What Influences Principal Perceptions of Bullying?

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WHAT INFLUENCES PRINCIPAL PERCEPTIONS OF BULLYING?

By

Matthew Benjamin Alred

Abstract of a Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate School
of The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

May 2012
ABSTRACT

WHAT INFLUENCES PRINCIPAL PERCEPTIONS OF BULLYING?

by Matthew Benjamin Alred

May 2012

Bullying is a wide-spread problem that affects millions of students every day. School bullying is a serious social issue that can have both short-term and long-term devastating effects on the victims, bullies, and bystanders. Federal, state, and local agencies have created policies to address school bullying. However, the school principal has the most pivotal role in reducing the incidents of bullying and appropriately intervening in incidents that do occur. Furthermore, the principal is the most empowered by his or her role to bring about change to the school’s climate and culture which are key factors in the prevalence of bullying. The perceptions principals have toward bullying inevitably affect their response to school bullying therefore it is important to investigate.

A quantitative survey-design method was used to conduct the study. This study analyzed the perceptions of 109 Mississippi public school principals through an online survey. The findings of this study show that age, race, gender, level of licensure, years of experience, type of school they work in, or their own involvement in bullying situations as a student did not have a significant effect on the principal’s perception of bullying. Additionally based on findings, it is suggested that principals in Mississippi need further bullying intervention training to better identify bullying behaviors.
The University of Southern Mississippi

WHAT INFLUENCES PRINCIPALS’ PERCEPTIONS OF BULLYING

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Matthew Benjamin Alred

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate School
of The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Approved:

[Signatures]

Director

Dean of the Graduate School

May 2012
DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my grandparents who taught me how to live.
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First, I would like to thank God for all the blessings He has placed in my life and for giving me the opportunity to serve Him in all that I do. I would like to thank my advisor, Dr. David Lee, for his invaluable support and guidance in this process. I would like to also to express my gratitude for the work of my committee members, Dr. Rose McNeese, Dr. J.T. Johnson, and Dr. Ronald Styron, for their thorough guidance and continuous support in completing this research. Additionally, I would like to thank the University of Southern Mississippi and its faculty and staff for their amazing support. I would like to thank my whole family for always believing in me and supporting me in everything I do. I would like to especially thank my father, Jack Alred, who taught me to question everything. I would like to thank my fiancé Amy Marolt and her parents, Mike and Debra, for their continued support as well.
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A principal’s first responsibility is to create an environment that ensures the safety and well-being of the students in his or her school. This may be seen first as a moral obligation above all the other possible legal or policy requirements that may exist. As the chief enforcer of school policy on the school campus and as the instructional leader of the school, the school principal must play the key role in ensuring the reduction and intervention of bullying. The perceptions and expectations the principal has of the faculty, staff, students, parents, and other stakeholders will influence how incidents of bullying are dealt with within the school. The principal’s actions and inactions contribute to the atmosphere of the school, thereby creating an environment that either promotes or dissuades acts of bullying from occurring (GLSEN, 2008).

A safe environment is critical to the achievement of all students and bullying has been shown to not only negatively affect the victim and bully, but also the entire communal nexus including student bystanders and adults (Doll, 2010). Bullying has been shown repeatedly in studies to have a strong negative impact on the lives of the victim, bystanders, and the bully. There is compelling evidence that shows that victims of bullying are more likely to engage in actions which are violent and self-destructive. Also research has shown that the behavior of the bully is likely to escalate toward and include criminal acts (Lodge & Frydenberg, 2005).

In the last decade the issue of bullying has gained greater attention by society, the media, schools, and researchers. In the past 10 years the amount of research conducted
concerning bullying has increased tenfold (Graham, 2010). Surveys conducted have shown that as many as six million students in the 6th to 10th grade have been subjected to moderate or frequent incidents of bullying. That is approximately 30% of the students of that age group in the United States (Boyle, 2005).

Other research suggests that the number of K-12 students bullied may be as low as 30%, but that in some schools that number drastically increases to 80% being bullied some of the time with as much as 10 to 15% of students being habitually bullied (Card & Hodges 2008). The sheer number of incidents that have been found to have occurred denotes the seriousness of the issue. Further, the short term and long term effects that research has shown to result from bullying provide evidence that even though there has been a greater response to bullying in the recent past, more information and policy changes need to be researched and implemented to effectively reduce the occurrence of this social issue (Bradshaw, Sawyer, & O’Brennan 2007; Dake, Price, & Telljohann, 2003; Graham, 2005).

Although most people have a general definition of bullying, the recent influx of research has been used to refine the meaning to commonly include three significant indicators. First, the act of bullying is an intentional action on part of the bully or bullies to cause harm to the victim(s). Second that these actions are repetitive and are not a single occurrence. Thirdly, that an imbalance of power exists or is perceived to exist between the bully and the victim in which the victim cannot stop the acts being committed against them (Rigby, 1996; Stopbully.gov, 2010a).

Many new school policies throughout the country, research-based programs implemented in many schools, and a recent law in the state of Mississippi all focus on
intervening and reducing the incidents of bullying for school age students. The recent law in Mississippi concerning bullying (formerly S.B. 2015) mandate that all school districts in the state have a policy that addresses bullying and that follows strict guidelines outlined in the legislation. Additionally, one of the main goals of the “No Child Left Behind” (NCLB) legislation was to increase school safety. There is specific language in NCLB that states that bullying is an undesired behavior research has shown it to have an adverse effect on the achievement of students. In fact it has been shown in the “Indicators of School Crime and Safety” 2010 report that student absenteeism from school activities occurs 15% of the time as a result of fear of being attacked, bullied, or harassed (Olweus Bullying Prevention Program, 2011).

Findings from a 2008 report conducted by Harris Interactive on behalf of the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) and the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) provided the perspectives of many school principals on bullying in their school. Approximately half of the principals involved in the research surveyed reported that bullying is a serious issue in the school they work in. The principals reported that it was a more common issue than the use of drugs and alcohol or violence. Bullying was reported as being a greater problem at schools identified as middle or junior highs. Three out of four middle or junior high principals survey stated that bullying was a prominent problem in their school while that number dropped below 50% for principals that worked in high schools or elementary schools (GLSEN, 2008).

Almost every principal stated that his or her school had some form of anti-bully or safe school policy in place. Most (94%) of the principals surveyed in the GLSEN/NASSP
study reported that they directly speak to the bully when bullying or harassments come to their attention. A slightly lower number of principals (90%) take the time to speak to the victim if a report of bullying or harassment is brought to the principal’s attention. Also, 75% of the incidents that the principal is informed of result in the principal taking disciplinary action against the bully. However only about a third of the principals believed that they were aware of the majority of incidents of student bullying happened in their school (GLSEN, 2008).

However the study conducted for the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network and the National Association of Secondary School Principals was a national study and not necessarily reflective of the perspectives of principals in all states (GLSEN, 2008). Another study conducted by Flynt and Morton in 2008 to gather data on Alabama principal perceptions of bullying in their schools had some different findings. In this study where 75 randomly selected principals were surveyed, and it was determined that bullying was considered a minor problem in their schools by 88% and considered a major problem in their schools by none of those surveyed. Less than 70% reported having a policy in place that specifically dealt with bullying. Also less than 40% responded that the district provided teachers with training on how to handle incidents of bullying or how to reduce the occurrence of bullying incidents. Last, the survey showed that 88% of the principals stated that their school would benefit from additional training on bullying (Flynt, & Morton, 2008).

The assessment and self-evaluation by school principals is critical to determine what their impact is and what perceptions exist about their leadership style is their school. Educational leadership is considered by many researchers to be the determining factor in
creating and maintaining a learning environment that is effective (Kelley, Thornton, & Daugherty, 2005). School culture dictates how staff and faculty communicate and cooperate. Positive changes lead to better effective learning for the students, but also make changes that improve the climate of the school. Effective leadership has been shown to improve the sense of community and levels of satisfaction within the school. The principals set the expectations, in which directly affect the students’ environment. A positive school climate can improve the way faculty and staff monitor students in various out of class locations and how they communicate with students in public places and in the classroom (Seashore & Wahlstrom, 2011). These changes work toward creating an environment in which bullying is not accepted.

Statement of Problem

The purpose of this study was to investigate Mississippi principals’ perceptions of bullying within their school. Additionally, the study sought to determine if certain factors affect those perceptions. Specifically the study sought to see if the age, gender, race, years of experience, type of school they work in, and licensure level of the principal has an effect on their perceptions of bullying. These factors have been shown to effect the perceptions of principals and educators toward many different issues including bullying. Several researchers have stated that there is a lack of data and research into the perceptions of school principals concerning bullying (Bradshaw et al., 2007; Dake, et al., 2003). Additionally, this study attempted to determine if a principal’s belief in how he or she were involved in bullying as a student affects their perceptions of bullying. Also research that has been conducted stated that there is a significant gap between the perceptions of school leaders concerning bullying and those of the teachers and students.
(Bradshaw et al., 2007, Rodkin, & Hodges, 2003). The focus has largely been on determining the perceptions of the classroom teachers and/or students and how they play a part in the occurrence of bullying (Dake et al., 2003). However, research has shown that principals are the key enforcers of school policy and are the most empowered through their role to make changes to the school’s climate and routines that would better protect students from bullying (Dillon, 2010; Doll, 2010; Harris & Hathorn, 2006; Kelley et al., 2005; Louis & Wahlstrom, 2011; Seashore & Wahlstrom, 2011). There has been a large amount of research conducted that shows the importance of school climate and how it affects the way students interact with each other (Kelley et al., 2005). Like in most states, there have been no previous attempts found to investigate Mississippi principals’ perceptions of bullying.

This study did not seek to determine if the principals are necessarily following the best practices of dealing with bullying or if their perceptions are what most researchers would deem appropriate, but rather to report on their perceptions as they are. There can be several beneficial outcomes from the data collected and analyzed. First, a basis of how principals perceive bullying in the state was established. At this point those perceptions could at best only be speculated upon by comparing them using research conducted with principals in other states. However, this would be a poor choice due to the cultural influences that most would anticipate exist which could affect those perceptions. Second, if certain factors are shown to influence the principals’ perceptions, this information may be considered when new openings are being filled and in determining how districts seek to train personnel to more appropriately deal with bullying issues in their school. There are many different programs that are used to train personnel. Having a more informed
understanding of how principals perceive bullying could aid a district in deciding which program would best meet their needs. Third, additional research in the field will have a foundation to build upon in the future. As the issue of bullying motivates educators and researchers to seek out more information to build policy and initiate change, this research should provide direction and a platform for more work.

Research Questions

1. What are the perceptions held by Mississippi principals concerning bullying in their schools?
2. How do the age, gender, race, years of experience, type of school they work in, and licensure level of the principal affect his or her perceptions of bullying in their school?
3. Does a principal’s belief that her or she was either a bully, victim, bystander, or uninvolved in bullying affect his or her perceptions of bullying?

Definitions of Terms

The following terms will be found within this research study and are pertinent to understanding the issue of bullying and to describe the perceptions related to bullying:

Bully- a person who uses an advantage to intentionally hurt or threaten another person physically, emotionally, psychologically, or socially.

Bully/victim- a person who bullies another person and who is bullied by others.

Bullying- repetitive intentional harm conducted against one person by another person, persons, or group who has an advantage over that person either physically, emotionally, socially, or psychologically.
Bullicide- an emerging term for a suicide in which it is believed to have been committed by a person because he or she was being bullied.

Bystander- a person who is a witness to bullying, but is not a victim, however, he may play a part by either enabling the bullying or standing up for the victim.

Cyberbullying- the electronic posting of mean-spirited messages about a person

Elementary school- a school that is made up of grades kindergarten through the fourth, fifth, or sixth grade.

High school- a school that is made up of the ninth grade to the twelfth grade.

Middle school- a school that is made up of grades between the fourth, fifth, and sixth grade to the eighth grade.

Peer Victimization- is aggressive behaviors of children against other children.

Provocative Victim- is a victim by his or her own behavior or choices make himself or herself the target of bullying.

School climate- the quality of a school and its characteristics that impact the perceptions and experiences of the students and personnel

Suicide ideation- thoughts of harming or killing oneself

Victim- a person who is bullied by another person, persons, or group.

Delimitations

This study had several delimitations placed on it in order to provide a concerted view of how Mississippi principals perceive bullying in their school. The first delimitation was that only current principals in the state of Mississippi participated in the study. Second, only principals who are employed in public schools in the state
participated in the study. The third delimitation placed on the study was the time frame principals have in order to complete the survey.

Assumptions

It is assumed that the principals participating in this study answered the survey honestly without attempting to control the outcome of their responses due to the anonymity the survey provides them.

Justification

Bullying is a widespread problem in most schools and there is a serious risk added to students involved when the adults in the school continue to believe and act as if bullying is an acceptable normal behavior (Espelage, & Swearer, 2003; Fekkes, Pijpers, & Verloove-Vanhorick, 2004; Fox & Boulton, 2005; Herba, et al., 2008; Rigby, 2003). Currently an estimated 2.7 million students in this country are bullied in some form by another 2.1 million students each year. Approximately 80% of American students are involved in bullying in some way each year (Bullying Statistics.org. 2010; Gastic, 2008). The effects of this bullying on the victim, bully, bystanders, and student body are serious and often have long-term life altering consequences to the emotional and psychological health of those involved (Due, et al., 2005; Espelage & Swearer, 2003; Fekkes et al., 2004; Fox & Boulton, 2005; Herba, et al., 2008; Kaltiala-Heino, Rimpela, Rantanen, & Rimpela, 2000).

