

**School Counselors' Perceptions of Cyberbullying**

by

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## Abstract

This was a qualitative study which examined school counselors' perceptions of cyberbullying. Thirty-two school counselors were asked seven reflection questions in regards to their experiences, roles/responsibilities, concerns, challenges and recommendations in handling cyberbullying occurrences with students. From the data analysis, three predominant themes emerged that were essential in better understanding the school counselors' perceptions. These themes were Training, Education, and School Policies in cyberbullying.

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## CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

Historically playgrounds, lunchrooms, bus stops and classrooms have been arenas for positive learning and social experiences for students. However, for decades bullying within these confines has negatively affected students causing reason to recognize it as a major social concern. Olweus (1986, 1991, as cited in Olweus, 1993) defines bullying “when he or she (a student) is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other students” (p. 9). In addition to the repetitive harassment and deliberate intent to do harm, most researchers agree a power imbalance between the victim and the bully must be present to constitute an act of bullying (Flynt & Morton, 2008; Nation, Vieno, Perkins & Santinello, 2007; Olweus, 1993).

The possibilities of being bullied are harsh realities for students in schools every day (Newman-Carlson & Horne, 2004). The Bureau of Justice statistics (2005) estimated 7% of public and private school students aged 12 to 18 reported they had been bullied at school within the past 6 months. Nansel, Overpeck, Pilla, Ruan, Simons-Morton and Scheidt’s (2001) national study of 15,686 students in grades sixth through tenth found 11% of participants were victims of bullying. Gender data found males significantly bullied more than females. Middle school aged children reported higher rates of bullying incidents than high school youth.

Researchers identify bully victimization to occur either directly or indirectly. Direct bullying includes acts of hitting, shoving or spitting. The perpetrators often taunt and tease their victim using racial slurs or sexual innuendos. The verbal harassment is recurrently threatening

and often denigrates the victim and even their family members. Relational bullying, an indirect form, is likely to include spreading rumors, ostracizing or recruiting others to participate in the bullying (Beran & Li, 2005).

Bullying literature suggests bullying incidents impact students in negative psychosocial ways. According to Nansel et al. (2001), “youth who are bullied generally show higher levels of insecurity, anxiety, depression, loneliness, unhappiness, physical and mental symptoms, and low self-esteem” (p. 2095). Negative psychological and cognitive consequences effect not only the victims as well as the bully, observer, schools and parents (Nordahl, Poole, Stanton, Walden, & Beran, 2008).

### **Technology and Cyberbullying**

Today’s recent technology explosion has afforded students a new arena for bullying (Kowalski & Limber, 2007). In the United States, youth have rapidly adopted the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) into their daily routines. PEW Internet and American Life Project (2007) found 87% of adolescents aged 12 to 17 used the Internet. In 2009, PEW Internet & American Life Project found 71% of teens have cell phones with 38% reporting using text messaging daily.

The worldwide web and cellular phones offer youth connectivity to social, entertainment, and educational needs (Patchin & Hinduja, 2006). With this exchange from personal contact to virtual contact, Williams and Guerra (2007) state, “internet bullying has emerged as a new and growing form of social cruelty” (p. S15). Students’ homes are no longer immune from the harassment and destruction of traditional bullying. This continued increase in technology has provided fertile grounds for bullying to occur 24 hours 7 days a week versus encounters on a daily basis at school.

Relatively, cyberbullying is a new phenomenon in the research field. Hinduja and Patchin (2009) defines it as “the willful and repeated harm inflicted through the use of computers, cell phones and other electronic devices” (p. 5). Other definitions include operationalization by power imbalance between victims and bully (Hinduja & Patchin, 2007). Although there is not a comprehensive universal definition, many researchers recognize the unique characteristics of cyberbullying which include anonymity of the perpetrator, an infinite audience for cruelty content to reach and potential sexual harassment and exploitation (Froeschle, Mayorga, Castillo & Hargrave, 2008; Hinduja et al, 2007; Kowalski et al., 2007; Shariff, 2005).

The cyberbullying phenomenon has captured researchers’ rapid interest within recent years (Bhat, 2008). An i-SAFE Inc. (2004) survey of 1,500 students in grades 4th through 8th findings showed that 42% of the students had been bullied while online; 1 in 5 have had it happen more than once. Harmful messages were received by 58% of the students, more than 4 in 10 had this happened to them more than once. Pew Internet and American Life Project (2005) recently released a study on cyberbullying that reported that 32% of all teenagers using the Internet at some point in time had received harassment. Only 17% of Hinduja and Patchin’s (2008) study of 2000 U.S. middle school students reported being bullied in their lifetime. Researcher’s explanations for widely ranged cyberbullying incidents are likely due from varying ages, methodologies of research, random selection, reporting periods and operational definitions of cyberbullying (Hinduja et al, 2009).

The Internet and cell phones provide a wide variety of communication tools used to bully which include email, instant messaging (IM), chat rooms or bash boards, short message services (SMS), web sites, and voting booths (Bhat,2008; Froeschle et al., 2008; Beale & Hall, 2007;

Kowalski et al., 2007). Popular Internet social networking sites include MySpace, Facebook, Bebo, Orkut, Friendster and Xanga (Bhat, 2008).

The paucity of empirical research regarding the psychosocial impact of cyberbullying lends many researchers to examine traditional bullying correlates. Bhat (2008) states “it is plausible that victims of cyberbullying and bullying would experience similar negative effects” (p. 55). These typically would include mental health problems and poor social adjustment (Li, 2006). Research also indicates cyberbullying may be linked to school violence, delinquency and lower academic achievement (Bhat, 2008; Froeschle et al., 2008; Hinduja et al., 2007).

The majority of today’s research relates to students’ perceptions and experiences with cyberbullying. Wolak, Mitchell and Finkelhor’s (2007) telephone survey of 1500 Internet users aged 10–17 reported experiences with cyber harassment that were not necessarily distressing. This finding might suggest cyberbullying is not as great a threat as perceived. However, cyberbullying has been linked to several suicides. Recent profile cases of cyberbullicide include Ryan Halligan who died in 2003 at the age of 13, Jeff Johnston who died in 2005 at the age of 15, Rachael Neblett who died in 2006 at the age of 17, and Megan Meier who died in 2006 at the age of 13 (Hinduja et al., 2009).

Cyberbullying may have a higher occurrence rate than is being reported in research. Multiple surveys and studies have found adolescents reluctant to report cyber harassment for several reasons including fear of restriction from cell phones and the Internet or their parents’ response may intensify the bullying (Juvonen & Gross, 2008; Kowalski et al., 2007; Keith & Martin, 2005). Juvonen et al. (2008) conducted a web-based survey of 1454 youth aged 12 to 17 years old. Seventy-two of the participants reported being bullied online with only 10% reporting the incidents to their parents. In addition to adolescents not reporting to parents, studies have

found students are hesitant to report incidents to school officials (Agatston, Kowalski & Limber, 2007; Li, 2006; Patchin et al., 2006).

Educational institutions have been effected by the recent proliferation of ICT. The National Center for Education Statistics (2005) reported nearly 100 percent of U.S. public schools had Internet access compared with 3 percent in 1994. With this technological growth, students may be at risk for cyber harassment in schools. Parallel with the technological progression, schools are being challenged to implement policies and programs to reduce risk and prevent victimization of students within the school walls. Fight Crime: Invest in Kids (2006) in polling 1000 adolescents found 45 percent of preteens were as likely to receive harmful messages via text messages at school. Policies for zero-tolerance, no cell phone usage on school grounds, and filtering software on all school computers have been recommendations to combat cyberbullying (Froeschle et al., 2008; Chibbaro, 2007; Worthen, 2007).

Schools are encouraged to adopt anti-cyberbullying programs. It is apparent from the literature that disciplinary boundaries are vague between school and outside of school regarding cyberbullying. Despite the United States First Amendment right of free expression, schools are generally allowed to execute disciplinary action to address cyberbullying if the “incidents substantially or materially disrupts learning, interferes with the educational process or school discipline, utilizes school-owned technology to harass or threatens other students or infringes on their civil rights” (Hinduja et al., 2009, p. 116). Bhat (2008) states “ignoring complaints about cyberbullying because it did not happen on school grounds is not justifiable because the effects of cyberbullying are experienced in school” (p. 60).

In the past, numerous anti-bullying programs have been introduced to schools and parents in order to reduce bullying behaviors. The Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (BPP; Olweus,

1993) is recognized as one of ten programs recommended as a national violence initiative. The program's core elements include assessing the extent of bullying problems within schools and fostering collaboration with students, staff and parents. The implementation of the BPP has shown bullying behaviors reduced by 25% to 50%. i-SAFE Inc. is a system level intervention available to schools to assist in developing Internet safety curriculum for teachers, parents and students. However, there is a lack of empirical evidence to validate the effectiveness of such programs (Mason, 2008).

### **School Counselors**

In review of the current literature, it becomes evident there is a greater emphasis placed on students' self-reports of cyberbullying experiences than with school educators and counselors. There is no empirical research directed toward the experiences of school counselors and cyberbullying. Today, bullying behaviors are more easily recognized by many teachers and administrators. However, Li (2006) states "few are aware that students are being harassed through electronic communication" (p. 158). Bhat (2008) suggests "gaining relevant knowledge about cyberbullying and its modalities, and being viewed as a knowledgeable resource person is thus an important step for school counselors to take" (p. 60). Thence, it is vital to examine school counselors' perceptions, awareness, experiences and their role in cyberbullying.

### **Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this study was to examine school counselor's perceptions of cyberbullying. This study's primary focus explored the school counselor's role in responding to student's cyberbullying occurrences. This qualitative study was conducted using reflection questions to examine these issues. The study was directed toward school counselors in order to better understand the phenomenon from a school counselor's perspective and to provide

knowledge on current prevention and intervention practices that may increase school counselors' awareness and effectiveness dealing with cyberbullying.

### **Significance of the Study**

A review of the cyberbullying literature appears to expose a gap regarding empirical research regarding school counselors and their direct involvement with cyberbullying.

Throughout the literature are guidelines and programs that discuss the school counselors' potential roles and responsibilities in dealing with cyberbullying (Bhat, 2008; Froeschle et al., 2008; Hinduja et al., 2008; Chibbaro, 2007). However, there are no studies that examine school counselors' direct experiences with cyberbullying. Therefore, the research in this study offered a better understanding of school counselors' perspectives and lends itself to future examination of this issue.

### **Research Problem**

The research questions explored concentrated on school counselors' awareness of cyberbullying, students' experiences, and effectiveness in responding to student reports of cyberbullying. The research questions were:

- 1) What are school counselors' interactions or experiences with students who have been involved with cyberbullying and the importance of the issue of cyberbullying?
- 2) What are school counselors' perceptions of how cyberbullying should be addressed in schools?
- 3) What do school counselors' identify as the challenges of addressing cyberbullying in the schools?
- 4) What are school counselors' concerns about their preparation to deal with cyberbullying in the schools?

5) What are the school counselor's perceptions of their role and responsibilities in implementation of intervention and prevention of cyberbullying?

6) What are school counselor's recommendations for addressing the issue of cyberbullying in schools?

## CHAPTER II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The beginning of this chapter is a review of the literature on bullying, technological advances and cyberbullying. Specifically, constructs of both bullying and cyberbullying have been described. The second part of the chapter focused on schools' and school counselors' prevention and intervention strategies dealing with cyberbullying.

### **Traditional Bullying**

The phenomenon of bullying is one of long-standing in the schoolyards and research. Over the many years of research, researchers have articulated widely accepted definitions of bullying. In addition, the plethora of research has produced coherent constructs that give researchers a greater understanding of bullying. Dan Olweus, often recognized as the “founding father” of bullying research, defines bullying “when he or she [a student] is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other students” (Olweus, 1993, p. 9). The tenants of intentionality to harm and repetitive behavior are supported by most researchers (Nansel et al., 2001).

In addition to the repetitive harassment and deliberate intent to do harm, many researchers have included the presence of a power imbalance between the victim and the bully to constitute an act of bullying (Flynt & Morton, 2008; Nation et al., 2007; Olweus, 1993; Shariff, 2008). Generally, the victim and the bully present differently in their psychological and physical strengths (Nation et al., 2007). Weaknesses in these areas tend to afford the bully to gain control easier and dominate their victim (Nation et al., 2007). Olweus's (1993) definition indicates if the

imbalance of power is not present between the victim and the bully, it is not considered an act of bullying. Historically, bullies select weaker and defenseless victims as their targets.

Bullies commonly exhibit characteristics which include, but are not limited to, popularity, physical strength, extroversion, intelligence and socioeconomic status (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009, Olweus, 1993). Findings also indicate bullies have poor relationships with parents and take positive attitudes toward violence (Olweus, 1993). Olweus (1993) states underlying bullying behavior suggests three interrelated motives which include bullies have that strong need for power and dominance, they have developed a certain degree of hostility toward the environment, and they find personal benefits and rewards in acts of bullying.

Typical victim characteristics apply to both males and females; however less research has been directed toward females (Olweus, 1993). Common characteristics include feelings of anxiety and insecurity. Victims' low self esteem often lends itself to behaviors of being cautious, sensitive and quiet. Frequent negative thoughts of being failures, feeling stupid, ashamed and unattractive are not uncommon for victims of bullying. Other struggles may include difficulty in making friends and struggling with emotional and social adjustments (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009).

Generally, bullying behaviors are face to face (FTF) (Mason, 2008). These overt forms of bullying may include acts of hitting, shoving or spitting (Milsom & Gallo, 2006; Shariff, 2005). Overt attacks of bullying are characterized by open attacks to the victim, which may intensify if bystanders are present (Shariff, 2008). Extreme forms of this type of bullying may include locking peers in school lockers, strangling, or using weapons to inflict harm (Shariff, 2008).

Verbal forms of bullying often include taunting and teasing the victim using racial slurs or sexual innuendos (Jacobsen & Bauman, 2007; Shariff, 2008). These acts are more subtle and manipulative which include ostracism and intimidation toward the victim (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009). This type of harassment is recurrently threatening and often denigrates the victim and even their family members. Additionally, bullies may steal or damage the victims' personal belongings and steal or extort money from the victim (Olweus, 1993).

Covert forms of bullying are identified as more emotional and psychologically damaging to the victims. The acts can be random or discriminatory (Shariff, 2005). Relational bullying is likely to include spreading rumors, ostracizing or recruiting others to participate in the bullying (Beran & Li, 2005; Nansel et al., 2001). These nonphysical forms of harassment foster breeding grounds for rumor spreading and sexual comments (Nansel et al., 2001). Consequences for the victim often include social sabotage and exclusion. The bullies' intentions often include destroying their victims' interpersonal relationships (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009).

In regards to gender, studies have found males more often than females participate in the physical and verbal forms of bullying (Nation et al., 2007; Nansel et al., 2001). Females tend to participate in covert forms of bullying such as relational bullying (Nansel et al., 2001). Generally, male bullies display the need to dominate physically, showing little if any empathy for others. Their actions are usually of an impulsive nature and exhibit aggressive reactive patterns (Mason, 2008; Olweus, 1993). In opposition to the male bully, females tend to have a strong need to socially dominate, being the center of attention within their peer groups (Mason, 2008; Olweus, 1999). It also appears that both females and males are more malicious to those of the same sex than the opposite (Tarshis & Huffman, 2007, as cited in Pergolizzi, Richmond, Macario, Gan, Richmond, & Macario, 2009).

According to Nansel et al.'s (2001) national study of 15,686 participants in grades six through ten, findings indicated 29.9% reported moderate or frequent bullying involvement, with 13% being the victims and 10.6% being the bully. The act of bullying was assessed by respondents' report of the frequency of the bullying and identification of the ways they were bullied. Bullying included five ways which included belittled about religion/race, belittled about looks/speech, hit/slapped/pushed, subjects of rumors or lies, and subject of sexual comments/gestures. Other results indicated the frequency of bullying was higher in sixth through eighth grade students. Males reported more physical acts of bullying over females, whereas females participated in more psychological victimization through rumors or sexual comments. Negative statements in regards to religion and race occurred at a lower frequency for both sexes (Nansel et al., 2001).

The possibilities of being bullied are harsh realities for students in schools every day (Newman-Carlson & Horne, 2004). The Bureau of Justice statistics (2005) estimated 7% of public and private school students ages 12–18 reported they had been bullied at school within the past 6 months. Nansel et al. (2001) estimates bullying involvement among American youth grades 6 through 10 is approximately 30%. Clearly, bullying is an aggressive behavior, capable of inflicting physical or psychological ramifications for all its participants.

### **Psychosocial Impact of Bullying**

There is increasing evidence that bullying can have significant psychological, social, emotional and educational effects on those being bullied and in some instances on those who perpetrate the bullying (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009; Olweus, 1993; Shariff, 2008). While there is evidence that not all incidents of bullying produce such negative consequences, there is far more evidence that being the victim can have significant repercussions (Patchin & Hinduja, 2006).

Specifically, the majority of existing studies have found bullying to impact both victim and the bully in negative psychosocial ways. Victimization may include a range of negative psychological and cognitive consequences for victims, bullies, and those who witness the bullying (Nordahl et al., 2008).

Those tormented by bullies may display suicidal ideation, develop eating disorders and chronic illnesses. Victims may also experience regularly feelings of vengefulness, anger and self-pity (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009). It is not uncommon for victims to run away from home due to their humility, embarrassment and fear of returning to school. Nansel et al.'s (2001) findings indicated victims demonstrated poorer social and emotional adjustment, reporting it was difficult to make friends among classmates. Extreme cases of victimization may lead to physical assault, homicide or suicide (Patchin & Hinduja, 2006).

In the fatal shootings at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado in 1999, the school system was challenged to address the issue of bullying. The teenagers who carried out the shooting, Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, were reported to have been bullied and ostracized by their classmates (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009; Patchin & Hindjua, 2006). Another study looked at 37 school shootings occurring from 1974 to 2000, discovering that 71% of the attackers had expressed they had been bullied and victimized prior to the incidents (Vossekuil, Fein, Reddy, Borum & Modzeleski, 2002 as cited in Hinduja & Patchin, 2009).

