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## Exploring the Coping Strategies of Female Urban High School Seniors on Academic Successes as it Relates to Bullying

Brenda Elaine Brooks-turner

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**EXPLORING THE COPING STRATEGIES OF FEMALE URBAN HIGH  
SCHOOL SENIORS ON ACADEMIC SUCCESSES AS IT RELATES TO  
BULLYING**

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**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN URBAN EDUCATION:**

**ADMINISTRATION**

**at the**

**CLEVELAND STATE UNIVERSITY**

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We hereby approve the dissertation  
of

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**April 28, 2016**  
Student's Date of Defense

## **DEDICATION**

To my father, Louis Brooks Jr. and my mother, Laura Almeida Jones Brooks:

### **A Parent's Heart**

© Ann T. Tran

When you feel like breaking down or crashing in,  
Who do you turn to, to forgive your sin?  
When you cried your lonely tears,  
Who will be there to fight your fears?  
And when it feels like no one would understand,  
Who was there to hold your hand?

There are people whom you can't replace,  
They're the ones who gave you your face.  
They'll love you through thick and thin,  
They show you the light from deep within.  
And if by chance, you happen to die,  
They'll be the ones who will really cry.

You see, my friend, there's no one who can love you more,  
Than your very own parents, that's for sure.  
Always remember that this is true,  
That wherever you go, your parents will be there for you.

To my daughter, Breoni Jonise Turner

**Precious Gift**

© Sherri Lawrence

When times seem too hard to bear and I feel like giving up  
I vision your beautiful face, the twinkle of your eyes and things of such  
The bond we created from my womb to the day you were born  
Is a mother and daughter bind that can never be torn  
With the strength and guidance of God and the blessings he pours down from  
above

I want to be the best mom I can be to you and embrace you with all my love  
You are as precious as a flower and as gorgeous as a rose  
You have been specially made to the very tip of your nose  
You are as sweet as honey; such an innocent young child  
You are brighter than any star in the sky every time you smile  
I want you to be proud of who you are and strive to be the best  
Put forth your efforts to achieve your goals and let God do the rest  
I will always be your mother first, but I'm also your friend  
You are the most precious gift, that I've ever been given

With All My Love,

Mommy

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**EXPLORING THE COPING STRATEGIES OF FEMALE URBAN HIGH  
SCHOOL SENIORS ON SCHOOL SUCCESSES AS IT RELATES TO  
BULLYING**

**BRENDA ELAINE BROOKS-TURNER**

**ABSTRACT**

Bullying has become a worldwide problem of pandemic proportion and degree. (Thomas, Bolen, Heister & Hyde, 2010). In the United States over thirty-five percent of school-aged students were directly involved in bullying incidents. Tragic news stories about suicides and school violence raised awareness about the importance of addressing this global issue (Van Der Zande, 2010). To date reports further indicate that more females are involved in indirect relational bullying than males. Unfortunately, as technology becomes more and more accessible, relational bullying has become one of the fastest growing epidemics (Brinson, 2005; Rigby & Smith, 2011).

Current research explanations were limited as to how female seniors who are victims of bullying showed resilience to academically succeed despite incidences of bullying throughout their high school experiences. Therefore, the purpose of this mixed method study was to explore the coping strategies utilized by 12th grade female urban high school seniors who have experienced school success despite their involvement as victims of bullying. In this study, 32 high school female seniors completed the online Olweus' Bullying Questionnaire which included self-reported attendance, discipline referrals, grade point average, and participation in extracurricular activities as it related to their bullying experiences.

Additionally, the researcher randomly selected eight focus group participants were involved in two focus group sessions to provide rich descriptions of their

experiences as victims of bullying. These victims expressed the coping strategies used to successfully defeat the negative connotations associated with bullying, and specifically acknowledged their personal triumphs. When students understood the intricacies of bullying, and were empowered to use effective coping strategies, their experience of school success should increase as the prevalence of bullying decreases.

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to decrease the number of bullying incidences in schools by providing students with effective resources or coping strategies that enabled them to no longer be victims of bullying, but to have opportunities to experience success as they develop, and learn in a safe and hostile-free environment.

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## **CHAPTER I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Throughout the nation, bullying has received a significant amount of attention following a number of high-profile school shootings and related incidents of violence in late 1990 and early 2000 (Trump 2010). Incidences involving recent reports, regarding tragic news stories about suicides and school violence have raised awareness about the importance of addressing this issue (Van Der Zande, 2010). When left unaddressed, bullying-related situations have ignited into horrific tragedies such as the Columbine High School Massacre (Littleton, Colorado), Chardon High School shooting, (Chardon, Ohio), and the Sandy Hook Elementary School tragedy (Newtown, Connecticut).

Other incidences have occurred where innocent victims suffered or even experienced death at the hands of their perpetrators who were previously bullied victims (Coloroso, 2003; Shariff, 2008). Consequently, bullying continues to be a national problem of pandemic size and degree (Thomas, Bolen, Heister, & Hyde, 2010). In fact, current research identified bullying as one of the most common and prevalent forms of aggression and victimization experienced by school-aged children (Nansel, Overpeck, Haynie, Ruan, & Scheidt, 2003; Veenstra et al., 2005).

In the United States, over 13 million American school aged children were bullied each year (Gaul, 2010; Williams, & Kennedy, 2012). What is bullying? Bullying as defined by Olweus (1997), the pioneer of bullying research, is a pattern of repeated behaviors intended to harm, intimidate, or exclude someone of lesser power. Bullying is the unprovoked physical or psychological abuse of an individual by one person or a group of people over a period of time where ongoing patterns of harassment and abuse exist (Batsche & Knoff, 1994; Hoover, Oliver, & Thomson, 1993; Olweus, 1991; Whitted & Dupper, 2005). Previously bullying was viewed as a single act of physical intimidation without recognition of psychological or emotional overtones.

Today, bullying is defined as a serious abusive problem now receiving the attention it deserves (Hirsch, Lowen, & Santorelli, 2012; Koo, 2007). Based on gender, between males and females, Olweus (1997) characterized two types of negative behaviors identified as being either direct or physical bullying or indirect or relational bullying.

Direct bullying is the act of physically abusing someone else (Smith & Brain, 2000). Whereby males typically were identified as engaging in more direct bullying tactics than girls; however, females utilize a subtler indirect approach to socially enforce isolated situations by spreading rumors or gossip (Ahmad & Smith, 1994; Smith & Sharp, 1994). With the onset of cyberbullying, reports indicated incidents of bullying from females have been currently increasing as technology becomes more and more accessible today (Brinson, 2005; Rigby & Smith, 2011). Therefore, it is important to focus more attention on females because of the technological advances and the more prevalent roles females play in our society today.

Even today, many social changes have been attributed to changes in lifestyles for women. The roles of females have transformed and changed over the last century placing women in more powerful leadership positions. As a result of these changes, more women work outside of the home, attend higher educational institutions, hold political offices, and make advances in their earning potential. As new and innovative small business establishments have increased, women in power must be prepared to strategically handle all situations, especially situations of bullying in the workplace (Field, Crother, & Kolbert, 2007). To combat this problem, a paradigm shift is needed to equip all victimized women of bullying to rely on effective strategies that empower them to not be afraid and to boldly achieve as they show confidence in taking on more prominent leadership roles in our society. When female students learn effective coping strategies in school, it will enable them to become successful in the world of work, because they can use their negative bullying experiences, as a method to overcome incidences and achieve school successes in spite of bullying.

### **Rationale of the Study**

Bullying has ignited the fears of millions and has forced a nation to take a closer look at the impact words and actions have on others (Austin, Reynolds, & Barnes, 2012). In schools, bullying was found to have the highest prevalence rates in the United States than in any other country (Duncan, 1999; Hoover, Oliver, & Hazier, 1992; Seals & Young, 2003). Based on increased shootings and killings in schools, this life or death issue can no longer be minimized, trivialized, taken lightly, brushed off, ignored or denied (Coloroso, 2003). Although negative acts of bullying are not a new concept, more awareness today of how much damage it can cause has been evident (Van der Zande,

2010). Overall, most mass shootings have been dominated by boys; however, mass shootings by girl bullies are increasing (Jones, 1998).

As a method to explain the results of victimization, researchers Eisenburg, Neumark-Sztainer, and Perry (2003) proposed that young people who feel more connected to school and earn higher grades, are less likely to be involved in violence and emotional distress than their less connected and less successful peers (Bauman, 2008; Smokowshi & Kopasz, 2005; Tsang, 2008). Based on their research, there is a need to fortify students who have been victimized with effective coping skills that will not allow bullying to impede their success (Eisenburg et al., 2003).

Unfortunately, bullying research was limited and inconclusive as it relates to gender, academic achievement, linkage between coping strategies of male and female, success and victimization of females. Moreover, the majority of research in the United States primarily focused on bullying of elementary and middle school students (Bauman, 2008); bullying from a female's perspective should not be dismissed because evidence indicated that bullying was increasing (Cristie, 2005). Because of this information, more research is needed to understand the ill effects of bullying on high school females who have been victimized by bullies. To address this growing problem schools have provided intervention programs to assist in educating students about bullying.

Although these preventative intervention programs exist, many researchers indicated that these programs are ineffective and merely shift from the venue of violence outside the boundaries of school property (Dake, Price, & Telijohann, 2003; Walton, 2005). Interpretively, all schools are expected to use programs as a primary catalyst to change the safety of a school's environment. Unfortunately, most programs provided are

inconsistent since all states do not use the same school-wide plans or programs. The inconsistency in plans and programs needs to be addressed in the future. Therefore, it is with the utmost importance that effective preventative strategies are identified to help those involved in bullying experiences survive and overcome hurting others or being hurt, as acceptable solutions to this worldwide problem (Tenenbaum, Varjas, Meyers, & Parris, 2011).

### **Statement of the Problem**

Bullying has been a critical issue faced in schools throughout the United States (Hoover & Hazler, 1991). Consequently, over 13 million American children have been bullied each year, with as many as 50% of high school students reporting personal accounts of bullying (Gaul, 2010). In schools, bullying has been an issue that continues to receive attention from researchers, educators, parents, and students. Based on recent research, the number of bullying incidences has increased over time and has become a vehicle for bullies to tease, threaten and humiliate others (Hinduj, & Patchin, 2011).

Bullying behaviors have even caused victims to commit suicide as a result of their not knowing how to cope with bullies (Van Der Zande, 2010). As reported by most research more and more females are involved in indirect relational bullying than boys, and current interventions to address bullying problems have been deemed ineffective in reducing the number of incidences at school (Ahmad & Smith, 1994; Smith & Sharp, 1994). Finally, the current Anti-bullying laws are inconsistent from states to state, yielding inequitable consequences to the perpetrators of bullying ([www.stopbullying.gov/laws](http://www.stopbullying.gov/laws)). When consequences for the same bullying crime in one state comparatively ranges from life in prison to minor charges in another state, states and

local lawmakers must take a more aggressive action in preventing bullying from occurring. Their job should be to protect all children from harm. By enforcing consistent state-to state- laws and consequences, victims would work in a safe environment.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this mixed method study was to explore how high school urban female seniors used coping strategies to obtain resilience and academically succeed while surviving the challenges of being involved in negative bullying experiences. This research involved high school females who combated negative experiences of bullying and utilized effective strategies to cope while socially and academically achieving.

The main focus of this study was to discuss methods to protect students from harm and decrease the number of bullying incidences while increasing the level of academic successes in school. Due to limited research in the areas of coping strategies that are related to bullying, an urgent need to address bullying problems is necessary. When coping strategies are taught to victims, then relational aggression should diminish, and feelings of depression and anxiety for female victims should also considerably decrease. Therefore, as a means to help victims obtain a voice to stand up to bullies at home and at school, it is important to understand and utilize these suggested coping strategies, in the United States and eventually throughout the world. To justify the need to conduct this research, the following research questions are presented to address this need.

### **Research Questions**

1. What is the experiences young female seniors encounter in an urban high school setting as it relates to bullying?

2. What is the relationship between bullying and victimization as it relates to school attendance, participation in extracurricular activities, discipline, and academic achievement?
3. What coping strategies does one use to navigate through situations of bullying and manage to achieve?

### **Definitions**

*Bully:* “A person whose goal is to get others to conform and be predictable” (Strauss, 2012, p. 63).

*Bullying:* “A negative action—physical or verbal—that has a hostile intent, repeated over time, and involves a power differential between the bully and the victim. It is a repeated behavior intended to harm, intimidate, and or exclude someone of lesser power” (Olweus, 1993 & 1997, p. 10).

*Coping Strategies:* Counting, ignoring, leaving the area, role playing; becoming friends with the bully; bonding with peers to develop strong respectful relationships; finding an adult to talk with; relying on religious beliefs and upbringings; reflecting on parental values; focusing on the goals to succeed; and refusing to participate in bullying behaviors (Olweus, Limber, Flerx, Mullin, Riese & Snyder, 2007).

*Cyberbullying:* Speech that is defamatory constitutes bullying, harassment, or discrimination, discloses personal information or contains offensive, vulgar or derogatory comments. It is the harassment of a person via the use of the Internet, or electronic devices (phones, iPad etc.), usually occurring outside of school or the misuse of technology to communicate to individuals in a negative manner by using threats or harassment to convey a message (Shariff, 2008, p. 29).

*Indirect Bullying:* Social isolation and intentional exclusion from a group (Olweus, 1993, p. 10).

*Minority Student:* A person whose race, creed, gender, religion, ethnicity and sexual preferences are not those of the majority of people in a designated area. People who are Hispanic, African-American, Asian/Pacific, Islander, and Indians etc. are considered to be of a minority race.

*Peer Victimization:* Being a victim of bullying behavior by peers (Bond et al., 2001; Hawker & Bolton, 2000; Schwartz et al., 2005, as cited in van Hoof, Raaijmakers, Van Beek, Hale, & Aleva, 2008, p. 772).

*Relational Aggression:* Behaviors that harm others through damaging their relationships, feelings of acceptance, inclusion in social groups, and friendships (Crick, 1999, p. 345).

*Relational Bullying:* Spreading rumors, excluding someone from a group, keeping others from liking a student, withdrawing a friendship, or leaving a student out of an activity (Fettrow, 2013, p. 38).

*School Success:* Internally emphasizing behaviors relative to a student. It is based on an individual's importance, or something that is self-satisfying. Externally emphasizing behaviors recognized as eminent by others or superior to their peers (Ablard, 1997). School success for this study is the criteria in which students experience any type of achievement or accomplishment.

*Verbal Abuse:* Overt or subtle verbalizations ranging from profanity and openly hostile remarks about competency, to double edged comments, gossip and rumors (Cooper, Saxe-Braithwaite, & Anthony, 1996)

*Verbal Bullying:* Picking on, threatening, name-calling, teasing, or yelling at another student (Fettrow, 2013).

*Victim:* Those individuals who are exposed to negative actions associated with bullying (Olweus, 2003).

### **Limitations of the Study**

This mixed method study is limited by the sample population, which is inclusive of 32 urban high school seniors, eighteen years of age or older.

### **Summary**

This section provides the rationale, statement of the problem and purpose of the study. It establishes the parameters of the research by outlining questions to be answered throughout the study, definitions applied for discussion of the subject matter and limitations of the study. A review of relevant literature on bullying, cyberbullying, the urban high school environment, coping strategies and an individual's academic success will be discussed in the next chapter.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Bullying has been recognized as a worldwide problem since the mid 1970's (Catanzaro, 2011), and is identified as a serious issue confronting all children today (Kevorkian et al., 2008). Based on the U. S. National Center for Education Statistics, almost a third of students, ages 12-18 reported their involvement in some type of bullying in school (Smokowshi et al., 2010). Although bullying activities have advanced from child's play to life or death situations, its existence can no longer be ignored (Kevorkian et. al., 2008).

As one method to examine the underlying problems of bullying, it was important to explore effective strategies that have been used to prevent or reduce the number of bullying problems in schools. This literature review discussed the etymology, history, legislature and specific cases of bullying from the 20<sup>th</sup> century to the present day, described the characteristics of bullying from a victim's point of view, identified various components that attributed to different types of bullying experiences and . Finally, the last section identified effective coping strategies and interventions used by students to provide opportunities for other individuals to maintain resilience against bullying as they develop a strong sense of self-confidence to succeed.

## **Definition of Bullying**

Bullying was defined when a person or a group of people do harm to others (Andreous, 2001; Isiklar, Sar, & Celik, 2012), intentionally (Hector, Barrios, Dios, Montero, & Barrio, 2008) and repeatedly embarrassing someone (Ayas & Pikin, 20011; Barboza et al., 2008; O'Connell, & Debra, 1999; Pikin, 2010). It was an individual attack on a person who possessed attributes which placed him or her in a non-dominant group (Hazel, 2010). A non-dominant group was defined as individuals with: special needs, identified as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT), or having psychological, emotional and physical disorders (Russell, Ryan, Toomey, Diaz, & Sanchez, 2011).

Bullying was also defined as a desired power of imbalance or malicious intent (Cornell, Sheras, & Cole, 2006; Doll, Song, & Siemers, 2004; Hazel, 2010). When a bully expressed a level of intolerance, discrimination and imbalance of power, it encouraged those who challenged violence to negatively respond to an individual who is less powerful (Hazel, 2010). Today, the term bullying has drastically changed over time.

For past generations, bullying was solely viewed, in its physical sense, as a negative act of someone physically overpowering someone else (Koo, 2007; Rigby, 2002). Presently, in the United States and in most parts of the world bullying is viewed as an unacceptable practice that is objectionable and offensive (National Institute of Health, 2009).

Bullying can further be defined as a physical, mental or emotional act of intimidation, and fear, forcing someone to do something against his or her will. When injuries are intentionally inflicted on another human causing that person to obtain feelings of discomfort, or when vindictive words are expressed causing someone to induce physical acts of harm, then one can identify these acts of bullying to have occurred

(Olweus, 2007). At one time, bullying was associated with problems among victims and perpetrators (Gamliel, Hoover, Daughtry, & Imbra, 2003). Research further indicates that associations of bullying include bullies, victims and bystanders (Coloroso, 2003). Despite the numerous definitions and types of bullying behaviors identified, the universal definition and meaning of bullying has been viewed as a passive and or aggressive behavior that is harmful to all involved (Koo, 2007).

### **History of Bullying**

In the 1800s the word “bully” was synonymous with the words cowardice, weakness, tyranny and violence, and often associated with gangs and gang violence (Shaff, 2008). During this period, any type of aggressive behavior was simply seen as mischief and a normal part of childhood. In fact, according to Koo (2007) bullying was thought of as an innocent “misadventure” or “misbehavior” among most schoolboys. A report in 1982 from a newspaper article published in Scandinavia drew national attention to an incident where a schoolboy from Norway committed suicide because three young boys severely bullied him (Olweus, 1993). Unfortunately, the school viewed the bullying behavior as a normal misadventure among the teens and failed to take the issue of bullying seriously. As a result, the schoolboys were exonerated and never received any type of consequences (Koo, 2007). Consequently, this occurrence triggered a nationwide campaign that brought awareness to the country and led people to fight against bullying and victimization. Government officials requested that Daniel Olweus (1997) who is now known as “the father of bullying research” develop an intervention program that would address the complex problems of bullying. During this century, bullying was primarily associated with mobbing or gangster activities (Beaty, & Alexeyev, 2008; Bidwell, 2006).

In his study, Olweus gathered data regarding bullying incidences and used his study to create a program that would help others understand the effects of bullying and caused people to become more sensitive to others with the intention of preventing any further acts of bullying from occurring in schools. His study included over 140,000 students in over 715 schools (Olweus, 1987). Based on his findings, over fifteen percent of the students who attended Scandinavia schools were involved in bullying activities, ninety-five of the students were classified as victims and six percent were identified as bullies (Beaty et al., 2008; Bidwell, 2006). Based on Olweus' groundbreaking research, many researchers today study the prevalence of bullying both inside and outside of a school's environment (Olweus 1991).

Afterwards, in the 1990s, several landmark studies investigated issues of female adolescent aggression (Beran & Li, 2007; Bjorkqvist et al., 1992; Catanzoro, 2011; Crick et. al., 1996; Owens et al. 2000; Simmons, 2002). Brown (2003) in her landmark study, discovered that girls exhibited traits very different from the Olweus (1993) model, and that boys who bully have difficulty with managing anger and impulse control.

Girls, on the other hand, developed in a context of affiliation or a connection with others. The threat of a disruptive social connection, and being shunned, was deeply hurtful to girls because it denied girls the interactions they most deeply valued (Brown, 2003). To date, Olweus' (1993) study about bullying has been perceived much differently than it was in the past. Now, negative acts of aggression or bullying are taken more seriously (Koo, 2007).

## **Models of Bullying**

More than thirty-five percent of school-aged students are directly involved in some type of bullying activities; over forty-eight percent were identified as being verbally assaulted (Turkmen et al., 2013).

Socially, individuals live in a nation where bullying has been unintentionally instilled as a survival tactic from birth to a very young age (The Journal of Undergraduate Research in Communications, 2012). When a child enters grade school, he or she is taught to be the best they can be. Once this seemingly innocent lesson morphs, a child further develops throughout his or her educational experiences. In some cases, students have learned how to adapt to their development by focusing on more corrupt ways to get ahead in highly competitive educational and social environments (Crother, Lipinski, & Minutolo, 2009). Some learned bullying tactics include: pressuring others for answers on assignments, to attain higher grades in school which led toward better college opportunities, or spreading social rumors about a fellow student. These tactics are considered to be dangerous mainly because an individual can construct a negative life style from these activities.

