CYBERBULLYING INTERVENTION: A CASE STUDY ANALYSIS

OF STAKEHOLDER PERCEPTIONS REGARDING THE

AUTHORITY OF SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS

IN ADDRESSING CYBERBULLYING ISSUES

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ABSTRACT

Cyberbullying is a growing phenomenon affecting victims, perpetrators, and bystanders. Schools and school officials are also affected by cyberbullying, faced with the responsibility of addressing issues that manifest from cyberbullying. Previous literature has identified strategies for school use in addressing cyberbullying, including forming stakeholder partnerships, implementing cyberbullying education and awareness programs, and applying disciplinary action. Opponents question school administrators' authority in addressing cyberbullying with disciplinary action, raising concern about the potential violation of student rights. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to better understand how cyberbullying affects school system stakeholders and gather ideas about how school officials should properly address it.

The researcher in this case study collected and analyzed stakeholder perceptions regarding cyberbullying effects upon their school system and how schools should address it. This school system is located in southeastern U.S. The researcher used focus group interviews to collect data from four stakeholder groups: school administrators, school counselors, parents, and external authorities. The researcher used content analysis to identify significant data; and organized, reported, and discussed the results in two distinct ways: 1) grouping results based on their connection to the study's research questions, and 2) grouping results into five themes through the use of thematic coding. The discussion of results, implications for stakeholders, and recommendations for future research are based on data connections with the research questions and the development of the five themes. The results, stakeholder implications, and recommendations for future research include ideas regarding stakeholder partnerships, education

and awareness programs, school disciplinary action, parental supervision and control, and other

ideas concerning stakeholder relationships and trust.

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CHAPTER I:

INTRODUCTION

Bullying has been prevalent in schools since the existence of education from the early century, one-room schoolhouse to today's technology-rich schools. In more recent years, policies and strategies have been created and executed to thwart the presence of bullying, particularly since the 1999 tragedy at Columbine High School, in Littleton, Colorado. The Columbine incident involved two high school students who shot and killed twelve students and one teacher, and injured others before taking their own lives. One of the contributing factors to this episode was bullying that the two students had endured during their time at Columbine (Hinduja & Patchin, 2006). Therefore, schools throughout the nation placed a heightened awareness on bullying prevention and school safety. Since that time, this awareness has steadily increased because of additional incidents across the nation and increased sensitivity to these issues in the media. In response, most, if not all school districts across the U.S. developed anti-bullying or anti-harassment policies for reporting incidents and administering consequences to perpetrators (Hinduja & Patchin, 2006).

Most anti-bullying policies created and enforced by school districts currently address face-to-face bullying behaviors, which is considered to be the traditional form of bullying (Gillis, 2006). However, a new form of bullying has emerged and become increasingly prevalent among our youth. Cyberbullying is a growing phenomenon in our nation and is a direct result of increased access to and use of technology tools and applications. These tools and applications include the internet, cell phones, instant messaging (IM), e-mail, text messaging (Short Message

Service or SMS and Multimedia Message Service or MMS), and social networking sites (Feinberg & Robey, 2008). Traditionally, bullying has taken several different face-to-face forms. As a result of increased awareness and new technology, bullying can now be defined as "repeated and deliberate harassment directed by one in a position of power toward one or more, which can be in the form of physical threats or behaviors, including assault, or indirect and subtle forms of aggression, including verbal actions" (Smith, Mahdavi, Carvalho, Fisher, Russell, & Tippett, 2008, p. 376).

Defining Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying is not necessarily a new type of bullying in terms of behaviors, but instead, is a new platform that exudes similar behaviors. Cyberbullying involves non-physical bullying and harassing behaviors such as "sending or posting harmful or cruel text or images using the Internet or other digital communication devices, such as cell phones" (Feinberg & Robey, 2008, p. 26). Additionally, the digital communication devices used by cyberbullies not only provide a means to harass and threaten victims, but often amplifies the behaviors (Feinberg & Robey, 2008). Bullying has evolved into a new form and identity as it enters a new dimension where the increase of student access to electronic communication correlates with an increase in the number of cyberbullying incidents.

Use of Technology

Recent studies have indicated a rise in student access and use of electronic communication devices, including cell phones and the internet. A 2005 study reported that over half (51%) of students aged 12 – 17 stated that they accessed and used online applications daily (Feinberg & Robey, 2008). Furthermore, 74% of those students communicated to peers using instant messaging. A year later (2006), another study revealed that 93% of U.S. students aged 12

– 17 used the internet at least occasionally (Feinberg & Robey, 2008). Hinduja and Patchin (2010) conducted a study focusing on technology use by students aged 10 – 18. The study found that 83% of students reported that they used a cell phone on a weekly basis, while 47% used a cell phone at school. More than 77% reported they sent text messages. A little more than 50% reported using the internet for schoolwork purposes. Almost the same percentage (50.1%) of students reported using Facebook. Approximately 40% of students used instant messaging online, 46.2% used e-mail, 40.5% took photos using a cell phone, 14.5% used a webcam, and 11.5% used YouTube (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010).

To illustrate a growth in technology use, Hinduja and Patchin (2010) reported that 16 million youths (aged 2 – 11) were online in May 2009. While over 90% of teens use the internet, more than 50% have profiles on a social networking site (e.g., MySpace, Facebook). An international perspective reveals that 88% of 12 – 14-year-olds in the U.S. use the internet, but fall behind Great Britain, Israel, and the Czech Republic where internet usage is at 100%, 98%, and 96% respectively. Eighty-five percent of teens communicate digitally with others and 85% of teens spend at least one hour on the Internet each day. These numbers and percentages indicate an increase in technology usage by adolescents over the past decade (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010).

<div align="center">Cyberbullying Statistics</div>

Most cyberbullying among children and adolescents occurs between peers and occurs as early as second grade. A 2008 study by Smith, Smith, Osborn, and Samara found that adolescent female victims discovered the cyberbully was considered "someone they knew" 68% of the time. In 2007, Hinduja and Patchin conducted a study of middle school students, which revealed that more than 17% of students stated they have been cyberbullied at least once. Seventeen percent

reported they cyberbullied others at least once. Furthermore, 12% reported they have been both a victim and an aggressor in cyberbullying situations (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009). Lastly, a 2006 study conducted by Fight Crime found that more than 13 million students aged 6 – 17 were victims of cyberbullying (Feinberg & Robey, 2008).

In 2006, a study was conducted known as the Youth Internet Safety Survey-2 (YISS-2), a follow-up to the same survey (YISS-1) conducted a year earlier (2005). The study focused on regular internet users that ranged in age from 10 to 17 years. Two simple questions were asked of the participants: 1) were you worried or threatened because someone was bothering or harassing you online; and 2) was someone using the internet to threaten or embarrass you by posting or sending messages about you for other people to see? Of the 1,501 participants, 9% stated that they had been harassed in the past year. Twenty-eight percent of those reported creating rude or "nasty" messages to others online. Also, 9% of participants reported that they harassed or embarrassed someone online because they were "mad at them." Eighty-five percent of the incidents reported by participants were reported to have occurred when they were accessing the Internet while at home (Wolak, Mitchell, & Finkelhor, 2006). A significant item of interest is the percentage increase reported in the 2006 study (YISS-2) as compared to the 2005 study (YISS-1). A 14% increase of students who reported that they had posted a rude or "nasty" message to others online was discovered when comparing the two surveys (14% in 2005 to 28% in 2006). Interestingly, the study revealed that female students were more likely to be victimized by online harassment at a 58% rate over male students at a 42% rate (Mason, 2008).

In 2009, Hinduja and Patchin performed a study of 10 – 18 year-olds that were enrolled in a school district in the southern United States. The participants reported on several items related to cyberbullying and their experiences with various forms of cyberbullying. Almost 25%

of the participants reported they have been cyberbullied at least once. More than 8% had been cyberbullied in the 30 days prior to participating in the survey. Other incidents that occurred within 30 days prior to participating in the survey were also communicated. More than 13% reported having rumors spread about them online. Nearly 13% reported that someone had posted mean or hurtful messages about them online. Nine percent reported that someone had threatened to hurt them via a cell phone text message, while 6.7% reported the same happening online. More than 7.6% reported that someone had attempted to impersonate them online in an attempt to harm their reputation or get them into trouble. Five percent reported that someone posted a mean or hurtful photo of them online, while 3.1% reported having a mean or hurtful video posted. Almost 4% reported that someone created a web page about them with mean or hurtful intent. Almost 19% of participants reported having some type of harassing incident happen to them on at least two occasions (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010).

Wright, Burnham, Inman, and Ogorchock (2009a) conducted a mixed methods study that included survey research. Middle school students participating in the study reported various means in which they were cyberbullied or in which they cyberbullied others. Over 35% of reporting students were victimized by e-mail, 11.8% via Facebook, 52.9% via MySpace, 50% by cell phone, 11.8% while participating in online chat rooms, 14.7% via online video, and over 35% experienced cyberbullying while participating in virtual online games. Almost nine percent of reporting students were cyberbullied by other means (Wright et al., 2009a). Conversely, over 17% cyberbullied others by e-mail, 70.6% via MySpace, 47.1% by cell phone, almost 6% while participating in online chat rooms, 11.8% via online video, and 23.5% cyberbullied others while participating in virtual online games (Wright et al., 2009a).

High Profile Cyberbullying Cases

 Some high-profile cases of cyberbullying have brought additional attention to the issue, influencing some state legislatures, school districts, and law-enforcement agencies to take action. One of the high-profile cases receiving significant or wide-spread attention nationwide involved the victimization of a 13-year-old girl named Megan Meier (Sutton, 2009). Megan was an eighth-grade student at a middle school in Missouri who befriended what she thought was a 16-year-old male peer named Josh Evans. However, "Josh" turned out to be a rival female peer's mother who was impersonating Josh and communicating with Megan on MySpace.com. The mother, Lori Drew, built a relationship with Megan only to tear it apart with an array of malicious and derogatory messages on the social networking site. This harassment continued for a short time, ultimately leading Megan, who already suffered from a lack of self-confidence and mild depression, to commit suicide by hanging herself in her bedroom (Jacobs, 2010).

 Another case that received heightened attention from the local and national media was the victimization of Ryan Halligan. Ryan was bullied at school and on the internet, with most of the harassment occurring online. Ryan was subjected to harassment by his peers including the spreading of rumors that Ryan was homosexual. It became such a problem that Ryan did not want to go to school. Ryan committed suicide at the age of thirteen (Stover, 2006). His father, John Halligan, was quoted as claiming that he does not solely blame the Internet for his son's death, but it "amplified and accelerated" his son's depressed state, which ultimately resulted in Ryan taking his own life (Abbott, 2008).

 Cyberbullying cases continually increase in number and continue to rise on the forefront on headlines of local, state, and national media outlets. Another example includes the victimization of Rachael Neblett. Rachael was a 17-year-old high school student in Kentucky,

considered to be friendly, outgoing, and was involved in numerous school activities, including being a cheerleader at the high school. Rachael began receiving threatening messages via e-mail, but she could not identify the aggressor. These messages were occurring at both home and school. The messages continued and Rachael became extremely frightened and removed herself from any extracurricular activities due to her fear. A few weeks later, Rachael shot herself in her parents' bedroom (Jacobs, 2010).

<center>Cyberbullying and the School's Responsibility</center>

There is an urgent need from school officials across the nation to consider the commonalities of cyberbullying. Victims in these high-profile cyberbullying cases share commonalities: they were harassed, threatened, demeaned, and otherwise tormented by their peers, who many times associated and interacted with them at school. Cyberbullying issues among secondary school-age students are increasing and many cases occur among peers at the same school. Cyberbullying issues contribute to increased conflict between students, which cannot be separated or ignored when the students are at school, regardless of whether the issues are occurring off-campus.

With extended boundaries to enforce, albeit cyberspace, school administrators are faced with a controversy that has been at the heart of many student-parent-school issues for decades: Preserving the balance between students' rights to free speech as defined by the First Amendment and the preservation of student safety and a quality learning environment free from disruption. The current challenge is secondary school administrators combating the presence of cyberbullying among students while preserving student rights to free speech. This challenge has resulted in numerous cases of litigation brought upon the school system and administrators by the students and their families. One of the most notable cases involved *Tinker v. Des Moines*

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Independent Community School District. In this case, students were initially suspended from school for wearing black arm bands in protest of U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War. The Supreme Court ruled in favor of the students' rights to protest since the wearing of the arm bands presented no threat to other students, nor did it create a disruptive learning environment at the school. This case has been used as precedent for many other cases involving schools' intervention of student expression. It is commonly known as the *Tinker* standard or test (Jacobs, 2010).

<div align="center">Impact of Cyberbullying</div>

The rate of cyberbullying among secondary school students is increasing. Evidence exists indicating that cyberbullying is a significant problem and deserves serious and immediate attention (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009). One of the major factors to consider is the effect of cyberbullying. Not only does cyberbullying affect victims and perpetrators, but also school culture, school policy development, and state and federal legislation (Juvonen & Gross, 2008). Each of these affected areas must be considered in determining the significance of this study.

Similar to traditional face-to-face bullying, the impact that cyberbullying has upon its victims can be grievous and detrimental. Cyberbullying victims have been found to experience lower self-esteem, higher rates of depression and feelings of anger, lower academic performance, lower attendance, and higher probabilities to commit acts of school violence and/or suicide (Juvonen & Gross, 2008). In contrast with what traditional bullying victims experience, where chances of being bullied are drastically reduced when leaving school grounds, cyberbullying victims may be victimized whenever they access the internet or use a digital communication device (Taylor, 2008). With constant access to online communication, cyberbullying can occur at any time and can victimize anyone. Within this context, it can amplify the problems experienced

by cyberbullying victims, due to the potential for constant attacks from cyberspace without a means to escape (Taylor, 2008). In addition, cyberbullying victims are less likely to report being victimized, as compared to victims of traditional bullying (Juvonen & Gross, 2008). Cyberbullying victims are more reluctant to report incidents because of numerous factors. These factors include a victim's emotional repercussions resulting from the cyberbullying incident, their feelings that the cyberbullying incident was their fault, their fear of cyberbully retaliation, and their fear of access to the internet or cell phone use being reduced or prohibited (Juvonen & Gross, 2008).

Differences exist between cyberbullying and traditional bullying. However, no other difference creates more cause for concern than the potential of cyberbullies to involve an audience. With electronic communication, cyberbullying can involve an extremely large audience, much greater than bullying in a traditional school setting (Shariff, 2009). Another area of concern is the potential for cyberbullies to hide behind the protection of anonymity. Cyberbullies can create their own identities while online, which can be very difficult for victims and others to discern. The uncertainty that exists in these anonymous situations can significantly increase the stress that cyberbullying victims experience (Feinberg & Robey, 2008). Most cyberbullying victims know the perpetrator and many times, both attend the same school. Also, in cases where victims retaliate against perpetrators, most retaliation occurs at school. When cyberbullying issues occur on or off school grounds, it may significantly affect student interactions and relationships at school. The social context of these interactions and relationships ultimately affect school culture (Feinberg & Robey, 2008). In a 2006 study conducted with students in grades 6 – 8, Hinduja and Patchin found that cyberbullies rated their school climate lower than other students. Therefore, cyberbullying can negatively affect school climate, place

students under intense stress, and cause issues with attendance and academic performance of victims.

School officials must consider the consequences resulting from a decision of whether or not they should intervene in cyberbullying incidents. The struggle for school officials to maintain a balance between preserving student rights of free speech and expression while protecting student safety and the learning environment has become more complex and difficult with the rise of cyberbullying. Although the rate of cyberbullying has reportedly increased, that increase is not reflected in a 2008-2009 U.S. Department of Education report, which states that only 40 cyberbullying cases out of 60,000 disciplinary cases resulted in suspension or expulsion. This figure is considered an underestimation of the actual problem existing in public schools. Because of the uncertainty existing among school officials in regards to response and consequences, disciplinary actions administered against perpetrators have been diluted to prevent possible litigation from the perpetrators and their parents (Olson, 2010). Furthermore, there is a certain "burden of proof" that exists for school officials to prove that the issue significantly disrupts the learning environment or it impedes on the safety of others at school. While schools carry this burden, many school systems are determined to react to situations they deem disruptive to the learning environment or threatening to the safety of students (Stover, 2006).

Statement of the Problem

Cyberbullying may threaten the safety and learning of students while at school, and consequently lead to school administrators issuing disciplinary action against perpetrators (Feinberg & Robey, 2008). However, because cyberbullying occurs in written or graphic form, and often originates off school grounds; it may be considered protected by individual rights to free speech set forth by the First Amendment (Abbott, 2008). The major issue at hand is that

cyberbullying may create situations where student safety and student rights to free speech conflict. As a result of this conflict, school officials are faced with the difficulty of preserving student safety, while simultaneously ensuring the protection of students' rights to free speech (Taylor, 2008).

Sensitivity to the cyberbullying issue among the media has led to negative press brought upon schools, which has resulted in many school systems addressing cyberbullying in their current anti-bullying policies (Feinberg & Robey, 2008). School systems across the nation are addressing the cyberbullying issue by revising their current student conduct and technology-use policies to help thwart future cyberbullying incidents and to further support administrators faced with assigning consequences to perpetrators (Riedel, 2008). With the number of high-profile cyberbullying cases reported, coupled with state legislatures taking action against cybercrimes, including cyberbullying, school systems must actively address these issues with higher intensity and fervor (Abbott, 2008).

As a result of some states and school systems taking more aggressive approaches to addressing cyberbullying, opposition to this aggression is increasing. The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) opposes some states' cyberbullying laws, which legislates more authority for school administrators to intervene in cyberbullying issues occurring away from school (Abbott, 2008). This so-called extension of school grounds creates more controversy and sensitivity to the cyberbullying issue (Willard, 2008). More controversy and divided opinion results in more ambiguity and delayed reactions when school administrators are faced with these issues in their schools (Willard). At a time when swift and objective decisions should be made, many school administrators are often reluctant to address cyberbullying issues with rigorous approaches (Stover, 2006).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to gather a school system's stakeholders' perceptions and beliefs regarding cyberbullying, its effects upon individual schools and surrounding communities, and how off-campus, cyberbullying should be addressed by school officials. The study gathered the perceptions and beliefs of school system stakeholders. School system stakeholders consisted of four groups: school administrators, school counselors, parents, and external authorities. External authorities included police officers, an attorney, a social worker, a technology specialist, and school system administrators focusing on student discipline.

The four stakeholder groups were selected as study participants due to each group's close proximity in dealing with cyberbullying issues, although in different roles and capacities. School administrators deal with cyberbullying issues because of their professional responsibilities in addressing student conduct and safety. School counselors also deal with cyberbullying issues due to their professional responsibilities in supporting student needs, which may include issues related to cyberbullying. Parents deal with cyberbullying in different capacities, and specifically from the standpoint of how it directly affects their child. In addition to parent perceptions, views of external authorities such as attorneys, police officers, investigators, technology specialists, social workers, and student-services administrators should be included to provide a level of experience, expertise, and objectivity to the study.

This study has contributed to a better understanding of cyberbullying and provided additional value to the growing body of literature related to the phenomenon. Also, it also provided additional information that can help school officials better understand how to address cyberbullying through educating students and parents about cyberbullying, its effects, and how to deal with it. This educational process includes incorporating the study's findings and conclusions

to provide professional development needs and training opportunities for school officials, law-enforcement officials, and other stakeholders who handle cyberbullying issues in a professional capacity. Furthermore, the results of the study can assist school officials and school board members in the development of school policy addressing cyberbullying issues.

Framework of the Study

A case study design guided the study. As defined by Yin (1984), case study research gathers in-depth data about a particular individual, group, or institution's experiences with a phenomenon that affects society on a larger scale. Case study research involves certain steps including the following: 1) the development of research questions to guide the study; 2) the selection of a particular case to study; 3) the selection of data collection instruments and procedures; 4) the analysis and evaluation of data; and 5) reporting of the findings (Soy, 1997).

This particular study followed the aforementioned case study research steps (Soy, 1997). Four major research questions guided the focus of the study. A large public school system in the state of Alabama was chosen as location of this study. Specifically, perspectives were gathered from school administrators, school counselors, parents, and external authorities. These four groups of individuals each have knowledge and interest in student safety, as well as student rights to free speech and expression. Focus-group interviews were used to gather data from all four groups (McNamara, 1999). The data collected was analyzed using qualitative methods (http://www.socialresearchmethods.net/kb/analysis.php). Data collected from focus-group interviews was analyzed by qualitative means, using content analysis to screen participant responses (http://www.socialresearchmethods.net/kb/unobtrus.php) to questions guided by a pre-developed protocol (McNamara, 1999). The analysis results were evaluated based on the three major research questions guiding the study. The research findings, conclusions, and

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recommendations were communicated in the research report at the conclusion of the study (Soy, 1997).

Research Questions

The major research questions that guided the study included the following:

1. What are the school system's stakeholders' perceptions and beliefs of how cyberbullying affects the community;

2. What are the school system's stakeholders' perceptions and beliefs of how cyberbullying affects the school; and

3. What are the school system's stakeholders' perceptions and beliefs of how cyberbullying incidents initiated off school grounds should be handled by school officials?

Significance of the Study

This study intended to bring more clarity to cyberbullying and its effects. Few studies have been conducted in southern regions of the U.S. Therefore, this study gathered, analyzed, and evaluated the perceptions of cyberbullying from school administrators, school counselors, parents, and external authorities who live and work in the southeast. Individuals in southern states may possess different sets of values, beliefs, and perceptions than do individuals in other regions of the U.S., so it was important to study the opinions of individuals who possess a common knowledge of the issue, but also possess an interest, influence, and understanding of school policy development and enforcement at the local level.

The school system selected for this study was located in central Alabama and encompasses diverse student demographics. The school system serves diverse communities with differing racial, cultural, and socioeconomic demographics. This diversity creates an ideal setting

to study the perceptions of three participant groups who play a significant role in influencing school policy and determining the importance of issues affecting students.

<div align="center">Definition of Terms</div>

In order to fully understand the issues concerning cyberbullying, one must understand the context of cyberspace and the technology that children and adolescents are using as communication devices. Online behavior has acquired its own terminology. These terms include but are not limited to flaming, harassment, denigration, impersonation, outing, trickery, exclusion, cyberstalking, cyberthreats, and sexting (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010). Also, one must understand a school's responsibility to protect the learning environment and safety of its students. In conjunction with this understanding, one must grasp the idea of constitutional rights, particularly the rights of free speech and expression.

Flaming: electronic messages with angry and vulgar language.

Harassment: Repeatedly sending nasty, mean, and insulting messages (Willard, 2007).

Denigration: "Dissing" someone online. Sending or posting gossip or rumors about a person to damage his or her reputation or friendships (Willard, 2007).

Impersonation: Pretending to be someone else and sending or posting material to get that person in trouble or danger or to damage that person's reputation or friendships (Willard, 2007).

Outing: Sharing someone's secrets or embarrassing information or images online (Willard, 2007).

Trickery: Talking someone into revealing secrets or embarrassing information, then sharing it online (Willard, 2007).

Exclusion: Intentionally and cruelly excluding someone from an online group (Willard, 2007).

Cyberstalking: Repeated, intense harassment and denigration that includes threats or creates significant fear (Siegle, 2010).

Cyberthreats: Direct threats or "distressing material"—general statements that make it sound like the writer is emotionally distraught and may be considering harming someone else, harming themselves, or committing suicide (Willard, 2007).