There are negative consequences as well for the students who bully. Findings indicate they are more likely to be involved in fighting, vandalizing, shoplifting, dropping out of school and drug use (Nansel et al., 2001; Olweus, 1993). Olweus's (1993) study reported youth who had bullied had at least one criminal record before the age of 24. Approximately 60% of these youth had bullied in grades six through nine. While this is not surprising, bullies tend not to be

as socially isolated as their victims, reporting a greater ease of making friends (Nansel et al., 2001).

Bullies and their victims are not the only ones impacted in negative psychosocial ways. The bully/victim, those who are both bullied and bully others, tend to have lower academic achievement and engage in cigarette smoking (Nansel et al., 2001). In addition, they are most likely to have higher psychosocial challenges, including poor relationships with peers and elevated feelings of loneliness (Nansel et al., 2001). Card and Hodges' (2000, as cited in Zins et al., 2007) study found males who scored high on victimization and aggression were most likely to carry weapons to middle schools.

Bystanders who observe bullying victimization may develop feelings of helplessness, anxiety or vulnerability. They often feel powerless to act on behalf of the victim. Consequently, this often leaves the bystander with feelings of guilt. Witnesses of bullying often lose a sense of security and suffer in academic achievements in the school environment (Newman-Carlson & Horne, 2004). It is also not uncommon for bystanders not to report incidents of bullying. Pergolizzi et al.'s (2009) study of 587 students in seventh and eighth grades found half of the respondents reported doing nothing when they saw someone being bullied with only 7% telling an adult. In addition, only 7% recruited friends to help the victim when bullying occurred.

Nansel et al.'s (2001) national study of 15,686 students in grades sixth through tenth found no noticeable differences in the psychosocial consequences among victims and bullies. According to Nansel et al. (2001), those who are bullied generally show higher levels of insecurity, anxiety, depression, social isolation, unhappiness, and low self-esteem. Results also indicated those who bullied often exhibited less interest in school activities, lower academic

achievement and may likely be involved with other problematic behaviors such as smoking and substance abuse.

In another study, Kumpulainen, Rasanen, and Puura (2001) evaluated the relationship between bullying and psychiatric disorders. Data was collected from 423 parents and 420 children conducted through interviews. Their findings indicated children involved in bullying incidences were more likely to develop psychiatric disorders in comparison to children not involved in such incidences. It was found that half of the victims and approximately two-thirds of bullies and bully/victims had been diagnosed with a psychiatric disorder. Anxiety, depression and attention deficit disorder were most common among the victims. Bullies and bully/victims were most commonly found to present with attention deficit disorder, depression and oppositional/conduct disorder.

Studies have found these negative psychosocial effects are not necessarily temporary. Effects can be seen into adulthood as evidence of the potential long term implications from bullying (Patchin & Hinduja, 2006). Bullies may continue in criminal and delinquency behaviors along with alcohol abuse (Magnusson et al., 1983, as cited in Olweus, 1993). Depression and lower self-esteem often manifests and continues in the victims' life (Magnusson et al. 1983, as cited in Olweus, 1993).

Additionally, the educational climate has been known to experience the disruption bullying generates, affecting the emotional and physical safety of students. In 1993, the United States Department of Justice and The National Association of School Psychologists estimated 160,000 children missed school each day due to the threat of bullying (Lee, 1993 as cited in Newman-Carlson & Horne, 2004). Consequently, students often view schools as unsafe learning environments. Newman-Carlson and Horne (2004) states, "unfortunately, many of these

children are reluctant to request aid from school staff for fear of reprisals and because of inadequate protection” (p. 260).

The deficit of effective adult responses to school bullying has been addressed in the literature. Bullying has been widely recognized by school officials and various intervention strategies have been introduced to manage the problem (Nordahl et al., 2008). Specifically, anti-bullying programs give emphasis to positive teacher and parent involvement and firm, consistent sanctions for bully/victim problems (Nordahl et al., 2008; Olweus, 1993). Findings in the bullying literature indicate schools that support aggressive and bullying behaviors likely will have students who see victimization as normative behaviors (Williams et al., 2007). Despite the numerous intervention recommendations for bully prevention, there has been a lack of empirical research to corroborate the effectiveness of teacher-training programs (Newman-Carlson & Horne, 2004; Zins et al., 2007).

Typically, bullying requires a physical location which is geographically proximal for the bully and the victim (Hinduja et al., 2007). Historically, common bullying venues have been school classrooms, playgrounds or public places such as bathrooms and bus stops (Patchin & Horne, 2006). Over the decades, home has been considered the safe environment to escape from the schoolyard bully. This is no longer the case. Bullying is no longer confined to the school grounds. Technological advances have transformed the playground of students’ lives, no longer limiting social cruelty just to local schools and communities (Williams & Guerra, 2007).

### **Technology and Bullying**

The existence of bullying in cyberspace is not surprising considering the rates that particular technologies are being espoused by youth. The vast majority of teens own or have access to a variety of media devices which include desktop computers, laptop computers, cell

phones or personal digital devices such as Blackberries or Sidekicks (PEW Internet and American Life Project, 2005). According to the U.S. Department of Commerce (2004), the number of households with Internet computers grew by 6.9 million between September 2001 and October 2003 and in 2004, 61.8% of households were equipped with computers with 87.6% using the computer to access the Internet. International in scope, market research in 2007 reported the Internet has been accessed by 1.26 billion people, which accounts for approximately 19 percent of the world population (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009).

In 2000, the PEW Internet and American Life Project began studies to identify the social impact of the Internet on individuals. In PEW's Teens and Technology study (2005), it was reported 87% of youth aged 12 to 17 used the Internet with 51% going online daily. This percentage equals to approximately 21 million youth Internet users, up from the 17 million in 2000. Other findings included teens were more likely to access the Internet from home. In regards to age, older teens aged 15 to 17 go online more frequently than younger teens with 7<sup>th</sup> grade marking the surge of teens connecting to the Internet.

According to PEW's Teens and Technology study (2005), the basic demographics of online teens and their parents show 13% of American teenagers do not go online. In particular, teens from low income families earning under \$30,000 annually are least likely to access the Internet. Among races, African American teens reported least likely going online. Gender status showed female teenagers having a higher level of engagement online than males.

Schools as well as homes afford Internet access to all ages. Li (2006) states "parallel to the fast development of technology and drastic increasing adoption of such technology including the Internet and cell phones in society, many schools are enthusiastically embracing new technology" (p. 158). The Digest of Education Statistics (2008) reported 99% of U.S. public

schools are capable of Internet access. This has been an increase up from 51% in 1998. PEW's Teens, Technology and Schools (2005) reported approximately 16 million students access the Internet from school which is a 45% increase from the 2000 study. Despite the high percentage of Internet availability in schools, 32% of all teens reported not using the Internet at school (PEW, 2005).

Equivalent to the fast adoption of Internet use, youth are rapidly utilizing cell phones as portable computers. PEW Internet and American Life Project (2009) has conducted extensive research over the past five years to ascertain cell phone usage comparison data of teenagers and their parents. The project first surveyed teens in 2004 and is currently conducting a survey of teens and parents with the results being released in 2010. Historically, parents' cell phone ownership was considerably higher than teens. However, this latest study show teens are narrowing the gap in cell phone ownership.

According to the PEW Internet and American Life Project (2009), cell phone usage has climbed steadily among teens from 45% in 2004 to 63% in 2006 and 71% in 2008. Among teenagers, older teens are more likely to own a phone than younger teens. The largest increase of phone ownership usually occurs around the age of 14. Fattah (2003, as cited in Patchin & Hinduja, 2006) reports more than 150 million individuals, including half of the youth aged 12 to 17 years old, own cell phones.

The exponential technology growth has afforded youth with a vast array of communication possibilities. Hinduja and Patchin (2009) state "Internet-enabled computers allow youth to conduct research for schoolwork, communicate with friends from afar, play games, and engage in a myriad of other positive, prosocial activities" (p. 9). In regards to the usage of cell phones, PEW Internet and American Life Project (2009) report teens daily engage

in text messaging and voice calling as a dominant means of communicating with friends. Williams et al. (2007) suggests social interactions once seen in a schoolyard venue have increasingly moved to virtual contact in cyberspace.

This proliferation of technological growth has appeared to open a new venue for bullying, moving from the physical to the virtual worlds of school-aged children (Kowalski & Limber 2007; Patchin & Hinduja, 2006). Butterfield and Broad (2002, as cited in Hinduja & Patchin, 2007) state,

Social change always provides opportunities for the predatory behavior that is characteristic of a small number of people. With the new technologies that support the Internet, those who cannot adjust rapidly, and that is all of us, are at risk from those who can and will deploy technology as a criminal weapon. (p. 90)

This phenomenon is commonly known as cyberbullying. Campbell (2005, as cited in Bhat, 2008, p. 54) refers to “cyberbullying or the use of technology to harm others as ‘the dark side’ of technology”.

### **Cyberbullying**

Cyberbullying is defined as “the willful and repeated harm inflicted through the medium of electronic text” (Patchin & Hinduja, 2006, p.90). Juvonen and Gross (2008) term it as “the use of the Internet or other digital communications devices to insult or threaten someone” (p. 497). Williams et al. (2007) refers to Internet bullying as “the willful use of the Internet as a technological medium through which harm or discomfort is intentionally and repeatedly inflicted through indirect aggression that targets a specific person or group of persons” (p. S15). Cyberbullying is often identified as the covert form of verbal and written bullying (Mason, 2008).

Shariff (2008) states “when we define a behavior, it is important to remember it is an action that take place in a particular context, at a particular time, with various influences operating on the individual(s) who take the action” (p. 28). He further states, “the term ‘cyberbullying’ describes forms of bullying that use technology” (p. 30). Other synonymous terms for cyberbullying are cyber harassment, text bullying, short message service (SMS) bullying, Internet bullying, digital bullying, online social cruelty, and electronic bullying (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009).

Other authors have broadened cyberbullying definitions to include specific technologies used in cyberbullying. Belsey (as cited in Bhat, 2008) defines cyberbullying as ‘the use of information and communication technologies (ICT) to support deliberate, repeated, and hostile behavior by an individual or group that is intended” (p. 54). Keith and Martin’s (2005) definition includes specific examples of ICT “such as e-mail, instant messaging (IM), defamatory personal Web sites and defamatory online personal polling Web sites” (p. 224). Agatston et al. (2007) include in their definition the use of cellular phones and personal digital assistants as instruments of ICT to conduct cyberbullying.

Cyberbullying is often observed by researchers as a cyber extension of traditional bullying. The limited empirical research on cyberbullying lends many researchers to examine correlates of traditional bullying. A better understanding of this type of bullying may be gained by looking at issues that are unique to bullying that occur in cyberspace. First, bullying through cyberspace allows the perpetrator to remain anonymous (Bhat, 2008; Kowalski et al., 2007; Shariff, 2008). Many victims of cyberbullying are unaware of the identity of their perpetrator and are unable to trace them. Kowalski et al. (2007) conducted a study to examine the prevalence of electronic bullying among middle school students. Participants included 1,915

girls and 1,852 boys who were administered a questionnaire packet that investigated electronic experiences with bullying. The relationship between victim and perpetrator revealed that almost half (48%) of the victims had no idea who had electronically bullied them.

Unlike overt forms of traditional bullying, cyberbullying is less personal and anonymity may result in greater hostility than might be expressed in person (Li, 2006). Kowalski et al. (2007) suggests the ability to mask or steal identities creates opportunities for others to express thoughts otherwise they would not say face-to-face. Froeschle et al. (2008) suggest the ease and freedom of cyber anonymity may lower perpetrators sense of accountability for their actions. Students who do not engage in bullying at school may choose to victimize classmates behind the hidden walls of technology to protect their identity (Shariff, 2005).

The unknown identity of the cyber bully may leave victims speculating if each person they come in contact with is possibly their perpetrator (Kowalski et al., 2007). In this study of 3,767 middle school students, 48% did not know who had electronically victimized them. The ability to hide behind cyber threats shields the victims' emotional reactions (Kowalski et al., 2007). Shariff (2005) suggests that "fear of unknown cyber-perpetrators among classmates and bullying that continues at school distracts all students (victims, bystanders, and perpetrators) from schoolwork" (p. 470). He further states the absence of visual confirmation of perpetrators has potential to create a hostile school environment leaving students to feel unsafe and unwanted.

Participation from an infinite audience is another issue specific to cyberbullying (Bhat, 2008). Bullying behaviors in a schoolyard can quickly move to cyberspace captivating and recruiting hundreds of perpetrators to join in the abuse (Shariff, 2008). Leishman (as cited in Bhat, 2008) described a cyber incident with a Canadian adolescent who was victimized through a website. The site posted false information regarding his sexuality, hygiene and his appearance.

The adolescent reported “rather than just some people, say 30 in a cafeteria, hearing them all yell insults at you, it’s up there for 6 billion people to see” (p. 56). This virtual space can be accessed instantly. Harmful messages and images can be quickly distributed and viewed by worldwide audiences (Kowalski et al., 2007).

Another key issue that makes cyberbullying problematic is the lack of supervision (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009, 2006; Mason, 2008). Research has found that adult monitoring percentages are low and may be a factor in online harassment among youth (Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004). For example, Ybarra and Mitchell (2004) interviewed 1,501 youth aged 10 to 17 along with one parent or guardian to examine characteristics of Internet harassment and aggression. Approximately 34% of reported aggressors and victims used the Internet at least 3 hours per day. During these interactions more than 50% of these youth reported inadequate parental monitoring of their Internet use, with 30% of the caregivers indicating they use blocking software on their home computers.

Lastly, the concept of disinhibition is an issue that increases the extent and scope of harm through cyberbullying (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009; Mason, 2008). The Internet provides a mask for the bully allowing freedom from restraints on behavior and from control of impulsivity. Suler (2004, as cited in Mason, 2008) states “cyberspace creates an illusion of invisibility because it is faceless” (p. 32). Joinson (1998, as cited in Mason, 2008) suggests cyberspace is an arena where bullies can easily and comfortably dissociate from their real identity to create a virtual identity to carry out their aggressive attacks.

Research indicates youth are at an increasing risk for cyber victimization. The Pew Internet and American Life Project Cyberbullying and Online Teens (2007) revealed approximately 32% of all teens had been targets in a range of cyberbullying attacks. In 2000 and

2005, two national surveys were conducted with youth Internet users' ages 10–17 identifying online threats. In 2000, 6% reported being subjected to online harassment and in 2005 the number rose to 9%. In addition, youth who reportedly used the Internet to harass someone rose from 1% to 9% (Wolak et al., 2007). i-SAFE Inc. (2004) conducted a survey of 1,500 students in grades 4-8 from across the United States. According to i-SAFE, 42% of the students were bullied while online and 21% of the students received mean or threatening e-mail or other messages.

Unlike traditional bullying, girls tend to cyberbully and are cyberbullied more than boys (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009, 2007; Kowalski et al., 2007; Li, 2006; Shariff, 2005). Kowalski et al.'s (2007) survey of 1,915 females and 1,852 boys grades 6 through 8 found 25% of the females versus 11% of the males reported being bullied and 13% of the females reported bullying someone compared to only 8.6% of the males. The Internet may afford girls with a social connection void of worries of how others perceive their physical appearance (Kowalski et al., 2007). In addition, research consistently shows that females have a tendency to rely on more indirect forms of aggression (Keith et al., 2005; Kowalski et al., 2007). The Internet may easily provide girls the ground to conduct these acts of relational aggression (Keith et al., 2005).

Contrary to the decline in traditional bullying throughout middle and high school, cyberbullying tends to peak in later middle school to high school (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009; Wolak & Finkelhor, 2007). Hinduja and Patchin (2009) suggests “7<sup>th</sup> grade seems to be an important transition point when it comes to online behaviors and cyberbullying specifically” (p. 56). Where racial differences have been largely inconclusive in traditional bullying, White students are more likely to participate in cyberbullying activities (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009).

Explanations for these differences may be other races or economic groups cannot easily access or afford these technologies (Hinduja et al. 2009).

On an international scope, cyberbullying is not a phenomenon confined within the boundaries of the United States. Even though research is limited and intermittent, the severity of the issue is giving cause for global concern (Shariff, 2008). In the United Kingdom, children's charity NCH and Tesco Mobile (2005) questioned 770 youth aged 11 to 19 in a mobile bullying survey. Findings indicated one in five (20%) admitted to experiencing some sort of digital bullying. Fourteen percent of the threats were via mobile text messaging. One in 10 of the youth admitted being photographed by a mobile phone camera. Youth who had a photo taken reported that this made them uncomfortable, embarrassed or threatened. Twenty eight percent of the respondents who had been bullied did not tell anyone. As a result of this survey NCH and Tesco mobile created a text messaging service for teenagers facing mobile phone bullying.

Worldwide, the Internet and cell phones appear to be common mediums of technology used in cyber victimization (Froeschle et al., 2008). Keith et al. (2005) reported over past years, parents provided youth with cell phones as safety measures to track and stay connected with their children (Keith et al., 2005). The authors suggest today these same cell phones are now potential tools of cyber harassment. Cell phone usage provides voice communication, as well as text messaging, digital pictures and videos for perpetrators to deliver harassment to their victims (Shariff, 2008). NCH and Tesco Mobile's (2005) survey of 770 youth aged 11 to 19 revealed 10% of the respondents had either felt unnerved, humiliated or threatened by others who had taken a picture of them through a cellular phone camera.

The Internet offers widespread tools of electronic communication for social networking as well as for cyberbullying (Bhat, 2008; Froeschle et al., 2008; Kowalski et al., 2007). Internet

tools such as email, instant messaging, chat rooms, web sites, blogs, and social network sites are conduits for activities of photoshopping, rumor spreading, flaming/trolling, identity theft/impersonation and physical threats (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009). Relatively little is known whether certain forms of electronic communication are riskier than others (Juvonen & Gross, 2008). However, Ybarra, Mitchell, Wolak and Finkelhor's (as cited in Juvonen & Gross, 2008) study found the use of instant messaging, blogging and chat rooms increase the odds of being electronically harassed.

Emails, one of the earliest forms of cyberbullying, provide perpetrators the capability to send harmful statements instantly to large audiences (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009). These authors illustrate an email bullying experience with an 11-year old girl from California:

“I was surfing the Internet and decided to look at my e-mail. Kristina, a friend from school in an email said, “tomorrow watch your back we are coming for you.” It made me feel so bad I started to cry. Nobody likes me.” (p. 25)

Instant messaging affords the Internet audience communication in real time. Instant messaging programs permit users to create “buddy lists” which provides names of friends who are currently online. These programs are designed for users to selectively block certain usernames if desired. However, screen names can be easily created that are unidentifiable to send malicious and harmful statements to others. The use of this technology allows direct messaging, verifies receipt of message instantly and can be forwarded to others not originally intended (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009).