The federal government and the state of Mississippi have imposed legislation to reduce the occurrences of bullying in schools (Olweus Bullying Prevention Program, 2011). However research suggests that the school principals are the most empowered by
their role to make the significant changes needed to reduce bullying in schools and create a more positive school climate that does not condone bullying (Dake et al., 2003). However, it has also been found that there is a lack of research on principal’s perceptions of bullying within their schools. That most of the research has been conducted on the perceptions of students or teacher (Harris, & Hathorn, 2006). Bradshaw, Sawyer, & O’Brennan (2007) stated that was a need for more investigation into the perceptions of principals of bullying and that it was likely that those perceptions were not conducive to reducing bullying behaviors.
CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In recent years bullying has gained increased attention in the media, society, and schools. This increase is due in some part to increased research in the field and probably to the recent increase in homicides and suicides committed by youths linked to incidents of bullying. Researchers have found that a common element among students who have carried out school shootings is that they themselves were subjected for a number of years to harassment, bullying, and mental anguish (Thomsen, 2002). Furthermore it has been shown that the schools with the highest level of violence also have an atmosphere in which bullying is highly prevalent and intense (Will & Neufeld, 2003). These tragic events have acted as catalysts in moving research forward and in changing the attitudes of many toward bullying. In the past, bullying was seen as a common human experience often characterized almost as a phase children go through. Society propagated the idea through literature and culture that to overcome a bully one simply had to find the courage in oneself to stand up to the bully. Research in bullying has shown that the this is a misconception and that the complex circumstances in which a bully chooses their victim and the relationship that is formed makes it very difficult for the victim to overcome the bully on their own. In 1996, Rigby, who is a leading researcher in the field, stated “for countless generations have been teasing, harassing, bullying one another, sometimes in fun, sometimes in deadly earnest, to the amusement, horror, or indifference or others, whether they be parents, teachers, or other students” (p. 19). Further, he states that because of the atypical nature of the cruelty, the continuous oppression that has no provocation or reason, bullying is a form of violence that can no longer be allowed to
Thus it is required that conscientious adults be aware of incidents of bullying and take appropriate steps to intervene and reduce the occurrences of bullying. In schools, the principal plays a key role in developing the school climate and in setting the tone for how students interact with each other.

Theoretical Framework

The development of a contemporary theory for understanding bullying is established on Bronfenbrenner's classic ecological theory and the research of Dan Olweus. The ecological theory creates a framework for understanding the social dynamic of bullying. It states that there is an interrelated structure linking a person's behavior with the various environments they exist in. These environments and interactions shape and provide context for the individual's behavior (Swearer & Doll, 2001). The use of the ecological theory was first put forth by Swearer and Doll in 2001. In their work, they put forth that the ecological theory states that as children develop mentally and physically, they also at the same time adjust to their environment. Bullying should not be seen as just the act of one person, but also the actions of peers, teachers, school personnel, family members, community members, and others who might have influenced the actions of the bully should be considered. Swearer and Doll emphasize utilizing bystanders to reduce bullying as well as building level staff. They also recognize that before significant gains are made in creating safer schools, administrators must take a more active role in managing and reducing bullying behaviors (Swearer & Doll, 2001).

Researchers using the ecology theory have classified and documented which groups the individual belongs to that significantly influence their involvement in bullying. Furthermore, researchers provide observed characteristics of the groups which form the
domain of interaction concerning bullying behavior (Espelage & Swearer, 2004). The school climate is a significant environment that contributes to the prevalence of bullying. As shown in research, the principal has the greatest opportunity to positively influence and guide the school climate thereby changing the environment in such a way that inhibits students from engaging in bullying through social expectations (Walsh, 2005).

Defining Bullying

Bullying is a term that has existed in the English language for some time and is found to be commonly used. Other phrases and terms that have similar meaning are peer harassment and peer victimization. There are many working definitions of the term, bullying, however in the influx of research the most commonly used explanation of the term comes from the work of Olweus (1994), who is a leading researcher in the field. His explanation of bullying is “a student is being bullied or victimized when he or she is exposed, repeatedly over time, to negative actions on the part by one or more other students” (Olweus, 1994, p. 7). These negative actions include any act which could be physical, verbal, social, or psychological in nature. Olweus provided a more detailed explanation of what bullying looks like by stating bullying occurs when students use unfriendly or hurtful language, socially ostracizing others from a group, threatening or committing physically violent acts, spreading or supporting gossip about another student, and/or attempting to cause other students to dislike or not be friends with a student (Olweus, 1999).

Other researchers have described an incident of bullying to have occurred when (1) an act is performed in order to demonstrate superiority or cause intimidation and fear over another person or when the act has no provocation and is conducted intentionally
with the goal to cause bodily harm or mental anguish; and (2) an there was a physical or psychological difference in power between the aggressor and the victim (Ross, 1996). An additional explanation of bullying is that those who are bullies usually are attempting to achieve dominance by the use of physical violence including hitting and pushing, negative and insulting language, use of threats, relationship sabotage, social exclusion, and other forms of bullying (Pellegrini & Bartini, 2000).

Further development of the term has led to three main components necessary to describe an action as being bullying. First, the act must be carried out intentionally to inflict or cause harm. Second, the act must be repeated over time. Third, there must be an imbalance of power between the victim and the bully(s) either physically or psychologically (Stopbullying.gov, 2010a). To be more clear it is not bullying when something occurs unintended, or as a single occurrence, or if it is between two students who are equally equipped to fend the other off. The degree to which the bully understands the physical or psychological pain they are inflicting is not part of the intentional component. The bully may be too young or immature to be aware of the damage they are causing, the key to the intentional component is regardless of the bully’s understanding the act is still intentional (Rigby, 1996).

In summary, bullying is an intentional act carried out by an aggressor or aggressors against a victim with a physical or psychological disadvantage, repeatedly over time. The extent to in which the harm is understood by the aggressor is not necessary for the act to be considered bullying. The explanation and definition of bullying is complex and evolving as research continues, however the basic tenets are accepted by most societies and individuals.
Types of Bullying

All bullying could be classified as either malign or non-malign. One of the key components of the bully definition discussed previously is that the bully commits the act intentionally to cause harm. However, researchers still provide a difference in what is described as malign bullying and non-malign bullying. Malign bullying is where the bully is old enough, mature enough, and emotionally able to understand the effects of their actions. The bully consciously chooses to commit these acts knowing that they are going to cause physical and/or psychological harm. The non-malign bullying occurs when the bully is not completely aware of the effects of their actions, although the act is still intentional (Rigby, 1996). An example might be that the bully knows that he should not repeatedly call another person chicken legs, but does it anyway without understanding that it actually inflicts emotional harm to the other person or to a greater degree than the bully comprehends.

There are several different types of bullying that have now been commonly accepted. In each the same three components are necessarily present. However, it is the intent and methods used that place an act into a category of bullying. First, there is relational or social bullying. This type of bullying is characterized by the bully using unwanted nicknames, humiliation, and mocking phrases or gestures to make the victim feel alone. When a victim is subject to this type of bullying they feel ostracized from the group. Often a social bully will sabotage the victim’s relationships with other students and attempt to keep others from becoming friendly with the victim as well. This is very common among middle school aged students; however it exists at every school level (Harris, 2006).
The next type of bullying is verbal bullying. This is the most common form of bullying as is characterized by the use of negative or insulting language often referring the victim’s personal life such as their race, ethnicity, gender, a real or perceived disability, religion, or sexual orientation. In a study conducted by Harris, Petrie, and Willoughby (2002), 41% of the students reported to having been called unwanted names and 38% reported to have been often teased.

Mindless bullying occurs when students who are considered non-bullies intentionally commit acts that result in harm that they are not aware of causing. With mindless bullying the bully is either too young, immature, or emotionally inept to comprehend the effect his or her actions are having although the acts are intentionally. They may perceive their actions as fun or as teasing in which no harm is being done. However their lack of understanding does not redefine the act from being bullying because the act is still intentional (Rigby, 1996).

Racial bullying is another form of bullying that has been identified, but has not yet had much research conducted. However, initial findings have shown that minorities are at a higher risk of being bullied than others (Rigby, 1996).

Educational or intellectual bullying is another type of bulling that is known to occur in schools. This form of bullying is the result of the bully believing or knowing himself or herself to being more intelligent than the victim (Harris 2006). This often occurs in the form of teasing in which the depth of harm caused is not always intended. Educational bullying that occurs in the classroom can be hard to discern between being intentionally mean or un-intentionally over critical of another student’s ability or work. It is difficult to for teachers to intervene in many instances (Rigby, 1996).
The most obvious form of bullying is physical bullying. This occurs when the bully uses or threatens to use physical contact to inflict harm on the victim. Examples of physical bullying can be kicking, shoving, or punching, but also can include any act in which the victim is harmed or threatened by physical violence (Harris, 2006). As many as 285,000 students are physically assaulted each month in this country with an incident of bullying occurring at a rate of once every seven seconds with 85% of these incidents occurring without any intervention by adults or peers (How-To-Stop-Bullying, 2009).

Cyberbullying is the use of technology as a means to bully another person. It typically happens via text messages and social networks, but other means are also commonly used. In 2009, the Cyberbullying Research Center reported that cyberbullying was more common than other studies had found. They reported that as much as 25% of students had been cyberbullied and almost the same percentage of students had committed cyberbullying (Bullyingstatistics.org, 2010).

Effects of Bullying

The consequences from bullying has had serious short-term and long-term effects on bullies, victims, and bystanders in their ability to be successful students and possessing good mental health. These effects can be shown in many studies to have detrimental outcomes in the lives of students (Due, et al., 2005; Espelage, & Swearer, 2004; Fekkes, et al., 2004; Glew, Fan, Katon, Rivara, & Kernic, 2005; Herba, et al., 2008, Kaltiala-Heino, et al., 2000; Rigby, 2003). Students who are involved with bullying have been shown to miss more school and to have more discipline problems in general (Gastic, 2008). Also there are adverse effects in the level of academic success for some students who are involved in bullying. Additionally, the emotional damage to the
student’s mental health status has both short-term and lasting effects on the student. Also studies have shown a correlation between being involved with bullying and suicidal ideation (Bonanno & Hymel, 2010). In this section the effects of bullying are reviewed from several key studies, some of which were conducted over ten years ago but have continued to be cited in many works due to their important findings.

In a recent study, bullying was investigated to see what effects it had on school truancy. The study looked at three measures of truancy: being late, missing a class, and excessive absenteeism. Students who were the victims of bullies were found to be slightly more likely to be late for classes and also to miss classes during the day, however the difference was not enough to be significant. In the same study it was found that there was a significant difference in the excessive absenteeism of students who were bullied. Non-victims were excessively absent from school 15% of the time. Victims were excessively absent 22% of the time from school. The difference of 7% is statistically significant enough to show a relationship between missing school and being victimized at school by your peers. In the study the researchers determined that after controlling for other key variables students who were bullied were 58% more likely to be excessively absent from school than those who were not victims. This therefore shows the difference to be both significant and practical in importance (Gastic, 2008). In the same study, students who were bullied were also more likely to have disciplinary problems during as school as well. Victims were 45% more likely to get into excessive trouble at school than non-victims. Also the likelihood of a student being given in-school or out-school detention was both statistically different and practically important between victims and non-victims. Students who are victims were given in-school detention 52% more times than
non-victims. Students who are victims were given out-school detention 65% more than non-victims. However, the greatest difference between victims and non-victims in regard to discipline issues is school transfers. School transfers for disciplinary issues are reportedly three times higher for bully victims than non-victims. The study finds that there is a clear correlation between being a victim of a bully and having excessive absenteeism and/or excessive disciplinary issues. Excessive truancy issues and ongoing discipline problems have serious negative consequences toward a student’s ability to be academically successful. This leads to a greater risk of dropping out of school. Therefore it is likely that a considerable number of school dropouts did so in at least part because of being bullied (Gastic, 2008). It has been proven that high school drop outs are more likely to have lower paying jobs, suffer from increased health risks, and have a greater chance of being incarcerated (Laird, Debell, Kienzl, & Chapman, 2007). Additionally it may be that these behaviors are an attempt by the victim to protect themselves against the bully. Missing school and disruptive behavior may be efforts to avoid situations or take a pre-emptive action in order to cope with an anticipated bullying incident (Gastic, 2008). These disciplinary issues may also be attempts of the victims to stand up to bullies. It is known that often students feel like nothing will be done if they report the bullying which is also in fact shown to be true, so they take it upon themselves to fight back (Harris & Petrie, 2003). This in turn causes themselves to get into trouble which may in the mind of some victims further alienate them from the school environment as they perceive that not only are the adults not going to stop the bullying, but that if they try to do something themselves to stop it then they are going to be punished (Gastic, 2008).
Studies have shown that there is a strong link between students being involved with bullying and suffering from symptoms of depression (Van der Wal, De Wit, & Hirasing, 2003). A study found that both bullies and victims were more likely to be unhappy at school and not feel safe while at school than other students (Glew, et al., 2000). Also a significant correlation exists between students who are labeled a bully or victim and being recommended to obtain psychosocial services (Sourander, Helstela, Helenius, & Piha, 2000). Students who are bullies are also more likely to develop other antisocial behaviors than their less aggressive peers. Bullies are more likely later in life to abuse drugs and alcohol (Kaltiala-Heino et al., 2000).

Students who are bullies have been shown to be more likely to suffer from poor mental health. As much as one-third of the students who are labeled as bullies have been shown to have attention deficit disorders, almost 13% suffer from some level of depression and almost 13% also have oppositional defiance disorders (Kaltiala-Heino et al., 2000; Kumpulainen, Rasanen, & Puura, 2001). Along with the attention deficit disorders, students who are bullies are also more likely than their peers to have hyperactivity issues as well (Kumpulainen, et al., 2001). As adults, students who were bullies in school are more likely to have a criminal record, be abusive to their spouses and children, and have lower than expected employment performance (Glew, et al., 2005).

There are many negative short-term and long-term effects of bullying on the victim. These consequences of bullying affect students both physically and psychologically. Students who are victimized by their peers are more likely to suffer from depression and also have suicidal ideation (Fekkes, et al., 2004). Many adults, including
educators, may not realize the level of risk students suffer from depression and suicidal ideation is equal among bullies and victims (Kaltiala-Heino et al., 1999). In one large study consisting of 123,227 young teenage students in 28 different studies it was found that students who were bullied were more likely to display psychosomatic symptoms. These symptoms included both physical and psychological which ranged from headaches, body aches, and amnesia to fatigue, loneliness, and helplessness (Due, et al., 2005). Students who are bullied are more likely to have digestive problems and cognitive difficulties. Students who are victims are more likely to suffer from symptoms akin to post-traumatic stress disorder as well. Also victims are at a higher risk of becoming smokers of tobacco. However, it is not been proven whether these facts are all a result of being bullied or possibly a reason why the bully chose the student to victimize (Houbre, Tarquinio, Thuillier, & Hergett 2006).

Additionally, it has been shown that very young students who are bullied suffer from a wide range of social problems that led to them having fewer or no playmates (Perren & Alsaker, 2006). Findings also show that adults who were bullied provided evidence that a positive correlation exists between being bullied as a child and being more likely to be shy as an adult (Jantzer, Hoover, & Narloch, 2006). Victims typically are more likely to have lower opinions of themselves than bullies or other students (Houbre, et al., 2006).