Sexting: Sending nude sexual images and messages electronically. Most often, images are sent between partners or where there is a desire for a relationship. Sometimes, the images are sent to attract attention or as a form of sexual harassment. Coercion by a partner, prospective partner, or peers to create an image may be involved. An image provided may be used for blackmail or sent widely to others. In rare situations, teens appear to be sending images as a form of sexual trafficking or as sexual exploitation (Willard, 2007).

Cyberbullying: the use of information and communication technologies to support deliberate, repeated, and hostile behavior by an individual or group that is intended to harm others (Willard, 2007).

Social Networking: Social networking websites allow users to be part of a virtual community. Currently, the two most popular sites are Facebook and MySpace. These websites provide users with simple tools to create a custom profile with text and pictures. A typical profile includes basic information about the user, at least one photo, and possibly a blog or other comments published by the user. Advanced profiles may include videos, photo albums, online applications (in Facebook), or custom layouts (in MySpace). After creating a profile, users can add friends, send messages to other users, and leave comments directly on friends' profiles or "wall." These features provide the building blocks for creating online communities (Willard, 2007).

Texting: the exchange of brief written messages between fixed-line phones or mobile phones and fixed or portable devices over a network. While the original term was derived from referring to messages sent using the Short Message Service (SMS) originated from Radio Telegraphy, it has since been extended to include messages containing image, video, and sound content (known as MMS messages) (Willard, 2007).

First Amendment of the United States Constitution – Freedom of Speech, Press, Religion, Petition, and Assembly: Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances. (Applies to Freedom of Speech and Expression) (U.S. Constitution Online, 2010)

<div align="center">Assumptions</div>

1. Most secondary school administrators and counselors in the selected school system had an understanding of cyberbullying and had experience in dealing with cyberbullying issues;

2. A significant number of secondary school students in the selected school system had access to digital communication devices and applications including cell phones, internet accessibility, social networking profiles, and text messaging;

3. Parents of secondary school students in the selected school system had a general awareness of cyberbullying and student rights; and

4. Interview questions posed to participants were answered and communicated honestly.

Limitations of the Study

1. The study was limited to one region of the U.S. with a demographic that may not represent the perceptions and values of individuals in other regions of the U.S. or the state;

2. Participation in the study was voluntary, which introduces potential for sampling bias; and

3. A single data collection method was used, which may result in a lack of triangulation of data:

   a. School Administrators (focus group interview);

   b. School Counselors (focus group interview);

   c. Parents (focus group interview); and

   d. External Authorities (focus group interview).

Organization of the Study

The study is organized and reported in five chapters. Chapter I provides an introductory view of cyberbullying as a general phenomenon, its implications upon schools, and its role in creating the major problem examined in this study. The purpose of the study, along with the study's significance, assumptions, limitations, and terminology are communicated. Chapter I also provides literature from previous studies that supports the problem, purpose, and significance of the study. Chapter II provides a review of literature referencing studies focused on cyberbullying as a growing phenomenon, resulting in increased implications for school administrators, school counselors, and parents, who along with students, are the school stakeholders on the front lines of the issue. Literature focusing on the effects of cyberbullying as it relates to legal issues (student rights and school obligations), student safety and well-being, as well as school culture.

Chapter III focuses on the methodology that will be used to perform the study. Also, the study's framework will be discussed. Perceptions and beliefs of the participants will be the main data source for the study. Each step of the study is discussed, including the rationale for each research question. The role of each participant group is discussed as well.

Chapter IV presents the results of the study. In this chapter, data gathered from the focus-group sessions are presented as participant responses, comments, and discussions transcribed during the audio-recorded interviews. Participant responses, comments, and discussions were guided by the principal researcher's question guide, driven by the study's three major research questions. The data are grouped and categorized according to the research question to which it connects and supports. Chapter V presents the discussion of the results and implications for stakeholders connected with the school system, including those participating in the study. This chapter also presents the study's conclusions, limitations, and recommendations for future research. The results of the study are grouped into five categories, based on themes identified through content analysis. Ideas for future research were influenced and framed by responses, comments, and discussion gathered from participants during the focus-group sessions. Strategies for addressing cyberbullying within the school system are also presented and may serve as possible solutions for other school systems, institutions, organizations, communities, and regions.

CHAPTER II:

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The use of technology by secondary school-age students is increasing rapidly. Additionally, the amount of online communication rises significantly each year. Since rising numbers of students frequently communicate with online posts and text messaging (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010), it may be extremely difficult for students who have suffered from cyberbullying to simply stay offline (Taylor, 2008). This would be similar to having a child isolate himself or herself from everyone else at school or on the playground during recess. Consequently, school officials must consider cyberspace interactions when identifying problems that may arise on their campuses. These are the types of issues facing students, school officials, and parents today. These types of issues, along with other topics presented in this review of literature, are currently at the forefront of cyberbullying research. The amount of research on cyberbullying is growing rapidly. With the growing number of cyberbullying related issues, a need for a greater understanding of the phenomenon is rising.

Cyberbullying: Significance, Causes, and Effects

Cyberbullying is a significant problem in society, and has transitioned its way into schools and the homes of students. Researchers involved in a national study (Kowalski & Limber, 2007) conducted with middle school students reported cyberbullying is occurring at noticeable levels. Twenty-five percent of female respondents reported having been cyberbullied and 11% of male participants reported the same. The students reported their experiences with cyberbullying within the two-month period before participating in the study. The study also

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indicates that cyberbullying among adolescent girls occurs at a higher rate as compared to occurrences with male adolescents. However, the rate of physical, face-to-face bullying remains higher among boys as compared to girls (Beale & Hall, 2007).

A study conducted by i-Safe.org revealed that 25% of high school students and 21% of middle school students have knowledge of someone who has been harassed while online. On the reverse side, 32% of high school students reported having participated in some type of cyberbullying behavior while online. Seventeen percent of middle school students reported they have made mean or derogatory comments to others while online. Eleven percent of secondary school students reported having been cyberstalked or cyberbullied by the same perpetrator multiple times (Riedel, 2008). A study conducted by the National Crime Prevention Council indicates that 43% of student respondents were cyberbullied at least once (Willard, 2007).

Hinduja and Patchin (2008) conducted a study focusing on cyberbullying among middle school students. They surveyed almost 2,000 students in grades 6 – 8 and found that more than 17% reported that they have been cyberbullied at least once in their lifetime. More than 9% reported to have been cyberbullied recently (within the last 30 days). More than 17% of students claimed to have cyberbullied another and more than 8% stated they cyberbullied someone recently (within the last 30 days). Another interesting component of the study is that 12% reported they had experienced both sides of the conflict as a cyberbully and victim, while almost 5% reported to have participated as both a cyberbully and a victim within the last 30 days (Hinduja & Patchin, 2008).

A 2008 study by Hoff and Mitchell indicates the rate of cyberbullying incidents among students continues to rise. The report revealed that just over 56% of participating students reported being "affected" by cyberbullying. Interestingly, a wide gap of victimization exists

between reported incidents of male victims and female victims. Over 72% of female participants reported being cyberbullied, while only 27.9% of male participants reported experiencing cyberbullying (Hoff & Mitchell, 2008). A study conducted by Kite, Gable, and Filippelli (2010) indicated that 44% of participating adolescents would inform an adult if they were attacked online. The 2006 NASSP publication *News Leader* reported 33% of participating adolescents stated having been harassed, threatened, or embarrassed by another's comments while online (Kite et al., 2010).

The rise in the amount of cyberbullying incidents reported during the last five years is alarming. The most recent Youth Internet Survey (2007) reported a significant rise in cyberbullying issues reported, which causes concern that cyberbullying may eventually overtake traditional bullying as the leading form of bullying behavior. Youth Internet Survey (2007) results, along with other data, have experts estimating anywhere from 9% to 49% of youth will experience at least one cyberbullying-related issue within a school year (Juvonen & Gross, 2008).

A study conducted by Hoff and Mitchell (2009) regarding student perceptions of cyberbullying and its effects is compelling and powerful. A high percentage of students participating in this study claimed the virtual online world can be an intimidating environment with limited standards of appropriate behavior and even less enforcement (Hoff & Mitchell, 2009). Cyberbullying has resulted in many students experiencing heightened stress and negative feelings, which if intensified with excessive cyberbullying, can lead to dangerous behaviors, including violence and suicide. Also, most students who are cyberbullied will not report it to adults, but if they do report, they most likely do so to their parents (Hoff & Mitchell, 2009).

Franek (2006) dubbed cyberbullying as "repeated misuse of technology to harass, intimidate, bully, or terrorize another person" (p. 39). One major difficulty of cyberbullying is the removal of non-verbal cues existing when individuals interact and communicate face-to-face. This leads to more animosity felt by the victim or recipient of perceived online attacks. Also, another heightened consequence of cyberbullying, as compared to traditional bullying, is victims of cyberbullying are more likely to cyberbully others as well (Kite et al., 2010).

Victims of cyberbullying are susceptible to feelings of anger, sadness, helplessness, and fear. Students who have experienced cyberbullying felt these emotions at a higher rate than those students who reported no cyberbullying. These psychological effects often caused students to withdraw from interaction with peers and from school activities. Feelings of helplessness and fear were enhanced in situations where student-victims were not aware of who or how many were responsible for the cyberbullying. When individuals are being attacked by an unknown entity, it often leads to a feeling of terror (Hoff & Mitchell, 2009). When these feelings exist over an extended period of time with repeated attacks, it can result in victims performing escalated levels of dangerous acts, including violence and suicide (Hoff & Mitchell, 2009).

The emotional damage experienced by victims as a result of being cyberbullied can be significant. It has been found that victims of traditional bullying experience diminished self-esteem, lower academic performance, attendance problems, difficulties with avoiding groups and social events, and even depression (Feinberg & Robey, 2008). Effects of cyberbullying can also be detrimental to schools. Although cyberbullying may not originate at school, the effects of cyberbullying do appear at school. These effects include negative impacts on school culture and climate, as well as social, emotional, and academic difficulties among victims (Feinberg & Robey, 2008).

Psychological distress has been found to be a direct result of traditional bullying and similar evidence is being found with cyberbullying, including a link between both types of bullying (Juvonen & Gross, 2008). Juvonen and Gross (2008) concluded that even though cyberbullying and traditional bullying are directly linked in some ways, cyberbullying victims who are not bullied at school still experience a large degree of distress. One of the main causes of distress is related to the victim's uncertainty of the perpetrator's identity. Although many cyberbullying victims have a good indication of the perpetrator, as well as being personal acquaintances with the cyberbully, it remains a stressful situation to victims who are not completely certain of the perpetrator's identity. The other factor that may cause distress among cyberbullying victims is their reluctance to report the incidents to adults. Most students do not tell adults about cyberbullying incidents they have experienced. Ninety percent of youth claimed they did not tell adults, including their parents, about being cyberbullied (Juvonen & Gross, 2008). Of those 90%, half stated the reason for not reporting was because the issue needed to be dealt with by them; while 31% did not report to adults due to their fear their parents or others would restrict their access to the Internet and communication devices (Juvonen & Gross, 2008).

It is evident that cyberbullying causes issues with both victims and the school environment, including safety and the overall culture. More specifically, certain factors exist that contributed to the development of cyberbullying into such a relevant issue facing students, families, schools, and society in general. Cyberbullying is occurring and increasing due to a number of factors. Mason (2008) identified major factors including the lack of parental or guardian supervision, difficulties transitioning between social and self-identities, and the disinhibition effect. The disinhibition effect is the decreased sense of fear for participating in online interaction, which may include inappropriate or dangerous activities (Mason, 2008). This

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decreased sense of fear is a result of the anonymity the Internet provides for its users (Willard, 2005). In a study performed by Ybarra and Mitchell (2004), 30% of adolescents reported using the Internet at least three hours daily. This statistic, coupled with 50% of the same respondents reporting parental supervision during online activity was poor, leaves little doubt adolescents have opportunities to engage in inappropriate online activities, including cyberbullying. Because online identities can remain anonymous, a decreased sense of individual identity and accountability occurs among young people using the Internet. This leads to a decreased sense of fear of repercussions for engaging in risky, inappropriate, or illegal behavior while online behind a protected or false identity. This lack of identity transition from social to individual self is a contributing factor to the disinhibition effect (Mason, 2008).

Also, a lack of supervision by parents and schools, coupled with increased access to technology could be a contributing factor in the rise of cyberbullying incidents. One law-enforcement official in Virginia, who deals with cybercrimes and cyberbullying issues states that providing adolescents with free and unsupervised access to computers and the Internet is like "giving a 14-year-old the keys to the car and no instruction on how to drive it" (Riedel, 2008, p. 22). This same official also alluded to the problem of Web 2.0 applications, which encompass such tools as blogs, wikis, instant messaging, texting, and posting capabilities on social networking sites. He also stated that the emergence of these applications provide those with intentions to bully, harass, and mistreat others a myriad of opportunities to accomplish those malicious intentions (Riedel, 2008). Juvonen and Gross (2008) reported that cyberbullying does occur more with youth who spend larger amounts of time online.

Finally, research indicated a major cause for increase in cyberbullying is pre-existing relationships between cyberbullies and cybervictims. The Opinion Research Corporation (2006)

conducted a study reporting 45% of pre-teenage students and 30% of teenage students responded they have been cyberbullied while at school (Feinberg & Robey, 2008). This contributes to the idea that most cyberbullying victims and perpetrators know each other and their initial relationships and interactions are school-based (Feinberg & Robey, 2008). There are distinct causes of cyberbullying, but the most prevalent causes are all linked to relationships or relationship dynamics often occurring from prior association between the perpetrator and victim (Hoff & Mitchell, 2009). The most common motivators for cyberbullying are troubled relationships, particularly romantic problems, feelings of envy, and intolerance towards others (Hoff & Mitchell, 2009).

Cyberbullying vs. Traditional Bullying: Similarities, Differences, and Connections

Various positions have been taken in regards to the similarities, differences, and connections existing between cyberbullying and the more traditional form of schoolyard, face-to-face bullying. Some similarities do exist between the two forms of bullying; however, more differences have been indicated in research studies, particularly in relation to the degree of the effect the type of bullying has on its victims.

Online bullying and traditional on-campus or face-to-face bullying can share many characteristics, including the victims. Many times, victims of cyberbullying also experience bullying and harassment at school. With the current electronic communication devices available for use by children and adolescents, another mode for bullying is now in full effect (Darden, 2009). A 2007 study by Raskauskas and Stoltz revealed that more victims and bullies remain in traditional bullying situations as compared to cyberbullying. A survey conducted with students, ages 13 – 18, indicated that 71% of respondents claim to be victims of traditional bullying while

49% of respondents claim to be victims of cyberbullying. Conversely, sixty-four percent claim to be traditional bullies, while only 21% claim to be cyberbullies (Smith, Mahdavi, et al., 2007).

According to some psychologists, cyberbullying does indeed result in more stress suffered by victims (Feinberg & Robey, 2008); however, the amount of stress cyberbullying victims suffer as compared to traditional bullying is not easily determined. Accessibility of bullies to victims may be significantly higher in cyberbullying situations; however, the ability of cyberbullying victims to electronically block cyberbullies may decrease stress levels, compared to those involved in traditional bullying (Smith, Mahdavi, et al., 2007). Smith, Mahdavi, et al. (2007) performed two studies and concluded that cyberbullying does occur more away from school, unlike traditional bullying; however, because of the significant amount of situations that occur between students who know one another, can result in conflict occurring on school grounds. Additionally, cyberbullies are similar to traditional bullies in a number of areas. For instance, cyberbullies have a greater chance of being bullied in a traditional fashion than those who are not bullies. Cyberbullies are more likely to participate in inappropriate behaviors, including use of illegal substances. Cyberbullies also use the internet on a daily basis (Feinberg & Robey, 2008).

One of the differences existing between cyberbullies and traditional bullies is in their goals. Traditional bullies often have a goal of attaining initial power and control over their victims (Feinberg & Robey, 2008). Cyberbullies, on the other hand, may intend to retaliate against traditional bullies who bully them or their friends. Some cyberbullies have the self-perception of not necessarily being a bully, but rather a "vigilante" who bullies online to punish other bullies for their inappropriate actions in traditional, face-to-face settings (Feinberg & Robey, 2008).

Cyberbullying victims may also experience more difficulties traditional bullying victims because of the opportunities online bullies have to reach much larger audiences when they threaten, harass, flame, or degrade others. Escaping online attacks can be a much greater challenge as compared to escaping face-to-face bullying. The challenge to escape from cyberbullying is a result of an increased dependence upon technology and digital communication that adolescents experience in today's society (Feinberg & Robey, 2008). Furthermore, cyberbullying victims are less likely to tell adults about being bullied, as compared to victims of traditional bullying (Feinberg & Robey, 2008). This reluctance to inform adults about cyberbullying is due to a number of factors, but the most common include the perception that it is somehow their responsibility, a fear of the bully retaliating physically or increasing online attacks by number or severity, and a fear that their online access and utilization of communication devices will be limited by adults attempting to address the issue (Feinberg & Robey, 2008).

Cyberbullying may not necessarily be an exclusive threat to students, but an extended threat to students who experience bullying while at school. The Youth Internet Survey-2 (2006) reported that 85% of students reporting being bullied online also experience bullying at school. This rate of overlap among students bullied online and students bullied at school indicated cyberbullying is indeed an extension of the school grounds and not necessarily a separate forum where unrelated acts of cyberbullying occur among students (Juvonen & Gross, 2008). Based on the study conducted by Juvonen and Gross (2008), it appears cyberspace may indeed be an extension of the school grounds, where bullying is being experienced by a large number of students who also experience bullying at school. Because most cyberbullying overlaps with school-based bullying (85%), it may be necessary for schools to possess the authority to

investigate and address online activity of students who have been reported for bullying at school, online, or both (Juvonen & Gross, 2008).

School grounds and the bullying occurring there may be extending, as it may be that a significant amount of cyberbullying may be directly linked to bullying occurring at school. Smith, Mahdavi, et al. (2007) discovered that approximately 33% of reporting seventh grade students claimed to have been victims of both traditional bullying and cyberbullying (Smith, Mahdavi, et al., 2007). Approximately 25% of the seventh grade participants reported to have been bullied online exclusively (Smith, Mahdavi, et al., 2007).

<center>Cyberbullying: Challenges Facing Schools, Parents, and Society</center>

As a result of the increase in accessibility to online communication applications (i.e., social networking sites, instant messaging, and chat rooms), the number of challenges will most likely increase (Wright et al., 2009b). These challenges include the number and intensity of cyberbullying issues facing schools, students, and parents. The challenges for schools include the ambiguity administrators must deal with when first deciding to address cyberbullying issues and then deciding the level of intervention needed. For students, the risk of being harassed, threatened, or bullied in some form while communicating online is steadily increasing. For parents, the constant threat of cyberbullying upon their children is a daunting challenge to face.

The experiences of cyberbullying victims may differ from those of traditional bullying victims. One difference is cyberbullying is a more difficult and complex issue to address because of the anonymity cyberbullies possess when attacking victims online. Also, cyberbullying victims are subjected to potentially larger peer audiences who witness the cyberbullying interaction through shared social networking accounts or text messages. Furthermore, cyberbullying incidents are more troublesome for cyberbullying victims to escape because of the

increased dependence upon online activities as a part of their social lives. Although students

mainly experience cyberbullying away from school grounds, they encounter many of the

perpetrators at school (Taylor, 2008).

One of the major difficulties for schools is identifying cyberbullies and ultimately

combating the problems that result due to the anonymity that cyberbullies possess when

harassing victims. Also, parents may experience a false sense of security about their child's

online activities because of the subtle nature of online activity (Beale & Hall, 2007), which

hinders parents from detecting problems during their child's online communication.

Cyberbullying is becoming a detrimental part of today's technology influence upon schools. It is

also becoming a leading factor in the threat to student safety and a significant disruption to a

positive learning culture (Beale & Hall, 2007).

Addressing cyberbullying presents an ambiguous problem for school administrators.

School officials are not confident in addressing cyberbullying issues even though evidence exists

indicating cyberbullying can have negative effects on student safety and well-being (Shariff,

2004). The knowledge of cyberbullying and its effects have increased; however, little

information has been posed to indicate how school officials can effectively address the problems

without fear of litigation (Shariff, 2004). School officials must concentrate on cyberbullying

because the local and national media are criticizing schools for not effectively addressing

cyberbullying issues, especially those resulting in tragic endings. For example, Phoebe Prince, a

15-year-old Massachusetts high school student, committed suicide after being bullied at school

and on Facebook. Officials at Phoebe's school sustained a tremendous amount of criticism from

media sources across the nation. Many critics claimed the school officials should have been

charged for negligence, although the state ultimately did not charge them (A.P. Education Week, April 7, 2010).

Social networking sites are the trendiest communication application for adolescents today. Many students have established profiles, groups, and circles of friends they created on these online network sites. The interaction occurring between students is increasing and presumably will continue to increase, which causes an increasing challenge for school administrators. At the same time, school administrators are faced with utilizing these technologies to enhance student learning (Kite et al., 2010).

Another reason for concern is the effect that cyberbullying has upon school safety and the preservation of the learning environment. Cyberbullying issues can lead to disruptions at school, due to opportunities for victims to retaliate against their alleged perpetrators. Juvonen and Gross (2008) reported the rate of retaliation at school by students who are bullied online is 60%, higher than the rate of online retaliation, which is 12% (Juvonen & Gross, 2008). Furthermore, increased pressure on schools to intervene is due to a possible increase in school violence. A study reported by Willard (2008) revealed that cyberbullying victims are eight times more likely to bring a weapon to school, as compared to students who were not victims of cyberbullying. This report is troublesome and with increases in the amount of cyberbullying cases, this may lead to more school violence issues with victims bringing weapons on school grounds for protection or retaliation purposes (Willard, 2008).

School administrators are in a state of crux attempting to determine the legalities of addressing cyberbullying issues occurring off-campus. However, there is little uncertainty about the effects that cyberbullying can inflict upon schools. Cyberbullying, especially when not addressed effectively, can lead to negative effects upon school climate harm student-victims'

academic performance and attendance and threaten the mental and emotional health of those who undergo severe attacks of cyberbullying (Feinberg & Robey, 2008). When ignored, cyberbullying will negatively impact the overall culture of the school, as well as the safety of the students (Feinberg & Robey, 2008).

Cyberbullying may raise greater concerns for parents due to their lack of experience and knowledge with current electronic communication technologies, such as text messaging, instant messaging and social networking (Juvonen & Gross, 2008). Although less students report incidents of cyberbullying to adults than students who do not report, almost 36% of students reported being cyberbullied to their parents (Hoff & Mitchell, 2009). This compares to only 16.7% of students reporting cyberbullying issues to school officials (Hoff & Mitchell, 2009). This leads to the conclusion that school officials must encourage and establish open lines of communication with parents to remain updated on issues that occur online or off-campus, but may lead to disruptions at school. Another alarming statistic reported from the analysis of student responses is of the 16.7% of students who reported telling a school official about being cyberbullied, more than 70% of those students reported school officials did not address the problem or did very little to address the problem (Hoff & Mitchell, 2009).

In conclusion, schools must take more action to address the cyberbullying issue, even if it originates off-campus. Students reporting in a study conducted by Hoff and Mitchell (2009) reveal little or no confidence in school officials to address cyberbullying issues that affect them while at school (Hoff & Mitchell, 2009). Cyberbullying can be detrimental to a student's sense of safety and well-being. It can even impede a student's opportunities for learning. However, even in cases where school officials attempted to address issues, the ambiguity of issues,

including evidence of the perpetrator's true identity needed to legally punish the perpetrator often made it difficult to help (Hoff & Mitchell, 2009).

