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Cyberbullying and the Middle School Adolescent: Educator Perceptions

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CYBERBULLYING AND THE MIDDLE SCHOOL ADOLESCENT:
EDUCATOR PERCEPTIONS

By
Kalani Crognal LaFrancis

A Dissertation Submitted to the
Gardner-Webb University School of Education
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Education

Gardner-Webb University
2019

Approval Page

This dissertation was submitted by Kalani Crognal LaFrancis under the direction of the persons listed below. It was submitted to the Gardner-Webb University School of Education and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Gardner-Webb University.

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Dedication

In memory of my Momma; she believed I could do anything. I did it, Momma!

In honor of Thomas Simon, John Stephen, and Anna Elaine; may my work serve as a remembrance of the significance of lifelong learning while ensuring you that with perseverance you can accomplish anything your heart desires. Thank you for allowing me to take this journey, and for always understanding the seemingly endless days of “homework.” All that I do has been, and will always be, for you. I love you barrels and barrels piled high to the sky.

But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength. ~Isaiah 40:31.

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Before January 2008, this accomplishment would have never materialized. I am thankful for the little Freudian slip that kept me on track and to Dr. Howard Gardner for discovering multiple intelligences. A 30% chance is enough. #icandohardthings

Abstract

CYBERBULLYING AND THE MIDDLE SCHOOL ADOLESCENT: EDUCATOR PERCEPTIONS. LaFrancis, Kalani Crognal, 2019: Dissertation, Gardner-Webb University

Victimization and perpetration of cyberbullying are ongoing threats to school systems across the United States. Cyberbullying is a vast problem for adolescents, due to constant access and availability of technology via the online environment. This mixed methods study was based on the theoretical framework of Bandura's (1989) theory. This study investigated the perceptions of middle school educators concerning cyberbullying via educator surveys, focus groups, and interviews to gather mixed methods data. This study took place in four middle schools in upstate South Carolina within District X. One hundred three educator participants took the survey, 12 educators participated in focus groups, and eight educators were interviewed. The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of middle school educators regarding cyberbullying, build on previous literature, and add related knowledge to current research. Results showed that educators are aware and extremely concerned about cyberbullying at the middle school level. Educators perceived parental awareness, parental involvement, and parental monitoring could directly impact cyberbullying. Additionally, educators saw a need to educate students, parents, and teachers to impact cyberbullying. A future study that examines parent perceptions with regard to student monitoring would be beneficial as well as a larger sample size.

Keywords: cyberbullying, educators, perception, middle school, adolescents

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction

The 21st century has seen the rapid expansion of many technological advancements and numerous digital innovations that have drastically altered the way people communicate. Infinite information is accessible around the clock and is literally at the fingertips of anyone with a networked device. The development of the Internet has made instant global communication routine, a thought that was unfathomable 50 years ago. The Internet made way for digital interaction via email, instant messaging, text messaging, and social media as methods of communication that are now mainstream in society (Smith, 2015). *Facebook* reported the social media network has over “2.38 billion active users” (Clement, 2019, para 1) and is accessible in 70 languages worldwide (Collier & Magid, 2012).

The Internet and digital communications allow near constant access to information. According to Little et al. (2012), one downside of unending information is the “near impossibility of disconnecting from technology” (p. 252). A “fast-paced dynamic” is not continually beneficial (Little et al., 2012, p. 252). Sengupta and Chaudhuri (2011, as cited in Smith, 2015) stated, “the constant access and availability of the Internet can lead to cyberbullying because of the amount of information teens disclose on social networking sites through posting, blogging, and chatting” (p. 1).

Hymel and Swearer (2015) reported that although bullying prevalence rates vary, as many as 10-33% of adolescents reported bullying victimization, and another 5-13% acknowledged bullying others (Schneider, O’Donnell, Stueve, & Coulter, 2012; Nansel et al., 2001; Perkins, Craig, & Perkins, 2011). Regarding its impact, “Bullying is an

important social phenomenon that is estimated to affect hundreds of millions of adolescents worldwide” (Volk, Dane, Marini, & Vaillancourt, 2015, p. 9). For sixth-through 10th-grade students, “more than 3.2 million—nearly one in six—are victims of bullying each year, while 3.7 million bully other children” (Fox, Elliott, Kerlikowske, Newman, & Christeson, 2003, p. 4). The numbers shed light on the mammoth challenge of bullying today.

Bullying is a power imbalance between two individuals; and with this imbalance, the stronger individual, the perpetrator, deliberately and repeatedly causes harm (physical or psychological) to the weaker individual, the victim (Olweus, 1991, 1993, 1999). Equally, cyberbullying is defined as the “willful and repeated harm inflicted through the use of computers, cell phones, and other electronic devices” (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010, p. 208). Bullying in its most modern form is cyberbullying, which presents its own problems and challenges. According to Feinberg and Robey (2009), the inability to escape the Internet and the online community is the crux of cyberbullying for many adolescents. As reported in an article distributed by *The Washington Post*, teens spend one third of their day, nearly 9 hours, using some sort of digital media (Tsukayama, 2015). To obtain a tighter grasp on the concept of adolescent cyberbullying, it is imperative to understand the adolescent middle school student.

Adolescents use an extensive array of technological devices each day, persistently linked to others through digital communication and social networking webpages. According to Prensky (2001), today's students are digital natives, with the rest of the population being digital immigrants. Digital natives have grown up with technology at their fingertips and know little of life prior to the advanced technology that is a vital part

of their daily lives. Digital natives learn, study, and interact differently than do digital immigrants. Digital immigrants have witnessed the digital transformation firsthand. During the last several decades, the rapid propagation of digital technology (Prensky, 2001) has brought about numerous changes in the way individuals communicate. Blair (2003) stated that adolescents are better prepared to communicate digitally than are adults. Face-to-face communication skills are taught in schools; however, the newest form of communication available to students is online or digital communication via personal mobile devices via the Internet. As a result of the constant access provided by mobile devices, online communication has become more accessible and readily used by adolescents. The Pew Research Center indicated that 92% of teens reported being on the Internet every day, while 24% specified that they are online “almost constantly” (Lenhart, 2015, as cited in Moreno, D’Angelo, & Whitehill, 2016, p. 50).

This study focused on middle school educator perceptions of cyberbullying. Chapter 1 includes an overview of the study, statement of the research problem, theoretical framework, and the purpose statement. This chapter explores the research questions, demographics, and definitions of significant terms. Chapter 1 continues with the role of the researcher and concludes with a summary. A literature review is provided in Chapter 2 to further examine the paradox of cyberbullying. Within Chapter 2, emphasis is given to the adolescent middle school student.

Statement of the Research Problem

Shapiro and Margolin (2014) noted, “Adolescence is a time of struggle to find balance between autonomy and connectedness” (p. 14). The Internet offers new contexts for trying out new identities, practicing social skills, and becoming interconnected with

peers (Shapiro & Margolin, 2014). Adolescents relish the agates of the Internet; among these jewels lie a potential risk.

Due to the frequency of communication, technology usage and the explosion of information (Faucher, Jackson, & Cassidy, 2014), adolescents are now experiencing cyberbullying at alarming rates. Cyberbullying is an Internet-based form of aggression and has become a national issue (Bauman & Newman, 2013). In the United States, 97% of adolescents are connected to the Internet (UCLA Center for Communication Policy, as cited in Tokunaga, 2010). On average, adolescents between 11 and 18 years old are exposed to some sort of electronic media for more than 11 hours each day (Rideout, Foehr, & Roberts, 2010). Mieczynski (2009) indicated that “more than half of the respondents have had at least one client who was the victim of online harassment or cyberbullying” (p. 1). According to research from Thatcher, Wretschko, and Fridjhon (2008), problematic Internet experiences can include cyberbullying, pornography addiction, the downloading and distribution of illegal material, and online sexual harassment.

The threat of cyberbullying victimization and perpetration escalates with the frequency of time spent online (Aricak et al., 2008; Dowell, Burgess, & Cavanaugh, 2009; Juvonen & Gross, 2008; Sticca, Ruggieri, Alsaker, & Perren, 2013; Ybarra, Diener-West, & Leaf, 2007; Ybarra, Mitchell, Wolak, & Finkelhor, 2006). Thus, the digital dependence of youth may contribute to the vast preponderance of cyberbullying. Steinberg (2008) stated that this is extremely important since adolescents struggle with impulsivity. Adolescents have swiftly moved from cyber utilization, as defined by using the internet for extra communication, to cyber immersion, utilizing it as “primary and

necessary” (Englander, 2012, p. 44). With the increasing popularity and daily use of the Internet and mobile devices among children and adolescents, cyberbullying has emerged as the newest type of victimization among adolescents. Hinduja and Patchin (2014), the leading researchers of cyberbullying, maintain that the frequency of victimization through cyberbullying is increasing. Hinduja and Patchin (2014) estimated the number of adolescents who have experienced cyberbullying victimization varies from 10-40%. Gasser and Palfrey (2008) found a significant connection between aggressive thoughts, violent behavior, and digital technology use. Administrator researchers in the field have completed 15 plus years of research that analyzed effect sizes for experiments studying aggression and the influence of TV and movie violence (Anderson et al., 2003, as cited in Gasser & Palfrey, 2008). The U.S. Surgeon General reported the need to curtail the adversarial outcomes of middle violence on youth (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [DHHS], 2001).

Clark (2005) found that youth have virtually continuous access to technology, which poses a growing problem for educators. Teachers and administrators work tirelessly to attempt to prevent bullying behaviors. Though the Internet was once deemed “the savior of education,” Subrahmanyam and Greenfield (2008) stated that schools today are struggling to regulate the precarious uses of digital media during the school day (p. 119). Smith (2015) specified many teachers and administrators use preemptive methods to stop bullying behaviors to safeguard the victims of bullying. Preventative measures include school-wide policies (Dyrli, 2005); direct bully intervention via school counselors (Chibbaro, 2007); and the involvement of administrators, parents, and community (Rice et al., 2015) as well as an assessment of the school climate (Hanish &

Guerra, 2000). Countless anti-bullying programs are available to assist educators in identifying aggressors while educating students about bullying (Payne & Smith, 2013).

Cyberbullying, unlike traditional bullying, can be hidden during the school day and yet still disrupt the educational atmosphere. Due to mobile devices being prohibited in most schools during the school day, cyber aggressors are not easy to notice. Cyber perpetrators typically do damage after school hours (Agatston, Kowalski, & Limber, 2007; Beran & Li, 2007), therefore causing chaos during the next school day (Patchin & Hinduja, 2006).

As cited in an article by Nixon (2014), Juvonen and Gross (2008) indicated the occurrence rates for cyberbullying victimization fluctuate from 4-72%; on average, 20-40% of youth report victimization (Tokunaga, 2010). In the Report of the Internet Safety Technical Task Force, Schrock and Boyd (2008) revealed, “17.3% of middle school students had been ‘cyberbullied’ in their lifetime and 43% had experienced victimizations that could be defined as cyberbullying” (p. 23). Cyberbullying perpetration rates vary from study to study; and this variation is due to the many different definitions of cyberbullying perpetration (Cook, Williams, Guerra, Kim, & Sadek, 2010; Hinduja & Patchin, 2005; Lenhart & Madden, 2007) as well as the variance of self-reporting. Cyberbullying perpetration rates range from 3-36%, according to Aricak et al. (2008), further confirmed via a report from WiredSafety.org (2012, as cited in Nixon, 2014).

In a 2011 study of 14- to 24-year-olds, 76% claimed that cyberbullying was a serious problem, with 56% identifying personal experience with online harassment (Camp, 2016). Cyberbullying is a national (Bauman & Newman, 2013) and global (Berger, 2007; Brighi, Guarini, Melotti, Galli, & Genta, 2012) “public health concern”

(Nixon, 2014, p. 154) that has the capability to adversely affect the social and emotional growth and development of adolescents.

Theoretical Framework

Social cognitive theory (SCT). The theoretical framework for this study was based on Bandura's social learning theory. Developed in the 1960s, it became the model known today as SCT. SCT is based on the principle of learning through the observation of others during social interaction. Bandura's theory stated that people learn through the observation of others within their environments, through their own individual experiences, and through behaviors that cultivate cognitive development (Bandura, 1988). Learning through observation was Bandura's primary claim; "whether it be positive or negative," individuals learn "through personal experiences" (Smith, 2015, p. 10). This theory was derived from the idea of modeling behavior. Further, Bandura (1971) indicated, "Although much social learning is fostered through observation of real-life models, advances of communication have increased reliance upon symbolic models" (p. 2). According to LaMorte (2016), the unique feature of SCT is social influence and the significance of internal and external social reinforcement. LaMorte indicated, "Learning happens in a social context with dynamic and reciprocal interaction of the person, environment and behavior" (p. 5).

Albert Bandura, a well-known psychologist, researched human behavior for over 50 years and was the first to propose the idea that personality is exceptionally complex and includes both innate and environmental factors (Zimmerman & Schunk, 2002). Bandura's SCT proposed two primary modes of learning: imitation and modeling (McLeod, 2011). According to Bandura (1986), modeling and imitation are minutely

different. Bandura (1986) asserted that modeling is the learning that takes place after a model is observed performing an action, while imitation is the duplicated behavior shown by the model. Observational learning is of significant importance, according to Bandura (1986). Children often display and imitate behaviors viewed in the home or at school. Children imitate behaviors from peers, parents, teachers, and other members of their communities. According to Smith (2015), “A onetime incident would not necessarily influence a child to bully, but repeated measures could lead to this type of activity according to the premise of the SCT” (p. 10). As reported by Strangor, Jhangiani, and Tarry (2015), Bandura argued that children’s schemas and attitudes about aggression change; it is more than a simple imitation of specific observed behaviors.

SCT can assist in the explanation of how aggression at school could stem from behaviors modeled at home or by peers (Smith, 2015). Bandura’s SCT is often utilized to explain aggressive behavior (Swearer, Wang, Berry, & Myers, 2014). According to Huesmann (1988), the existence of environmental and household characteristics that encourage the learning and release of aggressive behaviors likely account for the greatest variation in aggression in individuals. Numerous researchers have concluded that children observing their parents within social situations and relational situations, predominantly their parents’ hostility, is likely to affect the “children's own social problem solving skills” (Duman & Margolin, 2007, p. 1). As reported by Huesmann, a child’s exposure to others’ aggressive behaviors will heighten the possibility that the child will respond to victimization with aggressive behaviors as well. SCT can help one understand how aggressors learn to bully through observational learning and reinforcement of those aggressive and violent behaviors.

Moral disengagement. Moral disengagement is a widespread characteristic of individuals who cyberbully (Kyriacou & Zuin, 2016). Moral disengagement is a tenant of cyberbullying and is defined as a “mechanism through which moral self-sanctions are selectively activated and disengaged from detrimental behavior at different points in the self-regulatory process” (Bandura, 2002, as cited in Smith, 2015, p. 9). Moral disengagement is a defense mechanism that one uses to rationalize his/her actions while within an online environment (Runions & Bak, 2015). Bandura (2002) specified that people behave ethically detached as a cognitive mechanism; this cognitive mechanism can clarify the correlation of moral disengagement and the motivation of perpetrators of cyberbullying.

Online disinhibition effect (ODE). Researchers and clinicians note that individuals who modify their behavior while online are less likely to modify their behavior when interacting in face-to-face situations (Suler, 2004). They may be more opinionated and thus less restrained while expressing themselves while online; this phenomenon is called ODE. ODE occurs when daily Internet users participating in online activities act out more frequently and intensely while on the Internet (Suler, 2004, as cited in Smith, 2015). ODE is a “loosening of social restrictions”; when this occurs, individuals display lower levels of inhibitions while communicating and interacting with others on the Internet (Jansen, Junger, Montoya, & Hartel, 2013, p. 35). Suler (2004) reported that people affected by ODE would likely never behave the same in real life or “face-to-face” situations as they do while online (p. 321). Suler indicated there are two directions of disinhibition, one benign and one toxic (Suler & Phillips, 1998). The benign disinhibition reveals compassion and real emotions, while the toxic disinhibition

breeds anger, frustration, and threats. Disinhibition is simply the way(s) a person shows lack of restraint when it comes to social cues and behaviors (Suler, 2004, as cited in Monjezizadeh & Untoro, 2016). This lack of restraint is manifested in impulsive behaviors, poor risk assessment, and a general disregard for social conventions within an online environment (Grafman, Boller, Berndt, Robertson, & Rizzolatti, 2002). The anonymity is provided in many modes of digital communication (Mishna, Saini, & Solomon, 2009) and “not only fosters playful disinhibition but reduces social accountability, making it easier for users to engage in hostile, aggressive acts” (Li, 2006, p.160). Studies from Suler (2004) found that individuals with a high tendency of ODE have a higher likelihood of being perpetrators of cyberbullying.

ODE incorporates six factors. These components consist of dissociative anonymity, invisibility, asynchronicity, solipsistic introjection, dissociative imagination, and the minimization of authority (Suler, 2004).

Dissociative anonymity. Dissociative anonymity is often described as “you don’t know me.” In psychology, dissociation is what occurs when people convince themselves that the behaviors they display are not indicative of their personality (Cardefia, 1994). While operating on the Internet, people construct a username, which provides anonymity if one so desires. Very few individuals, other than network administrators or those who are technology savvy, might be able to locate an individual’s email address or Internet Protocol (IP) address. For the most part, people on the web will only know what an individual is willing to openly disclose. The anonymity that the Internet provides is a large part of ODE invisibility or “you can’t see me.”

Invisibility. Online environments provide a “cloak of invisibility” (Pearce,

Thogersen-Ntoumani, & Duda, 2014, p. 17) of sorts for its population. Invisibility allows people not to worry about how what they post on the web sounds or the response(s) received from others. This invisibility overlaps with anonymity giving individuals a sense of further concealment (Suler, 2004). Online invisibility provides an amplification of Suler's (2004) ODE.

Asynchronicity. Asynchronicity could be described as “see you later.” On the Internet, communication is asynchronous, which means not simultaneous, and “allows interaction to occur at different times” (Ohlund, Yu, Jannasch-Pennell, & Digangi, 2000, p. 5). Communication online does not always occur in real time; therefore, individuals do not have to cope with an individual's instant response, and this leads to disinhibition. Suler (2004) maintained, “In real life, the analogy might be speaking to someone, magically suspending time before that person can reply, and then returning to the conversation when one is willing and able to hear the response” (p. 323). Self-disclosure is shaped by responses that are not continuous and thus might not typically conform to social norms (Suler, 2004). Some digital users view asynchronous communication as “running away” (Suler, 2004, p. 323) after posting personal or hostile information on the Internet.

Solipsistic introjection. Solipsistic introjection could be defined as “it's all in my head.” Without body language and face-to-face cues, communication online becomes a voice in your head (Suler, 2004). The primary communication online is text communication which allows for individual interpretation of what another person's message might mean (Suler, 2004). According to Suler (2004), interpretation is subject to “one's internal representational system” (p. 323), which shapes how a person presents

him or herself online. When reading online, one tends to “subvocalize” (Suler, 2004, p. 323) the conversation occurring. This practice can lead to dissociation wherein the reader feels as comfortable as if they are simply talking to themselves; their voice in communicating is therefore that of the “real life person.”

Dissociative imagination. Dissociative imagination could be said as, “it’s just a game.” Suler (2004) specified that once on the Internet, people like to “escape or dissociate” (p. 323), which can be done consciously or unconsciously. Seemingly, the online persona they create exists in an altered universe away from the real world; and thus, dissociation becomes easier, as if an individual’s online life becomes a type of game rather than reality (Suler, 2004).

Minimization of authority. Minimizations of authority might be defined as, “we’re equals.” When on the Internet, an individual’s perception is that everyone has the same status; authority figures are of no concern in cyberspace. The absence of social cues of status levels the playing field online. According to Suler (2004), a person’s prominence while online is ultimately determined by one’s writing ability and technical expertise, unlike in the real world where authority defines communication. These six factors make up ODE: dissociative anonymity, invisibility, asynchronicity, solipsistic introjection, dissociative imagination, and the minimization of authority (Suler, 2004).

When one looks at the complex social nature of bullying and bullying behaviors, SCT and ODE are vital investigatory components (Swearer et al., 2014).

Purpose Statement

The intent of this mixed methods study was to investigate the perceptions of educators regarding middle school cyberbullying. The three groups of educators were

included in the study; administrators, school counselors, and teachers. The current study surveyed middle school educators at four middle schools in rural, upstate South Carolina. This study can be valuable to assist educators in better understanding the problem of cyberbullying and thus add to current strategies of prevention and intervention. Increased incidents of cyberbullying call for this research (Citron, 2009; Juvonen & Gross, 2008; Price & Dalgleish, 2010). One of the most predominant methods of aggression faced by adolescents, aged 11 to 14, is cyberbullying (Carlson & Cornell, 2008). It is expected that the evidence obtained from this research study can provide middle school educators further insight that will enable them to better accomplish anti-bullying prevention and intervention efforts.

Research Questions

A strong research question and rationale guided the entire research project through data analysis (Labaree, 2009). This chapter addressed the methodology used to answer the following overall research question: What are the perceptions of educators related to middle school cyberbullying? To successfully answer the overall question, these research questions were utilized:

1. What are the perceptions of teachers related to middle school cyberbullying?
2. What are the perceptions of school counselors related to middle school cyberbullying?
3. What are the perceptions of administrators related to middle school cyberbullying?

Demographics

Demographics provide data descriptive information about the statistical

characteristics of human populations (Gruenewald, Treno, Taff, & Klitzner, 1997). This descriptive demographic information includes school information. Demographic information assists the researcher in understanding the components of the research process over which one has no control (Gruenewald et al., 1997). Demographic information was essential in data analysis.

Each of the study schools were located within a public school district in rural, upstate South Carolina. The name District X will be the pseudonym used to identify the study school district throughout the study. The schools are represented by names: School 1, School 2, School 3, and School 4. The educator participants for the study were volunteers from each of the four middle schools in the study. Table 1 represents the demographic information for each of the four study schools based on the South Carolina Department of Education 2018 School Report Cards.

Table 1

Demographic Information for Study Schools

Category	School 1	School 2	School 3	School 4
Classified as Title I	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Student Enrollment	373	403	553	550
Teacher Population	25	28	39	37
Percentage of Teachers with Advanced Degrees	52	61	56	62
Percentage of Students in Poverty	69	78	81	58
Percentage Free/Reduced Lunch Population	71	100	100	66

Each of the four middle schools had over 50% of their student population living in

poverty, with more than 60% of students receiving free or reduced lunch.

Definition of Significant Terms

The following operational terms have been defined in order to provide meaning and consistency within the current study to assist the reader's understanding of any esoteric language.

Adolescent middle school student. For the purpose of this study, adolescent middle school student will be defined as a child between the ages of 11 and 15.

Traditional bullying. Olweus stated, "A person is bullied when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other persons, and he or she has difficulty defending himself or herself" (Olweus & Limber, 2010, as cited in Shetgiri, 2013, p. 1). The behavior of bullying is defined as a power imbalance between two individuals where the perpetrator deliberately and repeatedly causes harm (physical or psychological) to the weaker individual, the victim (Olweus, 1991, 1993, 1999).

Cyberbullying. The "willful and repeated harm inflicted through the use of computers, cell phones, and other electronic devices" (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010, p. 208). Further, cyberbullying is "an aggressive, intentional act or behavior that is carried out by a group or an individual, using electronic forms of contact, repeatedly and over time against a victim who cannot easily defend him or herself" (Slonje, Smith, & Frisen, 2013, p. 1).

Cyberbully perpetrator. The aggressor (bully) who deliberately and repeatedly harms another person through electronic communication (Kowalski, Morgan, & Limber, 2012).

Cyberbully victim. The person being repeatedly and deliberately harmed (bullied) via electronic or digital means of communication (Kowalski et al., 2012).

Participant(s). For the purpose of this study, middle school educators (teachers, school counselors, and administrators) at the four study schools.

Perception. A person's knowledge or insight about a situation (Marshall, Varjas, Meyers, Graybill, & Skoczylas, 2009).

Prevalence. Common, generally accepted, widespread (Merriam-Webster, 2019).

SCT. Behavior learned via observation of other individuals (Bandura, 1986, as cited in Smith, 2015).

For the purpose of this study, cyberbullying and electronic, digital, Internet abuse, harassment, and aggression will be used synonymously and interchangeably to designate bullying by any electronic or digital means.

Researcher's Role

Initial interest is the focus "for both the photographer and the researcher" (Machi & McEvoy, 2016, p. 23). The researcher became interested in the issue of cyberbullying after working more than 20 years as an educator while witnessing the rapid rise and utilization of technology and digital media by students. According to Machi and McEvoy (2016), a subject of sincere interest or curiosity will yield a solid study. During the researcher's career in education, the researcher observed firsthand the advent of cyberbullying alongside the utilization of technology inside and outside of the classroom.

According to Teherani, Martimianakis, Stenfors-Hayes, Wadhwa, and Varpio (2015), in research, the primary data collection instrument is the researcher. Superior research results from diligence of the researcher and an organized approach, which

includes gathering sufficient data which are synthesized and analyzed (Charmaz & Belgrave, 2007). The researcher collected data concerning the perceptions of middle school educators as they relate to middle school cyberbullying. The researcher was a teacher-librarian in one of the four study schools. As a teacher-librarian, the researcher was responsible for collaboration with teachers, the dissemination of specific information, and technology implementation. In order to remain the independent researcher, the researcher digitally expedited the distribution of the cyberbullying educator perceptions survey and acted as a facilitator and observer during the teacher focus groups and interviews. These actions reduced researcher bias during administration.

The researcher strives to have a positive working relationship with the staff at each of the study schools, having led district-level presentations, collaborated with multiple school personnel during professional development opportunities, and while serving as a chairperson for the response to intervention team. Within the research setting, the relationships established are reciprocally supportive and respectful. The researcher believes that these positive relationships are an advantage to the study because positive working relationships improve performance and produce positive outcomes.

Summary

Provided in this chapter are an introduction to the study as well as the historical background of traditional bullying, the research problem, purpose statement, and research questions. Chapter 1 included the definitions of significant terms and concluded with the role of the researcher in the study. Chapter 2 contains a review of the relevant literature focusing on cyberbullying and further examines the major findings of cyberbullying.

Chapter 3 outlines the methodology and research procedures used to collect the study data and includes an explanation of the study design. The study findings are explained in Chapter 4, while Chapter 5 provides key conclusions and recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2: Review of Related Literature

Introduction

A literature review demonstrates the researcher's knowledge of a specific subject gained while researching (Fink, 2013). A literature review "helps researchers glean the ideas of others interested in a particular research question, but it also lets them read about the results of other (similar or related) studies" (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006, p. 67). The intent of this literature review was to examine educator perceptions of cyberbullying as they relate to the middle school adolescent.