Dake, et al. (2003) summarized characteristics of bullies and victims found in relevant research. Their summations are contained in the following chart:
### Tables 1

**Summary of Characteristics of Bullies and Victims**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics of Bullies</th>
<th>Characteristics of Victims</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Suffer symptoms of depression</td>
<td>Suffer symptoms of depression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience suicidal ideation</td>
<td>Experience suicidal ideation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suffer from psychiatric problems</td>
<td>Suffer from psychiatric problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suffer from eating disorders</td>
<td>Suffer from eating disorders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have suffered child abuse</td>
<td>Have suffered child abuse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engage in substance abuse</td>
<td>Suffer from loneliness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engage in fighting behaviors</td>
<td>Suffer from anxiety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engage in criminal misconduct</td>
<td>Suffer from low-self esteem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engage in academic misconduct</td>
<td>Be less popular than others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have friends who are bullies</td>
<td>Spend a lot of time alone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have friends who are large in size</td>
<td>Come from harsh home environments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceive friend-making as easy</td>
<td>Perceive friend-making as difficult</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Begin dating earlier than other children and at more advanced levels</td>
<td>Have parents who allow for few opportunities to control social circumstances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be physically and socially aggressive toward dating partners</td>
<td>Have a parent-child relationship marked by intense closeness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have authoritative parents</td>
<td>Have parents who are more involved in school activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have parents who use punitive forms of discipline</td>
<td>Have less-responsive and less-supportive parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have less-responsive and less-supportive parents</td>
<td>Experience health problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have poor parent-child communication</td>
<td>Have problems with school adjustment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack adult role models</td>
<td>Have problems with school bonding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Come from harsh home environments</td>
<td>Have higher rates of absenteeism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have lower academic achievement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have lower school adjustment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have lower school bonding</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. (Drake, et al., 2003)

Suicides as a result of bullying (or Bullicide is the term emerging to describe bully induced suicides) have become either more common or better diagnosed in recent years. Several suicides in the last 20 years were said to be the result of bullying. In some of these incidents the individual who committed suicide provided evidence before or left
evidence behind that stated or suggested bullying was the reason he or she took his or her own life. In other situations, parents and those who had close relationships with the individual who committed suicide believed or had proof that bullying was the reason the person killed himself or herself. Regardless of the extent of proof that bullying was the main reason in these suicides, the attention gained by these incidents has increased the awareness of many individuals to the harmful effects of bullying. Even though suicides are rare in general and the number of suicides related to bullying is only a fraction of the number of students that are bullied each year, it should still be a major social concern to protect children from such behavior that would lead to suicides (Herba, et al., 2008).

Further studies have shown that there is a considerable increase for anxiety disorders and depression among men and women who were bullied or were bullies as children. These effects are often related to suicidal ideation. Also it has been shown there is an increase in suicides and attempted suicides in young adult females who were bullied over time. Adult males were found to be at a lesser risk for suicidal ideation as a result of childhood bullying (Nunn, 2010).

Bullying has been linked to suicidal ideation especially when the student’s level of hopelessness is taken into account. This level of hopelessness is attributed to factors that lead the student to believe nothing will be done to change the situation and the bullying will likely continue in the future. Home life and the school environment are among some of the critical factors that contribute to the level of hopelessness a student feels (Bonanno & Hymel, 2010). Students who are bullied and feel like they are not accepted within their family are more likely to have thoughts about suicide. Furthermore researchers have suggested that when examining the effects of bullying on students, that
school personnel and health care professionals should strongly consider the student’s home life and the mental health of the parents (Herba et al., 2008).

Prevalence of Bullying

The Indicators of School Crime and Safety (Dinkes, Kemp, & Baum, 2009) report gives an overview of statistics that helps understand the prevalence of bullying. Although because of various definitions of bullying and bullying behaviors, as well as the methods used to collect statistical data, findings can differ from report to report. In their report they found that one in three teenagers was being victimized by bullies while they were on school campus. Additionally, among the 30% that were bullied; 4% had property damaged by bullies, another 4% were intimidated into committing acts they did not want to do, 5% were ostracized from social activities they desired to be a part of, 6% was subjected to threats, 11% were the victims of physical violence by bullies, and 20% reported verbal harassment. This report further stated that 4% of the teenagers who participated in the research stated they had been bullied online. However the majority of the bullying incidents were to have occurred within the school. Other places, where bullying was reported to have occurred, were on the school grounds, on the way to and from school, and on the school bus. Notification of a bullying incident was only reported to school authorities about 30% of the time. Most of the victims were not the subjected to bullying on a regular basis with the majority reporting they were bullied only once or twice a year. However about 20% reported monthly incidents of being bullied and approximately 10% reported daily bullying or being often bullied in a week. The most occurrences of bullying reported by victims were done by white students and female students (Dinkes, Kemp, Baum, 2009). Another report conducted by the National Youth
Risk Behavior (NYBS) Survey in 2009 stated that 20% of teenagers were the victims of bullying during the previous year (NYRBS, 2009). Also statistics provided by the federal Find Youth Info website provided additional data to the prevalence of bullying. Their findings stated that almost half of middle school students may be suffering from peer victimization, where bullying is often found to be the most prevalent. Also they state that the percentage of students who are routinely bullied may be as high as 15 to 20% and the same percentages are found for students who reported being often bullied. One in five students is subjected to physical bullying at some point and as much as 30% of students are bullied in one way or another. Although not commonly known to many people, many studies have shown that female students are more likely to be victimized by their peers at a greater rate than male students although males are more likely to be subjected to physical forms of bullying (Find Youth Info, 2011). Disabled students are at a higher risk of being bullied than other students (Flynt & Morton, 2008). Also students who are homosexual or bisexual are also at a higher risk of being bullied. In 2009, the Cyberbullying Research Center reported that cyberbullying was more common than other studies had found. They reported that as much as 25% of students had been cyberbullied and almost the same percentage of students had committed cyberbullying (Bullyingstatistics.org, 2010).

In 2010, The Indicators of School Crime and Safety Report showed a significant increase in bullying especially in cyberbullying. Approximately 2.7 million students in the United States are being bullied by another 2.1 million students every year. In this report, about 14% of students in school from kindergarteners to seniors are being bullied or are bullying others. A majority of students believe that peer victimization is a reason
why students commit school shootings. More than half of students in some studies have reported to being bystanders to bullying at school. Bullying is reported as the reason for absenteeism for 15% of all students who miss school. Almost in three in four students see bullying as a continuing problem. Being the victim of ongoing bulling is given as the reason for one in ten students to move from one school to another or to just stop going to school altogether (Robers, Zhang, & Truman, 2010). Bullying is apparently more prevalent in some grades than in others as students are more likely to bully at certain ages as they mature. Some findings show as much as nine in ten students in Grades 4th through 8th were bullied in one way or another (Bullyingstatistics.org, 2010).

School bullying and cyberbullying combined victimizes possibly as much as 77% of students psychologically, bodily, or verbally. Due to the ever increasing use of technology, it is reported that incidents of cyberbullying are increasing faster than the statistics can be compiled so any reported figure is likely to be less than the actual rate of occurrence. Additionally findings state that as little as half of the incidents of school bullying that occur are ever reported and that cyberbullying is expected to be reported even less. Other findings show that one in three students between the 6th and 10th grade are subjected to or involved in incidents of bullying on a moderate or frequent occurrence. Data from bullying statistics show that 20% of students participating in studies admit to being a bully or to have at least bullied others before. As many as 285,000 students are physically assaulted each month in this country with an incident of bullying occurring at a rate of once every seven seconds with 85% of these incidents occurring without any intervention by adults or peers (How-To-Stop-Bullying, 2009).
Legal Aspects of Bullying

As the awareness of bullying has increased among parents, educators, researchers, the media, and society, legislative bodies and national organizations have also enacted policies, laws, and statutes to combat this social problem. However, it is necessary to point out that all the laws adopted in the United States to date and in most countries are requirements for schools or school districts to take action. The school is seen as the government agency in which bullying prevention will be carried out. Therefore violators of these laws would be schools or school officials and not the bullies themselves. In short, although bullying is considered violence it is not necessarily a criminal act punished by the state, although students who bully others with physical attacks could be charged with assault. Other acts that constitute bullying might also result in prosecution; however for the most part the discipline a student receives for bullying is general administered through the school.

The federally implemented NCLB Act of 2001 has specific passages that are contribute to how schools in every state are to handle occurrences of bullying. This federal law stipulates the following:

- Students in a persistently dangerous school, or a student who is victimized at school, can transfer to a safer school.
- States are to report on school safety to the public.
- School districts are to implement drug and violence prevention programs that show that they work.
- Districts that get Safe and Drug-Free School funds have a detailed plan for keeping schools safe. The plan must include (1) Appropriate discipline
policies; (2) security; (3) prevention activities; (4) student code of conduct; and (5) a crisis management plan for responding to violent events at the school.

Further federal policies from the Office of Civil Rights (OCR) prohibit any racial or sexual harassment from being tolerated for any activity at a school that receives federal funds. The OCR defines racial bulling as an act that could include: (1) racially motivated physical attacks against a student or group of students; (2) racial slurs on school walls or other property; and (3) racially hostile environment that limits the student’s ability to participate in school activities. The OCR states that sexual harassment is any conduct that is unwanted and extreme, ongoing, or inescapable that it inhibits a student’s involvement in curricular or extra-curricular activities. Whether racial or sexual, schools funded in part from the federal government cannot allow these climates to perpetuate (Stopbullying.gov, 2010a).

Students with disabilities are further protected from acts of bullying by the Rehabilitation Act, Section 504, which guarantees their right to be educated in a safe learning environment. Section 504 states that the child cannot be left out of activities or be in danger of harm by other students as a result of their disability (Stopbullying.gov, 2010a).

The Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) is a federal government agency under the United States Department of Health and Human Services. The HRSA monitors state legislative laws that impact both physical and mental health. The HRSA cites that several states have passed legislative laws with goals to address the issue of bullying. HRSA, through a program known as Stop Bullying Now, outlined the steps in which the states are following. The current laws in states have at least one or more of the
following intentions in their legislation: (1) state that schools must or should have a policy that prohibits bullying; (2) advocate the adoption of a bully prevention program; (3) proffer the training of school personnel on bullying prevention; (4) some states have stipulated incidents of bullying must be reported to law enforcement agencies; (5) laws in some states specifically endorses the disciplining of bullies; (6) some laws endorse initiating changes to make communication concerning bullying between students and personnel more effective (Olweus Prevention Program, 2011).

Furthermore, in Mississippi SB2015, which was passed in 2010, directly addresses the issue of bullying in this state. The Olweus Group, which is one of the leading bully prevention programs in the world, provides a description of SB2015 in common language. The three major components of SB2015 as described on the Olweus Group website are as follows:

- **SB2015** (2010) defines bullying as any pattern of gestures or written, electronic or verbal communications, or any physical act or any threatening communication, or any act reasonably perceived as being motivated by any actual or perceived differentiating characteristic, that takes place on school property, any school-sponsored function or on a school bus. The act must (1) place the student or school employee in actual and reasonable fear of harm to his or her person or damage his or her property, or (2) Create or is certain to create a hostile environment by substantially interfering with a student's educational performance, opportunities or benefits. The statute defines hostile environment.

- **SB2015** (2010) states that no student or school employee shall be subjected to bullying or harassing behavior by school personnel or students. It prohibits
reprisal or retaliation against a victim, witness or person with reliable information about an act of bullying or harassing behavior. It requires a school employee who is a witness or has reliable information about an act to report it, and also requires students or volunteers to report incidences.

- **SB2015 (2010)** requires each local school district to include in its personnel policies, discipline policies and code of student conduct a prohibition against bullying or harassing behavior and adopt procedures for reporting, investigating and addressing such behavior. Further requirements of the policy are outlined in the statute.

This recent legislation has created much more attention to bullying across the state with educators and parents alike. Additionally in Mississippi another previous law adopted in 1972, Code 37-11-20, and also addresses the issue of school bullying. Code 37-11-20 makes it unlawful for any person to intimidate, threaten or coerce, or attempt to do such things, to any person enrolled in any school for the purposes of interfering with the right of that person to attend school classes or of causing him not to attend such classes (Olweus Prevention Program, 2011).

The new Mississippi legislation, SB2015, has yet to be tried in court. However, other schools in several different states have been sued in federal court. Since courts commonly follow precedents set in other cases, it is likely that future lawsuits in Mississippi might have similar results. In most cases the courts rule in favor of the school when a policy addressing bullying is in place and schools make appropriate attempts to intervene when incidents of bullying are reported. However, courts will likely rule in favor of the parents if they perceive the school as being indifferent. The
two major concepts used by the courts are the level of reasonable action taken by the school and the ability of the school to predict the event. Specifically, in one case in Minnesota where a school was sued after a student committed suicide as a result of being bullied, the court still found in favor of the school, stating that while the school was expected to provide students with safety, the school was not liable for sudden unforeseen actions. The court will examine the events and determine whether the school should have been able to foresee the act and prevent it (Diamantes, 2010).

Additionally, the court will want to determine if the school followed their own policy. The school's failure to follow their own policy will likely result in the school being found negligent by the court. Furthermore, the court may want to investigate to see if bullying had been an ongoing problem at the school and how prevalent bullying was in the school. Lastly, it may want a record of how other events were handled in the past. Although intervening and reducing bullying is by many seen as a moral obligation, school principals need to have an understanding of the legal expectations that are additionally placed on them to handle issues of bullying appropriately (Diamantes, 2010).

Role of the Principal

Besides state and federal laws and policies requiring schools to take action, other professional organizations have also created standards for principals that promote how they lead the development of a school’s climate and how they should provide a safe environment for all students. These organizations recognize the extremely important role principals play in reducing the occurrences of bullying in their schools. The National Association of Elementary Principals (NAESP) and the National Association of
Secondary School Principals (NAESSP) with help from the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) created standards for school principals to follow (Hessel & Holloway, 2002). The publication they provided listed the following standards for school leaders to use in guiding their practice:

1. Facilitates and develops a shared vision of learning that is supported by school Stakeholders (ISLLC Standard 1).
2. Advocates, nurtures and sustains a school climate that promotes student and Faculty learning. (ISLLC Standard 2).
3. Manages a safe learning environment (ISLLC Standard 3).
4. Collaborates and responds to school stakeholders (ISLLC Standard 4).
5. Acts with integrity and fairness (ISLLC Standard 5).
6. Influences beyond the immediate school environment (ISLLC Standard 6).

Clearly these standards show that school leaders are expected to be dealing with occurrences of bullying and initiating bully prevention programs. Standard 3 specifically states the expectation for principals to create and maintain safe learning environments. Additionally, Standard 2 places the responsibility of the school’s climate and how it impacts the student on the role of the school principal as well.