<div align="center">Legal Issues: School Obligations, Student Rights, and Court Cases</div>

Although the legal right of school administrators to address cyberbullying issues occurring off-campus is debatable, administrators are faced with the decision to address these issues due to the effects brought forth by cyberbullying. Although it is the burden of the school to prove if cyberbullying acts have threatened the safety of other students at school or disrupted the learning environment negatively affecting students' education, administrators can address cyberbullying, including the issuance of disciplinary action upon perpetrators (Feinberg & Robey, 2008). On the other hand, if school administrators decide not to address cyberbullying incidents that originate away from school, it is possible that they will be held responsible based on tort claims of negligence or by standards set forth under Title IX (Trager, 2009).

Many times, administrators are forced to address cyberbullying issues in some way, to avoid accusations of neglect. However, addressing issues with overly aggressive action can result in litigation being brought upon administrators and their respective school districts. School leaders must find legal methods to adequately address cyberbullying issues that threaten student safety and cause disruptions at school. Fortunately, a somewhat vague roadmap has been established with previous court rulings ranging from the circuit courts to the Supreme Court. School administrators must develop a legal knowledge base enabling them to act appropriately and effectively when confronting cyberbullying issues, particularly incidents involving off-campus activity. Administrators should be aware of court cases used as precedent in dealing with student rights to free speech and expression. Furthermore, acquiring an understanding of the rationale for how each case was decided will be beneficial to administrators.

Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District is the primary legal

precedent referenced when dealing with students' rights to free speech. This Supreme Court

ruling applies to student expression that occurs either on or off of school grounds. The Supreme

Court stated in the explanation of its ruling in 1969 that "conduct by a student, in class or out of

it, which materially disrupts class work or involve(s) substantial disorder or invasion of the rights

of others is, of course, not immunized by the constitutional guarantee of freedom of speech"

(Trager, 2009, p. 554). In other words, when student expression results in a substantial disruption

to the learning environment, that expression is not protected by their First Amendment rights to

free speech and can be addressed by school officials to censor or correct the action. This

explanation is somewhat different from the grounds by which rulings would be made in a

situation involving an adult in a general public forum. The Court takes a stance that the

protection of education and safety of students within the forum of a school setting is an exception

and may take precedent to the protection of student rights to free speech and expression.

However, the Court also stated that schools do not have the authority to act on situations

regarding student expression based on a perceived or anticipated situation of disturbance to the

learning environment. The Court explained, "Undifferentiated fear or apprehension of

disturbance is not enough to overcome the right to freedom of expression" (Trager, p. 555). This

ruling and explanation were provided in 1969 and more broadly interpreted and extended in later

court rulings (Trager, 2009).

In the case of *Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District* (1969), the

Supreme Court ruled that the students, who were suspended from school for wearing black

armbands to protest U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War, were within their rights and were

protected by their First Amendment rights to do so. The Court explained that due to the inability

of the school to provide evidence the student protest caused a substantial disruption to the educational environment of the school, it ruled in favor of the students. The ruling establishes a precedent that is still applied today in cases involving situations of conflict between student rights to free speech and the protection of a school's learning environment. The *Tinker Standard*, or *Tinker Test*, is primarily used to gauge whether schools possess the right to intervene in situations of student expression, including off-campus issues. The *Tinker* case establishes the standard that if schools have the ability to prove that student expression of any sort has 1) caused a significant disruption to the learning environment or 2) threatens the safety of other students at school; schools have the legal authority to intervene (Taylor, 2008).

A recent case involving cyberbullying addressed the issue using the *Tinker* standard as precedent for the ruling. A high school student, who attended a public high school in Pennsylvania, was suspended from school for creating a MySpace page considered by school officials to harass and mock the student's school principal. The student received a 10-day suspension for his actions. The student filed suit against the school district and the case was heard by the 3rd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals. The U.S. District Judge, Terrence McVerry, ruled in favor of the student and reversed the student's suspension. The decision was based on a lack of evidence which supported the student's case that no real threat was made towards the school principal and no "substantial" disruption was caused at the school as a result of the web page created. The judge also stated, "Public schools are vital institutions, but their reach is not unlimited." The school's decision to suspend was reversed due to the lack of evidence provided to support its claim that a disruption of the learning environment had been created by the student's off-campus actions (Darden, 2009).

Mary Rose Papandrea (2008) argued that the *Tinker* standard may not be a legal action by school officials, since in many cases it only affects individual students who are bullied and does not affect the overall school learning environment (Trager, 2009). Others have argued that a "substantial disruption" to individual students has the potential to be as equally damaging to the overall school learning environment when examining the short-term and long-term effects that cyberbullying has on victims (Trager, 2009). Students who are victimized intensely or over long periods of time can resort to violence and/or suicide, which negatively affect the school environment as a whole (Feinberg & Robey, 2008).

In addition to the *Tinker* standard, another exception exists. Most student speech occurring off school grounds or during non-school platforms is protected by the First Amendment. However, another circumstance exists where student speech and expression is not protected. This can be applied when students make threats to others that are considered to be "true threats." "True threats" are those specific in nature and intended towards a specific individual or group. Threats can result in students being subject to school disciplinary action and, if severe, criminal punishment by law-enforcement authorities (Anderson, 2007).

Other cases are also occasionally used to provide guidance in situations currently carrying litigation or threatened by the possibility of litigation. The case of *Hazelwood School District v. Kuhlmeier* (1988) provided more precedent for schools to consider when dealing with student expression. The case involved a school principal's decision to prohibit a student from publishing an article in the school newspaper about teen pregnancy and divorce. The school administration felt the article was detrimental to the school's objectives and mission. The principal felt that even though names had been changed identities were not protected. He also had concerns about younger students and their ability to comprehend the information in the

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articles. The student felt that her rights to free speech were being violated by the school's censure of the article. The Supreme Court disagreed with the student and ruled in favor of the school district. The precedent set in this particular case establishes that a school possesses the authority to limit or restrict student expression that conflicts with the school's educational mission and goals. However, the violation of the school's mission or goals must be proven by the school with an exhibit of "compelling evidence" to support the school's actions (Taylor, 2008).

In the case of *Morse v. Frederick* (2007), the Supreme Court ruled in favor of the school district, whose administrators disciplined a student for displaying a sign that read "Bong-Hits for Jesus" at a school-related function. Although the student's behavior was off-campus, the Court ruled in favor of the school based on the fact that the student committed the act at a school-related activity. The term "off-campus" was never communicated by the Court during their explanation of their decision, thus never completely establishing a precedent for schools addressing "off-campus" behavior (Taylor, 2008).

However, in *Morse v. Frederick*, the Supreme Court stated that a "reasonable forecast" could be applied, which gives school officials the authority to intervene in issues of student expression that occurs off-campus. The Court upheld the principal's decision to make the student take down the sign based primarily on its presence at a school-related function. Additionally, Justice Alito communicated that schools have an extended authority to address situations that may affect the school environment in terms of violence or threats to student safety. He stated that school officials possess a "greater authority to intervene before speech leads to violence" (Trager, 2009, p. 557). This is based on the *Tinker* standard's precedent of school officials having the authority to prevent a "substantial disruption" before it occurs. Furthermore, Chief Justice John Roberts stated "the governmental interest in stopping student drug abuse (provides)

schools (authority) to restrict student expression that they reasonably regard as promoting illegal drug use" (Trager, p. 556). Therefore, the sign displaying the message "BONG HiTS 4 JESUS" was considered by Chief Justice Roberts to be cause for school officials to intervene and prohibit student expression of this nature based on the need to prevent promotion of illegal drug use. Chief Justice Robert's also added that school authority to intervene in order to prevent or deter illegal drug use is "important indeed, perhaps compelling" (Trager, p. 556).

In a later case that used a "reasonable forecast," *Boucher v. School District of Greenfield*, a student was disciplined by school officials for distributing a handbook that communicated to other students how to hack into computer and networking systems, which could include the school district's network as well. The "Hacker's Handbook" was considered to be a potential disruption to the school's learning environment and the "reasonable forecast" precedent was established. This precedent was established because although the "Hacker's Handbook" was never used to circumvent or disrupt the school's networking or computer systems, U.S. District Court ruled that school officials had authority to intervene due to the potential threat the issue brought upon the school and its learning environment (Trager, 2009).

In the case of *Layshock v. Hermitage School District* (2006), the District Court of Pennsylvania ruled in favor of the school district for claims that a student's creation of a web-site parody focusing on a local high school principal had created a disruption to the school's educational environment. However, a federal district court overturned the initial decision in favor of the student. According to the federal district court, school officials' claims of disruption were minimal; and school officials violated the student's rights to free speech when they disciplined him for his actions. The federal district court explained that the disruptions to the school learning

environment were "rather minimal," because there was no evidence of classes being cancelled, disorder among a wide range of students, or violence due to the web site posting (Taylor, 2008).

In the case of *Emmett v. Kent School District No. 415* (2000), the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Washington ruled in favor of the student, who was expelled by the school district for creating and posting a web page containing an obituary list of current students at the school and an online voting application to determine who should "die next." The court ruled in favor of the student because the court explained that the school district was unable to prove that the web page had specifically threatened anyone or insinuated any violent acts. Once again, it is the burden of the school district to provide evidence to support their actions, particularly suspension and expulsion of students, in these types of cases (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009).

Several circuit courts have upheld school decisions to intervene and discipline students in regards to off-campus expression. The Eighth Circuit Court upheld a school district's decision to punish a student for a "threatening" letter the student wrote off-campus, but which was brought to school by another student. The letter was interpreted as a "true threat" to student safety and the writer was disciplined accordingly. In another case, *Doniger v. Niehoff*, the Second Circuit Court upheld the school officials' decision to discipline a student for creating an online blog, which was deemed a "substantial disruption." The blog negatively attacked school administrators, referring to them as "douchebags," for allegedly cancelling a pre-scheduled extracurricular event. The blog also called for other students to call or e-mail one administrator in order to "piss her off" because of her alleged decision to cancel the event. The school district had evidence showing that the administrators were bombarded with excessive e-mails and phone calls in connection with the directions communicated on the blog. The Court ruled in favor of the school

district because of the disruption to its duties to effectively run the school program and the comments "douchebags" and "piss her off" were a direct cause of the disruption (Trager, 2009).

In a case that involved more threatening remarks, *Wisniewski v. Weedsport Central School District*, the Second Circuit Court ruled in favor of the school, which disciplined a student for creating an online picture of his teacher's head transforming into the head of Hitler. The student also included a request to have the teacher killed (Trager, 2009). The Court ruled that the school had a right to discipline the student for his actions due to the threatening message created online and the safety concerns that message brought to the teacher and the school. The Fifth Circuit Court upheld a school district's decision to intervene in the case of students distributing a newspaper produced off-campus, because it was potentially disruptive to the school environment (*Sullivan v. Houston Independent School District* 1973). Also, in the case of *Feton v. Stear* (1976), the Fifth Circuit Court upheld the school district's decision to discipline a student for yelling offensive language at a teacher in a shopping center parking lot. The Court explained the ruling by stating the language used by the student were "fighting words" or words used by an individual to inflict injury to another or a breach of peace (Trager, 2009).

Although several states and school districts within those states are taking a more aggressive approach to dealing with cyberbullying, including issues occurring off-campus, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) is attacking the policies being set. Their claim is the language in the policies is giving school district officials too much authority in addressing cyberbullying issues occurring away from school. ACLU representatives claim these policies will lead to administrators attempting to restrict students from making comments that may or may not be appropriate, but by no means are threatening to the learning environment or to other students (Willard, 2008).

As previously stated, school administrators face mixed pressures to either implement disciplinary action or refrain from applying intervention. Cyberbullying intervention with disciplinary action can be ambiguous; however measures can be taken by school administrators to better ensure legal protection. Nancy Willard (2008) has offered the following suggestions when dealing with cyberbullying issues:

1.   Download and save all material and communications generated by the
     alleged   cyberbully and sent to the reporting victim;

2.   Any on-campus interactions between the alleged cyberbully and the
     reporting victim should be investigated to confirm a connection between
     the reported cyberbullying and school;

3.   Document possible scenarios or likelihood of threats to student safety or
     disruptions to the learning environment caused by the reported
     cyberbullying behavior. Gather other data about the alleged cyberbully
     and acquire others' perspectives about the alleged perpetrator;

4.   Thoroughly investigate to ensure the cyberbullying was initiated by the
     alleged bully, instead of retaliation against the reporting student for on
     campus bullying or other online bullying;

5.   Practice caution when administering discipline to perpetrators in
     cyberbullying issues. Excessive discipline can lead to angered reactions
     from parents, which may lead to litigation against the school. This could
     especially be the case when parents feel the school may have acted outside
     their boundaries or violated their child's right to free speech, expression,

or privacy. Ultimately, the purpose of discipline is to change behavior; excessive discipline is not necessary; and

6.   Refrain from addressing student messages or posts that seem inappropriate, but are not necessarily threatening to student safety or disruptive to the learning environment at school.

A multitude of scenarios and situations exist that influence and enable school administrators to address cyberbullying issues in a legal fashion. However, the possibility of litigation is always present. Therefore, in order to remain completely immune to the risk of being sued by students and parents in discontent, school administrators may choose to ignore or address issues in an overly conservative manner.

Shaheen Shariff referred to school administrators' reluctance to address off-campus issues of student expression, including cyberbullying, as a "wall of defense" (Shariff, 2004, p. 225). This reluctance has been reportedly noticed by parents who sought help from school administrators when their children had been targets of bullying or harassment. Parents participating in the study reported that school officials, when approached about bullying issues, would 1) assume the victims took some sort of action to instigate the attack; 2) state the issue was not as bad as it seemed; and 3) state that the school's current policies prevented them from aggressively addressing the issue with the alleged perpetrator. This, according to Shariff, is a direct result of a lack of school administrators' knowledge and training pertaining to bullying intervention (Shariff, 2004).

It is possible school districts will be held responsible in cases where students lack protection when they are threatened or harmed by others, specifically situations occurring on school grounds or by individuals under the same school jurisdiction. The University of Delaware

was held liable by the Supreme Court of Delaware when a student was victimized by fraternity hazing, and the University was held to be knowledgeable by the Court. The university was held responsible on the premise of *Restatement (Second) of Torts* §323. This premise pertains to the responsibility of an institution to protect the safety of those performing actions as a part of the institution's program, whether or not it is held permissible by the institution. This case specifically applied to hazing at a university; however, many states began requiring their public school districts to create anti-bullying or anti-harassment policies to promote and enforce student safety more effectively (Trager, 2009).

When school officials do not address or appropriately address issues affecting student safety and learning, schools can potentially face litigation on the grounds of unintentional tort or negligence. School officials have a duty to protect student safety and their opportunities for learning. However, the question is to what extent do school officials execute this obligation? Although school districts have been sued for "educational malpractice," where students and their families perceived to have been underserved or neglected by the school district in some capacity, courts have mostly sided with the schools in these instances (Shariff, 2004).

Courts have ruled against schools and school officials for neglect based on the tort law premise, when issues of bullying and harassment of students occur without active and appropriate responses by those officials. Cyberbullying can be applied to this premise as well, based on the potential harm to student safety, as well as the potential disruption to the learning environment the acts impose. Additionally, school administrators may be held liable for cyberbullying incidents based on Title IX provisions. In the case of *Davis v. Monroe County Board of Education*, the Supreme Court sided with a student who was sexually harassed by other students. The Court held the school district liable for the protection of the victimized student.

The student was not protected and school administrators were found to be neglectful of the student's needs, especially since the student and parent sought help from administrators, who took no formidable steps to intervene (Trager, 2009).

Since the Court alluded to a school's rightful authority to intervene in order to deter illegal drug use, even in cases similar to *Morse v. Frederick* involving off-campus student expression, courts may also provide the same precedent for schools regarding the prevention or deterrence of cyberbullying. Cyberbullying has become an issue that threatens student safety and the learning environment similar to illegal drug use. Therefore, the *Tinker* standard, which provides school officials the authority to intervene in cases where a substantial disruption exists, may be applied. Furthermore, the precedent laid down in *Morse v. Frederick*, which communicates the authority of school officials to apply "reasonable forecast" to prevent potential threats upon student safety or potential disruptions of the school learning environment, may be applied to cyberbullying as well (Trager, 2009).

Justice Samuel Alito's explanation in the *Morse* ruling should also apply to issues involving cyberbullying, including issues originating off-campus. He alluded to school officials possessing a "greater authority to intervene" before student expression results in violence, this pertaining to the specific instance of the promotion of illegal drug use in the Morse case. However, this explanation can be more broadly applied, since his statements were made in more general terms and are applicable to situations beyond that specific case. This explanation can also be applied to cyberbullying, since it has potential to lead to school violence in certain situations that are deemed threatening to student safety or substantially disruptive by school officials (Trager, 2009).

Actions and Interventions: Policy, Collaboration, and Education

The impact of cyberbullying upon schools and society is evident (Feinberg & Robey, 2008). Many school districts are revising policies to incorporate procedures and by-laws addressing issues concerning online misconduct. An increasing number of states are also legislating and enforcing new laws to combat the effects of cyberbullying. Partnerships between schools and Internet social networking sites such as MySpace and Facebook are being strengthened to legally and effectively address cyberbullying issues (Chaker, 2007). These are just a few examples of measures being taken to curb the detrimental effects of cyberbullying. This section contains examples of literature focusing on the various strategies that state governments, school administrators, school counselors, Internet sites, parents, and other entities are executing to address the ever-growing phenomenon of cyberbullying.

For schools, the first and most important part of the process to address cyberbullying in schools is for school officials to create a cyberbullying component for their current anti-bullying or anti-harassment policy. This can be done by specifically addressing the term cyberbullying to leave little confusion regarding the school district's stance on the issue. Also, guidelines and expectations concerning cyber-conduct for students should be explicitly communicated (Smith, Mahdavi, et al., 2007).

Most school system technology and Internet acceptable use policies were designed to deter inappropriate use of the resources by students at school - whom spend considerably less time online at school as compared to home. Although it may not be legally defensible, Bill Belsey, an education consultant and cyberbullying website creator, states that school officials should consider writing a policy covering Internet use away from school grounds (Gillis, 2006). According to Richard Rosenberg, professor emeritus of computer science at the University of

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British Columbia, the creation of these policies will bring more awareness to the issue and possibly deter some cyberbullying behaviors and incidents from occurring (Gillis, 2006). Belsey stated, "the more you bring parents on-board with issues like this (cyberbullying), the more inclined they are to talk with their kids, to convince them that access to the Internet is a privilege, not a right" (Gillis, 2006, p. 35).

School officials are forced to create and enforce anti-bullying policies that include cyberbullying as a specific action. Additionally, school officials should look at incorporating strict, yet clear guidelines, for technology use and tough consequences for students who choose not to follow them (Darden, 2009). Shariff and Hoff (2009) stated that school officials should approach cyberbullying more seriously, "it nonetheless constitutes a form of 'real' violence and ought to be understood and interpreted this way by schools and courts" (Hoff & Mitchell, 2009, p. 664). Hinduja and Patchin (2009) developed a list of six fundamental, yet critical components needed in a school policy addressing cyberbullying behaviors:

1. Detailed and specific definitions of bullying and its related behaviors;

2. Hierarchy of consequences administered to found perpetrators;

3. Detailed list of procedures for victims or bystanders to report incidents;

4. Detailed list of procedures for investigating reported incidents;

5. Policy language that directly addresses off-campus cyberbullying behavior that results in "substantial disruptions to the learning environment" or specifically threatens student safety; and

6. Strategies and methods for cyberbullying prevention program(s).

Some school administrators are taking action against cyberbullying in a more aggressive manner. This is due in a large part to the increasing amount of incidents occurring at school due

to online exchanges and messages between bullies and victims at home. School districts and state lawmakers alike in states such as Florida, South Carolina, Utah, and Oregon are developing policies and laws to better address the issues (Chaker, 2007).

A number of states are reacting more aggressively towards cybercrimes and cyberbullying. For starters, many states have legislated school districts to incorporate cyberbullying policies into their current anti-bullying or anti-harassment policies. This differs from state to state, but more aggressive policies are specifically addressing cyberbullying, including off-campus activity, with stated disciplinary actions for students who violate the policy. Although there are cases where school administrators believe they do not have authority to intervene with disciplinary action, administrators still have an obligation to act by informing law-enforcement officials. Also, school administrators can direct parents of alleged victims to law-enforcement officials, who can intervene when particular cyberbullying incidents may not necessarily result in disruptions at school, but remain a threat to the student-victim's safety outside of school (Taylor, 2008).

Over forty states have passed laws in various forms that address harassment, bullying, and some cyberbullying, whether directly or indirectly. Virginia, specifically, has passed legislation making it illegal to use a computer or related technology to harass others (Code of Virginia 18.2-152.7:1 2000) (Beale & Hall, 2007). In January 2010, California created legislation mandating that schools have the authority to suspend or expel students who participate in cyberbullying against other students. Other states with current cyberbullying legislation and policies include Arkansas, Delaware, Idaho, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Nebraska, New Jersey, Oklahoma, Oregon, South Carolina, and Washington. From a federal standpoint, the U.S. is taking action against cybercrimes, including cyberbullying. The

Department of Justice created a series of information packets addressing cyberbullying, which

can be accessed online (http://www.ncjrs.gov/internetsafety/cyber.html). The Federal Trade

Commission has developed web sites communicating to users about the dangers of cyberbullying

(Darden, 2009).

In October 2009, the state of Alabama passed legislation providing additional support for

schools, victims of student-to-student harassment, and parents of student-victims. The new law,

House Bill 216 (107674-6), was introduced by the Alabama House of Representatives and was

named the *Student Harassment Prevention Act* (2009). The intent of this legislation was to

provide a uniform definition of harassment for all state public school systems to follow and

incorporate into their respective student conduct policies and codes. The law requires public

school systems to outline policies prohibiting student-to-student harassment and develop

comprehensive plans for addressing issues that arise. The law also requires school systems to

provide harassment reporting forms for students and parents to use when reporting alleged

incidents of harassment. All public school systems in Alabama were required to establish policy

in compliance with this act on or before July 1, 2010. The *Student Harassment Prevention Act*

(2009) defines harassment as:

> A continuous pattern of intentional behavior that takes place on school property, on a
> school bus, or at a school-sponsored function including, but not limited to, written,
> electronic, verbal, or physical acts that are reasonably perceived as being motivated by
> any characteristic of a student, or by the association of a student with an individual who
> has a particular characteristic, if the characteristic falls into one of the categories of
> personal characteristics contained in the model policy adopted by the department or by a
> local board. To constitute harassment, a pattern of behavior may do any of the following
> (Sec. 3, p. 2):
>
>> Place a student in reasonable fear or harm to his or her person or damage to his or
>> her property (Sec. 3a, p. 2);
>>
>> Have the effect of substantially interfering with the educational performance,
>> opportunities, or benefits of a student (Sec. 3b, p. 3);

Have the effect of substantially disrupting or interfering with the orderly operation of the school (Sec. 3c, p. 3);

Have the effect of creating a hostile environment in the school, on school property, on a school bus, or at a school-sponsored function (Sec. 3d, p. 3); and

Have the effect of being sufficiently severe, persistent, or pervasive enough to create an intimidating, threatening, or abusive educational environment for a student. (Sec. 3e, p. 3)

Regardless of the outside support schools are receiving from their respective state legislatures and the U.S. government, school administrators must partner with their local law-enforcement officials to effectively address cyberbullying issues among students. Due to privacy rights of their users, many Internet-based companies that offer communication tools such as e-mail and messaging will not provide user information to school administrators, who sometimes need this information to fully conduct cyberbullying investigations (Franek, 2006). However, these companies will provide this information to law-enforcement officials when they are conducting investigations regarding cyberbullying or inappropriate online activity that threatens others' safety or if the activities are considered illegal (Franek, 2006).