Literature Search Procedures

The literature reviewed for this chapter was retrieved utilizing *Google Scholar* and several online databases, including *ProQuest*, *EBSCO host*, *Research Gate*, *Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)*, and *Academic Search Premier*. In the guiding search of cyber, bullying, perception, middle school, educator, and adolescent, these keywords initially yielded 1,265 results. Additionally, digital and print copies of peer-reviewed educational journals and peer-reviewed books were utilized. In order to provide pertinent information that enhanced the existing literature, the researcher completed this literature review for the mixed methods study using a theoretical framework for scholarly literature reviews.

This study examined the theoretical framework in Chapter 1, Bandura's SCT. Moral disengagement and ODE are examined within the context of SCT and comprise the theoretical context for the study. This literature review begins by analyzing the characteristics, growth, and development of the adolescent middle school student. Subsequently, there is a review of both traditional bullying and cyberbullying followed by an in-depth examination of cyberbullying concerning historical perspectives, types of

cyberbullying, and cyberbullying law. The final section of the literature review closes with current research and a summary statement.

Bullying is a widespread problem (Boulton, 1997; Gini & Pozzoli, 2009; Wolke, Woods, Bloomfield, & Karstadt, 2001), and bullying within schools is an ongoing hazard to the welfare and education of the student (Cross et al., 2011). The purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions of educators as they relate to middle school cyberbullying.

Overview of the Problem

Adolescents are coming of age and grappling with development and personal identity, as have countless adolescents before them; however, adolescents today are doing so in a digital world (Byron, 2008). Adolescents will communicate, learn, play, and express themselves via social media and the Internet. Utilization of the Internet by adolescents is 97% (UCLA Center for Communication Policy, as cited in Tokunaga, 2010). The Internet provides an online space for adolescents to learn, socialize, and engage with their peers via social media and other online applications (Allen, Ryan, Gray, McInerney, & Waters, 2014; Rice & Barman-Adhikari, 2014). During this time online, adolescents are interacting with their peers and developing relationships (Fox, Warber, & Makstaller, 2013; Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 2008; Wolak, Mitchell, & Finkelhor, 2003), playing multiplayer online video games (Cole & Griffiths, 2007), and exploring their identities within the bounds of the Internet (McKenna & Bargh, 2000). Englander (2012, as cited in Nixon, 2014) specified, “Adolescents in the U.S. culture are moving from using the Internet as an ‘extra’ in everyday communication (cyber utilization) to using it as a ‘primary and necessary’ mode of communication (cyber immersion)” (p. 143). This digital culture and amplified use of technology present both

opportunities as well as challenges (Jenkins, Purushotma, Weigel, Clinton, & Robison, 2009).

The progress of technology is often associated with the development of civilizations. Technology was thought to be the answer to all education problems (Collins & Halverson, 2009); however, schools today are plagued with regulating the appropriate use of digital media during the school day (Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 2008). School personnel have implemented anti-bullying programs and intervention strategies to protect bullying victims (Smith, 2015). Payne and Smith (2013) reported numerous anti-bullying programs available to support educators as they foster awareness of bullying, its prevention, and in the identification of aggressors. Prevention of bullying behaviors is a tireless mission of both teachers and administrators who are ill prepared to handle cyberbullying (Storm & Storm, 2005, as cited in Aoyama & Talbert, 2010). Bullying intervention during middle school is essential, as bullying peaks in early adolescence (Milsom & Gallo, 2006).

The actions of cyber aggressors, although typically occurring outside of school (Agatston et al., 2007; Beran & Li, 2007; Shariff & Hoff, 2007; Stewart & Fritsch, 2011; Tokunaga, 2010), have the distinct ability to drastically disrupt the school day (Hinduja & Patchin, 2012a). Adolescents with near “constant access” (Mills, 2016, p. 4) present a mounting crisis for educators (Clark, 2005). Although most schools prohibit the use of digital and mobile devices throughout the school day (Hill, 2011), cyber aggressors are present and are not easy to recognize (Slonje, Smith, & Frisen, 2012, as cited in Peebles, 2014). Perpetrators are able to conceal their identity, as they are identified only by a username or false name (Hinduja & Patchin, 2014).

Tokunaga (2010) found that 20-40% of U.S. adolescents have experienced at least one incident of cyberbullying in their lifetime. Of the types of harassment, cyberbullying is one of the most predominant forms for students in Grades 6-8 (Blair, 2003; Crawford, 2002, as cited in Chibbaro, 2007).

The creation of the Internet has forever changed how individuals interact. Electronic communication is now the most frequent type of communication among adolescents (Talwar, Gomez-Garibello, & Shariff, 2014). The vast majority of U.S. adolescents (93%) use the Internet (Owens, Behun, Manning, & Reid, 2012). Adolescents are digital dependent; 75% of all 11- through 17-year-olds have their own mobile device (Lenhart, 2012), with 73% using social networks daily (Lenhart, 2009, 2012; Lenhart, Ling, Campbell, & Purcell, 2010). Social networks have millions of adolescent users (Al-Jubayer, 2013). According to the Kaiser Family Foundation, 11- through 18-year-olds spend roughly 11 hours daily engaged in or exposed to some type of digital media; this does not include media required for schoolwork (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2010, as cited in Shapiro & Margolin, 2014).

The probability of cyberbullying has further developed with the rapid infiltration of mobile devices and networked computers into the lives of adolescents. With this widespread use of the Internet and electronic devices, cyberbullying has become the newest type of victimization, and the frequency of victimization through cyberbullying is increasing (Hinduja & Patchin, 2014). Studies by Gasser and Palfrey (2008) show a connection between digital technology use and aggressive thoughts and violent behavior. Throughout adolescence, verbal and indirect bullying increase (Cohn & Canter, 2003), with 39% of middle school students (Neiman, 2011) having had an incident with

cyberbullying weekly or, in some instances, daily. Students aged 12 through 18 who were bullied indicated that 21% were picked on by peers, 8% were victims of rumors, 11% were physically assaulted, and 9% reported being cyberbullied (Robers, Zhang, & Truman, 2010, as cited in Dupper, 2013). Additionally, 6% were threatened with physical harm, 5% report being excluded from activities, 3% had personal property destroyed, and 3% described being coerced into actions in which they had no interest (Robers et al., 2010, as cited in Dupper, 2013).

According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), 20% of school age students have experienced bullying on school property (Kann et al., 2014). Across multiple studies, student rates of bullying vary from 10-50% (Atria, Strohmeier, & Spiel, 2007; Cook et al., 2010), and cyberbullying rates reach up to 30% (Mishna, Khoury-Kassabri, Gadalla, & Daciuk, 2012). Cyberbullying has become a significant issue for adolescents. Juvonen and Gross (2008) have acknowledged cyberbullying as a national public health concern. Cyberbullying presents a danger to the emotional and social development of adolescents (Raskauskas & Stoltz, 2007, as cited in Camp, 2016). Cyberbullying perpetration and cyberbullying victimization put forward a “significant detrimental impact on an adolescent’s health” (Nixon, 2014, p. 154).

This literature review explored the characteristics and development of the early adolescent, to assist in the better understanding of the complexities of those most often influenced by cyberbullying.

Characteristics and Development of Adolescents

To say adolescents are unique is a gross understatement. Adolescents have a special spirit; they embrace their awkwardness, enjoying life to the fullest while

struggling with social (Shapiro & Margolina, 2014) and academic challenges.

Adolescents wrestle with truths (Fenwick, 1987), their identity (Heilman, 1998), and answers to the numerous questions of life with a natural curiosity. Between the years of 10 and 14, students encounter more changes than throughout any other time in their lives, other than during the first 18 months of life (Cromwell, 1998). No other grade span compares to middle school when considering both intellectual and physical as well as psychological and social development of students (Fenwick, 1987).

This study focused on educator perceptions of cyberbullying on middle school students. Attempts to understand and explain the complicated adolescent years are not reserved to recent history. In fact, more than 2,300 years ago, Aristotle stated, “The young are heated by Nature as drunken men by wine” (Binford, 2012, p. 1). Many scholars and theorists have attempted to explain adolescence as the most challenging timespan of the human journey. Adolescence demonstrates the transition to adulthood and is considered the “turning point” of human development (Erikson, 1963, as cited in Kroger, 2008, p. 207). According to Piaget (1972), adolescence is the period between the ages of 12 and 15 and is considered the transitional period between childhood and adulthood. Stages of adolescence include early adolescence, which occurs between the ages of 11-14; middle adolescence, arising between 15-17 years of age; and late adolescence being the period from age 18-21 years of age (Stang & Story, 2005). With each transition to a new stage, adolescents begin to confront new physical and emotional changes and challenges. One thing that continues to remain true is the presence and importance of technology in their lives.

For an historical perspective on adolescence, one must look to child psychologist

Erik Erikson. According to Erikson (1963, 1968), during adolescence, a person begins to search for his own meaning and begins to attempt to answer the existential question, “Who am I?” This period of adolescent growth is riddled with mixed feelings and emotions and is marked by the development of relationships and commitment to principles, ideals, and friends. Erikson (1963) also stated that adolescents tend to avoid responsibilities during this period and experiment with rebellious behaviors and activities in a desperate attempt to find themselves (Erikson, 1968). Adolescence is a time of crucial development of a person's identity in which children begin to question their values, focus on social integrity, and develop interpersonal relationships (Erikson, 1963). Erikson called this psychosocial crisis of identity “identity versus role,” and further stated that adolescents are developing the beginnings of their personal identity, pride, and dignity and the standards that they will live by in the future (Erikson, 1968, as cited in Sokol, 2009, p. 142).

Psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg developed his theory of moral judgment, stating that adolescents begin the development of autonomous morality, a theory first established by Piaget (Barger, 2000). Autonomous morality is the period when adolescents begin to understand that people construct rules and laws and these rules and laws are changeable if the majority agrees to the changes. During the period of autonomous morality, moral reasoning is established by an individual moral code which is not wavered by the opinions or expectations of society (Sigelman & Rider, 2014).

The biological development of adolescence is known as the beginning of puberty, which includes a rapid physical growth spurt (Blakemore, Burnett, & Dahl, 2010) and numerous psychological changes. This growth surge includes distinctive physiological

changes including height, weight, and body composition. Reproductive changes, as well as changes within the adolescent brain, are largely influenced by increased hormonal activity. Jean Piaget, a Swiss psychologist, was a pioneer and the leading contributor to the current knowledge of child growth and cognitive development (Woodhead, 1999). Piaget (1967) marked the universal stages of cognitive development and biological maturation with his theories of child and adolescent development. Piaget (1967) indicated that adolescents exit the concrete operational stage, then enter the formal operational stage. According to Piaget, during the formal operational stage, adolescents begin to acquire the aptitude to think more abstractly and more logically (Kramer, 2007).

From a theoretical perspective, there are many improvements in cognitive ability during adolescence. These improvements include hypothetical and abstract thinking, metacognition, and realistic thinking (Shirk, 2013). Cognitive development in adolescence begins with a more complex way of thinking. Examples of this include the ability to think abstractly while considering various possibilities and the ability to reason from principles while forming new ideas or questions of their own (Stang & Story, 2005). Adolescents are beginning to consider multiple points of view in order to compare or debate ideas and opinions, and this is the first time in their cognitive development that they are aware of their own thought processes. Paus (2005) on adolescence:

It is the final phase of a prolonged pattern of growth and maturation, which have emerged late in the evolution of our species and may confer an evolutionary advantage by providing ample time for the maturation of the brain and its cognitive apparatus before it reaches the full potential of a young adult. (p. 60)

To better understand the early adolescent, one must understand the social

development during the ages of 10 through 14 years. A typical transition through adolescence involves some degree of disruption of emotions and attitudes with oneself and others (Wise, 2000). During adolescence, adolescents begin to develop self-concept and sense of identity (Erikson, 1968). This includes balancing their identity within the environment as well as focusing on identity with relation to sexual orientation (Kroger, 2007). Social development during adolescence focuses on relationships with peers, family, and even beginning romantic relationships (Grieger, Kusunoki, & Harding, 2014).

The primary focus for the majority of adolescents is simply “fitting in” within their peer groups. Their relationships with their friends have top priority, and this has a substantial influence on an adolescent’s development. According to Erikson (1968), this period is one of conflict of identity where peer relationships are the most important. Adolescent relationships are formed and reformed while the adolescent confronts challenges in finding his/her own identity within social interaction. Social interaction is crucial for cognitive development (Talay-Ongan & Ap, 2005). According to Vygotsky (1978), this period of childhood is called the “origin of reasoning” and has more to do with language and thought and the ability to communicate with others. This interval of growth is seen as the “complicated years,” as communication is challenging on its own without the addition of this transitional period for adolescents.

Standing out from the crowd while fitting in is the mission of adolescents – to create an identity and chase autonomy while seeking peer acceptance and attaining reliable friendships (Crosnoe & Johnson, 2011). On the struggle of adolescence in the digital age, Ito et al. (2009) stated, “Today’s youth may be coming of age and struggling

for autonomy and identity as did their predecessors, but they are doing so amid reconfigured contexts for communication, friendship, play, and self-expression” (p. 4).

Traditional Bullying

The period of adolescence is a challenging time for youth; within this period, the threat of bullying drastically increases the hardships faced by adolescents. Many researchers believe that cyberbullying stems from traditional bullying (Li, 2006; Raskauskas & Stoltz, 2007). Bullying is by no means a new concept; the usage of the word “bully” dates back to the early 16th century (Harper, 2008, as cited in Donegan, 2012). Bullying is peer aggression in its most authentic form (Hinduja & Patchin, 2014). Adolescent bullying is undoubtedly an extremely old occurrence; children being repeatedly harassed and attacked by other children has been documented for years and years (Olweus, 1994a). Bullying is characterized as a collection of behaviors that cause physical or emotional harm (Matsunaga, 2009). Norwegian Psychologist Dan Olweus is revered as the father of bullying. His research in the early 1970s on bullying intervention was the first of its kind (Koo, 2007; Olweus, 1978). During the last 35 plus years, Olweus’s Bullying Prevention Program has been the model for many anti-bullying programs across the world. Olweus (2007) stated, “A person is bullied when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other persons, and he or she has difficulty defending himself or herself” (p. 11).

The main characteristics of aggressors or “bullies” include the individual being quick tempered and impulsive; having a dominant personality, coupled with a lack of empathy toward others, specifically the victim; and finally, having proactive or reactive aggressors (Frick & Viding, 2009, as cited in Panayiotou, Fanti, & Lazarou, 2015). Few

studies have been completed to determine the attributes of aggressors and perpetrators (Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004a). According to Bradshaw, Sawyer and O'Brennan (2007), "70.6% of teens have seen bullying" (p. 361) taking place in their schools and nearly "30% of young people admit to bullying (another) themselves" (p. 361).

A study cited by DHHS stated that 29% of middle school students reported experiencing bullying in the classroom, hallway, and/or locker room, with 23% occurring in the cafeteria (Bradshaw et al., 2007). Additionally, 19.5% reported being bullied while in gym; and 12.2% of bullied students were even bullied in the restroom (Bradshaw et al., 2007). Research specifies that victims of bullying are more likely to develop an assortment of health related and academic adverse outcomes (Gini & Pozzoli, 2009; Schneider et al., 2012, as cited in Bell et al., 2014) as well as antisocial and criminal culminations (Bender & Losel, 2011; Lodge & Baxter, 2014).

Prevention and intervention in middle school are vital, as a study by Milsom and Gallo (2006) demonstrated that bullying has a tendency to escalate in early adolescence. Although there are hundreds of anti-bullying programs (Smith, Ryan, & Cousins, 2007; Twemlow & Sacco, 2008), very little is known of their effectiveness (Hall, 2017). Regarding the success of anti-bullying programs, Smith (2011, as cited in Yeager, Fong, Lee, & Espelage, 2015) stated, "On average, anti-bullying campaigns have had some modest success" (p. 2). Anti-bullying prevention programs "yield modest reductions" (Cunningham et al., 2016, p. 461) in bullying in North American schools.

The Olweus Bullying Prevention Program is one of the most renowned anti-bullying programs (Olweus, 2003). Olweus's anti-bullying prevention program is intended to be implemented in elementary and middle schools, for students ages 5 to 15

years old (Olweus et al., 2007). School-wide, the entire student body participates in the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program, while specifically identified students, either victims or perpetrators of bullying, receive additional individualized focused instruction and interventions (Olweus et al., 2007). The main tenets of Olweus' program aim to improve relations among peers, while making schools more positive and safer for student learning and development (Olweus, 2003). The goals of the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program include decreasing current bullying problems, the preventing of future bullying incidents, and improving peer relations school-wide (Olweus, 2003).

Olweus' program outcomes include reductions in student reports of bullying as well as decreased incidents of fighting and general antisocial behavior. Classroom social climate improves with "more positive academic attitudes toward school and schoolwork" (Olweus, 1994b, p. 1184). Olweus's program is said to provide greater focused support for students who have been victimized and effective strategies for student perpetrators (Olweus, 2007).

The behavior of bullying is defined as a power imbalance between two individuals; with this imbalance, the stronger individual, the perpetrator, deliberately and repeatedly causes physical or psychological harm to the weaker individual, the victim (Olweus, 1991, 1993, 1999). The bullying behavior is characterized as being unwanted by the victim. Bullying is typically thought of in the traditional sense as repeated, deliberate verbal or physical harassment (Milsom & Gallo, 2006).

Bullying often accompanies mental health problems such as anxiety and depression (Anthony, Wessler, & Sebian, 2010; Thompson, Arora, & Sharp, 2002), antisocial behaviors, low academic achievement, and criminal actions (Gini & Pozzoli,

2009; Olweus, 1993; Pontzer, 2010; Vaillancourt, Hymel, & McDougall, 2003; Volk, Henderson, Neuman, & Todd, 2006). Bullying has also been associated with the use of illegal substances, aggressive impulses, and poor school attendance (Bradshaw et al., 2007; Gastic, 2008; Juvonen & Galvan, 2009; Klomek, Marrocco, Kleinman, Schonfeld, & Gould, 2007; Luk, Wang, & Simons-Morton, 2012; Nansel et al., 2001; Tharp-Taylor, Haviland, & D'Amico, 2009; Topper, Castellanos-Ryan, Mackie, & Conrod, 2011). Additionally, bullying has been known to cause suicidal ideation and action (Duke, Pettingell, McMorris, & Borowsky, 2010; Fleming & Jacobsen, 2009; Holt et al., 2015).

Consequently, victims and perpetrators are affected by bullying, as well as the observer or bystander (Kowalski & Limber, 2007). According to Rivers, Poteat, Noret, and Ashurst (2009), the observation of bullying behaviors at school is now associated with numerous “mental health risk factors for students not directly involved” (p. 211). Common results of bullying can range from psychological harm to injury or even death of the victim (Espelage & Horne, 2008; Olweus, 1991, 1999). Globally, bullying involves between 100 to 600 million adolescents annually (Volk et al., 2006), and “studies show that bullying tends to peak in late childhood/early adolescence, making prevention and intervention efforts in middle school crucial” (Milsom & Gallo, 2006, p. 12). Traditional bullying is typically conducted by a lone perpetrator or a group (Olweus, 1993), usually occurs in or close to school, and frequently goes unreported by the victim (Beale & Scott, 2001). Cyberbullying, however, can take place anywhere and at any time of the day, and the perpetrator is oftentimes faceless by way of the Internet. Donegan (2012) stated, “This age-old conflict has matched the pace of technological evolutions, making it more dangerous and harder to contain” (p. 33). Rushkoff (1995) referred to

this online atmosphere as “Cyberia,” a place where rules do not apply, and restrictions are few. According to Donegan, the use of cell phones and websites, encompassing social networking sites and chat rooms, offers bullies the opportunity to expand into cyberspace.

Among the pervasive use of technology, mobile devices, and the Internet, a new and different method of bullying exists – cyberbullying. Affirming the ongoing development of cyberbullying, Tokunaga (2010) stated that cyberbullying is not referenced in scholarly articles before 2004. Over the last 10 years, occurrences of cyberbullying have grown drastically (Slonje & Smith, 2008), driven by the development of newer and more powerful mobile devices and the popularity of social media. Cyberbullying takes place over the Internet or via mobile devices, and it is a vastly increasing problem (Aoyama & Talbert, 2010) due to the availability of technology. Cyberbullying can be defined as electronic harassment via the Internet (Diamanduros, Downs, & Jenkins, 2008; Hinduja & Patchin, 2007). Like its counterpart traditional bullying, cyberbullying is deliberate and repetitious (DeHue, Bolman, & Vollink, 2008; Olweus, 1991); however, unlike traditional bullying, there does not seem to be a need for an imbalance of power (Vandebosch & Van Cleemput, 2009).

Cyberbullying is fundamentally different from traditional bullying, and according to Dodds (2014), its primary characteristic is anonymity. On the topic of the anonymity of cyberbullying,

Anonymity allows those bullies to be more scathing, hurtful and unless the bully makes real and intended threats or repeatedly and personally harassed a student, those that are caught usually cannot be punished by the school or through criminal law; most of this sort of bullying does not take place at school and therefore, the

students are not under its jurisdiction. (Simmerle, 2003, as cited in Li, 2005, p. 10).

The Internet provides anonymity that offers cyberbullies freedom to attack their victims without detection. Compton, Campbell, and Merger (2014) found that anonymity is one of the aspects that distinguishes between traditional bullying and cyberbullying. Physical strength is a factor in traditional bullying, as the victim is typically weaker than the perpetrator; in cyberbullying, there is no physical strength factor because the final characteristic is the lack of ability for physical interaction. Cyberbullying tactics include demeaning or hurtful text messages, inappropriate or explicit messages (Hinduja & Patchin, 2014) that may or may not include photos (Li, 2006), threatening emails (MacDonald & Roberts-Pittman, 2010), and comments or posts on social media (Whittaker & Kowalski, 2015). According to Donegan (2012), technology has a distancing effect on adolescence that allows perpetrators the opportunity to say more harsh things than traditional face-to-face bullying.

The following section of the literature review closely examined cyberbullying. The historical significance was studied, followed by the types of cyberbullying; recent research; and finally, cyberbullying-related law.

Historical Overview

Cyberbullying has a relatively minute history until a little over 2 decades ago. The word “cyberbully” did not exist prior to the late 1990s when the Internet became commercially available, and later advanced significantly in the 2000s when smartphones became the must-have, trendy item for youth. The advancement of digital technologies and network connections have allowed users to gain faster and more efficient access to

cyberspace. Kowalski et al. (2012) attributed the ongoing advancement of technologies to the rise in cyberbullying. Technology is abundant and widespread; it is a significant part of the daily lives of adolescents (Madden, Lenhart, Duggan, Cortesi, & Gasser, 2013). Youth demand connection to the online community.

One of the first scholarly references of cyberbullying occurred in the survey Crimes Against Children Research Center prepared by the University of New Hampshire in 2000 (Finkelhor, Mitchell, & Wolak, 2000). Finkelhor et al. (2000) surveyed 1,501 adolescents between 10 and 17 years old. In this early study, the Crimes Against Children Research Center found that of the 1,501 adolescents surveyed, 6% had experienced some form of harassment (Finkelhor et al., 2000). Eleven years later, Popovic-Citic, Djuric, and Cvetkovic (2011) sampled 387 middle school students ages 11 through 15 via a short survey that determined the frequency of technology use and also looked at various types of cyberbullying. Popovic-Citic et al. found that 10% of students acknowledged bullying others and 20% stated that they had been bullied themselves.

In a study paralleling the relationship concerning traditional bullying and cyberbullying, Kowalski et al. (2012) studied secondary students in sixth through 12th grade. The student participants completed a survey about their personal experiences with both traditional bullying and cyberbullying. Of the 4,531 students, 38% reported being a victim of traditional bullying, and 32% stated that they were aggressors of traditional bullying (Kowalski et al., 2012). Further, 17% of students surveyed stated they were victims of cyberbullying, with 11% disclosing perpetration of cyberbullying. There is a solid connection between traditional bullying and cyberbullying (Kowalski et al., 2012; Vandebosch & Van Cleemput, 2009).

Cyberbullying

Nixon (2014) stated that judged against traditional bullying, cyberbullying is distinctive in that it influences “an unlimited audience with increased exposure across time and space” (p. 143), protects words and safeguards images in a permanent state, and “lacks supervision” (p. 143).

Cyberbullying is an “intentional and overt act” (Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004b, p. 320) of aggressive behavior towards another individual online or the utilization of computers and or cell phones to inflict continual and willful harm on another person (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010). Lenhart and Madden (2007) indicated that cyberbullying can involve private messages such as text or chat messaging, semi-public messages such as harassment via an email list, or public communication as on social media.

Wolak, Mitchell, and Finkelhor (2006) reported that 90% of parents are justifiably apprehensive about the safety and welfare of their children while online. The prevalence rates of cyberbullying victimization vary, ranging from 4-72% (Juvonen & Gross, 2008), with only “10-40%” (Cyber-Bullying Research Center, 2011, as cited in Lindsay & Krysik, 2012, p. 705) of adolescents actually reporting online harassment. In the U.S., between 15-57% of school age adolescents have experienced cyberbullying (Hinduja & Patchin, 2005; Lenhart & Madden, 2007).

The consequences of cyberbullying are potentially devastating and have recently elicited much public attention (Wong, Cheung, & Xiao, 2018). In 2006, cyberbullying first came into national attention when Megan Meier, a 13-year-old from Missouri, committed suicide after a series of aggressive online messages (O'Neil, 2008). Megan was involved in an online relationship with a young man, “Josh Evans,” who was, in fact,

the mother of one of Megan's friends who had created a fictitious profile (Tokunaga, 2010). After messages between the two turned hostile on the social media website known as *Myspace*, "Josh" posted "Everyone in O'Fallon knows who you are. You are a bad person and everybody hates you. Have a [expletive] rest of your life. The world would be a better place without you" (Beckstrom, 2008, p. 1). Following this post, Megan hung herself in her bedroom closet. Lori Drew, the mother who created the fictitious profile, was later charged in criminal court with being in violation of the Computer Fraud and Abuse Act (CFAA) and was convicted of a misdemeanor violation (Stewart & Fritsch, 2011). The mother of Megan Meier, Tina Meier lobbied for cyberbullying awareness and a change in the law in the wake of her daughter's suicide. U.S. Representative Linda Sanchez presented the Megan Meier Cyberbullying Prevention Act in 2008 and 2009 (Zuchora-Walske, 2010).