Social network sites, such as Facebook, MySpace, and YouTube, provide social means for youth to stay connected with friends. These sites provide a variety of communication tools such as messaging systems, bulletin boards and blogging services. These serve many purposes

for youth from offering means to socialize with friends and peers to creating a personal online image for themselves (Boyd & Jenkins, 2006 as cited in Shariff, 2008). In addition to the benefits and convenience of social networking, these sites lend concern for the possible vulnerability of youth to predators and pedophiles (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009).

According to Herring (2002, as cited in Shariff, 2008), 25% of Internet users aged 10–17 were exposed to unwanted pornographic images, which included 8% being violent and the remaining images involved sex and nudity. Cybersexual harassment may take on many forms ranging from sexualized comments, pornography that dehumanizes women and “flaming” which is overt attacks on a person (Li, 2006). Bhat (2008) reports many victims do not report this type of harassment due to the additional embarrassment linked to the sexual persecution.

Online predator risks have been associated with social networking sites. The Associated Press (2006, as cited in Hinduja & Patchin, 2008) reported seven underage girls were fondled or had consensual sex with adult males they had met through MySpace. Filosa, a U.S. Attorney (2007, as cited in Wolak, 2008) stated “Young girls who are innocently posting very personal information, or their identities, on these sites are setting themselves up for disaster”.

The Pew Internet and American Life Project (2007) conducted a random telephone survey of youth between the ages of 12 and 17 among a sample of 1,100 parent/child pairs. The goal of the project was to find what impact the Internet had on children, families and communities. The report found 55% of online teens aged 12–17 created personal profiles, uploaded pictures and posted videos on social networking sites. U.S. federal agents at a news conference suggested these sites are not as innocent and friendly as they seem. They further warned sites such as Facebook and MySpace are often used “by sexual predators as victim directories” (Wolak, Finkelhor, Mitchell, & Ybarra, 2008, p. 111).

Photoshopping, image-editing software, has become a common form of cyberbullying. Hinduja et al. (2009) states, “while sometimes done strictly for clean or even flattering humorous intent, in cyberbullying instances, photoshopping generally involves doctoring images so that the main subject is placed in a compromising or embarrassing context or scene” (p. 35).

Documented incidents support the concept that the misuse of technology is capable of breeding malicious and sometime deadly consequences (Bhat, 2008; Li, 2006). A most recent case of the possible link to cyberbullying and suicide is the death of 13 year old Megan Meier. In October of 2006, Megan began receiving denigrating messages on MySpace. The defaming messages were created by a friend’s mother who was impersonating a boy who pretended to like Megan. Continued postings on MySpace called Megan “fat” and a “slut”. Megan’s mother found her hanging in her bedroom closet and rushed her to the hospital where she died the next day (Hinduja & Patchin, 2008). Although new technology is intended to contribute to society, negative byproducts inevitably will surface (Patchin & Hinduja, 2009).

### **Cyberbullying Compared to Traditional Bullying**

Researchers are currently investigating whether the tenets of traditional bullying are also salient features of cyberbullying. The term “bullying” applies when (1) the bullying behavior toward the victim is repeated over time, (2) there is intentionality in harming others, and (3) there is a power imbalance between the bully and victim (Bhat, 2008). Bhat (2008) states “the aim of the cyberbully is no different from that of a conventional bully: it is to embarrass, threaten, shame, hurt, or exclude the victim” (p. 58). According to the literature, there is an absence of research to definitively conclude cyberbullying corresponds to the tenets of traditional bullying (Wolak & Finkelhor, 2007).

i-Safe Inc. (2004) conducted a survey with 1500 students in Grades 4–8. In the sample, 42% of the students reported being harassed while on line, while one in four reported it happened more than once. Fifty-eight per cent of the sample reported the harassment was of a derogatory nature. Of the students who bullied, 53% admitted to these derogatory comments and reported they did this more than once to the victim. Patchin and Hinduja (2006) conducted a study to better understand the nature and extent of cyberbullying. In the sample, 30% reported being victims of cyberbullying. The authors operationalized online bullying “as having been ignored, disrespected, called names, threatened, picked on, or made fun of or having had rumors spread about them” (p. 162). The results of this survey and study on cyberbullying indicate the inclusion of bullying tenets of intentionality and repetitiveness.

The power imbalance seen in bullying as its relation to cyberbullying is also an area of interest for researchers. Power over a victim in traditional bullying is generally manifested in the perpetrators physical strength (Hinduja & Patchin, 2007). The author’s state cyberbullying power differential may stand alone in the computer proficiency of the bully. They suggest that computer literate youth may have an advantage over those who are not to navigate the Internet with expertise. Hinduja and Patchin (2006) collected data to identify characteristics of youth who had been bullied. Computer proficiency and the amount of time spent online were found to be positively related predictors of cyberbullying. Henderson et al.’s (2002, as cited in Shariff, 2005) research suggests persistent victimization attracts onlookers who support the bully instead of the victim thus creating this power imbalance.

The relationship of psychosocial effects of cyberbullying and bullying are another great area of interest with researchers. A plethora of bullying studies has linked numerous negative consequences for its victims, the bully, observers, local schools and communities. Whereas

Kowalski and Limber (2007) suggests there is a need for empirical work directed toward psychosocial challenges associated with cyberbullying. Beran and Li (2005) further supports research in systematically investigating the nature of cyberbullying.

Bhat (2008) suggests a look into what is known about bullying in the literature may shed light on cyberbullying. Many researchers hypothesize cybervictims may be at risk for experiencing poor psychosocial adjustment and may likely report depressive symptoms when cybervictimized (Bhat, 2008; Li, 2006). Victims of bullying tend to experience depression, low self-esteem, health problems, poor grades, disengagement in school and suicidal thoughts. In a study of 1,454 youth aged 12 to 17; researchers examined similarities and overlaps between Internet and school bullying. They additionally tested assumptions regarding online harassment. Their findings showed an increase in social anxiety for both online and offline bullying (Juvonen & Gross, 2008). Two Canadian studies examining cyberbullying effects found one in four of cyber victims reporting anger and sadness from their victimization (Beran & Li as cited in Patchin & Hinduja, 2006).

Patchin and Hinduja (2006) noted that respondents of a study of 571 youth under the age of 18 reported negative effects associated with online bullying. Approximately 42% had feelings of frustration, 40% felt angry, and 27% of the respondents reported feeling sad. Interestingly, almost one third reported the cyberbullying incidents affected their functioning at school. A Canadian study conducted by Beran and Li (2005) measured the impact of experiencing cyberharrasment of 432 students in grades 7 to 9. These students also reported negative consequences such as anger (57%) and sadness/hurtfulness (36%).

Cyberbullying incidents are likely to go unreported for several reasons. Adolescents today relate to technology very different from their parents. Most adults perceive computers as

practical applications while adolescents see them as a way to maintain social contact. Belsey (as cited in Keith & Martin, 2005) state “Kids know there is a gap in the understanding of technology between themselves and their parents, and their fear is not only that the parents’ response may make the bullying worse, but that the adults will take the technology away” (p. 226).

Supporting the notions of unreported cyberbullying incidents by youth, Juvonen and Gross (2008) study found that 90% of the 1,154 youth participants on a web based survey reported not revealing cyber incidents to their parents. Fifty percent reported it was their responsibility to deal alone with the matter. A third of the sample reported reluctance to tell parents for fear they would lose or be restricted of their cell and Internet privileges (Juvonen & Gross, 2008).

Parents are not the only ones youth show hesitancy toward in reporting cyberbullying incidents. Agatston et al. (2007) conducted interviews during focus groups with 148 middle and high school students to gain a better understanding on students’ perspectives on cyberbullying. Students reported even though the majority of cyberbullying was held outside of school grounds, if an incident happened during school they were more likely to tell their parents rather than the teachers. The majority of the students reported their reasons for this included the cyberbullying frequently occurred via cell phones during class and school policies banned the use of cell phones during school hours. Students also indicated they did not think the adults at school were capable of handling the cyberbullying.

Li’s (2008) survey study of 264 students from three junior highs reported believing only 64.1% of adults in school attempted to intervene in cyber incidents. Patchin and Hinduja’s (2006) analysis of 384 youth aged 17 years and younger found that fewer than 9% cyber victims

would report the incidents to teachers or an adult. Shariff (2005) suggests a reason why school officials do not intervene in cyberbullying complaints is the lack of a clear direction on how to handle the situations and fear of overstepping legal authority.

### **School's Response to Cyberbullying**

In examining the school and school counselors' role, specific to bullying, there have been various roles proposed in the bullying intervention literature. Recommendations include intervention programs that meet the unique needs of each school. Strategies implemented support concepts that not only include classrooms, but also the entire school, the student body and parents. Research has found antibullying programs have the potential to be effective when policies are clear and concise regarding rules and sanctions relating to bullying incidents (Milsom & Gallo, 2006).

Despite the dearth of antibullying programs in the literature, there has been limited research in the cyberbullying literature regarding roles for schools and school counselors. Furthermore, the existence of these programs appears to have no empirical evidence to validate their interventions (Mason, 2008). In view of this, further research is needed to better understand and examine systematically the nature of cyberbullying (Beran & Li, 2005; Bhat, 2008; Chibbaro, 2007; Froeschle et al., 2008). Shariff (2005) implies that if schools are to use technologies, they should be equipped to address the challenges that come along with the use.

Specifically, Mason (2008) suggests the issue of cyberbullying be addressed in a concerted effort with schools, families and communities. Mason (2008) recommends prevention and intervention efforts should be approached at system-level interventions, classroom interventions, individual interventions and community interventions. System-level interventions include curriculum-based, antibullying programs and strong policies against online harassment.

Included at this level are guidelines for the appropriate use of computer networks within the school. Such measures as these may reduce cyberbullying and create safer school environments.

Mason (2008) suggests effective classroom interventions such as lessons on cyberbullying into life skills, prevention classes and social skills and conflict resolution education may improve the classroom's social climate. Recommended resources for educators include i-Safe Inc. and NetSmartz. These programs are designed to engage students in interactive, educational safety resources on Internet safety. Netiquette is another Internet site which provides students with rules for Internet etiquette. The National Centre for Technology in Education (2002, as cited in Mason, 2008) reported 72% of educators found it a necessity to provide Internet education to students, with 60% of them agreeing this education would promote safer Internet environments.

On an individual intervention level, Mason (2008) proposes school personnel address students who are specifically involved in cyberbullying. This would include the victim, bully, and bystanders. Willard (2005, as cited in Mason, 2008) states "adolescents need to have a better understanding of family, school, and legal limits on online speech, negative influences on online behavior, and Internet privacy protection" (p. 336). Last, Mason (2008) proposes community outreach and education in the forms of newsletters and parent workshops hosted by various community agencies on cyberbullying prevention and intervention. Mason's (2008) prevention and intervention measures are designed to implement a cyberbullying program as well as create partnerships with families and the communities.

Other recommendations have been proposed for the systematic integration of education and safety strategies dealing with cyberbullying (Beale & Hall, 2007; Chibbaro, 2007; Li, 2009; Mason, 2008). These strategies necessitate parents, educators, and other adults to work with

students to foster self-control, tolerance and respect promoting responsible behaviors and choices in cyberspace (Hinduja & Patchin, 2008). Other strategies include schools to adopt anti-cyberbullying policies which include zero tolerance and suspension (Agatston et al., 2007; Shariff, 2005; Wolak & Finkelhor, 2007). To increase awareness and responsibility of cyber behaviors, Agatston et al. (2007) further suggest parents and students read and sign these school district policies regarding accepted use of technology.

Despite calls for action, school officials justifiably argue it is difficult to monitor students' online activities due to the fact that the majority of technology use occurs outside the school boundaries, outside school hours and from home computers (Shariff, 2005). In addition, school administrators and their staff are hesitant to broach the issue of cyberbullying due to a policy vacuum on this issue (Bhat, 2008). Despite a lack of clear direction on how to legally and effectively combat cyberbullying, Bhat (2008, p. 60) states "ignoring complaints against cyberbullying because it did not happen on school grounds is not justifiable because the effects of cyberbullying are experienced in school".

Research suggests educational professionals should be trained to recognize and respond to online harassment (Wolak et al., 2008). In 2008, the National Cyber Security Alliance conducted a cyberethics, cybersafety cybersecurity baseline study to explore educational awareness, policies, curriculum and practices currently taking place in the United States. Researchers collected data from 1,569 public and private K-12 educators and 94 technology coordinators in an online survey. In addition, 219 educators, technology coordinators and directors participated in focus groups for the study.

Findings indicated less than 5% of educators claimed that cybereducation was included in their state curriculum. Less than 3% of the educators said their state curriculum did not include

information on teaching students how to protect themselves on social networking sites and chat rooms. In regards to teacher preparedness, 75% of the participants did not feel comfortable discussing cyberbullying and less than 32% felt comfortable giving guidance on cybersafety. Lastly, 39% of the technology coordinators stated they implemented external Internet safety curriculum such as i-SAFE, Cyber Smart, etc. This clearly highlights the need to better understand the experiences of educators in dealing with cyberbullying and methods to best educate them in identifying and dealing with the issue.

Specific to school counselors, Bhat (2008) suggests “gaining relevant knowledge about cyberbullying and being viewed as a knowledgeable resource person is an important step for school counselors to take” (p. 60). The American School Counselor Association (ASCA, 2006) states counselors are responsible for promoting healthy student development which may include helping students address safety issues associated with the personal, psychological and social complications of cyberbullying and technology risks. In part to address this need, cyberbullying is specifically mentioned in the ASCA position statement as a potential danger of technology. Chibbaro (2007) states “school counselors are not the only people in the school who are responsible for the safety of students, but they may be the primary contact person for parents and students seeking information or help” (p. 4). She further suggests school counselors can provide leadership to faculty, parents and students in addressing cyberbullying issues.

Cyberbullying intervention models, policies and teams with designated roles assigned to individuals involved in cyberbullying incidents are all a part of a comprehensive response to cyberbullying. However, this research is limited and one specific concern is the limited attention that has been paid to the role and involvement of school counselors. Currently, there are no studies in the existing literature that explore the role of school counselors and cyberbullying.

This includes no studies that adequately assess the experiences of school counselors with cyberbullying, and what responses or interventions they have used or recommend.

In addition, the previous review of the literature highlights the need to explore school counselors' preparation, school involvement, and concerns about addressing this issue. The current study was designed to address these issues. Specifically, this study was designed to examine how school counselors perceive their roles and responsibility in addressing cyberbullying, as well as their experiences.

## CHAPTER III. METHODOLOGY

### **Purpose**

A review of the literature revealed limited descriptive accounts of students' perceptions on cyberbullying. However, there were no descriptive accounts of school counselors' perceptions on cyberbullying. The purpose of this qualitative study was to better understand school counselors' experiences with students involved in cyberbullying incidents. In addition, exploration on how the issue of cyberbullying should be addressed in schools was a focus. The value of this study was in examining school counselors' perceptions in an attempt to gain deeper insight into the phenomena of cyberbullying, school counselors' roles and responsibilities in the intervention and prevention of cyberbullying, and to discover if addressing the issue through anti-cyberbullying curriculum would be advantageous for schools.

### **Research Questions**

The research questions investigated focused on school counselors' perceptions of cyberbullying. The research questions included:

- 7) What are school counselors' interactions or experiences with students who have been involved with cyberbullying and how important is the issue of cyberbullying in schools?
- 8) What are school counselors' perceptions of how cyberbullying should be addressed in schools?
- 9) What do school counselors' identify as the challenges of addressing cyberbullying in the schools?

- 10) What are school counselors' concerns about their preparation to deal with cyberbullying in the schools?
- 11) What are the school counselor's perceptions of their role and responsibilities in implementation of intervention and prevention of cyberbullying?
- 12) What are school counselor's recommendations for addressing the issue of cyberbullying in schools?

### **Theoretical Framework**

This research study was a qualitative design due to the exploratory nature of the investigation. In particular, the theoretical orientation of symbolic interactionism was used to explore the school counselors' perceptions of cyberbullying and how the issue is addressed. Symbolic interaction roots developed from the sociological department of the University of Chicago in the 1920s and 1930s. Blumer (1969, p. 2 as cited in Jeon, 2004) stated the premises of symbolic interactionism were:

- Human beings act towards things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them.
- The meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one's fellows.
- These meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretive process used by the person with the things he encounters.

Boglan and Biklen (2007) stated "theoretically, they all saw symbols and personalities emerged from social interaction" (p. 9). A primary component of this approach is that human interpretation was not an autonomous act. It is only by interactions in social relationships that meaning of experiences can be constructed (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). In order to reach the full

awareness of a social process, the interactivist strived to understand the meanings of the participants within their particular context (Jeon, 2004).

Therefore, this study emphasized the participants lived experiences and understanding of cyberbullying to describe and conceptualize these experiences in order to develop an explanatory theory from their perspectives (Jeon, 2004). Symbolic interactionism was appropriate for this study because the researcher was interested in understanding cyberbullying through the lens of a school counselor and understanding their beliefs, motives and desires.

### **Participants**

The participants in this study were school counselors who were self-identified as working in K–12 public schools in the State of Alabama. A school counselor was considered to be an individual with a master’s degree or higher whose degree is from a school counseling program. With the intent of this study to examine the perceptions of school counselors, a purposeful sample was accessed through a professional organization. Purposeful sampling has been a method of sampling frequently used in qualitative studies because it is believed the choice of particular participants will better facilitate the development of the expanding theory (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

### **Recruitment Procedures**

First, approval from the Auburn University Institutional Review Board (AU IRB) for the Use of Human Subjects in Research was obtained to conduct this study. Recruitment for potential participants occurred through the Alabama Counseling Association (ALCA) listserv. The ALCA agreed in a Letter of Cooperation (Appendix A) to disseminate an informational consent document to school counselors in the State of Alabama via email requesting participation in the study. The informational consent document contained information about the

study, a description of the participants' potential role, informed consent information, the benefits and risks of participation and contact information related to potential inquiries (Appendix B). In addition, this document provided a link the participants could follow to a survey webpage that allowed them to participate in the study. Agreement to participate in the study was voluntary on the part of the school counselor.