Although internet-based companies and social networking sites remain reluctant to share certain information regarding account information and activities, more popular social networking Internet sites are partnering with parents and schools to address cyberbullying. MySpace.com has created a process for schools to contact site administrators when cyberbullying issues arise. Site administrators at MySpace will help school administrators investigate possible cyberbullying cases at their schools. This allows administrators access to more information to better address cyberbullying issues and protect victims of cyberbullying attacks (Chaker, 2007).

In addition to creating partnerships with law-enforcement officials and Internet social networking sites to better address cyberbullying issues, school administrators must establish

strong relationships with parents. Most cyberbullying occurs away from school; therefore, school administrators cannot police most issues. Parents, however, must take a more active role in policing their child's online activity. Parents should partner with schools to ensure their child is following appropriate guidelines for online behavior. Parents can help schools ensure their child follows both the district's acceptable use policy for technology and the anti-bullying policy, especially when the policies address cyberbullying issues occurring off-campus. Parents can help by informing school administrators of any inappropriate online behavior in which their child has been involved or if their child has been involved in cyberbullying, as a victim, perpetrator, or both (Beale & Hall, 2007). Establishing partnerships between schools and parents will communicate a strong message to students about the seriousness of the issue and it may help perpetrators correct issues and change behavior without the administration of severe consequences (Beale & Hall, 2007).

The most common practice for school administrators to utilize when addressing cyberbullying perpetrators is the administration of disciplinary consequences. Of course, issuing discipline to students for controversial off-campus issues can sometimes be a difficult challenge for school administrators to execute. Beyond the ambiguous task of administering discipline to cyberbullying perpetrators, administrators can address the problem in other ways as well. Beale and Hall (2007) provided the following ideas for school administrators:

1. Educate both students and parents about the issue;

2. Incorporate cyberbullying into the school district's anti-bullying or anti-harassment policy by addressing cyberbullying exclusively and specifically within the policy;

3. Ensure that the school district's student acceptable use policy for school technology incorporates a prohibition against bullying by use of district technology;

4.   Partner with local law enforcement to help address issues occurring off-campus, which may be threatening to student safety both on and off school grounds;

5.   Ensure that faculty and staff members at school are aware and educated about cyberbullying behaviors, warning signs, and potential effects that cyberbullying may have on student safety, well-being, and the learning environment;

6.   Work to establish a school culture encouraging students to report incidents of cyberbullying, including issues occurring off-campus; and

7.   Create a network with other schools within the system or outside the system to share strategies, cases, and ideas, which will create a more consistent approach to dealing with cyberbullying issues among networking schools.

When cyberbullying incidents occur, student-victims should seek assistance from adults, including their parents and school officials (Juvonen & Gross, 2008). Along with school administrators, who play important roles in addressing cyberbullying incidents, school counselors encounter cyberbullying issues. School counselors play an important role in cyberbullying intervention by providing assistance for student-victims (Burrow-Sanchez, Call, Drew, & Zheng, 2011). Student-victims may seek the assistance of school counselors in lieu of their parents or administrators based on two major factors:

1.   student-victims possess a need or desire to inform an adult, however they fear that if they tell their parents, their parents will limit or prohibit further online activities (Juvonen & Gross, 2008); and

2.   Student-victims desire to tell an adult without fear of punishment or disciplinary action applied to them or to the perpetrators, which may lead to increased or intensified harassment from the perpetrators (Hoff & Mitchell, 2009).

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Furthermore, school counselors also have opportunities to address cyberbullying issues because of their roles as student advocates and the relationships they establish with both students and their parents (Burrow-Sanchez et al., 2011)

Regardless of the reason, school counselors play an important role in cyberbullying intervention. Counselors must execute their responsibilities to effectively address situations that may arise among their students. Two crucial responsibilities for school counselors are to provide assistance for student-victims and advice for students about handling cyberbullying issues; and to educate parents about cyberbullying, intervention, and prevention (Burrow-Sanchez et al., 2011).

In regard to students, school counselors must provide immediate support and counsel for students who have been cyberbullied. School counselors can help student-victims cope with the issues and encourage them to discuss the issue with parents or administrators in order to stop the harassment (Burrow-Sanchez et al., 2011). In addition to counseling support, school counselors can educate students about operating safely online, as well as informing students about appropriate and inappropriate websites, online behavior, and etiquette. Also, school counselors can teach students certain coping skills to deal with inappropriate online interaction with others, including harassment. Lastly, counselors can instruct students on how to properly report online victimization (Burrow-Sanchez et al., 2011).

School counselors can help parents understand cyberbullying and educate them about effectively addressing related issues. Parents are in close proximity to their child's Internet activities and can act as a safeguard against inappropriate online behavior. Regardless of their level of involvement, parents are in a strategic position to thwart inappropriate online activity occurring with their child, including cyberbullying (Burrow-Sanchez et al., 2011). School counselors can help parents become better equipped to deal with these issues through education

and by providing parents with strategies to help them develop stronger relationships with their child. Counselors can help parents utilize preventive strategies for supervising their child's online activities. This may include the development of rules for Internet or cell phone use or placing online devices (i.e. desktop computers, laptops) in a high-traffic area of the home such as the living room or family room (Burrow-Sanchez et al., 2011). School counselors play an important role in helping students address cyberbullying issues. However, counselors must use these opportunities to help students and parents address current issues and the future threats of cyberbullying (Burrow-Sanchez et al., 2011).

School officials must take a more aggressive stance against cyberbullying, because of its effects on many students and the potential development of serious issues on-campus, including violence. Schools have a strategic advantage that other entities do not possess, including law enforcement and parents. School officials can lead efforts to raise awareness about cyberbullying as well as address issues that have occurred and clearly affect student learning and safety at school. Three major issues should be covered in order to effectively address cyberbullying: 1) the establishment of a formal education program for students and parents, which addresses cyberbullying and its dangers; 2) methods for assisting students who currently deal with issues related to cyberbullying and other problems that result from cyberbullying issues; and 3) professional development opportunities for administrators that will better inform them of legal issues pertaining to cyberbullying and clarify questions of whether to address certain issues (Hoff & Mitchell, 2009).

Wright et al. (2009a) suggested school officials use virtual simulations or scenarios to address cyberbullying with students and parents. Online virtual environments allow users to operate with virtual identities known as avatars. The virtual simulations or scenarios are

attractive instructional tools for students, which motivate them to become engaged in learning activities about cyberbullying (Wright et al., 2009a). Also, simulations or scenarios can be played out in classroom settings to educate students about cyberbullying issues (Wright et al., 2009a). Furthermore, virtual simulations enable school officials, such as school counselors, to effectively educate parents about cyberbullying, which can better prepare parents to address or prevent cyberbullying issues at home (Wright et al., 2009a).

Although raising awareness among professionals and providing education to students and parents about cyberbullying and its dangers may be a logical approach, it is simply not sufficient in effectively combating against cyberbullying. Cyberbullying must be addressed specifically in school district anti-bullying policies and disciplinary actions must be applied in order to address the growing problem in an effective manner (Riedel, 2008). However, the issue of ambiguity and possible litigation looms large in the minds of many school administrators (Anderson, 2007).

CHAPTER III:

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

In Chapter III, the methodology and design of the study is discussed. As communicated in Chapter I, this study was conducted using a case research design. The setting of the study, along with the participants are communicated and discussed. Research was conducted in a single public school system and all data were gathered from four participant groups. The four participant groups were all considered stakeholders of the school system involved in various roles and capacities. The rationales for selecting the four participant groups are communicated. The study was guided by three major research questions. The three questions are communicated and rationales for each question are provided in this chapter. Instrumentation, data collection, and procedures for data analysis are communicated and explained in this chapter. Focus-group interviews were utilized as the sole data collection method. A focus-group guide was used to direct the data collection process, as well as interview protocols containing questions for each focus group of participants. Data analysis methods are discussed at the conclusion of this chapter.

Methodology

The study's framework incorporates a case study methodology. A case study is a focus on a particular entity involved in a larger phenomenon. In this study, the impact of cyberbullying in a large public school system in the southeastern United States was examined. More specifically, the study focused on the perceptions of school administrators, school counselors, parents, and external authorities about cyberbullying, its implications upon local schools, and

whether or not school officials should address cyberbullying incidents initiated off school grounds.

By using a case study design to examine cyberbullying and its effects upon this school system, a more in-depth view of the personal experiences of those directly affected within the context of specific demographic areas were examined. Case study research is by nature a qualitative approach to research. Yin (1984) defined case study research as "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used" (Yin, 1984, p. 23).

Design of the Study

A case study design was utilized to conduct research for this study. Soy (1996) provided a list of steps for conducting case study research. These steps were gathered from the ideas of the case study researchers, Yin (1984), Stake (1995) and Simons (1980). These steps include the following:

1.   the development of research questions;

2.   the selection of particular cases to study;

3.   the selection of data collection and analysis methods;

4.   the gathering of data from participants;

5.   the analysis and evaluation of data; and

6.   the development of the research report. (Soy, 1997, p.1)

Setting of the Study

The selection of cases differentiates the case study method from other statistical methods. During case selection, it is important for the researcher to select a case or cases that reflect the

intent of the study and satisfy the data gathering process in terms of reliability and validity. The potential to utilize multiple sources is present with case research. Qualitative collection and analysis methods can also be incorporated. Generally, tools used to collect data using case study research include: interviews, surveys, observations, review of documents, and/or collection of artifacts (Soy, 1997).

In this particular study, a case research design was utilized to examine the perceptions of stakeholders in regards to cyberbullying in a large public school system in the southeastern U.S. The school system encompasses a portion of a metropolitan area in the central and northern areas of the school system, which includes urban and large sub-urban populations. Southern portions of the school system consist of mostly rural areas that are less densely populated communities including farmland and wooded areas, while the northern part of the school system is densely populated. This school system provides a diverse demographic that encompasses urban, suburban, and rural areas.

The school system serves over 28,000 students and employs over 2,000 teachers and administrators. Of the students enrolled in the system, almost 15,000 are middle and high school students. The school system consists of 39 total schools, of which 17 are middle and high schools. Included in the sample are two centralized schools, the alternative school and the school of technology, which serve middle and high school students exclusively. The school system has a diverse student demographic. Over 1,500 students (almost 6% of total student population) receive English as a Second Language (ESL) services. Furthermore, almost 3,000 students use a language other than English while at home. There are a total of 42 different languages spoken by students in the school system. The socioeconomic status is highly diversified between school zones. Over 26% of students served by the school system are eligible for free and reduced lunch

meals. However, certain areas of the system, particularly in the southern areas and school zones, have student populations consisting of 50% or more eligible for free and reduced lunch meals. Therefore, the school system is a highly diversified region in terms of the culture, race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status of students and families**.**

<div align="center">Research Questions</div>

The purpose for developing research questions for case study research is to guide the study in a desired direction. This purpose is similar to other research designs. However, research questions for case study research should also establish a connection with factual characteristics related to the phenomenon and perceptions, feelings, and opinions of those individuals directly involved in the phenomenon or experienced the phenomenon (Soy, 1997).

The study began with the formulation of questions guiding the researcher through the process of sample selection, data collection, data analysis, data evaluation, and development of the report. The first step of the case study design, as referenced by Soy (1997), was to develop research questions. The questions that guide a case study should focus on the "how" or "why" of the phenomenon being examined (Soy,1997).

As reported in Chapter I, the major research questions that guided the study were

1. What were the school system's stakeholders' perceptions and beliefs of how cyberbullying affected the community;

2. What were the school system's stakeholders' perceptions and beliefs of how cyberbullying affected the school; and

3. What were the school system's stakeholders' perceptions and beliefs of how cyberbullying incidents initiated off school grounds should be handled by school officials?

The development of each question was driven by a rationale and purpose. Each of the three major research questions is discussed.

Question One

The rationale for this particular question was to gather an understanding of the participants' knowledge base and opinions regarding the issue. Each group may have differing opinions on this issue, because of experiences in their particular fields of work. School administrators' knowledge and opinions may differ with parents' due to their exposure to the issue. School administrators have dealt with cyberbullying issues in a wider range of formats and situations as compared to parents. However, school counselors may differ in opinion based on how they deal with cyberbullying issues at school. External authorities may have a more in-depth knowledge regarding cyberbullying among adults, whereas school administrators and school counselors may have more experience dealing with cyberbullying issues among children and adolescents. The knowledge and experiences of all four participant groups drove their responses to question one and any follow-up questions posed in an attempt to gain more in-depth data.

Question Two

The rationale driving this question is to gain perspective regarding the cause for cyberbullying among children and adolescents. The question was posed to gather knowledge and opinions about causes of cyberbullying, specific to the use of technology and digital communication devices that are utilized by a growing number of children and adolescents in today's society (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010).

Question Three

This question sought stakeholder knowledge and perception about the over-arching problem that guided this particular study. Most research studies addressing cyberbullying focus

on the phenomenon and its implications upon society or upon a smaller entity. This question was asked in order to discover stakeholder perceptions about the authority that school officials can exercise in dealing with cyberbullying issues. Participant responses will help school officials better understand the implications and potential stakeholder reactions to them addressing cyberbullying issues that involve off-campus activity.

The rationale to this question was to obtain participant opinions about whether it is appropriate for school administrators to address cyberbullying issues, especially situations that originated off school grounds. Differences in opinion may exist when comparing responses of school administrators, school counselors, parents, and external authorities. The differences of opinion may be a result of various knowledge levels and experiences dealing with issues relative to cyberbullying. Student rights, the impact on the school's learning environment, student safety, and overall school culture were considered when addressing this question.

Selection of Participants

Participants were selected based on their connection with the study's overarching focus, which was to gather the selected school system's stakeholders' perceptions and beliefs about cyberbullying, its effects upon their schools and surrounding communities, and the determination of whether or not school administrators should address cyberbullying incidents initiated off school grounds. In this case, four distinct groups of participants were selected to represent school system stakeholders and provide data for the study. The four participant groups represented a collection of individuals who generally have knowledge and experience in dealing with cyberbullying issues, although differences in perspectives and knowledge levels may exist.

As previously mentioned in this chapter's description of the study's setting, the school system serves a diverse region containing areas of population ranging from rural communities to

large sub-urban and urban communities. Each of the four stakeholder groups contained participants representing one or both of the following demographic areas, which are based on population density: Rural/sub-urban communities and sub-urban/urban communities. These two categories were established to identify each participant's demographic area, ultimately aiding the principal researcher in balancing participants' demographic area representation within each of the four stakeholder groups.

School Administrators

School administrators were selected because of their direct involvement with disciplinary and safety issues among students. The study sought to gather data related to their perceptions and beliefs regarding cyberbullying, including their professional knowledge and experiences working directly with cyberbullying incidents. The participation of school administrators was limited to those serving in middle and high school administrators in the selected school system. This group participated in qualitative (focus group interview) data collection. Administrators representing each of the middle and high schools in the selected school system were chosen to participate in the study. An interview session was conducted between the researcher and the focus group.

School Counselors

School counselors were selected as a participant group due to their involvement with student issues that occur on and off school grounds. As reported previously in Chapter I, cyberbullying incidents usually initiate off school grounds. School administrators may not address student issues that occur off school grounds, particularly with disciplinary action. However, students are still affected by those issues. Therefore, in order to support student well-being and success, school counselors address many of these issues, including cyberbullying, which can occur off school grounds.

Parents

Parents were selected because of their direct involvement with their children and the selected school system. As major school stakeholders, parents have opinions about their children's rights to free speech, as well as the school system's obligation to protect their children's safety and learning. Parent members of Parent-Teacher-Student Organizations (PTSO) representing each community zone in the school system were selected to participate in focus-group interview session. Participant information was obtained from PTSO lists generated by each middle and high school in the selected system. Also, administrators at each school assisted in selecting less-involved parents to participate in the interview session. The selection of a less-involved parent may add diverse perspective to the data collected, which is more representative of the school system population.

External Authorities

External authorities are considered officials who hold jurisdiction and responsibilities outside school boundaries, while having the ability to operate in conjunction with the school system. The exceptions to this qualifier are the school administrators, who operate solely within the school system. This group of participants was selected to provide perspective regarding the balance school authority and school administrators' obligations to protect the safety and learning of students. Three school system administrators who focus on student services and discipline in the selected school system were selected to participate in the study. One representative from the school system's technology department was selected to participate in the study. This individual has a background in cyber-investigations conducted by the school system in relation to the misuse of school technology equipment and violations of the school system's acceptable use policy. Two police officers, who both play the role of school resource officer, participated in the

study. One social worker, who represented a local agency specializing in child and adolescent advocacy, participated in the study. Finally, an attorney who lives and works within the school system's boundaries, participated in the focus-group session. A total of eight participants were selected for this group.

<div align="center">Instrumentation</div>

The data collection instruments were specifically designed interview protocols for each of the four participant groups. The development of interview questions was guided by the three major research questions highlighted in this study; and is based on literature reviewed as a part of this study. Hinduja and Patchin have conducted numerous research studies focusing on the effects of cyberbullying and the perceptions of those involved (Hinduja & Patchin, 2006, 2009, 2010). The development of the four participant interview protocols was also influenced by Trager (2009) and Willard (2007). Their articles contained focus on legal precedents set by prior court cases dealing with issues involving actions occurring off school grounds (Trager, 2009; Willard, 2007).

Validity for interview protocols was determined through the use of a focus-group guide that ensured consistency throughout the interview process involving all four participant groups. The particular focus-group guide used for this study is based on a focus-group guide created by Wright, Burnham, Inman, and Orgochock (2009b) as a part of their mixed-methods study related to cyberbullying. A level of validity and reliability is needed when performing qualitative research such as focus group interviews. Select individuals representing each of the four groups analyzed interview protocol questions to determine if the instruments were capable of measuring responses relative to the four major research questions and the purpose of the study (Web Center for Social Research Methods, http://www.socialresearchmethods.net/kb/unobtrus.php).

Before data collection began with administration of the focus group interviews, research approval was acquired through the Institutional Review Board's (IRB) required process at the University of Alabama. Each interview session was prefaced with a presentation of basic knowledge pertaining to the study and an inquiry for participant consent. Interview participants provided consent by signing a consent form prior to the interview session. No interview sessions were administered without prior consent from participants.

Interview protocols were designed specifically for each participant group. The interview protocols (see Appendices B – E) for each of the four participant groups consisted of 10 items. All interview sessions were conducted solely with each participant group in focus-group format between participants and the researcher.

Data Collection

The preparation for gathering data in a case study design was especially crucial to the overall success of the study. This was because of the multiple layers of information from multiple sources generally associated with this type of research design. Creating a plan for collection before beginning the actual data collection can be helpful for researchers to maintain clarity and focus during the collection process, as well as during the data analysis phase. A structured process for gathering data is essential to the success of a case study. In most cases, data are gathered from multiple sources simultaneously, which requires a comprehensive and systematic approach to the collection process. Although the data gathering process can be versatile and fluid, it is important for case study researchers to consistently adhere to the plan established at the onset of data collection and guide data collection with the purpose of the study (Soy, 1997).

The study consisted of qualitative data collection among the four participant groups. The qualitative approach consisted of focus-group interviews (Kvale, 1996). There was no mixture of participants representing more than one group involved in the study. For instance, no participant groups were mixed during interview sessions. The interviews were guided by questions posed in an interview protocol (McNamara, 1999). There were 10 guiding questions for each participant group. Each interview protocol used for the four focus-group interview sessions was driven by the three major research questions. All interview data were recorded with two audio recording devices (McNamara, 1999). One device was analog with an audiotape and the other device was a digital audio recorder.

The questions developed for the interview protocols were posed to gather data regarding the school system's stakeholders' perceptions about cyberbullying, its effects upon local schools and surrounding communities, and whether or not school administrators should address cyberbullying incidents initiated off school grounds. These questions were directed at participants who had some connection to or familiarity of both the phenomenon being studied and the school system (Soy, 1997). Therefore, a series of questions were posed to all four participant groups. Certain questions probed stakeholder perceptions and beliefs concerning the effects of cyberbullying upon local communities in the school system. Questions were posed that probed the perceptions of stakeholders regarding the effects of cyberbullying upon the school itself. More specifically, the study sought to gather perceptions about how cyberbullying affects students and other school stakeholders, as well as school culture. Questions were posed to gauge stakeholder perceptions and beliefs about school policy and procedures addressing cyberbullying, particularly issues originating off school grounds. Other questions sought

stakeholder perceptions about whether or not school administrators should address cyberbullying issues, particularly those originating off school grounds.

Data Analysis and Evaluation

Analyzing and evaluating the data gathered from the research field can be executed by using numerous methods. The utilization of various and multiple methods for data analysis and evaluation is a strong point of case study research. Multiple applications of various tools and methods during the data analyses and evaluation processes, coupled with the multiple sources of data, empower researchers to reinforce their methods and findings through triangulation (Soy, 1997). Once the data have been analyzed and evaluated to form conclusions, another crucial step is reporting the findings. The essence of effective case study research is found in the clarity and authenticity case study research can bring upon large and complex phenomenon affecting a wide range of entities (Soy). With case study research, the broad and complex impact of cyberbullying can be marginalized and analyzed with more clarity and utility. With the study of the phenomenon in a particular school system, multiple perspectives and knowledge bases can be reviewed, which strengthens the study while maintaining high amounts of organization and control (Soy).

Data were analyzed using qualitative methods. Data collected from interview sessions were recorded using audio recording devices. The recorded data were transcribed and analyzed using content and thematic analyses. Content analysis was used to determine the frequencies or number of occurrences those key words and phrases appeared in the focus-group transcripts (Web Center for Social Research Methods, http://www.socialresearchmethods.net/kb/unobtrus.php). Words and phrases were determined to be significant based on the data's connection to cyberbullying and its effects upon stakeholders,

particularly those participating in the study. Structural coding was utilized to connect the key words and phrases to the three major research questions providing the study's focus (Namey, Guest, Thairu, & Johnson, 2007). In addition to analyzing the data to form connections with the research questions, thematic coding was utilized to develop themes, grouping the data into five categories (Web Center for Social Research Methods). Together, content and thematic analyses connected the data to the study's three research questions and grouped the data into themes. This provided opportunities for a more thorough discussion of the results and more specific data implications for the school system being studied and its stakeholders.

CHAPTER IV:

RESULTS AND DATA ANALYSIS

In the following chapter, results from the focus group sessions are presented. The data collected from the focus group interviews are the source of data for this case study analysis. The analysis focuses on the responses of individuals who participated in the focus group interviews conducted by the principal researcher. The study participants were divided into four stakeholder groups that represented the case being studied: a single school system. The four stakeholder groups were: 1) secondary school administrators; 2) secondary school counselors; 3) parents of secondary school students; and 4) external authorities. All participants worked for the school system being studied, worked in the area served by the school system, or have children attending secondary schools in the school system.

The data collection process involved all four stakeholder groups. Focus group sessions took place over a course of three months, with sessions administered in 2011 between the months of July and October. A total of nine focus group sessions were held to gather data from participants. All stakeholder group sessions were homogenous in terms of stakeholder types, with each session involving participants representing one stakeholder group. Of the nine sessions, three consisted of administrators, two involved counselors, three involved parents, and one consisted of external authorities.