There are numerous conceptual definitions of cyberbullying used in research as well as various ways to classify different forms of cyber aggression. To provide a thorough representation, here are the relevant definitions, provided in order of occurrence in scholarly literature. Finkelhor et al. (2000) defined online harassment as offensive behavior or threats sent to or posted online for others to view. Ybarra and Mitchell (2004a) defined cyberbullying as a deliberate and explicit action of aggression made online directed at an individual. According to Hinduja and Patchin (2010), cyberbullying is defined as harm that is inflicted through electronic text that is both "willful and repeated" (p. 208) in nature. Slonje and Smith (2008) defined cyberbullying as "aggression that occurs through current technological devices and specifically mobile phones or the Internet" (p. 147). Willard (2007) described cyberbullying as using the

Internet or other digital communication devices to transmit or post harsh or damaging text messages or images. Li (2008) stated that bullying derives from email, cell phones or personal digital devices, instant messaging, or the Internet. Juvonen and Gross (2008) cited cyberbullying as threats or insults to an individual via use of digital communication devices or the Internet. Smith et al. (2008) defined cyberbullying as both an “intentional and aggressive act” (p. 376) achieved via electronic contact, occurring repeatedly against a victim unable to defend him/herself. According to Besley (2009), cyberbullying is the use of communication technologies to deliberately and repeatedly inflict harm via an “aggressive, hostile or harmful act” (p. 278) on an individual or group. As detailed by the CDC, bullying is “electronic aggression” (Ferrara, Ianniello, Villani, & Corsello, 2018, p. 1) which occurs across digital devices and instruments such as email, websites, instant messages, social media, text messages, and other digital applications.

Regardless of the accepted definition of cyberbullying, understanding why individuals cyberbully others can help one obtain essential information about the nature of cyberbullying behaviors. Vargas, Talley, Meyers, Parris, and Cutts, (2010) detailed, “Uncovering the motivations for cyberbullying should promote greater understanding of this phenomenon and potentially reduce the interpersonal violence that can result from it” (p. 269). The motives of cyberbullying can vary and include cyberbullying for the purpose of entertainment (Smith et al., 2008; Zhou et al., 2013), in order to gain power or status among peers or the online community (Buhrmeister, 1996; Compton et al., 2014; Dooley, Pyzalski, & Cross, 2009; Nocentini et al., 2010; Ojanen, Aunola, & Salmivalli, 2007; Vandebosch & Van Cleemput, 2008; Ziegler & Rosenstein-Manner, 1991).

Further motives for cyberbullying include acting out revenge (Shapka & Law,

2013; Varjas, Talley, Meyers, Parris, & Cutts, 2010; Zhou et al., 2013) for the purpose of harming an individual (Mishna, Cook, Gadalla, Daciuk, & Solomon 2010; Rafferty & Vander Ven, 2014; Talwar et al., 2014) and avoidance of adult punishment (Compton et al., 2014; Varjas et al., 2010).

Researchers have identified three separate groups regarding cyberbullying (Arıcak, 2009; Kokkinos, Antoniadou, & Markos, 2014). The first type is known as “pure-bullies,” who bully individuals online without becoming a cyber-victim. The second type, known as “pure-victims,” were individuals who were victimized online but never cyberbullied other individuals (Arıcak, 2009, p. 171). The last type is the “bully-victims,” who were victimized online and also became bullies (Arıcak, 2009, p. 171). In addition to these three types, there are also “non-involveds,” also referred to as “bystanders”; these individuals never cyberbullied others and were never victimized (Coloroso, 2008). Even though non-involveds and bystanders are present, they typically do not intervene (Li, 2010). These observers passively watch the bullying episode (O’Connell, Pepler, & Craig, 1999) or even join the bullying behavior (O’Connell et al., 1999; Twemlow, Fonagy, & Sacco, 2004). Kowalski and Limber (2007) indicated, “The potential audience of bystanders and observers of electronic bullying is limitless” (p. S29). The majority, 85%, of bullying incidents happen in front of peers (Craig & Pepler, 1997, as cited in O’Connell et al., 1999), with 88% of middle school students reporting having watched a bullying incident (Hoover, Oliver, & Hazler, 1992).

Cyberbullying is still evolving (Spears, Slee, Owens, & Johnson, 2009) and thus is tremendously difficult to define in one encompassing sentence. Due to the number of operational definitions, the reported frequency of cyberbullying varies drastically

(Walker, Sockman, & Koehn, 2011). Willard (2007) defined cyberbullying as “being cruel to others by sending or posting harmful material or engaging in other forms of social aggression using the Internet or other digital technologies” (p. 1).

Types of Cyberbullying

According to Willard (2007), there are eight types of cyberbullying, including flaming, harassment, cyberstalking, denigration, exclusion, outing, impersonation, and trickery. Within these eight types of cyberbullying, there are two distinctive methods of bullying, “the first is a more direct form of aggression (e.g., Flaming, Harassment, Denigration, Outing), while the second is more indirect and specific to cyberbullying (e.g. Impersonation)” (Willard, 2005, as cited in Francisco, Simao, Ferreira, & das Dores Martins, 2015, p. 168).

Flaming. Flaming is a form of public bullying that is similar to harassment but refers to a short headed online “fight” directed at an individual via instant messaging or chatrooms. During flaming, angry and rude comments are exchanged. Flaming typically occurs in front of a digital audience on social media; therefore, it does not typically occur via private emails or text messages (Smith, 2015). Popular among high school students, flaming is considered an easy way to “get the best of” another individual. An individual elicits a flaming incident in order to “inflare” the feelings of the target of the insults. The slang term “burn” is an expression used to describe a harsh insult; the usage of the word likely came about because of flaming. According to O’Sullivan and Flanagan (2003), flaming does not contribute to the conversation taking place online; instead it is an attempt to socially wound an individual while proclaiming power over them. According to Pilkey (2011), the most frequently utilized method of cyberbullying for

middle school students is flaming.

Cyber harassment. Traditionally, harassment has been viewed as a direct incident concerning a perpetrator and a victim occurring in front of a group of spectators, typically peers (Espelage & Swearer, 2003); however, the digital age has brought about a new technique of peer harassment, recognized as cyber harassment (Li, 2005). Cyber harassment involves the perpetrator repeatedly sending malicious messages to an individual. Messages of this nature are often rude, insulting, and offensive and are sent through electronic means. Cyber harassment can transpire in public online forums such as a chatroom or on the social media platform *Facebook*; however, it typically occurs through private emails or text messages. Cyber harassment that occurs in school typically consists of intimidation, humiliation, and threats by an aggressive individual made against a weaker victim (Graham & Juvonen, 2002). If not stopped, cyber harassment can evolve into cyberstalking, which involves continual threatening or offensive messages and can eventually lead to physical harassment offline as well as online. According to a cyberbullying study by Pilkey (2011), cyber harassment was the least common type of cyberbullying by middle school students.

Cyberstalking. Another tactic used by a perpetrator to cyberbully another person is cyberstalking. According to Kowalski et al. (2012, as cited in Smith, 2015), “cyberstalking involves the use of electronic devices towards a victim in a repetitive threatening and harassing manner” (p. 18) for the purpose of tormenting the victim (Delaney, 2017). Another definition described cyberstalking as the “repeated pursuit of an individual using electronic or Internet-capable devices” (Reyns, Henson, & Fisher, 2011, p. 1153). The National Crime Victimization Study *Stalking Supplement* specifies

that cyber harassment or cyber threats can arrive to the victim via emails, instant messaging platforms, message boards, social media, and other Internet sites (Baum, Catalano, Rand, & Rose, 2009). Cyberstalking perpetrators can also use digital and electronic devices to secretly watch their targets; these devices can include hidden cameras, microphones, computer software programs, and tracking devices like the Global Positioning System (Reyns et al., 2011). The majority of cyberstalking victims are inexperienced Internet users (Berson, Berson, & Ferron, 2002).

Denigration. According to Popovic-Citic et al. (2011), denigration and harassment are the most universal methods of cyberbullying. Smith (2015) stated, “Denigration is the act of posting, emailing, or texting information that is untrue about another person” (p. 19). A few of the more deplorable examples of denigration include modifying or editing photos to make a person look unflattering in order to make fun of the person or creating undesirable lists on webpages about peers such as “The Most Unattractive Girl in High School” (Kowalski et al., 2012, as cited in Smith, 2015, p. 19). As per Paulson (2003, as cited in Li, 2006), some websites distribute rumors or prod students to vote on the fattest or most unattractive kid. Denigration also includes the creation of a website for the purpose of mocking individuals. These websites can include cartoons, caricatures of individuals, or stories that ridicule (Blumenfeld, 2005, as cited in Smith, 2015). Paulson (2003, as cited in Li, 2005) shared this account of denigration: “When Will, a middle-schooler in Kansas, broke up with his girlfriend, she created a website devoted to smearing him. She outlined vivid threats, made up vicious rumors, and described what it would be like to see him torn apart” (p. 3). The newest trend in cyberbullying denigration is posting cruel online polls about the individual on various

webpages (Beale & Hall, 2007). These polls encourage condemnation via group consensus by urging peers to “vote” and thus attack the target victim. Denigration polling includes voting on the ugliest, fattest, dumbest, most sexually promiscuous, and many other disparaging vivid characteristics (Beale & Hall, 2007). Pilkey (2011) found denigration was the second most popular type of cyberbullying by middle school students.

Online exclusion. According to Smith, Morgan, and Monks (2017), online exclusion or cyber ostracism is the third type of cyberbullying. Exclusion occurs when an individual is intentionally omitted from online group chats and group text messages, deliberately singled out (Willard, 2007), and harassed via malicious comments. For adolescents, online exclusion is the ultimate form of rejection (Willard, 2007). Social exclusion has a more significant negative effect on adolescents; these effects include shame, anger, and lower self-esteem (Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 2008). Kwan and Skoric (2013) suggested that an important factor leading to victimization is being socially excluded. For this reason, victimization can be predicated on both online and offline social popularity (Beran & Li, 2007). This type of victimization is particularly significant for the adolescent, as they are extremely concerned about their social status. Adolescence is a developmental period “in which individuals increase their focus on the social world around them” (Adelman, 2004, as cited in Shamel, 2013, p. 8). According to Beale and Hall (2007), exclusion is one the most prevalent ploys of bullying. In a German cyberbullying study, it was determined that 14% of adolescents had experienced exclusion (Riebel, Jager, & Fischer, 2009).

Outing. The term “outed” is used to describe the fourth and most prolific type of

cyberbullying. Outing occurs when a perpetrator shares or forwards private, personal, or embarrassing information, usually in the form of pictures or videos of the victim, publicly via the Internet (Kowalski et al., 2012; Popovic-Citic et al., 2011). Outing causes numerous problems for the victim due to the repercussions of their personal information being shared repeatedly online (Smith, 2015). One of the most detrimental consequences of outing is identity theft. A newer form of outing is “swatting.” Swatting transpires when a perpetrator takes the victim’s personal information and uses it to directly harass the victim (McIntyre, 2016). The purpose of swatting is general malice or typically a prank (Enzweiler, 2014; Wingfield, 2015). Swatting usually occurs when the perpetrators utilize spoofing software or applications. There are numerous applications like *Spoof Card*, *Hushed*, and *Burner* that permit their users to hide their identities in order to send text messages or make phone calls anonymously (Messitt, 2014, as cited in Smith, 2015). Spoofing software can be used to call the victim superficially using the victim’s own telephone number, thus making the call untraceable. Another common and illegal use of swatting occurs when the perpetrators, unknown to the victim, call emergency services from the victim’s phone number to report a crime and the police respond (Delaney, 2017). According to Delaney (2017), swatting derives its name from the Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) unit that is deployed by an emergency services dispatcher. Swatting is well known to individuals who study social deviance, to law enforcement, and to members of the video game community. Pilkey (2011) found that outing was the second least common type of cyberbullying by middle school students.

Impersonation/masquerading. Another type of cyberbullying is impersonation/masquerading which occurs when a perpetrator creates a fake online identity in order to

harass someone anonymously (Akinbogun, 2016). This type of cyberbullying is also used when a perpetrator impersonates someone else that the victim may know in order to gain online access into the victim's life (Hinduja & Patchin, 2014). Another form of impersonation occurs when someone sends or posts mean or false messages or information online, while pretending to be someone else (Willard, 2005). The act of impersonation can damage an individual's reputation or potentially get them into serious trouble (Kwan & Skoric, 2013). Nocentini et al. (2010) found that participants believed that impersonation was more than cyberbullying; many considered it to be legally relevant and a violation of privacy. Impersonation accounted for 18% of incidences of cyberbullying by adolescents (Mishna et al., 2010, as cited in Beringer, 2011).

Trickery. The act of trickery involves deceiving an individual into divulging personal or embarrassing information for the purpose of sharing it on the web (Willard, 2007). Although Willard (2007) did not include happy slapping, sexting, and slut shaming, they are regrettably some of the newest types of cyberbullying. Happy slapping is an unfortunate phenomenon that began in the United Kingdom (Mann, 2008) and is now occurring all over the world (Palasinski, 2013). This can be attributed to the absence of video upload regulations on social media and to the rise of the use of mobile devices with video capabilities (Chan et al., 2012). A video clip posted on social media that depicts one person or a group of individuals hitting or slapping a random person while recording the incident is referred to as "happy slapping" (Mann, 2008). According to Mann (2008), typically the victims are males the same age as the perpetrator, although the variety of victims has augmented. Victims have included adults, the elderly, and youth (Mann, 2008). The focus of happy slapping is humiliation; ridicule; physical

injuries (Chan et al., 2012); and, in some cases, death (Murphy, 2010). Pilkey (2011) found that trickery together with outing were the second least common type of cyberbullying by middle school students.

Cyberbullying and cyberbullying techniques continue to evolve daily; there are numerous new methods of bullying. Slut shaming and sexting are new tactics of cyberbullying that have become more common in recent years.

Slut shaming. Slut shaming is older than the Internet; it occurs when primarily women and girls are harshly criticized by others online due to the virtual community's perception of sexual behavior or sexual appearance. The behavior of these perpetrators is considered a violation of societal expectations for sexual behavior online (Friedman, 2011; Keller, 2015; Sweeney, 2017). Slut shaming is not limited to one age group; it occurs to females of varying ages (Cohen, 2013, as cited in Poole, 2013). Sweeney (2017) stated that slut shaming is a deliberate act to dishonor an individual due to immodesty and uninhibited sexual behavior. To accomplish this task, the perpetrator must first create groupings of normal and deviant online sexual expectations (Sweeney, 2017). Once individuals are placed into the sexual deviant category by the perpetrators, the victims are shamed, embarrassed, humiliated, filled with regret, and left dejected (Sweeney, 2017). This sets up the victim for further mistreatment and disrespect. Victims of slut shaming are left with a poor reputation, loss of social status, and social isolation (Sweeney, 2017). Slut shaming occurs on all forms of social media; however, the most commonly used are *Facebook* and *Instagram*. Incidents of slut shaming on the social media platform *Facebook* have resulted in harassment convictions (Fredericks, 2016).

Sexting. In 2009, sexting was *Time* magazine's number one buzzword (Stephey, 2009, as cited in Siegle, 2010). Sexting is a new 21st century word, a hybrid of the words "sex" and "texting" that denotes the "interpersonal exchange of self-produced sexualized texts and above all images (photos, videos) via cell phone or the internet" (Doring, 2014, p. 1). According to Ferguson (2011), the slang term "sexting" denotes "sending explicit photographs or messages to others" (p. 239). Sexting includes posting, "sending or forwarding nude, sexually suggestive, or explicit pictures on a cell phone or online" (Siegle, 2010, p. 15). According to Doring (2014), the original images are "self-produced sexual images" (p. 1) that were meant for "private exchange" (p. 1). A 3-year longitudinal study conducted by Temple et al. (2012) indicated that 28% of the participants revealed having emailed or texted a naked picture, and 31% described asking someone for a "sext." Additionally, over half (57%) had received a request to send a sext (Temple et al., 2012). Showing a steady increase, a poll conducted by the Associated Press-MTV indicated that only three of 10 individuals ages 14 through 24 have sent or received nude photos via mobile devices or via the Internet (Patchin, 2012).

The media has helped bring awareness to the growing problem of sexting and "tech sex." The devastating story of Jesse Logan is a cruel example of sexting gone terribly awry. While dating, Jesse sent her boyfriend a photo of herself naked. After the couple broke up, Jesse's now ex-boyfriend forwarded the photo to other students at their school. Jesse was humiliated and distraught; as a result, she committed suicide by hanging herself (Celizic, 2010, as cited in Pascoe, 2011). Another case involved a teacher, Christy Lynn Martin, who was arrested in 2009 for sending nude pictures to a male student who was 14 years old at the time (Calvert, 2009). Sexting meets the

statutory definitions of child pornography (Walsh, Wolak, & Finkelhor, 2013) and thus a number of youth have been arrested for distributing pornography (Wolak, Finkelhor, & Mitchell, 2012).

Over half, 59%, of parents trust the Internet as a “positive influence” (Rideout, 2007, as cited in Schrock, & Boyd, 2008, p. 4); however, several parents, educators, and law enforcement officers have developed concerns regarding the dangers of digital communications, specifically online predators, risks on social network sites (Cassell & Cramer, 2007; Marwick, 2008), the likelihood of unknown contact, and sexting (Wolak et al., 2012). These concerns are valid, and it is vital to mention the effects of cyberbullying. The effects can vary from sadness to worry and can escalate to anxiety for the adolescent middle school student (O’Brien & Moules, 2010). Negative experiences can lead to destruction of a youth’s freedom and the ability to utilize valuable online resources, often resulting in severe psychological and emotional implications (Hinduja & Patchin, 2007). The relationship between bullying and psychosomatic problems should be considered a “significant international public health issue,” according to the research of Gini and Pozzoli (2009, p. 1064). These psychosomatic problems have become prevalent, and cyberbullying incidents have mutated into criminal acts. Criminal acts of cyberbullying have necessitated laws to combat perpetrators of cyberbullying and cybercrimes.

Law

The benefits of the Internet are massive: global connection, up-to-the-minute news, an infinite range of information, resources, and countless services. These vast resources of the Internet come along with dangers including identity theft; hacking; and

the newest danger, cyberbullying. Legislation today is inadequate in thwarting and treating the ills of the Internet. Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act (CDA) was created in 1996; section 230 provides protection to online service providers and websites, protecting them from any liability for the content posted by their users and third parties (Gumbus & Meglich, 2013). The current CDA indicates Internet service providers are not required to eliminate derogatory, offensive, or bullying subject matter from their pages (Poole, 2013). In 1996, when the statute was created, the Internet was primarily used for communication via email and perusing very few websites (Poole, 2013). In addition, these 1996 Internet users were primarily adults; adolescents were not utilizing the Internet as they are today (Poole, 2013).

Due to recent events, many more people are aware that cyberbullying is a substantial problem; both state and federal lawmakers have begun to wrestle with the issues surrounding cyberbullying (Donegan, 2012). Laws regulating cyberbullying and online communication were unheard of 20 years ago and have only recently begun to shift in response to the news media and public demand (Schrock & Boyd, 2011). The role of the legal system in cyberbullying has emerged in light of various, previously unheard of, online concerns and cybercrimes. Lawmakers continuously struggle to adequately determine proper sanctions, while grappling with the difficult task of defining cyberbullying – all without infringing on the constitutional rights of the people (Donegan, 2012).

The infringement of constitutional rights has long been an issue of distress where adolescents are concerned. In 1969, *Tinker v. Des Moines* was a significant case that reached the Supreme Court after school administration suspended students for wearing

black armbands during school, in symbolic protest of the Vietnam War (Hinduja & Patchin, 2015; Tedford & Herbeck, 2009). The United States Supreme Court ruled that any school inhibiting the free expression of student opinion must prove that the prohibition was enforced “to avoid substantial interference with school discipline or the rights of others” (Hinduja & Patchin, 2015, p. 2). The school could not demonstrate evidence that the armbands interfered with school discipline, and thus the actions of the school were deemed unconstitutional. The students won the case; it was the foremost lawsuit of its kind, and thus set the guidelines limiting public schools where forms of student expression were concerned. As technology has developed and advanced, this concern has been expanded to the question of whether or not schools can interfere with the off-campus actions of students (Donegan, 2012).

To date, 50 states have enacted bullying laws (Sabia & Bass, 2017). Of these states, 48 specifically included cyberbullying and electronic harassment (Hinduja & Patchin, 2018b). In 2010, the first National Summit on the prevention of bullying was held in the United States (Garnett et al., 2014). This event brought together government officials, researchers, policy makers, and educators to investigate prospective practices and strategies to tackle bullying in schools (Garnett et al., 2014). During the Summit, the group reviewed evidence of bullying as well as the implications on the health and general well-being of children (Garnett et al., 2014). Further, the National Summit looked at legislative options and considered the most effective anti-bullying prevention programs (Garnett et al., 2014). According to Greene and Ross (2005), the aim of current legislation is to curb bullying; to date, the primary role of the legal system in regard to cyberbullying concerns online safety. Local, state, and federal laws have begun to

regulate online communications and activities. As of now, the United States is without a federal law to protect against bullying; however, each of the individual states has anti-bullying laws (Hinduja & Patchin, 2018b).

Many states have paved the way for other states with stringent anti-bullying laws. In 2011, the state of New Jersey passed the harshest anti-bullying laws to date (McCarthy, 2014, as cited in Smith, 2015). The New Jersey anti-bullying statute forbids provocation, traditional bullying, and cyberbullying that hinders the civil liberties of individuals or causes disorder during the instructional day (Smith, 2015). According to this law, administrators may address off-campus bullying involving students. Prior to this law, it was difficult for schools to address and regulate conduct occurring off campus. Each New Jersey school has a staff member who is the overseer of bullying; the overseer is required to meticulously scrutinize any bullying grievance within a period of 10 days (Smith, 2015). All New Jersey schools obtain a grade based on the management of bullying complaints; school administrators may be reprimanded if they do not obey the law (McCarthy, 2014, as cited in Smith, 2015). In 2011, North Carolina extended its anti-bullying laws to include the protection of classroom teachers; it is a criminal act for students to threaten, harass, or cyberbully teachers (McCarthy, 2014, as cited in Smith, 2015). Florida's anti-bullying statute dictates that the schools create a process to provide instruction to all school stakeholders so that individuals are capable of identification, prevention, and response to bullying or harassment (Richman, 2010). In New York, the state mandates that each student take part in character education and citizenship instruction via Project SAVE, Safe Schools Against Violence in Education Act: Instruction in Civility, Citizenship and Character Education (Kadamus, 2001). South

Carolina, where the study occurred, is one of the states that has cyberbullying laws that also include beneficial model policies (Limber & Small, 2003). Model policies are templates that provide minimum criteria that can be utilized by individual institutions to develop a personalized policy on a given subject.

Although laws vary by state, Hinduja and Patchin (2015) indicated that the following features are commonly included in state statutes:

- include cyberbullying in school anti-bullying guidelines and policies,
- ban cyberbullying and create explicit discipline for cyberbullying,
- create new conditions to permit school staff to intervene when off-campus behaviors affect on-campus routines,
- mandate that schools employ new reporting protocol and discipline methods when cyber aggression occurs, and
- require the creation and execution of Internet safety, Internet ethics, Internet etiquette training, and digital literacy curriculum within each school and school district (p. 119).

Even with this current recognition of cyberbullying within state statutes, it is imperative to keep in mind that laws must continually evolve as cyberbullying and cybercrimes evolve. According to Hinduja and Patchin (2011), schools need to be aware of the changes of state laws in order to make necessary adjustments to their school policies.

In recent years, the focus has intensified as a reaction to the harsh reality of school violence, the first surge of which occurred in 1999, immediately following the tragedy at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado. In a time when school violence is

common, “school officials are justified in taking very seriously threats against faculty and other students” (Herbeck, 2010, as cited in Donegan, 2012, p. 38). After the Lori Drew (Megan Meir) case, the law began to prohibit any electronic or digital communication that “knowingly frightens, intimidates, or causes emotional distress” (Henderson, 2009, p. 389).

Current Research

In recent years, the notion of cyberbullying has amplified in frequency, due somewhat to the advancement of technology (Donegan, 2012). Smart devices, mobile phones, and tablets have made it easier to communicate electronically. The significance of cyberbullying as a vast problem has been found in numerous large-scale cross-sectional studies (Berson et al., 2002). The prevalence of cyberbullying victimization is extremely difficult to determine due to various definitions of cyberbullying and the nature of self-reporting (Peebles, 2014). As technology continues to advance and transform, there will be an ongoing need to revisit the definition of cyberbullying.

Bringing additional attention to the urgency of cyberbullying earlier this year, the First Lady of the United States, Melania Trump, announced her awareness initiative which includes social media use (Kshetri & Voas, 2019). Social media use is just one of the key areas Mrs. Trump includes in her campaign to help children learn the significance of social and emotional wellbeing. The First Lady’s platform is entitled *Be Best* and focuses on some of the key issues that children face today; it includes three pillars: wellbeing, social media, and the opioid crisis (U.S. Government, 2018). Mrs. Trump’s emphasis involves healthy living and encourages kindness and respect. The First Lady stated that parents and teachers can help children to better prepare for their futures and

specifically addressed the importance of teaching children to better navigate social media by avoiding negative interaction (U.S. Government, 2018).

According to C-SPAN, the First Lady participated in a summit on August 20, 2018 hosted by the Federal Partners in Bullying Prevention. The summit focused on awareness and prevention of cyberbullying (C-SPAN, 2018). Mrs. Trump opened the summit; other speakers included Alex Azar, the United States Secretary of Health and Human Services, and student activist Joseph Grunewald (C-SPAN, 2018). The summit on cyberbullying prevention was attended by federal agencies, law enforcement, youth programs, educational organizations, and several social media companies (C-SPAN, 2018). During the summit, Mrs. Trump's opening remarks included

In today's global society, social media is an inevitable part of our children's daily lives. It can be used in many positive ways, but can also be destructive and harmful when used incorrectly. This is why *Be Best* chooses to focus on the importance of teaching our next generation how to conduct themselves safely and in a positive manner in an online setting. (C-SPAN, 2018, 7:37)

The First Lady gave a warning of the “destructive and harmful” (C-SPAN, 2018, 7:51) outcomes of social media misuse while encouraging safe online habits. Further, Mrs. Trump encouraged parents via the *Be Best* website to take a look at a new publication by the U.S. Federal Trade Commission (2018) titled “Talking with Kids about Being Online.” The publication includes a parental guide to online safety for children, tweens, and teenagers (U.S. Federal Trade Commission, 2018). The U.S. Federal Trade Commission guide includes talking points for parents and information on proper socialization online as well as what to do if you are a victim of cyberbullying.