When bullying habits are developed, the varied tactics affect countless numbers of people and eventually can lead to working in a corrupt place of business (Crother et al., 2009). In general, when bullying occurs, aggressive behaviors are repeatedly carried out over a period of time. This negative act creates an imbalance of power between one person to another. (Turkmen et al., 2013).

## **Types of Bullying**

**Direct/Physical Bullying.** In the 1970s, Olweus (1999) identified three types of bullying. Physical or direct bullying is in the form of verbal and or physical attacks

whereby someone is punched, hit, or sexually abused (Fox, Jones, Stiff, & Sayers, 2014). At least ninety-five percent of the boys, more so than girls involved in bullying behaviors demonstrate physical aggressiveness and emotional harassment such as shoving smaller or weaker boys and calling them names (Turkmen, 2013).

In another study, only five percent of boys significantly attributed causes of bullying to the victims compared to thirty-three percent of girls (Seals & Young, 2003). This statistic implied that boys tend to use physical bullying or direct bullying more often than girls, and girls used relational or indirect bullying more often than boys (Coloroso, 2003). Although physical bullying was not exclusively identified as something boys mostly done by boys, in some instances, big girls were known to physically attack smaller boys or girls and engage in acts of bullying (Smith et al., 1999; Chapell, Hasselman, Kitchin, Lomon, MacIver, & Sarullo, 2006).

**Indirect/Relational Bullying.** A second type of bullying is indirect, verbal or relational bullying. This type of subtle aggression involves someone being engaged in acts of: name calling, making harassing phone calls, spreading rumors, transferring vicious emails and inducing emotional abuse. With relational bullying social exclusion or isolation is deliberate. This type of bullying has been identified as the most common form of bullying among girls (Duncan, & Owens, 2011; Hamel, 2008). Victimization experiences of bullying differed between males and females and the gender differences for females involved in indirect bullying such as social exclusion and spreading rumors, are still a main concern. According to research, more information in the area of gender differences is needed to verify the notion that females are indirectly and relationally victimized more than males (Felix & McMahon, 2007).

Other research supports the implication that females experience more relational bullying through verbal teasing and name-calling (Hoover et. al., 1992). Additionally, recent studies of girls' aggressive behaviors produced consistent findings that girls are aggressive towards each other, but usually in a more covert, indirect way, which is motivated by the relational goals concerned with the making and breaking of friendships (Archer and Coyne, 2005; Bjorkqvist et. al., 1992; James and Owens, 2005; Owens et al., 2000; Underwood, 2003). Boy relationships tended to be held together by common interests. Boys are loose and relatively conflict-free (Sullivan, 2011). Moreover, boys seek power and dominance, and parents positively reward boys for the verbal and physical aggression in sons and positively reward interpersonal and social skills in daughters (Woo, 2007).

Girls, on the other hand, need a sense of affirmation and affiliation, a feeling of belonging and shared intimacy expressed in exchange for confidence and gossip (Besag, 1989). This type of bullying includes: excluding, ignoring, and isolating along with non-verbal behaviors such as eye rolling, crossing one's arms, turning away or socio-mental abuse (Anderson, 2013; Miller & Lohan, 2013; Strauss, 2012). According to Brown and Gilligan (1992) relational aggression is considered a female's rite of passage and is exacerbated by the absence of access to constructive conflict resolutions. When girls approach adolescence, they often disavow their feelings and suppress their experience in order to preserve relationships (Hammel, 2008). In general, females have been known to participate in indirect relational bullying experiences whenever subtle verbal and non-verbal gestures are presented. Females indirectly participate in spreading rumors, responding to hearsay, and exhibiting signs of jealousy and or envy (Kevorkian & D'Antona, 2008).

However, Catanzaro (2011), concluded that victimization was higher for females than boys. This rise in gender difference was attributed to the growing number of relational bullying incidences whereas more females have participated in the newest acts of indirect relational bullying called cyberbullying, which further gives bullies more opportunities to torment and torture their victims through online emails, websites and texting (Shariff, 2008), females are more involved in relational bullying than boys.

**Cyberbullying.** Cyberbullying is a deliberate and intentional act of participating in indirect anonymous acts of harassment, intimidation, taunting, posting negative and inappropriate messages through electronic means. It is a form of indirect, verbal, and or relational bullying (Barlett & Coyne, 2014). This indirect act has increased the amount of bullying incidences which are growing at alarming rates (Beale & Hall, 2007; Kevorkian et al., 2008).

Cyberbullying, uses information and communication technologies such as email, cell phones, pager text messages, instant messaging, defamatory personal web sites, and defamatory online personal polling web sites, to support deliberate, repeated and hostile behavior by an individual or group that is intended to harm others (Li, 2007; Ramirez, 2013; Shariff, 2008). Due to improvements in telecommunication, online innovations such as the creation of websites, Myspace, Twitter blogging, Facebook, and Instagram have continued to advance bullying technology (Shariff, 2008). By using these website, can result in victims becoming isolated and ostracized, increasing the power of imbalance that helps the perpetrators convince themselves that their actions are justified (Shariff, 2008).

This type of bullying has grown from kids pushing on the playground to gossiping anonymously on the website; from physically using word of mouth messages to passing

rumors on cell phones, tweets, and twitter accounts; from surfing the Internet to media attention, as well as using other technological devices to exploit one another (Myers, McCaw & Hemphill, 2011). Additionally, chat rooms and online forums have provided a communal breeding ground for youth to assault one another (Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 2008). In chat rooms, youths can get together with selected groups of friends and exchange the latest gossip (Miller, & Lowen, 2012).

Even young females, from ages twelve to eighteen, have increasingly been identified as perpetrators of cyberbullying in groups and have been more frequent users of social networking tools, spending at least seventy-five percent of their time in chat rooms and or using instant messages to communicate (Shariff, 2008). Overall, it can be noted that girls used more psychological or relational bullying while boys used physical bullying (Bulhari, & Hafiz, 2011).

As technology evolves, bullying has become more prolific. The internet has taken bullying to another level allowing bullies to anonymously and intentionally spread lies and rumors about their victims. Unfortunately, with the dangers of online publications of personal information, many people can view information or create alias profiles that may otherwise be kept private during a face-to-face interaction without worry of any type of repercussion.

### **Characteristics of Bullying**

Some defining bullying characteristics include: having the desire to feel powerful, acquiring special attention (Ziegler and Rosenstein-Manner, 1991), experiencing mental or health challenges (Kaltiala-Heino et al., 1999; Kaltiala-Heino et al., 2000; Kumpulainen et al., 2001; Roland, 2002; Salmon et al., 1998), using drugs and alcohol, attempting suicide, and exhibiting problems learning in school unlike their peers who do

not bully others (Berthold and Hoover, 2000; Simanton et al., 2000); (Gamliel et al., 2003), affiliating with gangs, abusive relationships, experiencing peer victimization in the community or incarceration (Viljoen, 2005). When a person acquires one or more of these characteristics, incidences of bullying can more than likely occur.

**The bully.** Bullying in schools has not been studied as much in the United States as in most other industrialized countries (Hazel, 2010). However, research suggests that nineteen to thirty-one percent of students' bully others regularly and twenty-four to forty- nine percent of U.S. students are regular victims of bullying (Bradshaw, Sawyer, & O'Brennan, 2007; Hazel, 2010; Nansel et al., 2001). Although early studies often separate individuals into bullies and or victims, more recent research indicates that many offenders fall into the role of both bully and victim (Ireland, 1999, 2001; Ireland & Ireland, 2000; Viljoen, 2005). To support this notion, researchers discovered that some of the same individuals who made fun of a person have themselves been victims of bullying (Goldman, 2012). Another study, Turkmen et al., (2013) examined why people bully, their findings concluded that, many students reported that bullies engaged in bullying as a way of making themselves feel better or gain a higher form of status Often times, the characteristic that is used to identify most bullies is, they are specifically aggressive in nature (Olweus, 1994). These aggressive bullies are impulsive, dominating, physically stronger and more violent than their peers (Cranham & Carroll, 2003). Yet, some bullies explained that they bully because it is a way of having fun and breaking the boredom in their everyday lives (Hamarus & Kaikkonen, 2008; Varjas e al. 2008).

Even in Finland, researchers selected a large population of 14 to 16-year-old students and discovered that bullies were more likely to suffer from a number of mental health problems, including symptoms of depression, anxiety, feelings of psychosomatic

thoughts, drinking excessively, and using substances other than alcohol more than their counterparts who were not involved in incidences of bullying (Kaltiala-Heino, 2000).

Additionally, researchers further found a significant difference in gender involvement, with forty-three percent of the victims being males and sixty-seven percent of the females identified as bullies (Peters & Bain, 2011). In another study involving over 6,127 participants, fifteen percent of the female victims stated that they only had one mental health issue and twenty-nine percent had two or more mental health problems (Bachus, 2011).

Based on their findings, the study indicates that female bullies may have more mental health problems than those who are not directly involved. Consequently, this information may explain why bullies are blamed more for initiating negative acts of bullying because they had a higher percent of health issues and victims were blamed less for provoking the crime (Thornberg, & Knutsen, 2011).

**The victim.** Almost one in three students within the age range of 12 to 18 reported being bullied in school (National Center for Education Statistics, 2005). Beyond the relatively rare cases of school shootings, victimization is associated with many negative mental health consequences including anxiety and depression (Baldry, 2004; Bond, Carlin, Thomas, Rubin, & Patton, 2001; Espelage & Swearer, 2003; Kass, Evans, & Shah, 2003; Olweus, 1993; Seals & Young, 2003; Smokowski & Kopash, 2005; Vossekuil, Reddy, Fein, Borum, & Modzeleski, 2002; Ybarra, 2004).

Overall, boys were most likely to be bullies, and girls were more likely to be victims (Strauss 2012, p. 64). One study suggested that students who were bullied believed that the reasons for their victimization included: favoritism, not being part of the “in” group, actions, speech, appearance, friendships, religion, academic and or social

demeanor (Hoover, Oliver, & Hazier, 1992; Seals & Young, 2003). Twelve percent of students from a school-wide study on bullying were responsible for sixty percent of victimizations where many incidences crossed classroom and grade boundaries (Chan, 2006). In the United States, forty-one percent of victims experienced physical aggression, and eighty percent suffered from emotional harassment. Out of the eighty percent of the students who were victims they reported having some type of experience which was related to abuse (Turkmen, Dokgoz, Akgoz, Eren, Vural, & Polat, 2013). Thus, the research implies that students who are depressed are extremely vulnerable (Turkmen et al., 2013). Moreover, these types of individuals are the ones who are passive victims of bullying. Overall, the victims reported higher rates of psychological distress and suicidal behaviors than those not involved.

Based on a study conducted by Gamliel, Hoover, Daughtry, and Imbra (2003), victims seemingly were better adjusted at adulthood than bullies (Olweus, 1993). As individuals grow older, the passiveness of female victims changed, and they, as adults became more sociable than bullies. Nonetheless, victims were increasingly more prone to depression and anxiety than bullies due to the frequency and severity of the bullying experiences in which they had encountered (Rigby & Slee, 1999). Comparatively, the emotional disorder of depression existed more for females than males (Gamliel, 2003). Thus, identifying relational aggression as the single most identified type of aggression that predicts depression and anxiety is higher for girls (Ellis, Crooks, & Wolfe, 2008; Williams, & Kennedy, 2012). If victims were equipped with strategies that would enable them to learn tactics that can help them fight against attacks and abuse, then they may decrease the number of bullying incidences and stop bullies from abusing (Bachus, 2011).

**The bystander.** Bullying behaviors do not occur in an isolated setting. Often there are individuals who witness the acts of bullying (Cowie, 1998). These individuals who witness bullying are identified as passive bystanders (Cowie, 1998; Duncan, 1996, Hazler et. al., 1997; Olweus, 1991). A bystander is someone who does nothing when he or she sees a person getting bullied. Bystanders often fail to take action when they see name-calling or harassment because they do not know what to do or refuse to get involved. Standing there and watching someone get harassed only makes the problem worse (Lueche, 2011). Passive bystanders do not take an active part in bullying; they simply witness the bullying behavior as it occurs (Olweus, 1991). Moreover, students who witness bullying episodes may become influenced or encouraged to participate or even imitate the observed bullying behaviors (Beaty et al., 2008). These passive actions from a bystander often allows bullying to carry on uninterrupted, regardless if the numbers of bystanders are greater than the perpetrators (Cowie, 1998; Cranham, & Carroll, 2003).

### **Factors of Bullying**

Bullying can happen to anyone at any time or at any place regardless of a person's wealth, creed or nationality, bullying has no boundaries. Some key factors that have been known to increase the likelihood of victimization or "risk factors" that presume or precede bullying activities include: environmental and social determinants (Jansen, Veenstra, Ormel, Verhulst, & Reijneveld, 2011; Sourander et. al., 2009), poor academic achievement (Bejerot et. al., 2013; Glew, Fan, Kayton, Rivara, & Kernic, 2005; Holt, Finkelhor, & Kantor, 2007), and physiological attributes, such as obesity or a visible disfigurement (Bejerot et al., 2013; Lumeng et al., 2010). When these factors affect how

a person acts or feels, then the likelihood of their being victimized is greater (Bejerot et al., 2013).

**Bullying at various school levels.** Bullying in school is an issue that continues to receive attention from researchers, educators, parents, and students (Werle, 2006). At the primary level, occurrences of bullying were more apparent; however, in a series of studies regarding bullying experiences, researchers confirmed that there were consistent associations between aspects of school climate and bullying at school (Bandyopadhyay, Cornell, & Konold, 2009; Brockenbrough, Cornell, & Loper, 2002; Williams & Cornell, 2006; Klein, Cornell, & Konold, 2012).

Although bullying in schools is a widely recognized problem that can cause considerable suffering to individual pupils, it can also create an unacceptable school atmosphere (Olweus, 1993; Nabuzoka, Ronning & Handegard, 2009). Bullies in school have explained that their act of bullying others is a way of having fun and breaking the boredom from their everyday routines (Varjas et al. 2008; Hamarus & Kaikkonen, 2008).

***Elementary school bullying.*** The problem of bullying and victimization in the United States has become particularly acute, in terms of frequency and severity, in early adolescence (National Center for Educational Statistics, 1995; Pergolizzi, Richmond, Macario, Gan, Richmond, & Macario, 2009). According to Dale, Price, & Telijohan (2003) prevalence of being both an aggressor, and a victim were reported higher among students between the ages of six to eight years old. Elementary school children further reported that a student's appearance, speech or clothing could single him or her out to be bullied (Bradshaw, 2007). In elementary school, children form hierarchical social structures where individuals and peer groups are more popular and central than others (Adler & Adler, 1996; Farmer & Rodkin, 1996; Estell et al., 2009).

In the United States, many elementary school students who have been victimized from bullying will be victims for multiple years (Buhs, Ladd, & Herald, 2006). Turkmen (2013) stated that the highest levels of victimization occur in elementary schools, with a steady decline in prevalence rates through secondary school (Eslea, & Rees, 2000). Why do statistics suggest that bullying rates are declining yet one in every three students experience bullying on a regular basis? To address this question, researchers explain that a skewness of confusion surrounding self-reports provided by students who were bullied is a key factor that may explain the decline. Additionally, victims who admit to being bullied did not want to dwell or remember the unpleasant thoughts that reminded them of the traumatic event. Thus they did not report their incidences to school officials (Sullivan, 2011). They felt that if they avoided reliving the traumatic event from bullying, then the bullying experience may not have been so painful (Luecke, 2011).

***Middle school bullying.*** According to research, studies indicate that bullies and victims are likely to experience more bullying at the middle school age (Brown et al., 2005; Espelage, 2004; Nansel et al., 2001; Pergolizzi et al., 2009). Reported estimates of incidences of victimization varied in range from three percent to ten percent in secondary school, where students were engaged in bullying others (Hazel, 2010). In another study, over 453 seventh and eighth grade general education students answered questions from a peer related survey. Their results indicated that twenty-four percent of students reported involvement with either bullying or victimization and more than forty percent of the participants reported that bullying occurred “often” and at school (Seals & Young, 2003).

Another study related bullying to gender differences with middle school students. Their findings indicated that boys reported participating in higher rates of bullying behaviors than girls (Bosworth et al., 1999; Brown et al., 2005; Espelager, Bosworth, &

Simon 2000; Varjas, Henrich, & Meyers, 2009, p. 161); however, girls experienced more sexual and indirect forms of aggression than boys (Davidson & Demaray, 2007).

***High school bullying.*** Bullying is a worldwide problem that has negative consequences for the general school climate and for the rights of students to learn in a safe and conducive environment without fear (Banks, 2013). Statistics show that hate crimes, which occur in both high schools and on college campus, are the third most common places where bullying exists in our nation (Astor, Meyer, & Pitner, 2001; Bradshaw et al., 2007; Craig, Pepler, & Atlas, 2000; Hazel, 2010).

In high schools, activities of bullying advanced beyond the playgrounds of elementary schools and increased to epic and disastrous proportions according to The National Research of Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2001). Despite the common assumption that bullying is a normal part of childhood which encompasses minor teasing and harassment, researchers increasingly confirmed that bullying is a problem that can be detrimental to a students' wellbeing (Jones Staats, Boling, Bickel, Cunningham, & Cadle, 2004).

**Bullying and school safety.** Although school aged children think that there are times when bullying is acceptable (Hara, 2002), there are no acceptable times for bullying. Findings from several studies state that children identified recess as the time when most bullying frequently occurs. During this time, older children mostly bully younger kids. However, bullying outside of the classroom has been proven to negatively affect the academic attentiveness for most students (Klein, Cornell, & Konold, 2012). In schools, more than twenty-four percent of the students reported some type of involvement with either bullying or victimization from their peers, and more than forty

percent of the participants reported that bullying occurred “often” at school (Bradshaw, Sawyer, & O’Brennan, 2007; Hazel, 2010; Nansel et al., 2001).

Within the school environment, the playground is the most common setting for bullying to occur followed by the hallways, classrooms, lunchrooms, and washrooms (Siann et. al., 1993; Whitney & Smith, 1993). Research further suggests that school climate is an important protective factor for high-risk behaviors (Klein, Cornell, & Konold, 2012; Langdon & Preble, 2008). Based on a Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance Survey, results showed that thirty-two percent of the students reported being in a fight in the past 12 months, eighteen percent reported carrying a weapon in the past month, and five percent within the past month reported not attending school because of safety concerns (Center for Disease Control, 2010; Klein, Cornell, & Konold, 2012). These safety concerns all surround issues of bullying.

Studies further stated that positive school climate is the key asset along with targeted interventions to have a broad impact on student success (Klein, Cornell, & Konold, 2012; Pekins & Borden, 2003). It was also concluded that the more exposure youths had to environmental safety, the more likely they would be to engage in healthy positive behaviors and less likely to engage in risky behaviors (Klein, Cornell, & Konold, 2012; Perkins & Borden, 2003; Scales, Benson, Leffert, & Blyth, 2000). Therefore, a need to establish a safe environment in all schools is an imperative priority that when created it should lead to decreased numbers of bullying occurrences and increased numbers of student success (Hazel (2010). Similar findings and the results verified the same deduction that victims of bullying have a difficult time achieving and have poor attendance as a result of them not feeling comfortable or safe coming to school. Therefore, the finding concluded that bullying along with class or school-wide variables such as feeling safe,

directly correlates with academic success (Barthet al., 2004). Hence, when unmet emotions and safety needs are not considered, then students will not have the opportunity to effectively engage in learning.

### **School Success and Failures**

**Attendance.** Bullying is the most common form of violence experienced by people in a nation. Everyday more than 160,000 students skip school because they have fears of being bullied (Hirsch, Lowen, & Santorelli, 2012). These bullied students who are victimized on a daily basis, do not want to attend school because they are afraid of being bullied, nor do they, have a desire to learn and experience school success (Hazel, 2010). With this in mind, perhaps the most alarming finding regarding victims and their attendance is that victimized students miss school more often than non-victimized peers. Also fearing for their lives, some victims are so intimidated by bullies that they start carrying weapons to school (Bauman, 2008).

According to the high school drop-out rate in the United States, reports indicate that approximately 607,000 public high school students from grades nine through twelve during the years of 2008 and 2009, dropped out of high school. This information translates into a dropout rate of 4.1 percent for females in 2008, which increased to 7.0 percent in 2009 (Chapman, Laird, Hill, & KewalRamani, 2011). Some factors related to a school drop-out rate indicated that students were fearful of being bullied, and therefore did not attend school, nor were they motivated to learn and exhibited signs of having low self-esteem and low self-worth (Cassidy, 2009; Klein, Cornell, & Konold, 2012).

Bauman (2008) suggests that poor attendance negatively affects academic performance. Another study concluded that there was a statistically significant difference in mean frequency of victimization and grades, thus confirming that poor attendance and

lower academic achievement among victims of bullying tended to increase from elementary to middle school (Smokowski & Kopasz, 2005). Subsequently, these victims were more likely to be involved in some type of violence and show more signs of emotional distress than their peers (Eisenburg, Neumark-Sztainer, & Perry, 2003). To further support these findings, a report from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2001) confirmed that the academic performance of victims reflected the negative consequences of their not attending school (Smith, 2004; Bauman, 2008). This study suggests that bullying affects academic success and student attendance. Overall, victimized students also tended to experience negative consequences regarding school attendance as well as academic performance (Smith et al., 2004). To address this problem of poor attendance, schools should inquire about behaviors of bullying being a key factor when investigating reasons why students have high rates of absenteeism (Bauman, 2008).