A total of 56 individuals participated, with each participant representing one of the four stakeholder groups. Of the 56 participants, eighteen were in the administrators' group, thirteen were in the counselors' group, seventeen were in the parents' group, and eight individuals were

in the external authorities group. Participants represented multiple areas and communities served

by the school system, who also represent various socioeconomic levels, racial and cultural

backgrounds, gender, and occupational experiences. Representation of these various

demographics was divided into two categories. The categories represented demographic areas

served by the school system, based on population density. The two areas were rural/sub-urban

communities and sub-urban/urban communities. Each stakeholder group contained participants

representing at least one of the two areas, creating a balanced representation across all four

stakeholder groups (see Table 1).

Table 1

Focus Group Participants: Demographic Area Representation and Total Participants

Groups	Rural/Sub-Urban	Sub-Urban/Urban	Total Participants
Administrators	8	10	18
Counselors	6	7	13
Parents	8	9	17
External Authorities	7*	7*	8
Total			56

Note: *The "External Authorities" focus group contained six (6) participants (3 administrators, 1 technology specialist, 1 social worker, and 1 attorney) representing both "Rural/Sub- Urban" and "Sub-Urban/Urban" demographic areas. One (1) police officer representing each of the two areas participated in this focus group, creating a total of seven (7) participants representing each area.

In order to obtain representation from the multiple communities served by the school

system, a varied number of focus group sessions were required to collect data from each of the

four stakeholder groups (see Table 2). For instance, it required three focus group sessions with

administrators to achieve sufficient representation across the two demographic areas served by

the school system, while only one session was required with external authorities to obtain

representation. Counselors required two focus group sessions to achieve sufficient representation and three focus group sessions were held to achieve adequate representation in each of the two demographic areas served by the school system.

Table 2

Focus Group Sessions and Participants

Groups	Number of Group Sessions	Number of Participants
Administrators	3	18
Counselors	2	13
Parents	3	17
External Authorities	1	8
Totals	9	56

All participants were provided with brief information regarding the study, its topic focus, consent information and a signature form. The information and consent forms were provided to candidates, including the actual participants, at least ten days in advance of the scheduled focus group session. All participants signed the consent form and participated in the focus group sessions. The focus group sessions were conducted at three locations, all being facilities currently owned and operated by the school system being studied. Of the nine focus group sessions, three were conducted at a middle school, five were conducted at the school system's professional development and learning center, and one session was conducted at the school system's central office and board of education building.

Data were collected from each participant group, which the principal researcher utilized to provide answers for the three major research questions guiding the study. The three questions were:

1. What were the school system's stakeholders' perceptions and beliefs of how cyberbullying affected the community;

2. What were the school system's stakeholders' perceptions and beliefs of how cyberbullying affected the school; and

3. What were the school system's stakeholders' perceptions and beliefs of how cyberbullying incidents initiated off school grounds should be handled by school officials?

All focus group sessions were led by the principal researcher, who used a focus-group guide (Wright, Burnham, Inman, & Orgochock, 2009b) to conduct each session. The guide was used to preserve the validity and reliability of the data collected and the data collection process. In addition to the focus-group guide, the principal researcher used a written protocol of questions to guide the interview and discussion process. The protocol of questions derives from the three major research questions guiding the study. A protocol was created specifically for each stakeholder group. The same protocol of questions was used to conduct focus group sessions with the same stakeholder type. For instance, the same protocol was used to generate questions for the three focus group sessions conducted with administrators, while another protocol was used to generate questions for the two counselor sessions, and so forth.

Methods for Data Collection, Resources, and Analysis

Data collected consisted of focus group responses and discussion from and among participants. The responses and discussion were recorded by use of two audio recording devices.

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One device was an analog tape recorder that recorded the data onto cassette tapes and the other device was a digital recording device that stored and uploaded data onto a computer hard drive. The data were uploaded and stored on a computer hard drive and converted to Windows Media files. The audio was then transcribed into text. All audio files from the focus group sessions were transcribed in their entirety.

The focus group discussion and responses produced almost ten hours (567 minutes) of audio data and 192 pages of transcribed data. The data transcripts were analyzed using content analysis coding (http://www.socialresearchmethods.net/kb/unobtrus.php). Data were initially analyzed using content analysis with the purpose of determining frequencies or occurrences of key words and phrases related to the three research questions that provided the study's focus. This chapter provides information about the connection between the data and those questions. The initial analysis also indicated over 150 key words or phrases that relate to the research questions, but also connect to more specific issues. In addition to analyzing participant responses and discussion to form connections between the data and research questions, another coding step, thematic analysis, provided further connections between the data and specific ideas or themes (Web Center for Social Research Methods). This step, along with the data, results, and discussion of the results connected to this step, are presented in Chapter V.

Data Related to Research Questions

Three major research questions guided this study, providing the principal researcher a format for developing focus group question protocols customized for each participating stakeholder group. The following section contains participant data provided in response to questions posed during focus-group sessions. The questions posed were a part of the protocol developed specifically for each of the four stakeholder groups and were directly connected to the

three major research questions that drove the study. Participant responses are categorized according to the major question in which they apply. Each of the three major research questions is provided followed by participant responses and discussion related to the question.

Question One

The perceptions and beliefs of participants were provided regarding the effects of cyberbullying and technology use upon their communities. Participants from every stakeholder group commented about the effects of cyberbullying on children's safety, self-esteem, and their social lives. Participants from the administrator and counselor groups discussed how cyberbullying affects students' self-esteem and performance at school. They discussed how cyberbullying affects relationships and interactions between students at school. Participants from the parent groups discussed how cyberbullying affects parents' responsibility to supervise their children. Participants from the counselor, parent, and external authorities groups believe that young people are now engaged with technology and digital communication at a level that has changed their culture and lifestyle. One participant from the external authorities group said, "Technology has just totally changed the way kids live. They have it at their fingertips constantly."

According to the multiple participants across stakeholder groups, young people are very knowledgeable and skillful with technology, but many have become somewhat dependent upon technology. Children and adolescents are becoming dependent upon technology both academically and socially. Participants believed this dependency has created an alternate reality and some youth excessively engage in it, which leads to a confusion between cyberspace and the real world. A participant from the external authorities group stated, "So many kids live a fantasy life through technology and it leads into reality." According to one participant each from the

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counselor and administrator groups, "Some students become so engrossed in technology that they cannot escape it." A participant from the administrator group spoke about how this adds to the dangers of cyberbullying, but can be more difficult for youth to handle or escape,

> The adult's response is to turn off the computer, but what if someone came to my office and said, "Turn off your computer for the day?" How much will I really get done? And I'm not someone who's completely dependent upon technology for my life, but these kids are.

This participant believes that children are heavily involved with social media and they may find it hard to escape someone who is bullying them online.

Several participants from multiple groups stated that adults, educators and parents in particular, must become more educated in regards to technology because children are "very savvy" about technology in comparison to adults. Also, one participant from the counselor group feels that cyberspace is a dangerous place because of a lack of parent knowledge and skill to access and manage it. The participant stated, "Cyberspace is kind of like the world used to be: There's no rules and there's no regulations."

As a result of the constant access to technology coinciding with the constant threat of cyberbullying, parents are increasingly concerned about their children's safety and self-esteem (Taylor, 2008). One participant from the counselor group felt parents must engage in heavier supervision of their children while at home. The counselor stated,

> I know of a situation, not cyberbullying, but a predator situation with this little girl and it had been going on for several months. The girl is eleven and that child had been sitting there at the kitchen counter on her laptop with her mom moving all about and mom didn't know it.

Therefore, this participant believed that parents must be actively engaged in their children's lives, including socially, having access to all things related to social media and cell phone use, including user accounts, passwords, and social networking profiles. However, some participants

noted that parents must become more knowledgeable of and skillful with technology before they will be able to effectively supervise and control their children's online activities. According to one participant, "Parents are not educated about the technology they give their children. You can tell them to monitor but that don't mean a thing." This comment reveals the perception that a lack of knowledge and skill pertaining to mobile communication device applications and other technologies is a direct result in the lack of effective monitoring, supervision and control that is perceived with parents and guardians.

Participants in every stakeholder group commented about a lack of effective supervision of children by parents. Participants from the parent and administrator groups specifically stated that parents may be unable or unequipped to handle this. A lack of knowledge and awareness among parents naturally leads to a lack of supervision and control. Because, in order to effectively monitor and control a situation, and have an advantage over others in that situation, one must be aware of what to monitor and have a knowledge of what is being monitored and controlled (Mason, 2008). One participant stated, "Kids are so much more savvy than (adults)." Another participant commented, "It goes back to a lack of parental involvement, but the parents aren't educated and we have to realize they don't know what to do."

One participant from the counselor group regarded technology as a blessing and a curse. She stated,

> I think technology is kind of a blessing and a curse. It's certainly a blessing because kids are much smarter because of the technology that we have today. Internet provides them limitless access to knowledge that of course in my day, they hadn't even thought of. But it's a curse because that access has provided them the ability to do more things that they just don't need to know at this age. It has taken away from the face-to-face communication that we all had as kids and I think that's a big negative.

Law-enforcement officials can become involved in cyberbullying and other technology or digital communication issues (Taylor, 2008). Community police departments and school

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resource officers operating in the school system studied, have developed partnerships with their

local schools and administrators. Cyberbullying and related issues are items now being addressed

by schools and law enforcement in this particular school system. One school administrator

stated,

> It's (cyberbullying) becoming more of an issue that even the police are now having to
> deal with it. It can be a felony, not a misdemeanor. I know a law-enforcement official and
> he says it's increasing by the number of times that parents of students will come in
> (police department) to file harassment charges against another student.

According to participants in the external authorities group, school resource officers and local

police departments are working with schools to supplement addressing issues that schools cannot

address with disciplinary action, including cyberbullying.

Another issue noted by participants from the external authorities group concerns young

people taking, sharing, and possessing inappropriate pictures, which can result in serious

problems. Participants were referencing a phenomenon known as sexting. One participant from

the external authorities group stated that sexting is dangerous and illegal. As one participant from

the external authorities group stated,

> There was a situation where a boy sent inappropriate pictures of a girl to others, after they
> broke up. The boy was eighteen but the girl was fifteen. He is now a felon for sending out
> child pornography because she was only fifteen.

Other participants added that these issues are steadily increasing among students at the middle

and high school levels. Another participant from the counselor group commented,

> There was a boy in the sixth grade and a girl in high school and they took pictures of
> themselves and sent to the other ones. I told them they can get into trouble (with law
> enforcement) for just sending out naked pictures of themselves and they were in shock.
> To my understanding, that is child pornography.

Question Two

As presented in the discussion of data gathered from participants as pertaining to

Question 1, communities where schools reside are negatively affected by cyberbullying. School

officials, mainly administrators and counselors, deal with cyberbullying issues regularly,

although the issues are usually manifestations of the cyberbullying. Cyberbullying usually occurs

off school grounds, negatively affecting schools by creating other issues for the school to address

without having the authority to address the source of the problem, cyberbullying itself (Juvonen

& Gross, 2008).

Participants believed school administrators are experiencing the negative effects of

cyberbullying from a community and societal perspective. One administrator stated, "We deal

with many of the behaviors that manifest from (online activity). But, we deal with what happens

at school." A second administrator stated, "We will deal with the manifestations (behaviors) that

result from cyberbullying, but we can't address it if it did not occur on school grounds." The lack

of authority by schools to directly address cyberbullying issues with disciplinary action is

causing some administrators to question why they deal with cyberbullying or related issues.

Another administrator stated, "There are some types of things that should not be a school's

responsibility." A fourth participant from the administrator group said,

> Parents who have children supposedly being harassed on Facebook or by text messages,
> sometimes nasty rumors being spread about them, will call us (administrators) and want
> us to do something about it. My (administrator) response is, "I can't do anything about it
> unless something has occurred here at school."

A participant from the parent group has similar thoughts about what administrators can and

cannot address, "I don't think that it's necessarily the school's job to go back all the way to the

root of (cyberbullying)…" However, the same participant proceeds to express concern about

schools not addressing manifestations of cyberbullying that occur at school, "…but, if we don't

address (effects at school) and it continues to happen, it's going to turn into news things like the child hanged or something." Participants from the administrator group believed that many parents don't understand the potential legal problems that exist when administrators intervene in cyberbullying situations, particularly when there is an expectation or demand for disciplinary action against perpetrators for online, off-campus misconduct. This lack of authority can sometimes be stressful to administrators. Participants also mentioned dealing with issues reported by parents attempting to protect their children, but were unaware of their child's involvement. An administrator discussed this,

> It becomes very difficult when dealing with parents, and the parents come there (school) demanding justice and you, at first you're like, "Oh yes we're going to handle this." But, then you'll have to end up punishing their kid because they said vulgar words or something in retaliation.

> One participant responded to a question regarding administrators refraining from

applying disciplinary consequences to issues that occur off school grounds. She stated,

> That's current practice. I have had informal conversations with students about Facebook (issues), but as far as applying disciplinary consequences, right now it's just mainly applying discipline to the manifestation of a behavior that is applicable to the code of conduct at school.

Another administrator followed with, "I'm not sure we can punish the behavior of the one that started it (off-campus), but we have to deal with what happened on us (on school grounds)." Participants went on to add that this situation can pose a problem because some parents expect school administrators to fully address these situations. A third participant from the administrator group stated, "Parents will call me and say, 'My child has been harassed on Facebook.' I will inform that that I can only deal with it if it makes its way into my school." Another administrator stated, "Parents don't realize that (in cases like cyberbullying) we (administrators) can't physically go and get something to stop." A final administrator spoke about this topic,

Parents will call and say this happened on Facebook last night and I will say, "Well, I'm not going to get involved unless it turns into something here; you know it's not our responsibility but if he did it in school, I promise you that I will handle this."

A participant from the parent group added thoughts about what schools should and should not be responsible for, "I think we need to let the legal sector handle the legal things and let the teachers and administrators teach."

Participants discussed another problem regarding the involvement of others, bystanders who witness incidents between individuals online. A participant from the administrator group had this to say,

Cyberbullying feeds the pack mentality. I mean everyone was much braver when they have 10 other people behind them. Just think when you have 200 people behind you. Well, online all 100 people are going to say something. They all feel like they've got to get their shot in.

A participant from the parent group made a similar reference about the effects of cyberbullying, "It's the same mob effect of your friends, her friends are talking about it (rumors) and their friends are talking about it and they are hearing about it because of all the (access to technology)." A participant from the counselor group believes that bystanders who witness issues online are less reluctant to defend the victim as compared to when bullying occurs face-to-face. The participant stated this about cyberbullying,

It's dangerous because someone on the Internet, it lessens the likelihood of a bystander. Yeah, if we're standing around and we see somebody getting punched or picked on I'd eventually say one of us is going to speak up, but on the Internet we would be less likely to intervene.

Along with participating administrators' proclaimed struggle between doing what is legally safe and offering complete protection to students, is a perceived lack of knowledge about the true definition of bullying, including cyberbullying. A second participant in the administrator group stated,

I think part of it is the media. It has given bullying so much attention that everything is bullying. They will say, "Well I don't want this to happen to my child, so I'm just going to say it's bullying and you really need to stop it."

Another administrator commented, "We (adults) are conditioning our kids to be bullied, bullied, bullied, you know, and instead of just saying that person said something to make me mad, now they're bullying." A participant also mentioned how parents will use famous, yet tragic stories related to bullying and cyberbullying to get administrators' attention. The administrator said, "Parents take the stance that we need to stop all conflict with their child because this girl in Massachusetts killed herself." However, as one administrator stated, "Ninety percent of what is identified or who is identified as being a bully, it turns out it's not bullying, but rather conflict."

Administrators agreed that parents will mention how this student committed suicide as a result of being bullied in hopes of adding more weight to their own problem, even if the problem is minor and isolated. A participant from the administrator group stated, "Bullying is a blanket term, everything is considered bullying. Educating students and parents about what is bullying is important." The participant goes on to add, "Educating is a good solution because we can get the victim involved and the parents to inform them of what bullying is; what cyberbullying is." Another participant from the administrator group said, "We are having to deal with, trying to define for students and parents, the difference between people just not liking each other and bullying. I think some parents and students get those confused." According to participants from the administrator group, educating students and parents about the true definition of bullying and cyberbullying is needed in helping students and parents better identify when these situations really occur.

According to study participants from the administrator and counseling groups, it would benefit schools if students were taught conflict management and coping skills. Participants from

the administrator group believe children do not possess the proper skills to manage problems with others. One administrator stated, "Our kids are not good conflict managers." Another participant communicated the need to teach students about the reality of facing adversity and dealing with it effectively. The participant said,

> I think educating people about (the dangers of cyberbullying) awareness is important, but the other part is going to be educating people about what is going to happen (reality), it's going to happen, and that everybody endures it; and, "Here's the way to cope."

The participant proceeds to explain how teaching coping skills could occur,

> With each of these levels (of coping skills), you know somebody says something mean to you and here's three or four options you could pick that are not going to escalate the problem. You know that these options are not going to damage them psychologically and you just teach them (students) these coping skills.

A participant from the parent group comments about coping with adversity and the importance of developing a positive self-esteem, "You can only be hurt by what you allow to hurt you and I think a lot that happens with what you teach your children about their self-esteem and that it does not depend on anybody else's perspective." Another participant from the parent group adds similar comments about self-esteem, "I just feel investing yourself and time in people and building self-esteem is one way that can help some of that (negative effects of bullying)."

Furthermore, administrators use time, energy, and other resources to investigate cyberbullying issues to determine what has happened and if anything can and should be done in terms of disciplinary action (Gillis, 2006). A participant from the administrator group comments about the demands of addressing cyberbullying,

> It takes so much. I mean it does. Not that we're considering that taking time with the kids is not important, but these issues that might previously have been parental issues are now ours to deal with. It's is a loss of productivity.

Therefore, schools are also faced with teaching students how to manage conflicts and cope with rumors or negative language relative to them. According to one administrator participating in a focus group session,

> We involve counselors to help out with these type issues. When it is determined that we cannot apply discipline, we, many times, will let counselors talk with the students and contact parents to inform them about the situation.

A participant from the counselor group made a supporting statement, "This problem is growing and becoming too much for administrators to deal with alone, especially when many of these issues are not at school." A participant from the parent group comments about how overwhelming cyberbullying can be for those (administrators) involved, "Like how much time, energy, emotion (administrators) all wasted basically on the situation and it was out of their control really, they didn't ask for, they didn't want it, but it took up family time, their emotions, their attention."

According to participants from the administrator, counselor, and parent groups, cyberbullying effects are similar to traditional face-to-face bullying. If unnoticed or ignored, it will cause harm to the school's culture and learning environment. Therefore, school officials must work hard to protect the culture and learning environment. However, cyberbullying, because of its off-campus nature and anonymity, can cause much more difficulty for administrators and counselors to address (Taylor, 2008). With traditional bullying, perpetrators are identified by victims and witnesses. Cyberbullying, on the other hand, is difficult because anyone can do it while hiding behind the mask of anonymity provided by an online (not face-to-face) format (Abbott, 2008). A participant from the parent group provided perspective about the difficulty of dealing with cyberbullying, as compared to other incidents, "It's a lot easier for (administrators) to deal with somebody that punched somebody on the face than it is for you to

deal with the effects of something that happened at 10:30 the night before." Another parent

spoke about their belief that the effects of cyberbullying will affect schools, "It's (effects of

cyberbullying) going to carry over (to schools)."

Cyberbullying is causing school officials to take a hard look at their current policies,

which relate to bullying, harassment, and student technology use. One participant from the

external authorities group said,

> I really started to evaluate what we are really doing in reference to all of this
> (cyberbullying), because it's part of an oppression element that we don't allow cell
> phones in class or whatever it may be, this far in our policies I think that we have built a
> wall between us as educators and adults in these children's lives.

Another participant stated, "It's the school's job to educate them as to how to use and not use

these tools (technology), but we're limiting them by not allowing them to bring these tools into

schools." Alabama recently revised law regarding harassment, but cyberbullying was not

specifically addressed within the law (Student Harassment Prevention Act, 2009, sec. 3). It is

"gray area," and schools cannot deal with many cases because of the situations that occur outside

of the school system's jurisdiction. Another participant of the external authorities group said,

> Our technology use policy only applies to the use of our technology equipment and
> network, but very rarely it has been on our computers or has been while they're in the
> school building. So, our range of what we're able to push, currently, is limited; which is
> kind of a weakness, so we'll have to deal with that.

Question Three

This particular question was framed because of the possibility of differing opinions

among participants across and between stakeholder groups. The data are divided into two major

categories: 1) data pertaining to school officials (administrators) handling cyberbullying issues

with disciplinary action; and 2) data pertaining to school officials (administrators) handling

cyberbullying incidents without disciplinary action (i.e., alternative methods and approaches).

Data gathered from participants representing each stakeholder group are discussed and the discussions are categorized as related to either disciplinary or non-disciplinary action.

Data Regarding the Application of Disciplinary Action

Most participants from all four stakeholder groups had similar responses regarding how school officials, particularly administrators, should handle cyberbullying issues with disciplinary action. Participants from the school administrator group commented about their willingness to apply disciplinary action in cases of cyberbullying. As one participant from the group stated, "I will not use disciplinary action unless they (students) have done something at school." Another administrator said, "Ninety-five percent of what we see, the cyberbullying and the stuff that relates, occurs outside of school and we can't necessarily touch that. It happens while they are at home, but they bring it into the school." A second administrator stated, "I think we should only deal with those issues that occur at school, and that may be behavior manifesting from cyberbullying or other issues occurring away from school." Most administrators reiterated their fellow participants' comments regarding how and when to use disciplinary action when addressing cyberbullying issues. No participants from the administrator group stated that they apply discipline to address off-campus cyberbullying nor did any participants comment that they should be able to apply discipline to address cyberbullying that occurs off school grounds.

Participants from the school counselor group commented less than participants from the other groups, regarding the application of disciplinary action in cyberbullying situations. One participant stated, "Administrators must be very careful in deciding whether or not to punish students for cyberbullying or any misconduct that occurs online." Another counselor said, "As far as using disciplinary action, I don't think they (administrators) have a leg to stand on." Other

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participants communicated that cyberbullying is usually an issue to be addressed by talking with

students who reported it and contacting their parents to inform them of the issues.

External authorities participants also spoke about the application of disciplinary action in

cyberbullying situations. One participant from this group stated,

> We know what schools can and cannot do when it comes to legally following our proper
> code of conduct, provided (the cyberbullying) is all done at home and things like that.
> But, what happens if it does affect the school? I think as soon as it spills into the school,
> it's brought to our attention. You know, it may not be that we can do anything about the
> specific act that occurred (away from school), but I thinks it's our (school system's)
> responsibility at that point to address it and be sure to notify parents as well. I think that's
> where we have a responsibility as a school system, even though the school is not involved
> in it and may not be school consequences, but I think it's our responsibility that we notify
> each parent involved.

A second participant from the external authorities group commented regarding school

jurisdiction in cyberbullying cases,

> I think it's a fine line, you know, what schools can and cannot do. How they (students)
> conduct themselves on the Internet, whether it's e-mail or social networking or its form
> of technology research, it's part of the educational setting, there can be some kind of
> awareness (about cyberbullying).

Another participant from the external authorities group communicated,

> If it's a threat, you have the grounds to respond because it has caused a sense of fear and
> a concern for safety and welfare is brought out because of that. The school system can
> respond and react to that, because of that. They're (school officials) definitely going to
> get the police involved because it is a threat.

No participants from the external authorities group stated that disciplinary action could or should

be applied, unless a specific and direct threat to student safety occurs.

