. Yes    Other places (write: _____)

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
25. Bullying is a problem at this school.	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>D</b>
26. If another student was bullying me, I would tell one of the teachers or staff at school.	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>D</b>
27. It feels good when I hit someone.	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>D</b>
28. Students here often get teased about their clothing or physical appearance.	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>D</b>
29. Students here try to stop bullying when they see it happening.	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>D</b>
30. If another student brought a gun to school, I would tell one of the teachers or staff at school.	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>D</b>
31. If you fight a lot, everyone will look up to you.	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>D</b>
32. Students here often get put down because of their race or ethnicity.	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>D</b>
33. Teachers here make it clear to students that bullying is not tolerated.	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>D</b>
34. If another student talked about killing someone, I would tell one of the teachers or staff at school.	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>D</b>
35. Sometimes you only have two choices – get punched or punch the other person first.	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>D</b>
36. I am telling the truth on this survey.	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>D</b>
37. If I tell a teacher that someone is bullying me, the teacher will do something to help.	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>D</b>
38. There are adults at this school I could go to if I had a personal problem.	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>D</b>
39. If you are afraid to fight, you won't have many friends.	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>D</b>
40. Students tell teachers when other students are being bullied.	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>D</b>
41. The teachers at this school genuinely care about me doing well.	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>D</b>
42. I am not paying attention to how I answer this survey.	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>D</b>
43. If someone threatens you, it is okay to hit that person.	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>D</b>
44. There is a lot of teasing about sexual topics at this school.	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>D</b>
45. Students who are bullied or teased mostly deserve it.	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>D</b>
46. Bullying is sometimes fun to do.	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>D</b>
47. Students in this school belong to groups that don't get along with one another.	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>D</b>

48. A. Male B. Female	49. Age: A. 11 B. 12 C. 13 D. 14 E. 15	50. Grade: A. 6 B. 7 C. 8
51. Are you Hispanic?	A. Yes.	B. No
52. Ethnicity/Race: A. American B. Asian C. Black D. White E. Multi-racial F. Indian/Alaskan Other: _____		
53. The answers I have given on this survey are true. A. Yes B. No		

## Appendix B

## Modified High School Climate Bullying Survey

<i>Definition of Bullying:</i> <b>Bullying is defined as the use of one's strength or popularity to injure, threaten, or embarrass another person on purpose. Bullying can be physical, verbal, or social. It is <i>not bullying</i> when two students who are about the same in strength or power have a fight or argument.</b>	Never	Once or twice	About once per week	Several times per week
<b>1. By this definition, I have <i>been bullied</i> at school.</b>	A	B	C	D
<b>2. By this definition, I have <i>bullied others</i> at school.</b>	A	B	C	D
Physical Bullying involves repeatedly hitting, kicking, or shoving someone weaker on purpose.				
<b>3. I have been physically bullied or threatened with physical bullying.</b>	A	B	C	D
<b>4. I have physically bullied or threatened to physically bully another student.</b>	A	B	C	D
Verbal bullying involves repeatedly teasing, putting down, or insulting someone on purpose.				
<b>5. I have been verbally bullied.</b>	A	B	C	D
<b>6. I have verbally bullied another student.</b>	A	B	C	D
Social bullying involves getting others repeatedly to ignore or leave someone out on purpose.				
<b>7. I have been socially bullied.</b>	A	B	C	D
<b>8. I have socially bullied another student.</b>	A	B	C	D
Cyber bullying involves using technology (cell phone, email, internet chat and posting, etc.) to tease or put down someone.				
<b>9. I have been cyber bullied.</b>	A	B	C	D
<b>10. I have cyber bullied another student.</b>	A	B	C	D