Summary

This literature review demonstrates the researcher's knowledge of the subject of cyberbullying. It includes a review of research on victimization and perpetration of cyberbullying as it correlates to the adolescent. The researcher reviewed both the characteristics and the development of the adolescent. Subsequently, there was an analysis of traditional bullying and cyberbullying followed by an in-depth examination of the types of cyberbullying, an overview of cyberbullying law, and current research. The final section of the literature review closed with a summary statement.

The subsequent chapter focuses on the methodology used in the study. The introduction of the methodology includes an in-depth examination of the research design and research questions. The chapter studies the participants and setting and inspects the research instrumentation. Finally, Chapter 3 ends with data analysis and a summary.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

Provided in this chapter is an outline of the methodology applied in the study examining educator perceptions as they relate to middle school cyberbullying. The study occurred at four public middle schools in upstate South Carolina. A mixed methods design was selected to answer the research questions. The mixed methodology (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2003) design combines both qualitative and quantitative elements (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). This methodology was selected to assist in the triangulation of data (Creswell, 2009), which is the process of corroborating evidence from multiple sources, types of data, and data collection (Creswell, 2014). The researcher selected the mixed method for to the opportunity to dive deep into the problem while enriching the data via researcher observation of participant body language, verbiage, gestures, and other details (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

The chapter begins with the study description, restatement of the purpose of the study, and the research questions. Next, the research design is shared, followed by a description of the study's participants and setting. The chapter continues with an exploration of ethical considerations and consent. Subsequently, the research procedures and the instrumentation are examined. The chapter then details the steps of data collection, continues with data analysis, and concludes with the delimitations and limitations of the study. The chapter ends with a summary statement.

Restatement of the Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to examine the perceptions of educators pertaining to middle school cyberbullying. A mixed method (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2003) study

was used to accomplish this task. Teachers, school counselors, and administrators were the focus participants at four middle schools in upstate South Carolina. One of the objectives of the study was to clarify the challenges of cyberbullying in order to improve understanding and effective strategies of prevention and intervention for educators. The prevalence of cyberbullying is escalating (Citron, 2009; Juvonen & Gross, 2008; Li, 2006; Price & Dalgleish, 2010). Cyberbullying is a predominant factor in the lives of adolescents between the ages of 11-14 (Carlson & Cornell, 2008). The results of the study can add to the existing literature on cyberbullying and can assist educators in gaining further knowledge and insight to guide them in their ongoing prevention and intervention efforts within the middle school environment.

Research Questions

The research questions and cyberbullying educator perceptions survey data guided the study through data analysis (Labaree, 2009). This chapter aims to address the methodology that was used to answer the following primary question: What are the perceptions of educators related to middle school cyberbullying? To successfully answer the overall question, this study addressed the following research questions:

1. What are the perceptions of teachers related to middle school cyberbullying?
2. What are the perceptions of school counselors related to middle school cyberbullying?
3. What are the perceptions of administrators related to middle school cyberbullying?

Table 2 provides the correlation between the research questions and data collection methods used in this study.

Table 2

Alignment of Research Questions with Data Collection Methods

Research Questions	Tools/ Instruments	Data Collected	Method of Analysis
What are the perceptions of educators related to middle school cyberbullying?	Survey Items Focus Groups Interviews	Quantitative Qualitative Qualitative	Likert Scale 1-4 Descriptive analysis of themes
1. What are the perceptions of teachers related to middle school cyberbullying?	Focus Groups	Qualitative	Descriptive Statistics Descriptive analysis of themes
2. What are the perceptions of school counselors related to middle school cyberbullying?	Interviews	Qualitative	Descriptive Statistics Descriptive analysis of themes
3. What are the perceptions of administrators related to middle school cyberbullying?	Interviews	Qualitative	Descriptive Statistics Descriptive analysis of themes

The study utilized educator surveys, focus groups, and interviews to gather data; each method seamlessly aligns with a research question.

Research Design

Parahoo (1997, as cited in De Langen, 2009) defined a research design as “a plan that describes how, when and where data are to be collected and analyzed” (p. 51). Hatch and Lazaraton (1991) contended that the research design should be closely correlated to the research questions and the research problem. The research design utilized in the study was a mixed method (Tashakkori, Teddlie, & Teddlie, 1998) design. The mixed method design is both qualitative and quantitative, mixing each method to collect and analyze data (Creswell, 2014). When combined, quantitative and qualitative methods

complement, permitting for a more all-inclusive investigation (Tashakkori et al., 1998). Miles, Huberman, Huberman, and Huberman (1994) concurred that the blend of quantitative and qualitative data provide a great research method. The mixed method design is used to more completely understand a research problem (Creswell, Klassen, Plano Clark, & Smith, 2011). According to Creswell (2014), research studies should start with a “broad survey” as the quantitative element, followed by “open ended interviews” to provide the qualitative component (p. 21). The quantitative element assists in simplifying the results, and the qualitative views of the participants help to explain the initial survey. Quantitative data were collected via surveys, and qualitative data were gathered using focus groups and interviews. The goal of the cyberbullying educator perceptions survey (Appendix A) was to assemble baseline information concerning educator perceptions, while the goal of the teacher focus groups and interviews was to obtain a more in-depth understanding of the educators’ insights concerning cyberbullying by gathering personal reports.

Prior to data collection, the researcher obtained permission from the school district, District X, by acquiring written permission from the district superintendent’s office and each administrator from the four participating middle schools. After receiving the necessary approvals, the researcher provided each study participant with a consent form in order to ensure their consent to participate in the cyberbullying educator perceptions survey, teacher focus groups, and interview phases of the study. The researcher explained to the study participants that confidentiality would be upheld throughout the research process in anticipation of gathering honest survey responses and feedback. Study participants were thoroughly informed that they could withdraw from

the study at any point throughout the research process.

Participants and Setting

Permission from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) was gained prior to the study. The participants for the study were educators from four middle schools in upstate South Carolina. Teachers, school counselors, and administrators participated in the study. Participants were encouraged to participate; however, participation was voluntary. The study participants were surveyed within their respective workplaces at each of their home schools.

All middle school educators were identified as prospective participants in this study. The middle school educators working at the study schools made up the study sample. Each of the study participants was employed full time in his/her respective middle school. All certified staff were invited to complete the cyberbullying educator perceptions survey. The final question of the cyberbullying educator perceptions survey indicated willingness to participate in the future focus group.

Of those 148 educators invited to participate in the cyberbullying educator perceptions survey, 103 educators (70%) consented to participate in the study. Of those consenting, 33 participants (32%) indicated additional willingness to participate in the teacher focus group. As was the case for participation in the cyberbullying educator perceptions survey, teacher focus group and interview participation was voluntary, yet encouraged.

County. The study was conducted within a county in upstate South Carolina. As stated by the latest census report (U.S. Census, 2010), the county in which the four middle schools reside had a population of 55,342, reflecting a 5.3% increase since the

previous census was taken in 2000 (U.S. Census, 2010). The county consists of 75% Caucasians, 20.4% African Americans, 3.7% of persons of Hispanic or Latino origin, 1.4% of persons reporting two or more races, and 0.4% Asians; 4.5% of the households report that a language other than English is spoken in the household (U.S. Census, 2010). The median household income for 2012-2016 is \$35,719, and 18.6% of the community members are considered to be living below the poverty level (U.S. Census, 2010).

City. Three of the middle schools were located in a city within upstate South Carolina. The 2010 U.S. Census reported that the city in which the upstate South Carolina middle schools reside had a population of 12,414, reflecting a 4.3% decrease since 2000. The city is comprised of 50.1% Caucasians, 45.7% African Americans, 0.2% American Indian and Alaska Natives, 0.9% Asians, 0.1% Native Hawaiians and Other Pacific Islanders, 1.6% reporting two or more races, and 3.1% persons of Hispanic or Latino origin; 7.6% of the households reported that a language other than English is spoken in the household (U.S. Census, 2010). The median household income for 2012-2016 was \$30,085, and 29.3% of its community members were deemed to be living below the poverty level (U.S. Census, 2010).

Town. One of the study schools is located inside a small rural town in upstate South Carolina. The U.S. Census (2010) website reported an estimated population of 1,893 within the town, and 76.9% of the town have attained a high school diploma or higher. The median housing value in the town is \$80,500 with 920 total housing units (U.S. Census, 2010). The median household income for 2012-2016 was \$22,692, and 45.5% of its community members were deemed to be living below the poverty level (U.S. Census, 2010). The U.S. Census website does not include further demographic

information for the town.

School district. The study was conducted within four middle schools within a school district (District X) in upstate South Carolina. District X had 100% of schools meeting AdvancedEd (SACS) accreditation. There were 19 schools within District X, four of which were middle schools. District X employs 627 teachers, and student enrollment is 8,958 based on the South Carolina state report card. District X received an “average” rating for the last 6 years; and the district graduation rate is 82.5%, 1.5% above the state average. In District X, 60.4% of teachers have advanced degrees, with 83.7% receiving a continuing contract. Teacher attendance in District X is 93.6%, with 92.8% of teachers returning from the previous academic year.

School 1. This middle school is located in a small community in upstate South Carolina. The middle school had a student population of 373 in Grades 6-8. During the 2018-2019 school year, the school employed 30 certified staff.

According to the annual South Carolina School Report Card, School 1 had an absolute rating of “average” in 2017, as well as during the years from 2012-2014. Of the 25 teachers currently teaching in this middle school, 52% hold advanced degrees. Of the 30 certified staff, there were 24 females (80%) and six males (20%).

Nearly 68.9% of students at School 1 were living in poverty; this number is based on the annual school report card that pulls information from Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Medicaid, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), foster-child, and homeless data.

School 2. The middle school is located within a city in upstate South Carolina. The middle school had a student population of 403 in Grades 6-8. During the 2018-2019

school year, the school employed 33 teachers.

According to the 2017 annual South Carolina School Report Card, School 2 had an absolute rating of “average” in 2017, as well as during the years from 2012-2014. Of the 33 certified staff currently working in this middle school, 21 teachers (60.7%) hold advanced degrees.

Almost 78% of students at School 2 were living in poverty; this number is based on the annual South Carolina School Report Card that pulls information from TANF, Medicaid, SNAP, foster-child, and homeless data. Of the 32 certified staff, there were 25 females (78%) and seven males (22%).

School 3. The middle school is located within a city in upstate South Carolina. The middle school had a student population of 540 students in Grades 6-8. During the 2018-2019 school year, the school employed 46 certified staff. School 3 is positioned within an economically disadvantaged area of the study city. School 3 is classified as Title I and 100% of the school’s students receive free lunch.

School 3 is positioned within an economically disadvantaged area of the study city, is classified as Title I, and provides free lunch for 100% of its students. Of the 46 certified staff currently teaching in this middle school, 56.4% hold advanced degrees. Of the certified staff, there were 39 females (85%) and seven males (15%).

School 3 reported that 81% its students were living in poverty. This number is based on the annual school report card that pulls information from TANF, Medicaid, SNAP, foster-child, and homeless data.

School 4. The middle school is located within a city in upstate South Carolina. According to the school report card for School 4, the middle school had a population of

550 students in Grades 6-8. During the 2018-2019 school year, the school employed 41 teachers.

According to the annual 2017 South Carolina School Report Card, School 4 had an “average” absolute rating in 2017 as well as during the years from 2012-2014, with an absolute rating of “good” in 2013. Of the 41 certified staff currently working in this middle school, 62.2% hold advanced degrees. Of the certified staff, there were 34 females (83%) and seven males (17%).

Over half (57.9%) of students at School 4 were living in poverty; this number is based on the annual school report card that pulls information from TANF, Medicaid, SNAP, foster-child, and homeless data.

All of the study participants work at one of the four middle schools. The study sample was made up of 150 educators. The study was comprised of 123 female participants (82%) and 27 male participants (18%).

Ethical Considerations

The foundation of strong research is a well-founded informed consent (Richards & Morse, 2012). Approval to conduct the study was granted by the IRB as required by the regulations of this board. According to Creswell (2013), the researcher must intentionally consider the ethical issues of research while maintaining confidentiality to protect the identity of the participants and at all times obtain consent before the study begins. The study participants provided consent within the cyberbullying educator perceptions survey. Confidentiality was paramount. Participation of educators was voluntary and could be ended at any point in the research process.

Participant anonymity was ensured; there were no identifiers included in the

Google Form. All cyberbullying educator perceptions survey responses were kept confidential. Educator participants were provided a thorough narrative of both the purpose of the research study and the necessity of their participation. Participants did not receive any compensation, monetary or otherwise, for their contribution in the research study. Participation was encouraged but not mandatory. All phases of the study were in compliance with Gardner Webb University's IRB requirements for research with human participants.

Consent. Participation in the study required consent of the study participants and permission from the IRB. In the study, permission was provided via informed consent forms. Informed consent is defined as “ethical codes and regulations for human subject's research” (Nijhawan et al., 2013, p. 2). Research participants were provided essential information regarding the research study in a language they could easily understand so that a “voluntary decision regarding ‘to’ or ‘not to’ participate in the research study” (Nijhawan et al., 2013, p. 2) could be made.

Participant permission indicated whether or not the educator would participate in the study. Participants not giving permission to participate in the study were not allowed to complete the cyberbullying educator perceptions survey. The informed consent form included information about the study, knowledge of voluntary participation, risks and benefits, confidentiality information, participant requirements, and researcher contact information. Participant informed consent was provided within the cyberbullying educator perceptions survey prior to the survey questions, and participants wishing to participate gave consent by selecting “Yes, please continue” within the survey, indicating agreement to participate. Participants not wishing to continue selected “NO – Thank you

for taking this survey,” and the cyberbullying educator perceptions survey ended.

All cyberbullying educator perceptions survey data were labeled anonymously and stored until the successful defense of the dissertation; at that time the data were destroyed.

Research Procedures

Researchers should consider three imperative goals: transparency, precision, and adherence to evidence (Yin, 2016). The researcher adhered to these three tenets throughout the duration of the study. Beginning with transparency, the researcher thoroughly documented research procedures; the researcher was precise in adherence to the systematic research procedures to ensure the data were accurately documented. Finally, the researcher adhered to reporting the evidence with validity by reporting based only on the responses of the participants.

The researcher contacted the administration at each of the four middle schools to request participants for the cyberbullying educator perceptions survey, teacher focus groups, and interviews. Each certified staff member was invited to complete the cyberbullying educator perceptions survey. Within the cyberbullying educator perceptions survey, participants were asked if they were willing to participate in a focus group during phase two of the study. Those participants interested in contributing via the teacher focus group entered their email address into the survey for later contact by the researcher. During phase three of the study, the researcher invited school counselors and administrators from each study school to be interviewed to further triangulate the data.

Instrumentation

The researcher collected data employing three different methods that consisted of the cyberbullying educator perceptions survey, a teacher focus group, and an educator

interview. The instrumentation section introduces surveys, focus groups, and interviews as data collection tools used in mixed methods research. The next section focuses on the two methods of data collection and the instruments used during the study. A research instrument is “a tool used to collect data,” and “a tool designed to measure knowledge, attitude, and skills” (Parahoo, 1997, as cited in De Langen, 2009, p. 60).

Surveys. One of the instruments selected for the research study was the survey. Surveys allow a variety of information in a quick context (Johnson, 2005). Surveys are utilized to measure attitudes, opinions, beliefs, values (Shaughnessy, Zechmeister, & Jeanne, 2011), and perceptions of survey participants (Heffernan, Quinn Griffin, McNulty, & Fitzpatrick, 2010). Surveys are simple to create, administer, collect, and analyze. The advantage of surveys is the number of questions one can ask and receive quantifiable data (Johnson, 2005).

The rationale of utilizing survey research was to make inferences about a characteristic or behavior within a population based on generalizations of a sample population (Babbie, 1990, as cited in Creswell, 2009). According to Creswell (2009), surveys are often chosen by researchers “due to the rapid turnaround time in data collection as well as the economy of the design” (p. 146). The survey was a cross-sectional Likert scale survey with “all data being collected at one point in time” (Creswell, 2009, p. 146). Cross-sectional surveys indicate that data are collected once (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). Data collection involved creating a web-based survey that is administered online (Nesbary, 2000; and Sue & Ritter, 2007, as cited in Creswell, 2009, p. 146). It is becoming more common for research instruments to be “designed for online surveys” (Sue & Ritter, 2007, as cited in Creswell, 2009, p. 149). To ensure validity and

reliability, all participant survey answers were retained confidentially.

Each study participant was provided the same survey to safeguard reliability. The participant surveys were self-completion surveys distributed via *Google Forms* (www.google.com/forms), a popular *Google* document product that is a user-friendly online survey system. *Google Forms* allowed the researcher to create a custom survey via a template. Custom surveys can be posted on a webpage or delivered via a link in an email for participants to access (Creswell, 2009). *Google Forms* produced the results and provided a report for the researcher. A PDF file of the cyberbullying educator perceptions survey is included in the appendices (Appendix A).

Cyberbullying educator perceptions survey. The cyberbullying educator perceptions survey was given to study participants in an online format. The middle school educator participants received a letter of invitation (Appendix B) in the form of an email from the researcher requesting their voluntary participation in the cyberbullying educator perceptions survey. It explained the study's purpose, the risks and benefits of their participation, and the process used to ensure anonymity. This email also contained the survey link. The educators gave their digital consent when they took the cyberbullying educator perceptions survey. The survey link connected participants to the cyberbullying educator perceptions survey via *Google Forms*. There were 20 items on the survey; all participants completed the cyberbullying educator perceptions survey in approximately five minutes. The last question on the cyberbullying educator perceptions survey asked participants about their willingness to participate in a future focus group.

Of the 20 items on the cyberbullying educator perceptions survey, 11 questions were straightforward, and nine questions were reverse-keyed. Reverse-keyed or reversed

polarity items are used as a standard procedure in research using multi-item Likert scales (Swain, Weathers, & Niedrich, 2008). Reverse-keyed items control for and identify acquiescence response bias (Herche & Engelland, 1996). Acquiescence is a type of response bias in which the survey participants are inclined to agree with all questions or designate a constant positive connotation (Watson, 1992). Acquiescence is sometimes referred to as “yea-saying” or “straight-lining” responses (Wong, Rindfleisch, & Burroughs, 2003, p. 86).

A Likert scale was used for the cyberbullying educator perceptions survey. The Likert scale is the most extensively utilized scale for research questionnaires and surveys (Wuensch, 2005). The Likert scale used was a 4-point scale. The four points range from 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=agree, and 4=strongly agree, organized in order of magnitude. Once the participants completed the cyberbullying educator perceptions survey, the data were downloaded from the *Google Forms* website into a *Microsoft Excel* spreadsheet. The data were analyzed for agreement in order to answer the research questions.

The reporting of the data generated descriptive statistics (Creswell, 2009; Marra & Bogue, 2006). According to Murphy, Staffileno, and Foreman (2017), descriptive statistics are utilized to describe features within data. As the name suggests, descriptive statistics describe and present patterns and themes among data. Descriptive statistics include a summary of the sample as well as researcher observations.

Focus groups. The second tool utilized in the mixed methods study was teacher focus groups. According to Lewis (2000), focus groups were created and utilized during World War II to gauge audience reactions to radio programs. Focus groups are a valuable research tool (Hartman, 2004). The core of research “is an effort to better

understand peoples' interpretations of their experiences" (Hartman, 2004, p .402). This methodology utilized "structured interviewing techniques" (Fontana & Frey, 1994, as cited in Hartman, 2004, p. 402) within a group setting. Focus groups impart valuable descriptive information (Hartman, 2004) from the point of view of the participant (Lindlof & Taylor, 2017), assisting researchers in understanding the perspectives of the participants. According to Krueger (1994), the purpose of a focus group is to ascertain feelings and perceptions of the group.

As stated by Marczak and Sewell (1998), focus groups are ideally made up of seven to 10 people with similarities or shared interests. For the study, the researcher capped teacher focus groups at six participants to encourage communication and group interactions. Communication was a vital component of the focus group. Participants talked to one another within the group as the researcher invited participation and performed as an observer, not adding to the discussion. Focus groups are an alternative to interviews in that the researcher does not have to ask each question to each participant; rather, the researcher asked the group. This type of interaction stimulated further discussion and interaction among group members (Morgan, 1996). Each focus group was recorded utilizing two digital audio recording devices. The digital audio recordings of each group were transcribed; coded; and finally, analyzed using descriptive statistics for the presence of patterns and themes within the data. The researcher used a nondescriptor (letter) to identify participants during focus groups and interviews. Upon entering the focus group setting, participants were provided a name tent containing the prewritten nondescriptor identification letter.

Two weeks prior to the scheduled teacher focus group, an email and consent form

were sent to the study participants at each of the four middle schools. The letter reintroduced the study and included the focus group questions, ground rules, and directions for the day. Participants were told of their ability to withdraw from the study at any point in the process. Also, the letter outlined participant anonymity and stated that all commentary made during the focus group would be kept confidential. The teacher focus groups took place after school hours at each of the respective schools.

After reviewing the consent forms, the researcher organized the educator focus groups, practiced the focus group guiding questions (Appendix C) and the focus group script (Appendix D), and reviewed a suggested focus group checklist. Prior to the actual day of the teacher focus group, the researcher reserved and confirmed the room at each site and secured the digital audio recording devices to be used on the day the focus groups were conducted. The participants were recorded using two separate devices to ensure at least one proper recording in the event of equipment failure.

The focus groups began once all nonparticipants had exited the room. The researcher utilized a focus group script (Appendix D) to maintain consistency at each of the four middle schools. The researcher read an introductory question to start the conversation and acted as an observer throughout the duration of the focus group session. The only interaction from the researcher was the addition of a new question or redirection to the topic by restating the purpose or question to be addressed. The researcher took great care to treat everyone with respect, while closely following the procedures outlined in the focus group script.

On the day of the event, the researcher greeted each study participant as they arrived and provided a packet that included the letter of invitation, two copies of the

consent form, and the name tent with a prewritten nondescriptor letter. The researcher kept one signed copy of the consent form and the participant kept the other copy. After a brief introduction, the researcher explained details of how the focus group would work. Participants were again told that anything shared during the focus group would be kept confidential. The researcher reminded the participants of the freedom to leave the focus group at any time, then reviewed the study purpose and guidelines of the teacher focus group. The focus group began once the researcher read the focus group script. The researcher reminded participants not to use actual names when recalling specific cyberbullying incidents, asking them instead to focus on discussing their feelings and experiences about the incident (Krueger & Casey, 2009). At the close of the teacher focus group, member checking was implemented by the researcher who asked each focus group participant for any closing thoughts in order to confirm that all participant comments were clarified and documented accurately. All teacher focus group data were kept strictly confidential.

Interviews. During phase three of this mixed methods study, the final tool utilized was interviews. Interviewing is the most common form of qualitative data collection (Jamshed, 2014). The purpose of the educator interview session was to add to the existing body of research; this research was contributed to by the interviewees and was centered on their life experiences (DiCicco-Bloom, & Crabtree, 2006). Interviews were selected by the researcher in order to further triangulate the data, while delving deeper into the perceptions of school counselors and administrators to answer the research questions. Practicality was the basis for Creswell (2013) in the determination of interview type; this ensured “the most useful information to answer research questions”

(p. 164). According to Gall, Gall, and Borg (2007), interviews are a useful tool that allow the researcher to build a strong rapport with the participant being interviewed. For the purpose of this study, the researcher elected to use a standard semi-structured, open-ended style of interview which allowed for more personal interpretation. Semi-structured interviews allow for more personal interpretation. These interviews took place either one on one or via a live video conferencing tool; each session was recorded, transcribed, coded, and analyzed. Although one-on-one interviews can be time consuming, they are the ideal method for participants who are unlikely to speak up during a focus group setting (Alshenqeeti, 2014).

After receiving interview consent from each of the interview participants, the researcher scheduled a time for the interview. Once the interview was confirmed, the researcher emailed the participant a copy of the questions for review prior to the scheduled interview. This was a professional courtesy to allow the participant time to read over and reflect on the questions in order to be well prepared on the day of the interview. The researcher invited each school counselor and each administrator from the four schools. The researcher desired to have at least one counselor and one administrator at minimum from each school. The school counselor and administrator interview questions (Appendix E) are shared in the appendices.

Pilot study. De Vaus (1993, as cited in Van Teijlingen & Hundley, 2001) advised, “Do not take the risk. Pilot test first” (p. 1). The purpose of the pilot study was to evaluate the design, locate potential problems, and assess the length of the cyberbullying educator perceptions survey questions. The study took place in two central stages. During stage one, a pilot study was completed to analyze the survey method for

any complications during administration prior to the second stage, throughout the actual administration of the cyberbullying educator perceptions survey, and during implementation of the focus groups and interviews. One of the rationales of pilot testing is the ability to reveal potential problems prior to the actual implementation of the research (Van Teijlingen & Hundley, 2001). Cann et al. (2008) indicated that a pilot sample should be 10% of the participants projected for the actual study. There were 10 educator participants invited to take part in the pilot study; the researcher attempted to attain six to eight staff members for the pilot sample for the cyberbullying educator perceptions survey. The cyberbullying educator perceptions surveys were piloted for length and comprehensibility. Staff participants included in the pilot study were not incorporated in the actual study. The pilot study took place during the first week of December 2018 at School 3 with classified staff as participants. The pilot study survey took participants between 3-5 minutes to complete.

The researcher completed the data analysis of the pilot study data to determine if there were any implementation errors during the pilot study survey. Examples of implementation errors could include challenges with the online access, lack of understanding of directions by study participants, or errors in data. The pilot study was utilized to yield information about the survey questions while looking for deficiencies in the research instruments prior to the execution of the study. The use of the pilot study was effective; the design of the study did not change, as the pilot indicated that no modifications were needed prior to the actual survey. The pilot study survey did not eliminate all errors or problems; however, it reduced the likelihood of major implementation problems concerning the methods and procedures of the study.