Overall, parent participants communicated the same feelings about school administrators'

application of discipline when addressing cyberbullying and cyberbullies. Participants from the

parent stakeholder group mostly agreed with participants from the other stakeholder groups, with

the exception of one parent participant. This particular individual said, "I think schools should

punish students for cyberbullying wherever it happens. This would get them (perpetrators) to that, 'Hey, we're not going to put up with this (cyberbullying).'" Overall, parent participants believe that schools should punish perpetrators when misconduct occurs at school or at school-sponsored functions. However, some participants noted that schools had a right to address cyberbullying issues with disciplinary action if it specifically threatened another student or was disruptive to the learning environment. One participant confirmed, "Yes. Schools should have the ability to discipline students when their behavior harms others or creates problems at school, even if it did not occur at school. But, parents should handle this."

Discussion Regarding the Alternative Methods to Disciplinary Action

As pointed out by multiple participants across stakeholder groups, school administrators must be very careful when applying disciplinary action in cases involving cyberbullying and other off-campus misconduct. A school system's authority to punish students for off-campus misconduct may be questioned and challenged by students and parents; and as previous court case decisions concerning student rights have indicated, school systems are not always validated in their decisions to handle student issues, particularly with disciplinary action. Therefore, questions about alternative methods to the application of discipline were presented to participants for discussion during focus group sessions across all four stakeholder groups. Three major ideas emerged from data gathered regarding alternative methods to disciplinary action:

1. The Counseling Approach: School administrators and counselors share in addressing cyberbullying issues by talking with students involved (victims, bullies, bully-victims, and bystanders), consulting with them, and encouraging them to find solutions to problems existing between students (Burrow-Sanchez, Call, Drew, & Zheng, 2011);

2.   Partnerships: School officials should communicate, inform, and partner with

   parents, students, law enforcement, and counselors in efforts to effectively

   address cyberbullying; and

3.   Education and Awareness: Schools should implement an education and

   awareness program focusing on cyberbullying prevention, intervention, and

   solutions. This includes teaching proper technology use, appropriate online

   behavior, conflict management strategies and solutions, and coping skills

   development.

The counseling approach (Burrow-Sanchez et al., 2011) was mentioned by participants

from the administrators' group. One administrator stated, "When I find out I can't discipline the

student, I will notify the counselor and have them talk with the students and call parents."

Another administrator stated,

> I really think the counseling part should be involved in a lot of stuff (cyberbullying and
> other off-campus issues). Legally, the more people (officials) you involve the better. I've
> had a couple of times where I met with students having conflicts (online) and determined
> no consequences were going to result. So I suggested to the students to talk to the
> counselor and told them to decide how far they wanted to take this in terms of bringing
> the issue on campus; because, "You (students) really don't want me involved, because if I
> get involved you will not like it."

Participants from the counselors' group obviously spoke about the counseling approach, since

they perform this on a daily basis. Several participants from this group have acknowledged an

increase in the number of issues they have dealt with in recent years. One counselor mentioned,

"I don't know if addressing off-campus issues (cyberbullying) is an administrative function

because I think as an administrator, you can get yourself into some legal issues there; but,

definitely counseling issues can be addressed with the counselor." Another counselor mentioned,

> As far as counseling, I don't feel like that I will be overstepping my boundaries as a
> counselor to talk to the children (about off-campus issues), but when it comes right down

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to it, I don't feel like they (administrators) have a leg to stand on when it comes to applying disciplinary action. Administrators will call on us to help, which I don't mind, because something needs to be done, but they will ask us to address problems they cannot handle.

Representatives from the parent and external authorities groups addressed the counseling approach in limited fashion. A few participants mentioned the approach as an alternative to discipline. One participant representing the external authorities group commented in response to a question about school authority to address cyberbullying with discipline, which was in reference to alternative approaches to discipline. The participant said, "It is the school's responsibility to address it and to be sure to notify parents that this (cyberbullying) has been brought to our attention." A parent representative commented,

> What can administrators do (in response to cyberbullying)? Talk to the students? I guess sometimes that is effective, but if parents are not willing to help out (addressing the problem at home), schools should be able to discipline, because I know some parents won't do anything about it.

In response to a question about school responsibility in addressing cyberbullying, a parent said,

> I think schools have a responsibility. They know what's going on so at least let the parents know, "If they get anything else, if they (students) tell, we keep doing things, but we need you to know this was going on." I mean, the parent at least, that's what they should do with it.

Administrators mentioned the importance of partnerships in dealing with cyberbullying as well as other issues. One administrator said, "Parents must be held accountable for some of these things because we, as a school, cannot be parents. Parents must be a part of this and help us deal with situations when we call." Another administrator communicated,

> My experiences with parents are mostly positive when I call them asking for help. Parents, for the most part, will be willing to help you if you ask. We need to approach parents in this way, instead of calling them up and telling them what their child has done and what you're going to do about it.

Another parent stated,

> At least, by calling the students in and talking with them and notifying the parents, I think, at least, whether or not if the parent does anything, the school took the steps, the administrators took the steps they could. But, if there's a bullying situation and the school knows about it, then maybe that's what the counselors should do (address the bullying).

Participants from the parent group discussed sharing responsibility with schools, communicating with schools, and partnering with schools in efforts to address cyberbullying issues, as well other issues that arise. As one parent stated, "When the school recognized a problem, I think that's when you need to call the parents, let the parents know." A second participant stated, "The school systems can't raise children" (referencing the need for schools and parents to work together). Another parent said,

> (If there is a problem) they (parents) got to deal with it. Those parents need to get together and sit down and talk; and then go to the school and they need to sit down with the principal and talk it out before it becomes a problem.

It is helpful when school officials can form partnerships with parents to address issues. A participant from the counselor group commented, "Administrators could call parents and address it and say, 'Well, these are the issues, this is how it's affecting the learning environment, this is what's going on. Let's work together to address it and do something about it.'"

The external authorities group had multiple participants communicate their perceptions about the importance of partnerships. One participant commented, "It is very important to contact parents and keep them informed, it's the school's responsibility to do so." A second participant commented about partnerships,

> When addressing cyberbullying, or bullying, or social networking bullying, or whatever you want to call it, there has to be a team effort between the school and police officials because well, it's really two different jurisdictions that kind of fall under that situation.

A third participant also mentioned the overlapping of jurisdictions between schools and law enforcement, "The bond between community and schools has now, sort of, strengthened. It sort

of naturally occurred out there because of need or just because we asked for it, our lines, our jurisdictions are now sort of meshing together." Another participant stated in similar fashion, "We can handle (cyberbullying) and it's (must be) a collective effort with the administration on down to the students." Other participants pointed out the importance of schools not having partnerships exclusive to parents, but also with law enforcement, as well as other community members and organizations.

Participants from the school administrator group touched on all three themes, but most participants in this group focused on educating students and parents about cyberbullying and related issues. One participant discussed the lack of education focusing on students' proper use of technology, "I think part of the idea in dealing with tech-related issues is that, we ban it; we make it forbidden, instead of teaching them how to be better citizens of the digital world." In similar fashion, a second participant from the administrator group simply said, "Education (about cyberbullying) helps. We have sessions here we talk about the different things we have at different grade levels. We have these books and booklets that were used (to educate students). We also have PTO presentations." Furthermore, another participant from the administrator group was self-critical about the school efforts to educate students about the proper use of technology,

> We've given them (students) these tools, but as a school, as schools we have not done a very good job of educating them on what is right and what is wrong behavior when it comes to (technology)…It's our job to educate them as to how you should and shouldn't use these tools.

In terms of awareness about the severity that cyberbullying can present, one administrator commented, "We need to educate our parents on the idea that (cyberbullying) is harassment, it is a felony, and (referring to parents in general), 'you need to make your kids understand that.'" Also, participants believe that parents should be educated on how to address cyberbullying. Another participant from the administrator group communicated, "Parents need to monitor their

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kids, and I think we'll probably have to teach parents how to monitor them." A second

administrator adds comments about teaching parents to effectively monitor their children's

technology use and online activities,

> You can offer them opportunities by saying, "Let me teach you how to do this." Students do not realize the power and far-reaching capabilities of technology. They also don't realize that when they hit send, it's done, it's over. They need to be informed of these things and taught how to interact with others online and the implications of saying or posting inappropriate things about someone else.

A third participant posited,

> We need to take a look at our current policies, technology and cell phones, for instance, our current policy (system policy) prohibits cell phone use. But, other systems, I read, are using cell phones for educational purposes, instruction, in the classroom. We need to embrace technology more and start educating students about the proper use of it, instead of saying, "You can't have this!"

> Several counselors who participated in the focus group sessions discussed the need for

education and awareness programs related to Internet safety, proper technology use, online

etiquette, and issues like cyberbullying. One representative of the counselor group stated, "I do

think the school (should address cyberbullying) for education purposes, but also for safety

purposes. It (cyberbullying) needs to be a part of the curriculum." Another counselor said,

> I don't think a lot of parents and children are informed of the ramifications of using anything technological to threaten or embarrass others. I don't think that they're educated that (cyberbullying) is illegal and that there are (serious consequences) and I just don't think people really realize that.

A third participant from the counselor group commented on parents' lack of awareness regarding

technology and the implications,

> Parents are not educated at all about what they are putting into their (children's) hands. I think there needs to be a concerted effort for law enforcement, school, churches, everybody to educate parents so that they can step in (supervise their children's online activities).

Representatives from the parent group discussed the need for education as well. Several participants from this group communicated a need for a formal education program and an awareness program that reaches out to students, parents, and other adults in the community. One parent communicated the need for education, "Children don't always know what bullying is. They don't understand that some people might perceive bullying from just a comment, so they need (to be taught)." In response to a question about alternative approaches schools can use in handling cyberbullying (instead of disciplinary action), one parent said, "Why can't we do the old-fashioned assembly program where they (school officials) get people coming in and you just bombard them – 'this is bullying and this is harassment!' and here's the situation." A second parent believes that formal education programs are the avenue to take for schools, but schools should offer topics in which students will be interested and use real examples of how bad things happening online or cyberbullying can hurt others, including one's self. The parent said, "Students need to see real-life examples someone saying, 'I was bullied, this is what happened, it started out as just words and this is where it ended up.'" A third parent added,

> (The local school) has had people come in and give personal testimonies and the kids really react to that more than anything, like, "You shouldn't do this (cyberbully) or you will go to jail." I think when we grew up we had more of the reality (programs), "Here is the seriousness of the situation" kind of thing. But, now it's all about, "Let's do everything in positive." And we don't really learn from the negative.

Another participant adds, "Fear has kind of been taken out as a motivation." A final participant stated, "I think there needs to be a little bit of fear factor there (in education). I mean, you can do positive education, but you also got to do a wake-up calling once in a while – be realistic though."

Participants from the external authorities group discussed the importance of education and awareness. One participant in particular mentioned the establishment of a formal curriculum.

The participant said, "There should be an education component for life, it's almost like (it should be called), 'Appropriate, Social Media Technology.' It (cyberbullying and technology etiquette) needs to be a component in our schools." A second participant from this group commented, "I think how we stop what's happening (cyberbullying) is more (about) how we educate and to address this we team up with counselors, and we discuss social networking, we discuss what is appropriate, what's not appropriate, reporting bullying." Also, parent education is mentioned as a priority. Another official stated, "Parent education (about cyberbullying) is probably at the top of everyone's list of things that needs to be conducted." In addition to education, some participants of the external authorities group place an importance on advertising and awareness. A fourth participant posited, "We've got to get the message to them (parents) the best way we can; talk about billboards or putting an ad in the local school football program." The same participant suggested marketing an education program via technology (i.e. Facebook). The individual said,

> Send out messages on the comment page through the directory it will go through; because the parents are all on this and the parents are talking about what happened at the ball game last night, or who won the beauty pageant.

A final participant commented on the education and marketing suggestions, "I think that there's a plan (for cyberbullying) that people in the (local school) community would support if they were properly educated and aware of it through the marketing strategies."

Summary of Data

The data collected during this study and presented in this chapter provided insight into the beliefs and perceptions of individuals living and working in the surrounding areas and communities served by the school system studied. Each of the research questions was addressed and supported with multiple responses and statements from participants across all four stakeholder groups. It is evident that study participants representing the stakeholder groups

possess adequate knowledge about technology's impact upon society and its increased utilization by young people. Participants communicated opinions about the implications of children using technology with or without a particular amount of guidance and support from parents and other adults. The effects of cyberbullying upon society and schools, including individuals involved, were thoroughly discussed among participants in all four stakeholder groups. Participants provided opinions about why cyberbullying has become a phenomenon in society, as well as reasons for effects upon local schools in the school system studied. Finally, data were collected that indicated strong beliefs in the approaches schools, parents, and others in the school systems and surrounding communities should implement when addressing cyberbullying.

CHAPTER V:

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The focus-group sessions administered with the four stakeholder groups: school

administrators, school counselors, parents, and external authorities; provided almost 200 pages of

transcript data. Content analysis (Web Center for Social Research Methods), described in

Chapter IV, was conducted to analyze the data transcripts. Initially, content analysis was

conducted to discover relationships between participant responses and discussion and the three

research questions providing the study's focus. Once again, these questions were:

1. What are the school system's stakeholders' perceptions and beliefs of how

cyberbullying affects the community;

2. What are the school system's stakeholders' perceptions and beliefs of how

cyberbullying affects the school; and

3. What are the school system's stakeholders' perceptions and beliefs of how

cyberbullying incidents initiated off school grounds should be handled by school

officials?

As stated in Chapter IV, over 150 key words and phrases emerged from the initial content

analysis of the focus-group transcripts. These key words and phrases related to cyberbullying and

its effects upon stakeholders, particularly the participants involved in the focus-group sessions;

and connected these data to the three major research questions that guided the study. However,

these words and phrases also connect with more specific issues related to cyberbullying.

Therefore, when these key words and phrases emerged, thematic coding was conducted that

grouped this information into five major thematic categories. This coding step categorized the existing data into themes (Web Center for Social Research Methods). Although the data and discussion of participant responses presented in this chapter can be applied to the three research questions, it is presented in this chapter as data connected and related to five thematic categories. Instead of applying the data analysis results to simply support the three research questions, thematic coding provided more in-depth analysis and discovered the five major themes. These themes provide opportunities for more discussion of results and allow for more specific implications pertaining to the school system and its stakeholders. After transitioning through the coding procedures and connecting key ideas and phrases, the five major themes that emerged relate to:

1. the power and implications of technology and its utilization by youth today, particularly in cases of cyberbullying and online misconduct;

2. the factors influencing cyberbullying and its apparent rise in occurrence and intensity;

3. the lack of parental knowledge, awareness, supervision, and control, particularly with technology use;

4. the responsibility and authority of parents, school officials, and law-enforcement officials in dealing with cyberbullying issues; and

5. the need for education programs that focus on proper technology use, online etiquette, and cyberbullying awareness and prevention

Discussion of Themes

As previously stated, each of the five themes relates to one or more of the three research questions guiding the study. In the following section, each of the five themes is discussed and data from the focus group interviews are provided to support each theme.

Theme One: The power and implications of technology and its utilization by youth today, particularly in cases of cyberbullying and online misconduct.

This particular theme frequently appeared in the data gathered from each of the four stakeholder groups. Participants from the four groups emphasized the power of technology, as both a tool for benefitting society, as well as a vehicle for more problematic issues, such as cyberbullying. Three participants representing three different stakeholder groups mentioned technology as being both a "blessing and a curse." Based on information gathered from participants, the term technology represents any tool that is utilized to communicate online or by electronic means. This includes communicating via social networking sites (i.e. Facebook, My Space), text messaging (SMS or MMS), instant messaging, e-mail, video gaming, or posting videos (i.e. You Tube) with Internet/network connections through the use of computers, cell phones, video game consoles, or other multimedia/mobile devices (Feinberg & Robey, 2008).

As mentioned by multiple participants across stakeholder groups, technology has the power to retrieve endless amounts of knowledge and provides access to all types of news, information, and data important to the individual user. One participant from the external authorities group stated, "We (adults) should embrace technology." A participant from the counselor group commented, "It (technology) is a limitless access to knowledge." And, as a second participant from the counselor group stated, "Technology is a wonderful tool."

On the other hand, technology users possess a power to cause harm in "unlimited" and "pervasive" ways. With the perceived "engaging power of technology" in attracting more and more users or technology's power to "suck you in," it provides more opportunities for cyberbullying to occur more frequently and in a more intense manner (Hoff & Mitchell, 2009). A number of participants from all four stakeholder groups commented on the "pervasiveness" that technology usage creates for cyberbullying victims and further, empowers cyberbullies to attack others in a limitless manner. For victims, cyberbullying can be very difficult or impossible to escape, without totally disengaging from technology use. With the power of technology cyberbullying can become a problem that exists anywhere at any time, without boundaries or limitations (Taylor, 2008).

The inability to "escape" from harassment is very troublesome, especially to young people. Along with the pervasive threat of cyberbullying, the anonymity that cyberbullies sometimes possess exacerbates the situation. The inescapability of harassment and uncertainty concerning the identity of the perpetrator can be extremely volatile. The pervasiveness and intensity of cyberbullying can lead to severe implications (i.e. depression, violence, and suicide) (Mason, 2008).

The access to technology and digital communication provides children and adolescents with many opportunities to interact with their friends, family, peers, and other individuals whom they choose. However, other individuals can, in turn, interact and connect with them. This unlimited connectivity can sometimes lead to adverse situations such as arguments, name-calling, threats, and other forms of harassment, which can be considered cyberbullying if a pattern of this type behavior develops between individuals or groups. Furthermore, these adverse

situations can occur at any time and any place via technology and digital communication (Taylor, 2008).

According to some participants from each of the four groups, technology allows cyberbullies to "hide behind their monitors" without fear of being discovered. Technology creates a "veil" or "mask" for cyberbullies to use that provides protection for them and enables them to continue harassing their victims. The "veil" or "mask" cyberbullies hide behind creates a sense of security, even invincibility. This heightened sense of security negatively affects the users' inhibitions to cease or filter their behaviors. In other words, technology has created a "disinhibition effect" among its users, which enables them to behave in a manner in which they would not normally behave in face-to-face situations (Mason, 2008). One participant from the administrator group commented,

> I feel like the filter has almost been taken down from people. You know, what I would say face-to-face makes me think twice because you're visually looking directly at me, or there's a group of people visually looking directly at me. Whereas, when they (perpetrators) get on the computer, it is a false sense of security. It's this, "I can get out there. I can say what I want to. I can put it out there…" I think that (communicating online) just takes away everybody's inhibitions. They (perpetrators) just – they lose that ability to filter and understand the difference between right and wrong, and because of that, it has such a major emotional impact on our kids (victims).

According to participants in all four stakeholder groups, technology use continues to grow and is now being used by children at younger ages than ever before. Participants from all four groups believe that technology is used to such an extent by young people, that it has become a major part of their lifestyle and culture. The saturation of technology into the lives of young people makes it difficult for them to disengage from use when problems occur (Taylor, 2008). The abundant access to technology devices and social media can greatly affect young people and their perception of the world or in some cases, the creation of another world. This other world or as participants from all four stakeholder groups have called it, "alternate universe," is known as

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cyberspace (Juvonen & Gross, 2008). One participant stated, "It (social media) has created another world." If young people engage in cyberspace on a frequent basis, it becomes a large part of the social life. Therefore, when problems occur online, they either disengage from a large part of their social life or deal with it. According to some participants, young people will usually choose to deal with it rather than disengage from technology use because of the perceived negative effect upon their social lives. An added note of interest by participants in the administrator group related to how the increase use and preference to communicate via technology rather than in person has negatively affected the development of students' face-to-face skills and their ability to resolve conflict.

The use of technology also establishes a limitless platform for cyberbullies to embarrass, humiliate, defame, or otherwise harass victims (Taylor, 2008). Text messaging, social networks (i.e. Facebook, My Space, Twitter, etc.), and other social media allow users to connect with "friends" or "followers" to share information. The connection ability and networking power of technology has created an environment where children can interact with others in unlimited fashion, which also creates more opportunities for negative interactions to occur, such as cyberbullying. Cyberbullies can attack victims instantaneously, while a limitless audience simultaneously witnesses the act (Shariff, 2009). The "large, limitless audience," according to some participants from all four groups, has very detrimental effects upon victims. While traditional bullying situations have bullies attacking victims face-to-face in front of a usually limited number of people, cyberbullies can attack their victims with as large of an audience as they choose. Even the bystanders have the power to forward or share the attacks with others (Juvonen & Gross, 2008). Therefore, cyberbullying, according to some participants in this study, can do much greater damage to victims than those who experience traditional, face-to-face

bullying. Also, participants from all four stakeholder groups discussed how cyberbullying creates additional problems at school when cyberbullying occurs between students attending the same school.

Theme Two: The factors influencing cyberbullying and its apparent rise in occurrence and intensity.

During one of the focus group sessions involving counselors, participants discussed the pre-conditions for traditional bullying as compared to pre-conditions for cyberbullying. As one participant stated, "In traditional bullying situations, there is always an imbalance of power" (present between the bully and victim). This imbalance of power could be physical, intellectual, psychological, or social (Feinberg & Robey, 2008). In cyberbullying situations, however, an imbalance of power may not exist, nor is it required. This is due to the virtual "veil" or "mask" behind which cyberbullies hide (Mason, 2008). According to the same participant, "Anyone can be the bully." Another participant from the administrator group stated, "It can be the smallest, weakest, most unpopular kid at school. Some kids are using it to get a power they have never had before." Although an imbalance of power may not exist nor is it required, the attainment of power is a motivation for cyberbullying. Another administrator stated, "It's those that are drawn to that anonymous, 'I'm not big enough to face you face to face, but this is where (online) I get my sense of power from.'" According to participants in the administrator, counselor, and parent groups, cyberbullies seek to intimidate, humiliate, and harass victims, in order to acquire a certain edge or power over others.

According to several participants in the administrator and parent groups, the increase in the number of cyberbullying incidents correlates with the increased number of users and the increased amount of time spent online. Not only do young people engage in technology use

often, several participants from all four stakeholder groups believe that many children and adolescents prefer to communicate via technology, rather than face-to-face. Furthermore, several participants across stakeholder groups alluded to a "dependency upon technology" that has developed among children and adolescents, to the point that young people feel they need technology to function normally on a day-to-day basis. Therefore, because of increased access and a perceived dependency upon technology among youth (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010), more instances of cyberbullying will occur as a result (Wright et al., 2009a).

Additionally, students' perceived dependency upon technology has resulted in some participants believing that young people would be reluctant to report cyberbullying incidents. According to some participants, this reluctance is due to the fear of losing access to technology at the hands of parents or other adults prohibiting use to prevent future cyberbullying issues. However, with technology being such a tremendous part of their social lives, losing access to online activity or electronic communication is not a desired outcome for young technology users (Taylor, 2008). Therefore, the increase in cyberbullying incidents, because of increased technology use, coupled with a perceived reluctance by young users to report issues leads to bigger problems.

Also, as mentioned in the discussion of Theme 1, the power of technology to involve large numbers through networking and the lasting effects of text, pictures, videos, and other visual/graphic forms of communication, lead to an increase in the number of cyberbullying incidents, as well as the intensity the incidents (Feinberg & Robey, 2008). According to participants in the counselor and administrator groups, bystanders take on a different role in cyberbullying situations, as compared to traditional bullying incidents. As one participant in the counselor group spoke about the less likelihood of bystander intervention with cyberbullying,

It is (dangerous) because someone on the Internet, it lessens the likelihood of a bystander. Yeah, if we're standing around and we see somebody getting punched or picked on I'd eventually say one of us is going to speak up, but on the Internet we would be less likely to intervene.

This situation allows bystanders to help or side with the bully, or "pile on" in attempts to further exacerbate the problem. This is possible because of the anonymity (Mason, 2008) or the lack of immediate reaction from others by according to several participants, being at home "safely in their rooms behind the keyboard or cell phone."