Regardless of what means of bullying is used, either direct or indirect relational bullying or teasing, it creates fear and concern for the safety of others also causing a slowdown in the academic learning process (Kevorkian, & D'Antona 2008).

Furthermore, research supports this finding and explains that students who have been bullied have a lower sense of self-efficacy, and lower achievement levels than their peers (Williams & Kennedy, 2012, p. 322).

**Extracurricular activities.** Peruero (2008) revealed in his study on bullying and extracurricular activities that students involved with three or more classroom related extracurricular activities or intramural sports were more likely to be less bullied than students who did not participate in any extracurricular activities. If a student participates in classroom-related and intramural sports extracurricular activities, then they are more

vulnerable to bullying victimization because they appear to be weak and more opportunities to bully students who spend more time at school.

On the other hand, this study showed interscholastic sports athletes were perceived by others students and administrators to have relatively higher social status as well as to be physically strong, during practice and game time more security is available to protect them while at school. All in all, the researcher acknowledged the fact that the experiences of interscholastic student athletes and bullying may vary depending on how the culture of that particular school values school sports.

**Discipline.** According to research, students who misbehave were more likely to be victimized. Generally, students who misbehaved found themselves in more dangerous and vulnerable situations than students who did no misbehave. Specifically, this meant that students who misbehaved were twice as likely to be bullied in comparison to well-behaved students (Peguero (2008).

Other studies suggest that there is a significant relationship between bullying and predicted school outcomes. These outcomes included levels of disciplinary infractions, gang activities (Bandyopadhyay et al., 2009), school-wide performance on high-stakes testing (Lacey & Cornell, 2011), and student dropout rates (Cornell, Gregory, Huang, & Fan, 2012; Klein, Cornell, & Konold, 2012), were related to victims of bullying who were less likely to report doing well with schoolwork, following school rules, and completing homework when compared to students who were not involved in bullying behaviors (Bacchus, 2011).

**Grade point average.** Although bullying experiences have a significant impact on a student's capacity to learn, consequently, the impact also has negative effects on an individual's emotional, physical, and psychosocial well-being (Whitted & Dupper, 2005).

Based on the data provided from numerous studies there is a verifiable link and connection to academic achievement, attachments to school, and healthy behavior. This link provides factors which relate to those who have been victimized causing them to develop a lack of school performance (Ayenibiowo, & Akinbode, 2011; Chapell et al., 2006; Leymann & Gustafsson, 1996; Lyznicki et al, 2004; Rivers, 2004; Smith, 1997; Tehrani, 2004).

Some other factors which may be related to school failures from those who are victims of bullying include: feelings of depression, death, dropping out of school, safety, fear, race, ethnicity, academic performance, school success, attendance and even physical characteristics that focus on height, weight, and obesity (Bauman, 2008). Even eating disorders such as anorexia and bulimia nervosa may also contribute to risk factors for victims which are caused by peer aggression and bullying (Ayenibiowo et al., 2011).

When students exhibit negative bullying behaviors, it affects their ability to concentrate and achieve in class (Hazel, 2010). Elliot (1997) verifies this fact by stating that bullied students have low levels of school success and low feelings of self-esteem when they are bullied. He further determined that bullies were jealous of others' achievements, had a difficult time admitting defeat, often failed, and demonstrated short-tempered behaviors in relationships (Fitzgerald, 1999). Schwartz (2005) confirmed that high levels of exposure to physical, verbal, or relational bullying predicted lower grade point averages and achievement test scores.

Hazel (2010) conducted a study which suggested that there were correlations between low self-efficacies and low academic achievement with individuals identified as victims of bullying (Ozer et al., 2011). Consequently, when students fear attending school their ability to focus on academic content decreases (Hazel, 2010). Eisenburg,

Neumark-Sztainer, & Perry (2003) believe that peer harassment influences academic performance, school connectedness, and academic success. Their study concluded that those bully victims who experience chronic peer exclusion have difficulties with academic achievement (Buhs et. al., 2006). Moreover, even bullying can have an impact on bystanders or those who may or may not be directly involved (Bart, Dunlap & Danes, 2004).

To support this view, Bauman (2008) stated that bullying was statistically significant to academic performance. He presumed that young people who felt more connected to school and earned higher grades were less likely to smoke cigarettes, use drugs, or be involved in early sexual encounters. With this in mind, if bullied students are less connected to school, then the likelihood of their being successful far exceeds those who are connected to school.

**Family relationships.** Based on family relationships, bullies are from families where difficulties are between child-parent relationships, marital difficulties, and financial and social issues ((Beaty & Alexeyev, 2008; Kumpulainen, Rasanen, & Henttonen, 1998; Nansel et. al., 2001). When family conflicts arise, children often experience some type of family violence (Williams & Kennedy, 2012). These experiences create “fertile soil” that causes an aggressive child to grow into becoming an aggressive adult once negative parenting behaviors are presented (Church, 2014).

Research further supports the notion that children who had more negative family experiences were more involved in bullying experiences (Mohr, 2006; Williams et al., 2012) thus indicating that bullies often come from families where parents use more physical forms of discipline, or from parents who are rejecting, hostile and overly permissive (Beaty & Alexeyev, 2008; Duncan, 1999).

In other studies, bullies or victims of bullying came from broken homes and were more frequently observed in families with separated parents or in the absence of two biological parents (Williams et al., 2012). In several instances females were known to aggressively cope with bullying experiences during mother-child conflicts, and victimized males reacted to bullying with fear during mother-child conflicts (Williams et al., 2012). Thus concluding those victims of bullying by either parent resulted in them receiving less support and affection from their fathers and more maternal rejection with less affection and support from their mothers (Beran, 2009).

**Peer and family relationships.** When an adolescent is healthy, a demonstration of good relationships between peers and parents is evident. When relationships are not healthy, students tend to participate in negative behaviors (Williams et al., 2012). It is important that the relationships between parents and youth are strong, and that family violence is non-existent, and those meaningful connections to family and school, along with and peer relationships must be significant (Langdon et al., 2008). If these entities are nonexistent, then the long-term harm, which includes peer rejection will be effected (Bierman, 2004; Bejerot, Plenty, Humble, & Humble, 2013). In school, students have not learned the significance of forming long lasting relations with each other and that these relationships can eventually lead to positive outcomes.

In our culture today, there are many reasons why students devalue the need to build relationships. One such reason explains that relationship building is poor become students are so anesthetized to violence through television, movies, video games, and the internet that they have lost their ability to delineate real pain and suffering from real pain experienced among their peers every day. Roberts, 2006) When family and school

relationships are strong, then a bond to avoid harmful practices of bullying will be replaced with behaviors that reinforce trust, care and empathy of others.

**Teacher-child relationships.** The relationship between teacher and child is special and if a teacher fails to support any student when they expressed encounters of bullying, then the ties and relational bonds may be severed. Hazier, Hoover, and Oliver (1992) asked participants who saw themselves as victims to rate the responses of school officials to bullying. In this study, the majority of the victims indicated that officials poorly responded to them. They stated that their teachers never or seldom intervened to stop bullying.

On the other hand, from another study, the majority of the students believed that their teachers either sometimes or almost always intervened in cases of bullying. Guerra, Williamson, & Sadek (2012) felt that the adults were not interested or were inconsistent about their willingness to intervene in bullying situations. One reason that justifies why teachers do not intervene is merely because they may be unaware of bullying situations (Beaty et al., 2008).

The results from many studies explain that students are apprehensive in reporting incidences of bullying to their teachers or other adults. This explains why reports of bullying in high schools tend to decrease as students move from elementary school. Regardless of the reasons, reports show a decrease in bullying incidences in high schools, yet bullying in all schools is still a major problem (Beaty et. al., 2008). Students may not feel safe to learn in a comfortable, sociable, and friendly environment (Hong, 2012). To ensure that students feel safe, bully prevention laws or antibullying policies were created in most states.

## **Anti-Bullying Policies & Laws**

Since 1999, legislative activity on bullying in schools has been remarkably active. With the implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, funding was tied to school law as a way to address bullying acts and keep students safe. Although the word “bully” did not appear in the current Act, it did support bully prevention by requiring that states pass laws that mandated districts to write safety plans and implement consequences for related behaviors (Edmondson & Zeman, 2011).

Over the last decade, currently, all but one state passed a law that directs school districts or individual schools to develop policies to address bullying (Cornell & Limber, 2015) Although state laws varied with regard to the types of provisions that must be included in school policies (Alley & Limber, 2009; U.S. Department of Education, 2011). There is a distinct gap between state legislature’s definitions of bullying and the criteria agreed upon by scholars (Dewey, & Limber, 2015; Allen, & Limber, 2009; Gladden et al., 2014) In order to make any comprehensive changes, states had the flexibility to change their own public school laws. As an end result, some public school laws appeared to be crude and ineffective, while others seem to incorporate best practice bullying policies (Edmondson & Zeman, 2011).

Unfortunately, based on current analysis, most school policies only include a definition of bullying and statements about improving school climate; however many school policies did not mention other important aspects such as: low coverage of cyberbullying, homophonic bullying, bullying based on disabilities, or faith; teacher-pupil bullying; responsibilities beyond those of teaching staff; following up of incidents; and specific preventative measures such as, playground work, peer support, inclusiveness

issues and bullying to and from school (Smith, Kupferber, Mora-Merchan, Samara, Bosley & Osborn, 2012).

Based on civil rights laws to prevent bullying, a key problem is that there are bullied students who do not fall into one of the protected groups (Cornell and Limber, 2015; Alley & Limber, 2009; Cascardi, Brown, Iannarone, & Cardona, 2014; General Accounting Office, 2012).

### **Special Education Policies**

Research on bullying and victimization by and toward students with disabilities is in its relative infancy in the United States. Fewer studies have examined bullying experiences in student populations inclusive of students in special education in the United States (Rose, Swerarer, and Espelage, 2012).

Overall, students with specific learning disabilities may be subjected to increased involvement in bullying based on perceived differences in academic, functional, and/or social skills (Rose, Swerarer, & Espelage, 2012;McLaughlin et al., 2010; Rose, Monda-Amaya, & Espelage, 2011;Swearer et. al., 2012).

In 2010, the United States Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights issued a Dear Colleague Letter addressing the potential intersections of bullying and federal antidiscrimination laws. In summary, these laws prohibit discrimination based on race, color, national origin, sex, or disability. The office of Civil Rights explained that schools must recognize that the nature of the misconduct (bullying) should determine response actions when civil rights laws are violated. Therefore, schools should evaluate school climate, which may require teacher or community training or additional policies to ensure the prevention and elimination of harassment. (Rose, Swerarer, and Espelage, 2012)

According to Roberts, (2006) regardless to the implementation and evaluation of school and district antibullying policies, “all the statues and policies in the world, will not do anyone any good unless they are realistic, enforceable, and actually enforced”.

When a student who is being bullied is also identified as a victim of federal civil rights violation, the school has more than an obligation to stop this violation. Despite more than a decade of judicial and legislative activity, as well as a massive increase in scientific research and the development of numerous prevention programs (Bradshaw, 2015; Hymel & Swearer, 2015), law and policy about bullying remain fragmented and inconsistent (Cornell & Limber, 2015).

It was further concluded that the current legal and policy approaches, which are strongly rooted in laws regarding harassment and discrimination, do not provide adequate protection for all bullied students. Therefore, a more inclusive universal approach is needed that protects all students who are bullied (Cornell & Limber, 2015).

### **General Bullying Intervention Programs**

By changing the school culture, aggressive bullying behaviors can be curbed; however, it requires the help of parents and schools to find out details (Klass, 2009). Peter & Bain (2011) discussed that the most effective interventions to reduce bullying would be provided in primary grades or earlier because propensities for peer-directed aggression and the forming of aggressive peer groups are evidenced in these settings (Astor, Pitner, & Duncan, 1996; Peter & Bain, 2011). Based on Peter and Bain’s (2011) research, the students who are in the greatest need for targeted interventions in order for the focus of reducing bullying and victimization would be with individual gifted and talented students.

On the other hand, Green, Dunn, Johnson, and Molnar, (2011) suggested that prevention and intervention programs may be beneficial in attending to the emotional well-being of students and supportive in understanding the role of the school environment which have shaped students' bullying experiences. However, it was determined that most bullying intervention programs limit pupils' expressions of what might really be troubling them at school and restricts their thinking about bullying to a narrow set of phenomena (Duncan & Owens, 2011). Teens expressed that lectures and seminars were not effective because students just sit there and listen and most stories they heard did not apply to them (Guerra et. al, 2012).

Prior to implementing any bully prevention program school counselors should assess the level of engagement and total commitment from teachers should be encouraged as a means to ensure program effectiveness. Prevention programs are more effective if counselors, teaches, and administrators take part in the development of the program (Orpinas, Hornes, & Staniszewski, 2003). The next steps in creating an anti-bullying program would be to set aside class time for discussions with students about problems of bullying (Beatsy et al., 2008). To reduce bullying in schools, a comprehensive, school-wide effort involving the entire school community is needed (Hilarski, Dulmus, Theriot, & Sowers, 2004).

Unfortunately, studies showed that many school-wide anti-bullying programs have yielded limited success and some have failed altogether (Newman-Carlson, & Home, 2004; Ramirez, 2013). Although some bullying prevention intervention programs appear to decrease the prevalence of bullying due to heightened awareness, in reality, no decreases occurred in actual bullying behaviors (Cowie, & Olafsson, 2000). Even in an England research study of peer-led interventions in schools, high levels of aggression

produced no significant decreases in bullying or the likelihood students would intervene (Cowie et al., 2000).

For most intervention programs, modest preventative benefits occur at the elementary level (Guerra et al., 2012). However, the SMART curriculum and the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program are two programs that have been identified as effective interventions that can promote safer schools in grades three through twelve (Werle, 2006). In one study both students and teachers suggested the solutions to address the problems of school bullying would be to create an intervention design that would manage inappropriate behaviors. By implementing effective bullying prevention programs in all elementary, middle school and high schools, then prevalence of bullying may decrease.

Unfortunately, existing bullying policies only provide minimal mandates of specific prevention programs, activities, or practices (Guerra, Williamson, & Sadek, 2012). Understanding perspectives from youth on bullying and victimization in adolescence is critical yet many prevention programs are not utilized. Hence, a need to implement effective bullying prevention programs in middle and high schools has never been greater (Guerra et al., 2012)

### **Coping Strategies**

Resilient individuals are those who manifest positive outcomes over time despite facing significant challenges of adversities (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000). Although limited research around resilience and bullying has been explored (Rothson, Head, Klineberg, & Stansfeld, 2001), it is perplexing how some bullied students manage to bounce back and function well over time despite their negative experiences. Research further suggests that bullying has an impact on the academic successes (Smith, Talamelli, Cowie, Naylor, & Chauhan, 2004).

By providing strategies that can promote positive outcomes in young people who have experienced negative events such as bullying, it could steer the development of successful interventions for victims to experience school success. Collectively, there are numerous coping strategies used by children to regulate the stressors of bullying (Ramirez, 2013).

According to Ramirez (2013), there are two distinct categories of coping strategies victims can use to protect themselves from experiencing harm. They are the problem solving and aggressive coping strategies.

**The problem solving strategies.** The Problem-Solving Strategy is one coping strategy that teaches a student to deescalate and resolve conflicts, such as using acquiescence, and avoidance. Another strategy is to use the thought Cessation and Redirection Strategy. This strategy helps students suppress and redirect negative thinking by thinking about something positive. By tuning out what a bully is saying, the victim is not listening to any negative comments made. The success for this type of strategy varies and depends directly on the bully. The Problem Solving Premonition strategy can be used to prevent attacks. This type of strategy allows victims to protect themselves by speaking out whenever they have an uncomfortable feeling prior to being attacked. Finally, The Forgiveness Strategy is the final problem solving strategy that has shown promise in alleviating the effects of bullying. When the victim expresses forgiveness, it placates vengeful feelings. This strategy helps a victim manage feelings of shame, humiliation, embarrassment, vengeance and low self-esteem.

**The aggressive coping strategies.** The Aggressive Coping Strategy helps a victim overcome the effects of bullying. Some examples include: attempting to befriend

bullies for the purpose of decreasing the attacks and to seek support from family members, friends, teachers or caregivers (Mahady-Wilson et al., 2000).

The Instrumental Strategy is an aggressive coping strategy used to deal with the effects of bullying. This strategy seeks support from parents, teachers and friends to help decrease the intensity of the attacks while providing an opportunity for participants to share their experiences with individuals they trust (Ramirez, 2013). When the Instrumental Coping Strategies were used, such as: leaving the room, or raising a hand to get the teacher's attention, participants felt supported and protected by the people they trusted.

Borg (1998) believed that there are differences in using coping strategies at different academic levels. Elementary children are inclined to share their experiences whereas secondary children depend on self-reliance; and girls are more inclined to share their experiences with friends (Grifith & Debow, 1993; Hunter & Boyle, 2004; Laursen, 1993). Other strategies for girls to use to protect themselves from bullying occurrences include: The No-Blame Intervention which includes active listening with respect (Owens, 2001); The Method of Shared Concern, where perpetrators find common ground expressing their concerns for victims (Owens, 2001); The Peer Mentors and Empathy Training allows students to become mediators learning how to develop concern for others' feelings; The Collaborative Mentorship helped girls see the relationships between various problem conceptualizations rather than point out mistakes (Larsen, 2005), and The Systemic Thinking Strategy affords girls opportunities to examine interpersonal relationships, interactions and repeated behavior patterns (Owens, 2001).

Gamliel et al., (2003) included three coping techniques victims used in his study to prevent bullying situations.

1. Avoidance or Ignoring-- pretend that the bully does not exist
2. Relational and Calm Confrontation--where a bully is approached in a non-aggressive demeanor and a discussion on why they should stop bullying occurs and how they should leave all victims alone
3. Verbal Retaliation and Cathartic Activities--victims verbally responds back to a bully. This type of coping strategy may lead to more incidences of retaliation.

Finally, Cantazaro (2011) discussed developmental strategies that were beneficial for girls because girls talk about their emotional experiences to a close friend or through peer interactions. This invaluable coping strategy gives girls permission to express the uncomfortable feelings that often precede conflict while they implement an action plan to take a closer look at themselves and their relationships for the purpose of developing a strong sense of self-worth and healing (Simmons, 2009). This plan further gives students opportunities to check in with adults, parents and teachers on a regular basis. All in all, effective coping strategies have no purpose unless this intervention plan is collectively and constructively implemented.

Whitten & Dupper (2005) stated that comprehensive, multilevel strategies must target bullies, victims, bystanders, families and communities to be most effective (Bowllan, 2001). Therefore, research has provided numerous coping strategies that may address the bullying problem and promote academic success in a safe and conducive environment; however, no decreases in bullying can be achieved unless teachers, students, parents and community stakeholders take ownership in implementing any successful intervention plan (Austin, Reynolds, & Barnes, 2012).

If victims were equipped with strategies that would enable them to learn tactics that can help them fight against attacks and abuse, then the number of bullying incidences may decrease (Bachus, 2011). Despite any form of bullying, whether it is a physical or relational, all negative acts of harassment are unacceptable and detrimental. In order to create a healthy environment for students to achieve in the future, the acts of bullying must cease to exist (Sullivan, 2011).

### **Summary**

The literature review was divided into three sections. The first section was an overview of the history, types, and factors of bullying. This section consists of environmental factors that perpetuated the prevalence of bullying. Section two discussed the characteristics of a victim, perpetrator, and bystanders. Finally, the last section focuses information about interventions and coping strategies that have been used that affect school success.

As bullying has become a global problem in the world, everyone needs to be challenged to re-examine its very existence. The goal of this study is to encourage all stakeholders to become more knowledgeable and inspired to no longer be apathetic bystanders, but become active participants who challenge legislative policies, and redirect the attitudes of parents, concerned citizens, and students, especially female students, to become a united force in implementing useful coping strategies that will enable all students to effectively deal with issues of bullying. In the following chapters, it is the intent of the researcher to discuss the methodology for this research, identify the theoretical framework, incorporate the process of collecting and analyzing data, determine common themes, and utilize resources that support data which focuses on validity, reliable and trustworthiness of the data.

### **CHAPTER III**

### **METHODOLOGY**

Bullying is viewed as a worldwide problem (Thomas, Bolen, Heister & Hyde, 2010). In the United States over thirty-five percent of school-aged students have directly been involved in bullying incidents. The literature review provided evidence that a vast amount of research has been conducted to address the issues of bullying and victimizations; however, most current research primarily focuses on the characteristics, factors, and causes of bullying yet research is limited in providing strategies that can prevent this phenomenon from continuously occurring in schools.

To address this problem, the purpose of this mixed method study was to explore the coping strategies high school female seniors used as victims of bullying and not allow bullying to impede their success. The researcher for this study presented the theoretical design, the research questions, a rich description of the school environment, and the sample and instruments used to collect the data. In addition to these components, a plan to analyze the data is included to justify this research proposal.

#### **Theoretical Framework**

Bullying is a life and death global issue that has been ignored in the past (Coloroso, 2003). Even in America, many children have been affected by one form of

bullying, or another either as a victim, a perpetrator, or a bystander (Kevorkian et al., 2008). With the onset of new technology, forms of indirect relational bullying called cyberbullying has increased in the levels of bullying incidences for females (Beale & Hall, 2007; Kevorkian & D'Antona, 2008).

Overall, the convergent parallel framework design was the foundation of this study, identifying bullying as an unacceptable practice that has been used by many researchers. To discuss the important and complex issues of bullying, this study explored the cultural phenomena of 12<sup>th</sup> grade high school female victims of bullying in their natural environment examined the behaviors victims obtain from being bullied and provided victims opportunities to express their view and experiences regarding bullying which spanned over a period of time.