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
11. Bullying was a problem at my high school.	A	B	C	D
12. If another student was bullying me, I would tell one of the teachers or staff at school.	A	B	C	D
13. Students at my high school got teased about their clothing or physical appearance.	A	B	C	D
14. Students tried to stop bullying when they saw it happening.	A	B	C	D
15. If another student brought a gun to school, I would tell one of the teachers or staff at school.	A	B	C	D
16. Students at my high school got put down because of their race or ethnicity.	A	B	C	D
17. Teachers made it clear to students that bullying was not tolerated.	A	B	C	D
18. If another student talked about killing someone, I would tell one of the teachers or staff at school.	A	B	C	D
19. I am telling the truth on this survey.	A	B	C	D
20. If I told a teacher that someone was bullying me, the teacher would do something to help.	A	B	C	D
21. There were adults at my school I could go to if I had personal problems.	A	B	C	D
22. Students would tell teachers when other students were being bullied.	A	B	C	D
23. The teachers at my school genuinely cared about me doing well.	A	B	C	D
24. I am not paying attention to how I answer this survey.	A	B	C	D
25. There was a lot of teasing about sexual topics at my school.	A	B	C	D
26. Students who were bullied or teased mostly deserved it.	A	B	C	D
27. It felt good if I hit someone.	A	B	C	D
28. If you fought a lot, everyone would look up to you.	A	B	C	D
29. Sometimes you only had two choices – get punched or punch the other person first.	A	B	C	D
30. If you were afraid to fight, you didn't have many friends.	A	B	C	D
31. If someone threatened you, it was ok to hit that person.	A	B	C	D
32. Bullying was sometimes fun to do.	A	B	C	D
33. Students in my school belonged to groups that didn't get along with one another.	A	B	C	D

Demographic Information							
<i>Definition of Demographic Location: Rural relating to the countryside other than the town or city. Urban relating to the city or town. Suburban relating to an outlying part of the town or city.</i>							
34. Which of the following best describes the high school you attended?	Rural		Urban		Suburban		
35. What is your gender?	Male		Female				
36. What is your age?	18		19		20		21+
37. How would you classify yourself? A. White B. Hispanic or Latino C. Black or African American D. Native American or American Indian E. Asian/Pacific Islander F. Other	A.	B.	C.	D.	E.	F.	

## Appendix C

## Modified College Freshmen Climate Bullying Survey

<i>Definition of Bullying:</i> <b>Bullying is defined as the use of one's strength or popularity to injure, threaten, or embarrass another person on purpose. Bullying can be physical, verbal, or social. It is <i>not</i> bullying when two students who are about the same in strength or power have a fight or argument.</b>	Never	Once or twice	About once per week	Several times per week
1. <b>By this definition, I have <i>been bullied</i> at school.</b>	A	B	C	D
2. <b>By this definition, I have <i>bullied others</i> at school.</b>	A	B	C	D
Physical Bullying involves repeatedly hitting, kicking, or shoving someone weaker on purpose.				
3. <b>I have been physically bullied or threatened with physical bullying.</b>	A	B	C	D
4. <b>I have physically bullied or threatened to physically bully another student.</b>	A	B	C	D
Verbal bullying involves repeatedly teasing, putting down, or insulting someone on purpose.				
5. <b>I have been verbally bullied.</b>	A	B	C	D
6. <b>I have verbally bullied another student.</b>	A	B	C	D
Social bullying involves getting others repeatedly to ignore or leave someone out on purpose.				
7. <b>I have been socially bullied.</b>	A	B	C	D
8. <b>I have socially bullied another student.</b>	A	B	C	D
Cyber bullying involves using technology (cell phone, email, internet chat and posting, etc.) to tease or put down someone.				
9. <b>I have been cyber bullied.</b>	A	B	C	D
10. <b>I have cyber bullied another student.</b>	A	B	C	D

	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>
11. <b>Bullying was a problem at my high school.</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>D</b>
12. <b>If another student was bullying me, I would tell one of the teachers or staff at school.</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>D</b>
13. <b>Students at my high school got teased about their clothing or physical appearance.</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>D</b>
14. <b>Students tried to stop bullying when they saw it happening.</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>D</b>
15. <b>If another student brought a gun to school, I would tell one of the teachers or staff at school.</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>D</b>
16. <b>Students at my high school got put down because of their race or ethnicity.</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>D</b>
17. <b>Teachers made it clear to students that bullying was not tolerated.</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>D</b>
18. <b>If another student talked about killing someone, I would tell one of the teachers or staff at school.</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>D</b>
19. <b>If I told a teacher that someone was bullying me, the teacher would do something to help.</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>D</b>
20. <b>There were adults at my school I could go to if I had personal problems.</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>D</b>
21. <b>Students would tell teachers when other students were being bullied.</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>D</b>
22. <b>The teachers at my school genuinely cared about me doing well.</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>D</b>
23. <b>There was a lot of teasing about sexual topics at my school.</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>D</b>
24. <b>Students who were bullied or teased mostly deserved it.</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>D</b>
25. <b>It felt good if I hit someone.</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>D</b>
26. <b>If you fought a lot, everyone would look up to you.</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>D</b>
27. <b>Sometimes you only had two choices – get punched or punch the other person first.</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>D</b>
28. <b>If you were afraid to fight, you didn't have many friends.</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>D</b>
29. <b>If someone threatened you, it was ok to hit that person.</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>D</b>
30. <b>Bullying was sometimes fun to do.</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>D</b>
31. <b>Students in my school belonged to groups that didn't get along with one another.</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>D</b>