### **Measures**

There were no expected risks associated with participation in this study. All results remained anonymous and the researcher was unable to identify participants and their responses. Consent of participant was shown by clicking a link to begin the survey. At the beginning of the survey, participants were asked to answer three demographic questions (Appendix C) regarding years of experiences as a school counselor, grade levels of school in which they were employed and approximate number of student enrollment at that school. If the respondent did not answer they were currently employed as a school counselor in a K–12 school, they were redirected to a webpage thanking them for their interest and involvement in the study and informed them that selection criteria was not met for the purpose of the study.

If criteria were met the participants proceeded to a webpage where they were asked seven reflection questions to determine their perceptions, thoughts and attitudes about their experiences with cyberbullying. The participants were given the opportunity to review their answers before submitting the survey. In addition, the participants were given the chance to withdraw from the survey at any time; however once the participant answers had been submitted, they were not able to withdraw their responses from the survey. After completion of the survey, the participants were directed to a page thanking them for their interest and involvement in the study.

The primary researcher paid for the use of an online software system to house the survey and data until the survey was closed for data analysis. Survey Monkey provided built in security methods to ensure participant confidentiality and to keep the data private and secure.

Additionally, the primary researcher purchased an additional encryption through Survey Monkey for added security during transmission of data.

### **Reflection Questions**

Several research studies have identified the need to address specific aspects of cyberbullying in the schools (Beale & Hall, 2007; Hinduja & Patchin, 2006; Kowalski & Limber, 2007; Li, 2006; Mason, 2008; Shariff, 2005). This has included increasing our understanding of school personnel, specific to this study, school counselors' knowledge and experiences of cyberbullying (Bhat, 2008; Chibbaro, 2007; Froeschle et al., 2008). Furthermore, there was an awareness that it would be critical to examine how cyberbullying is addressed within schools and within professional school roles (Beale & Hall, 2007; Beran & Li, 2005; Hinduja & Patchin, 2007; Juvonen & Gross, 2008; Williams & Guerra, 2007). The reflection questions (Appendix D) in this study were based on the specific research questions identified for the study.

The data for this study was generated through the use of standardized, short answer open-ended reflection questions. These type questions were effective with this qualitative study due to the exploratory nature of process and meaning versus cause and effect (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). These open-ended questions provided rich data and were useful when the researcher was exploring personal perceptions of participants and the complexities of the study's topic. In addition, they were valuable to use when the constructs of a phenomena are not well defined (Johnson & Christensen, 2007). The absence of descriptive accounts regarding school

counselors' perceptions of cyberbullying provided the rationale for the development of these stimulating reflection questions. The questions were designed for the anticipated needs to explore and clarify school counselors' perceptions of this phenomena and their roles and responsibilities with the issue of cyberbullying.

## **Data Analysis**

### **Content Analysis**

Content analysis has been a longstanding method for analyzing textual material such as written, verbal and visual messages (Kapborg & Bertero, 2003). The method of content analysis involves a systematic and objective process to describe and quantify the research questions (Elo & Kyngas, 2007). Weber (1985) states, "A central idea of analysis is that the many words of the text are categorized into much fewer categories" (p. 7). The goal of content analysis purposes the development of a concentrated and expansive description of the phenomena. Thus, the analysis outcome becomes meaningful descriptive categories of the phenomena (Elo & Kyngas, 2007).

Elo and Kyngas (2007) suggested content analysis is best represented as three main phases: preparation, organizing and reporting. These phases enable the researcher to move from textual material to results. For the purpose of this study, the researcher used an inductive content analysis approach due to the limited research on cyberbullying and the absence of empirical research with school counselors and cyberbullying. The inductive way is recommended when there is limited knowledge of the phenomena or the knowledge is fragmented (Lauri & Kyngas, 2005). The following steps best described these phases implemented in this study.

**Preparation.** The survey was closed once 32 participants had a 100% completion rate for the reflection questions. The data was saved to a Microsoft Excel file where the responses

were kept in their original format, including grammatical errors and punctuation. The researcher created data sheets for each of the seven research questions. These data sheets were identified as the Raw Data (Appendix E) and were referenced throughout the process of content analysis. Next the researcher transferred the participants' responses to the corresponding research question. Find, cut and paste options in Microsoft Word provided this transfer which was beneficial for later sorting and coding the content units and identifying themes. The responses were annotated with the research question number followed by the participants' number. An example of this was P1Q4 which was participant one's response to reflection question four.

Once all participants' responses were organized under the corresponding research question, the researcher began to become immersed in the data. Morse and Field (1995) states this is when the researcher ventures to make sense of the data in an attempt to comprehend the significance of the responses. The researcher read over the responses multiple times to become familiar with the responses and the related research question.

**Organizing.** After completing the preparation phase, the researcher began to organize the data. The process of organizing included open coding and creating initial categories and main categories. Open coding was used to examine the text to create categories of information and detect evolving themes. The use of the constant comparative approach was used to identify the evolving themes and categories of information from the content units. Content units consisted of sentences, a word or words within the participants' response. Creswell (1998) explained the constant comparative method as "the researcher attempts to saturate the categories — to look for instances that represent the category and to continue looking until the new information obtained does not further provide insight into the category" (p. 151).

Once the initial categories for each research question were identified the researcher began collapsing those categories with similarities into “broader higher order categories” (Eli & Kyngas, 2007). To accomplish this task, the researcher developed Magnitude tables (Appendix F) which were used for tracking the frequency of the content units under the headings of theme and subthemes. The frequency of the content units was tallied under each theme and subtheme. Tallies were noted as “(n=)” which represented the number of occurrences of a content unit, not the number of participants. These numbers were added to other similar content units that emerged across participants. It is also noted that participants’ responses often contained more than one subtheme or theme which indicated the total number of tallies could exceed the number of the participants in this study. The broader categories were labeled using content-characteristic words from the participants’ responses (Elo & Kyngas, 2007). In turn, these categories became themes with the greatest magnitude for the research question. For example, in research question one of this study, participants’ responses for descriptions of their experiences identified sub categories of multiple mediums of technology students used in cyberbullying. Through the process of interpretation, two broader categories were created that best described the phenomenon.

**Reporting.** Once themes of the greatest magnitude were identified, the researcher began the process of describing the meanings of the content of these themes. GAO (1996 as cited in Elo & Kyngas) described this process where “the results should be described in sufficient detail so that readers have a clear understanding of how the analysis was carried out and its strengths and limitations” (p. 112). In the results section, the researcher provided the data collected in a simplified form describing the themes of the greatest magnitude that reflected the participants’ responses and addressed the research questions.

## Quality and Verification

Research constructs of validity and reliability have been more commonly used in quantitative studies. Globally, quantitative studies emphasize cause and effect of research problems and the data is quantified with the final results presented in statistical terms (Golafshani, 2003). In contrast, this qualitative study sought to understand research problems in context-specific venues. Although the terms reliability and validity are conceptualized differently in quantitative research, it was equally important for this study to achieve similar constructs comparable to the equivalents of a quantitative study. Therefore, various steps were taken to ensure the quality of the data in this study (Creswell, 1998).

Verification of this study was the responsibility of the researcher. This was accomplished through three processes. To verify the data in the organization phase, the researcher continually looked at the data in relation to the subtheme and theme headings to confirm the contents within each group interrelated. This process is known as discriminant sampling. Creswell (1998) stated this is the time when “researchers pose questions that related the categories and returns to the data and looks for evidence, incidents, and events that support or refute the questions, thereby verifying the data” (p. 209). Another means to verify this study’s data was to link it with the current literature (Elo & Kyngas, 2007). This process enabled the researcher to validate current research with the accuracy of data collection or discuss how it differed (Creswell, 1998). Last, the Magnitude tables were used to demonstrate the links between the data and results. Additionally, the tables were helpful in tracking the frequency of the content units under the corresponding categories.

## CHAPTER IV. RESULTS

This chapter will outline the results of this study. This will be accomplished through the analysis of the reflection question responses provided by the school counselors in this sample. This section is organized by research questions and the specific reflection questions in the survey that were used to address these research questions. Content analysis was used to analyze the data from the reflection questions. Themes were identified across responses by the systematic examination of each participant's responses and the identified content units in each response. Content units were indexed, organized and analyzed in this process. This process also allowed for the reporting of the frequency of responses, specifically shared themes, across the sample. To facilitate this process, content units were labeled Q, the reflection question number, P, and the participant number. The actual question and participant number followed the Q & P. For example, the third participant's response to the first reflection question was labeled: Q1P3. Refer to Appendix E for the complete verbatim report of participant's responses. Refer to Appendix F for the tables that embody emerging themes in response to each reflection question. Table headings include Response Units, referring to the number of content units related to identified themes, and Participants, to reflect the number of participants in the sample whose response was associated with the theme.

### **Demographics**

A series of three questions were used to obtain information about the school counselors' years in the profession, the grades they counsel, and an estimate of the number of students they

currently work with as a school counselor. The first demographic question was, “How many years of school counseling experience do you have?” Ten (n = 10) of the participants responses ranged from one to five years of experience. Eight (n = 8) reported six to ten years of experience. In the range of eleven to fifteen years of experience were ten (n = 10) participants. Four (n = 4) participants reported over fifteen years of experience.

The second demographic question addressed “Current grades you counsel?” School counselor’s responses encompassed a range of grades from Prekindergarten to twelfth grade. Ranges included: Prekindergarten–5<sup>th</sup> grade (n = 14), sixth grades to eighth grade (n = 2) and ninth grade to twelfth grade (n = 4). Other grades counseled not falling within these categories included: Kindergarten–sixth (n = 2), Prekindergarten–eighth (n = 1), Prekindergarten–twelfth (n = 1), fourth–sixth (n = 1), fifth–eighth (n = 1), seventh–ninth (n = 1) and seventh–twelfth (n = 3).

The third demographic question was, “Estimate how many students you currently work with as a School Counselor.” School counselor’s responses reflected the following ranges: 200–300 students (n = 3), 300–400 students (n = 6), 400–500 students (n = 7), 500–600 students (n = 6), and over 600 students (n = 9).

### **Research Question One**

What are school counselor’s interactions or experiences with students who have been involved with cyberbullying and the importance of the issue of cyberbullying?” To address this research question, data from reflection questions four (4) and five (5) were both analyzed and then summarized to determine what themes emerged from both questions. Then these themes and responses were analyzed together to address this research question. As part of the analysis, content units are discussed to help identify emerging themes within responses. Participants’ responses that reflect emerging themes or address the specific nature of the reflective question

will also be provided. These responses are coded by the specific question number and a participant number.

#### **Reflection Question Four**

Reflection question number four on the survey asked the participants to “Discuss the experiences you have had with students, who have been involved with cyberbullying, this may include students who were the focus of cyberbullying or initiated cyberbullying.” The majority of participants responses reflected professional experiences with students involved with cyberbullying (n = 22), while others reported no professional experiences or awareness of students involved (n = 9) and one (n = 1) counselor’s asked that their response be maintained as confidential so it will not be reported in this analysis. Examples of responses that indicated that the participants had professional experiences with students involved with cyberbullying included:

Q3P10 “I have dealt with cyber bullies and those being bullied.”

Q3P12 “I have had experiences with both victims of cyberbullying and the initiator of cyberbullying”

Q3P22 “I have worked with a group of students who were texting one another after school hours. It started out as innocent fun but turned into rumors.”

Q3P26 “Gossip on social websites mainly. Some texting where students were spreading rumors, etc.”

Q3P29 “Mostly fourth and fifth graders, average of two to three students per year”

Responses from counselors who had not had professional experiences with students and cyberbullying or were not aware of any student involvement in cyberbullying were:

Q3P7 “None at this point”

Q3P19 “I am not aware of any students.”

Q3P24 “None to my knowledge.”

Q3P27 “At this age, cyberbullying has never been a problem that I am aware of.”

Only one participant’s (Q3P20) response was “confidential.”

### **Internet and Communication Technology Tools and Cyberbullying Behaviors**

Content units from Reflection Question Four revealed two emerging themes: information and communication technology tools (ICT) by which students were cyberbullying and cyberbullying behaviors of students. School counselors’ descriptions of their experiences with students and cyberbullying indicated two ICT tools students were using to cyberbullying: The Internet (n = 19) and Cell phones (n = 13). Two counselors (n = 2) did not specify specific methods of cyberbullying.

**Internet.** Responses that provided evidence of the use of the internet as a medium for cyberbullying included:

Q3P16 “experience I have had: have been both ways: the focus of the cyberbullying and initiating the cyberbullying. Most often it happens off campus on the computer or phone, but then the incident is brought on to school campus, we have even had a suicide threat and a student threatening to kill another student.”

Q3P18 “One student threatened to say something embarrassing to another student on the internet.”

Within the responses of Internet use, school counselors’ responses revealed specific forms of cyberbullying in which students were using over the Internet. These included Social Websites (n = 14) and Email (3). Specific to the social website, counselors’ responses identified actual names of these websites which included MySpace (n = 4), Facebook (n = 7) and You

Tube (n = 1). The following examples reflect data chunks that were merged to create the category of Social Websites:

Q3P6 “Most of the lower school experiences have been with the equivalent of children’s “Facebook.” A few children have posted unkind items about other children on their facebook page, or have gone on to someone else’s facebook page and posted ugly comments.”

Q3P17 “5<sup>th</sup> grade girls participating in My Space. Many of them changing each other’s password without permission and gossiping.”

Q3P25 “Students currently use social networking to bully one another. For example a fight occurred at my school and was unloaded onto YouTube and My Space. Due to the content of the video was erased from MySpace but can still be viewed on YouTube. Students also use text messaging to send and share photos and messages about an individual. I find this mainly happens with girls. Finally, gaining access to a password to humiliate or spread rumors about an individual. These are just a few incidents of cyberbullying I have been involved with.

Additional data chunks were merged to create the category of Email:

Q3P3 “I have had students who were threatened through MySpace, Facebook and on email.

Q3P8 “Students have been bullied at our school using text messaging, facebook, myspace and emails.”

Q3P11 “Creating bogus MySpace pages and email addresses to forward negative comments and pictures regarding classmates, enemies and frienemies.”

**Cell phones.** School counselors responses (n = 13) described cell phones as another ICT tool students used in cyberbullying. Specific to cell phones, texting (n = 10) and sexting (n = 2) were forms of technology students used to cyberbully with the ICT tool cell phones. Responses related to texting included:

Q3P2 “Text messages were reported to have been sent while at home but the incident ended up being discussed at school.”

Q3P22 “I have worked with a group of students who were texting one another after school hours. It started out as innocent fun but turned into rumors.”

Q3P28 “None-my students are too young to really be able to cyberbully. They may send mean text messages, but not to the victim.”

Sexting was identified in only two school counselor's responses. These responses were:

Q3P4 “Relational aggression, name calling sexting, excessive texting despite being asked not to text a person and Facebook “wars”.”

Q3P15 “I do not follow all the students on Facebook or My Space and discourage My Space for the most part. I have a Facebook page and if a student wants to “friend” me, I will. Texting and cell phones comprise the major component of any cyberbullying incidents we have dealt with. Fights have been recorded off-campus and sent to many other students causing a problem with retaliation issues at school. Suggestive, partial nude and nude photographs have circulated, though most of these have been initiated at other schools and sent to students here. To my knowledge, these come to our attention when they have been sent/received outside of school hours. We do make an effort to inform our students how easily texting, posting and email can become bullying.”

**Cyberbullying behaviors.** The second theme that emerged from Reflection Question Four was the cyberbullying behaviors of students. Globally, these responses reflected the content and the nature of what students did when engaging in cyberbullying, as reflected by the responses of participants. The majority of the behaviors are commonly categorized as verbal harassment. Responses (n = 14) that identified these behaviors were:

Q3P3 “I have had students who were threatened through MySpace, Facebook and on email.”

Q3P4 “Relational aggression, name calling, sexting, excessive texting despite being asked not to text a person, and Facebook wars.”

Q3P6 “Most of the lower school experiences have been with the equivalent of children’s “Facebook”. A few children have posted unkind words about other children on their facebook page, or have gone on to someone else’s facebook page and posted ugly comments.”

Q3P11 “Creating bogus MySpace pages and email addresses to forward negative comments and pictures regarding classmates, enemies and frienemies.”

Q3P18 “One student threatened to say something embarrassing to another student on the Internet.”

Q3P21 “Students often use Facebook to reach each other. They chat back and forth and sometimes post things to embarrass each other. The same is for texting.”

Q3P26 “Gossip on social websites mainly. Some texting where students were spreading rumors, etc.”

In addition to negative verbal behaviors, counselors reported aggressive behaviors (n = 8) of an overt nature that stemmed from cyberbullying incidents. These included:

Q3P15 “I do not follow all the students on Facebook or My Space and discourage My Space for the most part. I have a Facebook and if a student wants to “friend” me, I will. Texting and cell phones comprise the major component of any cyberbullying incidents we have dealt with. Fights have been recorded off-campus and sent to many other students causing a problem with retaliation issues at school. Suggestive, partial nude and nude photographs have circulated, though most of these have been initiated at other schools and sent to students here. To my knowledge, these come to our attention when they have been sent/received outside of school hours. We do make an effort to inform our students how easily texting, posting and email can become bullying.”

Q3P25 “Students currently use social networking to bully one another. For example a fight occurred at my school and was uploaded onto YouTube and My Space. Due to the content the video was erased from MySpace but can still be viewed on YouTube. Students also use text messaging to send and share photos and messages about an individual. I find this mainly happens with girls. Finally, gaining access to a password to humiliate or spread rumors about an individual. These are just a few incidents of cyberbullying I have been involved with.

Q3P31 “Fights occurred at school because of Cyberbullying.”

Five counselors (n = 5) indicated the cyberbullying behaviors occurred after school hours or off school grounds. Examples included:

Q3P2 “Text messages were reported to have been sent while at home but the incident ended up being discussed in school.”

Q3P16 “experience I have had have been both ways: the focus of the cyberbullying and initiating the cyberbullying. Most often it happens off campus on the computer or phone. But then the incident is brought on to school campus. We have even had a suicide threat, and a student threaten to kill another student.”

Q3P30 “I have had several junior high age mostly female that have been the victim of bullying via text messages. These incidents occur outside of the school day but get brought to school where emotions get out of control.”