Technology users are perceived by study participants to be "getting younger and younger" because "parents are caving in" to the demands of their children. The issue of maturity and understanding should be considered a factor of influence in the occurrence of cyberbullying. As with any tool, an understanding of proper use and an awareness of the potential dangers, pitfalls, and implications of improper use should be established in order to ensure a successful and positive experience. This is no different with technology. Participants across stakeholder groups believe that many users are simply "too young" to understand how to properly interact with others via technology. Many participants indicated that youngsters do not fully understand the dangers of improper technology use or abusive online behavior. A participant from the counselor group stated, "I think the other things (problems) we (counselors) see is kids are younger and younger (owning and using technology), getting cell phones, it's crazy how young they are getting cell phones."

Other factors discussed by participants across stakeholder groups are also themes that emerged from the data. One factor participants feel contributes to increased rates of cyberbullying is a lack of parental supervision and control of their children's technology use. Another factor is the lack of knowledge and awareness of technology use and cyberbullying by parents, adults, and others who are responsible for youth behavior. Multiple participants from the

administrator, counselor, and parent groups stated that "kids are savvy" in regards to technology use as compared to adults. Therefore, with limited knowledge of how technology works and a limited awareness of issues related to technology, including cyberbullying, adults will struggle monitoring and controlling technology improper technology use by children and adolescents (Mason, 2008).

Participants from all four stakeholder groups believe that a moral decline across society and lack of solid family structures and foundations suffered by many of our youth are contributing factors to increased online misconduct and cyberbullying. Participants believe that cyberbullying and an inability of young people to interact positively with others is a direct result of larger societal issues, including a moral decline and lack of responsibility by parents to properly supervise their children. Also, participants mentioned that a lack of "modeling good behavior and proper online conduct" by parents and adults contributes to improper online conduct and technology abuse by children and adolescents. Finally, a lack of student knowledge and awareness regarding proper technology use, appropriate online behavior, and the dangers and implications of improper conduct, like cyberbullying, is perceived by participants across the stakeholder groups to be an enabling factor of cyberbullying.

Theme Three: The lack of parental knowledge, awareness, supervision, and control, particularly with technology use.

All four stakeholder groups had participants that discussed the issue of parents, adults, or other guardians lacking knowledge and/or awareness about today's technology and inappropriate online activity such as cyberbullying. Participants across all four stakeholder groups believe that adults currently possess less technological knowledge and skill, as compared to our youth today. In situations where the child is more knowledgeable and skillful with technology, parents lose

the ability to effectively monitor and control their children's technology use, and in many cases, surrender complete and total access and control to their children (Mason, 2008).

In one parent focus group session, two participants mentioned, "Parents are using technology as a babysitter." According to the participants, parents don't see the danger in allowing their children free and uncontrolled access to technology. One participant stated, "Parents will say, 'Not to worry, they're on a computer, they're fine. You know I can go off and do what I want because they're taken care of.' It's (technology) a babysitter like TV used to be." Several participants commented that many parents feel a "false sense of security" by having their children in their rooms on their computers, cell phones, or video games. However, as one participant from the counselor group said,

> I don't think parents see the danger and the possibilities of cyberbullying, or cyberstalking, or child predators or any of that. I don't think parents are thinking of that when they're allowing their kids or helping their kids log in to Facebook or whatever.

Although many parents are unaware of the potential dangers that exist in cyberspace, others, according to several participants in the parent, counselor, and administrator groups, believe that many parents are aware of potential dangers, but do not believe it will happen to their child. One participant from the parent group said,

> I think some parents just don't have a clue that it is going to happen. They say, "Would my kid do this?" or, "Could this happen to my kid?" I think they feel it will never happen or, "My kid would never do this."

This nonchalant approach is cause for serious concern, according to many participants across the three stakeholder groups of parents, counselors, and administrators. The participants who mentioned this issue believe that parents must realize the potential dangers and threats of online activity.

Although some parents are not aware of the dangers and some parents don't believe that it will involve their children, according to participants in this study, other parents don't consider cyberbullying or online harassment to be serious. This is mainly due to the belief of some parents that if the problems are online, in cyberspace, and not a real-life, physically threatening situations, then it is "not a big deal." However, these parents may not realize that the issues occurring online may lead to real, physical dangers at school or local gathering places like the mall or park. The argument could be made that if a false security exists among technology users or the "disinhibition effect" (Mason, 2008), the same can apply to parents regarding their lack of concern for the dangers that their children may encounter while participating in online activities.

According to several participants across all four stakeholder groups, the problems with parental supervision and control go beyond monitoring technology use by their children. One participant in the parent group stated, "Many parents do not know what is going on in their child's life." Another parent in the same group adds, "If parents are aware of what is going on, if it is not appropriate, they may choose to ignore it or not handle it like they should." Other participants also commented that many parents today choose to "be their child's friend." Another participant stated, "I think parents have given their children too much privacy."

An important factor that participants from the parent and counselor groups mentioned is about parents' trust and defense of their children in excessive amounts. Some participants from the parent group perceive that parents "trust their children too much" and allow them "too much freedom." Others believe that some parents enable their children by ignoring their conduct or choosing not to apply firm discipline. Another participant from the parent group stated, "Many parents defend their children, even if everyone knows they did wrong." Another participant from the administrator group echoed the previous statement by saying, "Kids know their parents are

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going to back them up no matter what. Their mom or their dad is going to be there to say their child was right regardless of what the facts are." A parent participant commented about some parents defending their children regardless of the situation. She said, "Parents will walk in (to the school) and say, 'Well, not my kid.' Immediately, the parent's on the defensive."

Participants across multiple stakeholder groups believe that parents must model proper behavior to their children when interacting with others. This behavior is inclusive of online behavior and etiquette. This is a component that is apparently missing according to many participants. One participant from the administrator group said, "We have so many parents nowadays that come in with the attitude to fight, fight, fight." Another participant stated, "All those parents (parents having children with online conflicts) are doing the same thing to other parents online that's where the kids are learning it and they're seeing it every day." This modeling or lack thereof is having a negative impact on the occurrence of conflict in face-to-face and online interactions among young people. Other participants referenced situations concerning parents who fail to model proper behavior, monitor online misconduct, or apply appropriate discipline and control. Several participants made reference to and discussed parents who actually participate and engage in online misconduct alongside their children. One participant commented that parents will falsely take the role of their children or other false identities to cyberbully others (Sutton, 2009). Usually, parents participate and engage in cyberbullying and online misconduct to "handle their child's business" or "defend their child against others who are possibly bullying the child."

Theme Four: The responsibility and authority of parents, school officials, and law-enforcement

officials in dealing with cyberbullying issues.

This particular theme appeared throughout the data collection process, in every interview session conducted with every stakeholder group. The term "responsibility" was mentioned by study participants many times. Based on the frequency of this theme throughout the data, it appears responsibility is a major component missing in the proper management of online behavior and technology utilization by young people, as well as an effective preventive measure of cyberbullying. Responsibility is important, especially when confronting issues in cyberspace, which is considered to be unchartered territory (Juvonen & Gross, 2008; Franek, 2005). In this particular study, the data collected indicate responsibility lies with students, parents, school officials, law enforcement, and other adults in charge of supervision and guidance of young people.

Student responsibility was addressed many times throughout the interview sessions and across stakeholder groups. Participants who spoke about this issue all had similar comments about student responsibility being extremely important and is the critical factor in determining whether or not a particular young person will participate in inappropriate online conduct or utilize technology in improper ways, particularly in situations related to cyberbullying and sexting. According to this parent and others, young people lack responsibility not because they are not capable, but because they are not afforded it by parents. Participants from the school administrator group believe student responsibility is critical, but it is wrong to think adults can fully trust students to be responsible and make proper decisions while engaging online, especially in cases where children and adolescents are frequently using technology and social media. One participant from the administrator group said, "Our students lack the maturity

needed to make good decisions about how to appropriately use technology." Therefore, others must also share in the responsibility of ensuring proper technology utilization and online conduct (Beale & Hall, 2007).

Study participants mentioned parents as being more responsible for managing or controlling their children's online behavior than the children themselves. So, parents are charged with the responsibility of supervising and managing their children's online conduct and technology use, as they are with most everything else pertaining to their children's lives. Many participants believe that parents who do not take responsibility of their children's behavior will face more problems caused by their children's misconduct. One participant from the parent group said, "Parents have to deal with (their child's behavior). If they think it's going to come to the school, parents need to get the principal and sit down and talk it out before it gets to be a problem." Another parent said, "If it happens at school, then the school needs to address it. But, you know what, (if it happens at home) household, parents, the responsibility lies on the parents." An administrator referred to cyberbullying and other issues that occur away from school as being simply, "The responsibility of the parents."

In addition to issues with parents ignoring their children's problems with online misconduct and misconduct in general, participants from the parent, counselor, and administrator groups mentioned issues with parents who defend their children, even in cases where evidence exists that their child made a mistake. Ignoring, denying, and misplaced defense of their children is a responsibility issue. More specifically, it is an issue related more to a lack of responsibility (Juvonen & Gross, 2008; Franek, 2005).

Another issue related to a lack of responsibility may be far worse than the three issues pointed out above. Participants from the parent, counselor, and external authorities groups

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commented on parents who involve themselves with their children's online misconduct or cyberbullying. According to study participants across the stakeholder groups, some parents will engage in online misconduct themselves, whether it is texting via cell phone or posting comments on social networking sites (i.e. Facebook). This behavior exhibited by parents is considered extremely irresponsible and can be detrimental to their children's outlook regarding appropriate online behavior and technology utilization. Another participant from the counselor group noted a story she read about a cyberbullying incident where a parent was directly involved as a perpetrator,

> I read where one parent actually disguised themselves as another young person, a boy, and proceeded to bully one of her daughter's classmates at school. She created a fake account and pretended to be this teenage boy who wanted to be her friend, at first, and then started saying mean things like, "You're fat." and, "Nobody likes you." The victim ended up killing herself because of this. The mother was discovered and went to trial, but I'm not sure what happened.

According to participants across the stakeholder groups, parents must be responsible by: 1) monitoring their children's online behavior and technology use, whether it be cell phone, social networking sites, Internet, or any other electronic/digital communication device (reviewing activity on all devices at unexpected/unannounced time and having full access to all accounts); 2) directly supervising their children's conduct at the time of use; and 3) controlling their children's time of use and the amount of time allowed online to prevent excessive/obsessive behavior and engagement in the virtual world (cyberspace), which may lead to a lessened priority of things in the real world (reality). According to these same participants, the lack of parent responsibility to monitor, supervise, and control their children's online behavior and technology use has been a major contributor to cyberbullying and its increasing occurrence and intensity.

School-age children spend a large portion of their lives at home, at school, and places in between. In terms of responsibility, students and parents are responsible for their behaviors at all times. However, school officials, particularly school administrators, are also responsible for supervision and management of student behavior and actions while they attend school and school functions (Willard, 2007). While most school systems have policies focusing on students' appropriate use of technology, these policies can only be enforced within the school systems' boundaries of authority or jurisdiction (Riedel, 2008). This can be an issue, since the majority of cyberbullying occurs outside of school hours and not on school grounds, which in most cases is outside of school officials' authority to address those issues (Abbott, 2008). However, according to participants in the administrator, counselor, and external authorities groups, cyberbullying is indirectly causing issues at school and during school operating time. Participants from the administrator group are familiar with cyberbullying and the issues resulting from cyberbullying. In fact, every administrator who participated in the focus group sessions confirmed their involvement in at least one cyberbullying incident. According to participants across all stakeholder groups, school administrators are responsible for the safety and security of students while at school, even in cases where misconduct occurs as a result from issues that occurred away from school or outside of school jurisdiction. Although this has generally been the case for years, the increases of online interaction between students who attend the same school have developed another dimension of relationships between those individuals and the groups they interact with at school (Feinberg & Robey, 2008; Hoff & Mitchell, 2009).

Participants from the administrator group believe that addressing cyberbullying, which usually occurs outside of school boundaries of jurisdiction, is a difficult situation that often holds problems that cannot be solved directly by them (administrators) or other school officials (i.e.

counselors, teachers, etc.). School officials cannot fully address issues utilizing school policy, standards, or guidelines if the issues are occurring outside jurisdiction. Therefore, administrators and other school officials must rely on the assistance of others, including parents and law enforcement, to address cyberbullying issues (Beale & Hall, 2007). While school administrators can directly and fully address issues occurring on school grounds or at school events that result from cyberbullying, it does not completely solve the problem without getting to the root of the problem itself, cyberbullying.

Because of a lack of administrators' authority to address issues occurring away from school with disciplinary action, counselors are sharing responsibility in dealing with the issues by talking and counseling with students who are involved with cyberbullying issues (Burrow-Sanchez et al., 2011). Participants from the administrator and counselor groups agree on sharing the responsibility of handling cyberbullying issues. While participants from the counselor group are confirming their direct involvement with cyberbullying issues, school administrators remain somewhat perplexed about how to handle cyberbullying issues effectively, in order to ensure the protection of students. Some participants from the administrator, counselor, and parent groups believe that simply talking or counseling with students, particularly the bullies and victims, is not enough. However, at the moment it appears all administrators can do is talk about it, team up with counselors, inform parents, and in some cases, involve law enforcement.

Law-enforcement officials, including school resource officers, have become involved in some cyberbullying issues (Beale & Hall, 2007). One reason is because of school administrators' lack of authority to deal with issues occurring outside of school coupled with those issues' direct impact on students or the learning environment at school (Shariff, 2004). According to one participant from the external authorities group, law-enforcement officials possess jurisdiction

that transition beyond the school system's boundaries, although it is dependent upon the circumstances. For instance, in most cases where a student is being directly threatened or illegal images have been sent, possessed, or created, law-enforcement officials have the authority to intervene (Taylor, 2008). In the case of illegal images, sexting is becoming an issue among adolescents. Sexting occurs when inappropriate or pornographic pictures of young people are sent to others via text or online messaging. In many cases, this occurs via text, where one individual will take an inappropriate or pornographic picture of him or herself and send it to another individual (Willard, 2007). Because of law enforcements' extended boundaries of authority and additional resources, school and law-enforcement officials are forming partnerships to address cyberbullying (Beale & Hall, 2007); especially since participants in both administrator and external authorities groups believe the schools and law enforcement boundaries of authority are coordinating.

However, partnerships must be established with other groups besides school and law-enforcement officials. According to participants in all four stakeholder groups, partnerships must be formed between parents and schools in order to effectively address cyberbullying, particularly in a proactive manner. School administrators and parents should work together to ensure their children and students are behaving properly and engaging in safe and appropriate activities both in and away from school. A partnership between parents and schools would increase awareness and understanding, while communicating high expectations of proper conduct for children and students, including online behavior and technology use (Beale & Hall, 2007). Another important partnership mentioned by participants in the counselor, parent, and external authorities groups is that of students partnering with both parents and school officials. This includes students who may not be directly involved with cyberbullying issues, but provide a strong presence of positive

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peer pressure, as well as a strong source of information for school officials when issues and potential problems arise.

Theme 5: The need for education programs that focus on proper technology use, online etiquette, and cyberbullying awareness and prevention.

Although disciplinary action was mentioned by participants from all four stakeholder groups as a means for addressing cyberbullying issues, this comment was superseded by suggestions regarding education and awareness as an effective means for addressing the cyberbullying. Participants across the stakeholder groups suggested formal education programs provided by schools would be the most effective method for attacking current cyberbullying struggles among young people. According to participants from all four groups, raising the awareness about the nuisances and dangers of cyberbullying and teaching students and parents how to deal with these issues is a positive step schools can take. But, other suggestions and questions are raised about what, when, and how to teach and present content about proper online behavior, technology use, and cyberbullying.

As indicated in the data analysis, participants have suggested that partnerships need to be established between schools, students, and parents in order to effectively and completely address cyberbullying problems. Creating formal education and awareness programs (Hoff & Mitchell, 2009) involving both students and parents is a step towards establishing partnerships or strengthening existing partnerships between schools, students, and parents (Beale & Hall, 2007). Students and parents alike should be involved in the education and awareness program. But, what information should be communicated and to whom?

Schools should focus on educating students regarding the exhibition of proper online conduct and treating others with respect. Also, students should be aware of potential dangers

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existing in cyberspace and how to deal with these issues (Burrow-Sanchez et al., 2011). Students

should be made aware of school system policies, as well as the law regarding proper online

behavior and issues related to cyberbullying. Also, the consequences for violating laws and

policies should be communicated. Students should be taught how to identify online bullying

when it occurs by defining cyberbullying and differentiating between bullying and conflict

between individuals. In similar fashion, students should be taught how to cope with

cyberbullying, negativity, and adversity experienced while interacting with others online and

engaging in online activities (Burrow-Sanchez, 2011). Furthermore, students should learn how to

use a "filter" to determine fact from fiction; and to help them determine what is appropriate

material for them to engage and interact, as well as how to properly reply to negativity,

argumentative, and adverse messages, material, etc. Several participants in all four stakeholder

groups commented on children and adolescents' lack of conflict management skills. Education

programs should focus on developing these skills to help students effectively manage conflict in

both online and face-to-face situations (Burrow-Sanchez, 2011; Hoff & Mitchell, 2009).

Parents should be taught about the potential dangers that exist for their children during

interaction with social media; and what parents should look for when monitoring and supervising

their children's online behavior and technology use. These include the potential threats of online

predator and bullies, including the awareness of false identities and impersonations via created

online handles, avatars, profiles, user names, and accounts. The nuances of social media and

social networking should be communicated as well. This includes hidden accounts, false

identities, false information included in profiles to acquire access to certain material and websites

(i.e. age limits, birth dates, credit card information, etc.). According to one participant in the

external authorities group, parents should be made aware of the "underground network" existing

among our youth and adolescents in cyberspace. This underground network contains false

identities and alternate realities in which young people are engaging at increasing rates.

Along with educating parents about how to effectively supervise their children's online

behavior and technology use, they should be made aware of the differences between negative

interaction and conflict occurring face-to-face compared to the same in online formats. Parents

should be made aware of the differences between traditional bullying and cyberbullying

(Feinberg & Robey, 2008); and how to understand and use technology at higher levels in order to

effectively monitor, supervise, and control their children's usage. The need for parents to acquire

more technological knowledge and skill can be explained by comments made by participants

from the external authorities group, parent group, and administrator group. One participant from

the external authorities group commented in regards to how young people will manipulate their

online activities to appear in conjunction with their parents' guidelines and rules. The participant

stated,

> Most kids (by fifth or sixth grade) already have a Facebook account, which means they
> all had to lie to get that, they're not thirteen in the sixth grade. I know a child who has
> twenty different e-mail accounts and the parents ask why and I respond by trying to tell
> them that their child is attempting to hide activities or manipulate good online conduct.

Another participant commented, "Some parents are very ignorant (to their children's online

activities)." Therefore, parents must be more knowledgeable and savvy in relation to technology,

social media, and online activity in order to effectively supervise and manage their children's

behavior in the virtual world, as well as reality (Juvonen & Gross, 2008; Mason, 2008).

As one participant from the counselor group stated, "Cyberspace has no rules." Adults

(educators and parents) should work together to establish rules for children and adolescents to

follow when they are engaged in online activities and cyberspace. Another positive result of

teaching parents how to effectively monitor and control their children's technology use and

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online activities is the development of trust between parents and children. Participants from the parent, counselor, and external authorities groups believe that a large number of cyberbullying incidents do not get reported because of students' lack of trust in adults, including their parents.

Along with students, parents should be made aware of the differences between bullying and isolated incidents of negative, adverse interaction or conflict between individuals, particularly young people. Parents should be informed of the differences between bullying and simple conflicts that occur on a regular basis between young people (Levy, 2011). According to participants from the administrator group, parents want to use bullying as a way to influence administrators to treat the situation with more importance and priority. Therefore, parents should be informed about how to differentiate between actual bullying behaviors, including online activity, and isolated incidents occurring between individuals or groups. Finally, educating parents in a formal manner (Hoff & Mitchell, 2009) may help in fostering trust in schools among parents overall.

According to participants from all four stakeholder groups, cyberbullying awareness and education should be a formal curricular program offered by schools to both students, parents, and other adults responsible for supervision of young people and/or technology use (Hoff & Mitchell, 2009). Also, according to participants from the counselor, administrator, and external authorities groups, technology and its use by young people should be accepted and embraced by school officials. Embracing technology instead of prohibiting or limiting the access of technology may help build trust between students and school officials.

<div align="center">Summary of Themes Discussion</div>

Multiple ideas and opinions were shared during the interview sessions. The data collected points to a number of themes related to cyberbullying. The five themes discussed in this chapter

have implications affecting multiple stakeholders, including the stakeholders represented by the groups participating in this study. Each theme indicates a strong role in the topic of focus, cyberbullying. Whether it is direct or indirect involvement, multiple groups contribute to the occurrence of cyberbullying.

The power of technology has definitely created a new culture in society, especially among our youth (Feinberg & Robey, 2008). While technology is not considered a stakeholder, it is the platform and vehicle for cyberbullying and other inappropriate activities in which many secondary school-aged children are involved. As technology usage continues to grow, so may the number of negative issues, including cyberbullying (Wright et al., 2009a). Troublesome incidents may increase because 1) more young people are using technology at earlier ages, which may lead to immature decisions made by young people when interacting online; and 2) a larger audience is present or has access to negative interactions between others (Feinberg & Robey, 2008). Also, it was mentioned in multiple focus-group sessions that more problems may be experienced by children who have excessive or unlimited access to technology and digital communication devices.

There were numerous discussions among participants about the factors influencing cyberbullying. It is interesting that the factor "imbalance of power," which exists in traditional bullying situations (Feinberg & Robey, 2008), is also present with cyberbullying. However, with cyberbullying, the "imbalance of power" is not established or fixed with one individual or group involved. In cases of cyberbullying, the "imbalance of power" can be shifted and anyone who wants to bully others online has the ability to do so. This is due to the power of anonymity, which is another factor contributing to cyberbullying. As discussed in Chapters IV and V, online communication creates anonymity, or a "veil" or "mask" for users because communication and

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interaction is not face-to-face (Mason, 2008). As a result, users can hide behind their online profiles or user names and interact with others as they choose, without fear of the immediate reaction, response, or consequences they would experience if in a face-to-face setting. Consequences in traditional bullying situations would be retaliation from the victim, bystanders, or punishment from adult authorities, who have a better chance of identifying the bully. This lack of fear or disinhibition effect (Mason, 2008), as defined in Chapters II and IV, leads to more opportunities and temptations for cyberbullying to occur.

The factors influencing cyberbullying and causing an increase in the number of incidents may be influenced by the amount of supervision children undergo when communicating and interacting online. Along with supervision or lack thereof, a lack of parental knowledge of technology was a frequent topic when study participants discussed causes for cyberbullying among students (Juvonen & Gross, 2008). As indicated by participants across all four stakeholder groups, parent and adult knowledge regarding technology application appears to be behind the general knowledge and skill possessed by many secondary school-aged children and adolescents. As discussed by study participants across stakeholder groups, an inferior or inadequate knowledge of technology use by parents is a definite problem when attempting to effectively control, supervise, and simply monitor their children's online communication with others and access to technology. There is no doubt among study participants that parents and adults in general must learn how to use technology, at least at an adequate level, in order to effectively monitor, supervise, and control their children's online activities, which may have a direct impact on their involvement with cyberbullying.