Demographic Information						
<i>Definition of Demographic Location:</i> <b>Rural relating to the countryside other than the town or city.</b> <b>Urban relating to the city or town.</b> <b>Suburban relating to an outlying part of the town or city.</b>						
<b>32. Which of the following best describes the high school you attended?</b>	<b>Rural</b>		<b>Urban</b>		<b>Suburban</b>	
<b>33. What is your gender?</b>	<b>Male</b>		<b>Female</b>			
<b>34. What is your age?</b>	<b>18</b>		<b>19</b>		<b>20</b>	
<b>35. How would you classify yourself?</b> <b>A. White</b> <b>B. Hispanic or Latino</b> <b>C. Black or African American</b> <b>D. Native American or American Indian</b> <b>E. Asian/Pacific Islander</b> <b>F. Other</b>	<b>A.</b>	<b>B.</b>	<b>C.</b>	<b>D.</b>	<b>E.</b>	<b>F.</b>

Optional open-ended response.

**If you have experienced bullying in high school and would like to share your personal experiences, please do so in the box below.**

## Appendix D

## Letter of Invitation

Dear IUP Freshman:

Congratulations to you as you approach the end of your first year of college! My name is Eric Witt, and I am currently a school administrator in Pennsylvania and a doctoral student at IUP. I am contacting you in regards to a survey that I am conducting that focuses on the correlation between bullying and school climate. By clicking on the link, you will give consent to participate in a brief online survey that should only take ten to fifteen minutes of your valuable time. My dissertation, entitled "The Correlation between College Freshmen's Perceptions of School Climate and Instances of High School Bullying" seeks to survey college freshmen to gather quantitative evidence to determine if the aforementioned correlation exists. If this study establishes that a relationship does in fact exist between school climate and bullying, then anti-bullying efforts made by schools can focus toward improving school climate.

Participation in the study is voluntary, will remain strictly anonymous and refusal to participate will not result in any penalty. The survey window will be available for four weeks to complete the survey. To ensure confidentiality, each participant will receive a randomly assigned security code generated through the online survey system. The security code will only be used internally in order to send follow-up reminder emails. As a thank you for your participation, you will be directed at the end of the survey to a separate web page where you can enter a random drawing for a **\$100 GIFT CARD**.

If you require additional information, please contact:

## Principal Investigator

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## Co-Investigator

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THIS PROJECT HAS BEEN APPROVED BY THE INDIANA UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS (PHONE 724.357.7730).

## Appendix E

## Permission to use Survey

**Permission email from Dr. Dewey Cornell**

**From:** Cornell, Dewey G. (dgc2f) <[dgc2f@virginia.edu](mailto:dgc2f@virginia.edu)>  
**Sent:** Friday, November 14, 2014 2:43 PM  
**To:** Eric Witt  
**Subject:** RE: Permission to use survey

I am ok with your request. I am attaching our most recent work, which you may want to consider in modifying the survey for your purposes. Dewey

**From:** Eric Witt [<mailto:Eric.Witt@agasd.org>]  
**Sent:** Friday, November 14, 2014 1:05 PM  
**To:** [dcornell@virginia.edu](mailto:dcornell@virginia.edu)  
**Subject:** Permission to use survey

November 14, 2014

Dewey G. Cornell,PHD  
405 Emmet St S  
Charlottesville, VA 22903

Dear Dr. Cornell,

I am a doctoral student from Indiana University of Pennsylvania writing my dissertation titled "The Correlation Between Perceptions of School Climate and Instances of Bullying" under the direction of my committee chaired by Dr. Joseph Marcoline.

I would be honored to have your permission to modify the School Climate and Bullying Survey (SCBS) and distribute it to college freshmen for my research study. I would be using the survey under the following conditions:

- I will use this survey only for my research study and will not sell or use it with any compensated or curriculum development activities.
- I will include the copyright statement on all copies of the instrument.

If these are acceptable terms and conditions, please let me know.

Sincerely,

Eric Witt  
Doctoral Candidate