Data collection. After gaining permission from District X and the administrators at each of the four study middle schools, a letter of invitation (Appendix B) with a link to the participant consent form was emailed along with the cyberbullying educator perceptions survey link to all certified staff. Additionally, participant informed consent was provided within the survey before the survey questions began, and participants wishing to participate gave consent by selecting “Yes, please continue” within the survey, indicating agreement to participate. Participants not wishing to continue selected “NO – Thank you for taking this survey,” and the cyberbullying educator perceptions survey ended. All IRB regulations and procedures were followed through the completion of the study. All data collected were used only for educational research purposes. The researcher utilized the letter of invitation to fully brief the participants on the purpose and rationale of the research. It was made clear that participation in the cyberbullying educator perceptions survey was voluntary yet encouraged. Study participants could have withdrawn at any time. The rationale of the study was thoroughly explained to the participants via the letter of invitation (Appendix B). The consent form attached to the email thoroughly explained participant consent.

The collection of the cyberbullying educator perceptions survey data began on December 6 of the 2018-2019 academic year. The cyberbullying educator perceptions surveys were dispersed to each participant via *Google Forms* through employee email. The participants had access to the cyberbullying educator perceptions survey link for 3 weeks; at the end of weeks 1 and then 2, the participants received a reminder email prompting them to complete the survey. At the end of the third week, study school administrators were reminded to email their staff to encourage participation, and a final

email reminder was sent to study participants at each school. At the end of the 3-week period, the researcher allowed an additional 5 days for any participants who indicated a need for additional time to complete the survey. This allowed 4 weeks for survey completion.

Participants opened the cyberbullying educator perceptions survey and provided informed consent by selecting “Yes, please continue,” indicating agreement to participate. Those participants who elected not to complete the survey at that time had the ability to opt out by selecting “NO – Thank you for taking this survey,” and the cyberbullying educator perceptions survey ended. At this point, the participants who wished to participate continued and completed the survey.

The cyberbullying educator perceptions survey contained two sections, each section appearing on its own page. The sections included informed consent followed by beliefs and awareness. There were 20 survey questions on a 4-point Likert scale. It did not take any participant longer than 5 minutes to complete the cyberbullying educator perceptions survey. Once the survey was completed, the participant saw a final question asking about willingness to participate in a teacher focus group related to the cyberbullying educator perceptions survey.

The cyberbullying educator perceptions survey did not allow participants to skip any survey questions; each study participant had to answer every question in the survey. If the participant attempted to skip a question, the following message appeared for that question: “This is a required question.” The system would not allow the participant to advance to the next question until the skipped question was answered. At any time throughout the survey, participants could withdraw simply by exiting the webpage.

Data Analysis

Data analysis intends “to organize, provide structure, and elicit meaning” (De Langen, 2009, p. 69) from data. All cyberbullying educator perceptions survey data were examined and converted into descriptive statistics. The teacher focus group and interview participant responses were transcribed, coded, and analyzed by the researcher.

Descriptive statistics. Once all cyberbullying educator perceptions survey data were received, the researcher began to analyze the data. The reporting of the data generated descriptive statistics (Creswell, 2009; Marra & Bogue, 2006) which were used to describe traits within the data (Murphy et al., 2017). As the name suggests, descriptive statistics described and presented patterns and themes among data. Descriptive statistics include a summary of the sample as well as researcher observations. All cyberbullying educator perceptions survey data were kept confidential. The researcher analyzed the survey data responses in order to further develop the guiding questions for the educator focus group. Descriptive statistics were utilized for summarizing the survey item data. The information was reported in text and in tabular form. A frequencies analysis was conducted to identify a valid percent for responses to all questions in the cyberbullying educator perceptions survey.

To analyze the teacher focus group and interview data, the researcher coded and classified the data into categories.

Coding. Once all teacher focus group and interview data were collected for each of the four middle schools, the researcher transcribed verbatim the raw qualitative data that resulted from each of the participant’s comments. This formed the data set that the researcher analyzed. Once all data were transcribed, the audio recordings were deleted. The data coding process consisted of converting the raw data into smaller, usable themes

and subthemes which were then assembled for a broader understanding. According to Saldana (2009), coding is the activity of classifying data; Lockyer (2004) stated that coding summarizes widespread data into smaller units which are then easier to examine. Coding is analysis (Attride-Stirling, 2001). Data coding organized the qualitative data by sorting and classifying the data. Coding helped the researcher to determine what the data showed and what it represented, allowing the researcher to summarize and synthesize the data (Attride-Stirling, 2001).

Qualitative data analysis can be conducted via manual or computer-assisted methods; the researcher chose to use the manual method for the study. This involved the researcher using colored pencils to color code areas of interest while classifying that area into a category or theme. The researcher coded the text while reading through the entire data set, beginning with the transcribed data. Each participant response was coded by sorting and categorizing each comment. The researcher labeled sections, passages, and sentences within the transcription of the teacher focus group commentary. Themes and subthemes emerge and were coded by the researcher (Braun & Clarke, 2006, as cited in Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017). Coding assisted the researcher in the identification of interesting features of the data. The researcher read and reread through the entire data set, coding the text of the educator focus group and, finally, the interviews. The analysis consisted of the researcher making multiple passes through the transcription of the focus groups while making observations, highlighting and classifying each area. The initial pass through the transcript produced a lengthy list of codes; there were multiple codes for one segment of text. The researcher refocused and sorted the initial codes into smaller groups that fit into an overarching theme or category (Attride-Stirling, 2001). The researcher then considered how the codes or themes interrelated or fit into

different levels (Attride-Stirling, 2001). Once the researcher made multiple passes through the transcript, the codes and themes were then organized and entered into a spreadsheet. This was done for teacher focus group data as well as for interview data.

Accompanied by data collection, the research questions were reexamined in order to improve the focus of the researcher.

The coding process. According to Yin (2016), coding is a procedure that unearths meaning from words and phrases in order to thoroughly inspect a large text. After transcribing the audio recordings of the raw focus group data, the researcher carefully read and reread to locate important themes. A line-by-line analysis of the transcript was completed for teacher focus groups and interviews. Common words and phrases were listed together and given a specific identification color within the transcripts. Utilizing the research questions, the researcher further summarized the findings into central themes and subthemes.

To ensure participant anonymity, the researcher identified each participant with an identifying letter of the alphabet that served as their pseudonym during each teacher focus group. A group number was given to identify each study group. The combination of the nondescriptor and group number was used to anonymously identify participant quotes.

Three teacher focus groups were conducted at three of the participating study schools, with one educator interview occurring via a video conferencing tool in lieu of a focus group.

The cyberbullying educator perceptions survey was validated with a pilot study given to 10 classified staff at School 3. When the surveys were completed, the researcher determined that there were no problems evident with the *Google Forms* cyberbullying

educator perceptions survey; therefore, no changes were made to the survey.

Delimitations and Limitations

Although there are many advantages to mixed methods research, some limitations are understandable. Mixed methods research is complex and can be challenging to implement.

Delimitations. Delimitations in research are those forces that the researcher can control and thus define the bounds of the study (Simon & Goes, 2013). Delimitations are set so that the research goal is attainable within the allocated time. Possible participant absences were addressed via a make-up opportunity for the cyberbullying educator perceptions survey, prior to the researcher's data collection deadline. Participants received periodic email notices to complete the cyberbullying educator perceptions survey as well as reminders prior to the teacher focus groups and interviews.

Limitations. Price and Murnan (2004) defined limitations as possible weaknesses in a study that were out of the control of the researcher. Limitations place restrictions on the methodology of a study. For this study, these included the inherent bias in the nature of self-reporting (Donaldson & Grant-Vallone, 2002); the limitations of the survey instrument; the willingness of the participant to participate; the limitation of the researcher; and finally, the time constraints of the study. Methodological limitations for this study included the small sample size and lack of prior research on the topic of middle school educator perceptions on cyberbullying. Additional limitations included the number of participants in the educator focus groups and interview sessions.

It is essential for the researcher to realize that the research results in the study are only relevant to the particular middle school educators in upstate South Carolina. No generalizations should be made in respect to the wider educational community, as the

study concentrated on four middle schools within District X. Another limitation of the cyberbullying educator perceptions survey was the ability of participants to complete the survey more than once; this was due to the format of the *Google Forms* survey. The researcher felt that utilizing the open format which did not require participants to identify themselves by signing in would encourage more honest responses. Another limitation of the cyberbullying educator perceptions survey was that the format enabled participants to select more than one response for each of the survey questions. This occurred two times during the survey and thus only affected two responses of the survey. Despite limitations, the results of this study provide a fragment in the demystification of the problem that is cyberbullying in middle schools.

Summary

This chapter described the methodology that was utilized in the study. The purpose of the study was to examine educator perceptions concerning middle school cyberbullying. To achieve this objective, this study utilized a mixed methods approach utilizing both qualitative and quantitative elements. Surveys were used to gain broad perceptions of middle school educators, and teacher focus groups and interviews were used to better understand those perceptions. Patterns and themes were discerned to better understand the data produced from focus groups. Chapter 4 presents an overview of the significant themes and detailed findings organized by research question. Subsequently, Chapter 5 summarizes what can be learned from the study's findings. Additionally, Chapter 5 affords an explanation of the implication of the findings and determines suggestions for future research.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The intent of this study was to investigate the perceptions of middle school educators regarding cyberbullying. The study utilized a mixed methodology, and occurred in three phases: surveys, focus groups, and interviews. This study sought to determine the perceptions of current middle school educators. This chapter includes the restatement of the research problem, demographics, research findings by research question, and a summary of those findings.

Restatement of the Research Problem

Adolescence is a sensitive period with numerous developmental changes including physical, cognitive, social, and emotional development. These many changes impose a crucial stage of struggle on the adolescent who is attempting to find balance (Shapiro & Margolin, 2014) in a time of uncertainty. During this period of development, relationships with the adolescent's peer group becomes a chief priority. Adolescents seek out peer groups to solve problems, form relational bonds (Rubin, Bukowski, & Parker, 1998), and help navigate daily life. Ryan (2000) maintained, "It is widely acknowledged that experiences with peers constitute an important developmental context for children and adolescents" (p. 101). During early adolescence, the manipulation of social relationships becomes more complex (Bibou-Nakou et al., 2012). As adolescents begin to adjust their views on popularity and status, they become "more attracted to aggressive peers" (Bukowski et al., 2000, as cited in LaFontana & Cillessen 2002, p. 636). Tactics of social aggression are used to gain the respect of peers while advancing through the social hierarchy (Watling Neal, 2010). This occurs as a means to find their place among

the adolescent hierarchy during this crucial time of development.

The concept of peer groups has drastically changed with pervasive new digital media (Sawyer et al., 2012). A large majority (77%) of Americans are online daily (Perrin & Jiang, 2018). Roughly a quarter of adults in the United States report that they are “almost constantly” (Perrin & Jiang, 2018, p. 1) online, and 95% of adolescents are connected to the Internet (Lenhart et al., 2011). Further, 69% of adolescents utilize smartphones, while 65% connect and communicate via social media applications (Kachur et al., 2013). Adolescents have grown up amid the digital explosion and utilize communication technologies continuously; because of this, many youths rarely disconnect from the Internet (Crooks & Baur, 2013).

The documentation of the pervasiveness of bullying in schools is international (James, 2010; Rose, Espelage, & Monda-Amaya, 2009). Bullying has changed over the years, and although bullying still exists, cyberbullying is the newest form of bullying (Slonje & Smith, 2008, as cited in Casas, Del Rey, & Ortega-Ruiz, 2013).

Cyberbullying, which is an Internet-based form of aggression, has in many cases taken the place of schoolyard bullying. Cyberbullying has become an international issue for adolescents (Srivastava, 2012). Cyberbullying experts Hinduja and Patchin (2010) stated that cyberbullying continues to increase. According to researchers, the frequency of time spent in online communication increases the probability of cyberbullying (Dowell, Burgess, & Cavanaugh, 2009; Sticca et al., 2013).

The Internet was once touted as the way to save education (Sancho, 2010), which would be accomplished by the development of new skills and ideas created within productive educational settings (Bailey & Cotlar, 1994); however, teachers and

administrators battle daily with adolescent misuse of technology. Most schools and educators have developed policies to help to eliminate the use of technology when it is not part of instruction. Policies help to eliminate the use of technology when not part of instruction. Along with school-wide policies and technology restrictions, there are many programs to assist educators with monitoring bullying behaviors. Administrators and school counselors provide bullying intervention and are the first line of defense when bullying occurs in schools (Smith, 2015). Additionally, educators work diligently to create new approaches and techniques to circumvent bullying before it starts (Smith, 2015). The development and implementation of anti-bullying programs are many, although their success is uncertain (Ferguson, Miguel, Kilburn, & Sanchez, 2007).

Unlike traditional bullying, cyberbullying is not easy to detect, monitor, and prevent. Although cyberbullying occurs primarily outside of the school day (Agatston et al., 2007; Smith et al., 2008), it still disrupts instruction. Cyberbullying among adolescents has grown into an international health concern (Nixon, 2014) because the effects of cyberbullying can grossly affect the social, emotional, and developmental growth of adolescents (Smith & Crestie, 2010, as cited in Srivastava, 2012). The rates of cyberbully victimization vary from study to study (Nixon, 2014).

Research Questions

The following overall research question for this study was, “What are the perceptions of educators related to middle school cyberbullying?” In addition, the following research questions will be explored in further detail:

1. What are the perceptions of teachers related to middle school cyberbullying?
2. What are the perceptions of school counselors related to middle school

cyberbullying?

3. What are the perceptions of administrators related to middle school cyberbullying?

Demographics

The researcher invited 142 middle school educators from four middle schools to participate in the cyberbullying educator perceptions survey; 103 educators (73%) consented to participate in the study and completed the survey. Of those 103 consenting survey participants, 33 educators (32%) indicated additional willingness to participate in the upcoming cyberbullying perceptions focus group. MacIntosh (1993, as cited in Gibbs, 1997) suggested at least six and no more than 10 participants in the focus group. For the purpose of this study, the researcher elected to attempt to have no more than six individuals in each teacher focus group. Of those 33 consenting participants, 11 educators (33%) participated in the focus groups and one in an interview. Each focus group participant worked at one of the four study middle schools. Of those 11 focus group participants, there was one male educator (9%) and 10 females (91%) who took part in the teacher focus groups and one male educator who completed an interview.

The researcher invited eight middle school counselors and nine middle school administrators to participate in the cyberbullying perceptions interview sessions. Of the eight counselors invited to participate, three counselors (38%) consented and participated in interviews. The three school counselors interviewed were all female (100%). Of the nine administrators invited to participate in administrator interviews, five administrators (56%) consented and participated in interviews. In total, three female administrators (two were assistant administrators) and two male administrators (one was an assistant

administrator) were interviewed. As with participation in the survey, focus group and interview participation was voluntary.

Findings

After the pilot study, the data collection for the study took place in three phases: an online survey, focus groups, and interviews. The survey response rate (Table 3) was as follows: School 1 participants returned 18 surveys (17%), School 2 participants returned 17 surveys (17%), School 3 participants returned 38 surveys (37%), and School 4 participants returned 30 surveys (29%). Table 3 illustrates the number and percentage of surveys returned for each of the four study schools.

Table 3

Cyberbullying Educator Perceptions Survey Response Rate

	School 1	School 2	School 3	School 4	Total
Surveys returned	18	17	38	30	103
Response Rate	17%	17%	37%	29%	100%

School 3 and School 4 nearly doubled the return rate of School 1 and School 2.

Primary research question: What are the perceptions of educators related to middle school cyberbullying? The educator cyberbullying perceptions survey answered the primary research question. Concerning educator awareness of cyberbullying, all educators (100%) surveyed were aware of cyberbullying in middle school; 74 educators (72%) strongly agreed and 29 educators (28%) agreed to awareness. Based on the cyberbullying educator perceptions survey data, Table 4 reports the awareness of middle school educators.

Table 4

Educator Awareness

	As an educator I am aware of cyberbullying
1 – Strongly Agree	74
2 – Agree	29
3 – Disagree	0
4 – Strongly Disagree	0
Valid Responses	103

Results indicated in Table 4 show that 100% of educator participants were aware of cyberbullying.

According to educator survey data, 101 educators (99%) agreed that cyberbullying is a problem faced by middle school students. Table 5 provides a report of educator participant perceptions of the problem of cyberbullying.

Table 5

The Problem of Cyberbullying

	Cyberbullying is a problem faced by middle school students
1 – Strongly Agree	62
2 – Agree	39
3 – Disagree	1
4 – Strongly Disagree	0
Valid Responses	102

Cyberbullying is a problem faced by middle school students, according to 99% of educator participants.

In response to the survey question about the need for cyberbullying to be taken more seriously at the middle school level, 98 educator participants (95%) agreed that

cyberbullying should be taken more seriously. Table 6 indicates educator participant perceptions, concerning how cyberbullying is viewed at the middle school level.

Table 6

The Significance of Cyberbullying

	Cyberbullying should be taken more seriously at the middle school level
1 – Strongly Agree	56
2 – Agree	42
3 – Disagree	5
4 – Strongly Disagree	0
Valid Responses	103

The majority of educator participants perceived the need for cyberbullying to be taken more seriously at the middle school level.

In regard to when cyberbullying occurs, 81 educators (79%) agreed that cyberbullying occurs during school hours, and 100 educators (97%) agreed that cyberbullying occurs before and after school (Table 7). These responses indicate the occurrence of cyberbullying at all times of the day: before, during, and after school hours. Table 7 reports the results of educator perceptions regarding the occurrence of cyberbullying incidents.

Table 7

Cyberbullying Occurrence

	Incidents of cyberbullying occur DURING school time	Incidents of cyberbullying occur BEFORE/AFTER school time
1 – Strongly Agree	29	55
2 – Agree	52	45
3 – Disagree	21	3
4 – Strongly Disagree	0	0
Valid Responses	102	103

As evidenced in Table 7, middle school cyberbullying occurs throughout the day: before, during, and after school hours.

The vast majority, 81 educators (79%), agreed that cyberbullying is underreported by middle school students, while 85 educators (83%) disagreed with the statement middle school students overreport cyberbullying (Table 8). Table 8 gives an indication as to educator perceptions of whether middle school students over or underreport incidents of cyberbullying.

Table 8

Reporting Cyberbullying Incidents

	Cyberbullying is OVERREPORTED by middle school students	Cyberbullying is UNDERREPORTED by middle school students
1 – Strongly Agree	3	29
2 – Agree	15	54
3 – Disagree	69	17
4 – Strongly Disagree	16	2
Valid Responses	103	102

As shown in Table 8, the majority of educator participants perceive that cyberbullying is

underreported by students.

The majority, 95 educators (92%), agreed that cyberbullying increases from sixth through eighth grade; in a reverse-keyed question, 97 educators (94%) disagreed that cyberbullying decreases from sixth through eighth grade (Table 9). Table 9 indicates educator perceptions concerning the change in cyberbullying through middle school.

Table 9

Grade Fluctuation

	Cyberbullying increases from Grade 6 to Grade 8	Cyberbullying decreases from Grade 6 to Grade 8
1 – Strongly Agree	43	1
2 – Agree	52	5
3 – Disagree	8	65
4 – Strongly Disagree	0	32
Valid Responses	103	103

Based on the data provided in Table 9, educators overwhelmingly agreed that incidents of cyberbullying increase as middle school students advance from grade to grade.

The bulk, 82 educators (81%), agreed that cyberbullying is more dangerous than traditional bullying (Table 10). In a reverse-keyed survey question, 82 educators (85%) disagreed that traditional bullying is more dangerous than cyberbullying, but 20 educators (20%) agreed (Table 10). Table 10 provides educator perceptions comparing which type of bullying is more dangerous.

Table 10

Cyberbullying versus Traditional Bullying

	Cyberbullying is more dangerous than traditional bullying	Traditional bullying is more dangerous than cyberbullying
1 – Strongly Agree	27	5
2 – Agree	55	15
3 – Disagree	17	78
4 – Strongly Disagree	2	4
Valid Responses	101	102

More than 80% of educator survey participants perceived cyberbullying to be more dangerous than traditional bullying.

When asked about the need for additional training for educators, 91 educators (88%) agreed, stating more training is needed related to the appropriate handling of cyberbullying. Table 11 presents educator opinions concerning the training for cyberbullying.

Table 11

Educator Training Need

	Educators need additional training on how to appropriately handle cyberbullying
1 – Strongly Agree	37
2 – Agree	54
3 – Disagree	11
4 – Strongly Disagree	1
Valid Responses	103

There were only 12 educators (11%) who perceived no need for further cyberbullying training in middle schools.

Regarding the likelihood of students reporting incidents of cyberbullying, 40 educators (43%) believed that students are likely to report incidents of cyberbullying. In a reverse-keyed survey question, 59 educators (57%) believed that students will not likely report incidents of cyberbullying. Table 12 depicts educator perceptions concerning the likelihood of middle school students reporting cyberbullying.

Table 12

Reporting Incidents

	Middle school students are likely to report incidents of cyberbullying
1 – Strongly Agree	6
2 – Agree	38
3 – Disagree	49
4 – Strongly Disagree	10
Valid Responses	103

Over half of educator participants felt that middle school students are not likely to report incidents of cyberbullying.

When asked if cyberbullying was limited to students, 87 educators (85%), disagreed that cyberbullying incidents are limited to students, and 15 educators (15%) indicated cyberbullying is limited to students.

Table 13 provides educator perceptions regarding cyberbullying victims.

Table 13

Cyberbullying Victims

	Incidents of cyberbullying are limited to students
1 – Strongly Agree	5
2 – Agree	10
3 – Disagree	70
4 – Strongly Disagree	17
Valid Responses	102

According to the vast majority of educator participants, cyberbullying is not limited to students.

When asked about the management of cyberbullying at the middle school level, over half, 56 educators (54%), believed that cyberbullying is handled appropriately at the middle school level, while 46 educators (46%) believed that cyberbullying is not handled appropriately. Table 14 reflects educator perceptions regarding the management of cyberbullying incidents in middle school.

Table 14

School Response to Cyberbullying

	Cyberbullying is handled appropriately at the middle school level
1 – Strongly Agree	6
2 – Agree	50
3 – Disagree	43
4 – Strongly Disagree	4
Valid Responses	103

Based on survey data, educators were split on their perceptions of how cyberbullying is handled in middle schools.

On the survey question regarding whether middle school students understand the seriousness of cyberbullying, 88 educators (85%) disagreed, stating that middle school students do not understand the seriousness (Table 15). Table 15 presents a report of educator perceptions of student understanding of the seriousness of cyberbullying.

Table 15

Student Comprehension of the Seriousness of Cyberbullying

	Middle school students understand the seriousness of cyberbullying
1 – Strongly Agree	2
2 – Agree	13
3 – Disagree	64
4 – Strongly Disagree	24
Valid Responses	103

Students do not understand the seriousness of cyberbullying, according to 85% of educator participant responses.

Concerning the likelihood of middle school students engaging in cyberbullying, 42 educators (59%) agreed, and 60 educators (41%) stated that high school students are more likely to engage in cyberbullying than middle school students. Table 16 provides data on middle school educator perceptions concerning the cyberbullying engagement in high school.

Table 16

Secondary School

	Middle school students are more likely to engage in cyberbullying than high school students
1 – Strongly Agree	7
2 – Agree	35
3 – Disagree	57
4 – Strongly Disagree	3
Valid Responses	102

Based on the data presented in Table 16, educators were split regarding whether middle school students were more likely to engage in cyberbullying than high school students.

Concerning the gender of victims and perpetrators of cyberbullying, 80 educators (78%) believed that female students are more likely to be perpetrators of cyberbullying, and 23 educators (22%) disagreed (Table 17). The greater part, 88 educators (86%), agreed that female students are more likely to be cyberbullying victims (Table 17). In a reverse-keyed survey question, 98 educators (95%) disagreed that male students are more likely to be victims of cyberbullying (Table 17). Table 17 provides a report of educator perceptions regarding the gender of victims and perpetrators.

Table 17

Gender and Cyberbullying

	Female students are more likely to be victims of cyberbullying	Victims of cyberbullying are more likely to be male students	Perpetrators of cyberbullying are more likely to be female students
1 – Strongly Agree	32	1	18
2 – Agree	56	4	62
3 – Disagree	15	92	23
4 – Strongly Disagree	0	6	0
Valid responses	103	103	103

Table 17 suggests that victims and perpetrators are perceived to be female. Based on these responses, educators perceived victims and perpetrators to be female.

Research Question 1: What are the perceptions of teachers related to middle school cyberbullying? Research Question 1 was answered utilizing the cyberbullying educator perceptions focus groups.

Focus groups. To answer Research Question 1, the researcher used two guiding questions (Appendix C) to assist the participants in beginning the focus group discussion. The first focus group question investigated the views of educators (teachers, counselors, and administrators) regarding middle school cyberbullying. The second guiding question allowed educators to state what they believed could influence or decrease cyberbullying in middle school. If the focus groups had difficulty staying on task or experienced difficulty contributing to the discussion, the researcher had clarifying questions available. Member checking is often utilized by researchers to increase trustworthiness while establishing the researcher-study participant rapport (Creswell & Miller, 2000). During the study, the researcher utilized member checking to verify participant responses and

gather additional information.

MacIntosh (1993, as cited in Gibbs, 1997) suggested between six to 10 focus group participants. For the purpose of this study, the researcher elected to attempt to have no more than six individuals in each focus group. There were 24 educators who volunteered to participate in focus groups. Of those 24 individuals, 12 individuals attended one of the four scheduled focus groups at each school. There were two male educators (17%) and 10 females (83%) who consented and participated in the focus groups. Due to scheduling conflicts and illness, participant numbers dropped at each study school. The first scheduled focus group became an interview and took place with one participant from School 2 via an online conference tool when the second volunteering participant had to be absent due to medical leave. The second focus group occurred at School 3 with four educators participating. School 4 had four educators who made up the third focus group, and finally there were three educators who participated in the focus group at School 1.

After each focus group, audio recordings were transcribed, coded, and analyzed. Central themes and subthemes emerged during this process. Numerous categories were gathered from educator participant responses, with 26 areas emerging from the focus group data; of these areas, five central themes emerged. Table 18 reports the 26 codes that emerged during the initial analysis of the focus group responses.

Table 18

Initial Focus Group Codes

Initial Codes	Number of occurrences in data
Nature of Cyberbullying	60
Training/Education Needed (students, teachers, parents)	38
Consequences of Cyberbullying	35
Parental monitoring / involvement	26
Motives “why” (reasons) students cyberbully	24
Perpetual nature of cyberbullying	18
Social media as a tool of cyberbullying	17
How can we impact (decrease) Cyberbullying	14
Anonymous nature of cyberbullying	12
Unintentional (accidental or for fun)	11
Safety/Mass shootings	11
Office referral (at school)	11
Communication (with students)	10
Teach Character Education (students are not empathetic)	10
Mental /Emotional Health (students)	10
Types and tactics of cyberbullying	7
Seriousness (adolescents do not understand)	6
Hidden nature of cyberbullying	6
Traditional Bullying (versus cyberbullying)	6
Help students cope with cyberbullying	5
Policy/ Restrictions (school & district)	5
Cyberbullying Awareness	3
Teach netiquette and digital citizenship	3
Laws (state & federal laws needed)	3
Importance/seriousness of cyberbullying	2
Revenge as a motive	2

As noted in Table 18, the theme *Nature of Cyberbullying* received double the responses of other central themes.