### **Quantitative Design**

This mixed method study was both interpretive and descriptive. Merriam (1998) defined interpretive research as, “one that contains rich, thick descriptions” (p. 38). Therefore, this study used the results from the quantitative instruments to analyze the statistical data as a way to obtain a deeper understanding and meaning of bullying situations. This design further disaggregated the data from the Modified Olweus Bully Questionnaire (2009) and the Self-Reported Survey to establish the degree in which the prevalence of bullying existed. By using these instruments, the data showed the area where participants yielded a higher response to questions from the survey and questionnaire. Based on the results, an additional determination involved identifying whether there was a relationship between bullying and victimization and school

attendance, grade point averages, discipline referrals, and extracurricular activities participation.

### **Qualitative Design**

Qualitatively, the concentration was to conduct two focus group sessions, and use the data as a means to contribute to the research base in understanding the prevalence of bullying and the how the use of effective coping strategies impacted victims in regards to school success. Additionally, the process of analyzing the responses from the focus group participants gave insight as to how these responses could support the findings throughout the sessions.

By obtaining the rich data from the two focus group sessions, the seven high school seniors' expressed their difficulties in overcoming bullying encounters and how they successfully achieved in school despite their horrific involvement in these negative incidences.

The researcher, in using this descriptive approach, will illuminate the reader's understanding of bullying experiences and offer a clearer explanation of how this phenomenon will go beyond the basic understanding and explanations of this subject (Creswell, 2007). Consequently, the researcher was responsible for gathering information about the problems students experienced from bullying and analyzing the data to formulate common themes that addressed victimization, and effective coping strategies used by victims to withstand episodes of bullying experiences to convey how participants managed and redirected their feelings as victims to their academic success in spite of their bullying encounters. Current school safety policies, the school setting, and a narration of the school's daily practices and procedures were also discussed. Overall, this

study provided a forum where the focus group participants could openly express their thoughts, feelings and frustrations as they provided detailed accounts of their bullying experiences. They discussed which effective coping strategies they used to survive. The data further emphasized how the victims showed resilience to survive physical, verbal and or threatening attacks while they continued to academically succeed, despite their struggle to resolve their personal problems.

### **Setting**

The setting for this study took place in a selected urban high school because its demographics and student population represent the majority of high schools in this large urban public school district located in Northeast Ohio. This site represented the majority of high schools within this district that have a high percentage of African American students who represented the majority of students in this particular school district.

The high school selected was identified as a failing school, where extra funds were provided, in addition to the general allotment, to grant teachers more time for instructional practices and opportunities to develop more professional development initiatives.

In this school, over ten outside community agencies were identified as partners to provide students with additional tutorial support and individualized academic assistance. The demographical features of this school included one hundred percent of the students being identified as economically disadvantaged living at high poverty level. In 2014, approximately sixty-two percent of the high school seniors graduated and sixty percent of the seniors passed the Ohio Graduation Test. Finally, seventy-nine percent of the seniors attend school on a regular basis. In summary, the researcher included a rich description

regarding the setting that emphasized information about this particular urban high school which depicted a large representation of a specific school district in northeast, Ohio.

### **Population**

The overall population of this large school district was based on the data from 2014-2015 academic school years. There are 23 high schools where one hundred percent of the students are identified as economically disadvantaged students receiving free and or reduced meals daily. Demographically, the district's high school student enrollment was comprised of an ethnical population of Asian or Pacific Islander, African American, Hispanic, White, Multiracial, Alaskan Native and American Indians. Within this district, over forty-eight percent of the students were identified as females.

The overall district's high school's attendance rate in 2011 was at ninety-one percent, and fifty-one percent of the high school seniors graduated during this particular academic school year. Fundamentally, this study occurred in one of the 23 urban high schools where the attendance rate was at eighty-eight percent and decreased to seventy nine percent last year, and the graduation rate of sixty-three percent increased by one percent the last school year.

### **Sample**

By selecting this particular urban high school, the focus was to collect data from at least 40 high school female seniors identified themselves as victims of bullying. They were expected to complete the Self-Reported Survey, the Online Modified Bullying Questionnaire and eight seniors from the 40 students were to participate in two focus group sessions conducted over two-week interval of time.

The researcher randomly selected the 40 students who filled out a Self-Reported Survey answering questions about their attendance, grade point average, participation in extracurricular activities and their accounts of the discipline referrals received within the past year. Of the 40 students, eight students were randomly selected by the researcher. Overall, the researcher was responsible for conducting all interactions that anonymously reported data about each participant.

### **Instrumentation**

The Self-Reported Survey provided self-reported accounts of participants' attendance, discipline referrals, extracurricular activities and grade point average records. Another instrument used to gather quantitative data was the online Modified Olweus Bully Questionnaire (2009) where 40 students were randomly selected. Moreover, the two qualitative focus group sessions were divided into two main phases. The first focus group session focused on a discussion about the selected senior's personal bullying experiences and the strategies they used to cope as a victim of bullying. The second session discussed each individual's accomplishment, their attendance, participation in extracurricular activities, discipline, school successes and the school's intervention programs and policies. The data collected from these sessions concentrated primarily on the 15 qualitative focus group questions (See Appendix E). The researcher's goal in conducting two focus group sessions was to provide rich descriptions of each student's bullying experiences and encourage these students to share their stories in a group-type forum where they could receive moral, emotional, and physical support from other empathetic victims of bullying.

## **Data Collection Procedures**

In this study, the data collection process consisted of female seniors completing the online Modified Olweus Bully Questionnaire. By using the two focus group format, it allowed an individual time to respond to other participant's comments and perspectives while providing opportunities for them to reflect and expound on the rich descriptions that encompass their bullying experiences as they recall their personal perceptions.

The researcher contacted the CEO, the regional superintendent and the administrator of the targeted school to inform them about the study and requested that a letter to conduct the study was signed. The letter explained the procedures requirements of the study.

Once the study was approved by the IRB committee, and the CEO, regional superintendent, and principal from the high school accepted the terms of the research agreement, the researcher invited all female seniors to an informal meeting. The purpose of the meeting was to explain the conditions of the study, and have interested parties sign a consent letter agreeing to uphold the provisions. Students who identify themselves as victims of bullying were randomly selected by the researcher and a date to conduct the focus group sessions was presented. While in session, the researcher was responsible for obtaining information regarding participation from the assistant principal and guidance counselors after the Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects in Research Application for Project Review Board (IRB) proposal was approved

The principal allowed the students an opportunity to meet in the computer lab on a given date time. Once the consent letter was signed, the students completed the Self-Reported Survey and received an envelope explaining the procedures of the study. A

special passcode was provided giving directions on how to complete the online Modified Olweus Bullying Questionnaire.

Additionally, the eight 12<sup>th</sup> grade female seniors chosen for the focus groups expressed in writing an interest to participate in the research. By completing a question from the survey, the seniors who identified themselves as victims of bullying were selected. The chosen participants were informed and assured that the information gathered would be anonymously and confidentially recorded. The researcher gave a brief description outlining the data collection procedures and the focus group session processes. The same seven female seniors are expected to participate in both of the focus group sessions.

Permission and consent forms were collected and students completed an online Modified Olweus Bullying Questionnaire. The students were instructed not to share their responses with anyone else ensuring confidentiality, validity and reliability of the study. All participants were informed of the Consent and Protection from Harm Clause assuring them that the information discussed would be safe and confidential. Letters of acceptance to participate were distributed in August 2015. The focus group sessions took place in September 2015 and were conducted within a two-week period. Students were asked to respond to several open-ended questions during their focus group sessions.

The participants had an opportunity to review discuss all information that related to them in order to gain trust. By using a focus group format, students had a “voice” to be heard (Creswell, 2003). Responses from participants provided further insight about bullying experiences as they shared their stories including the effective coping strategies they implemented which caused them to succeed as a result of using these strategies.

During the sessions, students were asked to respond to open-ended questions or a variation of the same questions to ensure that a thorough collection of the rich data was not been omitted. Once the sessions were completed, the researcher taped, transcribed and analyzed the results from each session. Data from this study was kept in a locked file cabinet that was not shared with anyone in order to guarantee confidentiality.

### **Trustworthiness**

By using the member checks process where the participants had opportunities to discuss their responses from the focus group questions and the data analysis interpretations created from this study, trustworthiness was established (Creswell, 2014). By using this approach, the researcher obtained feedback by allowing participants opportunities to verify that the data collected was accurate and valid and ensure that the information reported was precise. By

By using the member checks process of paraphrasing, the reader was more persuaded to trust the information the researcher presents (Merriam, 1998) which in turn enabled the researcher an opportunity to present information without using biases, personal ideas or judgments. Unfortunately, biases occur regardless and cannot be avoided. By using this approach trustworthiness was established because the researcher obtained feedback from the participants. The researcher continuously reflected on data collected was an accurate and valid to without hindering the reliability and validity of the students.

### **Reliability**

To create reliability of the study, the researcher made sure the findings were consistent to the data collected for this particular study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The

strengths of the research design included the purposeful random selection of participants so that the populations of various cultural backgrounds were represented.

This process emphasized the abilities and uniqueness of the focus group participants, which added credibility to this sample. According to Madriz (2000) focus groups were especially useful when studying women of color and women of lower socioeconomic status. Therefore, the researcher chose to use the focus group format, which was a combination of two qualitative methods of observations and interviews. These methods provided a variation of different views about one topic (Byrne, 2001).

The purpose of using two focus group interview sessions was to describe how the focus group experience empowered women when stating the shared dialogues, stories, and knowledge generated by the group interviews; the potential to help such women to develop a sense of identity, self-validation, bonding, and commonality of experience was established (Madriz, 2000). Collectively, the students answered open-ended questions, allowing opportunities to freely interact each other and express their personal experiences of success and the strategies used to address bullying circumstances.

To assure reliability, the researcher examined the data collection procedures, and provided rich descriptions of information by gathering that explaining their bullying and their coping strategy situations they used to enable female seniors to succeed. The purpose of this study was to transfer the research collected to younger students for the purpose of reducing the occurrences of bullying.

### **Internal and External Validity**

The strength of this mixed method study was to use both internal and external validity to assure accuracy and validity (Merriam, 1998). The focus group sessions were

examples of internal validity, whereby the female participants answered formal and informal questions allowing them opportunities to express, clarify and share their experiences, and their successes. These female seniors discussed the coping strategies they used as a means to illicit new meaning and self-discovery during the interview session. Galletta (2012) verified that the interviews from participants increased the validity of a study.

Consequently, by applying the information about effective coping strategies used to identify school successes and transferring the strategies to others, it caused this research to be both reliable and invaluable. In order to measure accountability and validity, the researcher synthesized the data until the common themes overlapped and to obtained feedback from participants to make sure the information reported is accurate.

Transferability or external validity occurred when an examination of current research conclusions and previous research conclusion were analyzed (Wood, 2004). Participants from the focus group provided suggestions that could be used to contribute to future advances in enhancing the efficacy of bully prevention and elimination.

Unfortunately, one disadvantage in having a small sample of eight focus group participants was that it might have limited the type of comparisons made from other studies with more diverse backgrounds, cultural disparities, and dissimilar environmental settings.

### **Credibility**

Credibility is the belief that the conclusions of the research are truthful (Wood, 2004; Byrne, 2001). Therefore, based on this study, the researcher used the methods of document collection, and triangulation. Member check of paraphrasing was used during

the focus group sessions to gain integrity and trustworthiness of the participants allowed them the opportunity to review the researcher's information from the conclusion to make sure that the information was accurately reported. Lastly, a combination of a survey, questionnaire and focus group sessions, were the three methods used to make the integrity of the data collection process stronger.

### **Data Analysis**

The focus group questions, the Self-Reported Surveys, and the online Modified Bullying Questionnaire were selected with the intention of addressing the three specific research questions which are:

#### **Research Questions**

1. What is the experiences young female seniors encounter in an urban high school setting as it relates to bullying?
2. What is the relationship between bullying and victimization as it relates to school attendance, participation in extra-curricular activities, discipline, and academic achievement?
3. What coping strategies does one use to navigate through situations of bullying and manage to achieve?

The purpose of this section was to analyze the text, categorize emerging questions and generalize common themes to interpret the meaning of the data collected. In using the triangulation strategy to study the results from the survey and focus group sessions, it allowed the researcher time to identify and acknowledge the impact bullying has on female students throughout their lifetime. The intended overall purpose was to use the

triangulation approach to collect data, identify, reflect, and ultimately explore solutions that could be used to prevent and or reduce the dilemma of bullying in schools.

The first step in the data analysis process was to use the inductive method of analysis. The inductive method involved the researcher collecting, reviewing and analyzing the data from the online Modified Olweus Bullying Questionnaire. Step two consisted of disaggregating the data from the focus group interviews. The researcher organized the information and sorted the data by according to similar responses while color coding themes to accurately organize the data, as well as use the data collected from the interview to analyze, and synthesize patterns of themes that depicted the overall findings of this study (Creswell, 2003).

The data collected and analyzed helped the researcher narrow the focus to develop thought-provoking interpretations that explain why and how bullying exists and how alternative coping strategies were used to resolve conflicts of bullying. By using a system of coding and randomly assigning each student a number, the analysis on how the female senior answered each question provided confidentiality and trustworthiness to the study. By using this coding system, participants acquired a sense of self-confidence to openly share their experiences in a non-threatening environment knowing that others, based on written agreement would not divulge personal information that was shared in each focus group sessions.

By conducting this study, it was the researcher's overall goal to encourage these victims to continue to resist the dangers of bullying by using these identified coping strategies to survive the challenges of being bullied and celebrated their triumphs to

academically succeed as they preserved to live peacefully in a non-threatening school environment.

### **Summary**

This chapter focused on the methodology of this qualitative case research study, the theoretical framework, the population, a description of the participants and the instrument. The data collection procedures, analysis of the data, the reliability, validity, and trustworthiness of the design will be further discussed in the next chapter.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **RESULTS**

Chapter four's personification was designed to analyze and report the findings of the data collected relative to bullying experiences and coping strategies of 32 female urban high school seniors. A mixed-methods approach combining quantitative and qualitative data was selected to both share statistical findings and provided experiential descriptions of the bullying syndrome.

The purpose of this chapter was to examine how coping strategies addressed issues of bullying, and how these strategies helped victims manage life's daily circumstances. The intent was to provide the reader with a detailed disaggregation of the data which yielded specific findings from the Self-Reported Survey, the online Modified Olweus Bullying Questionnaire and two focus group discussions. The data presented created a method for students to further express their innermost sentiments regarding personal bullying experiences and the coping strategies used that allowed them to survive.

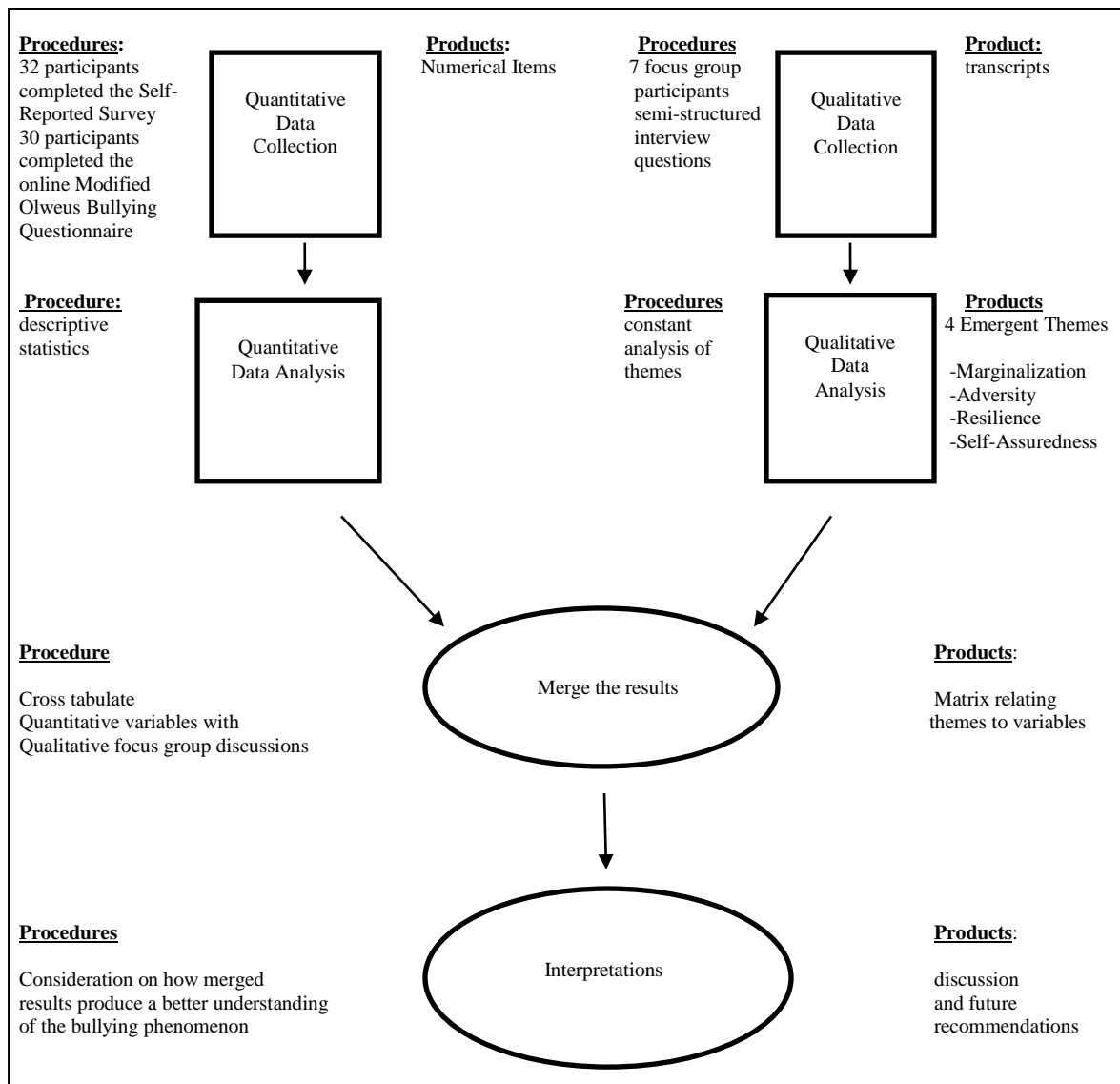
Overall, the quantitative and qualitative research findings were intertwined with the three research questions as a method to enhance a rich and meaningful examination of the results from the participants' responses.

## **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework used in this mixed method study was the Convergent Parallel Design. Both the quantitative and qualitative data relating to bullying experiences, attendance and participation in extra- curricular activities, discipline referrals and school success were all simultaneously collected and analyzed within a three-month period.

The researcher followed the four-step process to enhance the procedures which identified this theoretical framework. First, the researcher collected both quantitative and qualitative data. Subsequently, the quantitative and qualitative data was analyzed separately and independently from each other using analytical procedures to understand the findings. Strategies were then used to merge the two data sets.

Finally, the researcher summarized and interpreted how the two results were interrelated to each other to produce a more comprehensive understanding of how effective coping strategies impacted the victim's bullying experiences. The researcher evaluated the findings to determine what to do if the quantitative and qualitative results did or did not agree with current research. These interpretations were further discussed in Chapter V (See figure 1).



**Figure 1.** Theoretical Framework: Convergent Parallel Design

## Research Questions

1. What is the experiences young female seniors encounter in an urban public high school setting as it relates to bullying?
2. What is the relationship between bullying, and victimization as it relates to school attendance, participation in extra-curricular activities, discipline, and academic achievement?

3. What coping strategies does one use to navigate through situations of bullying and manage to achieve?

### **Quantitative Research Process**

Quantitative data was collected via the administration of a Self-Reported Survey and an online Modified Olweus Bullying Questionnaire. This specific research focused on: the disaggregation, analysis, and interpretation of experiential bullying data collected as it related to the four independent variables of attendance, extracurricular activities, discipline, and school success.

The Self-Reported Survey was composed of five questions to be completed by the study's 32 participants. Of the five questions, one was designed to identify participants as a victim of bullying. All other questions were designed around the aforementioned independent study variables to determine whether or not there was a statistically significant relationship between the variables identified and incidences of bullying.

Descriptive statistics reported from the Self-Reported Survey and the standardized, multiple-choice Online Modified Olweus Bullying Questionnaire measured various aspects of bullying problems in a school setting. The data collected was sent to the Hazelton Publishing Company along with a reported explanation of the results established from the participants' responses.

Of the study's 32 participants, 30 completed the 42 item questionnaire typically administered to students in grades 3-12. Two participants were excluded from the study, due to their invalid and contradictory responses on the questionnaire. Results from both survey instruments were anonymously reported. The Self-Reported Survey and the online Modified Olweus Bullying Questionnaire were anonymously reported.

## **Qualitative Research Process**

The qualitative research analysis and findings were based on results from the two focus group discussions. Seven randomly selected students, from the original pool of 32, participated in two one-hour focus group discussions. For each focus group discussion, the interactions were transcribed and coded into the NVivo software program. Focus group participants had an opportunity to candidly share their thoughts and feelings; data collected included the recordings of the two focus group sessions. In their discourse reoccurring patterns evolved. The researcher then analyzed the data into emergent themes such as: marginalization, adversity, resilience, and self-assuredness.

**Data collection process.** On October 2015, a meeting was held with the principal to discuss the procedures for collecting the quantitative and qualitative data. The computer lab and other facilities were made available for participants to complete the Self-Reported Survey, the online Modified Olweus Bullying Questionnaire, and the two focus group sessions. The researcher met with the assistant principal and head counselor to discuss pertinent information regarding the students' schedules, and classroom assignments.