In summary, results from Reflection Question Four illuminated several themes and subthemes. The two themes that emerged were common ICT tools students used in cyberbullying and cyberbullying behaviors. Subthemes of the ICT tools indicated the use of the Internet and cell phones as primary ICT tools used by students. Behavior subthemes included verbal and overt attacks as means of cyberbullying. Lastly, four counselor’s responses indicated these behaviors occurred off school grounds and after school hours.

### **Reflection Question Five**

Reflection question number five on the survey asked the participants to “Discuss how important the issue cyberbullying is in your school and in your work as a School Counselor.” Notably, content units revealed the majority of participants responses indicated cyberbullying was an important issue in the schools and in their work as a school counselor (n = 22), while others either noted cyberbullying was not a major issue (n = 5) or cyberbullying was not an issue at the grade level they counseled (n = 2). Five responses (n = 2) were not specific to the relevance or non relevance of the issue of cyberbullying.

The following were examples of school counselor’s responses which indicated cyberbullying was an important issue:

Q4P5 “Very Important”

Q4P12 “It is very important due to the lack of information as how to deal with it as a counselor. I feel that there should be examples or precedents as to how to effectively deal with cyberbullying.”

Q4P20 “Very”

Q4P22 “I work with my 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> graders especially in the area of cyberbullying. We take it extremely important.”

Q4P24 “Very important, however I do not see cyberbullying as much in the older grades.”

Responses which indicated cyberbullying was not an issue were:

Q4P13 “It is not a problem at my school.”

Q4P30 “This is not a major issue at my school at the present but I see it increasing each year and more and more students have access to text messages.”

Q4P32 “not very important.”

In relation to the importance of cyberbullying at grade levels, responses included:

Q4P18: “At this grade level it is not used as much as in older grades.”

Q4P26: “we do not see it very much at this age. We do see some around 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> grade but it is mainly gossiping and rumors.”

Being mindful of the counselors’ responses in regards to the importance of the issue of cyberbullying, many responses were linked to more than one theme. A theme linked to the importance of cyberbullying were counselors’ responses (n = 8) that expressed cyberbullying concerns for both students and the schools. The following examples of “important” and “concerns” illuminate how more than one content unit is linked to more than one theme.

Q4P8” It is very important because we have seen a rise over the last five years in this type of bullying.”

Q4P10 “it is very important. Many students are depressed due to cyberbullying.”

Q4P11 “the issue is very important because per our cell phone policies students are able to bring cell phones to school and forward negative messages regarding classmates.”

Q4P12 “It’s very important due to the lack of information as how to deal with it as a counselors. I feel that there should be examples or precedents as to how to effectively deal with cyberbullying.”

Q4P16 “it is becoming more important especially since there are no focused ethic or moral rules which school officials can emphasize. Often I view it as 3 seconds that a student responded in haste.”

Responses (n = 8) also indicated the issue was important enough that counselors’ currently included cyberbullying curriculum in their classes. Examples of the linked themes of “Important” and “Current Education” are:

Q4P2 “ it is very important due to the way that students communicate on social networking sites and with text messages. Consequently, I do lessons of these topics.”

Q4P17 “I feel it is very important. I do a guidance lesson with the 5<sup>th</sup> graders.”

Q4P22 “I work with my 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> graders especially in the area of cyberbullying. We take it extremely important.”

Q4P29 “I address bullying and cyberbullying is an integral part of the program.”

## **Research Question Two**

Research question two focused on “How should the issue of cyberbullying be addressed in schools?” To address this research question, data from reflection question six (6) was analyzed, categorized and then summarized to identify what themes emerged from the data. Then these themes and responses were analyzed together to address this research question. As part of the analysis, content units will be discussed to help identify emerging themes within responses. Participants’ responses that reflect emerging themes or address the specific nature of the reflective question will also be provided.

### **Reflection Question 6**

The sixth reflection question, “Discuss the ways and methods that you think should be used to address cyberbullying in the schools” illuminated several themes and subthemes. The three themes that emerged consisted of education (n = 47), cyberbullying consequences (n = 10) and policy endorsement (n = 6). Implementing cyberbullying education was made reference to three distinct groups: students (n = 34), parents (n = 10) and administration (n = 3).

**Student education/counseling.** Responses reflecting general education (n = 23) globally for students included:

Q5P16 “classroom activities, media and family values”

Q5P21 “There should be whole class discussions in tech classes and in counseling classes”

Q5P24 “educating the student.”

Q5P29 “students must be taught to recognize put downs and the language of put downs”

Q5P32 “increased awareness”

Responses specific to utilizing cyberbullying education within the counseling venue with students (n = 11) included:

Q5P1 “this issue needs to be addressed in group counseling situations. I have also used worksheets, real life accounts and have brought the school resource officer to class to bring out the law enforcement consequences of cyberbullying”

Q5P2 “Guidance lessons. Parent education.

Q5P8 “Guidance classes that focus on this issues are an important education tool. Public speakers, such as the ABI, FBI, or other law enforcement individuals, provide great information to our students about the dangers and the impact of cyberbullying.

Q5P22 “large group guidance, law enforcement to come talk to parents in workshop at night; faculty meetings”

**Parent education.** Participant responses also reflected parent education as a way or method to address cyberbullying. Example responses with this subtheme “Education/Parent” were as follows:

Q5P5 “I think parents should be made aware of the potential dangers of cyberbullying and they should monitor the sites their children visit. Counselors should address cyberbullying when they talk about harassment and bullying. Cyberbullying is happening more in our schools.”

Q5P19 “Parent seminars, counseling sessions, information shared with faculty and staff such at venues such as faculty meeting and/or professional development.”

Q5P28 “guidance lessons, police visits to classrooms, informational pamphlets to parents”

**Administration education.** Administration was another group identified in the participants responses which indicated the need for cyberbullying education. Examples of participant responses related to this subtheme “Education/Administration included:

Q5P18 “I believe that it is important for counselors and administrators to be informed about the websites that students use and to be able to access them regularly”

Q5P22 “large group guidance, law enforcement to come talk to parents in workshop at night; faculty meetings”

### **Consequences and Penalties**

In addition to the theme of education, consequences/penalties (n = 10) were identified as another means of addressing cyberbullying in schools. Notably nine of the ten responses identified consequences for students while one response suggested penalties for parents. The responses for this theme included:

Q5P7 “students engaging in such activities should be expelled and made to attend anger and behavioral management counseling.”

Q5P9 “large groups (classroom guidance), principal should address it and punishment if it affects things at school.”

Q5P10 “I think we should have some form of serious punishment if we have proof.”

Q5P27 “Closer monitoring on school computer use and immediate consequences if this occurs on or off campus. Parents should also have some type of penalty or consequence similar to hosting parties with under age drinkers.”

## **Policy Endorsement**

Implementing cyberbullying policies was the third theme for this reflection question. Participant responses (n = 6) endorsed a need for some policy endorsement that would address the issue of cyberbullying.

Q5P14 “I believe students should be provided information in the early elementary grades about cyberbullying and its potentially devastating effects on the targets, as well as the perpetrators. I further believe it is the school’s responsibility to monitor student use of school computers and report any violations of the school’s acceptable use policy. Cyberbullying is clearly a violation of acceptable use and those students who engage in cyberbullying should be prohibited from using school computers. The school also needs to partner with parents and law enforcement if necessary to stop cyberbullying among the student body.”

Q5P26 “It would help if the students were not allowed to have cell phones AT ALL in the schools. Having them at school just means they will sneak them into the classroom and use them anyway. Having access to internet during the school day makes it easier for the gossip and bullying to occur. It would not prevent it but it might slow it down somewhat or at least give the bully some time to think about what is going on at school before they get home to the technology! Having instant access to social websites, texting and other devices just makes the bullying that much more of an issue.”

Q5P31 “It needs to be apart of the student code of conduct”

### **Research Question Three**

The third research question was, “What do school counselors’ identify as the challenges of addressing cyberbullying in the schools?” Reflection question seven addressed this research question. The reflection question was: “Discuss what you perceive to be the challenges in addressing cyberbullying in the schools.” Three themes emerged in the area of challenges. The themes were Location (n = 11), Anonymity (n = 7), and Parental Involvement (n = 6).

#### **Location**

Several of the participants responded that they had no control over what happens off school grounds and/or no control over monitoring students after school hours. Thus, the assigned label for this theme was Location. Examples included:

Q6P2 “These things often happen away from school and we know nothing about it OR we find out about it once the problem is huge.”

Q6P12 “how to handle it when it takes place off campus; and it’s brought into the school.”

Q6P13 “No control over what happens in the home.”

Q6P22 “After school hours is when most occurs so very little goes detected. Students are afraid to say anything and little evidence is seen at school.”

#### **Anonymity**

In addition to the challenge of identifying the location of the cyberbullying incidents, participants’ responses (n = 7) revealed the challenge of not being able to identify the students involved in the cyberbullying incidents due to the ability to remain anonymous through the use of ICT. Example responses include:

Q6P18 “the problem with cyberbullying is that students can have their information marked as private and no one could see the bullying except for the intended parties. Sometimes it could be one person’s word against another.”

Q6P25 “Some challenges would be identifying the person responsible for spreading the rumors. This is because children can blame on another. “One behavior against the other.”

Q6P27 “Who is actually doing the bullying online since the identity of these kind of perpetrators would be hard to track due to the confidentiality the medium provides.”

Q6P 29 “It is very difficult for the original author of the message to be determined. Often times students think it is cool to pass on and accept no responsibility because they didn’t actually create the original message.”

### **Parental Involvement**

The final theme to emerge from the participants responses related to the challenges with parental involvement (n = 6). Linked to the Locality theme, responses indicate lack of parental involvement becomes problematic due to the fact school counselors are unable to monitor after school hours. Examples of these responses addressing counselors’ challenges included:

Q6 P4 “Getting parents to learn about technology, and getting them to monitor or not allow texting/facebook/internet access at too young an age.”

Q6P16 “no set rules or groundrules. Often have to turn to law enforcement. Some parents do not see it worth the effort.”

Q6P19 “parental minimum involvement”

### Research Question Four

The fourth research question was “What are school counselors’ concerns about their preparation to deal with cyberbullying in the schools?” Reflection question 8 was used to explore this topic. The question was: “Discuss your current concerns about your preparation for addressing cyberbullying.” The primary theme associated with this question was Educational Training. Education was a theme previously identified in response to the sixth reflection question which asked counselors to identify the ways and methods to address cyberbullying in schools. School counselors responses (n = 18) indicated the need or lack of training as a concern about their preparation to handle cyberbullying issues. Below are examples of responses that fit the Educational Training theme for this question.

Q7P1 “There needs to be more hands on materials in order to teach these students in classroom situations. My best materials came for my resource officer.”

Q7P2 “I wish that all schools had an in-depth curriculum.”

Q7P3 “I need much more training.”

Q7P9 “Don’t have a good program about it.”

Q7P12 “I need more information to effectively give my students, faculty and staff, and parents/guardians information as how to handle cyberbullying

A theme that emerged with less magnitude, although still relevant to training, was Counselor Competence (n = 4) indicating they have adequate training and no concerns about dealing with cyberbullying at school. Example responses were as follows:

Q7P4 “None, I feel well educated and equipped to educate students and parents, however I am of the millennial generation!”

Q7P5 “I think I am adequately prepared. I have attended several workshops and training sessions focused on cyberbullying.”

### **Research Question Five**

“What are school counselors’ perceptions of their role and responsibilities in implementation of intervention and prevention of cyberbullying?” was the fifth research question for this study. Reflection question 9 addressed this research question. The question stated: “Discuss what you consider to be the roles and responsibilities of School Counselors in addressing cyberbullying.”

Ninety seven percent of the participants’ responses (n = 29) described roles and responsibilities for school counselors in the intervention and prevention of cyberbullying. This response indicated that the majority of the participants thought school counselors should have a role in addressing cyberbullying. Only one participant’s response (Q8P20) was “undecided”.

Examples responses were:

Q8P3 “They should be on the front line addressing it.”

Q8P16 “I feel the school counselor has a major role in addressing students, as well as the classroom teacher.”

Participants’ responses indicated their roles and responsibilities in cyberbullying intervention and prevention should involve students (n = 29) and parents (6)

### **Students**

Two themes emerged from the content units in relation to students: Global Awareness (n = 21) and Individual Counseling (n = 8). These topics were reflected in participants’ responses as the primary responsibilities in intervening and preventing cyberbullying with students. The

following examples reflect data chunks that merged to create the category labeled Global Awareness:

Q8P8 “I believe that school counselors should educate students on the dangers, emotional impact and legal issues regarding cyberbullying”

Q8P15 “Make certain students understand what it is, how dangerous it is and how serious the outcome of what seems like simple teasing might be.”

Q8P24 “I would address it from the standpoint of being proactive in teaching the do’s and don’t’s.”

Q8P25 “the counselor’s role is to educate students about the harm cyberbullying may cause. The counselor’s responsibility would be to provide a program to address cyberbullying”

The following examples reflect the data chunks that merged to create the category of Individual Counseling.

Q8P10 “Counsel students about not being a bully and counsel students who are being bullied.”

Q8P21 “it is important that counselors be available to listen to students who are being bullied and to make students aware of possible consequences.”

Q8P26 “Just talk with the victims about their feelings and emotions. We can address the bully, not only to see if they are having emotional issues to be addressed. We can educate the students during large group sessions and be a parental support if they need information.

## **Parents**

Parents were the second group that the participant responses identified as being necessary components of the school counselors' response to cyberbullying. Increasing parental awareness was also a theme. Examples that led to this theme were:

Q8P5 "Basically if a student informs me they are receiving messages via the computer which are demeaning, threatening and repetitive and can provide proof of the correspondence that happens with another student on our campus, I contact both parents, I also inform the parent of the child receiving the messages to speak to the resource officer we have on campus for additional help with the issue."

Q8P13 "notifying parents as needed and dealing with an upset child as with any problem."

Q8P29 "Counselor should be responsible for informing parents of the possibility of their phone, computer, etc. being used for intimidation and threats."

## **Research Question Six**

The final research question for this investigation was, "What are school counselors' recommendations for addressing the issue of cyberbullying in schools?" Reflection question 10 was used to explore this topic. The question was: "Discuss what recommendations you have for addressing cyberbullying in the schools." Three themes emerged from the responses to this reflection question. Responses produced themes that included recommendations for: Cyberbullying Education (n = 20), Curriculum Development (n = 7) and School Policy Development (n = 12). Only one participant (P23) did not make any recommendations.

## **Cyberbullying Education**

The majority of the responses related to education were directed toward recommendations for implementing cyberbullying education for students. Responses that were a reflection of this were:

Q9P8 “Educating our students through groups and open discussions concerning the issue.”

Q9P21 “discussions in tech classes and in counseling classes.”

Participant responses also recommended education for parents. Examples of these responses included:

Q9P17 “Middle School and High School do parent workshops. For all grades do classroom guidance and send home cyberbullying information

Q9P19 “PTA meetings, parent seminars, individual and small group sessions.”

## **Curriculum Development**

In addition to cyberbullying recommendations, reflection responses (n=7) indicated a need for course development for cyberbullying and training for educators as well as training materials. The following are examples of these responses:

Q9P2 “In-depth curriculum”

Q9P6 “I think more information about how children can cyberbully would be a good thing for a counselor so that we can understand the technology”

Q9P14 “First, educators must be trained to recognize cyberbullying and taught the potential effects of such bullying. Cyberbullying should not be taken lightly and should be addressed as any other instance of bullying”

Q9P24 “Use it as part of your curriculum that is already in place. You may address it via web-classes or assembly”

### **Policy Development**

Recommendations for policy development for cyberbullying were reflected in the participants’ responses. These responses were most often related to a policy or procedure of cyberbullying conduct for students to be included in existing or new policies. The following examples reflect data chunks that were merged to create the category of Policy Development:

Q9P7 “Develop a plan that will stop it before it stops”

Q9P11 “We use our bullying and conflict resolution policy”

Q9P26 “Just taking cell phones away during the school day all together. Cell phones are not necessary on campus and only cause problems.

Q9P27 “No tolerance”

Q9P31 “Give harsh punishment for these actions, just like normal bullying”

### **Summary: Participants Narratives**

Two participants’ narratives were developed to summarize the findings in this study. This method of additional analysis helps elucidate and illustrate the themes and responses of all participants. In addition, these narratives were generated to provide additional support for the themes identified during the analysis of participants’ data. All participants’ responses are provided in Appendix E.

### **Participant 2**

The participants’ experiences with cyberbullying included students who had text messaged at home and the incident(s) was discussed at school. Cyberbullying was considered a very important issue in the participant’s role as a school counselor. Realizing students

communicate on social networking sites and with text messaging; the participant educates students on these topics. The participant recommended guidance lessons and parent education as the means to address cyberbullying in the schools. Challenges for the participant in addressing cyberbullying included the inability to identify where cyberbullying first begins and once the incident is reported to the participant, it is usually at a heightened level. The lack of an in-depth curriculum was also a concern for the participant's preparedness in addressing cyberbullying. The participant's role and responsibility in addressing cyberbullying included educating the student and creating awareness of the consequences of cyberbullying. In-depth cyberbullying curriculum was the recommendation from this participant to address cyberbullying in the schools.

### **Participant 17**

This participant's experiences with students involved in cyberbullying included 5<sup>th</sup> grade girls participating on the social website "My Space". The participant revealed the students were changing passwords without permission and gossiping. The issue of cyberbullying in the schools was considered a very important issue with this participant. Educational instruction was implemented in guidance lessons with 5<sup>th</sup> graders. General education and creating awareness to the consequences of cyberbullying were considered as the means to address the issue. A challenge for this participant was getting the students to realize legal repercussions of cyberbullying. Parental input was a concern about the participant's preparation for addressing cyberbullying. The participant identified classroom guidance and parent education as roles and responsibilities of a school counselor. The participant recommended parent workshops, classroom guidance and cyberbullying information to be distributed to homes.

## CHAPTER V. DISCUSSION

The majority of today's cyberbullying research has been limited to students' perceptions and experiences with cyberbullying. To date, there has been no empirical research related to schools, educators and school counselors' perceptions and experiences with cyberbullying. Therefore, the findings of the research were important. Since school counselors' play crucial roles in improving the academic, interpersonal, intrapersonal and career development of students, it was vital their perceptions and experiences with cyberbullying were investigated.