Presented in Table 19 are themes and subthemes that emerged during teacher focus groups.

Table 19

Themes and Subthemes Based on Analysis of Focus Group Responses

Themes and Subthemes

Theme 1: The need for Educational Training

- 1a. Character Education
- 1b. Etiquette and Digital Citizenship
- 1c. Awareness

Theme 2: Parental Involvement

- 2a. Parental Awareness
- 2b. Monitoring

Theme 3: Consequences of Cyberbullying

- 3a. Safety and mass shootings
- 3b. Mental and Emotional Health
- 3c. School referrals
- 3d. Future

Theme 4: Nature of Cyberbullying

- 4a. Anonymous or Hidden
- 4b. Perpetual
- 4c. Ubiquitous

Theme 5: Motives

- 5a. Unintentional
 - 5b. Revenge
 - 5c. Adolescence
 - 5d. Parental role models
-

The following section is organized according to those central themes and subthemes found in Table 19.

Overview of the Focus Group Major Themes

In an attempt to answer Research Question 1, the researcher established the following five major themes from the focus group data.

Theme 1: Educational training. A prominent theme mentioned by a majority of the participants was the need for cyberbullying education and training for students, parents, and educators. Focus group participants concentrated on the need for specific educational training to include basic cyberbullying awareness, character education, netiquette, and digital citizenship as well as the need for specific training for teachers to help students cope with cyberbullying victimization.

Concerning cyberbullying awareness, Teacher Participant 1C commented, “Maybe educate kids and parents as well as educators.” Teacher Participant 1A remarked, “Teach them, and communicate when they are angry what their options are ... teach them how to handle it [cyberbullying] better.” Teacher Participant 1B related, “I think starting [educational training] maybe with the parents and letting them know what it [cyberbullying] is.” Teacher Participant 2H responded, “So, I just think a little more emphasis ought to be placed on it [cyberbullying education].” Regarding the need for student training, Teacher Participant 2H stated, “You know, a lot of young people don't understand or don't really know what cyberbullying is.” Teacher Participant 3O noted, “I just didn't realize; I didn't really think about how far it [cyberbullying] can spread. Just regular bullying is just going to stay around the school, but cyberbullying could be nationwide, worldwide.”

Stating what is needed for educators, Teacher Participant 1C indicated, “Training on how to handle, you know, what to do if they [adolescents] come to you [about

cyberbullying].” Teacher Participant 3R specified,

I think exposing kids to those ramifications [of cyberbullying] and letting them see this is not a joke, this is serious. I can really ... I can hurt people with this, or I can be hurt by this. Maybe just having more in-depth conversations about it [cyberbullying], because I think sometimes we just kind of don't do that and put a Band-Aid over it [cyberbullying] and just ... we don't talk a lot about it [cyberbullying]. So, I think maybe having more conversations, of course, which might lead to more of it [cyberbullying].

Regarding the need for education, Teacher Participant 3O detailed,

I think that parents ... we need to start with parent awareness [about cyberbullying]. I know that a lot of parents are already aware of cyberbullying, but they think, “My child would never do it.” Maybe have parent awareness sessions [at] the beginning of school, have that be a part of our opening night or our PTO or whatever.

Teacher Participant 4S indicated, “I just think that the bottom line is that we have to teach parents the danger [of cyberbullying]. But how can you keep kids’ parents [educated] when they're involved in it [cyberbullying]?”

Regarding the need for further training, Teacher Participant 3R replied, “I don't know how to handle this [cyberbullying]. Oh, gosh, what do I do? And so maybe some training on how to deal with this.”

Referring to safety, Teacher Participant 3M stated,

I mean we ... whenever we go through our [safety] training at schools or with the kids, like [for example] active shooter drills. But when it comes to cyberbullying,

I don't think we really kind of do that [show real examples of cyberbullying]. Concerning the need for more character education, Teacher Participant 4T remarked, “I definitely think we need to teach empathy and mindfulness like teaching kids how to be strong, how to control their thoughts, like how to control their negative and positive thoughts and focus.”

Regarding the need for student character education, Teacher Participant 3R stated, I think a lot of our students lack compassion. They don't ... they don't feel anything for their classmates. They're not connected to them, and so it's easier to be ugly to them and easier to ignore the hurt that they're inflicting because they don't care [about their peers].

Regarding the need for good parental role models, Teacher Participant 3M specified, “I think home life also, some of these children are not brought up with the knowledge of how to deal with people appropriately.” Teacher Participant 3R related, “They [adolescents] don't know how to talk with each other. So maybe we give them those communication skills, maybe have a class on how to hold a peaceful conversation, a respectful conversation.” Teacher Participant 2H specified, “I think it's [an] opportunity to continue to teach, particularly the young students, on the right from wrong and how to behave.” Teacher Participant 4T detailed, “I'm a huge believer in we need an empathetic class, like how these kids are not learning empathy.” Teacher Participant 4T described, “They don't think about their actions anyway, but they're just so mean and not remorseful. That frightens me that there's so many that do that and that just don't ... there's no empathy.” Teacher Participant 4T stated, “The fact that they won't come forward for anything that is said [online], that concerns me. That lack of moral compass

when it comes to the cyber stuff, it's a completely different environment to them.”

On the subject of the need for students to be taught online etiquette and digital citizenship, Teacher Participant 2H commented, “I think that one, it [cyberbullying] just has to be talked about in classrooms more frequent,” and further, “Teaching them how to be good digital citizens.” Teacher Participant 2H detailed, “They [adolescents] could start learning other ways to ... more responsible ways of using their social media.” Teacher Participant 4S stated, “There's not much I can do about that [unkindness] except say, ‘Be nice,’ and maybe in addition to sex ed [education], we need to add a little bit of social media etiquette.”

Theme 2: The need for parent involvement. A majority of the focus group participants spoke of the need for parental involvement concerning student digital media use. Participant discussion focused on making parents aware of the signs of cyberbullying victimization as well as the importance of constant monitoring of their adolescents’ social media accounts. Educators mentioned parent naivety and lack of knowledge about social media. Concerning the need for parental involvement, Teacher Participant 3Q indicated,

From what [Teacher Participant 3O] was saying about parents, I think a lot of it [the problem] also is parents are not involved in their children's social media. Just the [user]names themselves you can tell that their parents aren't paying attention to what they're doing on social media. So, their parents aren't looking at what they're doing on social media at all, and they have no idea if their kids are being bullied or if their kids are being bullies.

In mentioning parents’ naiveté about their students’ online habits, Teacher Participant 3R

added,

It wasn't until I accidentally saw one of my girls' phones light up with the message that said, "Hey, did so-and-so send you a nude picture?" And then, I told the Mom, and she was like, "My daughter doesn't have any of those apps," and I was like, "Well, yes she does. You need to look." So yes, they're not aware. They're oblivious because it's easier, I think.

Recounting the need for parent involvement, Teacher Participant 4T agreed and further mentioned students having multiple social media accounts. Further Teacher Participant 4T stated, "I think parents are naive if they think that their kids aren't doing that [having multiple social media accounts], but a lot of them honestly believe [that]."

Responding to the need for parental monitoring, Teacher Participant 1C related, "Many of our kids don't have parents [raising them]." Teacher Participant 1A remarked, "And are they [adolescents] acting out just because they don't have that structure at home?" Teacher Participant 3M stated, "If my child was the bully, there would be some major consequences at my house. But is that happening at home to the students here? Are they being ... is there any kind of consequence that's happening?"

Theme 3: Consequences of cyberbullying. Many focus group participants concentrated on the consequences of cyberbullying. Participants discussed the school-wide safety aspect of cyberbullying and mentioned mass shootings and the mental and emotional health of victims of cyberbullying. Numerous participants mentioned the immediate consequences of cyberbullying at the school level, focusing specifically on office referrals for discipline, with others mentioned the long-term consequences of cyberbullying. On the topic of safety, Teacher Participant 3M noted, "As a teacher, I

don't constantly worry about something happening [safety concern] because another student is being bullied, but it's always at the back of my mind. If something is not handled appropriately by myself, by my colleagues.”

The theme of safety and mass shootings was mentioned by several teachers including Teacher Participant 3R who indicated, “And it [cyberbullying] can have serious repercussions later in life.” Teacher Participant 3M stated, “Down the line you're going to get kids that are like ... Columbine, you know. I think of stuff like that.” And further, “If someone were to get upset enough to come in and, for example, shoot other students. Are we doing enough for the students who are involved [in cyberbullying] to be safe?”

Regarding the mental and emotional health of middle school students, Teacher Participant 3S detailed, “I think it's [cyberbullying] a true issue that is detrimental to our children.” Teacher Participant 3T noted,

Well, and we have the children who will put those kinds of things [personal information or intimate details] out there about themselves to a friend which is shared and they're confiding in a friend, trusting that person, and then, that [personal information or intimate details] gets shared. Or I know we've had lately a number of our sixth graders that have had to have threat assessments [a threat assessment is the process used to assess risk] done because of these suicidal conversations.

Teacher Participant 4T added, “And I mean, I'm a firm believer in our mental health ... that our society as a whole, our mental health is on the decline.” Regarding mental and emotional health of our students, Teacher Participant 4T stated,

And so they you know, their mental health is not any ... you know they're these

other stronger kids that are picking at them and they're, like you said [referring to another educator], they've got ... you've got, 10-year-olds with suicidal thoughts, like that's young.

Teacher Participant 4S, speaking about adolescents, stated, "I mean, they're so concerned, like a consuming concern and that their level of self, self-love or whatever you want to call it and depression increases the more they do *Facebook*."

Regarding school referrals, Teacher Participant 3R replied, "When a student comes to you and says hey I'm being bullied or they're sending me these hateful messages, I'll call guidance. What's the better response? And I think that [educator training] would help a lot."

Teacher Participant 3X mentioned the future consequences of cyberbullying: They [adolescents] don't understand that whoever made that [cyberbullying post] in 20 years and [if] they tried to run for president, you could pull this [online post] up and say, "Look how they were objectifying me," and there goes their campaign. You know, they don't realize that if you want a job and that's your handle [social media username], as human resources I'm looking at [that username] then going, "That is inappropriate."

Theme 4: The nature of cyberbullying. The nature of cyberbullying was revealed many times during focus groups. Participants mentioned the hidden nature of cyberbullying, the anonymity of cyberbullies, and the perpetual nature of cyber activities. Participant 4T asserted,

I see it with my sixth graders, where particularly in a group chat format, they tend to get into these group chat apps, and once one person says something, it's like a

dog pile. They all jump in, and then, somebody's feelings get hurt, but it's that mob mentality that I find the most concerning.

Teacher Participant 4T related, "I know one of mine [student cyberbully victim] specifically; it spreads. She [victim of cyberbullying] gets picked on all the time. People [adolescents] make fun of her, and it just spreads through the social media."

In relation to the hidden nature and anonymity of cyberbullying, Teacher Participant 1A indicated, "Something [cyberbully incident] started on *Facebook* or *Snapchat*, and then, it escalates and becomes a situation [behavioral problem] in the classroom, and it starts affecting their friend group." Teacher Participant 1A further stated, "You never know, because once they get it out there, everyone knows about it. Things are still going to fester to some degree." More on the hidden nature of cyberbullying, Teacher Participant 1A commented,

It's [cyberbullying] going on underneath the surface, and we need to be more – like what's the word I'm looking for – I don't want to use aware again, because we've used that quite a lot. But it deals with ... [Here, another participant supplied the word "Vigilant"] yes, vigilant, and yes about seeing the signs of possible bullying happening on that level.

Teacher Participant 3R related, "It [cyberbullying] makes you anonymous, and you have more confidence when people don't know who you are." Teacher Participant 4X detailed,

I think part of the reason that it's [cyberbullying] so popular, you know, prevalent with our group [adolescents], is that you can do it anonymously as well. You can make up a fake [social media user]name; you can make up a fake account, and

then, you can say all the things that you wouldn't say to someone's face, because you feel safe saying it; whereas, you wouldn't feel safe saying it to their face at school.

On the subject of the invisibility of cyberbullying, Teacher Participant 1B specified,

It's largely invisible to [those not on social media] until it hits a kid so hard that they break down in the middle of your class. Or two kids get in a screaming match, and you don't know why [they are upset], and somebody else explains what he/she had said about he/she on *Facebook* last night.

Discussing the anonymity of cyberbullying, Teacher Participant 3R emphasized, "Anybody can cyberbully anyone. So, you don't even have to know that person, and you can just attack them." Further, Teacher Participant 3O specified,

I know everybody's heard it's so much easier to say something ugly behind the screen than it is to somebody's face. So, if we have something against somebody, it's so much easier to hit that reply [button]. You can say whatever our mind is thinking, if they [adolescents] go, "We don't have to deal with the actual person." It [cyberbullying] is easier; it's cowardly.

Concerning the anonymity of cyberbullying, Teacher Participant 4X responded,

And like I said, it's harder to bully somebody face to face than it is to bully someone when you're anonymous. That's just it. You can't defend yourself [against cyberbullying]. At least if you're fighting with your fists you have the opportunity [to defend yourself].

On the topic of the perpetual nature of cyberbullying, Teacher Participant 3M indicated,

I feel that cyber bullying is just an extension of students being able to bother other

students outside of the classroom. And for students who are being bullied outside of the classroom, it's like they have no way to get away from it [cyberbullying].

Whereas, when we were, you know, when we were younger, we can go home [to avoid bullying] and do our own thing, where the Internet wasn't as big of a deal back then. But now, kids, they thrive and live off of internet usage and social media, and now, they're being harassed at home.

Teacher Participant 3R specified, "It's just a constant method to keep it [student bullying] going, and you can't escape it; it's in your face, literally on your phone."

Teacher Participant 3Q added, "I think that cyberbullying can actually even be worse than regular [traditional] bullying. So, like it [cyberbullying] can spread a lot easier than just regular bullying could."

Teacher Participant 3O replied, "Well and I agree with Q [Teacher Participant 3Q] and that it's [cyberbullying] so deep and so wide, and it spreads so quickly that it's almost gone to a point of no return."

Teacher Participant 4X stated, "It [cyberbullying] just kind of branches out and gets bigger and bigger and bigger and bigger." Teacher Participant 4S indicated, "Yes, and I think they [adolescents] don't realize that it's permanent." Concerning the perpetual nature of cyberbullying, Teacher Participant 4S specified,

And then, it [cyberbullying evidence] follows them throughout their life. And that's what's so worrisome, because it [cyberbullying evidence] follows them.

You know if you chose to move and it [bullying] wouldn't follow you, but this [cyberbullying] follows me everywhere because you are ... I mean, it's the Internet.

Further on the permanence of cyberbullying, Teacher Participant 4S stated,

Like they're invincible, too, because of video games. I mean I think that while people don't get hurt in video games, or they get hurt they get to come back. And I think that that's their [adolescents'] mentality now is that nothing is permanent. And that's what the whole cyber bullying thing ... they [adolescents] don't understand that it's permanent.

Teacher Participant 3O, concerning the ubiquitous nature of cyberbullying, “I think cyberbullying, at first I think of it as social media, email that type of thing, ‘Mean Girls,’ an extension of bullying that is at school that transcends into the home environment.”

Theme 5: Student motives for cyberbullying. The “why” of cyberbullying was repeatedly discussed by educator participants during focus groups. The majority of focus group participants listed cyberbullying as often being an unintentional act by adolescents. Other participants indicated that adolescents do not truly grasp the seriousness of cyberbullying, while others listed revenge as a possible reason for cyberbullying.

Many teachers noted that middle school students were unintentional in their cyberbullying actions. Teacher Participant 1B specified, “Some of them [adolescents] do have pictures of me that they found [online] that they think are funny, and they’ll pass it [old pictures of the teacher] around, but it is never anything malicious.” Teacher Participant 1C stated, “I would agree with that; it [cyberbullying] is unintentional.” In reference to students unintentionally cyberbullying, Teacher Participant 3Q indicated,

I still don't think that a lot of kids realize that what they're doing is [cyber] bullying either. A lot of times they just think they're doing something funny, like

they're making memes about people now you know, and they just kind of think it's a funny thing, and they don't even necessarily realize that whatever they're doing is hurting someone.

Teacher Participant 3M remarked, "I think like [Teacher Participant 3Q] stated, they [adolescents] may or may not even know they're bullying. They might just think they're doing something funny, because they're getting other kids to laugh with them instead of at them." Teacher Participant 2H asserted, "We noticed that there is some unintentional cyberbullying that happens, just kids being kids."

In the School 4 focus group, several teachers indicated that the lack of a proper parent as a role model contributed to middle school adolescents' decisions to participate in cyberbullying. Teacher Participant 1C noted that students may cyberbully because they see their parents cyberbullying on social media:

A lot of times, because I've seen parents on *Facebook* also call out, you know, teachers [and] other students. And so it's, I don't know if sometimes they feel like that motivates them for their cause [to participate in cyberbullying], because a lot of people jump on that bandwagon.

Teacher Participant 1A related, "I had experienced, or it wasn't just a student that did it. It was a parent that also did it ... so, this year so I think some parents are involved with students at some point." Teacher Participant 4S further reinforced,

I think one of the biggest problems is our parents are part of the problem. Yes, they love it [social media conflict] as much as the kids. In fact, there was a case years ago where a child committed suicide, a girl committed suicide, because of cyberbullying. When it all came down to it, it was the mother of the bully that

was doing all the response. And that's what I see. That parents love the internet, they love social media, and it's natural their kids would, too.

Teacher Participant 4X stated, “I mean they [parents] almost keep it [social media drama] going themselves just as bad as the kids, and they had their own battles with other parents.” Teacher Participant 4T noted, “I think parents, between the fact that we have a lot of parents who enjoy the drama themselves and then the parents who are just so in the dark about what's going on with kids and social media.”

Some teachers indicated that revenge was the basis for middle school adolescent cyberbullying. Teacher Participant 2H commented,

They want to try to take vengeance, you know, and do it their own way, and who knows what the outcome could be in ... a lot of time [it] is catastrophic, because most of the time, they don't just target the person who's bullying them.

Further mentioning revenge as a motive for cyberbullying, Teacher Participant 4S remarked, “And I think that they often put things on places [social media sites] like that to blackmail girls and boys.” Another teacher, Teacher Participant 3M noted, “This is their life. ‘This is how I'm not going to be made fun of because I'm making fun of somebody else.’” Teacher Participant 3M indicated,

You're going to get these kids that are being bullied and want to take revenge on the people who are bullying them, and they're going to come to school and take care of [retaliate] issues, because they think that's how it [cyberbullying] should be taken care of. Because of other forms of social media, video games that it's okay to go around shooting people.

A number of teachers cited the period of adolescent development as the reason for

middle school adolescent cyberbullying. Teacher Participant 1C stated,

Because truly, you can tell a middle schooler to treat others as you want to be treated, and they hear you, but it's so much easier to not to. You know, to do things that are going to hurt somebody else; for that age, it's just second nature.

Teacher Participant 3O indicated, "You know, they [adolescents] are not even aware that they're being bullied." Teacher Participant 3R specified, "I don't think they [adolescents] get it, they think it's [cyberbullying] just a joke." Teacher Participant 3O stated, "Because [at] their age they don't have the common sense that, 'This is going to affect me the rest of my life. This is going to affect someone else the rest of their lives.'" Teacher Participant 3M explained, "This [cyberbullying] is cool to them [adolescents]." Teacher Participant 3M stated, "But at this age, they don't comprehend that, because they're just so involved in themselves." Teacher Participant 3R detailed, "Again, they don't understand the full effect." Indicating the playful nature of the adolescent, Teacher Participant 2H specified,

I just feel like the younger they are, they [are] "Just playing." That's their big phrase. While, "We're just playing," and they don't really understand the severity of what they're doing, and the impact it has on the victim. You know, right now, you [are] "just playing," but you know that's just building towards something that's going to be more serious later on.

Teacher Participant 1A affirmed, "I mean are they [adolescents] going to do that just because they want the attention, because they don't have the security? That is how they're trying to get the attention or want somebody to notice who they are." Teacher Participant 4S added, "*Snapchat*, that is where I see it [cyberbullying] the most because

they think it disappears, and then, there's you know ... and that's where I've had the most experience with sending pictures.” Teacher Participant 4T asserted, “Yeah, even our sixth graders. And that's again, I think, that permanence. They don't get it if it disappears from their phone. To them, it's gone.” Teacher Participant 4T remarked, “They don't want to be left out, don't want to be excluded.” Teacher Participant 4S stated, “I think a lot of times with our kids, they don't see cyberbullying as bullying.”

Research Question 2: What are the perceptions of school counselors related to middle school cyberbullying? To answer this research question, the researcher interviewed three school counselors asking them the question, “As a counselor, what are your perceptions related specifically to middle school cyberbullying?” Counselor Participant 4C responded, “It is one of the biggest issues we deal with. I've done this job for 14 years, and it's amazing how things have changed over the years. That is one of the biggest issues.” Counselor Participant 4C stated,

I don't know whether I feel like it's [cyberbullying] gotten [worse]. But then, sometimes I also feel like we also don't hear about it as much, and I think that was because I think they've just stopped telling. I think that they don't always report it anymore.

When interviewed, the school counselors answered the interview question, “What is cyberbullying?” Three of three school counselors have a solid understanding of the definition of cyberbullying. Counselor Participant 3 defined cyberbullying as,

Cyberbullying to me is when people are using social media and the internet to basically bully someone and belittle them, and it's something that they do repetitively and that the other person [student] feels like they kind of are helpless

in the situation, that there's like a power imbalance.

During the interviews, the school counselors answered the interview question, “Is cyberbullying a problem in your middle school?” Of the three school counselors interviewed (Counselor Participant 3A, Counselor Participant 3B, and Counselor Participant 4C), each agreed that cyberbullying was a problem in middle schools. Counselor Participant 4C stated, “It is one of the biggest issues we deal with”; and Counselor Participant 3B specified, “I do think it's a problem, and I do think that it's something that's under-reported.”

When asked, “Have you noticed a change (increase or decrease) in incidents of cyberbullying,” one school counselor, Counselor Participant 4C commented, “So, I think it's definitely increasing, because there's more avenues for that”; and another counselor, Counselor Participant 3B, remarked,

I feel like I'm going to contradict myself when I say this, but I think that you think that it's gotten worse, because I think that there's more and more apps out there on their phones that allows them to do it, in ways that they can be sneaky about it, and I think that they're not getting caught. So, I think that it has gotten worse in that way, but I also think that the kids are part of the reason. I think is not reported as much because I think a lot of them have started to get kind of immune to it.

Counselor Participant 3A indicated, “It's definitely been an increase. [The] more social media is out there, more that they're starting at a younger age. It is definitely increasing.”

During the interviews, the school counselors answered the interview question, “How often do you encounter incidents of cyberbullying?” All three school counselors

interviewed (Counselor Participant 3A, Counselor Participant 3B, and Counselor Participant 4C) indicated weekly occurrences of cyberbullying. One counselor, Counselor Participant 4C, specified, “Weekly. I would say at least weekly, because you'll have some weeks you have it two, three times, and then, one week, you may not.” And another school counselor, Counselor Participant 3A, noted, “I think we see a lot of it.”

During the interviews, the school counselors answered the interview question, “What is your professional responsibility with regard to cyberbullying?” Counselor Participant 3A stated, “My responsibility is the first line [of defense]. Usually, they'll come to us and let us know what's going on.” Indicating professional responsibility in regard to cyberbullying, Counselor Participant 3B added,

When we hear about it professionally, obviously, to talk to the students and check on the student, that one that was bullied. To check on them and make sure that they are okay and how things are going and also for the one that did the bullying to report that somewhere.

Further, Counselor Participant 3A stated,

We also ... have parents to call us. We also tell them that they can go wherever it happens. If it happens in the county, they can call the county police; if it happens in the city, we advise them to call the city police department.

On the topic of a school counselor’s professional responsibility concerning cyberbullying, Counselor Participant 4D stated,

In regard to cyberbullying, our sort of mentality on that is if it doesn't happen at school, and it doesn't come to school, we're sort of limited [in what we can do].

So, a lot of times, we will contact parents, but many times, it does come back to school.

Further, Counselor Participant 4D added,

So, like the students may message on the weekend, but in that message [it] is like, “I’m going to beat you up at school,” or they bring it to school. And then, it’s distracting them from education, and so, therefore, we have to deal with it there. Sometimes with discipline, we are limited because the actual thing did not happen on school property and wasn’t messaged on school property. But we have to sort of deal with the after-effects of that.

When asked, “How often do you conference with students in regard to cyberbullying incidents,” all three school counselors responded, “Weekly,” and further indicated they are available to students as necessary. Counselor Participant 3B specified, “As needed, we conference with students as the need arises.”

During the interviews, the school counselors answered the interview question, “What do you tell students to help them cope with cyberbullying?” One school counselor, Counselor Participant 3B, responding to assisting students in coping with cyberbullying, stated,

If they’re the victim, we listen to them and tell them not to respond to the person, because then, it gets back and forth. We tell them to make sure they’re blocking that type of person, and we just go over the etiquette of technology.

Counselor Participant 3A indicated, “The best way I told students to deal with it [cyberbullying] is to block the person [online] and to then screenshot anything, so you can have that as evidence.” Additionally, Counselor Participant 4C indicated,

I tell them that they should block the person who is bullying them. In some cases, I'll even encourage them to not be on that, to delete the app if it's like *Snapchat*. You need to get it off it's causing that much stress to you, and you can't control other people's words. Maybe you just don't need [to] be a part of that ... Don't be their friend on social media. Block them. You know you don't have to deal with them.

During the interviews, the school counselors answered the interview question, “Does your school have a program (already in place) to help students and staff cope with cyberbullying?” Counselor Participant 3A and Counselor Participant 4C indicated that Olweus [program] was the anti-bullying program used within the district, although it was not currently utilized at either school. Counselor Participant 3A added,

Well, we were doing Olweus [program], yes, which was supposed to be like an anti-bullying program. I'm not sure what happened there. Nothing was being said about it in two years. I'm not sure if we're still technically supposed to be doing that or not. But other than that, no.