Eligible students attended a PowerPoint presentation explaining the purpose, expectations, requirements, confidentiality, anonymity and procedures of the study. Participation requirements included: being 18 years or older, a female, enrolled in an urban high school setting and willing to sign a Consent Letter. Having been informed of methods used in the selection process, students then received an envelope containing a copy of the Consent and Participation Letter, the Self-Reported Survey document, and directions for completing the Online Modified Bullying Questionnaire. All students

completed a 5 question self-reported survey and answered 40 questions from the Modified Olweus Bullying Questionnaire (See Appendix B).

Eight students were randomly selected from this pool of 32 for the focus group sessions. However, due to illness, one student was excused from participation in the focus discussions. To ensure a comfortable setting, free of anxiety and apprehension, participant's senior guidance counselor was available for support. Again, confidentiality and anonymous reporting of the taped discussions was reviewed. Finally, participants were reminded of their options to be excused from the discussion without penalties or recourse.

### **Quantitative Analysis, Findings and Interpretations**

**Research question 1.** *What are the experiences young female seniors encounter in an urban public high school setting as it relates to bullying?*

Blake & Louw (2010) reported that relational bullying with girls is at a higher rate than boys because relational bullying is more elusive and harder to address than direct, physical bullying. Verifiably, verbal bullying was recognized as second highest for ways a victim is bullied, according to the results from the Online Modified Olweus Bullying Questionnaire. The questionnaire further revealed other ways a victim is bullied. These variations ranged from verbal, to physical, to cyberbullying. While percentages and types of bullying varied, the level of occurrence (two to three times a month), remained a constant.

The research findings personification concluded the majority of the students reported spreading rumors was the most frequently used method of bullying among females as shown in Table 1. It was concluded from the research findings that the

majority of students reported spreading rumors as the most frequently used method of bullying among females as shown in Table 1.

Table 1

*Ways of Being Bullied-Results from the Online Modified Olweus Bullying Questionnaire*

	% of 12 <sup>th</sup> Grade Females	# of Participants
Verbal	20%	6
Exclusion	7%	2
Physical	3%	1
Rumors	21%	6
Damage	7%	2
Threat	10%	3
Racial	7%	2
Sexual	7%	2
Cyber	3%	1
Another way	7%	2

It was determined from the research personification that supports the preponderance of verbal bullying as being one of the most frequently observed, acted, and experienced bullying behaviors (Ng & Tsang, 2008); however, one of the least reported and newly identified forms of bullying, cyberbullying is on the rise (Beale, & Hall, 2007).

In all schools, it was important to know where bullying most often occurs. Analytically, based on the participants' responses, bullying most frequently took place in

a variety of settings. According to results from the Online Modified Olweus Bullying Questionnaire, a qualitative analysis emphasized that bullying typically occurred in classrooms where teachers were not present. Nationally, the highest percentage of bullying took place in the classrooms where teachers were present as shown in table 2.

Table 2

*Places Bullying Occurs Compared to the National Average.*

	12th Grade Females	National Average
On playground (during recess or breaks)	17%	10%
In hallways/ stairwells	33%	35%
In class (teacher in the room)	67%	38%
In class (teacher not in room)	83%	30%
In the bathroom	17%	9%
In gym class or locker room /shower	0%	10%
In the lunchroom	33%	29%
On the way to and from school	17%	9%
At the school bus stop	17%	3%
On the school bus	33%	10%
Somewhere else at school	17%	10%

Rigby (2007) suggested that bullying primarily occurred on the playground, classrooms, corridors, outside the school building at lunch, or on the way to and from school. The research findings from this study supported data that showed “high incidences of bullying take place in the classroom” (Rigby, 2007). Even when teachers

were present in the classrooms, according to the Olweus Questionnaire, more than half of the participants stated that teachers did little or nothing to reduce bullying in the classrooms.

**Research question 2.** *What is the relationship between bullying, and victimization as it relates to school attendance, participation in extracurricular activities, discipline, and academic achievement?*

**Victimization.** According to results from the Self-Reported Survey, the majority - or more than fifty percent - of 12<sup>th</sup> grade seniors were identified as victims of bullying. The Survey data verified and was aligned to the reports from other studies indicating that almost 50 percent of high school students reported personal accounts of being a victim of bullying (Gaul, 2010).

When young people are mistreated, they may not have a desire to attend school; thereby missing out on the benefits of school connectedness as well as educational advancement (Eisenburg, Neumark-Sztainer, & Perry, 2003). Concurrently, when incidences of bullying are not reported by omission or unawareness, many targeted victims miss school because they feel unprotected (Trump, 2011).

**Attendance.** Based on Self-Reported Survey responses, for the months of August through November 2015, the following results were gathered: 53 percent missed one to six days of school; 18 percent missed seven to 12 days of school, three percent of the students missed 13 to eight days of school, four percent missed 19 to 24 days of school, and one percent missed 25 to 30 days of school. As noted, 17 out of the 30 participants stated that they were victims of bullying, and the majority of those reported missing one to six day of school.

Similarly, the majority of students from the online Modified Olweus Bullying Questionnaire reported they liked attending school, while 10 percent of the participants reported they disliked school. Research stated that, those who disliked school suffer more from mistreatment of others and victimization from bullying had negative consequences regarding school attendance and academic performance (Smith et al., 2004).

***Fear of coming to school.*** Oftentimes, students do not attend school because they are afraid of being bullied. Based on the online Modified Olweus Bullying Questionnaire, one fourth of the participants reported they were afraid of being bullied. Students and others may often know about a potential violent act before the incident occurs, yet the information may not be communicated to those who can prevent the violence (Trump, 2011).

***Participation in extracurricular activities.*** The data obtained from the Self-Reported Survey revealed the majority, more than half, of the students participated in at least one extracurricular activity; eight students reported participating in no activities; eight students reported participating in two activities; and one student reported participating in four extracurricular activities.

***Discipline referrals.*** According to the Self-Reported Survey based on the Likert Scale student discipline referrals accumulated at school within the past four months [from September to November 2015] were seventeen, or the majority, of students received no referrals. Fourteen students received one to four referrals, and one student received five to eight referrals. This data indicated that a high percentage of students reported having zero referrals. Regarding bully-victim responses from the original, ten participants

reported zero referrals, six reported having one to four referrals, and one reported having five to eight referrals.

Overall, the data collected suggested that the majority of participants surveyed did not have discipline problems and a small percentage reported having received one to four discipline referrals.

***GPA- school success(s) and accomplishments.*** Based on the Self- Reported Survey the majority from the thirty-two students surveyed, or more than half of the seniors received an average 3.0 GPA score or better, as it related to academic achievement. The GPA scores ranged from 1.0 to 4.0. Two students had a 1.0 GPA, one student's GPA was 1.5, seven students had a 2.0 GPA, one student had a 2.5 GPA, 15 students had a 3.0 GPA, five students had a 3.5 GPA and one student had a 4.0 GPA. The ordinal data was obtained from the Self- Reported Survey.

### **Qualitative Analysis, Findings and Interpretations**

The qualitative findings from the focus group discussions provided victims an opportunity to articulate their bullying experiences. Two major subheadings distinguished themselves from the semi-structured focus group questions -bullying experiences at home and at school, and negative and positive coping strategies used to protect themselves from bullying attacks.

**Research question 1.** *What are the experiences young female seniors encounters in an urban public high school setting as it relates to bullying?*

***Bullying experiences at home.*** Research corroborated that children aren't just bullied at school, but also at home by siblings and adults residing in the home. Studies showed that children become mentally harmed when they have a sibling that bullies

them. The three basic reasons why bullying happens at home are due to feelings of jealousy, fear and distrust (Nobullying.com).

Several participants discussed their feelings about bullying in their home environment. The common belief was that family members bully others because they may have been bullied during their childhood and are repeating the cycle of bullying. Terry shared,

I got bullied by my sisters and brothers. They (my siblings) used to say, “oh, you’re only going to be nothing, you’re just going to be just like your daddy doing drugs, you’re not going to never amount to be nothing. My sisters don’t do nothing for me or talk to me no more. My own sisters called me fat and ugly.

They wouldn’t even buy me anything or no school supplies or nothing. [crying]

Laura reflected on her bullying experiences and stated,

I’ve been bullied at home... I live with my dad... my mom moved back to Columbus when I was twelve. So I’ve been with my dad for a while. ...and I just remember growing up like... feeling real depressed... like it’s even hard for me to talk about it right now because... I just start thinking about everything... it’s been like... I ran away twice, and like I guess I get bullied a lot by my dad and like he... if he gets mad or whatever, plus like I said, he would hit us and stuff and... not just me, it’s like my siblings... and he’s like real controlling and stuff and I remember like when I was... my uncle had passed and it was my mother’s brother... he wouldn’t even let us go to the funeral. I remember when I ran away the first time, he said that he didn’t want to discipline me because he would kill me. And when I ran away the second time, he would beat me with a belt and...

even... just yesterday, he got mad about something... he threw some chips at me...(Laura)

Even at home, spreading rumors may cause others to negatively react as reported in cases of cyberbullying.

***Cyberbullying.*** Dana shared her rumor experiences. She expressed,

...whatever, so she had took a picture and sent a false lie to my ex or whatever, well, he's my ex now. And I guess he wouldn't listen to what I had to say,

She further communicated that social media affected her relationship with her boyfriend. She concluded that her boyfriend believed the false rumors about her on social media. As a result, her relationship with her boyfriend ended. In spite of her situation, she articulated that cyberbullying was the main source of bullying experiences.

Dana, further stated,

It was like I was being judged because I was small and I wasn't pretty at the moment. I was being talked about, picked on... basically talked about at school, outside of school, on social media and everything else. They would say like, "Oh, you ugly B... you skinny... you smell... your hair isn't fixed right... you're not dressed like the rest... everybody else... Social media is the main... like the main spot for bullying actually?"

Although social media was the culprit of most bullying problems as expressed by the entire focus group, bullying experiences are in no way limited to the home environment. Conversely, according to Elias and Zins (2003) bullying and harassment can also be identified as pervasive problems in schools.

***Bullying experiences at school.*** When teachers are present in the classroom, the majority of the focus group participants expressed their concerns about teacher effectiveness in preventing bullying incidences from occurring.

Many of the participants, who were victims of school bullying, openly and straightforwardly discussed their perceptions of teachers and the teachers' responses to students whenever bullying situations arose. The participants mostly viewed teachers as "bystanders". Participants felt that teachers needed to take more time to be more sensitive to the needs of students, especially when a circumstance of bullying escalates. Shantae and Morgan expressed their feelings concerning teachers' behaviors and lack of involvement during bullying events. They reported,

Teachers didn't do anything, they just stand there and watched (during episodes where victims are being bullied) (Shantae).

Like... teachers, when teachers see fights, they don't do nothing. They just let them fight. They will walk slowly to the security and tell Security and they just walk slowly back to their room and don't try to break it up as quickly (Morgan).

Participants further expressed that if teachers cared, they would listen and take action against the perpetrators. Dana mirrored the views of other participants when she shared her opinions of teachers' responses whenever bullying incidents were reported. She stated,

Adults do not understand what we students or kids are going through with bullying. Because you go tell them one thing, and they'll be like, oh, okay we'll handle it. But the next day, or a couple of hours later, it's still happening and you

go tell them, and be like, I thought you was going to handle the situation, I thought you understand what I was going through, and they're still bullying on me. And they'll be like, oh we'll get to... I just got a lot to do... but you're risking my life and not trying to help me out. You just end up killing yourself, and it's just because the adults wouldn't do nothing and they don't understand what you're going through... the bullying situation.

Sullivan (2011) explained why teachers do not assist. He stated, many teachers are “ill-equipped” to deal with relationship problems and specific antisocial behaviors like bullying, simply because they have not been trained to do so and because teaching is so demanding. Therefore, adults may choose not to respond to bullying incidences due to demanding teaching responsibilities, improprieties, liabilities and risk of injury.

In summary, the participants expressed their personal thoughts and feelings about bullying experiences at home and at school. The first part of the focus group discussions explored personal thoughts and feelings about bullying experiences at home and at school. The second part of the focus group discussions concentrated on coping strategies- negative and positive at home and at school.

**Research question 2.** *What is the relationship between bullying, and victimization as it relates to school attendance, participation in extra-curricular activities, discipline, and academic achievement?*

When participants were asked about attendance, extracurricular activities discipline referrals and school successes, their response indicated that their involvement was minimum.

**Attendance.** Research states that victimization by bullying has negative consequences regarding school attendance and academic performance (Smith et al., 2004). At first, Shantae felt she had to fight to defend herself. As a result, she was suspended for more than ten days and missed a considerable amount of school last year. To date, Shantae's attendance improved because she ignored demoralizing bullying tactic and focused her attention on life-long dreams.

I never missed school anymore because I figured I just have to deal with them (bullies) while I'm in school. Once I get home, I'm kinda in my comfort place. I don't have to see they face. I don't have to hear none of the negativity they have to say about me.

Other focus group participants stated they did not want to attend school because of bullying, but chose to attend because they wanted to complete their school requirements. Hazel (2010) added, bullying which occurs largely outside the classroom and in peer groups, can affect a student's ability to attend school and learn because they feel unsafe. In the case of the participants the majority wanted to graduate so they attend school on a daily basis.

Research further stated that victimization by bullying has negative consequences regarding school attendance and academic performance (Smith et al., 2004). It was predicted that victims showed lower attendance rates than non-involved children, and that they liked school less, or at least, aspects of school related to peer groups, and to break time (recess) where much bullying is known to occur (Whitney & Smith, 1993) For the majority of focus group participants, they all attended school on a regular basis.

Additionally, having good attendance is a required expectation for students to participate in extracurricular activities.

***Extracurricular activities and programs.*** Some participants were actively participating in at least one after school program while others felt that bullying was the cause of their non-participation.

Shantae, a focus group participant, expressed only having verbal experiences of being bullied while participating in an extracurricular activity. In her case, the bully was eliminated from the team while she, the victim remained. She shared,

It was like the person...she was still bullying me at the time, she was telling me that. I'm not gonna make the team. So, I didn't quit. I stayed on the team to show her and to prove to her that she's wrong. And it turns out that she (the bully) didn't make the team.

This indicated that some students refused to participate in extracurricular activities because they were avoiding bullying experiences and some students decided to participate in at least one extracurricular activity as a way to connect, formulate and build stronger relationships of trust.

***Bullying intervention programs.*** In regards to bully intervention programs, the majority of the participants talked about the lack of bullying programs aimed at helping victims cope. Specifically, participants discussed two district-wide programs which purport to decrease violence in school. They expressed how ineffective the Stop the Violence Program and the Rave Mediation Program were because bullying still exists.

The Stop the Violence Program was designed to help students become more aware of their surroundings as they travel to and from school. Counselors are expected to

check in with students to make sure they were not experiencing bullying problems outside of school, and become available to speak with students if problems arise. Shantae shared,

I didn't even know we had a Stop the Violence thing. I've seen posters but I didn't know that was a... it's not doing nothing for this school. It's not doing nothing for the students because... us looking at a piece of paper on the wall, they've got a picture of a gun and saying, "stop the violence" is not stopping the violence or anything. That's all that they have posted around the school is pictures... that's not doing nothing for us. It's like, they need to get more involved and that don't have nothing to do with bullying either. It's... we have nothing... no programs to deal with bullying ... and... I don't know... we don't have anything. The Stop the Violence program is for outside... outside of school, not in school.

The Rave Mediation Program was designed to empower students. Specially trained facilitators lead meetings where both the victim and the perpetrator discussed the incidents with the goal of resolving the problems between them. Terry felt in some instances, having all parties in the same room to discuss problems could actually lead to more violence.

The RAVE mediation, yeah it is somewhat effective, but they still fight. So it is fairly effective program, but it could lead to bullying and fighting because everyone's there. Maybe someone wants to show off...but the mediation, to me, is not really for bullying.

Shantae, Dana and Terry expressed their feeling about the after school programs' ineffectiveness. They felt that most after school programs failed to address bullying problems at school. Additionally, Shantae suggested more meetings about bullying and victimizations needed to take place in all schools and communities.

***Discipline policies.*** Most schools have a discipline policy and a systematic process for collecting data regarding student referrals, suspensions, and expulsion records (Trump, 2011). When students break school rules, they receive consequences for their actions based on the district's school-wide discipline policy. Because Madison and Morgan and other seniors expressed that they feel as if adults don't care, they explain why students take matters into their own hands and decide to confront the bullies by bringing weapons to school to protect themselves. Madison shared,

...like... the students who are getting bullied, they like start coming to school with guns... like a student here before then... and start shooting up the school and turning to other students and teachers and principals and that stuff.

As reported by Hazel (2011) perhaps the most alarming finding was that students who are victimized miss school more often than their non-victimized peers because they fear for their safety, and some victims carry weapons to school, believing this would serve as a source of protection from bullies.

To avoid suspensions participants expressed that they would rather fight outside of school than get in trouble at school. Shantae explained that if she had to fight, she would choose to fight outside of school in order to avoid any suspensions. She said,

...discipline referrals, no... I haven't like fought them (bullies) in school, but out of school, yeah. I told her (the bully) straight up, just like that. I said there's no point of me getting suspended for them.

Tasha provided her feelings about bullying. She talked about students who are victims and no one was willing to help them. This hopeless sense of despair was expressed when she said,

I got suspended a couple of times for fighting. One time in particular I got suspended for 10 days". "If somebody is getting bullied, it's not going to be no consequences for the bully. You're just getting bullied on. That's that.

Although some victims received consequences for fighting, Hazel (2010) noted, there is an association between bullying and poor achievement.

***GPA- school success(s) and accomplishments.*** Participants discussed school success, personal accomplishments, and the challenges faced in completing school requirements for graduation. They expressed feelings of elation when notified about passing the state requirement tests, receiving recognition for their efforts and helping others as a way to give back to the community. Terry, exclaimed that,

I passed my math OGT. The whole bullying thing, like for me not really caring about how anybody else look at me or portray me, I don't... I don't care anymore and it's like... it's better for me that I am where I am now, because... because I feel like if I did still care, then I'd still be fighting and I would still be in the same situation (Terry).

Qualitatively, several reoccurring topics or themes were identified as a result of analyzing the data from the focus group discussion. These four themes emphasized

participants' feelings as described with: incidences of bullying, effective coping strategies and self-confidence.

**Research question 3.** *What coping strategies does one use to navigate through situations of bullying and manage to achieve?*

***Negative coping strategies at home.*** There are many strategies an individual can use when confronted with bullying situations at home and at school. Victims of bullying used negative and/or positive coping strategies to navigate through daily life situations. Outside of the classroom bullying can negatively affect academic attentiveness for most students (Hazel, 2010). Some focus group participants utilized the redirection of thoughts and feelings strategy as an alternative method to ignore or not address the problems of bullying to focus their attention directly on learning. By ignoring or seeking negative attention, victims attempted to forget about their bullying problems.

In this study, some females admitted to participating in negative methods to deal with bullying problems, the participants all admitted that the negative strategies used did not help the situation. Participants experienced a self-realization epiphany that negative coping strategies were ineffective in solving bullying problems; in fact, in some cases their negative solutions intensified the problem.

***Self-inflictions.*** At first, Shantae addressed her bullying problems with family members by using drugs and performing acts of self-mutilation. She admitted that that was the worst way to deal with problems and said that she learned how to be strong enough and get help from a counselor.

"I stab myself in my stomach, there's plenty of times that I overdose..." Shantae's expressed that this was her way of coping with bullying when she was younger.

Presently, she realizes how much she loves herself and no longer has a desire to hurt herself to stop the hurt. Although students used negative coping strategies to survive the ordeal of being bullied at home, participant use other negative methods to cope with bullying at school.

***Negative coping strategies at school.***

*Isolation.* Participants chose to keep to themselves and not talk to others about their bullying problems because they were afraid of repercussions whereby they are bullied even more for telling or they felt that no one would help. By staying to yourself, Tasha felt that isolation has a negative effect on communications and it did not address the problems of bullying.

...staying to myself, it helped a lot too. But I also feel like staying to yourself when you don't have someone to talk to about the situation, it could make the situation worse. And so a lot of people do need somebody to talk to sometimes about it. People are afraid to report it [bullying] because they feel like they're snitching? Yeah...a lot of kids.

Participants stated that people are afraid to tell someone about bullying because they feared that their safety would be compromised and unpleasant results implemented. Nor did victims want to relive the negative event (Luecke, 2011). As an end result, the participants expressed that many victims may even commit suicide because they are fearful of being harmed and don't want to tell.

*Fighting.* Tasha on the other hand, had so much anger built up, that she chose to physically respond in a violent way by fighting anyone who said or did anything against her.

In elementary school... I would wait for somebody to talk about me just so I could fight them for picking on me. I used to fight, just because I thought that that would help the situation. But, I learned in the end it really didn't help the situation, it kind of made it worse because the fights kept continuing.

Tasha admitted that her solution to fight as a negative coping strategy did not solve the problem and only caused her to obtain more suspensions which affected her education. According to research, children are most likely to use the least effective methods (verbal and physical aggression) when responding to bullying and these responses are associated with more prolonged and severe bullying interactions (Mahady-Wilton; Craig, & Pepler, 2000).

In this case, the participant realized that fighting was a negative coping strategy- an ineffective approach to resolve bullying problems. Conversely, when participants chose positive coping strategies these proved to be more effective tools to combat bullying.