The current study examined school counselor's perceptions of cyberbullying and explored the school counselor's role and responsibilities in responding to student's cyberbullying occurrences. This qualitative study provided descriptors of school counselors' concerns and challenges with cyberbullying. Additionally, the study provided descriptors of school counselors' prevention and intervention recommendations that may increase school counselors' awareness and effectiveness dealing with cyberbullying.

Overall, the school counselors' in this study were K-12 school counselors in the State of Alabama with a range of experience from one to twenty-five years. The majority of the school counselors' counseled students in grades K through 5<sup>th</sup> grade. With cyberbullying tending to peak in later middle school to high school, most of the current research has been directed toward middle school students (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009; Wolak et al., 2007). However, the findings of this study revealed that more cyberbullying research is warranted at the Kindergarten through 5<sup>th</sup>

grade level. Specifically, the results of the study indicated that cyberbullying was in fact occurring at these lower grade levels.

### **Experiences with Cyberbullying**

One specific focus of this study was, “What are school counselors’ interactions or experiences with students who have been involved with cyberbullying and the importance of the issue of cyberbullying?” Results indicated that the majority of participants had dealt with students who reported cyberbullying occurrences. This contributes to what has been a paucity in the research; the actual experiences of school counselors and cyberbullying. The results clearly demonstrated that many school counselors are dealing with cyberbullying as part of their work within schools.

The study also highlighted some of the methods or means that students are using when they are engaging in cyberbullying. Specifically, school counselors’ indicated that Internet and cell phones were the most common methods used by students for cyberbullying. This was not surprising for previous research has indicated that these Informational Communications Technology methods are the primary modes by which cyberbullying are generally carried out (Froeschle et al., 2008; Mason, 2008). In regards to the Internet, the school counselors’ participating in the study noted that social websites and email were the principal tools used for cyberbullying activities. Counselors also discussed how students used cell phones to cyberbully. In reference to cell phones, texting and sexting were reported as conduits for cyber harassment. This finding supports research that has demonstrated that cell phones are being used increasingly by students to harass and cyberbully their peers (Shariff, 2008).

As with traditional bullying, school counselors’ described cyberbullying behaviors as both overt and covert. Generally, traditional bullying behaviors were face to face (Mason,

2008); however, the data in this study suggests that covert behaviors are now a primary medium for cyberbullying behaviors. Furthermore, school counselors' identified relational aggression as a primary foundation for cyberbullying. The types of behavior that reflected relational aggression included; rumor spreading, gossip and name calling. However, cyberbullying behaviors were not limited to covert attacks. School counselors in this study described that sometimes, physical fights, occurring on or off school grounds, were an outcome or response to cyberbullying.

### **Cyberbullying as an Issue in Schools**

Another focus in this study was, "How important was the issue of cyberbullying in schools and in the work of a School Counselor?" The results supported that cyberbullying was an important issue in the schools. In fact, the school counselors in the study clarified that not only was cyberbullying an important issue but it also created noteworthy concerns for students and the schools. This parallels a growing body of research that has linked numerous negative consequences for its victims, the bully, schools and communities (Beran & Li, 2005; Juvonen & Gross, 2008; Patchin & Hinduja, 2006). Moreover, as with traditional bullying, this study's findings indicated cyberbullying has the potential to disrupt the educational climate as well. Given the fact participants in this study expressed concerns for students' well-being, the increased activity of cyberbullying, and the lack of sound cyberbullying school policies and proper training, it is not surprising that many school counselors have taken the initiative to integrate cyberbullying guidance lessons into their curriculum.

### **Methods to Address Cyberbullying**

Another goal of this study was to explore, "the ways and methods school counselors suggested addressing cyberbullying." Overwhelmingly, the participants revealed education as

the primary means for addressing cyberbullying in the schools. There were also indications that school counselors believe that cyberbullying education should not be limited to students only. There were recommendations that education for parents and school administrators would also be critical elements of addressing cyberbullying. This is similar to research which has suggested that cyberbullying needs to be addressed through a systemic integration of education and safety strategies (Beale & Hall, 2007; Chibbaro, 2006; Li, 2009; Mason, 2008). There was also an identified need for the creation of cyberbullying policies which include sanctions relating to cyberbullying incidents. The type of punishment was not specified by the participants however consequences for cyberbullying was a general consensus.

### **Challenges for School Counselors in Addressing Cyberbullying**

Challenges for school counselors' in addressing cyberbullying was another area of exploration in this study. The current study demonstrated that many of these challenges are directly linked to the difficulty of addressing a problem that occurs in "cyberspace". School counselors identified several challenges related to the way that cyberbullying occurred: cyberbullying occurrences happened off school grounds, the inability to identify the perpetrator, and the lack of parental involvement. Related to this, the findings of this study support research indicating that the majority of cyberbullying happens off of school grounds (Agatston et al., 2007). In addition, research has suggested that the most significant challenge facing schools dealing with cyberbullying is that it is difficult to monitor students' online activities outside of school hours and from home computers (Shariff, 2005).

Participants also found it challenging not be able to identify the student due to the fact cyberbullying allows the perpetrator to remain anonymous. This presents a unique challenge to school counselors, how do they address or deal with an incident of cyberbullying when it is

difficult to correctly identify the student or students that participated (Bhat, 2008; Kowalski et al., 2007; Shariff, 2008). This is further complicated by the reality that students usually do not come forth with cyberbullying incidents for two reasons: students are hesitant to report since the incidents happen outside of school and they believe that the adults at school are not capable of handling the cyberbullying (Agatston et al., 2007).

Parental involvement was another issue that school counselors in this study identified as a challenge to addressing cyberbullying. Specifically, participants suggested that parents need technology training and stricter rules for home computer use. The cyberbullying research to date, has had much to say in regards to the absence of parental monitoring of computer use by their children. Additional research has found adult monitoring is low and youth have reported inadequate parental monitoring of their Internet use (Ybarra et al., 2004). One reason for this lack of supervision is the technology gap between parents and students (Keith & Martin, 2005).

### **Preparation Concerns**

Another area of investigation in this study was, “Did school counselors have any concerns about their preparation to deal with cyberbullying?” The findings of this study confirmed that school counselors do have concerns about their preparation for dealing with cyberbullying. Specifically, the findings indicated education and training were the prominent preparation concerns of school counselors. Participants discussed an absence of training opportunities and educational materials for dealing with cyberbullying in the schools. This includes training relevant to school counseling. These concerns have been demonstrated in other research. Wolak et al. (2008) suggested that all educational professionals should be trained to recognize and respond to online harassment. However, a 2008 National Cyber Security Alliance study indicated that nearly 75% of the participants in this study did not feel comfortable

discussing cyberbullying and less than 32% felt comfortable giving cyberbullying guidance. The findings of the current study, coupled with previous research clearly demonstrate the necessity for cyberbullying education for school counselors.

### **Roles and Responsibilities**

School counselors perceived roles and responsibilities, in relation to cyberbullying, were also explored in this study. Overwhelmingly, the majority of the participants indicated school counselors should assume a leadership role with specific responsibilities in addressing cyberbullying issues. This appears to be an important aspect of school counselors' response to cyberbullying, there are indications that school counselors need to be at the forefront of schools' response to cyberbullying. Chibbaro (2007) states that school counselors need to be seen as knowledgeable about cyberbullying and be seen as an informed resource of this issue.

Participants identified several other areas of responsibility for school counselors. This included creating cyberbullying awareness programs directed toward students and parents as well. In addition, participants felt it was important that they provide counseling to students involved in cyberbullying incidents. There is clearly a need for this type of intervention from school counselors. Traditional bullying research supports evidence that students involved in bullying often have significant psychological, social, emotional and education effects associated with bullying (Hinduja et al., 2009; Olweus, 1993; Shariff, 2008). While the research in cyberbullying is in its early stages, one can hypothesize that students who are victims of cyberbullying can experience some of the same psychological and emotional outcomes. The findings of this study indicated school counselors clearly believe that they should have a significant role in addressing cyberbullying. This finding compared to those discussed earlier indicates; school counselors clearly can identify a need for their involvement in cyberbullying.

However, this is also coupled with their own awareness that they may not be adequately prepared to serve in this capacity. The findings of this study lay the foundation for examining the preparation and role of school counselors in dealing with cyberbullying in schools.

### **Implications for School Counselors**

The purpose of this study was to better understand cyberbullying through the eyes of the school counselor and capture their experiences accurately. These findings provide a foundation for examining the implications of these results as they pertain to school counselors and cyberbullying.

#### **Training**

The findings of this study revealed school counselors' are cognizant of the issue of cyberbullying and the majority acknowledged cyberbullying was an important issue in their schools. Research suggests school counselors should be on the frontline combating cyberbullying issues in schools. Bhat (2008) states, "School counselors can take a leadership role in offering training to parents and students, to make issues of cyber safety and cyber bullying more visible and comprehensible" (p. 61). That said, it is necessary and essential to adequately prepare school counselors to effectively address the issues of cyberbullying. Awareness, knowledge, and skill training in cyberbullying must be readily available for school counselors.

Being mindful of the limited research in the area of cyberbullying, researchers currently compare the correlates of traditional bullying to cyberbullying. Empirical research has found increasing evidence that bullying can have significant negative psychosocial effects to all parties involved (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009; Olweus, 1993; Shariff, 2008). School counselors' experiences in this study support the current cyberbullying research. These school counselors'

have also observed negative overt and covert behaviors in students. Additionally, the school counselors' identified specific challenges in dealing with cyberbullying which included anonymity of the cyberbully, no control over monitoring students after school hours and lack of parental involvement. Given these findings, it is imperative school counselors' receive a variety of training strategies in cyberbullying. Although the availability for training is currently limited, there are several resources accessible for school counselors' to increase their knowledge of cyberbullying. School counselors' can utilize reliable websites devoted to stopping cyberbullying. The Cyberbullying Research Center (<http://www.cyberbullying.us/index.php>) houses information on cyberbullying, offering youth, educators and parents up to date facts on cyberbullying. Dr. Hinduja and Dr. Patchin are the creators of this website and have been involved in cyberbullying research since 2002. These researchers offer training workshops which discuss topics and issues of cyberbullying that best meet the unique needs of the school. Additionally, this site provides cyberbullying information on national and international levels.

i-SAFE Inc. (<http://www.isafe.org/>) is another dependable resource for school counselors' which provides training and cyberbullying curriculum. This site is a non-profit organization dedicated to internet safety education. The educator page offers either direct or online training through i-LEARN video modules. The services are offered to schools or districts through a subscription and license only. Additional websites that offer training include:

- Stop Bullying Now! (<http://www.stopbullyingnow.hrsa.gov/kids/>),
- Connect Safely (<http://www.connectsafely.org/>), and
- Common Sense (<http://www.common sensemedia.org/>).

In addition to website resources, school counselors may receive beneficial training within local in-service programs. Most states offer regional service agencies associated with the

Department of Education which offer training opportunities for school administration and faculty in areas of critical needs. For instance, East Alabama Regional In-Service Center (EARIC), (<http://education.auburn.edu/centersandinstitutes/earic/>) operated through the College of Education at Auburn University, Alabama offers professional development training and workshops throughout the year. School counselors' can contact the directors of their respective state agencies requesting workshops and training specifically dealing with cyberbullying. Regional service agencies may offer additional links to valuable cyberbullying training materials. The EARIC website provided a link to Technology in Motion (TiM, <http://technologyinmotion.alsde.edu/>). This project is a part of an Alabama initiative to provide professional development to educators to promote effective technology use in the classroom to better facilitate learning. School counselors can contact their State's Department of Education to locate in-service contacts. Advance training in technology may be beneficial given the fact counselors are responsible for promoting healthy student development which may include helping students address safety issues associated with cyberbullying and technology risks (ASCA, 2006).

Finally, professional organizations and publications may offer a myriad of resources for school counselors to obtain training materials on cyberbullying. The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) offers a multitude of professional development opportunities for school counselors. The benefits of training will give school counselors' a clearer knowledge of how to identify and respond to bullying. Therefore, it is imperative for school counselors to be aware of the nature, extent, causes and effects of cyberbullying. Cyberbullying training affords school counselors the knowledge and skills to design effective curriculum to meet the needs of their schools in addition to effective ways of addressing cyberbullying.

## **Education**

A primary responsibility indicated by the majority of school counselors in this study was to provide cyberbullying education to students, administration and parents. This was the second theme to emerge from this study. This finding supports the current research which proposes a systemic integration of education and safety strategies in addressing cyberbullying (Beale & Hall, 2007; Chibbaro, 2006; Li, 2009; Mason, 2008). Bullying intervention and prevention programs have been found most effective using an all school approach. Educating parents and administrators in addition to students about issues of cyberbullying has the potential to increase the effectiveness of such programs.

There are numerous ways to integrate cyberbullying curriculum into the classroom. Specific recommendations by school counselors in this study for students included open forums, guidance classes, skits, testimonies, and technology labs. The majority of websites previously mentioned in the training section provides printable handouts and activities for classroom use, which can be used as part of classroom guidance activities that are a common part of school counselors' activities. Utilizing an all school approach, school counselors can also collaborate with school resource officers or local law enforcement in the delivery of cyberbullying education.

With the majority of cyberbullying incidents originating in the homes of students, school counselors in this study recommended parent education. The school counselors suggested this can be accomplished through Parent Teacher Association Meetings, parent workshops and informational pamphlets. Resources from the United States Department of Education and State Departments of Education also provide information and guidebooks on cyberbullying that can be distributed to parents. One of these resources is Netcetera – OnGuardOnline.gov

(<http://www.onguardonline.gov/topics/overview.aspx> ) which is a website dedicated to encouraging and educating parents on minimizing risks for children on and offline. For administrators, school counselors' in this study recommended workshops, faculty meetings, and informational pamphlets as ways to stay current with issues of cyberbullying and technological advances.

### **School Policies**

Despite the clear direction on how to legally and effectively combat cyberbullying, school counselors' in this study recommended tougher policies and sanctions for acts of cyberbullying. This was the third theme related to this study. In line with an all school approach, it is imperative to include cyberbullying policies in the school's code of conduct (Agatston et al., 2007; Mason, 2008; Shariff, 2005; Wolak et al., 2007). In this study, school counselors suggested the development of cyberbullying policies to be included in student handbooks which are distributed to parents as well as the student. To increase awareness and responsibility of cyber behaviors, it is suggested parents and students read and sign these school district policies (Agatston et al., 2007).

With the support of administration and local law agencies, school counselors will be able to develop and enforce policies more effectively for their school districts within the local legal systems. School counselors can be the catalyst to get cyberbullying policies written into the schools policies. To date, several states have written cyberbullying laws that require schools to adopt anti-cyberbullying into school policies. If a school counselor is unsure of their state cyberbullying laws, they can contact their local senate website and search *cyberbullying*. Cyberbullying codes can also be written into existing bullying codes if they are currently being used in the school.

Current cyberbullying research has identified these strategies for delivery with students, schools, families and communities. It has been suggested system level interventions include curriculum-based, antibullying programs and strong policies against online harassment (Mason, 2008). Currently schools provide education to students on many issues that are experienced off school grounds such as drug awareness and sex education, the findings from this study clearly support cyberbullying education to be an integral part of the schools' curriculum and policies regardless of whether these incidents happen on or off school grounds.

### **Limitations**

The findings of the study need to be considered cautiously, within the parameters of the limitations of the study analysis and design. The findings of this study have limited generalizability. The sample was limited to school counselors in Alabama. The sample size also limits generalizability. The qualitative nature of this study was to provide in-depth and firsthand accounts of how school counselors perceive cyberbullying and to describe these experiences, thus a larger sample size may not have been possible.

The design of the study may have also limited overall findings. The study used stimulus reflection questions. The nature and content of these questions may have limited or directed the nature and content of participants' responses. Open-ended interviews may have produced different or more detailed responses. A quantitative study may have been able to identify more frequencies of responses across larger samples. Lastly, the sample had a large number of participants from grades K–5. With research indicating that most incidents occur in higher grades, a sample with a larger number of school counselors in higher grades may have yielded different responses or results.

## **Recommendations for Future Research**

Little is known about the cyberbullying phenomena. While these results provide an important first look at school counselors' perceptions of cyberbullying, more qualitative research is necessary as well as quantitative. It was apparent from this study, training, education and school policies were important to school counselors in order to be effective in addressing the issue of cyberbullying. Future research to examine school counselors' experiences and perceptions with a broader sample is necessary to see if their experiences are congruent with the school counselors' in this study. One focus of such research could concentrate on school counselor' at specific grade levels. Additionally, having identified valuable recommendations to addressing cyberbullying in this study, it would be useful to examine schools' who currently integrate cyberbullying into their curriculum. It would be interesting to examine the effectiveness of these programs.

If an important role for school counselors is to promote healthy student development, additional qualitative research to examine students' perceptions of school counselors' role and effectiveness in addressing cyberbullying may be beneficial. In the same manner, it would be important to look at the parents' and faculty's perceptions of these programs and their effectiveness. For example, focus groups with students, parents and faculty would provide a rich opportunity to further explore prevention and intervention programs. This information would be useful for school counselors' in customizing these programs to best meet the needs of the students and faculty.

## **Summary**

Overall, the findings of this study provided a foundational backdrop for descriptors of the school counselors' perceived roles, responsibilities, challenges and concerns in dealing with

cyberbullying. Findings from this study suggested there were limited training opportunities available for school counselors in addressing cyberbullying issues. Moreover, school counselors supported an all school approach which was indicative of additional roles and responsibilities for students, parents and administration in areas of education and school policies. If traditional bullying has been known to have devastating effects on students, it is imperative school counselors take leadership roles in prevention and intervention with cyberbullying.

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APPENDIX A

ALCA LETTER OF COOPERATION

APPENDIX D: ALCA LETTER OF COOPERATION



ALABAMA COUNSELING ASSOCIATION

217 Daryle Street  
Livingston, AL 35470  
(205) 652-1712

A State Branch of the American Counseling Association



January 11, 2010

Institutional Review Board  
c/o Office of Human Subjects Research  
307 Samford Hall  
Auburn University, AL 36849

Dear IRB members,

After discussing and reviewing the proposed study, "School Counselors' Perceptions of Cyberbullying", presented by Kathy Robinson, an Auburn University graduate student, the Alabama Counseling Association has agreed to cooperate in the dissemination of a recruitment letter via our email listserv to school counselors in public K-12 schools within the state of Alabama. This is a common use of this association's listserv.

