School Climate and Bullying Research in the USA

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Dr. Cornell has studied youth violence for 30 years and has assisted numerous schools in the development of violence prevention programs. He has authored more than 200 publications in psychology and education, including two books: Guidelines for Responding to Student Threats of Violence and School Violence: Fears versus Facts.
Main Points

1. Need for a theory-based model of school climate

2. Good schools are like good parents – demanding, but supportive.

3. An authoritative school has less bullying, less aggression toward teachers, and fewer suspensions.
School Climate

1. School climate is broadly defined with many components.
2. There is a need for theoretically grounded measures that have good psychometric properties.
3. The authoritative school climate model provides a theoretical foundation for school climate and bullying research.

Bullying

1. Bullying is a widely recognized problem in schools, especially the middle grades.
2. Bully victimization is associated with both emotional and academic problems.
3. Many prevention authorities assert that a positive school climate can help reduce bullying.
Classic study of parents

Two contrasting groups
- “Authoritarian” strict discipline-oriented
- “Permissive” lacking in discipline

Source: Baumrind, 1966

Four types of parenting

- Authoritarian
- Authoritative
- Negligent
- Permissive
Survey of principals

Two contrasting groups

- “Get-tough” strict discipline-oriented
- “Be supportive” prevention-oriented

Source: Skiba & Edl, 2004

Four types of school climate

- Authoritarian
- Authoritative
- Negligent
- Permissive
Measurement Needs

1. Brief measures of structure and support for students and teachers.

2. Prior research has overlooked the nesting of students within schools. Need a multi-level assessment of factor structure.

3. Criterion-related validity in relation to student outcomes.

Authoritative School Discipline: High School Practices Associated With Lower Bullying and Victimization

Anne Gregory, Dewey Cornell, Xitao Fan, Peter Sheras, Tse-Hua Shilt, and Francis Huang
University of Virginia

In this study we examined authoritative discipline theory, which posits that 2 complementary aspects of school climate—structure and support—are important for adolescents’ safety in school. Using a statewide sample of over 7,300 ninth-grade students and 2,000 teachers randomly selected from 290 high schools, we showed, using hierarchical linear modeling, that consistent enforcement of school discipline (structure) and availability of caring adults (support) were associated with school safety. Structure and support were associated with less bullying and victimization after we controlled for size of school enrollment and the proportion of ethnic minority and low-income students. These findings suggest that discipline practices should not be polarized into a “get tough” versus “give support” debate because both structure and support contribute to school safety for adolescents.

Prior study of 9th grade developed measures of Structure and Support.
New study of 7th and 8th grade
http://psycnet.apa.org/index.cfm?fa=browsePA.ofp&jcode=spq

Virginia Secondary School Climate Study

Schools – 423 (98.4%)
Teachers – 9,134 (79%)
7-8th Students - 43,805 (84.8%)
• Split sample
• EFA
• Multilevel CFA (Within and Between schools)

Konold, et al. (2014) School Psychology Quarterly
Support - Care and Willingness to Seek Help

Most teachers and other adults at this school care about all students
1.5

Most teachers and other adults at this school want all students to do well
2.9

Most teachers and other adults at this school listen to what students have to say
3.2

Most teachers and other adults at this school treat students with respect
2.8

There are adults at this school I could talk with if I had a personal problem
2.9

If I tell a teacher that someone is bullying me, the teacher will do something to help
3

I am comfortable asking my teachers for help with my school work
3

There is at least one teacher or another adult at this school who really wants me...
3

Overall SUPPORT
3

- Split sample
- EFA
- Multilevel CFA (Within and Between schools)

Konold, et al. (2014) School Psychology Quarterly
**Prevalence of Teasing and Bullying Scale**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Agree/Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bullying is a problem at this school.</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students here often get teased about their clothing or physical appearance.</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students get teased or put down because of their race or ethnicity at this school.</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is a lot of teasing about sexual topics at this school.</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students here get teased or put down about their sexual orientation.</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Stable factor structure
- Works for males and females, grades 6-12, white and minority students
- Teacher and student versions
How much teasing and bullying do we observe in schools with different levels of structure and support?

IV - 4 groups of schools

DV - School percentile in Prevalence of Teasing and Bullying

Konold, et al., in press School Psychology Quarterly
Multi-level multivariate analysis of peer victimization and school climate

Cornell, Shukla, & Konold, under review
Interaction Effect of Structure and Support on PTB

Structure has a stronger effect on PTB when support is high.
Student Aggression Reported by Teachers

- A student said mean or insulting things to me: 68%
- A student stole my personal property: 29%
- A student threatened to hurt me: 12%
- A student physically attacked, pushed, or hit me: 6%
- A student threatened me with a weapon: 1%

Averages for 9,134 7th and 8th grade teachers in 387 schools

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Student Aggression Toward Teachers across 4 Types of School Climate

- Disengaged (156): 67%
- Permissive (36): 56%
- Authoritarian (36): 60%
- Authoritative (159): 42%

Type of School Climate (387 schools)
Schools with high structure and high support:

Findings are consistent across schools varying in
• School size
• Student poverty %
• Minority students %
• Urbanicity

Recommendations for schools

• Schools should assess their levels of structure and support.
• Schools do not have to choose between strict discipline and being supportive.
• Improving school climate may improve student behavior.
Virginia Secondary School Climate Study

In collaboration:

- Virginia Department of Education
- Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services and Center for School Safety

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Virginia Youth Violence Project

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