### ***Positive coping strategies at home.***

*Artistic expressions & helping others.* Dana, expressed that she found several ways to make herself happy, despite her bullying experiences.

... sings and sketches. And I'm like... I don't know, I just be by myself and I got this stuffed bear or whatever... and his name's Snuggles... and I like... talk to him sometimes because I don't be having nobody else to tell my problems. to ...I'll just tell the bus driver to like... oh this person is running to the bus stop, just wait 'til they get here... or so if an elder... or elderly lady or man need help with their groceries, taking it to their car with no payment, I'll help them out.

*Sharing time.* Madison added, “I walk my dog, talk to my dog, because I like my dog, and... I watch TV or I go out with my friends and party and stuff.”

*Individual counseling.* On the other hand, Dana chose to get help by participating in therapy sessions to talk about her bullying experiences and seek advice from a professional. This act was Dana’s way of coping with victimization issues.

I also have coped by going to therapy or whatever and I would talk to my therapist about my bullying or whatever. And she’ll give me some very good advice on how to cope with the bullying and stuff... just focus on your goals because the bully, they’re not helping you out with your situation.

*Family connections and role playing.* Laura felt by spending time with her siblings and talking about her bullying problems, she could use role-play and other techniques of substitution to cope with her experiences of being a victim of bullying.

Me and my siblings, we do this little acting thing, we do it every day... it’s funny but we do like these little funny voices and stuff and we just act with each other and do like little home plays and stuff like that. We try to change the subject and make it... the atmosphere, like feel better by making each other laugh and stuff.

Madison used walking as a way to cope. She shared, “I used to go outside and like... walk down the street and just get my mind off of everything”. All participants expressed that by using positive coping strategies they were able to feel better about themselves and not focus on situations regarding bullying.

### ***Positive coping strategies at school.***

*School Involvement.* The school environment afforded students avenues to implement positive coping strategies. Some participants were involved in sports, band

cheerleader, choir, track, and basketball as a way of getting their minds off of bullying experiences. Others used their creative talents to write, sing, or act to get involved in activities that enabled them to control ill feelings that bullying elicits. Morgan felt that journaling and actively moving helped solve her problems. She verbalized, "I write about my feelings, and I do weird dancing to calm myself down. I stay active like playing volleyball or basketball or football... it relieves me from stress."

Terry used a combination of a various strategies to help her deal with bullying situations. She added, "I'm going through a lot so I play an instrument or write, like poems. I even attempt to write songs. By singing, it helps me clear my thoughts." Furthermore, the participants discussed the importance of having a friend to share trials and accomplishments

*Friendships.* When questioned, participants gave an account regarding the number of friendships obtained throughout the years. Based on the participants' report, Terry and Shantae explained that they depended on friends as a way to help get through the day, and how important it was to have friends. Having friends and keeping friends who really care about their well-being was an accomplishment, as expressed by Terry,

...something else I'm proud of is... hmm... only I got friends that care about me and that's there for me, and like... this year, this year, I really needed somebody to be by my side...and they were there for me. I don't like to sing in front of people, but I did then, and I had came in first place.

By having strong relationships with friends, family members and adults at school, it would be easier for victims to feel comfortable and free in sharing their feelings about bullying with others.

*Assertion and forgiveness.* Others reflected on their situations and used positive affirmations to build themselves up; however, Shantae applied a strategy of facing her accusers by telling them that she forgave them for bullying her. This strategy had a positive outcome because the bully stopped bullying her after she confronted them. She said,

I wake up every morning and tell myself, that I'm beautiful. Umm... some of the people that bullied me... I see them to this day. I actually went up to them, the bullies) face to face, and told them that I forgave them. They was looking lost... they didn't know what I was talking about.

*Empathic redirection.* Sometimes, as Tasha expressed, it was best not to address the problem at that moment in time. Tasha employed redirection so as to not focus on her problems and chose to do things that would make others happy. Her rationale was to not focus on her problems but to use her energy to help others.

...that I like to do... and I used to do is to make others happy because it made me happy to see that I put a smile on somebody else's face and to see that I changed somebody's mood. I recently got this tattoo, it says, live the life you love and love the life you live. And I feel like that's my motto, that's what I plan to do for the rest of my life, is to be myself and to do what I like to do and to be happy doing it. And to not worry about what others have to say about that. As long as my happiness is involved, I'm not really worrying about what others feel about that.

Overall, the majority of the focus group participants concluded that positive coping strategies were more effective than negative coping strategies.

## **Emergent Themes**

Four common qualitative themes emerged as a result of the focus group responses regarding victimization, coping strategies, and the relationship bullying has on attendance, extracurricular activities discipline and academic successes. The four emergent themes identified were: marginalization, adversity, resilience and self-assurance.

The themes include: marginalization, as discussed when students expressed the experiences of victims at home and at school; adversity, as a result of the bullying situation; resilience, as evidenced by the participants' ability to develop and implement effective coping strategies; and self-assurance, as participants convey a sense of confidence as they described how they used the coping strategies to stop bullying. The victims openly shared their personal achievements and goals, despite their involvement in experiences of bullying.

**Marginalization.** The concept of marginalization centered on treating someone as if they were unimportant (Jenson, 2000). Whereby a bullied victim could gradually feel “dehumanized and viewed by other students as a worthless person who asks to be bullied” (Olweus & Limber, 2007), the issue of marginalization emerged as a salient theme that was interwoven throughout the focus group discussions. At home and at school, participants shared their experiences and feelings of being mistreated, and being made to feel insignificant, unimportant, and/ or unworthy. Tasha shared,

...and like recently, like I was telling her [my grandmother] I wanted to join the military and like telling her my dreams and everything I wanted to do, and she was like, “Well I just hope you don’t think that you’re going to get all of that

done. It's not going to happen; you don't have the right attitude. You don't have the potential. You don't have everything that you need to pursue your dreams and all of that.” and I'm just like, how can you talk down on your grandchild like that and just tell me that I can't be what I want to be and to tell me that I'm not good enough? I just didn't view that as right ...

When individuals are plagued by feelings of being insignificant, they are more likely to become targets of bullying and subsequent victimization (Miller & Lowen, 2012). Overall, bullies prey upon those who they perceived to be weaker than themselves. Some characteristics of victims included: insecurities, unassertive, cautious and the inability to defend themselves (Sullivan, 2011). McGrath (2007) further explained that the majority of victims who are bullied at school internalize their suffering, often leading to traumatic stress.

Gravitz (2004) classified chronic trauma as a repetitive and insidious accumulation of everyday insults to one's integrity and sense of safety as a human being. The more a person is bullied and threatened, the more he or she is traumatized. In the participants' cases, they heard repeated comments: “you're fat, ugly, four-eyes, stupid, and you have a peperoni face”. Some participants stated they did not care about themselves or others; in extreme cases they allowed these feelings to consume them. “Trauma”, according to Gravitz (2004), “is learning to have so few wants and needs that you can't possibly be disappointed”. Terry expressed.

My bullying experience... at first, it tore me down because it made me feel like I was nothing. I was lonely, I didn't have nobody, I was always gonna be... I was always gonna be this girl that was never going to amount to do anything.

Overall, the trauma or a traumatic experience of being bullied, could cause victims to view life through a distorted lens, resulting in a loss of self-esteem, misdirection in life, lack of a purpose, an inability to adapt to stress and /or a disconnection from other people. The eventual cost of cumulative trauma could be a loss of self (McGrath, 1998.)

In spite of the harmful effects marginalization could have on an individuals' psyche, the participants chose to defy the cycle of victimization, and elevated themselves to become valued citizens. Shantae shared,

My bullying experience helped me succeed by waking up every morning... looking in the mirror telling me I'm going to be something. So, I just decided to do something with my life. That's the only way I'm gonna feel good about myself. It (being marginalized) makes me want to be a better person.

**Adversity.** The second emergent theme of adversity focused on the participants' reflection on the hardships they endured as a result of being bullied in school. Adversity is a series of misfortunes preventing individuals from achieving their goals. The focus group participants expressed their difficulties in overcoming life's hardships as victims of bullying. Consequently, the participants had options to either become complacent and accept the personal hardships or use effective coping strategies to make ameliorative decisions. During their bullying experience, some chose to use drugs, fight, and/or engage in harmful self-inflicting behaviors to mask their pain in coping. Tasha explained,

I don't really deal with bullying right now. ... (drugs) was something that I turned to, and it's not like hard drugs or anything like that, it's like, you know,

marijuana. But, it did help put me in a state of mind where I didn't really care about anything... it helped and it was something that I did to cope with the whole bullying situation.

Her feelings of apathy caused her to suppress her true feelings and accept her fate as an unconcerned victim.

Another participant shared her unpleasant bullying experience where she physically retaliated, justifying her actions as a manner to release feelings of anger. She later realized that her efforts were in vain.

When I got older, and I was in middle school and they was still bullying me, I used to fight, just because I thought that that would help the situation. But, I learned in the end it really didn't help the situation, it kind of made it worse because the fights kept continuing.

Later, participants realized that negative solutions only exacerbated the problem, and failed to address the bullying issues. McGrath-Nishina & Juvonen (2005) explained, if kids continue to get harassed, over time they become more psychologically vulnerable. To avoid the cycle of vulnerability and fear, focus group participants shared how they helped other bully victims.

I know what it feels like to be bullied, so I offer as much as I can to help others that's been bullied. It's a lot of people that come to me and talk to me about what they go through and I give them the best advice that I can. I share with them what I went through so they know that I've been through what they've been through. It might not have been the same situation, but we've both been through the same thing.

While no one should ever have to go through the pain and trauma of being targeted, the outcomes of these experiences do not necessarily have to have long-term negative impacts (Miller & Lowen, 2012). In fact, being bullied could open doors for kids to mature, develop relationships, and gain a sense of independence that can turn a painful encounter into an opportunity for growth.

**Resilience.** The third emergent theme focused on a participant's ability to become resilient despite their adverse bullying situation. Although the participants experienced some form of adversity or hardship, they did not allow their life experiences of bullying to quell their spirits:

...like... but now I look at it (bully experience) as in... I don't really care what nobody (bullies) have to say no more because I'm doing this for myself. I don't have to prove myself to nobody else because I'm the one who's got to live my life. (Terry)

Likewise, many other participants decided to use positive coping strategies, such as: forgiving the perpetrator, helping others and engaging in creative artistic endeavors. It yielded them opportunities to become resilient in the face of bullying situations. McGrath (2007) explained, victims of bullying responded in many ways. Some suffered self-doubt and a drop in self-esteem and confidence. Others became bullies themselves in an attempt to compensate for their sufferings. Tash reflects,

...like when I was younger, when I used to get bullied, it was something that was constantly always on my mind and it like always made... it always put me in a bad mood and I always felt sad. I was always thinking, like oh, I need to go get

some better clothes or some better shoes... I need to fit in... I need to do what these people need me to do... (Tasha)

Conversely, according to Graham & Juvonen (2001) some victims used resilient coping skills that combat behaviors perpetrated against them; others were controlled by external factors that prevented them from prospering. Tasha adapted to the stressful situation of being a bullied victim by becoming more flexible and working to improve her self-esteem. She explained,

Honestly, I have no idea... it was like... I wish I could say that somebody pulled me to the side and said, hey this is what you need to do... I read a book and I just was like... what... but that's not how it happened. I just as I got older or something, I realized that's what you need to deal with a... get through life, you need to be happy and you need to do what you want to do and...

Based on the consensus from the participants, it was more advantageous to use effective coping strategies to withstand the negative effects of bullying.

**Self-assuredness.** Self-assuredness was the last emergent theme discussed in this chapter. During the sessions, the participants expressed their satisfaction at reaching their goals of improving attendance, participating in at least one extracurricular activity, decreasing the number of referrals received, achieving high grade point averages of at least a 3.0 or better, and anticipating a life-long goal of graduation from high school.

All participants expressed a sense of accomplishment, in spite of experiences of being bullied. Their attitudes were positive, uplifting and optimistic as observed by the researcher. Tasha discussed her plan to remain positive, focused and successful regardless of her negative bullying experiences. She stated,

I recently got this tattoo. It says, live the life you love and love the life you live. And I feel like that's my motto, that's what I plan to do for the rest of my life, is to be myself and to do what I like to do and to be happy doing it. And to not worry about what others have to say about that. As long as my happiness is involved, I'm not really worrying about what others feel about that (Tasha).

Generally, bullying had an adverse effect on attendance, participation in extracurricular activities, discipline and school success. Smokowski and Kopasz (2005) reported that poor attendance and lower academic achievement among victims of bullying tended to increase from elementary to middle school (Green, Dunn, Johnson, & Molnar, 2011).

When students attend school on a regular basis, are involved in activities and have few discipline problems, the assumption is that they are likely to succeed. When students fail to attend school, as a means of avoiding bullies, then they academically fail to receive a quality education (Bauman, 2008). In this study, participants attended school on a regular basis because they realized how important it was to achieve and complete the necessary requirements to graduate. Dana explained,

So, I have been walking away from (bullying) situations like that, I have been ignoring the negative stuff and focusing on the positive as my future. My goal is... I'm trying to walk across the stage and everything else.

The focus group participants expressed how they used their positive strategies to confront bullies. One individual discussed the importance of overcoming hardships by forgiving her abuser as a way to prove to the perpetrators that forgiveness supersedes condemnation. Terry disclosed,

...like the best thing for me to overcome it is like succeeding, also like if I succeed, I can prove anybody wrong and make you feel bad about the way you treated me, just because of my success. I feel success is the best key to overcoming.

Shantae explained, “One of my biggest... I mean my biggest accomplishment was to forgive the people that bullied me.

From September to December 2015, the focus group participants accumulated zero discipline referrals, maintained improved attendance, participated in at least one extracurricular activity, and received recognition for school successes. In turn, the number of bullying incidences, fights and suspensions decreased. Ultimately, the high school participants came to the realization that by using coping strategies, they obtained a sense of empowerment to stand up to bullies and the courage to no longer be vulnerable, or victimized.

## **Summary**

Chapter IV contained the results and analyses of the Self-Reported Survey, the Modified Olweus Bullying Questionnaire and the two focus group discussions. Data was collected between September and December, 2015. Thirty female senior participants completed the online Modified Olweus Bullying Questionnaire, 32 participants completed the Self-Reported Survey, and seven participants completed the two focus group discussions.

Finally, an analysis of both the quantitative and qualitative research findings was documented in this report. Quantitatively, the data were used to provide descriptive statistical analysis. Qualitatively, triangulations was used as a collection method to

confirm, support, and enhance greater validity of the emergent findings. To promote validity and reliability other strategies were used to collect data. Using the saturation techniques, subcategories, patterns, and themes evolved. Overall, rich, thick descriptions of the participants' responses regarding their bullying experiences matched the context of the research outcomes.

In Chapter V, an interpretation of the research findings was further discussed and supported to confirm or refute the data results. Additionally, the quantitative and qualitative data analysis relating to the research questions, the results, conclusions, limitations, and future recommendations to support this study's findings were examined.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATION, AND CONCLUSIONS**

Chapter V, the final chapter of this study, addressed the issues of bullying, concentrating on effective coping strategies used by bully victims. To address this issue, an analysis and interpretation of the research findings must be further examined. Thus, chapter five was divided into three sections as they relates to the theoretical framework emphasizing the rationale and intentions of the study.

Section one included an overview of the introduction, purpose and justification to conduct this study. Section two provided a quantitative and qualitative interpretation of the research findings and a brief summary associated with the three research questions. Finally, section three discussed the limitations, and suggested intervention programs and future recommendations for stakeholders and policy makers to implement at the local, district, state, and federal levels.

Bullying is a widespread problem in the United States and all across the world. In schools, students reported seeing or experiencing incidences of bullying daily (Thornberg, Rosenqvist, & Johnhansson, 2012; e.g. Borntrager et al., 2009; Eslea et al., 2003). In order to reduce the number of bullying incidents, a student must use effective

coping strategies to overcome bullying and not allow bullying to interfere with their successes.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this mixed-methods study was to explore how high school urban female seniors use coping strategies to develop resilience and succeed in school in spite of having had bullying experiences. This research involved 18 out of 32 high school female seniors who shared their coping strategies experiences as victims of bullying and how they used these strategies to combat bullying. Additionally, victims discussed how attendance, participation in extracurricular activities, discipline referrals, and school successes were achieved in a school setting.

The quantitative data focused primarily on: bullying experiences, the most frequent ways bullying occurs, and the identification of common locations where bullying incidents mostly take place. The qualitative data offered rich descriptive recordings of seven focus group participants as they shared their personal bullying experiences, effective coping strategies used to guard against bullying attacks, and accomplishments from victims who succeeded in navigating abusive situations of bullying.

It was the expectation of the researcher that all victims could use these coping practices to protect themselves from harm; to decrease the number of bullying incidences in school; to increase the levels of achievement as a result of using these effective strategies; and become empowered to have a voice in discontinuing negative attacks against them. Collectively, this study presented an examination of alternative coping skills that female victims of bullying used. Prior to this study, little research had been

conducted to verify that positive coping strategies enable victims of bullying to survive and achieve; however, this study suggested that positive coping strategies had an affect on academic successes as it related to bullying situations. Therefore, this study investigated, clarified and confirmed the data collected as valid. This data and findings should be shared with every school district. Furthermore, the results of this study could also be shared with other bully victims in order for them to acquire and use lifetime survival techniques in the future.

### **Justification**

Based on statistics generated from a national American study, research verified the number bullying incidents among female victims is increasing (Cristie, 2005). In the United States, incidents of bullying continue to resonate throughout the world. As reported by one newspaper article last year, Emilie Olsen, a 13 year-old adopted girl, decided to shoot herself in the head because she received mean and cruel messages from her classmates. Messages such as, “Emilie is a whore” or other messages such as, “Go kill yourself” were left on the bathroom stalls (Golick, 2014). The abusive acts lasted over a span of three years. As a desperate young girl, she communicated her frustrations to her parents and teachers explaining her fears of attending school. Before measures could be implemented, without hope, Olsen killed herself. The plaintiffs in the lawsuit claimed that, “the Fairfield School District did little to stop bullying” (Boroff, 2014).

Who was there for Emilie or the countless number of victims who are discouraged and don't know what to do? Why didn't she use effective coping strategies that would enable her to overcome these horrific acts of bullying? Because of Emilie's story and countless others, it is imperative that people use the information from this study to prevent further acts of abuse and or suicides.

Therefore, school districts must invest and teach students effective coping strategies to prevent bullying from occurring at the state, district and local levels. Hence, this study will add to the literature base in providing victims with successful ways to use coping strategies as a means to combat and achieve the prevalence of bullying in schools worldwide.

This chapter further explored an in-depth analysis of two subsections as they related to the research questions discussed in section two:

- The Quantitative and Qualitative Research Findings & Implications
- The Quantitative and Qualitative Research Summary

Additionally, research question one and two addressed quantitative and qualitative bullying experiences and the results from the instruments and the focus group discussions of how bullying related to the independent variables of school attendance, participation in extracurricular activities, discipline referrals and school successes. Question three primarily highlighted the focus group discussions which were related to the effective coping strategies victims of bullying used to survive.

### **Quantitative and Qualitative Research Findings and Implications**

**Research question 1.** *What is the experiences young female seniors encounter in an urban high school setting as it relates to bullying?*

***Quantitative findings and implications.*** The substantial baseline data from the quantitative instruments were the determining factors that gave credence to the current research findings. In this study, more than half of the participants who completed the Self-Reported Survey stated they had been a victim of bullying. One third of the participants from the Modified Olweus Bullying Questionnaire confirmed that females who were teased or made fun of, either through verbal or other threatening means were

involved in some type of relational bullying. Relational bullying referred to being called names, made fun of, or teased in a hurtful way. The data from this study aligned with other research including the national average verifying approximately one-fourth of the students continued to be bullied today, corroborating the fact that bullying is still a major unresolved problem (Gaul 2010).

Victims, in this study were bullied in various ways. The findings stated that spreading rumors was the most frequent way victims are bullied, with verbal interactions being the second most frequent way participants are bullied. Shariff (2008) supported the notion that media influences were on the rise, when she stated that adolescent girls were increasingly surfacing as active instigators of cyber-bullying. Although spreading rumors was the most frequent way victims were bullied, cyberbullying was one of the lowest ways bullying occurred in this study.

In school, bullying could occur at any time or at any place. Research suggested that bullying could even take place before, during or after school. Research further indicated that bullying can specifically take place on the playground, in the classroom, on the bus, in the stairwell, before school, after school or in the cafeteria.

The quantitative research findings from the online Modified Bullying Questionnaire identified where bullying most frequently occurs. Based on this study, bullying mostly took place during school. From the 30 participants' responses, the majority of the victims stated that bullying took place in the class with the teachers present. This information aligned with the national average finding. However, in this study more than three-fourths of the bullying took place in class when the teachers were not in the room. In order to address the discrepancy in the findings, where three-fourths and more than half of the findings were conclusive, the researchers from the Olweus

Questionnaire explained that participants were able to select more than one answer for their choices.

*Qualitative findings and implications.* The qualitative experiences and responses from the female focus group participants' perspectives on bullying revealed that even at home, bullying experiences existed. Participants shared clear depictions of incidents where their parents, siblings or other family members verbally and physically hit, beat or sexually abused them. Most expressed their grief toward their family members who failed to support them regarding future endeavors. Instead, some family members marginalized the participants and one participant shared comments from her grandmother, "You know you're not going to amount to anything good." Some participants concluded that family members' bullying actions were due to jealousy and their inability to feel a sense of connectedness to them.