Cyberbullying has presented a difficult challenge, according to study participants, because of where it is occurring compared to where it is being discovered. Based on the data

collected, most cyberbullying occurs at home, or at least away from school. Therefore, school officials, at least initially, do not possess the authority to address these issues. However, many incidents occur at school as a direct result of those same online activities and interactions (Feinberg & Robey, 2008). While it is the school administrators' responsibility to address the incidents that occur at school, the origin of the problem cannot be addressed with the same disciplinary action because it did not occur at school or within school jurisdiction. A question was raised and discussed multiple times regarding who is responsible for these incidents and where are those boundaries of responsibility between schools, parents, and, in some cases, law enforcement. If nothing else, these responsibilities should be defined and communicated between and among the stakeholder groups, including school officials, parents, law enforcement, and students. As indicated by the data, many participants suggest that partnerships be formed between schools, parents, and law enforcement to better address cyberbullying in their communities and schools. Also, the idea of making students active partners in the effort was also mentioned. Partnerships should be formed in addressing cyberbullying issues, as well as other issues that transcend the defined boundaries of authority between school, home, and elsewhere (Taylor, 2008).

The final theme discussed in Chapter V pertained to the approach most study participants believed was most effective for addressing cyberbullying and other online issues. All focus groups discussed disciplinary action administered by schools as a means for addressing cyberbullying, however all groups realized the issue of authority or lack thereof by schools to address cyberbullying in this manner. Although some participants felt that disciplinary action would somewhat help in addressing these issues, if it where appropriate, most participants felt that strong partnerships between schools and parents would be the most effective approach. But,

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many participants across stakeholder groups also mentioned that for partnerships to be formed, knowledge and awareness regarding technology use, its dangers, and a need to intervene must be communicated and shared. Therefore, participants representing all four stakeholder groups shared their feelings about the importance of schools being the catalyst to forming these partnerships by creating formal education and awareness programs regarding technology, potential problems and dangers, and strategies/solutions to address those problems and dangers.

Implications

Multiple strategies for addressing cyberbullying were communicated during the focus group sessions. Participants discussed the importance of direct stakeholder involvement in the successful execution of each strategy. Stakeholder involvement includes participation from school officials (administrators, counselors, and teachers), parents, law enforcement, and students. After thorough data analysis, the idea of stakeholder responsibility appears throughout the data transcripts of all focus-group sessions. Study participants frequently mention the importance of responsibility and school system stakeholders playing a specific, yet crucial role in managing various types of responsibility. These school stakeholders are parents, students, school officials, and law enforcement.

Based on content analysis of participant discussions and responses, responsibility comes in different, but significant forms. Those forms of responsibility are executed by parents, students, school officials, and/or law enforcement. One responsibility emerging from the data is the monitoring and supervision of online activities. A second significant responsibility is forming partnerships against cyberbullying between and among the aforementioned stakeholder groups. A third responsibility is maintaining support and communication through those established partnerships. A fourth responsibility is the evaluation of current policies pertaining to student

technology use and harassment, which includes the potential impact of cyberbullying. A fifth and final responsibility pertains to the development and implementation of formal education and awareness programs for students, relative to cyberbullying and the proper use of technology and online etiquette.

The first responsibility, pertaining mainly to parents, is monitoring and supervising their children's online activities. Since the local school system has a current policy regarding restricted or limited use of personal technology by students at school, most personal online activities and technology use is conducted away from school. Therefore, parents are in position to monitor, supervise, and manage their children's technology use and online activities. As stated previously in Chapters II and IV, technology has become such a part of society's methods for communication, interaction, and retrieving information, particularly among youth, parents cannot expect to simply prohibit the use of technology to solve problems that their children may be experiencing online (Taylor, 2008). According to the data, participants believe parents must allow their children to utilize technology for the benefit of learning and having a positive social life and self-esteem, but should carefully and closely monitor their activities. This will help parents stay aware and informed of any issues, while maintaining a mutual trust and respect between parent and child. Trust was one of the elements mention by several parent participants as being key to having good relationships between them and their children, as well as between parents and schools.

Partnerships should be formed between schools, parents, law enforcement, and students (Beale & Hall, 207). Schools are the common link between the groups, therefore schools are charged with the responsibility of forming a grounds for communicating, sharing, and forming relationships between the groups. Because cyberbullying and other incidents occurring online

transcend boundaries of authority (Juvonen & Gross, 2008), it is crucial that partnerships be formed between schools, parents, and law enforcement (Beale & Hall, 2007). According to participants in the administrator and counselor groups, many issues arise at school that originated online or via cell phone communication (texting). While schools are left to deal with the manifested behaviors, school officials cannot address the origin of the issues based on a lack of authority (Willard, 2007). Therefore, parents must be included in the process of addressing these issues. Parents can administer consequences to their children for behavior taking place at home, while online, or any other place for that matter. Schools can only administer consequences for issues that occur at school or within school jurisdiction. So, parents are important pieces to the formula for effectively attacking issues that overlap boundaries of authority, such as cyberbullying (Juvonen & Gross, 2008).

Another important partnership for schools is with law enforcement. School administrators involve law-enforcement officials in cases of violence, such as fighting and weapons possession; and other incidents where the safety of students is threatened. Cyberbullying, particularly incidents severe or threatening in nature, can be included in those situations requiring assistance by law-enforcement officials (Taylor, 2008). As indicated by a couple of participants from the external authorities, when a student threatens the physical safety of another, law enforcement can become involved, especially when the parents of the victim file charges. Therefore, to maintain a safer school culture and learning environment, schools must establish and maintain strong partnerships with law enforcement to fully address issues that involve the actual or potential threat of violence and breach of student safety (Beale & Hall, 2007).

According to one participant from the counselor group, students should be considered an important partner as well. Students, who are aware of cyberbullying issues, as well as other

inappropriate online activities, can work with school administrators, counselors, and parents, although it may be risky to their reputation among their peers (Willard, 2007). Students, many times, are aware of issues and have access to information regarding their peers, of which adults are not aware. As stated before, the formation of healthy partnerships between stakeholder groups is crucial to the success and safety of all involved (Beale & Hall, 2007). School officials are faced with providing opportunities for those partnerships to develop and flourish by effectively communicating, sharing information, and making themselves available for feedback and for receiving assistance from the other groups.

School officials need to assess their school system's current policies pertaining to technology use by students. Based on the data, some study participants from the administrator, counselor, and external authorities groups believe that technology should be embraced more by schools and students should be allowed to use devices to enhance their learning. However, these opportunities for increased student technology use must be directly associated with and connected to the school system's and its respective schools' mission and learning goals. In particular, increased student technology use must be directly connected to the curriculum and plans for instruction and student learning. This would provide schools with more opportunities to teach students how to properly use those devices in both academic and personal contexts. Therefore, according to some participants, school system leaders and policy-makers should take a look at breaking down the barrier of prohibited use of personal technology use at school and allowing students to use those devices in positive ways, while enhancing their learning experiences. Although, it should be added that those same participants who suggested policy changes also believe they must coincide with a formal education program to teach students how

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to properly use those devices, as well as to teach them how to interact appropriately with others while online.

The need for a formal education and awareness program, regarding technology usage and online communication, was communicated more than any other potential solution for addressing cyberbullying and other technology-based problems present among students. Schools must develop programs that raise awareness about technology-based issues, including cyberbullying, sexting, Internet safety, and so forth. Their target audiences must be students and parents, and in some cases those two groups together simultaneously. Students should be taught proper online etiquette, including appropriate and inappropriate online communication and interaction with others (Hoff & Mitchell, 2009), conflict management skills, coping skills, and how to report and communicate problems to adults (Burrow-Sanchez et al., 2011). This thorough program should address proper actions by students, regardless of their role as a victim, perpetrator, or bystander in cyberbullying or other inappropriate situations. Several participants commented on their feelings that students today do not have the conflict management skills to interact appropriately with others, whether online or in face-to-face situations. Therefore, schools should focus on teaching students the necessary skills for managing conflict without it leading to inappropriate behavior such as name-calling, fighting, or bullying. Also, schools should teach students the difference between conflict and bullying (Levy, 2011). This can be done by defining what bullying and cyberbullying are, and compare that to simple disagreements, fights, and conflicts that occur more often.

Finally, schools should include information on how to cope with negative interactions and statements made about them online and how to effectively deal with it without resorting to improper actions such as retaliation, cyberbullying, threats, or violence (Burrow-Sanchez et al.).

As previously mentioned with schools altering current policies allowing students to bring and use technology items at school, schools must justify teaching conflict management and coping skills by connecting this instruction to the schools formal curriculum. Teaching students how to effectively manage conflict with others and cope with negative interaction and adversity must align and connect with the school system's and its respective school's mission and goals for student learning and achievement. If formal connections to curriculum and instruction are established, schools will be justified in teaching these skills to students, as well as allowing students to use technology on school grounds.

Parents should be educated on the serious nature of cyberbullying and other inappropriate online activities that occur today. Parents should be made aware of the dangers existing online, especially when children know their activities are not being monitored (Hoff & Mitchell, 2009). Inappropriate activities include cyberbullying, visiting inappropriate sites, interacting with unknown users in chat rooms, gaming sites, etc., and sexting (Willard, 2007). Parents should be educated on how to adequately use technology and access their children's devices and online profiles by equipping them with the knowledge and tools for establishing a plan of action and trust with their children; in order to effectively monitor, supervise, and ultimately control their children's online activities (Mason, 2008).

<center>Limitations to the Study</center>

Several factors present limitations to this particular study. First, the study was conducted with participants representing a single school system in central Alabama, which may create a regional bias of opinion concerning cyberbullying, its effects locally, and strategies and solutions for dealing with it. The ideas and opinions gathered may not be applicable to other school systems, areas of the state, regions of the United States, or other parts of the world. Secondly,

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data analysis was conducted by a single researcher, who used subjective reasoning to determine key ideas, thoughts, strategies, solutions, and themes that emerged from the data.

Focus group sessions were conducted with single stakeholder groups only. No sessions were mixed with participants representing different stakeholder groups. All groups were homogenous in terms of stakeholder type. Therefore, no opportunities existed for representatives of different stakeholder groups to share ideas, questions, and discussion. Furthermore, only 56 participants representing four different stakeholder groups took part in the study. This number, although large enough to conduct numerous focus group sessions, may not fully represent the ideas, opinions, and beliefs of others living and working in the school system being studied or areas and communities served by the school system. Finally, various numbers of focus group sessions for each stakeholder group were required to achieve a sufficient number of participants representing the two demographic areas of the school system: rural/sub-urban communities and sub-urban/urban communities. The variation in the number of focus group sessions may have created a lack of consistency in responses between stakeholder groups.

Recommendations for Future Research

After collecting data from nine different focus group sessions containing a total of 56 participants and analyzing 192 pages of data transcripts, several themes emerged that implicate multiple stakeholders involved. These themes contain data indicating causes of cyberbullying and solutions for addressing the problem, within the school system being studied. Participants provided sufficient data about the topic of study, however participant responses and discussions led to other questions and topics of interest that need more attention. Each recommendation for future research relates to ideas and questions posited in the focus group sessions and were

mentioned previously in the discussion of each theme. Also, one recommendation for future research addresses a limitation to this particular study.

The knowledge and skill of adults, particularly parents, regarding the use of technology, specifically digital communication devices, is one topic of interest that should be explored more thoroughly. Study participants across all four stakeholder groups indicated that many parents and adults in general possess inadequate knowledge about the effective use of technology and the methods of communication used by many students today (i.e. cell phones, text messaging, social networking, Internet, etc.). However, more investigation should be conducted to support this idea. Another key element that emerged during this study is the amount of trust that exists or does not exist between children and their parents, children and schools, and parents and schools. Participants mentioned the element of trust several times during focus group sessions and this factor should be studied in more depth to determine the importance of trust between stakeholder groups and how to enhance it in order to improve issues impacting students, parents, and schools, such as cyberbullying.

Another idea emerging from the data that warrants more attention and investigation is partnerships and the idea of forming partnerships to effectively address problems transcending boundaries of authority between parents and schools. Although numerous studies have been conducted investigating partnerships between schools and parents, more focus should be applied to partnerships between partnerships involving stakeholders and efforts to address cyberbullying (Beale & Hall, 2007). Based on this study's results, an important factor in the cause and solution of cyberbullying is the presence or lack thereof, and amount of parent awareness, monitoring, supervision, and control of their children's online activities. This topic should be explored more

to determine what types of monitoring and supervision are needed, as well as the amount of monitoring and supervision needed to effectively prevent or address cyberbullying.

During the study, several ideas were communicated concerning the effects of technology use upon today's youth. Ideas such as the creation of an alternate universe, the disinhibition effect, and the far-reaching power of technology are among these ideas (Mason, 2008). However, another idea demanding more research is the effect of technology upon users' interactions with others and the development of conflict management and coping skills. With less face-to-face interaction between children and adolescents who use digital communication devices to communicate, it would be interesting to determine if increased communication and interaction via technology have an effect upon the development of conflict management and coping skills among young people. Finally, more research is needed in the area of educational programs that focus on raising student and parent awareness about technology use and its dangers; as well as educating students and parents to effectively deal with problems and issues that may arise when engaged in numerous online activities, particularly communication with others (i.e. cyberbullying). Finally, this study should be replicated in other regions of the United States. This would address possible variations of participant perceptions and biases existing in certain geographical regions, such as this study and its setting in the southeastern region of the U.S. Stakeholder perceptions and biases in other geographical regions of the U.S. may vary and affect a particular study's results and conclusions.

<div align="center">Conclusion</div>

Cyberbullying is a complex phenomenon that affects many individuals in a number of stakeholder groups (Feinberg & Robey, 2008). This study sought to provide more insight into the ideas, perceptions, and beliefs about this phenomenon's effects upon the school system being

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studied. Also, this study sought to gather data from participants about whether or not school administrators should be able to address cyberbullying incidents, particularly those occurring off school grounds and outside of school authority to fully address problems with disciplinary action. The study gathered sufficient data supporting these purposes and discovered additional themes that emerged from analysis of the data. The effects of cyberbullying upon the school system and its stakeholders, including school administrators, are clearly evident. Data collected from the focus-group sessions indicate the school system and its surrounding areas and communities have stakeholders who experienced negative effects created by cyberbullying and related online activities.

Although no easy solutions or quick-fix strategies were discovered, the study revealed some interesting perceptions about cyberbullying and its effects upon the school system. Also, strategies and potential solutions were communicated by participants in all four stakeholder groups. The effectiveness of these strategies depends on the amount of effort, collaboration, and communication between and among school officials, parents, students, and law enforcement. While participants representing all four stakeholder groups communicated an understanding that school administrators cannot apply disciplinary action to cyberbullying behaviors occurring off school grounds, many offered similar ideas regarding how to address cyberbullying and related issues without using school-administered disciplinary action. According to many of the participants across all four stakeholder groups, schools should create formal education and awareness programs focusing on technology usage, online activities, and the dangers that exist. The content should be taught to both students and parents, with another component implemented for parents concerning the proper monitoring and supervision of their children's online activities. This educational component may be a more complete and permanent solution for addressing

cyberbullying and related issues (Hoff & Mitchell, 2009), as compared to simply allowing school administrators to address these same issues with disciplinary action, even though it is not authorized at the current time. Applying disciplinary action is only a reactive approach to dealing with cyberbullying and does little to promote increased awareness and knowledge among all stakeholders involved. Forming effective partnerships between stakeholder groups (Beale & Hall, 2007) and creating and implementing a comprehensive, formal education and awareness program is a proactive approach to solving issues like cyberbullying in this school system (Hoff & Mitchell). It may also apply to other school systems and communities served by those systems. Finally, parents must take responsibility for effectively and consistently monitoring, supervising, and possibly controlling their children's online activities to ensure their children's safety, well-being, and success, both online and elsewhere.

As indicated by data gathered in this study, schools in this system experience a significant amount of problems associated with students' improper online conduct, including cyberbullying. However, it is not a problem that can be successfully attacked solely by school officials, particularly administrators. Although schools bear a significant responsibility in developing and implementing education and awareness programs focusing on cyberbullying and proper online conduct, other stakeholders must share in effectively addressing cyberbullying and related issues. In order for the effects of cyberbullying to be minimized and reduced in this school system and surrounding communities, strong partnerships must be formed between and among the stakeholder groups; more consistent and effective supervision of youth online activities must be employed; and formal education and awareness programs about cyberbullying and related issues, geared toward students and parents, must be developed and implemented. Ultimately, it will require a community effort involving multiple stakeholders to effectively

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attack cyberbullying and related problems. However, it can be accomplished with organized

efforts, strong leadership, and growing trust among stakeholders involved.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Focus Group Interviews Guide (All Four Participant Groups)

Introduction
I want to thank you for coming out today. I know how busy all of you are and I really appreciate your willingness to help us out with this focus group.

How many of you have been in a focus group before? Well, the main reason why I bring a whole group of people together is so that I can hear all of your different ideas, perceptions, and beliefs. Today I've invited you here because I want to hear about **your** ideas, perceptions, and beliefs related to cyberbullying.

As you know, my name is Wesley Hester. And I am the principal researcher in this particular study. I am here today to learn from all of you about your knowledge, experiences, perceptions, and beliefs related to cyberbullying. Also, I am here to make sure each of you has a chance to talk and share with everyone. So being a good facilitator and listener are my primary roles. Okay. Let's talk about your role.

Moderator/Participant Roles
The basic way this works is that you should feel like this is **your** group. So you will be the talkers and I will be the listener. Even if you are a little shy, I want you to find the "talker" in you.

In fact, most of the talking you will be doing will be with each other. I'll have some questions that I need to ask, but for the most part you will be talking among yourselves. My basic job is to make sure that the topics get fully explored, and to make sure that we get to hear all of your different points of view.

Ground Rules
We do have a few basic ground rules, but these are really things about talking in groups that we all learned a long time ago.

1. The first thing is to participate. The reason that we have invited (say the number that applies) people today is so we can hear your different points of view. So we need everybody's help to have a good group.

2. The second thing is to take turns. We know that some people like to talk more than others, but sometimes you may have to hold on to some of the things you like to say, so everyone in the group has time to talk.

3. Finally, it's all right to disagree with each other, but please be polite when you do.

Taping Procedures
We will be audiotape recording the discussion here today. That way, I don't have to try to write down everything that you discuss in our group today.

Confidentiality
Any comments you make here today will be confidential. Your names or any other identifying information will not be included in our report. I am interested in what you as a **group** have to say, not in who says what. So I want you all to feel like you can speak freely.

Finally, I ask that you respect each other's privacy. Whatever we say here today is just for this group. I know you don't want other people repeating anything that would violate your privacy, so we all will need to trust each other.

Introductions (5 minutes)
Let's start by going around the table so you can introduce yourselves to each other. A focus group is most successful when you openly share ideas with each other, like people do in everyday conversations. So to get this conversation started today, everyone should:
1. First, state your first name.
2. Second, share one thing about yourself.
3. Third, share your ideas/opinions about the types of technologies, applications, communication devices used by students in [say selected school system] (Question #1 – protocol).

Interview Session (30 – 40 minutes)
There is a notepad in front of you. You can use the notepad to jot down ideas about cyberbullying. Just put down a few words or phrases to help think about this (**WAIT, about 3-4 minutes**).

Okay, now who can get the conversation started?

- Let's talk about your ideas about and definition of cyberbullying. Describe it in as full detail as possible.
- Allow others to respond/provide input. Allow the conversation to flow among the participants during this question.
- Allow participants time to respond and use notepads to write down ideas (provide time for participants to use notepads).
- Use the previous two steps (first two bulleted items) to guide the interview session through each question. After the first two questions have been discussed and responses shared (all participants provided equal opportunities to share), proceed with following questions (question item #3 through #10 in interview protocols – see Appendices B, D, F, or H).

WRAP-UP:
1. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to discuss any issues with me after the session or contact me (provided contact information with consent document). Also, feel free to contact Dr. Vivian Wright, my dissertation study chairperson (provided contact information in consent document).

2. Thank participants for coming.
3. Provide copy of informed consent.
4. Shake hands and thank again.

Appendix B

Focus Group Interview Protocol for School Administrators

1. What type of electronic communication devices/applications do students in [selected school system] use?

2. What is your definition of cyberbullying? What does it involve?

3. In your opinion, how is cyberbullying different from traditional (face-to-face) bullying? How is it similar?

4. Do you feel cyberbullying is a problem in the community? Why?

5. How does cyberbullying affect those involved in the issue (victims, bullies, witnesses, parents, school administrators, and law enforcement)?

6. Is cyberbullying a problem at your school? Why?

7. Do you feel it is the school's responsibility to address cyberbullying issues initiated off school grounds? Why? If not, who is responsible?

8. Do you believe administrators should use disciplinary action when addressing cyberbullying issues initiated off school grounds, if it affects students and the school's learning environment? Why or why not?

9. If so, what type of disciplinary actions would be appropriate for addressing these issues?

10. If not, what alternative methods or ideas can schools implement to counter cyberbullying issues affecting school culture?

Appendix C

Focus Group Interview Protocol for School Counselors

1. What type of electronic communication devices/applications do students in [selected school system] use?

2. What is your definition of cyberbullying? What does it involve?

3. In your opinion, how is cyberbullying different from traditional (face-to-face) bullying? How is it similar?

4. Do you feel cyberbullying is a problem in the community? Why?

5. How does cyberbullying affect those involved (victims, bullies, witnesses, parents, school administrators, and law enforcement)?

6. Is cyberbullying a problem at your school? Why?

7. Do you feel it is the school's responsibility to address cyberbullying issues initiated off school grounds? Why? If not, who is responsible?

8. Do you believe administrators should use disciplinary action when addressing cyberbullying issues initiated off school grounds, if it affects students and the school's learning environment? Why or why not?

9. If so, what type of disciplinary actions would be appropriate for addressing these issues?

10. If not, what alternative methods or ideas can schools implement to counter cyberbullying issues affecting school culture?

Appendix D

Focus Group Interview Protocol for Parents

1. What type of electronic communication devices/applications do students in [selected school system] use?

2. What is your definition of cyberbullying? What does it involve?

3. In your opinion, how is cyberbullying different from traditional (face-to-face) bullying? How is it similar?

4. Do you feel cyberbullying is a problem in the community? Why?

5. How does cyberbullying affect those involved (victims, bullies, witnesses, parents, school administrators, and law enforcement)?

6. Is cyberbullying a problem at your child's school? Why?

7. Do you feel it is the school's responsibility to address cyberbullying issues initiated off school grounds? Why? If not, who is responsible?

8. Do you believe administrators should use disciplinary action when addressing cyberbullying issues initiated off school grounds, but affect students and the school's learning environment? Why or why not?

9. If so, what type of disciplinary actions would be appropriate for addressing these issues?

10. If not, what alternative methods or ideas can schools implement to counter cyberbullying issues affecting school culture?

Appendix E

Focus Group Interview Protocol for External Authorities

1. What type of electronic communication devices/applications do students in [selected school system] use?

2. What is your definition of cyberbullying? What does it involve?

3. In your opinion, how is cyberbullying different from traditional (face-to-face) bullying? How is it similar?

4. Do you feel cyberbullying is a problem in the community? Why?

5. How does cyberbullying affect those involved (victims, bullies, witnesses, parents, school administrators, and law enforcement)?

6. Is cyberbullying a problem at local schools? Why?

7. Do you feel it is the school's responsibility to address cyberbullying issues initiated off school grounds? Why? If not, who is responsible?

8. Do you believe administrators should use disciplinary action when addressing cyberbullying issues initiated off school grounds? Why or why not?

9. If so, what type of disciplinary actions would be appropriate for addressing these issues?

10. If not, what alternative methods or ideas can schools implement to counter cyberbullying issues affecting school culture?