A principal’s first responsibility is to create an environment that ensures the safety and well-being of the students in his or her school. This can be seen first as a moral obligation above all the other possible legal or policy requirements that may exist. However, bully prevention experts report that often principals are the least represented group in conferences and workshops in which the focus on bullying, school safety, and school climates. The faculty and staff that are present state that they do not receive the
necessary support from their principals. Without the leadership and of the school principal there is obviously little chance that any programs, policies, or initiatives will be successful in the intervention and reduction of school bullying. A main hindrance to the success of reducing and intervening in incidents of bullying is the lack of adults taking responsibility (Barnett, & Fallon, 2007; Dillon, 2010; Espelage, & Swearer, 2003).

Bullying is a natural occurring phenomenon among all human populations so there is no reason to assign blame, however it is the responsibility of everyone associated with the school to take action to intervene and reduce bullying (Rigby, 1996). However, it is clear that the single person who has the greatest ability and opportunity to bring about change would be the school principal. The fact that research has shown that most bullying occurs at times that students are not under the direct supervision of teachers or occurs without the notice of adults makes it difficult to gain the commitment of the staff and faculty. Research reports that the majority of bullying that occurs goes unknown by the adults in the school. Students have reported that bullying happens in the classroom when the teacher is present yet the acts are not identified by the teacher as bullying. A major problem is that teachers do not have a good understanding of what acts constitute as bullying (Dillon, 2010).

Experts in the field of bully prevention express that bullying is not only an issue of discipline concerning the bully and the victim. The school climate is negatively affected if persistent bullying is allowed to occur (Rigby, 2003). When a school climate becomes infected with bullying students who are never bullied directly will develop fear and intimidation of becoming a target when they see that nothing is done to prevent it from happening. Most educators and parents feel it is sufficient to identify the bully and
apply an appropriate consequence. Researchers and experts however suggest that this is not enough. In order to make significant reductions in the occurrences of bullying it is necessary to change the school’s climate (Rigby, 2003). However, the routines for monitoring students, creating progressive efforts, and implementing policies that change a school culture can be very difficult tasks. Nonetheless a change in the culture and climate is the most effective measure to deal with this issue. It is the role of the principal to identify the climate of the school and determine a strategy for making the needed to changes that ensure student safety (Dillon, 2010).

The role that is played by the principal in preventing incidents of bullying is critically important. Along with the commitment of parents and faculty, the leadership style and degree of commitment of the school principal are highly related to the prevention of school bullying (Rigby, 1996). Principals who work to create a school climate with practices that promote positive relationships between faculty, the students, and their caregivers are commonly found in the schools noted as being safe. Principals should develop an understanding of the harmful results that bullying brings to the atmosphere of the school and create a dialogue that discourages incidents of bullying to all stakeholders (Harris & Petrie, 2003). However researchers have stated that there is a lacking amount of research on the perspectives held by principals on the topic of bullying at their respective schools (Bradshaw et al., 2007; Harris & Hathorn, 2006).

Researchers have stated the importance of school climate as a major component of school success. Teachers, instructional strategies, and curriculum materials are the only three items deemed more essential to student success than the school climate. Although these three are obviously the most important, in the past school climate may not
have been recognized as having such a large impact as it is accepted as having today (Doll, 2010; Higgins, 2005; Rigby, 2003). The climate of the school, or its atmosphere as some refer to it, directly adds to the likelihood of academic success for the students in the school. The school climate predicts the level of several key activities including: students’ participation in the learning process, school attendance, completion of class assignments, and how much effort they put into doing well in school. Schools with more positive levels of school culture have more likely to have students who feel more connected and therefore more likely to graduate. Further these students are additionally more likely to go on to be successful in college and career opportunities (Doll, 2010).

When principals lead changes in school climates the results are positive and evident in the way faculty and staff work together on and off campus to improve the learning environment for the students and develop or refine their routines and practices as professionals. Instructional effectiveness throughout the school has shown to be have a positive correlation with improved school climates (Doll, 2010; Higgins, 2005; Louis & Wahlstrom, 2011; Rigby, 2003). Further, these changes have effects on how the students experience school outside the classroom as well. Students’ time spent in the cafeteria, hallways, and how they interact with the adults in the school are more likely to show improvements if the school culture develops positive change. Each of these changes has shown to result in greater levels of academic success for the students and creating a greater sense of accomplishment among the staff and faculty. The effort principals make to increase collaboration among all stakeholders and to improve school climate is related to the success students have in their classrooms (Louis & Wahlstrom, 2011).
A key strategy in enhancing the climate of a school is developing student’s self-regulation habits and works to minimize and manage conflict. Students who go to a school that has a positive climate are less likely to engage in conflict and more likely to interact with others with respect (Louis & Wahlstrom, 2011). The changes to bring this about occur when principals modify how adults supervise students, encourage activities that are more productive, and create opportunities for students to have enjoyable interactions with their peers. Effective school climates have measures in place which encourage students to not act in ways that are inconsistent with their expectations and desired successes. Modeling and enforcing positive habits like listening well, being attentive, and taking part in activities enhance a student’s success and will likely discouraging disruptive and aggressive behaviors. Schools that have protocols in place that are prompt and effective in dealing with disruptive and aggressive behaviors are less likely to cause distraction to achievement and foster greater self-regulatory behaviors among students (Doll, 2010).

It is also important for principals to ensure that students have been given the proper guidance in solving problems in a proper manner through appropriate dialogue. A school with a positive climate takes serious measures to address bullying effectively. Furthermore, the routines and environments of the school are structured to limit the opportunities for bullying to take place. In such climates students are aware that the faculty and staff will step in to safeguard them if it is warranted (Doll, 2010).

Some researchers state that educators are not aware enough of the factors that can lead to a school climate that does not impede violence. The lack of awareness can be contributed to the educators having a poor understanding of what violence is, how
dominance plays a role in violence, being informed on how violence can be created from negative actions, incidents of bullying, not accepting the results that bullying can have, and not being informed to the role neglect from the parent can play (Thomsen, 2002). There are serious negative effects that occur psychologically to the child who is subjected to acts of bullying. Often bullying only further complicates the difficult maturation process that adolescents are undergoing by making it more difficult for the student to form positive relationships with peers and adults (Harris & Petrie, 2003).

The school plays a key part in the student’s social as well as academic, development. However when school employees do not intervene in acts of bullying or work to reduce the occurrence of bullying, they inadvertently enable the bully to continue and provide a culture that accepts bullying (Unnever & Cornell, 2004). Additionally, excusing the behavior through rationalizations, justifications, denials, blame, minimization, and avoidance on the part of educators also allows the bully to continue and the school climate to further shift toward being bullied centered (Harris & Hathorn, 2006). By making excuses that they have not had the proper training to intervene, having a negative attitude, and being overall unwilling, educators have increased the likelihood of school violence. These attitudes and beliefs contribute to the harm bullying can cause and increases the negative impact in can have on learning (Ross, 1996).

However, how a principal responds to any individual incident of bullying cannot be predicted (Mishna, Scarcello, Pepler, & Wiener, 2005). Principals have been shown through research to respond differently in how they discipline students. Research conducted in 2004 by Skiba and Edl investigated the attitudes of principals (N= 325) on the use of discipline. Their findings showed that 41% of principals used a zero tolerance
approach and 28% of the principals in the study reported they preferred a preventative approach. The remaining 31% used a mixture of both preventative and zero tolerance approaches. Within the same study, a majority of principals (71%) responded that their teachers did not have enough training to appropriately resolve discipline issues. This further illustrates the reasoning behind so many programs and policies that place a significant responsibility on the role of the principal in dealing with bullying and reducing bullying (Skiba & Edl, 2004).

The school principal clearly has a duty to create and maintain a school climate that discourages bullying. Principals as the instructional leaders of the school should attempt to cultivate a better understanding of the school vision, enable the mission to be conducted, and create a positive school climate (Kelley et al., 2005). The development and implementation of the school vision, mission and climate can occur in many different approaches however the responsibility to ensure those key components are carried out belong to the principal. Therefore it is again clearly the responsibility of the principal to deal with bullying and so it becomes imperative for researchers to investigate how principals perceive the issue of bullying (Bradshaw et al., 2007; Harris & Hathorn, 2006).

The views of school leaders in four elementary schools in 1993 were studied by Burrello and Reitzug (1993) to investigate their impact on the school’s climate. The researchers found that it was crucial for school leaders have to standards for the ethics of the school. This study demonstrates that it is the principal who has the most influence to create a climate within the school that does not tolerate bullying. In this type of atmosphere students and teachers are likely to feel that something will be done about
the bullying if they report the incident so they are more likely to do so (Burrello, &
Reitzug, 1993).

The Olweus Group has put forth that there are two separate classes for the causes of bullying. The first class of causes is individual and is less influenced by the climate of the school. However, the second class of causes is environmental and these are highly influenced by the school climate. These environmental factors that lead to increased bullying behaviors include the perceptions, actions, and routines of the school personnel that impact student behaviors such as the principal and teachers. These factors contribute to the number and severity of bullying incidents (Olweus, 2003). Furthermore not only must the principal take the responsibility and enact change in order to reduce bullying, the principal in order to be successful must involve all stakeholders, especially students, teachers and parents. Evidence from researchers who investigated the effects of appropriate leadership has shown that positive changes in schools are initiated by strong leaders (Higgins 2005).

Principals’ and Educators’ Perceptions of Bullying

There was very little research conducted to investigate the perceptions that principals held about bullying or preventing bullying before 2004 (Harris & Hathorn, 2006). Since then the amount of research has increased, but remains low. A search for dissertations conducted on ProQuest using the terms perspectives, principals (or administrators, or school leader), and bullying (or peer victimization) in 2011 provided no more than 27 responses and many of these when reviewed did not have the focus of investigating the principals perceptions. Further when the search criteria was reduced to the same terms, but to search within the titles of dissertations, the number of responses
was reduced to only 4, of which only 3 could be considered like studies. In the past the majority of research has focused on the perceptions of students and teachers.

Bradshaw et al. (2007) found that the perceptions of educators of bullying had not been adequately investigated that they most likely were negating the effects of bully prevention programs. The study also found that how principals and students viewed bullies were quite different. Students typically do not like students who are actually identified among them as bullies, however principals perceive these same students to be liked, but at the same time feared by the other students. However students are not always going to identify a student as a bully when they are indeed. Therefore, students who are indeed bullies often may be popular students. Also in the social dynamic of middle and high school, a student’s popularity may not have as much to do as being “likeable” as adults may assume. In contrast, younger students are more likely to not tolerate bullies within their groups (Bradshaw et al., 2007). The findings in Bradshaw et al. calls for additional research to be conducted in investigating the perceptions of bullying and what variables are likely to be major factors.

In 2006, a study conducted by Harris and Hathorn investigated the perceptions principals held on bullying (Harris & Hathorn, 2006). Previously, Dake et al. also investigated the perceptions of principals of bullying in 2003. Other known researchers of bullying have conducted sideline questions or developed questionnaires that could be used to gather data about principals (Rigby, 2011). However the reliability of several of these questionnaires has been called into question. The findings of the Harris and Hathorn study (2006) were similar to that of the Dake et al. (2003) in which 378 principals reported back from a random sample of 700 U.S. principals. Most principals perceived
bullying to be a greater issue on other school campuses than their own. Less than 1% believed that their school’s bullying problem was greater than the average U.S. school (Dake et al., 2003). Also, a preventive method using the whole school approach which is widely recommended by many experts is rarely found to be in effect. Principals who had not received some type of bully prevention training were less likely to incorporate a bully prevention program or to assess the student body about the school’s bullying with a survey. Their research showed a wide variety of methods used within the schools whose principals reported back in how they plan to prevent bullying. Principals in this study were much more likely to favor using activities that were post-bullying interventions rather than activities implemented to educate students and establish behaviors that would limit bullying beforehand. Furthermore, the study showed a serious difference in the perceived severity of bullying and the occurrences of bullying within the school between the principal, teachers, and students.

Teachers will normally report greater concern of bullying within their schools than their principal will and the students normally report more than either the teachers or principals (Dake, et al., 2003). In the Harris and Hathorn study the participating principals unanimously stated that the principals, faculty, and staff’s level of commitment was key in establishing a safe school environment. However, the principals also indicated that they were to a degree unaware as to the locations in which bullying was occurring on their school grounds. Older principals were also more likely to believe that immediate punishment was the most appropriate way to deal with a bully. They stated that not only should the punishment be immediate that it should also be automatic being more in line with a zero-tolerance approach. Also principals in the same study stated that they
believed that they along with the school personnel had established a safe and supportive environment at their school (Harris & Hathorn, 2006).

In studies a variety of findings report on the perceptions principals have concerning peer victimization. Some differences were found to possibly be related to the self-reported ethnicity of the principal. Although in general principals are found to have a low awareness of bullying, it was found that minority principals were more aware of bullying than Caucasian principals. Gender differences were shown to exist in some situations, with female principals being more aware of students stealing from each other than male principals. Also principals who had between 4 and 10 years of experience as administrators were more likely to recognize students being socially bullied by purposeful exclusion (Isernhagen & Harris, 2003).

In the past it has been shown through research that perhaps educators did not accept bullying as a major social issue. Many educators and others as well did not regard school violence or bullying as a major issue until the 1999 school shooting at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado (Holt & Keyes, 2004). Regardless of the media attention that has been given to bullying and the terrible incidents that occur that are often attributed to retribution from bullying, the fact remains that the reactions and perceptions of principals is very important in reducing incidents of bullying in schools (Rigby, 2002). Administrators need to have an extensive understanding of what bullying is and how it affects students because of their day to day involvement with students (Dake, et al., 2003).

Unfortunately research continues to show a strong difference in the perceptions of students toward bullying in their schools and the level of concern held by the school’s
principal (Harris & Petrie, 2003). There are still individuals who underappreciate the effects of bullying and still hold to the idea that it is a part of natural development (Wedemeyer, 2002). Lack of intervention is still prevalent because adults see the conflict between the bully and victim as normal transition into a mature adult (Dunn, 2001). Also at other times principal are aware of incidents but do not intervene because they do not appropriately diagnose the incident to warrant their involvement (Garbarino & de Lara, 2003). Additionally principals who have their own definitions of bullying may actually sanction behaviors deemed by experts as bullying through their own ignorance. This lack of understanding also leads to misdiagnosing the school’s climate by the principal allowing for continued peer victimization (Holt, & Keys, 2004). At other times some principals have the belief that students should be working out their own conflicts. Many still hold that in the process of growing up, students should naturally learn to deal with aggressors and stand up for themselves (Harris & Petrie, 2003).