Hamarus & Kaikkonen, 2008; Varjas et al. (2008) explained the intrinsic connotations of bullying behaviors by stating that many students reported bullying as an intolerable act of deviant behavior and that the negative attitudes of a bully are deviant, odd, or different because they do not accept people. Bullying was most frequently reported in classes where teachers were not present; on the other hand, participants further explained that bullies engage in bullying activities to make themselves feel better or gain higher status. Teasing and harassing can be the bully's way of having fun and breaking the boredom in their everyday life (Sullivan, 2011). Hazel (2010) explained why people bully; elementary school children felt: a student's appearance, speech or clothing could single him or her out for bullying.

The focus group participants, who were all victims of bullying, also reported being teased, harassed and ridiculed for their appearance based on excessive acne, large

body weight, and imperfect facial features. The participants were also told that their lips were too big, their arms were too skinny, unattractive marks on the face, nails too long, and the hair being too coarse. One participant specifically talked about her mother's strife as a single parent to provide for her family. As a result, she did not have the best of everything, she had to wear "hand me downs to school." This made her extremely sad, especially when other students teased her for not having the so-called "high end, designer shoes and clothes."

In elementary and middle school, students reported a greater amount of bullying incidents; Bullying was most frequently reported in class where teachers were not present; on the other hand, however a decline in reports of bullying incidences by students at the high school level significantly decreased. To provide an explanation for the decline in students reporting bullying from elementary to high school, researchers reported, victims may know about bullying incidents before it happens, but were sometimes afraid to report it (Trump, 2011).

It was further reported that students wanted to know that two things will occur when they report bullying: first, that they, the informant, will remain anonymous, and second, that someone will follow up on what they report. Moreover, the focus group participants expressed that they did not report incidents of bullying because they felt adults in school would not respond to their reports of bullying. Instead, participants felt it was more important to handle problems of bullying on their own to avoid conflicts and dependencies of others.

### ***Quantitative Summary.***

1. Bullying is prevalent and continues to grow at home and at school. Based on this study more than 56% of participants were victims of bullying.

Comparatively, research indicated that one out of every three, or 33% of students are bullied each year in school. This information implied that bullying is still on the rise, and has not decreased, but has increased in this particular urban high school setting.

2. Spreading rumors, a form of verbal bullying ranked highest in this study regarding the way bullying occurs; however, cyberbullying, another form of bullying ranked lowest. However, cyberbullying is on the rise and was ranked as one of the highest forms of bullying nationally.
3. Researchers reported that the playground was the most frequently identified place bullying occurs, yet in this study bullying was most frequently reported in class when teachers were not present.
4. A decrease in reports of bullying in high school were a result of students feeling as though they were not taken seriously nor did they feel as if anyone would do anything to help. This information from research was aligned to this study.

**Research question 2.** *What is the relationship between bullying and victimization as it relates to school attendance, participation in extracurricular activities, discipline, and academic achievement?*

***Quantitative findings and implications.*** The quantitative aspects regarding how bullying was related to school success based on a student's attendance rate, participation in extracurricular activities, disciplinary incidences, and grade point averages were reported. Participants in this study did not want to miss school or be suspended; instead, they expressed a strong desire to attend school in a safe and conducive environment, graduate and become productive citizens.

*Attendance.* Research stated that victimization by bullying has negative consequences regarding school attendance and academic performance (Smith et al., 2004). When victimized, students had no desire to come to school for various reasons which included: unsafe conditions, fear of being bullied, despair from being ignored, or dislikes of a school environment; their poor attendance affected their academic performance.

When students missed school due to bullying situations, it affects the entire school's attendance rate. Based on this research, more than half of the victims surveyed missed at least three days of school within a three-month period. These findings, from the Self-Reported Survey, suggested that attendance did not have an adverse effect on victims of bullying. Unfortunately, this data was inconclusive due to the openness of individualized interpretations.

*Extracurricular activities.* In regards to extracurricular activities, more than half of the victims stated they were involved in more than or one after school extracurricular activity. This data had no bearing as to whether bullying affected their decision to participate in one or more than one activity.

*Discipline.* The data collected from the Self-Reported Survey regarding discipline policies and school safety suggested that the majority of participants did not have discipline problems and a small percent of participants reported not receiving any or received a few discipline referrals in school for the 2015-2016 school year. The findings from this study were inconclusive because not enough evidence was incurred connecting the number of referrals received to those who were or were not bullied.

*Grade point average.* To address school success, the findings from the Self-reported survey indicated that the majority of the participants obtained a 3.0 grade point

average or higher. This data implied that the seniors who were bullied in school, based on this study were more academically focused on school success and chose not to focus on the aftermath of being a bully victim. Although most research supports the notion that there is a correlation between perceived psychological and physical vulnerability and student achievement (Nishina, Juvonen and Witkow, 2005), the participants from this study, overcame the obstacles of adversities and succeeded.

The research findings from the Self- Reported Survey, in this study were inconclusive, However, implications, from this study suggested that grade point averages may or may not have an effect on victims of bullying. In such cases, there was no direct relationship between bullying and victimization causing the results to be inconclusive. However, the participants in this study, who were victims of bullying obtained a high grade point average.

***Qualitative research findings and implications.***

*Attendance.* Qualitatively, the focus group participants stated they did not want to attend school because of bullying, but chose to attend because they wanted to complete their school requirements. Conclusively, more participants attended school on a regular basis even though bullying continues to occur in their school.

*Extracurricular activities.* Some focus group participants refused to participate in extracurricular activities because they were avoiding bullying experiences. Some participants decided to participate in at least one extracurricular activity as a way to connect, formulate and build stronger relationships with other students. This implied that a victims' involvement in extracurricular activities varied based on his/her personal decisions to participate.

*Discipline.* The participants reported that they currently did not have discipline problems this school year; however, in the past years, they were suspended for fighting and retaliating to incidences of bullying. Research indicated that victims of bullying usually have discipline problems. Research from this study suggested that victims of bullying did not have discipline problems in school.

*School Success(es).* To analyze the participants' responses regarding their experiences of school success, the findings showed that all participants achieved in spite of their bullying situation. Instead of accepting their situation of being a victim, they expressed feelings of resilience and self-assuredness.

*Qualitative Summary.* The quantitative and qualitative summary from these mixed method research findings were as follows:

1. Participants in this study had good attendance despite being bullied. This data was contrary to the findings from other studies, which indicated that most victims of bullying had poor attendance.
2. Victims in this study had few discipline problems, whereas most research studies showed that victims had a higher percentage of discipline problems.
3. Participants in this study joined at least one activity despite their experiences as a victim, as opposed to most victims who did not participate in activities because they had a fear of being bullied.
4. Most victims had low self-esteem, symptoms of depression, and psychological problems (Sapouna, & Wolke, 2013). Conversely, the participants in this study were confident and successful, even after being bullied.

**Research question 3.** *What coping strategies does one use to navigate through situations of bullying and manage to achieve?*

Many participants expressed how they coped with negative acts of bullying. Conversely, some participants used physical aggression as a defense mechanism for protection while others used drugs to fill the void of not knowing what to do when confronted with bullying situations. Participants used ignoring techniques as another alternative, hoping the situation from feeling victimized would disappear.

As stated by one participant, “one way of coping with bullying is to completely ignore the situation and act as if it never even happened.” Some participants wanted bullying to stop and as a result they turned to negative remedies that caused them to experience negative outcomes. Tasha expressed, “...it (taking drugs) was something that I did to cope with the whole bullying situation.”

Consequently, by ignoring, taking drugs, and using aggression as a solution to cope, participants realized that the negative choices were not conducive or productive to their health. Instead, participants decided to focus their attention on positive experiences that made them happy.

The three most commonly used negative coping strategies to address experiences of bullying were: ignoring, confronting and retaliating (Gamliel et al., 2003). Unfortunately, the negative coping strategies were ineffective and victims realized that positive coping strategies were more effective.

***Positive coping strategies.*** The focus group participants found peace and comfort when they listened to music, sang, danced, wrote, played, prayed, walked, talked and helped others as ways to positively cope with bullying. Most importantly, they found confidence and strength to forgive and help other victims. “It was such a freeing

experience”, expressed Shantae, a focus group participant. “I didn’t tell them (the bullies) why, I just walked up to them and said I forgive you and then, I walked away.”

By showing compassion for a bully who may have experienced hurt and pain from abandonment, isolation, and abuse, Shantae’s act of forgiveness was an unselfish gesture of kindness demonstrating unconditional love for a bully. As stated by Ramirez (2013) when the victim expressed forgiveness, it placated vengeful feelings. Therefore, forgiveness was a powerful and effective coping strategy.

Seeking support from parents, teachers and friends to help decrease the intensity of bullying attacks was another coping strategy. Although some participants chose to tell someone about bullying, the majority of the focus group participants felt that, “they, themselves were the only ones that had the power and control to stand up to any bullying situation.”

On the other hand, the three most commonly used positive coping strategies focused on thought cessation, redirection, and forgiveness as ways to suppress and replace negative thoughts after being victimized with positive ones (Ramirez, 2013). These positive coping strategies empowered these victims to focus their energies on bettering themselves and becoming stronger worthwhile advocates for change.

The focus group participants did not use a specific technique to identify various types of coping strategies used. Instead, a combination of strategies practical, effective and valuable methods to cope with bullying was used.

Participants discussed basic strategies that enabled them to survive and cope as victims of bullying. By utilizing these various coping strategies, participants expressed their feelings of liberation and fortitude to speak up against bullying. As a result, the participants were confident and focused to achieve and succeed in school. As an end

result, Trump (2011) summarized the need to explore coping strategies as a way to resist acts of bullying. He stated, “Perhaps the attention should be on developing coping skills and support mechanisms along with identifying triggers that can help teens manage stress.”

By understanding that peer pressure, alcohol, drugs, abandonment by others, domestic violence, abuse, gangs, cults, deviant attractions, and rejection were vices that were connected to bullying (Austin, Reynolds, & Barnes, 2012), it verifies the extreme importance of possessing adequate and appropriate coping skills as armor to protect victims against bullying.

Fortunately, in this study the participants chose to acquire and utilize effective coping strategies which helped them survive. Therefore, the quantitative and qualitative data from this study concluded that incidences of bullying have increased. At home, it was determined that family members bully because they are unable to deal with their own personal problems. At school, the participants were ecstatic to know that the coping strategies shared during the focus group sessions were important enough to be passed on enabling other victims to overcome bullying and achieve. In summary, the qualitative findings from this research established 4 main points of discovery for the third research question.

#### ***Qualitative Summary.***

1. Negative coping strategies used by participants were ineffective.
2. The positive coping strategies were more effective (walking pets, singing, dancing, writing, and helping others etc.).
3. Forgiveness, praying, and meditation were the most frequently coping strategy used.

4. Coping strategies could intrinsically and extrinsically be applied to protect victims from harmful effects of bullying.

### **Limitations**

The sample of respondents was limited to one urban high school in Northeast, Ohio and only 32 students responded to the questions from the Self-Reported Survey and Online Modified Olweus Bullying Questionnaire, limiting the number of participants that may have participated in this study. The findings to this study could have been enriched by a comparison between two urban high schools, an urban and suburban high school, or other schools at the elementary and middle school levels. Another limitation focused on the fact that all the participants were females excluding all boys from this study. Additionally, the participants were required to be 18 years of age or older. Other requirements included limited amount of data available on coping strategies that were used to prevent bullying occurrences.

Although the online Modified Olweus Bullying Questionnaire primarily is used with students in grades three through 12, this study would have yielded more enhancements if all grades levels were included. Additionally, this study only focused on one grade level involving the high school level and was limited to only the 12th grade, opposed to using a variety of grade levels to encompass more rich data. To focus on the subjects of the study, all participants had to meet the basic requirements to be identified as high school senior students. Conclusively, this study was limited to a three-month timeframe. If the time frame had been longer, perhaps more rich and descriptive qualitative and quantitative data analysis might have been provided.

## **Future Implications and Recommendation**

This section discussed future recommendations that involve a holistic-approach including a collaborative effort from parents, teachers, administrators and students.

**Parents.** It is imperative that parents become stakeholders in the safe and well-being of the children. They must nurture a positive environment at home where children are inspired not marginalized; protected not neglected and encouraged to report any threatening act of bullying or harassment. Parents should partner with the schools to have open dialogue where staff can be more vigilant in providing mandatory interventions of any violations infringed upon their children. Thus, schools can become a safer haven where students can feel as if their voices are heard and complaints about bullying are immediately reported and addressed by authorities. Finally, it is imperative that all parents take time to listen to and spend quality time with your children and take action immediately whenever they hear about episodes of bullying and work to enforce new and more effective laws against offenders. This act of care will show students that they are loved and respected.

**Teachers.** Teachers are often the first line of defense. They usually build a relationship of confidence and trust with students. Teachers, along with counselors, are the key individuals who offer help and support to all students. It is important that teachers listen intently to concerns of their students to show students they care. The majority of participants responded by saying,

Maybe they don't listen... I don't know... I think most of the time they don't listen because like... they things they did in the past and maybe they might have lied about things and they think we might be doing the same thing. So, they just don't listen to what we have to say because they think back on what they would

have did when they were younger. Their attitude should not be relaxed; any type of bullying should be taken seriously.

Ultimately, their job is to teach, lead, and protect. The results from the online Modified Olweus Bullying Questionnaire were congruent to most research studies stating that the classroom is the main setting where bullying occurs (Rigby, 2007). This study reaffirmed that teachers are responsible for monitoring and supervising students at all times, making classrooms safe where students are comfortable and free from incidents of bullying. Eighty-three percent agreed with the national finding that bullying occurred in the classroom where students were unsupervised or supervised.

To address this problem, teachers should be aware of the school policies and more vigilant when supervising students. According to Ronald Pitner, a PhD, associate professor at Washington University, he concluded that greater adult supervision and more attention needs to be given to concentrated areas as a way to decrease the level of bullying in high-risk areas (Trump, 2010).

Furthermore, teachers should be more proactive in defusing incidents of bullying behaviors, and eliminating inappropriate comments whenever they occur in the classroom. They should be required to immediately respond to the authorities when threats of harassment against victims arise.

Finally, it should be mandatory that all teachers participate in workshops on bullying and attend professional development classes involving classroom instruction and management practices (Caard & Hodges, 2008; Elias & Zins, 2003) This process would enable teachers not be afraid to confront students when bullying escalates, but become more sensitive, and encouraging in meeting the needs of all students. This act will

empathically show students the support they need to learn and attend school in a safe and bully-free environment.

**Administrators.** Since the late 1900s, all schools are required to have a school-wide discipline policy. All administrators are responsible for creating and maintaining a safe environment in schools. For consistency reasons, the school districts should have a uniform intervention program where administrators can purchase their own supplemental anti-bullying program materials and teachers would be apprised of the expectations to implement the program initiatives.

The responsibilities would be to oversee and implement all bully prevention programs and assess and reevaluate the program's effectiveness throughout the year. Although it would be the administrator's responsibility to select the supplemental bully prevention programs, the administrator should also be the one to enforce the rules and make sure that the school disciplinary policy be included and that all students who are involved in bullying incidences receive proper consequences for their inappropriate behaviors. In order to achieve this task, administrators would formulate a strong coalition with teachers and other stakeholders where meetings would be scheduled to discuss and resolve bullying problems at the school-wide level.

**Students.** Students must not be afraid to report any acts of bullying to their parents immediately. When students feel unsafe, they should be able to leave a room and get help without any repercussions. Secondly, students must be taught their rights and how to use school policies to their advantage. No one has a right to control, or the power to verbally, mentally or physically abuse anyone.

Lastly, students must know and use a combination of all or some of the coping strategies discussed in this study to overcome any form of bullying. If students use

coping strategies to defend themselves against bullying, then students will feel empowered to stop the abuse, and hopefully through these actions a reduction in the number of suicides and deaths will occur.

Trump (2011) summarized and supported the need to explore coping strategies as a way to resist acts of bullying. He stated, “Perhaps the attention should be on developing coping skills and support mechanisms along with identifying triggers that can help victims manage stress.”

**Student support.** Regardless, it was stated that no matter how many programs are implemented, no program will be effective unless the issues to help bullies have been addressed. Therefore, as stated by the participants, bullies need to get the help through counseling or some type of involvement in special programs designed to offer assistance and support. No matter what the reason, all participants were adamant about instructing all bullies to treat people right. Other participants offered advice to bullies. Terry said,

So, the advice I’d give them (bullies) is that you shouldn’t treat nobody a way that you wouldn’t want to get treated. Because everybody’s got a story, you never know what’s going on with somebody else and they don’t know what’s going on with you so... it’s like... I feel you should treat the person how you want to be treated instead of bullying them and picking on them.

Laura spoke about the advice she would give bullies. She expressed, “...and some advice I would give a bully is to get help, because they really need the help and they need to talk to somebody about their problems.”

By understanding that peer pressure, alcohol, drugs, abandonment by others, domestic violence, abuse, gangs, cults, deviant attractions, rejection are vices that are

connected to bullying (Austin, Reynolds, & Barnes, 2012), it is extremely important to have adequate and appropriate coping skills as armor to protect victims against bullying.

### **Intervention Programs**

If schools used more effective interventions and implemented successful anti-bullying policies, more children would dissociate themselves from bullying practices and offer support to those being bullied (Sullivan, 2011). Even the results from a Sheffield study showed that after being introduced to an effective bullying programs, bystanders became more active in trying to combat bullying incidences (Smith & Sharp, 1994).

During incidences of bullying, research stated that the strategy of negatively responding to bullying with aggression is not an effective way to retaliate, even though it has been the most frequent response victims use (Mahady-Wilton, 2000).

Instead, alternative interventions for victimized children should provide effective strategies that can help the cope (Elias, & Zins, 2003). Extracurricular programs offer many opportunities to prevent and address bullying. After school programs such as summer camps, faith-based organizations, and community at large events (Holt Raczynski, Frey, Hymel, Limber, 2013). Other programs that encourage positive self esteem building are: Girls Scouts of America, 4H and other Young Women's conferences throughout the United States.

As a response to the findings, the participants from this study agreed that all schools, all over the world should establish some type of bully-victim focus group discussions similar to the one implemented in this study for the purpose of helping students openly talk about effective strategies they could use to deal with bullies, providing opportunities for victims to be heard to formulate connections that would make them feel supported. Tasha articulated,

I feel like there should be a program like this for the kids that's getting bullied to come together and have something that they can do to get their mind off it while they're there. To talk about it and to kind of... open their mind up so they can see and get to the point.

**Safety programs.** There is also a need to incorporate effective educational intervention programs in all elementary, middle, and high schools that teach students the importance of changing their mindset: threats to safety is not a form of “snitching”, but instead their acts of reporting may be “life-saving” (Trump, 2011). In 2008, Bauman revealed that victimization by bullying and harassment was associated with depressive symptoms, suicidal behaviors, low grades, and feelings of being unsafe at school. These symptoms verified the fact that students need to attend school in a safe and bully free environment. Hazel (2010) supports this notion by stating that in order to optimize academic learning and achievement, time needs to be regularly spent on attending to children's social-emotional needs and building a safe and inclusive environment. Ultimately, identifying education as an important norm, not the exception and safe schools should be a place where all students have opportunities to attend and learn without any worries of being bullied.

With more and more situations of bullying being reported, parents are becoming outraged and frustrated at the lack of attention given to the horrific acts of violence in school. Based on recent school shootings, school safety should be a top priority. If members from a community want students to feel comfortable and academically achieve in school, then safety cannot be overlooked. According to Barton, 2003 and Scott, Nelson, & Liaupsin, (2001) in regards to bullying and academic achievement; it was concluded that high achieving schools were classified as safe schools (Hazel, 2010).

Thus, the goal for all school districts should be to create major initiatives to systematically require that safety measures to protect students from harmful attacks are implanted. Once schools are considered to be safe, then they can be identified as high achieving schools. Therefore, effective safety measures need to be implemented.

Safety measures should include: practice and professional development for school safety training and planning time to update school crisis plans (Trump, 2011) and regularly assessing the building safety plans to make sure equipment is working and members of a staff know how to use it. As a future suggestion to support this plan, a 24/7 telephone hot line monitored by district employees can be established where threats of bullying could be anonymously reported.

**Bullying programs.** Because bullying has become so widespread throughout our nation, school officials should incorporate intervention programs in all schools that would help students cope with bullying situations. Both elementary and middle schools would be required to include at least one Social Emotional Learning programs in the school. Programs such as DARE and the WAVE /RAVE programs should be modified and used during daily instructional time in the classroom. Although most of these types of programs involve activities where students participate in role-playing, reenactments of bullying scenarios, or attend discipline workshops or lectures other more effective intervention programs such as focus group discussions should be considered.

Research stated that some intervention programs are effective on paper; however, based on the consensus of this study, participants mostly viewed the programs mentioned to be ineffective programs. Dana expressed,

We do not have... like, no... no type of club or like... we don't have like meetings for like this type of stuff for bullying. We have meetings for like the

violence and stuff, but it's just always that main one they're always missing to have a meeting about is the bullying. That's the main reason of all this violence.

The majority of the participants expressed that intervention programs similar to the focus group discussions used in this research where a facilitator would be responsible for conducting the meetings and victims would answer questions and sharing their personal experiences. Also, in a focus group setting, the participants expressed that students could get the help they needed and become skilled at learning and practicing coping strategies so they would know how to deal with bullying problems when they are presented. Dana commented,

So I think what they need to... for real, they (in all grades) need to start having more meetings about bullying like this one, because they (district and government leaders) need to understand that bullying leads to the violence

All participants agreed that there should be some type of forum like the focus group sessions from this research to not only be available this particular school, but in all schools throughout each state. Participants felt that this type of program would be more effective in helping students no matter what age talk about strategies that would help them not be victimized by bullies any longer. Tasha suggested,

I feel like there should be a program like this (the focus group discussions) for the kids that's getting bullied to come together and have something that they can do to get their mind off it while they're there. To talk about it and to kind of... open they mind up so they can see and get to the point.

Shantae explained, "People is actually losing their lives because of it. Yeah, that [having focus group discussions for victims] might be a more effective way to stop bullying".

Unfortunately, researchers believe that the most effective intervention programs to reduce bullying should be mostly provided to students at the primary grades because propensities for peer-directed aggression and the forming of aggressive peer-groups are evidenced in these settings (Green, Dunn, Johnson, & Molnar, 2011; Astor, Pitner, & Duncan, 1996). The participants disagreed with this conclusion and felt as though the focus group discussions should be available in all schools for all victims from kindergarten to the 12<sup>th</sup> grade.

For bullying intervention programs to be beneficial, most need to focus on the emotional well-being of a student and support the importance of understanding the role the school environment has in shaping a student's experiences (Hazel, 2010). Therefore, an effective bullying intervention program should be school-wide, including all grades where community and parent outreach components are incorporated and direct interactions are included as a means of actively involving more student participation and personal interactions.

### **Study Recommendations**

1. Replicate this research study in a suburban or rural high school.
2. Replicate this research in more than one urban high school to recruit a larger sample size population.

### **Policy Recommendations**

Anti-bully policies should be at the federal, state and local levels. At the federal level, according to research, there has been a lack of accurate baseline, under-reporting of statistics and the absence of national, and in most cases, state level-surveillance systems that provide data that reports trends and injuries incurred at schools due to bullying encounters (Trump, 2011). To address this problem, congress should pursue federal

school crime reporting and tracking laws for K-12 schools to create an accurate database throughout the nation. The records obtained should identify trends and incidents of bullying from all states. Additionally, federal government agencies should mandate that all schools acknowledge, report, and identify security problems, as well as uphold and enforce zero tolerance policies. Interpretively, this means that the federal government agencies should monitor and have the capabilities to require all states to have the same consequences when penalties are ensued for the same crime.

Secondly, as suggested by Trump (2010) federal funds should be used to support effective unified K-12<sup>th</sup> grade anti-bully intervention programs that should be evaluated and reevaluated by parents, students, teachers, administrators, and community leaders to continuously develop these types of programs. By creating an “all inclusive” approach, students most importantly will have an opportunity to have input in determining whether a bully intervention program is effective in a school district, and the federal government should be responsible for supporting the school’s decisions.

At the state level, it should be noted that unfunded mandates without consumer buy-in, may lack real commitment, and well-written comprehensive policy based on best practices could be successful and inspirational (Edmondson & Zeman, 2011). Therefore, it is important that all bullying policies are consistent and added to all statewide school discipline policies. Additionally, state departments should financially provide assistance to school districts and school districts should fund supplemental bullying programs that support and meet school and statewide initiative needs.

To address the lack of state-wide consequences for individuals who bullying, each state should also have the same policy that holds parents responsible for paying for any damage sustained by bullies when a victim is attacked and criminalized provisions with

special penalties and punishments enforced when infringements are made on victims' rights. Other state mandates would require that therapy sessions be provided to families of bully victims.

Although nearly all states require the development of school policies on bullying, we know little about their implementation or effectiveness (Cornell, & Limber, 2015).

Moreover, schools must assure students that bullying policies will be immediately enforced, and that the ramifications of consequences will also be enforced when rules regarding bullying are disregarded. Schools need to conduct more than one discipline assembly explaining school policies. If these measures were implemented in all schools, then there would be no need for students or participants like Madison to express that, "there are no bullying policies at school."

So, if somebody got a referral for bullying somebody, they just get suspended ... the school policies do not exist. Tasha a focus group participant expressed,

They (counselors) really don't do... they really don't nothing but... the counsel...

I know one of the counselors, she'll walk around to classes, telling people to be safe on their way home. But... and it's not effective because it's not really for us students. It's mainly for the outside world, if you can say it.

Just to have counselors support the Stop the Bullying Program is not enough. It should be required that school counselors are required to continuously teach preventative bullying lessons in the classrooms throughout the year to all students at the elementary, middle and high school levels.

Briefly, based on past experiences, the recourse of action should acknowledge that existing bullying laws and policies have failed to protect students from incidences of bullying, and most are deemed ineffective. Hence, a need to create new laws and policies

that are more effective in allowing victims opportunities to overcome anxieties and live in a safe and inclusive environment. Consequently, the old laws and policies must be changed or revised to address bullying in all school where all stakeholders are expected to work together to create a safe environment where they support and protect all students from bullying. When all stakeholders are involved in a whole-school process, then everyone will have the power and the voice to change and/or eliminate bullying in all schools.

## **Conclusion**

The consequences of being victimized by bullying could be catastrophic, as the world learned from the Columbine tragedy and other horrific school shootings (Green, Dunn, Johnson, & Molnar, 2011). Unfortunately, research in the area of coping strategies that directly relate to incidents of bullying has been limited. Additionally, little research exists on effective intervention bullying programs and program recommendations (Austin, Reynolds, & Barnes, 2012). This information alone indicates an urgent need to address bullying problems at all levels in all schools.

It is the job of all administrators, teachers and staff to assume responsibilities in supervising students at all times and criminal and civil laws must be revised, evaluated and enforced. Regular ongoing school-wide discipline sessions should occur at least once a month and professional development workshops must be required where effective classroom management techniques are practiced. It should be the primary focus of all schools to create a safe school climate for students and that effective district and statewide intervention programs are implemented (Trump, 2010). Then and only then, will students feel safe in developing a strong desire to attend school to successfully succeed.

With the use of effective coping strategies, victims will obtain a voice and a choice to stand up to any bullying occurrences performed at home and at school. In the end, if these strategies are taught to victims of bullying, then relational aggression should decrease and the symptoms of suicidal behaviors, low grades, and feelings of being unsafe at school because of bullying incidences will decline (Bauman, 2008). The most effective methods of bullying reduction are to create a holistic whole school approach where all stakeholders are involved.

This system would collectively involve parents, students, teachers, administrators, and community leaders to utilize coping strategies as a resource to decrease the number of bullying situations. By creating a paradigm shift, all stakeholders should become more vigilant advocates to teach proactive techniques to victims of bullying in schools worldwide. Bullying is a terrible act of violence and no one has the right to harass or threaten anyone, physically, verbally, emotionally or mentally. As adults, everyone must take an active stance to create policies for change. No longer can individuals allow children to become victims of bullying. By using effective coping strategies, victims will be able to stand, fight and change the mindset of bullies. In the end, incidences of bullying will be eliminated in all schools in the United States and throughout the world and all students can experience school success in a safe and bully free environment.

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## **APPENDICES**

## APPENDIX A

### PERMISSION LETTER FROM THE DISTRICT



**Christopher L. Broughton**  
Interim Deputy Chief, Organizational Accountability

**Chief Executive Officer**  
Eric S. Gordon

**Board of Education**  
Denise W. Link  
*Board Chair*

Louise P. Dempsey  
*Vice Chair*

Anne E. Bingham  
Robert M. Heard, Sr.  
Willetta A. Milam  
Shaletha T. Mitchell  
Justin L. Monday, Esq.  
Stephanie Morales  
Lisa Thomas, Ph.D.

**Ex Officio Members**  
Ronald M. Berkman, Ph.D.  
Alex Johnson, Ph.D.

August 24<sup>th</sup>, 2015

Brenda Turner  
Cleveland State University  
School of Urban Education  
Doctoral Student

Dear Ms. Turner:

Please consider this letter your conditional approval to begin your research with the Cleveland Schools entitled "EXPLORING THE COPING STRATEGIES OF FEMALE URBAN HIGH SCHOOL SENIORS ON SCHOOL SUCCESSES AS IT RELATES TO BULLYING".

Please note the following issues:

Permission must be granted by the CMSD Principal at John Adams High School before conducting any research.

Electronic versions of all parental consent forms must be signed for the 12<sup>th</sup> grade seniors and submitted to Mr. Dennis Donohoe before administration of the survey or focus groups take place.

You will need to provide Mr. Donohoe of my staff with the exact wording of any and all survey questions that will be asked of students or staff before any questions are asked.

Our conditional approval does not mandate the participation of any individual student, staff or school. It is up to you to work with and obtain consent from John Adams High School and the individuals you wish to interview.

The results from surveys and focus groups need to remain anonymous and can only be used in the aggregate.

CMSD reserves the right to request any information that might benefit the District 45 days after completion.

Please keep this department apprised of progress of your project. We look forward to seeing the results to of your work.

Sincerely,

Christopher L. Broughton  
Deputy Chief of Organizational Accountability

A handwritten signature of Christopher L. Broughton in black ink.

1111 Superior Avenue East, Suite 1700, Cleveland, OH 44114 • Office: 216.838.0117 • Fax: 216.436.5050  
ClevelandMetroSchools.org

## APPENDIX B

### STUDENT CONSENT LETTERS



# \_\_\_\_\_

## Cleveland State University

### STUDENT CONSENT LETTER

College of Education and Human Services  
*Counseling, Administration, Supervision and Adult Learning*

Dear 12<sup>th</sup> Grade Female Seniors,

October 26, 2015

My name is Brenda Turner, and I am a doctoral student at Cleveland State University. I am requesting your participation in a research study regarding coping strategies relating to bullying used by 12<sup>th</sup> grade female seniors. This study further focuses on school success, which includes: referrals, attendance, grade point average, and participation in extracurricular activities of high school female seniors.

Bullying is one of the fastest growing social problems in our society today. Because of your social concerns and successes, your participation to share your coping strategies as a means to minimizing incidences of bullying, others may benefit and follow in your footsteps to overcome bullying in the United States and throughout the world.

If you decide to participate in this study, 40 students will be asked to sign this consent letter, complete a 5-minute short screening survey, and complete a 15 minute Online multiple choice Olweus Bullying Questionnaire. Your answers are anonymous, and the information you provide today is completely confidential. The total time needed to complete these tasks will be 20 minutes.

Eight of you will be randomly selected to participate in two focus group sessions at a later date. Each focus group session will take place at school and will last approximately one hour per session. All information discussed in the focus group will be confidential. Also, all documents, flash-drives, recordings, and transcriptions, will be secured in a locked cabinet and destroyed within three years. To minimize risks, students are asked not to share or discuss any information in these sessions with others. All measures to protect your rights will be taken to avoid breach of contract and maintain confidentiality. Any violations will be reported directly to the Principal. Additionally, to maintain a level of comfort and support, counseling services, from the school's counseling staff, will be available to all participants. Ms. Katherine McQueen's- 12<sup>th</sup> grade Guidance Counselor's contact numbers is: (216) 491-5781. You may call or go to her office any time, and she will make arrangements to privately speak with you.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary with no rewards or monetary compensation. If at any time you choose to withdraw from this study, there will be no consequences. To participate you must be a female high school senior who is at least 18 years of age or older. When signing the Consent Letter, you are agreeing to participate in both the online questionnaire and possibly the two focus group sessions, if selected.

At the conclusion of the meeting today, you will receive a copy of this Student Consent Letter for your records. By signing this consent letter, you are stating that, **"I understand if I have any questions about my rights as a research subject, I can contact the Cleveland State University Institutional Review Board at (216) 687-3630"**. If at any time you have any questions, you may also contact me at: Brenda Turner- Cleveland State University at (216) 687-2000 or you can e-mail me at: [b.turner02@vikes.csuohio.edu](mailto:b.turner02@vikes.csuohio.edu). Thank you in advance for your time, patience, and support.

Sincerely,

Brenda E. Turner  
Cleveland State University

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Please Print First Name)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Please Print Last Name)



# Cleveland State University

## STUDENT LETTER OF PARTICIPATION

### ONLINE QUESTIONNAIRE AND 2 FOCUS GROUP SESSIONS

College of Education and Human Services  
*Counseling, Administration, Supervision and Adult Learning*

Dear 12th Grade Seniors:

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Congratulations. You have been chosen to participate in the online Modified Olweus Questionnaire and 2 focus group sessions. The purpose of the study is to gain a better understanding of how coping strategies can be an effective tool to prevent incidences of bullying, and how these strategies can be used to promote school success. As a reminder, all information and communications are confidential and may not be discussed or shared with others. Expectations to honor this agreement are imperative.

In your envelope you will find three sheets. The first sheet is this cover letter, the second sheet provides directions to take the online questionnaire and the third sheet gives you information regarding the focus group discussions- including the dates, times and location of each session.

As previously stated, participation in the online questionnaire is completely voluntary. This means that you may withdraw at any time without receiving any type of consequence. Your rights will be completely protected and if you choose to withdraw from participation at any time. Minimal risks for participation is acknowledge and counselors will be available to address any level of discomfort before during or after any session. There are no rewards, or consequences if anyone chooses to participate or not in this study.

The online questionnaire is comprised of at least 40 questions and will take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete. All answers will be anonymous, private and confidential. Additionally, you will participate in 2 focus group discussions. Each focus group session will take approximately 1 hour to complete. As a reminder your answers will be anonymously recorded and must not be shared with anyone else based on your signed confidential agreement. If there is a breach of confidentiality, the Principal will be contacted immediately. As a reminder, participants signed a confidential agreement stating that no information will be discussed or shared with anyone else. Please read the following. I understand that:

- I am expected to participate in an online questionnaire only
- I am expected to not share or discuss any information about this research with anyone else
- Your name will not be shown or given to anyone other than the researcher.
- If breach of confidentiality occurs, the Principal will immediately be contacted
- Your information will be kept private and confidential, and all documents will be kept in a sealed locked file at Cleveland State University and destroyed after 3 years.
- If you experience any level of discomfort, counseling will be available.
- If I change my mind and withdraw from participation, please contact the researcher.
- No consequences will be given if a student chooses to withdraw from the study

Please read the following: ***“I understand that if I have any questions about my rights as a research subject, I can contact the Cleveland State University Institutional Review Board at (216) 687-3630.”*** If you have any questions regarding this research, you may contact me, Brenda Turner at Cleveland State University at (216) 687-2000 or e-mail me at [b.turner02@vikes.csuohio.edu](mailto:b.turner02@vikes.csuohio.edu).

**Directions to take the Online Modified Olweus Questionnaire**

Today, you will be taking an Online questionnaire. There are approximately 40 questions to answer. All questions are multiple-choice and only one answer to each question can be selected. If you do not find your exact answer to the question, then choose the best answer for that particular question. It should take approximately 15 minutes to complete the online questionnaire. If you do not finish, you may press pause and resume the questionnaire at a later time. You will have a 3-day window to complete the questionnaire. Please answer all questions and do not skip any answers.

When you are ready to begin the questionnaire you will go to the website\_\_\_\_\_, type in the pass-code\_\_\_\_\_, and follow the prompts as directed.

### Focus Group Directions

There will be 2 focus group sessions. As a reminder: the information shared during these discussions will be strictly confidential and may not be discussed with anyone else. All rights of each participant will be protected and breach of confidentiality, will be reported to the principal immediately. Risks are minimum and all participants will have the opportunity to seek counseling if they experience any levels of discomfort. Additionally, participants will have the right to withdraw at any time without penalties, or consequences. If you have any questions, do not hesitate to contact me at: [b.turner02@vikes.csuohio.edu](mailto:b.turner02@vikes.csuohio.edu).

#### Focus Group 1

Date:

---

Time:

---

Location:

---

#### Focus Group 2

Date:

---

Time:

---

Location:

---

As you continue to complete all necessary requirements prior to graduation, it is with great honor that I congratulate you in advance for your hard work and perseverance. Take care and best of luck today, tomorrow and in the near future. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me immediately. Thank you in advance for your time, patience, and support.

Sincerely,

Brenda E. Turner-Doctoral Student  
Cleveland State University



# Cleveland State University

## STUDENT LETTER OF PARTICIPATION

### ONLINE QUESTIONNAIRE AND 2 FOCUS GROUP SESSIONS

College of Education and Human Services  
*Counseling, Administration, Supervision and Adult Learning*

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Date\_\_\_\_\_

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When you are ready to begin the questionnaire you will go to the website \_\_\_\_\_, type in the pass-code \_\_\_\_\_, and follow the prompts as directed.

## APPENDIX C

### INSTRUMENT



# \_\_\_\_\_

# Cleveland State University

## WRITTEN SCREENING SURVEY QUESTIONS

College of Education and Human Services

*Counseling, Administration, Supervision and Adult Learning*

### Written Screening Survey Questions

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

1. Have you ever been victimized by a bully at school? Yes      No
2. What is your grade point average? (circle one)  
1.0      1.5      2.0      2.5      3.0      3.5.
3. How many extracurricular activities do you participate in? (circle one)  
1    2    3    4    5    6
4. How many days have you missed school? (circle one)  
1-6      7-12      13-18      19-24      25-30
5. How many referrals have you received in the past year?  
0    1-4    5-8    9-12    13-16    17-20

Thank you!

## APPENDIX D

### IRB APPROVAL FORM



# Cleveland State University

College of Education and Human Services  
*Counseling, Administration, Supervision and Adult Learning*

IRB - Study Details

<https://csuohio.cayuse424.com/rs/irb/#study/76946>

IRB

≡

Study Details

4

Brenda Turner

Studies / Study Details

+ New Submission

Study Details

Submissions

Approved

IRB-FY2016-39 Exploring The Coping Strategies Of Female Urban High School Seniors On School Successes As It Relates To Bullying

PDF

Delete

Link Proposal

Approval Date:

Expiration Date:

Organization:

Sponsors:

Active Submissions:

10-20-2015

10-18-2016

College of Education,  
College of Grad Studies

N/A

N/A

#### Key Study Contacts

Team Member	Role	Number	Email
Frederick Hampton	Principal Investigator	216-687-3828	f.hampton@csuohio.edu
Brenda Turner	Co-Principal Investigator	216-687-2000	B.TURNER02@vikes.csuohio.edu
Frederick Hampton	Primary Contact	216-687-3828	f.hampton@csuohio.edu



# Cleveland State University

College of Education and Human Services  
*Counseling, Administration, Supervision and Adult Learning*

**From:** <[cayuseirb@csuohio.edu](mailto:cayuseirb@csuohio.edu)>  
**Date:** October 20, 2015 at 10:39:18 AM EDT  
**To:** <[B.TURNER02@vikes.csuohio.edu](mailto:B.TURNER02@vikes.csuohio.edu)>, <[f.hampton@csuohio.edu](mailto:f.hampton@csuohio.edu)>  
**Cc:** <[cayuseirb@csuohio.edu](mailto:cayuseirb@csuohio.edu)>  
**Subject:** IRB-FY2016-39 - Initial: IRB Approval

Oct 20, 2015 7:39 AM PDT

Dear Frederick Hampton,

**RE: IRB-FY2016-39**

**Exploring The Coping Strategies of Female Urban High School Seniors On School Successes as It Relates to Bullying**

The IRB has reviewed and approved your application for the above named project, under the category noted below. Approval for use of human subjects in this research is for a one-year period as noted below. If your study extends beyond this approval period, *you must contact this office to initiate an annual review of this research.*

**Approval Category: Expedited**

**Approval Date: October 20, 2015**

**Expiration Date: October 18, 2016**

By accepting this decision, you agree to notify the IRB of: (1) any additions to or changes in procedures for your study that modify the subjects' risk in any way; and (2) any events that affect that safety or well-being of subjects. Notify the IRB of any revisions to the protocol, including the addition of researchers, prior to implementation.

*Reviewer Comments:*

*This study is now approved.*

Thank you for your efforts to maintain compliance with the federal regulations for the protection of human subjects. Please let me know if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Michelle Lofton  
IRB Analyst  
Cleveland State University  
Sponsored Programs and Research Services  
(216) 687-3624

## APPENDIX E

### SEMI-STRUCTURED FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS



## Cleveland State University

College of Education and Human Services  
*Counseling, Administration, Supervision and Adult Learning*

### Semi-Structured Interview Questions

#### **Semi-Structured Research Question for Question #1**

1. Tell me about your experiences you had as it relates to bullying. (Please be specific).
2. How has your bullying experience impacted your ability to succeed?
3. Explain why you think people bully? What advice would you give them?

#### **Semi-Structured Research Question for Question #2**

1. What systems are in place that are safe or unsafe to help you cope with bullying?  
Describe them.
2. Do you think the principal, teachers and staff understand what you are experiencing or going through as it relates to bullying? Explain why or why not?
3. What strategies did you use to help you cope as a victim of bullying? Tell me about your processes to survive and overcome bullying? Explain your success?

(cont.)

**Semi-Structured Research Question for Question #3**

1. Tell me about your accomplishments.
2. Have you had any discipline, or attendance problems because of bullying?  
Explain.
3. Has being a victim affected you in participating in extracurricular activities?  
Explain how.
4. What are your current school disciplinary policies? Explain why you think they are effective or not?
5. Tell me about a typical day from your perspective, from an administrator, lunch attendant, teacher, bully, bystander, and victim's lens?

## APPENDIX E

### RESEARCH QUESTIONS



## Cleveland State University

College of Education and Human Services

*Counseling, Administration, Supervision and Adult Learning*

### Research Questions

1. What are the experiences young female seniors encounter in an urban high school setting as it relates to bullying?
2. What coping strategies does one use to navigate through situations of bullying and manage to achieve?
3. What is the relationship between bullying, and victimization as it relates to school attendance, participation in extra-curricular activities, discipline, and academic achievement?