During the interviews, the school counselors answered the interview question, “Does cyberbullying occur inside or outside of school?” School counselors identified cyberbullying as occurring outside of school. Counselor Participant 4D indicated, “Outside, always outside of school, but it distracts from instruction and causes problems during school time.”

When counselors were asked if they had personally or professionally experienced cyberbullying, two school counselors, Counselor Participant 3A and Counselor Participant 4C, indicated that they had not been a victim of cyberbullying; and one school

counselor, Counselor Participant 3B, had been a victim of cyberbullying. Counselor Participant 3B did not want to elaborate on the cyberbullying incident.

The researcher asked school counselors how to impact cyberbullying. Counselor Participant 3A stated,

I do think that having some sort of established program would help. I think it would make people, if there was a way that students felt they could report it and it be kept anonymous, so that they know that they weren't going to be found out that they told.

To influence cyberbullying at the middle school level, Counselor Participant 3B stated, “Specifically, parents. Parents, as far as educating them.” Counselor Participant 3B continued, “I think they [parents] know what it is, but I think it's more of watching your children because your child could be the bully or the one being bullied.”

Research Question 3: What are the perceptions of administrators related to middle school cyberbullying? To answer this research question, the researcher utilized several interview questions. The first question asked of administrators, “What is your perceptions of cyberbullying?” Administrator Participant 2C stated, “We don't have a lot of that at my school. We do have some but generally, we don't have quite as much as I think other schools do.” Administrator Participant 1E responded, “This goes on quite a lot. In many instances, we are never involved. Only when a child comes forward with something at school does it become a discipline issue for disruption of school.” To the same question, Administrator Participant 3A answered, “I think that cyberbullying takes place with older as well as younger kids and it's irrelevant what socioeconomic status they're in. I think they're all doing it.”

Regarding the proper definition of cyberbullying, four of five middle school administrators were able to give a specific definition of cyberbullying. Administrator Participant 3B replied, “Cyberbullying is the use of digital technology that is used to intimidate, harass, or threaten students via the Internet.” Administrator Participant 3A responded, “Cyberbullying is any form of bullying that takes place on social media.” Administrator Participant 1E answered, “The use of an electronic [or] digital device to send messages [and] pictures that intimidate, harass, or bully.”

When asked about administrative professional responsibility with regard to cyberbullying, administrator answers varied. Administrator Participant 3A stated, “To make sure it doesn't disturb the school,” while Administrator Participant 2C responded,

If it is brought to us at school, dependent on the situation, but mainly if it doesn't interfere with [the] school day, and somebody is not saying that they're going to do something at school, we do a lot of counseling and talk to [students] as far as punishing [for cyberbullying].

Administrator Participant 2D stated, “If it is happening at school, we are responsible for getting it stopped. If it happens away from school, and it affects school, we have to deal with it.”

Participating administrators were questioned about whether cyberbullying was a problem for the middle school. Of the five administrators interviewed, three middle school administrators (Administrator Participant 3A, Administrator Participant 3B, and Administrator Participant 1E) stated that cyberbullying is a problem faced in their middle schools, and two administrators (Administrator Participant 2C and Administrator Participant 2D) indicated it is an occasional problem. Administrator Participant 3B

specified,

I define bullying as one person intimidating another without the other having any response. When you respond to it [bullying] or say something back, to me that's no longer bullying. You're just as much a part of the problem as the person who started it. In the sense of pure bullying where it's just one person doing something to another, there are some issues with that, but it is not as much as it [is] just merely going back and forth.

When administrators were asked if there has been a change in the number of incidents of cyberbullying, two administrators (Administrator Participant 2C and Administrator Participant 2D) indicated no change in cyberbullying, whereas three administrators (Administrator Participant 3A, Administrator Participant 3B, and Administrator Participant 1E) indicated an increase in cyberbullying in middle school. Concerning changes in incidents of cyberbullying, Administrator Participant 3B specified, "Absolutely, it has increased, yes ma'am. It's just something that has become more prevalent." And Administrator Participant 3A indicated, "Yes an increase, because they have more access to it."

Regarding the occurrence of incidents of cyberbullying, two administrators (Administrator Participant 2C and Administrator Participant 2D) indicated they encounter cyberbullying once or twice a month, with three administrators (Administrator Participant 1E, Administrator Participant 3A, and Administrator Participant 3B) indicating that incidents of cyberbullying occur weekly.

Two administrators (Administrator Participant 1E and Administrator Participant 3A) stated that they conference weekly with students about incidents of cyberbullying,

and three administrators (Administrator Participant 3B, Administrator Participant 2C, and Administrator Participant 2D) indicated conferencing with students monthly.

Administrator Participant 1E specified, “As needed, at least weekly.” Administrator Participant 3B stated, “Generally I don't do quite as much discipline as the other administrators in our building. So therefore, mine is very limited, maybe monthly.”

Administrator Participant 3A indicated, “At least once a week, weekly.”

In answering the interview question, “What do you tell students to help them cope with cyberbullying,” Administrator Participant 3B stated, “The biggest thing you have to do is let people know that it's going on. There's so many times that, whether it's school officials or parents, [they] are not notified that there's things taking place.” Another administrator, Administrator Participant 1E, detailed, “Be sure to save the messages and show them to an adult,” and continued, “Don't carry on messaging [or] talking with people you don't know,” and “Block anyone that tries to do this – don't drag it on.” Administrator Participant 1E and Administrator Participant 3A indicated that students should always report incidents of cyberbullying, save any evidence, and block the person doing the cyberbullying.

Administrators were asked, “Does cyberbullying occur inside or outside of school?” In answering where cyberbullying occurs, Administrator Participant 2C stated that it occurs outside of school, whereas all other administrators indicated it occurs both inside and outside of school. In reference to where cyberbullying occurs, Administrator Participant 3B specified,

The majority occurs outside of school. There are a few instances that we've had over a couple of years at this school where there have been a couple of things

inside of school, but the majority of the cyberbullying takes place outside of school.

Administrator Participant 1E added, “Both places, but more outside of school.”

When asked if the school or district had a program in place to help students and staff handle cyberbullying, Administrator Participant 3B stated, “No”; two administrators (Administrator Participant 3A and Administrator Participant 1E) specified, “Yes” but were unable to name the program or district policy; and two administrators (Administrator Participant 2C and Administrator Participant 2D) indicated, “Yes” and stated the name of the program currently or previously utilized in the district.

Administrator Participant 3B, who indicated, “No,” specified, “I don't know that we have a particular program in place.” Two other administrators (Administrator Participant 1E and Administrator Participant 2C) indicated that “Olweus” was the anti-bullying program currently utilized in the district. Administrator Participant 1E stated, “There is district policy”; and Administrator Participant 2C responded, “We do have. We had, and we've used it in the past. We've used the Olweus [anti-bullying program] which is [the] bullying type thing.” Administrator Participant 2D added, “Olweus,” in response to the district program for cyberbullying.

During the interviews, administrators were asked, “Do you have personal or professional experience with cyberbullying?” Of the five administrators interviewed, Administrator Participant 3B and Administrator Participant 2C had been victims of cyberbullying, while the other three administrators (Administrator Participant 3A, Administrator Participant 2D, and Administrator Participant 1E) had no personal experience with cyberbullying. One of the administrators, Administrator Participant 3B,

shared, “I have, kids putting mean comments on the Internet.” This administrator participant continued, “But if you don't follow it then you don't know about it.” Another administrator who had been cyberbullied on social media, Administrator Participant 2C, asserted, “When you're in my position, they're going to say how they think that my school didn't handle the situation properly, so yes.” Administrator Participant E1 indicated, “Only between students.”

During interviews, the researcher asked administrators, “How do you propose the schools can make an impact on cyberbullying?” Administrator Participant 3B stated,

The magic wand would be to take cell phones and the ability to access those types of content away from students. I think realistically, for students to develop a sense of empathy for others and to realize what they are truly doing.

On how to impact cyberbullying, Administrator Participant 3A indicated, “Increase their education; students, parents, and teachers, which would make an impact on cyberbullying at the middle school level.” Regarding what schools can do to affect cyberbullying, Administrator Participant 1E stated, “It is really out of our hands. There have been incidents where students were punished here at school (when it crossed over into school) but continued with the messaging outside of school.”

Summary

Within Chapter 4, the results of the study are reported via the research questions. The study centered around the primary research question, “What are the perceptions of educators related to middle school cyberbullying?” The findings for the primary research question were achieved through the utilization of the cyberbullying educator perceptions survey, teacher focus groups, and counselor and administrator interviews. According to

the cyberbullying survey, middle school educators are aware of cyberbullying.

Research Question 1: What are the perceptions of teachers related to middle school cyberbullying? The introductory research question addressed teacher awareness and understanding of cyberbullying among middle school students. The researcher answered this question in two ways, via the cyberbullying perceptions survey and teacher focus group sessions. Survey questions 1-20 and focus group responses were used to indicate teacher perceptions of middle school cyberbullying. According to focus group data, teachers deal with cyberbullying in their classrooms frequently and perceive the problem to be due to lack of parental knowledge about the Internet and social media.

Research Question 2: What are the perceptions of school counselors related to middle school cyberbullying? Research Question 2 explored school counselor conceptions of middle school cyberbullying. Cyberbullying perceptions interviews were conducted with counselors to answer this research question. According to school counselor interview data, counselors are concerned about cyberbullying in middle schools and state that it is a problem that requires weekly attention.

Research Question 3: What are the perceptions of principals related to middle school cyberbullying? Interviews on cyberbullying perceptions were conducted with school administrators to answer this research question. According to educator interview data, principals deal with cyberbullying weekly and perceive it to be a growing problem.

Chapter 4 ends with a summary statement. Chapter 5 provides conclusions and an explanation of the implications of the findings and determines suggestions for future research.

Chapter 5: Findings, Discussion, and Recommendations

Introduction

The aim of this study was to determine cyberbullying perceptions of middle school educators: teachers, school counselors, and administrators. One goal of this study was to explain the challenges of middle school cyberbullying in order to expand understanding and build effective strategies of prevention and intervention for middle school educators. Understanding the issue of cyberbullying is paramount, as adolescents' preferred method of communication and interaction is via digital media (Lenhart et al., 2010).

A summary and conclusion will be shared based on the overall research question, "What are the perceptions of educators related to middle school cyberbullying?" In addition, findings based on the following research questions will be explained in further detail:

1. What are the perceptions of teachers related to middle school cyberbullying?
2. What are the perceptions of school counselors related to middle school cyberbullying?
3. What are the perceptions of administrators related to middle school cyberbullying?

Research question deductions will each be discussed according to the method used, including the cyberbullying educator perceptions survey, educator focus groups, and interviews with school counselors and middle school administrators. The researcher examined middle school educator perceptions, finding both similarities and discrepancies among the three participant groups. This chapter will provide a summary of the study

findings, connections to theory, recommendations and implications based upon the results, recommendations for future research, and concluding remarks.

Summary of Findings

For the analysis of study results, the researcher will discuss findings specific to the primary question and each supporting research question. These findings represent the perceptions of educators related to middle school cyberbullying and will be shared from the voice of each study participant group.

Perceptions of middle school cyberbullying: Educator assertions. The primary study question, “What are the perceptions of educators related to middle school cyberbullying,” was answered via the cyberbullying educator perceptions survey as well as via a holistic look at teacher focus groups and interviews with school counselors and administrators. The results from the cyberbullying educator perceptions survey indicated that educators expressed serious concern over middle school cyberbullying, which they consider a growing problem. This perception is supported by researchers who found that cyberbullying is increasing (Campbell, 2005; Ottenweller, 2006; Von Marees & Petermann, 2012). Educators perceived cyberbullying is steadily on the increase; this finding was further validated during teacher focus groups and interview sessions. Researchers support this perception of cyberbullying increasing (Beran & Li, 2005; Brydolf, 2007; Von Marees & Petermann, 2012), attributing the escalation to the numerous adolescents who have “embraced online interactivity” (Hinduja & Patchin, 2014, p. 3).

Middle school educators stated that cyberbullying should be taken more seriously at the middle school level, noting that cyberbullying increases from Grades 6-8. Many

researchers support this finding and stated that cyberbullying increases during middle school (Beale & Hall, 2007; Carta, Fiandra, Rampazzo, Contu, & Preti, 2015; Milsom & Gallo, 2006). Educators perceived that cyberbullying is more dangerous than traditional bullying due to its very nature (Meech, 2007). Overwhelmingly, educators stated that although cyberbullying occurs primarily outside of school, it disrupts the school day; this finding is supported by cyberbullying experts Hinduja and Patchin (2011).

One primary perception of middle school educators was the need for education; overwhelmingly, educators recommend the need to educate students, parents, and teachers about cyberbullying. The education of school stakeholders is crucial to cyberbullying prevention (Simmons & Bynum, 2014). This finding is further supported by researchers who recommend intervention via cyberbullying education (Hoff & Mitchell, 2008; Popovic-Citic et al., 2011). Educators play a vital role in cyberbullying prevention while fostering digital citizenship and appropriate online behavior (Cassidy, Brown & Jackson, 2012). Educator perception focused on teaching cyberbullying awareness, types and methods of cyberbullying, consequences of cyberbullying, and how to help students avoid difficult situations as well as cope with cyberbullying victimization.

Another primary concern for middle school educators was the strong need for parental involvement and parental monitoring. Cyberbullying typically occurs via social media and new websites or apps that adults rarely frequent, known as “the hidden world of adolescent electronic communication” (Mason, 2008, as cited in Snakenborg, Van Acker & Gable, 2011, p. 90). Further, Snakenborg et al. (2011) found that parental monitoring could reduce incidents of cyberbullying by as much as 50%. Educators

overwhelmingly agreed that parental involvement and parental monitoring were drastically needed to impact cyberbullying at the middle school level. Baldry and Farrington (2000) and Wang, Iannotti, and Nansel (2009) agreed that parental support is a key facet which could lead to less cyberbullying and bullying. All three participant groups stated over and over that parents are not aware of the dangers of cyberbullying, nor do they realize that their adolescent children are heavily involved in social media and Internet activities. According to Stauffer, Heath, Coyne, and Ferrin (2012), parental intervention is unlikely if mothers and fathers are unaware of cyberbullying. Many parents lack the skills to monitor their children's online activities (Hinduja & Patchin, 2014; Palfrey, Gasser, & Boyd, 2010).

Perceptions of middle school cyberbullying: Teacher assertions. Research Question 1, "What are the perceptions of teachers related to middle school cyberbullying," was addressed via teacher focus groups. Middle school teachers had a solid understanding of the definition of cyberbullying as well as the many types of cyberbullying that their students participate in at the middle school level. Based on their weekly experiences with cyberbullying, teachers perceived it as a very serious problem that is on the increase, a finding echoed by Gourneau (2012) and Aoyama and Talbert (2010). The researcher found that teachers perceived cyberbullying as primarily occurring outside of school, only occasionally transpiring during school. Teachers further stated that even when cyberbullying occurred outside of school, it had the ability to directly impact the school day. When cyberbullying activity is "known to others," it can have a substantial effect on the school via "disruption of the learning environment" (Snakenborg et al., 2011, p. 91). Teachers stated that more of their time was filled with

discipline related to cyberbullying and social media activities than bullying in the traditional sense. Davison and Stein (2014) found that cyberbullying can be as detrimental as traditional bullying.

Related to occurrence during school, teachers recognized that their school's no cell phone policy somewhat limited in-school opportunities for cyberbullying. Most schools or districts do have policies in place (Obringer & Coffey, 2007). Teachers noted that many students still sneaked their phones throughout the day, regardless of the cell phone policy. Tindell and Bohlander (2012) found that 95% of students bring their digital devices to school daily, with 92% of them admitting to using them during class time. Even though teachers perceived cyberbullying to happen outside of school, they overwhelmingly noted that it disrupts instruction on a weekly basis, if not more often. Teachers further stated that oftentimes discipline problems with students erupted as a result of "he said, she said" on social media the night before. Teachers asserted that cyberbullying increases each year of middle school, continuing into high school.

Educator survey data indicated a belief that cyberbullying was more dangerous than traditional bullying. Regarding the significance for the victim, researchers have found that cyberbullying is worse than traditional bullying (Campbell, 2005; Sticca & Perren, 2013; Tokunaga 2010). During focus group discussion, teachers contended that the invisible nature of cyberbullying made it more dangerous than traditional bullying. Teachers noted that they could see the emotional and physical signs of traditional bullying, whereas with cyberbullying, they often had no idea.

Regarding teachers' professional responsibility concerning cyberbullying, teachers stated they felt the need to help victims of cyberbullying learn to cope, while

balancing the discipline issues that arise as a result of the cyberbullying. Teachers stated that they conferenced with students, giving them directions to avoid or block cyberbully perpetrators. As with other issues, teachers were certain that students knew they could come to them or another responsible adult to share any concern, including cyberbullying.

During the focus group session, several teachers stated they had been either personally or professionally cyberbullied. Some teachers described cyberbullying attacks by students, while others mentioned being cyberbullied by parents of their students. According to Phippen (2011), the cyber abuse of school personnel is “prevalent and potentially extremely damaging” (p. 12). These incidences included being made into a meme or having a picture photoshopped with an inappropriate statement or ugly commentary posted on social media with their full name displayed. Teachers repeatedly stated that parents are part of the problem with cyberbullying and perceived some parents as being poor role models. Teachers felt that some parents acted inappropriately on social media and felt students were merely modeling what they saw their parents doing online. Parental involvement and parental monitoring were repeatedly specified by teachers as a chief need in the plight to impact cyberbullying. Researchers Hinduja and Patchin (2014) supported this finding and indicated that parents need to educate their adolescents about acceptable online behavior, just as they would for offline behaviors. Teachers noted that if parents were monitoring their adolescent children’s social media activity, incidences of cyberbullying could be reduced, as involved parents would end inappropriate social media interactions that lead to cyberbullying actions. Davison and Stein (2014) revealed that lack of parental monitoring is likely to lead to cyberbullying.

When asked how to impact cyberbullying, teachers repeatedly stated that parent

education would have the greatest influence. Teachers referenced parent lack of knowledge about the Internet, social media, and about their adolescent children's online activities. Further, teachers perceived that parents were naive about their children's accounts and web interactions; many noted that if parents were truly aware, there would be less incidents of cyberbullying. Teachers identified parental education not only as the best deterrent to cyberbullying, but also as a way to increase awareness within the community, because parents share with other parents. Training programs for parents are essential for "parent support in the area of cyber safety and cyberbullying" (Robinson, 2013, p. 74).

During focus groups, teachers perceived many motives for student cyberbullying. These motives ranged from revenge, to humor, to just participating in their popular culture. Primarily, teachers perceived that students were unintentional in cyberbullying, seeking only entertainment or social interaction online. Teachers noted that if students were educated about cyberbullying, many would realize their behavior and online activities were unacceptable. Teachers stated that they felt powerless concerning cyberbullying due to the problem being parent related. Further, they asserted that until parents did their part and got involved, there was little teachers could do to curb cyberbullying other than educate the students. Some researchers recommend educators to seek parental help. Li (2010) stated cyberbullying occurs outside of school; educators should "direct such issues back to parents" (p. 384) due to educators having "no legal jurisdiction" (p. 384).

During focus groups, teachers never mentioned bullying prevention or anti-bullying programs being utilized in either their schools or in their district. Some teachers

stated there was a district policy, although none were able to articulate its contents.

Perceptions of middle school cyberbullying: School counselor assertions.

Research Question 2 was, “What are the perceptions of school counselors related to middle school cyberbullying?” This question was answered by school counselors via interview sessions. According to school counselor interviews, counselors had a solid understanding of the definition of cyberbullying and its many types and were concerned about how quickly it is growing. Further, school counselors indicated that cyberbullying in middle schools was a problem that required weekly attention, if not more. School counselors, in addition to teachers, revealed that they had been a victim of personal or professional cyberbullying via social media.

School counselors stated that cyberbullying occurred outside of school yet affected social interactions and student relationships during the school day. Sabella, Patchin, and Hinduja (2013) indicated that school counselors must educate students with the skills they need to respond to cyberbullying. Counselors spent much time conferencing with individuals in an attempt to help them cope with cyberbullying victimization. According to Burnham and Wright (2012), school personnel must listen and intercede. During these conferences, counselors gave students strategies to use in fighting cyberbullying, first encouraging students to block perpetrators (Sabella et al., 2013). Other strategies included taking a screenshot and reporting the incident to a trusted adult (Sabella et al., 2013). Often school counselors suggested that students take a break from social media in an attempt to let any difficult situation calm down. These actions addressed what counselors considered to be their job responsibility concerning middle school cyberbullying, with conferencing with students being paramount.

Although school counselors perceived that teachers were the front line of defense against cyberbullying, they considered themselves part of that protection for students. Sabella et al. (2013) stated that school counselors should take a lead role in the fight to impact cyberbullying.

School counselors stated they had programs and activities that supported bullying prevention. During class time with students, they teach them what cyberbullying is as well as what to do if they are victimized. This type of education is delivered to classes in small groups or one on one as needed when a student becomes a victim of cyberbullying. Counselors asserted that the ongoing education of students about cyberbullying and its dangers was vital. The researcher learned that school counselors agreed with teachers regarding the need for parental involvement and parental monitoring of their students' online activities and interactions. Along with parental involvement, counselors felt that parental education on cyberbullying was lacking, stating that educating parents would directly impact cyberbullying incidents (Sabella et al., 2013). According to Burnham and Wright (2012), school personnel need to train parents on cyberbullying intervention and prevention techniques.

School counselors, unlike teachers, mentioned the Olweus anti-bullying program as previously being utilized in some schools within the district. None of the school counselors interviewed, however, were currently using Olweus in their buildings. The counselors stated that the Olweus program had either fallen by the wayside years ago, or it was never used in their building.

School counselors specified that overall, they felt that they were doing a good job in educating students about cyberbullying. Further, they believed that they were helping

individual students learn to cope with victimization via conferencing and other strategies.

Perceptions of middle school cyberbullying: Administrator assertions.

Research Question 3 was, “What are the perceptions of administrators related to middle school cyberbullying?” The school administrator’s cyberbullying perceptions interview sessions answered this research question. According to interview findings, administrators were well versed in the definition and also in the methods and types of cyberbullying tactics used by their middle school students. Administrators were concerned about cyberbullying in middle schools, acknowledging it as a serious problem that is not going anywhere. Beale and Hall (2007) described cyberbullying as the “most insidious aspect of modern technology in the schools” (p. 12). Further, administrators stated that their staff members dealt with the effects of cyberbullying on a weekly basis at minimum.

Administrators indicated that cyberbullying occurred both inside and outside of school, yet overwhelmingly agreed with teachers and counselors about the impact on the school day. Administrators saw their professional responsibility as having to ensure that incidents of cyberbullying did not disrupt instruction, while also having to deal with the fallout of outside incidences by issuing disciplinary consequences to involved students. Hinduja and Patchin (2018a) stated that educators have difficulty intervening in online activities involving their students that occur outside of school.

When asked if they were professionally or personally affected by cyberbullying, administrators noted they had been affected. Some administrators stated that they had been attacked online by both students and parents. As with teachers, administrators had been made into a meme or had been “blasted” by a parent on social media. According to Phippen (2011), educators have been victimized online by either a student or a parent.

Makri-Botsari and Karagianni (2014) found that parental behavior is a “significant predictor of cyberbullying” (p. 3248). When parents cyberbullied administrators, it was concerning parental displeasure with administrative decision-making or dissatisfaction with consequences given to their students.

Administrators perceived that parental involvement and parental monitoring are needed to impact cyberbullying. Gilden (2013) stated that parents need to be more proactive in the elimination of cyberbullying. Further, administrators felt that education for students, parents, and also teachers was extremely important due to the pace at which cyberbullying changes. Cyberbully experts Hinduja and Patchin (2018a) indicated that educators do their part to prevent cyberbullying, but sometimes they are uncertain as to how they should intervene. Regarding a specific program or district policy, administrators noted the previous use of the Olweus anti-bullying program as well as an established district policy. There were no administrators who could state the district cyberbullying policy.

Administrators were concerned about the misuse of the term cyberbullying, stating that students “taking shots” back and forth at each other was not bullying. They considered this behavior as more of equal action misbehavior, while cyberbullying was an attack on a weaker individual who did not retaliate. Researchers support this definition of bullying being a one-sided action against a weak individual (Smith et al., 2008; Wolak, Mitchell, & Finkelhor, 2007). Further, administrators mentioned the need for laws and policies to be updated to fully address the changes in cyberbullying. The current discipline code states that administrators can confiscate and keep (for the remainder of the school year) a student’s cell phone; administrators stated that they were

not comfortable with this policy. Administrators were hopeful that this policy will be changed, as it is being reviewed by the district office. Administrators would prefer that cellphones be successfully banned from their schools in order to help with discipline, yet they realized that this idea was unrealistic.

Connections to Theoretical Framework

When investigating the intricate social nature of bullying and bullying behaviors, SCT is a fundamental component (Swearer et al., 2014). The theoretical framework for this study was centered on Bandura's social learning theory that later transformed into SCT. Bandura's SCT is based on learning through observation and an individual's experiences, occurring during social exchanges (Bandura, 1986). Bandura believed that individuals gain knowledge through personal observation of experiences, both positive and negative (Smith, 2015). The theory of SCT originates from the idea of imitating and modeling observed behaviors (Bandura, 1986). Smith (2015) stated that "repeated measures" rather than "a onetime incident" would more likely influence an adolescent to bully "according to the premise of SCT" (p. 10). SCT may play a role in the understanding of the manifestation of aggression online that could originate from behaviors demonstrated at home or by peers (Smith, 2015; Swearer et al., 2014).

The first connection to theory emerged during educator focus groups; teachers perceived that one reason for student involvement in cyberbullying was parents' actions. This perception firmly supports Bandura's SCT in that students imitate behaviors based on their observations of those actions. Teachers repeatedly stated that parents model behaving inappropriately online by cyberbullying teachers, administrators, and other parents. Educators within each participant group confirmed bullying parental behavior

online and felt adolescents are emulating their parents.

The second connection to theory was established by teacher focus group members who stated that students are “doing what their friends are doing” and “it’s just funny to them.” Educators stated that students are “just being kids” and interacting with their friends in the online environment. The weight of an adolescent’s peer group is well known. Researchers and theorists have frequently stated the importance of friendship as a critical component of adolescent development (Bukowski, Hoza, & Boivin, 1994; Claes, 1992). Friendships are formed not only in school and in the community, but also online via the Internet. Even those friendships formed at school and within the community are maintained via digital communication occurring online or via text messaging. This further supports SCT, in that adolescents are simply doing what their peers are doing, be it good or bad, in an online environment.

Modification of typical behavior in an online environment is known by researchers and clinicians as ODE (Suler, 2004). Examples of ODE include an individual being overly opinionated online or being less restricted in expression online. Internet users affected by ODE behave in an intense way (Suler, 2004); they are less concerned with social restrictions when online than during typical “face-to-face” interaction (Suler, 2004, p. 321). Suler and Phillips (1998) cited both benign and toxic disinhibition. Benign disinhibition reveals compassion and kindness, whereas toxic disinhibition exposes frustration and anger. ODE surfaces as a total lack of control, in contempt for social precepts, as rash behaviors, and in poor risk calculation (Grafman et al., 2002). Suler (2004) found that perpetrators of cyberbullying were likely to have a high tendency of ODE.

The third connection to theory was established by teachers who stated that students who would not normally participate in inappropriate behavior actually participated in cyberbullying. Teachers stated that some of their “best” students had inappropriate social media usernames that were “shocking.” Teachers further indicated that students not normally involved in wrongdoing were following and interacting on “inappropriate” social media pages. These same students were involved in the “meme pages” that cyberbullied teachers and administrators. These types of behaviors fit well into Suler’s (2004) toxic inhibition concept, a part of ODE.

Recommendations and Implications

It is the belief of the researcher that middle school educators could benefit from professional development that is focused on cyberbullying awareness and prevention as well as research-based intervention strategies. It is recommended that educators receive more training (Bradshaw, Waasdorp, O’Brennan, & Gulemetova, 2013; Notar, Padgett, & Roden, 2013). Professional development should include a component that teaches all staff how to identify cyberbullying and how to help student victims of cyberbullying cope with victimization. Further, the researcher believes that students could profit from a theory-based anti-bullying or bullying prevention program that teaches the dangers and consequences of cyberbullying by utilizing real world examples. Shetgiri (2013) reported a need for an “evidence-based” (p. 8) intervention program.

There is a strong need for parental education that includes teaching parents what cyberbullying looks like and how to monitor their adolescent children’s social media and Internet activities. The researcher recommends that schools host a parent education night led by students and school staff who are knowledgeable about cyberbullying in middle

schools. The trainings should include the identification of cyberbullying as well as the types and methods of cyberbullying. Parents should be invited (Ryan et al., 2011) to hear personal accounts and concrete examples of middle school cyberbullying. This event would foster parental awareness (Makri-Botsari & Karagianni, 2014) while providing knowledge (Shetgiri, 2013) concerning how to best impact cyberbullying. Further topics for this venue could include general cyber safety information and how to report cyberbullying incidents. Student led (Hinduja & Patchin, 2012b) information sessions for parents and educators would be invaluable as it provides a firsthand account for all stakeholders (Couvillon & Ilieva, 2011; Phillips-Shyrock, 2014).

An additional recommendation would be school led online cyberbullying campaign which would be periodically updated on the school or district social media pages. This campaign would include basic identification of cyberbullying, types and methods of cyberbullying as well as contact information for resources to combat cyberbullying. Parents would greatly benefit from guidance (Makri-Botsari & Karagianni, 2014), specifically ways to monitor their adolescent children's online activities (Sabella et al., 2013).

Middle schools could benefit from technology-based cyberbullying intervention methods that would allow students to anonymously report cyberbullying victimization or online harassment. This recommendation is supported by researchers who support an anonymous online reporting system (Ryan, Kariuki, & Yilmaz, 2011).

Technological society as a whole could benefit from new laws that are created to protect victims of cyberbullying as well as prosecute repeat offenders of cyberbullying. Current legislation does not adequately stipulate clarity in regard to cyberbullying (El

Asam & Samara, 2016).

It is the desire of the researcher that each of the study schools will use the findings of this research to inform their future decisions concerning middle school cyberbullying in regard to cyberbullying prevention and intervention. Cyberbullying is a “constantly and rapidly growing phenomenon and has many variables and facets that must be thoroughly addressed, in order to gain a clearer and broader knowledge of it” (Makri-Botsari & Karagianni, 2014, p. 3250).

Implications. The implications of this study and the potential impact it will have on District X should begin with conversations between middle school education stakeholders and students as to (a) awareness and significance of cyberbullying; (b) the need for cyberbullying education and training for educators, students, and parents; and (c) the need for intervention and prevention programs and policies to address cyberbullying.

Adolescents are going to continue to utilize technology and social media; many students in this age bracket even sleep with their mobile devices. The ways individuals can harm others will “evolve with changes in, and access to, technology” (Barlett et al., 2014, p. 300). Cyberbullying is not going to disappear. Bullying in schools is an ongoing threat to the safety and education of students (Cross et al., 2011). Researchers confirm the increase of adolescent technology use (Lemola, Perkinson-Gloor, Brand, Dewald-Kaufmann, & Grob, 2015) and the increase in cyberbullying (Citron, 2009; Juvonen & Gross, 2008; Price & Dalgleish, 2010). This research is in response to that increase.

Educators expressed grave concern over middle school cyberbullying, which they consider a growing problem. Couvillon and Ilieva (2011) echoed this “growing concern”

(p. 96) for adolescents. Educators stated that cyberbullying should be taken more seriously at the middle school level, noting that cyberbullying increases from Grades 6-8. This finding is supported by researchers, Mark and Ratliffe (2011) who stated that incidents of cyberbullying “increase throughout middle school” (p. 104). Educators recommend the need to educate students, parents, and teachers about cyberbullying. The prevention and intervention of cyberbullying must be an organized effort shared by all parties (Phillips-Shyrock, 2014).

Educator perception focused on teaching cyberbullying awareness, types and methods of cyberbullying, consequences of cyberbullying, and how to help students avoid situations as well as cope with cyberbullying victimization. Craig, Bell and Leschied (2011) agreed that teachers must be informed about the assortment of kinds of cyberbullying to assist them in “developing appropriate prevention and intervention strategies to ensure safety of all students” (p. 30). Teachers regarded education, student conferences, and parent involvement to be vital strategies for managing bullying (Perren et al., 2012).

Cyberbullying researchers Hinduja and Patchin (2012b) indicated that the behaviors of adolescents are influenced by the actions and behaviors of their peers and significant adults. This point validates the importance of both parents and educators and confirms their influence on adolescents. Educators must continue to learn about the types and tactics of cyberbullying in order to be effective in the fight to eliminate cyberbullying incidents. According to Beale and Hall (2007), parents must fully boost the school’s efforts to counteract cyberbullying – first via awareness and second by tackling it with their children. Early intervention via education of students is essential to prevent

cyberbullying. According to Phillips-Shyrock (2014), it is essential to teach adolescents the appropriate use of technology in early childhood as a strategy to prevent cyberbullying.

Hinduja and Patchin (2012b) stated the significance of school-based activities which incorporate student leadership to address both bullying and cyberbullying. Research-based anti-bullying prevention and intervention programs are essential in the education of students; Ttofi and Farrington (2011) noted that anti-bullying programs can reduce victimization by 20-23%. These prevention and intervention programs must be embraced by all building-level stakeholders and used with efficacy. According to Couvillon and Ilieva (2011), it is imperative to have all stakeholders involved in order to successfully execute a prevention program. Ryan et al. (2011) found that parents and the community were crucial in prevention efforts.

Researchers disagreed on the utilization of prevention and intervention programs due to variable results (Shetgiri, 2013). For this reason, intervention and prevention programs must be evaluated and updated to contain current information; only then can they effectively address the constant change in actions and tactics of cyberbullying perpetrators. It is imperative that teachers, the main facilitators in bullying prevention (Ettetal, Kochenderfer-Ladd, & Ladd, 2015), receive professional development in anti-bullying strategies (Parson, 2015). Couvillon and Ilieva (2011) supported regular professional development as a way to reduce cyberbullying. Because adolescents are in school for a large percentage of each day, “there is impetus to develop and implement anti-violence curricula to foster a safe and healthy climate” (Wolfe, Crooks, Chiodo, & Jaffe, 2010, as cited in Craig et al., 2011, p. 31) within schools.

Parents have a solid influence on the actions and behaviors of their children (Sabella et al., 2013). Parental intervention shapes the way adolescents utilize media (Park, Na, & Kim, 2014). Educators established that parental involvement and parental monitoring were drastically needed to impact cyberbullying at the middle school level. Teachers considered parent involvement to be a crucial component for prevention of bullying (Perren et al., 2012). Researchers have found that parents give adolescents devices for communication purposes and for emergencies (Campbell, 2005). Srivastava (2005) specified that parents give children cell phones for safety reasons and Oksman and Rautiainen (2003) indicated parents give children devices when they begin to venture out alone. Sabella et al. (2013) stated that parents need to educate their children in the appropriate use of technology. Further, parents need to monitor the technology use of their children (Sabella et al., 2013) and set guidelines (Ramirez et al., 2011).

The educators in this study overwhelmingly stated that the most effective way to impact cyberbullying was through parent involvement, specifically parental awareness and monitoring of adolescents' Internet activities. Shetgiri (2013) stated that parental education is essential to successful intervention. Sabella et al. (2013) indicated that parents should monitor online activities of their children, which can be accomplished either through active participation or the establishment of rules. Educators stated that if parents were aware, they would put an end to cyberbullying before it began. According to Makri-Botsari and Karagianni (2014), parent understanding and awareness of cyberbullying has a chief function in the deterrence of cyberbullying. Educators should therefore support parents in understanding the impact of cyberbullying. This support may come via training sessions, led by educators and students alike, to share knowledge

about cyberbullying and the consequences of cyberbullying. Certain anti-bullying intervention and prevention programs may have videos to assist in the training process. School counselors can be vital in the professional development of both students and parents. Specifically, school counselors “should encourage parents to learn what their children are doing online” (Sabella et al., 2013, p. 2708) and strive to gain knowledge about new digital technologies used by their adolescents.

Cyberbullying will continue, and it will continue to change as new technologies are developed. Cyberbullying is “the most common online risk for all teens” (O’Keeffe, & Clarke-Pearson, 2011, p. 801). Administrators indicated the need for laws and policies to be updated in order to fully address the changes in cyberbullying. Wiseman (2011) noted that it is “nearly impossible to keep up with” (p. 115) changes in technology. Educators and all educational stakeholders need to cultivate new policies to address the ongoing changes in cyberbullying. According to Notar et al. (2013), new cyberbullying legislation “will guide school districts on what actions they can and must take” (p. 138). Hinduja and Patchin (2012b) contended that schools should have a strict policy concerning all forms of harassment. According to Hamburger, Basile, and Vivolo (2011), a school-wide anti-cyberbullying policy should include intervention strategies and a prevention program as well as an ongoing assessment of the program to regulate its value. Cyberbullying experts Hinduja and Patchin (2014) stated that one of most important things that a district can do “to help protect its students and protect itself from legal liability is to have a clear and comprehensive policy regarding bullying and harassment, technology, and their intersection: cyberbullying” (p. 188).

Cyberbullying fluidly crosses boundaries between home and school.

Cyberbullying has no limits; its scope includes school personnel, students, and parents as well as organizations that provide Internet service and companies that establish and run social media (Sabella et al., 2013). To fully impact cyberbullying incidents in middle school, all stakeholders must work collaboratively. According to Phillips-Shyrock (2014), there is rarely collaboration among educators, students, and parents to combat cyberbullying.

Future research recommendations. More cyberbullying research is necessary (Aboujaoude, Savage, Starcevic, & Salame, 2015). One of the methodological limitations of this study was the small sample size; thus, the researcher notes that a future study with a larger participant group would be beneficial (Patel, Doku, & Tennakoon, 2003), as it would provide a more thorough investigation. A future study that examines parent perceptions with specific regard to student social media monitoring would be useful to assist parents in awareness of cyberbullying and to begin the routine of monitoring their adolescent children's online activities. Researchers support this recommendation for parental monitoring of adolescent Internet activities (Perren et al., 2012; Zhou et al., 2013). Gentile, Nathanson, Rasmussen, Reimer, and Walsh (2012) indicated that this monitoring is a vital need in "helping us gain an understanding of how parents monitor their children's media use" (p. 484).

Due to the small number of educator participants in focus groups and interviews compared to those who answered the survey, it would be advantageous to have a replication study that allocates a larger time frame for middle school educators to share their perceptions either via focus groups or interviews. In general, researchers agree on the value of replication research (Evanschitzky & Armstrong, 2010). Because this study

occurs in a rural area in upstate South Carolina, a similar study in a more diverse area would be beneficial, as a number of researchers concur that there is a need for research data to reflect diversity (Allmark, 2004).

Conclusions

In conclusion, “cyberbullying is a serious problem whose consequences are real and should not be dismissed as a ‘virtual’ by-product of an increasingly digitalized childhood and adolescence” (Aboujaoude et al., 2015, p. 10). The aim of this study was to determine educator perceptions related to middle school cyberbullying. The findings of this study indicated that educators are precisely aware and extremely concerned about the growing problem of middle school cyberbullying. Additionally, educators have indicated that parental involvement and parental monitoring are much needed to combat cyberbullying. Further, educators see a dire need for education of all parties in order to successfully impact cyberbullying. The findings of this study support Bandura’s SCT, specifically students imitating and acting out online actions and behaviors of their parents and peers which have been learned through observation and during social settings. This study required the expertise of teachers, school counselors, and administrators to uncover the perceptions of educators regarding middle school cyberbullying. Educator perceptions gleaned from this study will foster a greater understanding of cyberbullying, allowing for the development of targeted operational strategies for intervention and prevention of cyberbullying.

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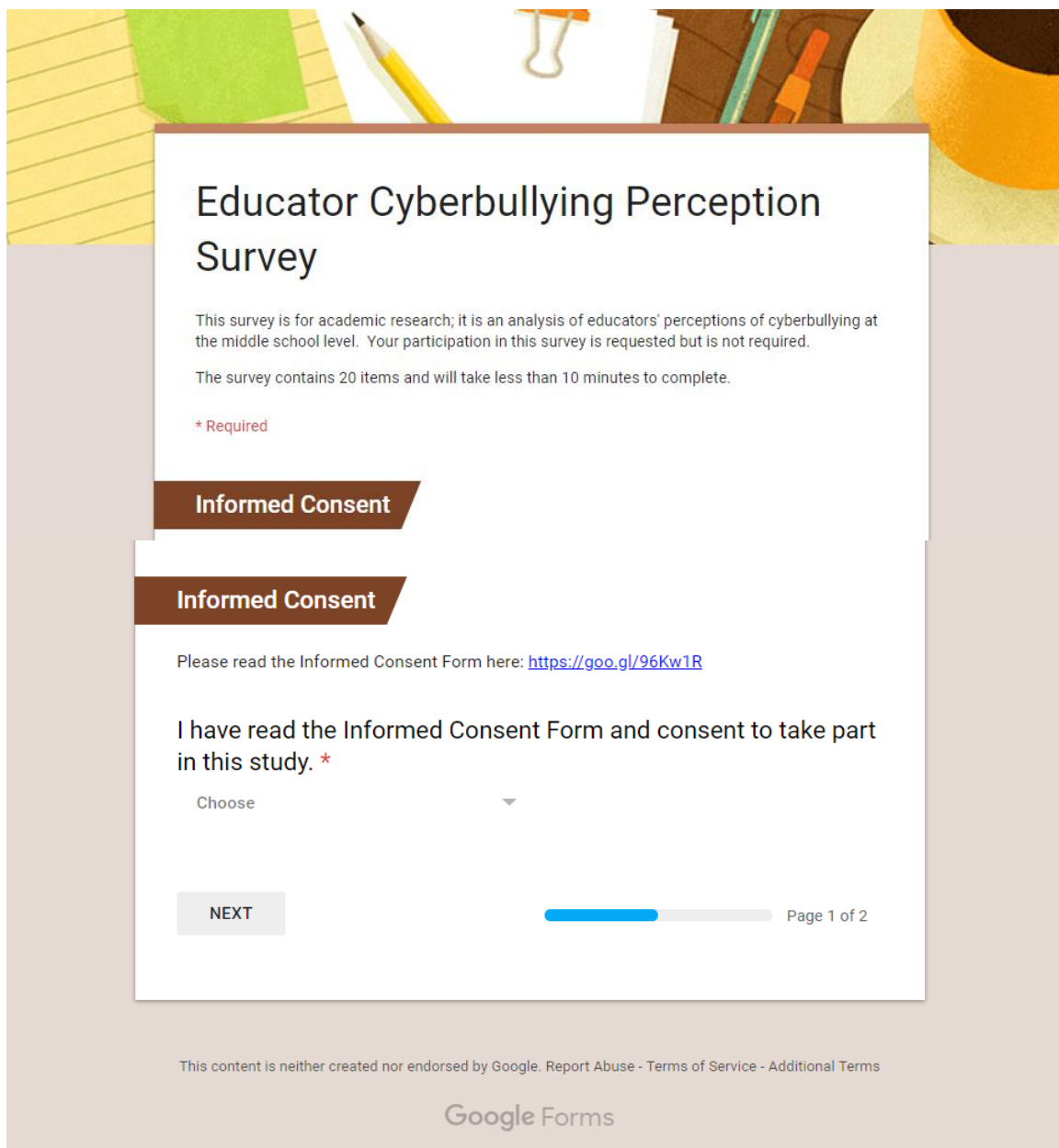
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Appendix A

Cyberbullying Educator Perceptions Survey

Link to Cyberbullying Educator Perceptions Survey: <https://goo.gl/ErBgXm>

The image shows a Google Form titled "Educator Cyberbullying Perception Survey". The form is set against a background of school supplies like a pencil, paper, and a binder. The form content includes a title, a description of the survey's purpose for academic research, and a note that participation is requested but not required. It also states the survey has 20 items and takes less than 10 minutes. A red asterisk indicates a required field. There are two "Informed Consent" sections. The first is a header. The second is a text box with a link to the informed consent form. Below that is a required text input field with the text "I have read the Informed Consent Form and consent to take part in this study.*". Underneath is a dropdown menu with the text "Choose". At the bottom, there is a "NEXT" button, a progress bar showing the first step is complete, and the text "Page 1 of 2". At the very bottom of the page, there is a disclaimer: "This content is neither created nor endorsed by Google. Report Abuse - Terms of Service - Additional Terms" and the "Google Forms" logo.

Educator Cyberbullying Perception Survey

This survey is for academic research; it is an analysis of educators' perceptions of cyberbullying at the middle school level. Your participation in this survey is requested but is not required.

The survey contains 20 items and will take less than 10 minutes to complete.

* Required

Informed Consent

Informed Consent

Please read the Informed Consent Form here: <https://goo.gl/96Kw1R>

I have read the Informed Consent Form and consent to take part in this study. *

Choose

NEXT Page 1 of 2

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Google Forms

* Required

School Identifier Number: *

Choose

Perceptions Section 1 *

	1 - Strongly Agree	2 - Agree	3 - Disagree	4 - Strongly Disagree
As an educator I am aware of cyberbullying	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Cyberbullying is a problem faced by middle school students.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Cyberbullying should be taken more seriously at the middle school level.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Incidents of cyberbullying occur DURING school time.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Cyberbullying is over reported by middle school students.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Perceptions Section 2 *

	1 - Strongly Agree	2 - Agree	3 - Disagree	4 - Strongly Disagree
Cyberbullying increases from grade 6 to grade 8.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Cyberbullying is more dangerous than traditional bullying.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Female students are more likely to be victims of cyberbullying.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Educators need additional training on how to appropriately handle cyberbullying.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Middle school students are likely to report incidents of cyberbullying.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Perceptions Section 3 *

	1 - Strongly Agree	2 - Agree	3 - Disagree	4 - Strongly Disagree
Incidents of cyberbullying occur BEFORE/AFTER school time.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Cyberbullying is UNDER reported by middle school students.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Incidents of cyberbullying are limited to students.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Traditional bullying is more dangerous than cyberbullying.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Cyberbullying is handled appropriately at the middle school level.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Perceptions Section 4 *

	1 - Strongly Agree	2 - Agree	3 - Disagree	4 - Strongly Disagree
Cyberbullying DECREASES from grade 6 to grade 8.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Victims of cyberbullying are more likely to be male students.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Middle school students understand the seriousness of cyberbullying.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Middle school students are more likely to engage in cyberbullying than high school students.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Perpetrators of cyberbullying are more likely to be female students.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Thank you for completing this survey. Are you interested in taking part in an educator focus group concerning cyberbullying? *

Yes

No

BACK

NEXT

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Never submit passwords through Google Forms.

Educator Cyberbullying Perception Survey

Your email address will not be linked to the survey results in any way.

What is your email address?

Your answer

BACK

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Educator Cyberbullying Perception Survey

Thank you for taking this survey.

BACK

SUBMIT



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Never submit passwords through Google Forms.

Appendix B

Educator Letter of Invitation

Dear Colleague:

I am currently working to complete a doctorate in Curriculum and Instruction at Gardner-Webb University. One of the requirements of the degree is to write a dissertation. I have chosen to complete a mixed methods study investigating educator perceptions of middle school cyberbullying. The title of my study is Cyberbullying and the Middle School Adolescent: Educator Perceptions. I would like to focus my field research on middle school educators at each of the four [REDACTED] middle schools. I am planning to conduct a survey for all certified staff as well as a small focus group (4-8 participants) at each of the four schools, followed by individual interviews.

As a professional within the field of education, you have received a copy of this letter of invitation. I invite you to participate as an expert contributor in the study. Participants will receive anonymity and confidentiality throughout the study. The study will occur in three phases: phase one is a cyberbullying educator perceptions survey, phase two is a teacher focus group, set at each of the four middle schools and phase three is the interview portion which will occur one-on-one in person or live via video conferencing software.

Survey responses, focus group and interview participation will be anonymous and will be held strictly confidential. All school and school district information will remain confidential except when legally bonded to report. Participation in this research is completely voluntary, however, all certified middle school staff will be invited to participate in the survey. All [REDACTED] educator participants will be required to provide informed consent. Participants may choose to opt out of the study at any point during the research process.

If further information is desired or if you have any questions you may contact the researcher, Kalani C. LaFrancis, by phone at [REDACTED] or by email at [REDACTED]. Any questions regarding the research or requirements for Gardner-Webb University may be directed to the student's dissertation committee chair, Dr. Jennifer Putnam at [REDACTED]. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Kalani C. LaFrancis
Doctoral Candidate, Gardner-Webb University

Appendix C

Focus Group Guiding Questions

Focus Group Guiding Questions

1. What are your perceptions of cyberbullying?
2. What do we need to do impact cyberbullying at the middle school level?

Clarifying questions can be utilized if needed:

3. How has cyberbullying impacted school safety?
4. Are students taught how to handle cyberbullying?
5. Cyberbullying has directly affected me as an educator.
6. Which is a bigger concern for educators, bullying or cyberbullying?
7. Please share your ideas about reducing cyberbullying:

Appendix D
Focus Group Script

Focus Group Script

Thank you for agreeing to be part of this focus group on educator perceptions of middle school cyberbullying. Participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to withdraw from the study at any point without consequence or penalty. You may elect to skip a question that causes you distress. You may opt out of this study at any time during the research process. You also have the right to refuse to answer any question(s) for any reason, again without consequence or penalty. If you choose to withdraw, your data which has been collected will be destroyed unless it is unidentifiable. If you decide not to participate after we have already begun, feel free to exit the room. If you decide to withdraw after materials have been submitted, please contact the researcher, Kalani LaFrancis at 704-898-2627 or KLaFrancis@gardner-webb.edu.

Participation should take 45 minutes of your time, please feel free to enjoy some refreshments at any time throughout the afternoon. I have posted the questions for our discussion (on the Promethean/Smartboard/poster). As you can see, our focus today is concerning your perceptions, as educators on the topic of middle school cyberbullying.

I will be conducting the group today. All information collected today will be kept confidentially. None of your names or identifiable information will be collected or utilized in this study, nor will it be reported in the research study. I will also be recording the discussion to make certain that I have accurately portrayed the groups' discussion; however, no one other than the researcher will listen to the recording. The recordings will be used exclusively for the purpose of composing a

typed transcript of the discussion today. Once the recording has been transcribed, the recording will be deleted.

You have been given a name tent that will serve as your pseudonym for today, so that your comments can remain anonymous. Now, let's talk about the ground rules. Anything discussed here today will remain confidential. During discussion in our group, please do not refer to anyone by name. This is vitally important not only to keep the focus group members anonymous, but also to protect any person(s) discussed.

Our focus is on discussing your perspective, awareness and knowledge of cyberbullying, your perceptions of what causes it to occur and why students choose to participate in it, your perceptions on present educator roles as well as any suggestions to decrease cyberbullying. Please remember we should focus on the general causes and issues, rather than on specific incidents people involved in cyberbullying incidents.

Are there any questions before we begin?

****We will begin with introductions.*

*Please use the introduction instructions that are in your **packet** to guide you in briefly introducing yourself.*

- *First, state the letter on your name tent.*
- *Next, indicate your role within the education field. (Teacher, Counselor, Media Specialist, etc.)*

The interview questions that will guide this qualitative focus group / interview are posted in the Promethean/Smartboard/poster:

1. What are your perceptions of cyberbullying?
3. What do we need to do impact cyberbullying at the middle school level?

If needed, the following clarifying questions can be utilized:

3. How has cyberbullying impacted school safety?
4. Are students taught how to handle cyberbullying?
5. Cyberbullying has directly affected me as an educator.
6. Which is a bigger concern for educators, bullying or cyberbullying?
7. Please share your ideas about reducing cyberbullying:

Member check: Now we will go around the group and ask for any other comments that each participant would like to add.

8. Is there anything else you would like to add about cyberbullying?
9. Do you have any other comments, concerns or clarifications?

As a token of my appreciation for your participation in this focus group, a summary of the findings from this study will be shared by request. Thank you for contributing your perspectives about cyberbullying. Please feel free to take some refreshments on your way out.

Appendix E

Educator Interview Questions

Administrator & School Counselor Perceptions Interview Guide:

Please state your position (administrator or counselor):

What is cyberbullying?

As an administrator or counselor what are your perceptions related to middle school cyberbullying?

What are your professional responsibilities in regard to cyberbullying?

Is cyberbullying a problem in your middle school?

How often do you encounter incidents of cyberbullying?

How often do you conference with students in regard to cyberbullying incidents?

Have you noticed a change in incidents of cyberbullying? (increase or decrease)

Does your school or district have a program already in place to help students and staff handle cyberbullying?

How do you propose the schools can make an impact on cyberbullying? (Reduction of incidents of cyberbullying)

Is there anything else you would like to add about cyberbullying?

Do you have any other comments, concerns or clarifications?