Often principals tolerate bullying that occurs because the severity of the bullying may be low and it may seem to the principal as an opportunity for the students to learn to resolve conflict. However, in these situations the principal does not understand the effect continued relentlessly peer victimization has on a student even at a low intensity level. Educators continue the old adage kids will be kids (Dunn, 2001). These types of perspectives inadvertently put more students at risk in schools as the school climate comes to accept bullying as normal (Wedemeyer, 2002). Even when incidents of bullying are witnessed by some educators there is still a lack of intervention due the individuals’ reluctance to react (Conn, 2004). The lack of bullying incidents reported by students in school is partially credited to these perceptions of administrators. Students typically have
little if any expectation of appropriate intervention by the principal. The students perceive the administrators inaction as apathy toward the continuous bullying they endure (Dunn, 2001).

However, it is clearly agreed among all stakeholders that the school principal has the obligation to provide a safe environment and protect the student from violence and mistreatment (Moore, 2007). However, principals must come to recognize the difference in normal conflict and bullying. Bullying does not have to be severe in any one incidence to inflict serious negative effects. A fist fight might often have less long-term negative effects on one student than the ongoing verbal mild teasing of another student. The difference in normal conflict and bullying goes back to one of the key components of the bullying definition: an imbalance of power. In a conflict that is not classified as bullying and is by other conditions considered normal, both sides of the conflict are capable of defending themselves and to be aggressive. The outcome of a normal conflict is not likely to be the same as the outcome of bullying because by definition the victim is outmatched in some key factor by the bully (Rigby, 2003). It is important that administrators comprehend the negative results of bullying as well as what constitutes bullying (Dake et al., 2003).

If the principal has the appropriate knowledge of bullying needed, then he or she is more capable of creating and maintaining a safer environment for all the students in the school and reduce the occurrences of bullying incidents (Wedemeyer, 2002). However findings show that educators still are not aware of the volume of bullying that is happening at the school especially in specific areas (Garner, 2003). The fact that much of bullying that occurs in schools is not overt and occurs in the presence of school personnel
further identifies the lack of training and awareness of bullying that educators have (Wedemeyer, 2002).

Additionally, research has shown that even when the incidents are clearly identified by educators often there is still no intervention (Espelage & Swearer, 2003). The perceptions of bullying held by the educators would definitely attribute to their lack of intervention. There are several factors that inhibit the intervention or level of intervention. It is reported that many school employees do not appropriately deal with an incident of bullying because (1) non-physical bullying is not seen as serious enough to deem their involvement; (2) the social standing of the individuals involved within the school; and (3) possibly the actions of the victim as well (Gibson, 2003).

The success in the reduction and intervention of bullying is strongly affected by the perceptions of the educators because they are the main source of authority to enact and carry out change. A key effect derived directly from their perspective is the level of confidence students has an adult will act on a report of bullying. Also educators with the appropriate perspective toward bullying are likely to lend in creating an atmosphere within the school environment that is not tolerant of bullying behavior so that they student body is more likely to regulate itself through established social norms (Walsh, 2005). This is supported by research that shows that there is a possible natural reduction in the occurrences of bullying situations. The middle school years have the highest number of incidents and then the number starts to decline as the students get older. However, this does not mean it gets easier on students who keep getting bullied because as the students get older they are more capable as bullies to cause increased physical and psychological harm to the victims. Furthermore, research has shown that students will
typically not tell an adult at school that they know of bullying happening and commonly do not believe that if they did tell anything would be done about it (Fekkes et al., 2004).

Additionally, it is commonly held by educators that it is not their role, but that of the students to be the progenitors of change in the behavior of the student body. Therefore it is extremely important that the perceptions of the educators are in line with the best practices and that they are capable of accurately identifying bullying situations and appropriately intervene (Walsh, 2005). It has been shown that when educators do not have the appropriate perspective and training that there is actually little done to reduce or intervene in cases of bullying even when the educators are clearly aware that the bullying is happening. Also, when these educators do in fact make an attempt to deal with the incidents they are not effective (Fekkes et al., 2004). This is partially resulting from the perspectives that these educators have toward bullying. Studies have shown that educators do not foresee any barriers with creating classroom rules to deal with bullying, but yet rules that apply explicitly to bullying are not commonly found. Also educators are likely to believe activities that address bullying after the fact it has already occurred are the best measures of preventing additional occurrences in the future (Dake, et al., 2003).

Also educators were more likely to believe that it was common for victims to have less social skills than the norms of the student body and that the characteristics that possibly caused them to be targeted will likely lead to more social problems for them (Fox & Boultan, 2005). Bullying is ranked by educational professionals only behind the use of drugs as the most dangerous student activity (Dake, et al., 2003). The severity of this is only further compounded by the fact that although educators rank it as so dangerous they are unaware by student accounts of a great amount of bullying that occurs
under the supervision of educators in the classroom and other areas on campus (Rodkin & Hodges, 2003). The lack of proper perspectives is also shown in the fact that the most common theme of prevention provided to students is to instruct them to either tell a teacher or enlist the help of a friend which has been clearly shown to be the least likely actions taken by the student (Nocolaides, Toda, & Smith, 2002).

A missing element of most educators’ perspective about bullying is validating the feelings of the victim and listening to them in order to establish trust and to ensure they feel comfortable in reporting the incidents (Mishna & Alaggia, 2005). It is more common that educators make generic statements that the bullies will be punished even when they often are not. These types of responses increase the likelihood that future incidents will not be reported. Educators need to be aware of the signs of bullying because of the fact students are not likely to report the incidents. Educators do not typically perceive the difficulty some students have in disclosing to adults they are being victimized by their peers (Mishna & Alaggia, 2005).

Additionally the ability to perceive activities as being bully related is not found to be equal among all educators. For instance, middle school personnel are likely to be the least perceptive even though they are working with the students that report the highest levels of incidents. School personnel that work with younger than middle school students had the highest ability of recognizing bullying behaviors. This may be a result of the greater amount of time spent by middle school students in less supervised situations. Personnel working with middle school students often are less likely to watch their students as closely as personnel working with younger students in elementary grades because they commonly spend less time in the classroom. Elementary and Middle School
personnel spend more time observing students in the classroom and are much more likely to see the same groups of students interact together all day so they have the greater chance of identifying a peer bully. High school personnel also have less time spent with the same students, but typically the number of instances of bullying relationships has already dropped due to the maturation of the students (Leff, Patterson, Kupersmidt, & Power, 1999).

Furthermore, educators are not as capable as students are to identify incidents of bullying because they typically do not observe the students throughout their scheduled day to see how the different settings allow for peer abuse to happen. Because the dynamic of the bully-victim relationship is altered due to the setting the students are in and because this changing dynamic is basically unseen by the educators in the same way as the student, their ability to discern the change in behaviors between students is very hard to perceive (Leff et al., 1999).

The future behaviors of the bully and the victim are both seriously affected by how school personnel respond to incidents of bullying. If a victim perceives the educator as being indifferent or unlikely to act on his or her part, the victim feels more vulnerable than before and will be less likely to risk retaliation from the bully for telling by reporting future incidents. Therefore the educator has unintentionally increased the likelihood the bullying continues to occur. In contrast educators who punish bullies severely might perceive themselves as adequately dealing with bullying, but however it may also put the victim at risk of retaliation by the bully if additional changes were not made to correct the factors that led to the incident in the first place. Especially if the students return to an environment in which bullying is accepted and those supervising the students are inept at
identifying bullying behaviors (Yoon & Kerber, 2003). However some studies have shown that educators cannot decide if behaviors that are reported to them or that witness should be categorized as bullying activities. In some instances educators were not willing to believe that the student was a victim of a bully. In these situations many times the educator could not decide whether or not the victim was actually responsible for the treatment they received from the supposed bully. The term provocative victim is used to describe a person who intentionally puts themselves at risk for being bullied. Often teachers may suspect a student is being a provocative bullying and the negative treatment they are receiving is deserved. Additionally, in one situation a behavior might be seen as normal banter between friendly classmates, but in another situation if the banter is misunderstood or unwanted the behavior might constitute bullying. It is common for friends to engage in rough behavior or language that would not be appropriate for individuals who did not have that type of relationship. Obviously there must be instances in which the student who feels they are being victimized may not understand that the supposed bully is intending to do them no harm, but is assuming that they are indeed friends. Therefore many principals who were unaware of the actual relationship between the students could have a difficult time deciding if one was bullying the other (Mishna & Alaggia, 2005).

The school leader needs to have an understanding of how damaging bullying can be to the student’s mental health. The inappropriate actions of school personnel can lead to a greater sense of alienation by the student from his teachers, school personnel and the school environment (Yoon, 2004). The principal needs to have a non-passive and serious demeanor in the way the incident is managed or their behavior may actually undermine
their own actions of intervening (Yoon & Kerber, 2003). Research by Yoon (2004) showed that the educators’ level of how serious the students perceived them to be, their self-efficacy, and their own empathy were all significant factors in whether or not the educator would be likely to intervene. Yoon’s research showed a positive correlation between the teacher’s level of empathy and how serious they stated an incident of bullying to be. The more serious an educator believes an incident is the more likely they will be willing to deal with it. However, just because an educator might be more willing to be involved was not indicative of the steps they would take or the level of success they might have in reducing future occurrences of bullying (Yoon, 2004).

The development of a healthy school atmosphere is largely dependent on the decisions of the school principal. The principal is usually the key enforcer of district policy and sets the atmosphere with their actions toward accepted and unaccepted student behavior. Appropriate school climates that are established and maintained by the principal are essential in providing a safer future for the students. This climate is directly affected by the principal’s perceptions of bullying within their school (Capelluti & Nye, 2005).

Teachers and principals roles are different within the school and the motivation behind their decisions is also as varied. Administrators commonly see themselves as facilitators that enable teachers whereas teachers often see their roles to be more about support and relaying information. These perceived roles often can be a hindrance to implementing changes when neither the principals nor teachers take on the responsibility to directly initiate the policy (Barnett & Fallon, 2007). However it is clear that principals must develop and maintain proper prevention and intervention strategies because students
cannot be expected to resolve these incidents on their own. The first step for the administrator is to educate themselves as to what bullying is and to accept the responsibility of creating a school environment that appropriate manages bullying. The second step is to create a clear policy that defines acceptable and unacceptable behavior with a plan to modify student behavior. Giving examples of the appropriate interactions and communication between students has been shown to highly influence how students treat each other (Bullock, 2002).

Perceptions of bullying by educators are extremely important to reducing the incidents of bullying and many schools have accepted the fact that bullying is a major issue that needs to be dealt with. However, even after the initial responsibility has been accept and programs implemented, the perceptions of the administrators and faculty still confound their own success. Educators within schools that have anti-bullying programs that provided training to the educators were still often unable to perceive the level of bullying that was occurring between students. Their own concepts of bullying were not sufficient in order to adequately surmise what was occurring and appropriately intervene (Naylor, Cowie, Cossin, de Bettencourt, & Lemme, 2006). Many educators lack the training to identify a student as a bully. They are not able to discern if a situation is a normal conflict between students or an incident of bullying. Without being able determine if the behavior is bullying or not it becomes increasingly unlikely they will be able to successfully intervene and stop the bullying from happening again in the future. Furthermore, certain types of the bullying, such as social bullying where the student is intentionally ostracized, are not often identified as a major issue even by the school counselors who are trained to identify bullying (Jacobsen & Bauman, 2007). Therefore it
is likely that principals who are not trained to detect and identify certain types of bullying behaviors will be incompetent in doing so.

Interventions for Bullying

There are numerous programs that have been created for schools to implement for bullying intervention. The most successful programs have been shown through research are a school-wide approach that seeks to create a school climate that inhibits bullying. The Olweus Bullying Program is the foremost in the field and has been used in many countries since its development in Norway in 1983. Since the 1990’s the Olweus program has been used in hundreds of schools in the United States with a significant level of success. The program has specific intervention strategies at the school level, class level, and individual level. The program focuses on the importance of adults taking appropriate actions and playing a key role in creating a safer school environment (FindYouthInfo.gov, 2011). Most popular programs including Bully Free Program, Bully Proofing, and PeaceBuilders incorporate a school-wide approach. Programs that provide single day training, or that only provide directions in dealing with incidents after they have occurred have been shown to be the least successful in reducing bullying behaviors. Furthermore, external researchers have found that ant-bullying programs are not highly effective in general. Researchers provide evidence that the American society encourages aggressive behaviors through popular competitive activities such as sports. Social supported aggression creates a climate in which bullying although an unwanted behavior is hard to inhibit (Ferguson, San Miguel, Kilburn, & Sanchez, 2007). These findings are supported by the ecological theory that many experts in the field use as a framework for understanding bullying behaviors (Swearer & Doll, 2001).
The following list provided by StopBullying.gov (2010b) is a list of suggestions all schools should take in order to reduce bullying incidents:

- Assess bullying in your school. Determine where and when bullying occurs.
- Increase adult supervision in bullying hot spots. Work with support staff, such as cafeteria staff, bus stop and playground monitors and bus drivers, who may observe bullying incidents that unfold outside the classroom.
- Involve students, parents, teachers, and staff in bullying prevention. Establish a school safety committee and task force with a coordinator whose job it is to plan, implement and evaluate your school's bullying prevention program.
- Encourage teachers and staff to file incident reports of bullying. Keep track of critical incidents, and assess and evaluate your bullying prevention program.
- Create policies and rules. Create a mission statement, code of conduct, and school-wide rules that establishes a climate in which bullying is not acceptable. Disseminate and communicate widely.
- Integrate bullying prevention material into curriculum and school activities. Implement curriculum-based, class-level discussions and activities about bullying (e.g., role-playing activities) at each grade level.
- Promote extracurricular activities. Reinforce positive social interactions in an inclusive environment.
- Raise awareness about your bullying prevention initiative. Launch an awareness campaign to make the objectives known to the school, parents, and community members.
Establish a school culture of acceptance, tolerance and respect. Take advantage of staff meetings, assemblies, class and parent meetings, newsletters to families, the school website, and the student handbook.