If the IRB has any concerns about the permission being granted by this letter, please contact me at [chip@alabamacounseling.org](mailto:chip@alabamacounseling.org).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ervin L. Wood', written over a horizontal line.

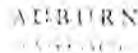
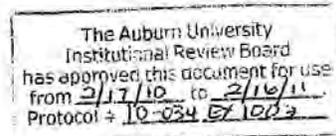
Ervin L. Wood, Ed. D  
Executive Director

APPENDIX B  
INFORMATIONAL LETTER

INFORMATIONAL LETTER

For a Research Study entitled

“School Counselors’ Perspective of Cyberbullying”



Auburn University, Alabama 36849-5222

College of Education

Department of Special Education, Rehabilitation and Counseling/School Psychology

2084 Haley Center Telephone: (334) 844-5160

INFORMATIONAL LETTER FOR PARTICIPATION IN A DESCRIPTION OF SCHOOL  
COUNSELORS’ PERCEPTIONS AND ROLES OF CYBERBULLYING

Dear School Counselor:

My name is Kathy Robinson and I am a licensed associate professional counselor in the state of Georgia. Additionally, I am a doctoral student in the Department of Special Education, Rehabilitation, Counseling/School Psychology at Auburn University, under the guidance of Dr. Jamie Carney. I am inviting you to participate in a study examining school counselors’ perceptions of cyberbullying. You are eligible to participate in this study if you are currently employed as a school counselor in a K-12 public school in the state of Alabama.

The purpose of this qualitative study focuses on school counselors’ descriptions of their experiences with students involved in cyberbullying incidents and exploration on how the issue of cyberbullying should be addressed in schools. In addition, the study will explore how school counselors perceive the challenge of cyberbullying in the schools and their current methods of intervening and effectiveness with students who report incidents of cyberbullying.

If you agree to participate in this research study, you will be asked to respond to a series of online, reflection questions. The questions pertain to your thoughts and experiences with students and cyberbullying. It is estimated that this process should not take longer than thirty (30) minutes.

The results of this study have the potential of contributing to the literature on cyberbullying prevention and interventions and implications for school counselors. You may not experience any direct benefit of participating in this study.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you are asked not to provide any identifying information (e.g., names, schools) in your responses when describing your experiences. All results from this study are anonymous, and the researcher will be unable to identify participants through their responses. Please understand at any time you can withdraw from the study during completion of the reflection responses. However, reflection responses cannot be withdrawn from the study after they have been submitted because the responses are anonymous. Your decision whether or not to participate in this study will not jeopardize your future relationship with Auburn University or with the Department of Special Education, Rehabilitation, Counseling/School Psychology.

If you have any questions about this study, contact Kathy Robinson, MS, or Jamie Carney, PhD at (334) 844-5160 or by email [kdr0012@auburn.edu](mailto:kdr0012@auburn.edu).

For more information about your rights as a participant, you may contact Auburn University's Office of Human Subjects Research

**HAVING READ THE INFORMATION PROVIDED, YOU MUST DECIDE WHETHER TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS RESEARCH PROJECT. IF YOU DECIDE TO PARTICIPATE, PLEASE CLICK THE "NEXT" ICON BELOW TO ACCESS THE SURVEY QUESTIONS. IF YOU DECIDE TO PARTICIPATE, THE DATA YOU PROVIDE WILL SERVE AS YOUR AGREEMENT TO DO SO. YOU MAY PRINT A COPY OF THIS LETTER TO KEEP.**

**SURVEY MONKEY LINK**

The Auburn University  
Institutional Review Board  
has approved this document for use  
from 2/17/10 to 2/15/11  
Protocol # 10-034 E6.1002

## APPENDIX C

### DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS

1. How many years of school counseling experience do you have?
2. Current grade (s) you counsel?
3. Estimate how many students you currently work with as a School Counselor.

APPENDIX D  
REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Please use the following questions to provide information about your experiences and responses to cyberbullying. You have sufficient space to provide detailed responses.

4. Discuss the experiences you have had with students who have been involved with cyberbullying, this may include students who were the focus of cyberbullying or initiated cyberbullying.
5. Discuss how important the issue of cyberbullying is in your school and in your work as a School Counselor.
6. Discuss the ways and methods that you think should be used to address cyberbullying in the schools.
7. Discuss what you perceive to be the challenges in addressing cyberbullying in the schools.
8. Discuss your current concerns about your preparation for addressing cyberbullying.
9. Discuss what you consider to be the roles and responsibilities of School Counselors in addressing cyberbullying.
10. Discuss what recommendations you have for addressing cyberbullying in the schools.

## APPENDIX E

### RAW DATA

#### Participants' Responses to Reflection Questions

***Question 4: Discuss the experiences you have had with students who have been involved in cyberbullying, this may include students who were the focus of cyberbullying or initiated cyberbullying.***

Q4P1 My fifth grade students know about the national case of the girl who hung herself as a result of cyberbullying. We discussed this problem in my group classes on internet safety.

Q4P2 Text messages were reported to have been sent while at home but the incident ended up being discussed at school

Q4P3 I have had students who were threatened through MySpace, Facebook and on email.

Q4P4 Relational aggression, name calling, sexting, excessive texting despite being asked not to text a person, and Facebook "wars"

Q4P5 I have had students initiate cyberbullying and be the recipients of cyberbullying

Q4P6 Most of the lower school experiences have been with the equivalent of children's "Facebook." A few children have posted unkind items about other children on their facebook page, or have gone on to someone else's facebook page and posted ungly comments.

Q4P7 none at this point

Q4P8 Students have been bullied at our school using text messaging, facebook, myspace, and emails.

Q4P9 Just some girls that are being called SLUTS, etc.

Q4P10 I have dealt with cyber bullies and those being bullied.

Q4P11 Creating bogus MySpace pages and email addresses to forward negative comments and pictures regarding classmates, enemies and frienemies

Q4P12 I have had experiences with both victims of cyberbullying and the initiator of cyberbullying.

Q4P13 None of which I am aware.

Q4P14 I have not had any students report instances of cyber-bullying to me. However, this is a topic that I cover each year in large group guidance sessions dealing with relational aggression and other forms of bullying.

Q4P15 I do not follow all the students on Facebook or My Space and discourage My Space for the most part. I have a Facebook and if a student wants to 'friend' me, I will. Texting and cell phones comprise the major component of any cyberbullying incidents we have dealt with. Fights have been recorded off-campus and sent to many other students, causing a problem with retaliation issues at school. Suggestive, partial nude and nude photographs have circulated, though most of these have been initiated at other schools and sent to students here. To my knowledge, these come to our attention when they have been sent/received outside of school hours. We do make an effort to inform our students how easily texting, posting and email can become bullying.

Q4P16 experience I have had: have been both ways: the focus of the cyberbullying and initiating the cyberbullying. Most often it happens off campus on the computer or phone. but then the incident is brought on to school campus. we have even had a suicide threat, and a student threatening to kill another student. 5th grade girls participating in My Space. Many of them changing each others password without permission and gossiping.

Q4P17 5th grade girls participating in My Space. Many of them changing each others password without permission and gossiping.

Q4P18 One student threatened to say something embarrassing to another student on the internet

Q4P19 I am not aware of any students.

Q4P20 confidential

Q4P21 Students often use Facebook to tease each other. The chat back and forth and sometimes post things to embarrass each other. The same it true for texting.

Q4P22 I have worked with a group of students who were texting one another after school hours. It started out as innocent fun but turned into rumors.

Q4P23 N/A

Q4P24 none to my knowledge.

Q4P25 Students currently use social networking to bully one another. For example a fight occurred at my school and was uploaded onto YouTube and MySpace. Due to the content of the video was erased from MySpace but can still be viewed on YouTube. Students also use text messaging to send and share photos and messages about an individual. I find this mainly happens with girls. Finally, gaining access to a password

to humiliate or spread rumors about an individual. These are just a few incidents of cyberbullying I have been involved with.

Q4P26 Gossip on social websites mainly. Some texting where students were spreading rumors, etc.

Q4P27 At this age, cyberbullying has never been a problem that I am aware of.

Q4P28 None - my students are too young to really be able to cyberbully. They may send mean text messages, but not to the victim.

Q4P29 Mostly fourth and fifth graders, average of two to three students per year

Q4P30 I have had several junior high age mostly female that have been the victim of bullying via text messages. These incidents occur outside of the school day but get brought to school where emotions get out of control.

Q4P31 Fights occurred at school because of Cyberbullying

Q4P32 very little - sometimes comments on Facebook

***Question 5: Discuss the important the issue of cyberbullying is in your school and in you work as a School Counselor.***

Q5P1 The fifth grade students have frequent access to the internet and are on the social networks. I feel this is an emerging social issue for the students in my school.

Q5P2 It is very important due to the way that students communicate on social networking sites and with text messages. Consequently, I do lessons on these topics.

Q5P3 Though I am at a small, rural school, we have had incidents where students cyberbully thinking since it wasn't done at school then they should not be addressed here. Students

come to school afraid of what may happen due to these threats. We do not have a large amount but enough for us to address the issue

Q5P4 Important to educate parents and students, however more needs to be done by parents to monitor. School monitors really well!

Q5P5 Very Important

Q5P6 Most of the bullying in lower school is the direct kind (ie. taunting, ugly words, teasing) that is spoken to the child at school. We have had a few instances of the Facebook type issues that I mentioned earlier and a few IMings that got out of hand. Everything of this nature has occurred in their homes, not at school.

Q5P7 we have not had any problems of this nature

Q5P8 It is very important because we have seen a rise over the last five years in this type of bullying.

Q5P9 very important

Q5P10 It is very important. Many students are depressed due to cyber bullying.

Q5P11 The issue is very important because per our cell phone policies students are able to bring cell phones to school and forward negative messages regarding classmates.

Q5P12 It's very important due to the lack of information as how to deal with it as a counselor. I feel that there should be examples or precedents as to how to effectively deal with cyberbullying.

Q5P13 It is not a problem at my school.

Q5P14 At this time, the issue is one that address on an informational level, but I have not had any personal experiences with students pertaining to cyberbullying yet.

Q5P15 It is a very important and serious issue. As with everything, I would like more time to discuss this with students. We have not had legal issues from a student's participation in any form of cyberbullying and to my knowledge they have been 'relatively' safe.

Q5P16 it is becoming more important especially since there are no focused ethic or moral rules which school officials can emphasize. Often I view it as 3 seconds that a student responded in haste.

Q5P17 I feel it is very important. I do a guidance lesson with the 5th graders.

Q5P18 At this grade level it is not used as much as in older grades.

Q5P19 I have sessions on cyberbullying mainly with 3rd-5th grades.

Q5P20 Very

Q5P21 Younger and younger my students are getting Facebook accounts and cell phones with texting. They talk online with each other frequently. It is important for me to make them understand that what they say online or in a text is the same as writing a note to someone or saying it to their face. Proper behavior is hard to teach because you are working with children who are not old enough to even be part of this tech culture.

Q5P22 I work with my 5th and 6th graders especially in the area of cyberbullying. We take it extremely important.

Q5P23 I'm sure it goes on but no one has complained to me.

Q5P24 Very Important, however I do not see cyberbullying in K-2 as much as the upper grades.

Q5P25 As a school counselor, it is necessary for counselors to provide a safe environment that will enable students to develop into acceptable adults. Cyberbullying is one form of behavior that can become a problems if not addressed immediately. Currently my school follows the County's code of behavior rules to address matters of cyberbullying. The

consequences if continued can lead to expulsion, juvenile detention center, and legal actions. I think everyone with the school should be informed and willing to work to prevent its convenience.

Q5P26 We do not see it very much, at this age. We do see some around 4th or 5th grade but it is mainly gossiping and rumors.

Q5P27 I address all types of bullying during my large group guidance lessons. We spend approximately one month talking about prevention and intervention of bullying situations.

Q5P28 It is a lesson I do 1 time a school year

Q5P29 I address bullying and cyberbullying is an integral part of the program

Q5P30 This is not a major issue at my school at the present but I see it increasing each year and more and more students have access to text messages.

Q5P31 Scale of 1–10 (10 highest) about an 8

Q5P32 not very important

***Question 6: Discuss the ways and methods that you think should be used to address cyberbullying in the schools.***

Q6P1 This issue needs to be addressed in group counseling situations. I have also used worksheets, real life accounts and have brought the school resource officer to class to bring out the law enforcement consequences of cyperbullying.

Q6P2 Guidance lessons. Parent Education.

Q6P3 It should be considered a threat and treated like any other fighting/threat, etc.

Q6P4 Workshops for parents, education for students. Start young!

Q6P5 I think parents should be made aware of the potential dangers of cyberbullying and they should monitor the sites their children visit. Counselors should address cyberbullying when they talk about harassment and bullying. Cyberbullying is happening more in our schools.

Q6P6 Parent involvement is key. They need to monitor what their children do online. I don't believe that any elementary age student should be on facebook (or its equivalent).

Q6P7 Students engaging in such activities should be expelled and made to attend anger and behavioral management counseling

Q6P8 Guidance classes that focus on this issue are an important education tool. Public speakers, such as the ABI, FBI, or other law enforcement individuals, provide great information to our students about the dangers and the impact of cyberbullying.

Q6P9 large groups (classroom guidance), principal should address it and punishment if it affects things at school

Q6P10 I think we should have some form of serious punishment if we have proof.

Q6P11 Parent notification, Cyberbullying Policy, student awareness

Q6P12 1). How to prevent it 2). How to deal with as it happens 3). How to get parents/guardians involved to help with the situation when it occurs.

Q6P13 Parents should be notified and in control of home computer activities.

Q6P14 I believe that students should be provided information in the early elementary grades about cyberbullying and its potentially devastating effects on the targets, as well as the perpetrators. I further believe it is the school's responsibility to monitor student use of school computers and report any violations of the school's acceptable use policy. Cyberbullying is clearly a violation of acceptable use, and those students who engage in

cyberbullying should be prohibited from using school computers. The school also needs to partner with parents and law enforcement if necessary to stop cyberbullying among the student body.

Q6P15 At this point, I have seen an impact when children see or hear someone who has been victimized or the parent of a victim share a story. When we talk about the 'what ifs', they probably tune it out. Need concrete proof and personal experiences.

Q6P16 classroom activities, media, and family values.

Q6P17 Discuss that any information or pictures that you share with others can be misused by others. Also, they need to be informed on the legal actions that can occur in each cyberbullying situation.

Q6P18 I believe that it is important for counselors and administrators to be informed about the websites that students use and to be able to access them regularly.

Q6P19 Parent seminars, counseling sessions, information shared with faculty and staff such at venues such as faculty meeting and/or professional development.

Q6P20 SRO presentations based on law

Q6P21 There should be whole class discussions in tech classes and in counseling classes.

Q6P22 Large Group guidance; law enforcement to come talk to parents in workshop at night;  
faculty meeting

Q6P23 I think it's hard to do at school. It is probably done at home and brought to school.

Q6P24 educating the students

Q6P25 Youth forum, group counseling sessions and individual counseling are a few methods that I would use to address cyberbullying in the schools.

Q6P26 It would help if the students were not allowed to have cell phones AT ALL in the schools. Having them at school just means they will sneak them into the classroom and use them anyway. Having access to internet during the school day makes it easier for the gossip and bullying to occur. It would not prevent it but it might slow it down somewhat- or at least give the bully some time to think about what is going on at school before they get home to the technology! Having instant access to social websites, texting and other devices just makes the bullying that much more of an issue.

Q6P27 Closer monitoring on school computer use and immediate consequences if this occurs on or off campus. Parents should also have some type of penalty or consequence similar to hosting parties with underage drinkers.

Q6P28 Guidance lessons, police visit to classrooms, informational pamphlets to parents

Q6P29 Students must be taught to recognize put downs and the language of put downs

Q6P30 This is a hard one — I'm not sure if anything we have tried really works

Q6P31 It needs to be a part of the student code of conduct.

Q6P increased awareness

***Question 7: Discuss what you perceive to be the challenges in addressing cyberbullying in the schools.***

Q7P2 These things often happen away from school and we know nothing about it OR we find out about it once the problem is huge.

Q7P1 The younger the student the less graphic you can be when discussing these issues. you need to gauge what you say by the grade level of the student.

- Q7P3 Sometimes students log onto one another's accounts and send stuff to others. therefore, the wrong person gets in trouble.
- Q7P4 Getting parents to learn about technology, and getting them to monitor or not allow texting/facebook/internet access at too young an age
- Q7P5 Although there are vague policies dealing with bullying in my school system. Nothing in our code of conduct addresses cyberbullying. Most of the time administration will not address it because it happens at home.
- Q7P6 I usually happens outside of school hours at the individual's home. We talk about it in my classes, but it is not something that a counselor is going to be able to stop on his/her own.
- Q7P7 School administrators and staff have no way of monitoring internet use on a consistent basis
- Q7P8 The biggest challenge is that this type of bullying usually takes place after school hours or at home.
- Q7P9 What they do at home is their business. Parents will get mad
- Q7P10 Great videos on you tube, but I can't show them at school. They are blocked. Students don't take it seriously, because there are no consequences.
- Q7P11 Actually being able to pinpoint the bully originator and confidentiality.
- Q7P12 How to handle it when it takes place off campus; and it's brought into the school.
- Q7P13 No control over what happens in the home.
- Q7P14 School administration can only control what students do at school, to an extent. If a student engages in cyberbullying outside of school, it is difficult to address. Furthermore, I feel that many teachers and administrators are uninformed about this issue. Often they

choose to ignore blatant bullying that takes place in the schools. They are certainly less likely to recognize or address the more covert form of cyberbullying.

Q7P15 Time

Q7P16 no set rules or ground rules. Often have to turn toward law enforcement. some parents do not see it worth the effort.

Q7P17 Getting the students to realize the legal aspect of things.

Q7P18 The problem with cyberbullying is that students can have their information marked as private and no one could see the bullying except for the intended parties. Sometimes it could be one person's word against another.

Q7P19 Minimum parental involvement

Q7P20 cannot control use in homes

Q7P21 Adequately explaining the consequences of this behavior.

Q7P22 Afterschool hours is when most occurs so very little goes detected. Students are afraid to say anything and little evidence is seen at school.