(StopBullying.gov, 2010a)

Also there are several strategies that have been implemented and found not to be effective in managing bullying and have possibly counterproductive results. “Zero tolerance” or “Three Strikes and you’re out” policies have been shown to be ineffective. These type policies can result in a significant number of students being denied access to schools. Students who are banned from school are less likely to have interactions with good role models. Also, these type policies may inhibit students from telling adults about bullying incidents. “Conflict Resolution” or “Peer Mediation” has also been shown to be ineffective. These policies fail to recognize that the bully and victim are not equally responsible for the behaviors nor do they both have the same control over their interactions with each other. “Group” treatment in which an adult sits with a group of bullying individuals actually has a negative result that strengthens bullying behavior. Additionally, activities such as school assemblies or one-day trainings that are conducted outside of a school-wide initiative are not as effective (StopBullying.gov, 2010b).

Summary

Bullying is a common occurrence in most of the schools in the world, however there is a considerable risk placed on students when adults allow the idea that bullying is normal or acceptable behavior to guide their perceptions (Herba, et al., 2008). Bullying is defined as having three components: (a) the bully is intentionally causing the victim harm; (b) the behavior is repeated over time; (c) there is a power imbalance between the
bully and the victim. This power imbalance makes it unlikely that the victim on his or her own will be able to stop the bullying from repeatedly occurring in the future (Olweus, 1994). Bullying can occur in many forms including the most common physical and verbal. However, other forms include social, racial, mindless, and intellectual bullying. Cyber-bulling is the use of technology such as mobile devices and the Internet to bully students. Often bullying behaviors that are not physical or verbal in nature are difficult for adults to accurately identify as bullying (Rigby, 2003). Approximately 2.7 million students in the United States are being bullied in one way or another by another 2.1 million students every year. The results of this bullying can be significant in its cost to students. Many students have serious short-term and/or long-term effects that harm their ability to be successful as students and to possess a healthy mental condition (Gastic, 2008). Additionally many victims are more at risk for suicidal ideation and research has shown a recent increase in bully related suicides occurring in the last 20 years (Herba, et al., 2008). The legal requirements of national and state laws mandate that principals take action to reduce incidents of bullying in their schools (NCLB, 2001, MS code, SB2015). It has been shown that the school climate and the role of the principal have considerable effect on the intervention and reduction of bullying. The principal is the most empowered individual by their role that is capable of implementing changes in the school to protect students from bullying behaviors (Dillon, 2010). However, researchers have stated that there is a lacking amount of research on the perspectives held by principals on the topic of bullying at their respective schools (Harris & Hathorn, 2006). Bradshaw et al. (2007) found that the perceptions of bullying held by educators had not been adequately
investigated and that they most likely were negating the effects school personnel were taking to reduce bullying.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The intent of this study was to investigate Mississippi principal’s perceptions of bullying and to determine what effect certain factors have on those perceptions. It was not the intent of this study to determine which expectations are best, but rather to obtain a description as to what are the current expectations held by principals in the state and whether a relationship exists between those expectations and suspect background information.

A quantitative approach was conducted with a survey-design method in which principals from across the state of Mississippi were solicited to participate in an online survey consisting of two sections: a descriptive section created by the researcher, and a 50 item measure of bullying perceptions developed by Dr. Wilma Gibson (Gibson, 2003).

Methodology and Design

In order to obtain participants for this study an email soliciting their involvement was sent out after IRB approval (Appendix D) had been granted. The email was sent to each principal of a public elementary, middle, junior high, high school, K-8 or K-12 school in the state of Mississippi. This population consists of 903 principals. The email contained a link to the site, SurveyMonkey, where if they agreed to participate they completed an online survey. The research was conducted blind with all responses given anonymously with no solicitation of personal identifying information from the principal or which could identify the school. The email was re-sent every two weeks until participation in the study had reached the required sample size.
An online survey was chosen over traditional methods in order to conserve costs, time, and to reach a larger population to create the sample. Although the response rates are lower with web-based surveys, the positive benefits may be greater. Additional benefits besides saving costs and time for the researcher, are that they are easier to monitor and implement, ease of data entry, no expense for the responder, and less time for the responder to have to commit as well (Dillman, 2000; Granello & Wheaton, 2004; Schonlan, Fricker, & Elliot, 2001). The cost to mail the survey to the approximately 900 principals in the state would have been approximately $1,000. Additionally, web-based surveys are more ecologically friendly as it conserves the use of paper products. It is advised that the survey uses few illustrations, does not force responders to answer questions, and to make all information gathered confident and anonymous (Granello & Wheaton, 2004; Schonlan et al., 2001). On the survey, responders were allowed to skip questions, no graphics were used, and confidentiality was assured. The confidentiality agreement was explained in the email along with a disclaimer and informed consent.

Survey Instrument

In order to gain descriptive data for the study, the first section of the survey gathered the demographic data from the principal about themselves and the schools they work in. This section, which was created by the researcher, created an overview of the participants in the study and gathers the independent variable data. The participant were asked to provide their age, race, gender, level of licensure, years of experience, and whether they identify themselves more as having been a bully, bystander, or victim while they were a K-12 student. This first section provided the study the independent variables
needed to investigate the relationship between the principle’s perceptions and his or her background.

The second section of the survey was a 50-item instrument developed by Dr. Gibson as a measure of bullying perceptions (Appendix A). The instrument used a four choice Likert-scale to determine the participants’ response to each item. There are no subscales within the instrument therefore each item will serve as a dependent variable. Dr. Gibson both piloted the instrument and used the instrument in a research study with 266 participants. In the study Dr. Gibson conducted, the reliability of the instrument was found to have a Cronbach’s Alpha coefficient of .87 which is well above .70 that is the standard requirement. There are no subscales in the instrument therefore further tests of reliability are not needed (Gibson, 2003). Permission to use the survey developed by Dr. Gibson was requested and granted (Appendix B, Appendix C).

Population

The population of this study consisted of school principals who are employed as such in a public elementary, middle, junior high, or high school. Principals who work in schools that comprise these grades, but in another configuration were also included such as a K-8 or a K-12 school. All Mississippi employed principals who fit the requirements of being in said schools above were solicited for their involvement in the study. This included principals in all the districts in the state. There are 903 school principals that comprise this population.

Analysis of Data

The analysis of this data was conducted using various statistical tests. First, the frequencies, means, and standard deviations were calculated for descriptive purposes.
using the demographic information provided by the principal in section one of the survey about themselves and the school in which they work. Additional tests including t-tests, Anova’s, and chi-square analysis were used to investigate the relationship between the dependent variables and the independent variables. For this study and its purpose the significant value is set at the $p=.05$ level.

Summary

This study solicited Mississippi public school principals who currently work in either an elementary, middle, junior high, or high school to participate in an online, two-section survey in which they provide information about themselves and the school they work in. Additionally, in the second section of the survey the participants completed a 50-item measure that investigated their perceptions of bullying in their school. Once the data were collected the analysis commenced with developing a description of the sample by calculating frequencies, descriptives, means, and standard deviations. Additional tests were performed including ANOVAs and Multiple Regression. Once completed, analysis of the data was conducted to provide information about the current expectations of principals across the state and what factors are related to those expectations.
CHAPTER IV
ANALYSIS OF DATA

Introduction

The research in this study was conducted to investigate the perceptions of school principals toward bullying in their school. Also the study aimed to determine whether the principals’ age, race, years of experience, level of licensure, type of school they worked in and/or personal school bullying experience would affect their perceptions toward bullying. In this chapter the data collected from the survey are examined along with the data analysis used to test the research questions.

Demographics

The online survey was completed by 109 school principals. A link to the survey was sent to 903 current public Mississippi principals. The sample represents approximately 12% of the total population. The mean age of the principals in the sample was 46.51 years with a standard deviation of 9.92 which was considered normal. The oldest respondent was 72 and the youngest was 28. The mean number of years’ experience as a principal was 8.29 with a standard deviation of 6.95 which was also considered normal. The highest number of years’ experience was 35 and the least was 0.

Refer to Table 2 for a breakdown of the respondents’ genders and race. In reference to their own gender, 49 of the respondents identified themselves as male and 59 identified themselves as female. One respondent did not identify his or her gender. In response to their race, 71 identified as White, 35 identified as African American, 1 identified as Asian, and 2 respondents did not identify their race.
### Table 2

*Principals’ Gender and Race*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>45.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>54.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Response</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>65.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>32.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Response</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Refer to Table 3 for a breakdown of the respondents’ level of licensure and type of school where they are employed as principals. There are only three levels of licensure for principals in Mississippi, and each level was represented in the study. The majority of the respondents held AA licenses which are the most common held in the state. Additionally, the breakdown of the other two categories, AAA and AAAA, are within expected norms based on the number of those licensed held by principals in the state. There was no majority among types of schools the principals were employed in. Elementary, with 39 respondents, has the highest level of representation. This is also expected because there are more elementary schools in the state than any other type.
Junior high schools were the least represented type of school with only four respondents representing that category.

Table 3

*Principal Licensure Level and Type of School*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Licensure Level</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AA License</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>60.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AAA License</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>27.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AAAA License</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>11.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of School</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High School</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>21.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle School</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>17.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary School</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>35.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior High School</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K-4 School</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K-8 School</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K-12 School</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Response</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Analysis of the Research Questions

Research Question 1

*What are the perceptions held by Mississippi principals concerning bullying in their schools?* In the survey there were 56 items used to investigate the perceptions of the
respondents. The first set of items investigated what principals considered to be bullying behaviors and the general severity of those behaviors. The second set of items contained statements about bullying in which the principal chose to which level he or she agreed or disagreed with the statement.

First the respondents were asked to identify if they considered particular behaviors as bullying. Refer to Table 4 for a breakdown of the respondent’s indications. Question 8 in the survey was used to gather this data. The frequency and percent of responses form that question were generated for comparisons. All the behaviors were considered to be bullying by over 60% of those who responded. All of those who responded identified intimidation and threats as bullying behaviors. The behavior least considered to be bullying by those who responded was vandalizing and stealing property with only 63.9% identifying it as such.

Table 4

*Behaviors Identified as Bullying*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behavior</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Threats</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hitting</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>94.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vandalizing Property</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>63.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teasing</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>88.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Isolation</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>71.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Next the respondents were asked to identify each of the same behavior’s level of severity. Refer to Table 5 for a breakdown of the respondent’s indications. Question 9 in the survey was used to gather this data. The means and standard deviations of the answer choices for each behavior were generated to develop an order to which the respondents considered each behavior to be more or less severe. Additionally, the frequency and percent of responses was generated for comparison. Similar to the first question’s responses, most respondents indicated that threats and intimidation was a severe act of bullying. The breakdown of the other behaviors has a greater range of responses. Social isolation and exclusion from the group received the least indication of being a severe bullying behavior with a majority indicating that it either was not severe or only somewhat severe.

Table 5

*Perceived Severity of Bullying Behaviors*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behavior</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social Isolation</td>
<td>2.44</td>
<td>.995</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Response</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Severe</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>16</td>
<td>14.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat Severe</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>47</td>
<td>43.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Severe</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>24</td>
<td>22.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Severe</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>21</td>
<td>19.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teasing</td>
<td>3.13</td>
<td>.821</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Severe</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5 (continued).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Severe</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>40</td>
<td>36.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Very Severe</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>21</td>
<td>19.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Threats</strong></td>
<td>3.70</td>
<td>.615</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Not Severe</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Somewhat Severe</strong></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.615</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Severe</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>20</td>
<td>18.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Very Severe</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>83</td>
<td>76.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Vandalizing</strong></td>
<td>3.34</td>
<td>.615</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Not Severe</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Somewhat Severe</strong></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>.615</td>
<td></td>
<td>10.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Severe</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>28</td>
<td>25.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Very Severe</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>61</td>
<td>56.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hitting</strong></td>
<td>3.66</td>
<td>.672</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Not Severe</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Somewhat Severe</strong></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>.672</td>
<td></td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Severe</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>19</td>
<td>17.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Very Severe</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>81</td>
<td>74.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the second set of items, principals were asked to which level of agreement they had with 50 statements concerning bullying. Refer to Table 6 for a breakdown of the respondents’ indications. The respondent had the same 4 answer choices for each of the 50 statements: Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, or Strongly Disagree. The mean and standard deviation for each statement was generated and then ranked for comparison.
This provided a list of statements ranked by consensus among principals. The statements at the top of Table 5 are those the principals most strongly agree and descend to those they most disagree. No statement had a unanimous response. Both ends of the list show the highest levels of consensus among the principals.

The highest level of consensus for items agreed upon was for the statement

*Teachers and adults should intervene in bullying situations when it becomes apparent that adult intervention is needed.* A strong majority of the principals held that this statement is true with only 4 respondents showing disagreement. The second highest level of agreement was for *School climate has a great influence on the number of incidents of bullying that occurs*, which had a combined *agree* and strongly *agree* of 96.6%. The next statement *Because students spend a significant amount of time in school, principals’ play a crucial role in bullying prevention*, also had an overwhelming 97.5% indicating they agree or strongly agree with the statement. Continuing in the same trend the fourth highest level of agreement statement, *Principals play a key role in reducing the number of bullying incidents that occur in their schools*, and the fifth statement *Bullying is a serious problem in the United States*, both also have percentages in the high nineties that demonstrate the agreement the principals hold for these perceptions. The twelve highest agreed upon statements are within the expected outcomes of the survey as shown in the literature review. These statements represent the perceptions of principals that as a group they most agree with.

Additionally there are a number of items of the survey that a consensus of the principals disagreed with. The statement in which the principals disagreed with the most was *Bullying is best ignored unless verbal and psychological intimidation crosses the line*
into physical assault. This statement is one in which the literature would suggest that principals should disagree with. Likewise, the next statement *Boys bullying girls is normal behavior* is a common perception that people would disagree with therefore it is logical for it to have the second highest consensus of disagreement. *Because bullying is a part of child development children must be allowed to resolve their own problems, Most bullying occurs in supervised areas, and Teachers are usually the first to know when bullying is a problem in their classes* were the third, fourth, and fifth statements that held the highest consensus for disagreement among principals. These five statements represent the perceptions that principals as a group disagree with the most.

However, there is evidence that when considering all 50 statements and the frequency of the principals response there is a considerably low consensus among the principals toward what the appropriate perceptions toward bullying should be. The mean for the total respondents on all the items was a 2.70 which is near 2.5 which would indicate the least amount of consensus possible. A total mean score of 4.0 for all the respondents on all the items would have indicated a perfect consensus that agreed with the perceptions presented. A total mean score of 1.0 for all the respondents on all the items would have indicated a perfect consensus that disagreed with the perceptions presented. Therefore a score of 2.5 would indicate the possible least amount of consensus among principals. The instrument’s mean of 2.73 indicates a possible low consensus among the principal’s perceptions although they have slightly greater tendency to agree with the perceptions rather than not.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perceptions Towards Bullying Statements</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers and adults should intervene in bullying situations when it becomes apparent that adult intervention is needed.</td>
<td>3.56</td>
<td>.600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School climate has a great influence on the number of incidents of bullying that occurs.</td>
<td>3.32</td>
<td>.526</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because students spend a significant amount of time in school, principals play a crucial role in bullying prevention.</td>
<td>3.31</td>
<td>.522</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principals play a key role in reducing the number of bullying incidents that occur in their schools.</td>
<td>3.28</td>
<td>.595</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullying is a serious problem in the United States</td>
<td>3.28</td>
<td>.596</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because students spend a significant amount of time in school, teachers play a crucial role in bullying prevention.</td>
<td>3.27</td>
<td>.467</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers need training to respond appropriately to bullying.</td>
<td>3.20</td>
<td>.486</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increasing teacher awareness of what bullying is and why it may occur should result in increased teacher intervention.</td>
<td>3.19</td>
<td>.456</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>Standard Deviation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers require training in order to intervene appropriately.</td>
<td>3.03</td>
<td>.538</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullies pick on children because of a need for power and control over individuals.</td>
<td>3.02</td>
<td>.537</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most bullying occurs in unsupervised locations.</td>
<td>3.02</td>
<td>.561</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students do not report bullying for fear of retaliation.</td>
<td>2.98</td>
<td>.527</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certain student behaviors make students a target for bullies.</td>
<td>2.98</td>
<td>.527</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students are more likely to report physical bullying.</td>
<td>2.97</td>
<td>.463</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victims of bullying must learn how to stand up for themselves.</td>
<td>2.94</td>
<td>.517</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers do not notice bullying as much as students’ peers do.</td>
<td>2.93</td>
<td>.447</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students will tell other students about being bullied before they will tell a teacher.</td>
<td>2.93</td>
<td>.591</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullies suffer from low self-esteem and pick on individuals they perceive as weak.</td>
<td>2.93</td>
<td>.683</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers do not receive adequate training to effectively intervene in bullying conflicts.</td>
<td>2.85</td>
<td>.593</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 6 (continued).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students, who have characteristics that make them appear different, such as being overweight, having freckles, red hair, wearing thick glasses, are more likely to be bullied.</td>
<td>2.81</td>
<td>.614</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victims of bullying are often passive and have low-esteem.</td>
<td>2.81</td>
<td>.614</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female students are more likely to report bullying behavior than male students.</td>
<td>2.79</td>
<td>.615</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullying in under-reported by teachers.</td>
<td>2.78</td>
<td>.567</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullies have average or below average levels of self-esteem.</td>
<td>2.76</td>
<td>.594</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students often will not tell adults they are being bullied because they feel nothing will happen.</td>
<td>2.74</td>
<td>.572</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allowing students to resolve bullying incidents assists in building character for those directly involved.</td>
<td>2.63</td>
<td>.681</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers are most often unaware of bullying that takes place in the class room.</td>
<td>2.60</td>
<td>.510</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principals do not notice bullying as much as teachers or students.</td>
<td>2.59</td>
<td>.760</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 6 (continued).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Girls bullying boys is not normal behavior</td>
<td>253</td>
<td>.694</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The larger the class or the school, the higher the level of</td>
<td>2.51</td>
<td>.648</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bully/victim problems for the school.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullying behavior is most often not noticed by teachers.</td>
<td>2.49</td>
<td>.556</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullying is a problem in my own school.</td>
<td>2.39</td>
<td>.653</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children and bullies in particular must go through a certain</td>
<td>2.36</td>
<td>.556</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stage.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullying affects only a small number of children.</td>
<td>2.31</td>
<td>.541</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict, which results from bullying, should first be resolved</td>
<td>2.30</td>
<td>.664</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>by the counselor, administrators, and then the teachers,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>respectively.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students are more likely to intervene in incidents of bullying</td>
<td>2.26</td>
<td>.602</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>than teachers.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males are more likely to admit to bullying than females.</td>
<td>2.23</td>
<td>.557</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Although school violence began escalating over the past decade,</td>
<td>2.21</td>
<td>.786</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bullying has only recently emerged as a problem.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>Standard Deviation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullies are physically more powerful than their victims.</td>
<td>2.21</td>
<td>.626</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullying is a normal part of development for children.</td>
<td>2.20</td>
<td>.647</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Therefore it is difficult for adults to know when to intervene.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical bullying is more distressful for students than behaviors such as ridicule or teasing.</td>
<td>2.15</td>
<td>.698</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggressive behaviors in bullies are a result of their frustrations with school; usually due to having poor grades.</td>
<td>2.14</td>
<td>.621</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullying is inevitable and in this sense a normal behavior.</td>
<td>2.14</td>
<td>.621</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers are usually the first to know when bullying is a problem in their classes.</td>
<td>2.14</td>
<td>.555</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most bullying occurs in supervised areas.</td>
<td>2.11</td>
<td>.569</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because bullying is a part of child development children must be allowed to resolve their own problems.</td>
<td>2.11</td>
<td>.614</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boys bullying girls is normal behavior.</td>
<td>1.93</td>
<td>.481</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullying is best ignored unless verbal and psychological intimidation crosses the line into physical assault.</td>
<td>1.81</td>
<td>.686</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Research Question 2

*How do the age, gender, race, years of experience, type of school they work in, and licensure level of the principal affect his or her perceptions of bullying in his or her school?* Age, gender, years of experience, type of school they work in, and licensure level were used as dependent variables in a multiple regression. Refer to Table 2, Table 3, and Table 4 for the respondents indications to the variables. The results of the regression were not significant (F(14, 88) = .755, p = .713, R square ≤ .07, showing that none of the dependent variables were significant in affecting his or her perceptions of bullying in their school.

Research Question 3

*Does a principal’s belief that he or she was either a bully, victim, bystander, or uninvolved in bullying affect his or her perceptions of bullying?* Principals were asked to identify themselves as being either a bully, victim, bystander, or uninvolved as a student themselves. Refer to Table 7 for the respondents’ indications of how they were involved in bullying as a student. The majority, 75 of the 107 that responded, indicated they uninvolved in bullying as a student. An ANOVA test was conducted to determine if the respondents’ own experience as a student being involved in bullying affected their perspectives toward bullying. The ANOVA test’s results, F(3, 103) = 1.892, p = .137, showed no significance in the principals perceptions of bullying and his or her involvement in bullying when he or she was a student.
Table 7

*Principal’s Personal Student Experience with Bullying as a Student*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Uninvolved</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>68.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victim</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bystander</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bully</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bully and Victim</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate public school principals’ perceptions of bullying in Mississippi and determine how specific variables may or may not influence those perceptions. School bullying has been established as a major concern among school officials, students, parents, community members, researchers, politicians, the media, and society as a whole in this country and in many other nations around the world. The prevalence of school bullying is contributed to many different factors. However, it is clear that the culture and climate of the school plays a significant role. The climate and culture of the school affects the acceptance of such behavior among the students, staff, and faculty. It can also affect the expectations of the community for handling incidents of bullying (Doll, 2010).

The school culture and climate plays into the subconscious of the bully, victim, and bystander as they perceive the possible outcomes and consequences for the bullying incidents. Research has shown, the principal to be a pivotal and significant instrument in developing and shaping the school’s culture and climate (Rigby, 2003). Therefore it is logical that the perceptions of those principals toward bullying will have at some level an effect of the prevalence of bullying and how those incidents are managed.

Additionally when the short-term and long-term effects of bullying, the legal obligations, and the ethical responsibilities are all considered there is a significant demand for research that could lead to creating a safer environment for students. The research has shown that the effects of bullying can be life-altering for many and that the
number of students being emotionally affected by bullying is greater than many might speculate (Thomsen, 2002). Federal and state agencies have created policies that oblige schools and their officials to protect students from bullying. In Mississippi, bullying policies go beyond the classroom and school campus. Schools are required to investigate any bullying behaviors that may negatively affect the student’s educational success regardless of where the incidents are occurring (Olweus Prevention Program, 2011). Also the ethical responsibility of working with students requires individuals to provide as much protection for the students as they reasonably can.

In this study, a bullying perception instrument created by Dr. Gibson was used to measure the principals’ perceptions toward bullying in an online survey which also collected personal data about the principals. The instrument Dr. Gibson created had 50 statements that the participants decided to what extent they agreed or disagreed with. The instrument used a four choice Likert-scale to determine the participants’ response to each item (Gibson, 2003). Additionally in a previous section personal data about the principal were collected. The participant was asked to provide their age, race, gender, level of education, level of licensure, and whether they identify themselves more as having been a bully, bystander, or victim while they were a K-12 student. This section provided the study the independent variables needed to investigate the relationship between the principle’s perceptions and his or her background.

Conclusion and Discussion

The survey was sent out to the entire population of 903 current public school principals throughout Mississippi. There were 109 participants used in the study that responded. These participants represent approximately 12% of the total number of
principals in the state. The demographics of the participants were representative of the demographics of the population of principals in the state.

Q1. What are the perceptions held by Mississippi principals concerning bullying in their schools? This study found that among the statements provided in the survey, there is possibly a low consensus among principals’ perceptions toward bullying. A level of disagreement exists between principals in Mississippi as to what the appropriate level of agreement or disagreement was toward most of the statements included in the survey. The mean for the total set of items and for all participants was a 2.70 which indicates a possible low level of consensus. These results may be considered a concern as research is likely to show less ambiguity as to what is considered appropriate perceptions toward the items provided in the survey.

However, there were several statements where a high level of consensus did exist among the respondents. All the respondents unanimously indicated that the use of threats is a bullying behavior. Additionally, a high percentage of participants indicated that all the following were also behaviors they believed to be bullying: hitting, kicking, shoving, vandalizing property, teasing, and social isolation. These results correspond with most current research and indicate that the principals in the study are aware of what should be considered bullying (Harris, 2006). The principals were also asked to indicate how severe these behaviors were for the victim. Social isolation was the only behavior not held by a majority to be considered either severe or very severe. Research has shown that social isolation can have significant long-term negative consequences on the self-esteem of the victim. Therefore, the perception that this is not a considerably severe behavior may be suggested as inaccurate (Peligrini & Bartini, 2000). Threats and physical violence such as
hitting and kicking were considered by over 80% to be very severe. These findings hold to a traditional view of what bullying behavior is. Additionally, principals agreed among each other with several of the statements on the survey. The highest level of consensus for items agreed upon was for the statement *Teachers and adults should intervene in bullying situations when it becomes apparent that adult intervention is needed*. These findings are expected for what many would consider an oversimplified statement. However, four respondents did indicate that they did not agree with the statement. The second highest level of agreement was for *School climate has a great influence on the number of incidents of bullying that occurs*, for which 96.6% of the respondents indicated they either agreed or strongly agreed. This perception is congruent with current research discussed in depth in the literature review. Research has found correlations between the prevalence of bullying and the attitudes concerning bullying with the school’s climate. This perception would be considered correct when compare to current research (Rigby, 2003). The next statement *Because students spend a significant amount of time in school, principals’ play a crucial role in bullying prevention*, was either agreed or strongly agreed with by 97.5% of the respondents. This perception indicates that the principals agree that the principal has a significant responsibility in preventing school bullying. This also is accurate in regard to the current research and would be considered to be the appropriate perception for principals to hold. Likewise, the statement *Principals play a key role in reducing the number of bullying incidents that occur in their schools*, held a high level of consensus among principals, who agreed with or strongly agreed by a significant majority. This, for the same reasons and explanations as the previous statement, would be considered an authentic and appropriate perception for principals to
concur with (Dillon, 2010). Principals with a 90% majority agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement *Bullying is a serious problem in the United States* indicate that they are in agreement with what is commonly held by the majority of principals across the country as evident in the literature review (Harris & Hathorn, 2006). These statements have the highest level of consensus among the participants in the study.

The study also found that there were a number of items that the principals held a high consensus among themselves to disagree with. Principals to a high degree either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement *Bullying is best ignored unless verbal and psychological intimidation crosses the line into physical assault*. This statement is one in which the literature would suggest that principals should disagree with therefore a seemingly appropriate perception (Harris, 2006). Research clearly indicates that non-physical bullying including cyberbullying can have severe and lasting negative effects on the victim and bully (Dillon, 2010). The next statement *Boys bullying girls is normal behavior* is a common perception that people would disagree with therefore it is logical for it to have the second highest consensus of disagreement among principals, but is not accurate when compared to numerous research findings that show boys bullying girls is a more common (ergo normal) behavior than previously assumed. Therefore, the level as to which principals perceive boys bullying girls is abnormal is not an appropriate perception (Find Youth Info, 2011). Principals also indicated that as a majority they disagreed or strongly disagreed with *Because bullying is a part of child development children must be allowed to resolve their own problems*, which would be considered an appropriate perception when considering the dynamic of common bully/victim relationship. In many bully/victim relationships, the victim lacks the ability either physically or psychologically
to stop the unwanted behaviors from occurring (Find Youth Info, 2011). Also, a
significant majority disagreed with *Most bullying occurs in supervised areas*, which is
congruent with research. However, the level of disagreement may indicate a lack of
knowledge of where bullying does take place. Most bullying may not take place in a
supervised area, but many students report that bullying is prevalent in supervised areas
and that in many cases occurs in the presence of school personal (Wedemeyer, 2002).
Research suggests that the presence of an untrained faculty or staff member is not an
effective deterrent of bullying behaviors. Principals continued to hold a consensus of
disagreement with the statement *Teachers are usually the first to know when bullying is a
problem in their classes* which is likely to be a false statement since many bullying
behaviors go unnoticed or mislabeled by the teacher.

This study found that among principals in Mississippi the perceptions were varied
with a possible low level of consensus overall. Furthermore, several of the perceptions
held by the majority of the participants may not be considered appropriate when
compared to the current body of research concerning bullying. It is suggested that the
lack of consensus and the possibility of inappropriate perceptions existing among a
significant percentage of principals is evidence of a need for additional bully education
and intervention training for principals in Mississippi.

Q2. How do the age, gender, race, years of experience, type of school they work
in, and education level of the principal affect his or her perceptions of bullying in their
school? Each of these variables was well represented compared to the known statistical
data of Mississippi principals. Age was not found to be a significant factor that had an
effect on principals’ perceptions of bullying. This result was unexpected as research
conducted on other populations of principals have found age to be a factor that affected the perceptions of principals (Harris & Hathorn, 2006). However, this study may not have considered the same aspects of bullying in which the other studies researched.

Gender was not found to be a significant factor that had an effect on principals’ perceptions of bullying. Gender was not expected to have a large effect on principal’s perceptions, however, in some cases, specifically when the bully involves theft, research has shown female principals to be more likely to appropriate identify the incident as bullying (Isernhagen & Harris, 2003).

Race was not found to be a significant factor that had an effect on principals’ perceptions of bullying. This result was not expected as research has indicated that principals who belong to minorities are more likely to identify bullying than Caucasian principals (Isernhagen, & Harris, 2003).

Years’ experience was not found to be a significant factor that had an effect on principals’ perceptions of bullying. Research conducted has shown in other studies that years of experience did effect principals’ perceptions with those having between 4 and 10 years of experience were more likely to recognize students being socially bullied by purposeful exclusion (Isernhagen & Harris, 2003).

Each of the different types of schools were represented in the survey. Elementary school principals made up the largest portion with 35.8%, followed with high school principals with 21.1%, and middle schools with 17.4%. Jr. High, K-4, K-8, K-12, and other type each made up between 3.7 to 6.4%. The type of school the principal was employed in was not found to be a significant factor that had an effect on principals’ perceptions of bullying. These results were not expected. Personnel that work with early
age students have been shown to be more likely than average to identify behaviors as bullying. Also, personnel that work with middle school age students have been shown in studies to be less likely than average to appropriately identify behaviors as bullying (Leff, et al., 1999).

To be licensed as an administrator in Mississippi you must hold either the AA, AAA, or AAAA license. The license typically represents the level of education the administrator has obtained with a masters, specialist, or doctoral degree respectively. Each license level was represented. The level of licensure held by the principal was not found to be a significant factor that had an effect on principals’ perceptions of bullying. There was no conclusive evidence reviewed by the researcher that indicated whether the level of licensure would have an effect on the principals’ perceptions of bullying.

In review of the results for the second research question, none of the variables investigated were found to be significant. For most of these variables, some level of significance had been shown in other studies. Additionally, the effect the differences from these variables found in other studies were typically positive. Therefore, in light of the findings for the first research question, it can be stated that the lack of consensus held by principals in their perceptions of bullying is not dependent on these variables. Furthermore, even when positive differences were expected from variables they were not found to exist in this sample.

Q3. Does a principals belief that they were either a bully, victim, bystander, or uninvolved in bullying affect his or her perceptions of bullying? The principal’s belief in how they themselves were involved in bullying as student was not found to be a significant factor that had an effect on principals’ perceptions of bullying. However, an
unexpected number of principals, 68.8%, stated they had no involvement in bullying even as a bystander. 10.1% of the respondents indicated that they were a victim; another
10.1% indicated they were a bully and a victim, and 9.2 % indicated that they were a bystander. Only one principal indicated that they had been a bully. It would be statistically unlikely that only one principal out of 109 would have been a bully. It is possible that at least some of the principals were either not honest, misunderstood the question, and/or not aware of their own previous behaviors as a student having been that of a bully. It is also possible that former bullies chose not to participate in the study.

Recommendations for Policy and Practice

Due to the findings of this study, there are several recommendations for the state department of education, local school districts, administrative preparation programs, and current or future school principals. The state department should expand and further promote the completion of SEMI credits aimed at providing principals with bullying education and intervention skills. Current principals, as evidence, from their lack of consensus, need further education and preparedness to develop a wider, more appropriate range of perceptions toward school bullying that are clearer, represent what research has provided on the social issue, and enable them to have a more positive influence in the reduction and intervention of school bullying. Local districts should consider to determine the perceptions of bullying held by the principals in their schools and, if need be, provide additional training and educational opportunities to ensure that the principal is better equipped to provide a safer school environment with a culture that inhibits bullying behaviors. Additionally, administrative preparation programs in Mississippi’s colleges and universities should consider incorporating additional bullying education and
intervention training into the educational leadership plans of study. It is further recommended that current and future school principals evaluate their own perceptions of bullying and compare them to the current body of bullying related research. Principals should consider further developing their understanding of this serious social issue and research options that would enhance their ability to effectively reduce and appropriately intervene in incidents of bullying.

Limitations

There are several limitations that existed in this study. First, due to socio-economic and cultural differences, the findings of the study may not be appropriate to describe the perceptions of principals outside of Mississippi. Second, it is possible that principals did not accurately identify their role in bullying when they themselves were a student. Third, the selection of the instrument was made based on availability and use in prior studies. The perceptions it was intended to measure likely did not include the entire range of perceptions toward bullying that exist thereby reducing the ability to measure the variables effects. Fourth, the survey did not allow for the respondent to provide additional information that might have provided additional insight into their perceptions of bullying. Another possible limitation to the study is the sample size.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future research needs to be conducted to verify the findings of this study within the same population so that further evidence can be gathered to promote needed and effective change that would provide students with a safer school environment. Additionally, similar research needs to be conducted within each state along with nation-wide studies. There has been a lack of research investigating the principal’s role in school
bullying. Furthermore, future research should consider developing new instruments that incorporate a wider range of perceptions and provide opportunities for the principal to give additional information. Future research that provided qualitative data about principals' perceptions would possibly provide additional insights. The development and use of an instrument in future research that would characterize a person’s involvement in bullying could be more informative than having the individual self-report their involvement.

Summary

School bullying is a serious social issue that can have both short-term and long-term devastating effects on the victims, bullies, and bystanders. Bullying is a wide-spread problem that affects millions of students every day. Federal, state, and local agencies have created policies to deal with school bullying. However, the school principal has the most pivotal role in reducing the incidents of bullying and appropriately intervening in incidents that do occur. Furthermore, the principal is the most empowered by their role to bring about change to the school’s climate and culture which are key factors in the prevalence of bullying. The perceptions principals have toward bullying inevitably affect their response to school bullying therefore it is important to investigate. The findings of this study show that additional education and training are likely needed for principals in Mississippi regardless of their age, race, gender, level of licensure, years of experience, type of school they work in, or their own involvement in bullying situations as a student.

It is the legal and ethical responsibility as well as a moral obligation to provide students with the safest school environment possible. Therefore, it is the duty of the state department of education, local school boards, and administrator preparation programs as
well as principals themselves to ensure that the school’s principal has the appropriate perceptions of bullying, needed education, and training necessary to reduce incidents of bullying and properly intervene in incidents that do occur.
APPENDIX A
SURVEY INSTRUMENT

This questionnaire is about how you see bullying in general, within your school. For the sake of consistency keep your school in mind as you answer the questions.

Part A: Principal/School information

1. What is your:
   AGE__ RACE ______________ GENDER (___)male (___) Female
4. Which type of school are you employed in?
   (___) elementary (___) middle (___) high school (___) k-8 (___) k-12 (___) other____
5. How many years have you been a school principal?
   (___) less than 5yrs (___) 5 to 10yrs (___) 11 to 15yrs (___) 16 to 20yrs (___) more than 20 years
6. What is your current licensure level?
   (___) A (___) AA (___) AAA (___)AAAA
7. Which of the following would you consider yourself as a student?
   (___) a bully
   (___) a victim
   (___) both a bully and a victim
   (___) a bystander
   (___) not involved in bullying

Part B: Perceptions of Bullying

1. Which of the following behaviors to you consider bullying? (check as many as apply)
   (___) Social isolation and exclusion from the group
   (___) Teasing, ridicule, degrading, rude gestures
   (___) Intimidation, threats
   (___) Vandalizing or stealing property
   (___) Hitting, kicking, pushing, often including teasing
2. How severe do you consider each of these behaviors?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Not Severe</th>
<th>Severe</th>
<th>Very Severe</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social isolation and exclusion from the group</td>
<td>1  2  3  4  5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Teasing, ridicule, degrading, rude gestures</td>
<td>1  2  3  4  5</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Intimidation, threats</td>
<td>1  2  3  4  5</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Vandalizing or stealing property</td>
<td>1  2  3  4  5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Hitting, kicking, pushing, often including teasing</td>
<td>1  2  3  4  5</td>
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<tr>
<th>Indicate how much you agree with the following statements</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>agree</th>
<th>disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
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<td>3. Bullying is a serious problem in the U.S.</td>
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<td>4. Students are more likely to intervene in defense of bullied students than a teacher.</td>
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<td>5. Bullying is a problem in my current school.</td>
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<td>6. Bullying behavior is most often not noticed by teachers.</td>
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<td>7. Students do not report bullying because of fear of retaliation.</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>8. Bullying is inevitable, and in this sense it is normal behavior</td>
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<td>9. Students will tell other students about being bullied before telling their teacher.</td>
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<td>10. Students often do not tell adults if they are being bullied because they feel nothing will happen.</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>11. Bullying is a normal part of development in children. Therefore it is difficult for adults to know when to intervene.</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>12. Because bullying is a part of child development children must be allowed to resolve their own problems.</td>
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<td>13. Teachers and adults should intervene in bullying situations</td>
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<td>when it becomes apparent that adult intervention is needed.</td>
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<td>14. Allowing students to resolve bullying incidents assists in building character for those directly involved.</td>
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<td>15. Bullying is best ignored unless verbal and psychological intimidation crosses the line into physical assault.</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>16. Teachers are most often unaware of bullying that takes place in the classroom.</td>
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<td>17. Teachers require training in order to intervene appropriately.</td>
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<td>18. Teachers do not receive adequate training to effectively intervene in bullying conflicts.</td>
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<td>19. Teachers should intervene by referring students to appropriate personnel.</td>
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<td>20. Bullying affects only a small number of children.</td>
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<td>21. Conflict, which results from bullying, should first be resolved by the counselor, administrators, and then the teachers, respectively.</td>
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<td>22. Increasing teacher awareness of what bullying is and why it may occur should result in increased teacher intervention.</td>
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<td>23. Although school violence began escalating over the past decade, bullying has only recently emerged as a problem in U.S. schools.</td>
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<td>24. Physical bullying in more distressful for students than behaviors such as ridicule or teasing.</td>
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<td>25. Victims of bullying are often passive and have low-esteem.</td>
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<td>26. Certain student behaviors make</td>
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<td>27. Students a target for bullies.</td>
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<td>28. Bullies are physically more powerful than their victims.</td>
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<td>29. Bullies suffer low self-esteem and pick on individuals they perceive as weak.</td>
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<td>30. Bullies pick on children because of a need for power and control over individuals.</td>
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<td>31. The larger the class or the school, the higher the level of bully/victim problems for the schools.</td>
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<td>32. Aggressive behaviors in bullies are a result of their frustrations with school; usually due to having poor poor grades.</td>
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<td>33. Students, who have characteristics that make them appear different, such as being overweight, having freckles, red hair, or wearing thick glasses, are more likely to be bullied.</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>34. Bullies have average or below average levels of self-esteem.</td>
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<td>35. Children and bullies in particular must go through a certain stage.</td>
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<td>36. Teachers are usually the first to know when bullying is a problem in their classes.</td>
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<td>37. Victims of bullies must learn how to stand up for themselves.</td>
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<td>38. Bullying is under-reported by teachers.</td>
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<td>39. Teachers need training to respond appropriately to bullying.</td>
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<td>40. Because students spend a significant amount of time in school, teachers play a crucial role in bullying prevention.</td>
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<td>41. Most bullying occurs in unsupervised locations.</td>
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<tr>
<td>42. Most bullying occurs in supervised areas.</td>
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<tr>
<td>43. Teachers do not notice bullying as much as students’ peers do.</td>
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<td>44. Males are more likely to admit to bullying than females.</td>
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<td>45. Boys bullying girls is normal behavior.</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>46. Girls bullying boys is <strong>not</strong> normal behavior.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47. Students are more likely to report physical bullying.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
From: Matthew Alred  
Sent: Thursday, September 15, 2011 1:42 PM 
To: wilma_m_gibson@fc.dekalb.k12.ga.us 
Subject: 2003 bully survey

Dr. Gibson,

I hope this email finds you well. My name is Matthew Alred and I am currently working at the University of Southern Mississippi toward my doctorate degree. My research is investigating the perceptions of school principals toward bullying in Mississippi. I am requesting your permission to use the survey you created in 2003 for your dissertation.

Thank you,

Matthew Alred  
Social Studies  
Burnsville School  
Tishomingo County School District
APPENDIX C
PERMISSION TO USE SURVEY

From: WILMA M. GIBSON [WILMA_M_GIBSON@fc.dekalb.k12.ga.us]

Sent: Tuesday, September 20, 2011 1:43 PM

To: Matthew Alred

Subject: Re: permission to use your bully survey

Yes, you may use the instrument.
NOTICE OF COMMITTEE ACTION

The project has been reviewed by The University of Southern Mississippi Institutional Review Board in accordance with Federal Drug Administration regulations (21 CFR 26, 111), Department of Health and Human Services (45 CFR Part 46), and university guidelines to ensure adherence to the following criteria:

- The risks to subjects are minimized.
- The risks to subjects are reasonable in relation to the anticipated benefits.
- The selection of subjects is equitable.
- Informed consent is adequate and appropriately documented.
- Where appropriate, the research plan makes adequate provisions for monitoring the data collected to ensure the safety of the subjects.
- Where appropriate, there are adequate provisions to protect the privacy of subjects and to maintain the confidentiality of all data.
- Appropriate additional safeguards have been included to protect vulnerable subjects.
- Any unanticipated, serious, or continuing problems encountered regarding risks to subjects must be reported immediately, but not later than 10 days following the event. This should be reported to the IRB Office via the “Adverse Effect Report Form”.

If approved, the maximum period of approval is limited to twelve months.

Projects that exceed this period must submit an application for renewal or continuation.

- PROTOCOL NUMBER: 11111702
- PROJECT TITLE: What Influences Principals' Perceptions of Bullying?
- PROJECT TYPE: Dissertation
- RESEARCHER/S: Matthew Alred
- COLLEGE/DIVISION: College of Education & Psychology
- DEPARTMENT: Educational Leadership
- FUNDING AGENCY: N/A
- IRB COMMITTEE ACTION: Exempt Approval
- PERIOD OF PROJECT APPROVAL: 11/30/2011 to 11/29/2012

Lawrence A. Hosman, Ph.D.
Institutional Review Board Chair
REFERENCES


Gibson, Wilma (2003). Elementary and middle school teachers' perceptions of bullying. Georgia State University, GA.


Harris, S., & Petrie, G. (2003) *Bullying: the bullies, the victims, the bystanders*. Lanham, MD, Scarecrow Press.