Q7P23 We have certain sites blocked so I don't see a lot of cyberbullying.

Q7P24 I don't perceive it to be a challenge, however more so as to what class to utilize. It could be taught in the computer class or in an open forum.

Q7P25 Some challenges would be identifying the person responsible for spreading the rumors. This is because children can blame one another "One behavior against the other."

Q7P26 It is difficult to determine exactly when the bullying occurs and if it is a school or home issue (or both). Having parent support in the schools on this issue is imperative. Telling children and teens they can't have cell phones at school is difficult as well, but I believe it is necessary at this point. It is getting out of control.

Q7P27 Who is actually doing the bullying online since the identity of these kinds of perpetrators would be hard to track due to the confidentiality this medium provides.

Q7P28 If I teach them about how cyberbullying works, they will know how to do it

Q7P29 It is very difficult for the original author of the message to be determined. Often times students think it is cool to pass it on and accept no responsibility because they didn't actually create the original message

Q7P30 The technology available today makes it almost impossible to prevent this. Parents often don't see this as an issue also.

Q7P31 It's new to many people and many people don't take it seriously

Q7P32 none

***Reflection Question 8: Discuss your current concerns about your preparation for addressing cyberbullying.***

Q8P1 There needs to be more hands on materials in order to teach these students in classroom situations. My best materials came from my resource officer.

Q8P2 I wish that all schools had an in-depth curriculum.

Q8P3 I need much more training.

Q8P4 None, I feel well educated and equipped to educate students and parents, however I am of the millennial generation!

Q8P5 I think I am adequately prepared. I have attended several workshops and training sessions focused on cyberbullying.

Q8P6 I don't know much about Facebook, I don't IM, I don't blog or twitter, so the children have a lot of technical expertise that I don't have.

Q8P7 How can school officials punish students in order to ensure that they won't engage in this horrible activity again

Q8P8 I do not have concerns about my preparation at this time but as technology advances, I will need to learn more.

Q8P9 Don't have a good program about it

Q8P10 Finding appropriate materials that will real tug at their hearts.

Q8P11 Lack of age appropriate material on 'sexting'.

Q8P12 I need more information to effectively give my students, faculty and staff, and parents/guardians information as how to handle cyberbullying.

Q8P13 None.

Q8P14 I am forty years old and only recently set up an account on a social networking site. I just don't have a lot of knowledge about social networking sites and how students use them for cyberbullying. I definitely think teachers, counselors, and administrators need more training in this area.

Q8P15 time

Q8P16 enough information and laws

Q8P17 Parent's input.

Q8P18 I teach lessons on bullying, I really do not talk about cyberbullying very much.

Q8P19 Not enough interest in cyberbullying, other issues more pressing.

Q8P20 Knowledge of law

Q8P21 I have an account on Facebook and Twitter so that I can keep an eye on my kids, but so much goes on of which I am unaware.

Q8P22 Getting the word out to parents to police the internet, cell phones, etc

Q8P23 Some students won't tell what's going on. How can I find out if cyberbullying is going on?

Q8P24 In the lower grades I would address it from the standpoint of fighting or picking on someone you don't even know.

Q8P25 Some concerns would be the victim would feel embarrassed, ashamed and fearful. In order to establish a safe environment for students to become successful to develop the whole child. However some current concerns are students not being open to the affects that cyberbullying has caused in the past.

Q8P26 Just getting the parents on board and getting the information out to the families. Having parental support is important and having them recognize the signs of bullying and reporting issues.

Q8P27 How to appropriately and effectively explain this to younger students.

Q8P28 None

Q8P29 Addressing this issue can become very legally challenging because often times the phone, computer, Ipod, etc; are in the parent's name

Q8P30 I don't have the time or resources to address this issue in a productive manner.

Q8P31 What can I do to stop it.

Q8P32 no concerns

***Reflection Question 9: Discuss what you consider to be the roles and responsibilities of School Counselors in addressing cyberbullying.***

Q9P1 We need to make students aware of the consequences of this issue to both the victim and the perp.

- Q9P2 We need to educate students about what cyberbullying is. We need to let them know about the consequences of cyberbullying both socially, emotionally, and legally.
- Q9P3 They should be on the front line addressing it.
- Q9P4 Education about technology and topic to parents, education about risks/consequences to parents and students. However, if it occurs outside of school, it becomes a gray area!
- Q9P5 Basically if a student informs me they are receiving messages via the computer which are demeaning, threatening and repetitive and can provide proof of the correspondence that happens with another student on our campus, I contact both parents. I also inform the parent of the child receiving the messages to speak to the resource officer we have on campus for additional help with the issue.
- Q9P6 When parents contact me I will talk with them about how they can handle the event. Also, I can speak with the other children involved and their parents as well.
- Q9P7 working with students on self esteem issues, anger management, and behavioral issues
- Q9P8 I believe that school counselors should educate students on the dangers, emotional impact, and legal issues regarding cyberbullying.
- Q9P9 To educate on what could happen and what to do if you see it happening
- Q9P10 Counsel students about not being a bully and counsel students who are being bullied.
- Q9P11 The role of the school counselor on cyberbullying is the same as bullying.
- Q9P12 Since this is a new phase, with prevalent information counselors should be able to share with students effective means as how not to use technology for inappropriate means.
- Q9P13 Notifying parents as needed and dealing with an upset child the same as with any problem.

Q9P14 I believe that school counseling programs should be developmental and preventive in nature. All forms of bullying should be addressed through large group guidance, as well as specific issues in small group and individual sessions.

Q9P15 Make certain that students understand what it is, how dangerous it is and how serious the outcome of what seems like simple teasing might be.

Q9P16 I feel the school counselor has a major role in addressing students, as well as the classroom teacher.

Q9P17 Using classroom guidance and handout materials for parents to inform the importance of stopping cyberbullying.

Q9P18 I feel that my role in cyberbullying should be the same as in other bullying. I speak to all students involved and try to handle it but I will speak to administrators if it does not stop immediately.

Q9P19 Awareness

Q9P20 Undecided

Q9P21 It is important that counselors be available to listen to students who are being bullied and to make students aware of possible consequences.

Q9P22 Providing the information to the devastating effects cyberbullying can have on students. Providing them the means to handle cyberbullying if they are or someone they know is being bullied.

Q9P23 Treat it as you do any bullying problem. Talk with students about the effects of cyberbullying and how it can be stopped or prevented.

Q9P24 I would address it from the standpoint of being proactive in teaching the does and don'ts.

Q9P25 The counselors role is to educate students about the harm cyberbullying may cause. The counselors responsibility would be to provide a program to address cyberbullying.

Q9P26 Just to talk with the victims about their feelings and emotions. We can address the bully, but only to see if they are having emotional issues to be addressed. We can educate the students during large group sessions and be a parental support if they need information.

Q9P27 Education and prevention

Q9P28 Educate students about cyberbullying and its effects

Q9P29 Counselor should be responsible for informing parents of the possibility of their phone, computer, etc; being used for intimidation and threats,

Q9P30 Getting information out to students regarding the dangers and working with the victims.

Q9P31 The same as normal bullying

Q9P32 not any different from bullying in general

***Reflection Question 10: Discuss what recommendations you have for addressing cyberbullying in the schools.***

Q10P1 Let's bring in community resources and parents if this is becoming a community wide problem.

Q10P2 In-depth curriculum.

Q10P3 Students and parents need to know it is just as serious as face-to-face threats and will not be tolerated.

Q10P4 Mandatory workshops for parents, put in curriculum for Character Education or in computer class. Have a specific and concrete technology use and cyberbullying policy in handbook/with administration.

Q10P5 I think awareness is the key and the willingness for administration to address the concern when it is brought to their attention in the form of a discipline referral. Especially if the bullying continues at school.

Q10P6 I think more information about how children can cyberbully would be a good thing for a counselor so that we can understand the technology.

Q10P7 Develop a plan that will stop it before it starts

Q10P8 Educating our students through groups and open discussions concerning the issue.

Q10P9 Bring someone in that does a training

Q10P10 We need some free programs for use with our students.

Q10P11 We follow our bullying and conflict resolution policy.

Q10P12 Experts come in a discuss the pros and cons of technology for social networking and communication.

Q10P13 It should be treated the same as bullying.

Q10P14 First, educators must be trained to recognize cyberbullying and taught the potential effects of such bullying. Cyberbullying should not be taken lightly and should be addressed as any other instance of bullying.

Q10P15 time to do it

Q10P16 knowledge of the system

Q10P17 Middle School and High School do parent workshops. For all grades do classroom guidance and send home cyberbullying information.

Q10P18 Education for parents, teens and elementary age students. The more education the more likely we are to be able to address it.

Q10P19 PTA Meetings, parent seminars, individual and small group sessions

Q10P20 Utilize SRO and teach law based

Q10P21 Discussions in tech classes and in counseling classes

Q10P22 Even if you don't think it is a problem, it is a topic that needs to be addressed.

Q10P23 N/A

Q10P24 Use it as part of your curriculum that is already in place. You may address it via web-classes or assembly.

Q10P25 Some recommendations to address cyberbullying would be parental involvement. If parents monitor cell phone and internet use with protective sign in as for schools continue to monitor students access with the schools on computer and addressing cyberbullying using incentive forums or group counseling to further prevent cyberbullying.

Q10P26 Just taking cell phones away during the school day all together. Cell phones are not necessary on campus and only cause problems.

Q10P27 No tolerance

Q10P28 More materials for counselors to use

Q10P29 Students should not be allowed to have any type of cell phone, Iphone, etc; on their person. Also computer networks should be closely monitored and limited access to only educational web sites available.

Q10P30 Tougher policies.

Q10P31 Give harsh punishment for these actions, just like normal bullying

Q10P32 do not participate or respond if it happens and it will stop

APPENDIX F

TABLES

Themes Identified by Research Questions

Table 1

*Description of Experiences and Importance of Cyberbullying*

Reflection Question	Response Units*	Participants**
Question 4: Experiences		
Yes	22	22
No Awareness of Cyberbullying Activity	9	9
Confidential	1	1
Informational Communication Technology	32	25
Internet	19	13
Social Websites	14	9
MySpace	4	4
Facebook	7	7
YouTube	1	1
General	2	2
Email	5	5

(table continues)

Table 1 (continued)

Reflection Question	Response Units*	Participants**
Cell phones	13	12
Texting	10	10
Sexting	2	2
General Use	1	1
Cyberbullying Behaviors	22	17
Verbal Harassment	14	9
Embarrassing Words	2	2
Negative comments	2	2
Name calling	1	1
Gossip	2	2
Rumors	3	3
Teasing	1	1
Relational aggression	1	1
Threats	2	2
Overt Aggression	8	8
Fights	3	3
Privacy Invasion	3	3
Post Unkind Items	2	3

(table continues)

Table 1 (continued)

Reflection Question	Response Units*	Participants**
Location of Cyberbullying Occurrence	5	4
Home	1	1
After School Hours	3	3
Off Campus	1	1
Question 5:		
Importance of Cyberbullying	32	32
Very Important	22	22
Not a Major Issue	5	5
Not an Issue at Grade Level	2	2
Not Specific	2	2
Concerns	8	8
Increased Activity of Cyberbullying	2	2
Students Mental Well Being	2	2
No Ethic/Moral Rules	1	1
Lack of School Policy	1	1
Age Onset Earlier	1	1
Freedom of Technology Access	2	2
Current Education	8	8
Addresses the issue with students	2	2
Teaches sessions	6	6

- \* Response Units: the number of content units related to each theme in the participants' responses. A participants' response to one reflection question could include multiple response units.
- \*\* Participants: represents the number of participants in the sample whose responses corresponded with each theme.

Table 2

*Methods to Address Cyberbullying*

Reflection Question	Response Units*	Participants**
Question 6:		
Education	47	30
Student	34	30
Global Methods	23	22
General Awareness	11	11
Technology Classes	1	1
Testimonies	2	2
Student Resource Officer	2	2
Family Values	1	1
Youth Forums	1	1
Police Officers	4	4
Media	1	1
Counseling Venue	11	11
Individual Counseling	1	1
Group Counseling	4	4
Guidance Lessons	6	6
Parent	10	10
General Education	6	6
Parental Involvement	4	4

Table 2 (continued)

Reflection Question	Response Units*	Participants**
Administration	3	3
General Education	3	3
Consequences and Penalties	10	10
Students	9	8
General Consequences	4	4
Prohibited from Computer Use	1	1
Legal Repercussions	2	2
Expelled	1	1
Anger/Behavioral Counseling	1	1
Parents	1	1
General Consequence/Penalty	1	1
Policy Endorsement	6	6
Computer Monitoring in School	2	2
No Cell Phones Allowed in Schools	1	1
Develop Cyberbullying Policy	3	3

Table 3

*Challenges of Addressing Cyberbullying*

Reflection Question	Response Units*	Participants**
Question 7:		
Location	11	11
Off School Grounds	7	7
At Home	4	4
Anonymity	7	7
Identity Unknown	4	4
Information Private	1	1
Hard to Recognize	1	1
Tapping into Emails Illegally	1	1
Parental Involvement	6	6
Lack of Interest	5	5
Invasion of Privacy	1	1

Table 4

*Preparation Concerns in Addressing Cyberbullying*

Reflection Question	Response Units*	Participants**
Question 8:		
Training	18	18
Hands on Materials	9	9
In-depth Curriculum	5	5
Technology Training	1	1
Law Based Training	3	3
Counselor Competence	4	4
No Concerns	3	3
Adequately prepared	1	1

Table 5

*Roles and Responsibilities in Addressing Cyberbullying*

Reflection Question	Response Units*	Participants**
Question 9:		
Students	29	29
Global Awareness	21	21
Individual Counseling	8	8
Parents	6	6
Notification	4	4
Handout Materials	2	2

Table 6

*Recommendations in Addressing Cyberbullying*

Reflection Question	Response Units*	Participants**
Question 10:		
Education	20	22
Students	10	10
Parents	8	7
Administration	2	2
Curriculum Development	7	7
In-depth Curriculum	7	7
Policy Development	12	12
No Tolerance	4	4
Use Current Bullying Policy	2	2
No Cell Phones	2	2
Monitor Internet Use	2	2
Cyberbullying in Student Handbook	2	2

APPENDIX G  
AUBURN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD (IRB)  
APPROVAL LETTER

**AUBURN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD for RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMANSUBJECTS**  
**RESEARCH PROTOCOL REVIEW FORM**

For information or help contact THE OFFICE OF HUMAN SUBJECTS RESEARCH, 307 Samford Hall, Auburn University  
 Phone: 334-844-5968 e-mail: hsubject@auburn.edu Web Address: http://www.auburn.edu/research/vpr/ohs/

Complete this form using Adobe Acrobat (versions 5.0 and greater). Hand written copies not accepted.

1. PROPOSED START DATE of STUDY: February 2010

PROPOSED REVIEW CATEGORY (Check one):  FULL BOARD  EXPEDITED  EXEMPT

2. PROJECT TITLE: School Counselors' Perceptions of Cyberbullying

3. Kathy Robinson Doctoral Student SERC 770-661-7784 kdr0002@auburn.edu  
 PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR TITLE DEPT PHONE AU E-MAIL  
 4150 Academy Dr #413 Opelika, AL robkat0660@bellsouth.net  
 MAILING ADDRESS FAX ALTERNATE E-MAIL

4. SOURCE OF FUNDING SUPPORT:  Not Applicable  Internal  External Agency  Pending  Received

5. LIST ANY CONTRACTORS, SUB-CONTRACTORS, OTHER ENTITIES OR IRBs ASSOCIATED WITH THIS PROJECT:

6. GENERAL RESEARCH PROJECT CHARACTERISTICS

6A. Mandatory CITI Training	6B. Research Methodology
Names of key personnel who have completed CITI: Dr. Jamie Carney Kathy Robinson  CITI group completed for this study: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Social/Behavioral <input type="checkbox"/> Biomedical  Protocol-Specific modules completed: <input type="checkbox"/> Genetic <input type="checkbox"/> Vet & Administration <input type="checkbox"/> International <input type="checkbox"/> Prisoner Research <input type="checkbox"/> Public School Students <input type="checkbox"/> Pregnant Women/Fetuses Other: _____ _____ _____	Please check all descriptors that best apply to the research methodology. Data Source(s): <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> New Data <input type="checkbox"/> Existing Data Will data be recorded so that participants can be directly or indirectly identified? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No  Data collection will involve the use of: <input type="checkbox"/> Educational Tests (cognitive diagnostic, aptitude, etc.) <input type="checkbox"/> Interview / Observation <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Surveys / Questionnaires <input type="checkbox"/> Physical / Physiological Measures or Specimens (see Section 6E) <input type="checkbox"/> Internal / electronic <input type="checkbox"/> Private records or files <input type="checkbox"/> Audio / Video / Photos
6C. Participant Information	6D. Risks to Participants
Please check all descriptors that apply to the participant population. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Males <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Females <input type="checkbox"/> AU students  Vulnerable Populations <input type="checkbox"/> Pregnant Women/Fetuses <input type="checkbox"/> Children and/or Adolescents (under age 18 in AL) <input type="checkbox"/> Prisoners Persons with: <input type="checkbox"/> Economic Disadvantages <input type="checkbox"/> Physical Disabilities <input type="checkbox"/> Educational Disadvantages <input type="checkbox"/> Intellectual Disabilities  Do you plan to compensate your participants? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	Please identify all risks that participants might encounter in this research. <input type="checkbox"/> Breach of Confidentiality* <input type="checkbox"/> Coercion <input type="checkbox"/> Deception <input type="checkbox"/> Physical <input type="checkbox"/> Psychological <input type="checkbox"/> Social <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> None <input type="checkbox"/> Other  *Note that if the investigator is using or accessing confidential or identifiable data, breach of confidentiality is always a risk.
6E. Institutional Biosafety Approval	
Do you need IBC Approval for this study? <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes - BUA # _____ Expiration date _____	

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DATE RECEIVED IN OHSR: 2/1/10 by BK PROTOCOL # 10-034 ES 1003  
 DATE OF IRB REVIEW: 3/1/10 by KSL APPROVAL CATEGORY: 43 CFE 46 J01 (M)(2)  
 DATE OF IRB APPROVAL: 3/1/10 by KSL INTERVAL FOR CONTINUING REVIEW: 2 yrs  
 COMMENTS: