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Phenomenological exploration of middle school principals' perspectives and responses to cyberbullying

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UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

Greeley, Colorado

The Graduate School

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL EXPLORATION OF MIDDLE
SCHOOL PRINCIPALS' PERSPECTIVES AND
RESPONSES TO CYBERBULLYING

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

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May 2014

This Dissertation by: Sara A. Knippenberg

Entitled: *A Phenomenological Exploration of Middle School Principals' Perspectives and Responses to Cyberbullying*

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College of Education and Behavioral Sciences in Department of School Psychology

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ABSTRACT

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This study explored the perspectives and responses of school principals to cyberbullying incidents occurring at their schools. This was accomplished by qualitative methods of data collection and analysis, namely through in-depth interviews of six school principals working in large school districts in the Denver-metro area. The seven steps of the modified van Kaam method were used in this study to help portray the meanings of each participant's experiences. The data were synthesized and extrapolated into the following five major emergent themes: (a) First, Gather the Facts; (b) Addressing the Incident; (c) Barriers to Preventing Cyberbullying, (d) Developing Partnerships; and (e) Building Safe Schools. Within the First, Gather the Facts theme, the principals stressed the need to collect information from multiple sources and validate the accuracy of that information by determining the nexus to the school and if the incident was truly cyberbullying and not just conflict. In the second emerging theme, Addressing the Incident, the principals expressed that during the investigation they provided support to the victim and sent the main message to their students--*the bullying must stop*. Within the Barriers to Prevention Cyberbullying theme, principals described the greatest barriers: technology, location, and anonymity. In the fourth emerging theme, Developing Partnerships, principals stressed the importance of working collaboratively with police,

parents, and mental health professionals to better prevent and intervene with cyberbullying. Within the final emerging theme, Building Safe Schools, principals discussed how cyberbullying was mostly reported by students, state bullying policy was not a driving force in most of the principals' actions, and all principals used a variety of programming for both intervention and prevention of cyberbullying. However, data based decisions were not commonly used to direct those efforts and all principals expressed the need to establish and maintain a positive school climate. It is essential that all school personnel know their roles in the prevention and intervention efforts of cyberbullying. Principals are the leaders of their school and key individuals to direct (cyber) bullying programming in their schools. The findings of this study might be used to shift cyberbullying research from awareness to action in three following ways: (a) help students and educators understand the differences between peer conflict and (cyber) bullying; (b) build a systematic multi-tiered approach to frame (cyber) bullying prevention and intervention efforts; and (c) given the state policy lack of depth and direction, district policy needs to help dictate the direction schools should take with their (cyber) bullying prevention and intervention efforts.

Keywords Cyberbullying. Principals. Middle School. School Psychologists. Bullying intervention. Prevention.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

“What her family and friends from both sides of the Atlantic grieve is the loss of the incandescent enthusiasm of a life blossoming. She enjoyed life with an energy only the young possess” (Goldman, 2010). The Prince family wrote this in the *Springfield Republican* newspaper after the suicide of their daughter, Phoebe. Phoebe, a 15-year-old recent Irish immigrant, hung herself in the family’s stairwell on January 14, 2010 after being tormented (Goldman, 2010). She was being harassed by older girls from her high school who apparently resented her for dating an older football player (Goldman, 2010; Holladay, 2011). These girls reportedly called her a “whore” and a “bitch” in person, through Facebook, and in text-messages over a period of time (Holladay, 2011). Even after Phoebe’s death, one South Hadley High School student gloated, “I don’t care that she’s dead” (Holladay, 2011).

Stories similar to Phoebe’s have become all too common in the media in the last few years. Holladay (2011) refers to these types of incidents as bullicide--suicide by bullying. Other heartbreaking incidents illustrate just how urgent and pressing this tragic problem has become:

- October 7, 2003: 13-year-old Ryan Halligan, a middle school student with special needs, committed suicide after being accused of being gay and

incessantly taunted, threatened, and insulted both online and in person (Halligan & Halligan, 2010).

- June 29, 2005: 15-year-old Jeff Johnston hung himself after enduring two years of physical and online bullying. The bullying began when Jeff's tormentor learned of his relationship with a popular girl at school. Another tormentor hacked into an online video game Jeff and his friends created and replaced it with a hate page about Jeff (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009a).
- July 3, 2008: 18-year-old Jessica Logan hung herself in her bedroom after she sent a nude photo of herself to her boyfriend's cell phone; that photo was then sent to hundreds of students in at least seven greater Cincinnati, Ohio, high schools (Kranz, 2009).
- September 18, 2011: 14-year-old Jamey Rodemeyer killed himself after enduring a year of hateful comments at school and online concerning his sexual orientation. Jamey had just started his freshman year in high school (James, 2011).

Phoebe Prince and these other adolescents were all victims of cyberbullying, a new phenomenon made possible in the digital age. Experts have had a difficult time defining the phenomenon of cyberbullying because of the rapidly changing landscape of cyberspace (Kowalski, Limber, & Agatston, 2008). Shariff and Strong-Wilson defined cyberbullying as "compromising covert, psychological bullying, conveyed through the electronic media such as cell phones, weblogs and websites, online chat rooms, MUD rooms and Xanags" (as cited in Shariff, 2008, p. 30). However, Shariff (2008) later revised his definition to include other social networking sites including Facebook,

YouTube, and MySpace. Belsey (2006) defined cyberbullying as the “use of information and communication technologies such as e-mail, cell phones ... and defamatory personal Web sites, to support deliberate, repeated, and hostile behavior by an individual or group that is intended to harm others” (para. 1). According to Hinduja and Patchin (2009a), cyberbullying is defined as ... “willful and repeated harm inflicted through the use of computers, cell phones, and other electronic devices” (p. 4). Experts are continually trying to keep up with the changes in technology and to identify and understand cyberbullying.

Background on Bullying and Cyberbullying

Bullying has become a global phenomenon and has been studied since the 1970s (Li, 2006; Mason, 2008). Bullying had previously been considered a rite of passage or an experience children must survive (Swearer & Espelage, 2004). Bullying was minimally regarded or overlooked as a serious problem even though educators knew students need a safe learning environment in order to flourish (Olweus, Limber, & Mihalic, 1999). However, in the last 20 years, researchers have found the significant impact bullying truly has on students emotionally, socially, and academically. Nansel et al. (2001) defined bullying as “a specific type of aggression in which (1) the behavior is intended to harm or disturb, (2) the behavior occurs repeatedly over time and (3) there is an imbalance of power” (p. 2094). According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (2011), 28% of students ages 12-18 reported they were victims of bullying in school during the 2008-2009 school year. Because almost one-third of students face bullying at school, it is important to understand the impact bullying might have on students. Traditional bullying has been linked to

- Disrupted social and emotional development of adolescents (Raskauskas & Stoltz, 2007).
- Lowered self-esteem and higher levels of anxiety (Kowalski et al., 2008).
- Increased academic risk caused by the stress and distractions of bullying (Kowalski et al., 2008).

Traditional bullying has been transformed and extended with the use of technology. The National Center for Education Statistics (Writ et al., 2002) reported that 99% of public schools in America have computers with Internet access. Cox Communications (2012) reported in their Tween Internet Safety Survey that 77% of parents (with tweens ages 10-13) said Internet safety was a major concern. Half of the parents reported that they could not control everything their tween did and saw online (Cox Communications, 2012). With the increased use of computers and the likelihood that total supervision is impossible, cyberbullying has quickly developed into a dangerous new phenomenon (Hinduja & Patchin, 2008).

The 2008-2009 *School Crime Supplement* (DeVoe & Bauer, 2011) surveyed 4,326 students in grades 6 through 12 across the country and found that 6% had experienced some form of electronic bullying. Earlier national studies found prevalence rates ranging from 9% to 75% (Hinduja & Patchin, 2008; Juvonen & Gross, 2008; National Crime Prevention Council, 2007). These large differences might be due to a number of factors including the survey instruments and the method of assessment (i.e., telephone interviews, paper and pencil surveys, and online surveys). Hinduja and Patchin (2013) discussed the methodologies of several of their research studies. The first two studies they conducted that included only online teenagers who voluntarily participated

had higher prevalence rates of cyberbullying as compared to further studies that included random samples of known populations in schools. In addition to the methodological differences, the varying operational definitions of cyberbullying used in the studies might have contributed to the variance in prevalence rates.

Despite the lack of a consistent definition, cyberbullying has brought new challenges to school administrators and educators in addition to the problems associated with traditional bullying. The characteristics of cyberbullying make it harder for school officials to intervene. Cyberbullying differs from bullying in four main ways: the perpetrators have a perceived sense of anonymity, the size of the audience (number of bystanders) may be unlimited, the perpetrator is unable to observe the victim's reaction, and victims are available to their perpetrators 24 hours a day. Research that exists about the effects of cyberbullying suggests that the characteristics are similar to those of traditional bullying (Kowalski et al., 2008). Victims may withdraw from school activities and may become sick, depressed, and possibly suicidal (Willard, 2007a). Raskauskas and Stoltz (2007) asked participants open-ended questions to identify effects of cyberbullying. In that study, participants who had been cyberbullied felt they had been negatively affected. The most common effects were emotional and social disruptions to their lives and feelings of sadness, hopelessness, and powerlessness. In extreme cases, cyberbullying has been linked to adolescent suicide (Raskauskas & Stoltz, 2007). Hinduja and Patchin's (2010) study of middle-school students in a large school district in the United States found the students who had experienced traditional bullying or cyberbullying as either the bully or victim had more suicidal thoughts and were more

likely to attempt suicide than those who had not experienced any forms of bullying. Also, victims of bullying were more likely to have suicidal thoughts than the bullies.

Statement of the Problem

“Cyberbullying is emerging as one of the most challenging issues facing parents and school personnel as students embrace the Internet and other mobile communication technologies” (Beale & Hall, 2007, p. 12). Specifically in middle schools, the prevalence of cyberbullying is concerning. National studies (Patchin & Hinduja, 2010; Ybarra, Diener-West, & Leaf, 2007) have found rates of cyberbullying victimization in nearly 30% of sixth through eighth grade students. Social, emotional, and academic impacts and even suicidal ideation can be attributed to cyberbullying. The most serious consequence of cyberbullying, suicide, has taken the lives of several young students. The effects of cyberbullying incidents occurring while students are at home can bleed into the school environment, impacting students emotionally and academically. Students need an environment free of harassment and violence to reach their learning goals (Ubban & Hughes, 1997). Cyberbullying incidents can “undermine school climate, interfere with victims’ school functioning, and put some students at risk for serious mental health and safety problems” (Feinberg & Robey, 2008, p. 10). Schools have long played an important role in the health and safety of students; thus, when cyberbullying occurs, schools play a crucial role, even if the bullying has occurred off-campus (Stewart & Fritsch, 2011).

Research on cyberbullying is still in the exploratory stages and there are gaps that must be filled to generate more information on the phenomenon and its widespread effects (Kowalski et al., 2008; Patchin & Hinduja, 2006; Tokunaga, 2010). While a great

deal of research addressed the prevalence of cyberbullying, there was very little research on how school administrators perceived this problem and, subsequently, responded or intervened in instances of cyberbullying. Administrators have long been called to intervene with bullying but cyberbullying has presented new difficulties. Also, the issue of how to intervene with cyberbullying that has occurred off school grounds is a topic of heated debate. With regard to cyberbullying,

there is no empirical evidence that exists to validate effective prevention or intervention measures; therefore, research into these areas is warranted. Nevertheless traditional...bullying research will provide the foundation for cyberbullying prevention and intervention recommendation. (Mason, 2008, p. 333)

There is a need to understand school administrators' perspectives of cyberbullying occurring in their schools so other professionals, specifically school psychologists, can better help combat cyberbullying. In-depth qualitative research is lacking across the entire genre of bullying research; particularly lacking is an understanding of how cyberbullying is being combated from the principal's perspective.

Purpose

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine school principals' perspectives of and responses to cyberbullying in large urban middle schools. Specifically, the study sought to determine principals' perspectives on the impact of cyberbullying and policies and laws that influenced the way they handled cyberbullying incidents. Also this study sought to determine from the principals' perspectives what intervention and prevention methods were most effective in limiting cyberbullying incidents and what they believed was the school psychologist's role in these efforts. To achieve a deeper understanding of the experiences and perspectives of the participants, I

utilized a qualitative phenomenology approach for this study, thereby providing information that might be meaningful to principals, school psychologists, other mental health professionals, educators, students, and community members who are interested in helping minimize the impact of cyberbullying on students.

Research Questions

To support the purpose this study, the following research question and sub-questions were asked:

- Q1 How do middle school principals perceive and respond to cyberbullying?
 - Q1a Under what conditions does cyberbullying have an impact on the school's learning environment and its students?
 - Q1b What intervention and prevention strategies are most effective for reducing cyberbullying?
 - Q1c What role do school psychologists play in preventing cyberbullying and intervening to combat its effects?
 - Q1d What policies or laws guide or influence the way school principals deal with cyberbullying incidents?

Theoretical Framework

Two theoretical perspectives guided and helped shape this research study: the ecological systems theory and the social learning theory. These theoretical frameworks helped build a connection with existing knowledge of cyberbullying and the goals of this research. Each theory is described in detail and the connection to cyberbullying is discussed.

Ecological Systems Theory

One theoretical perspective that helped inform and provide a foundation for the present study was the ecological systems theory. Systems theory is a way of organizing

interactions and information that various scientific fields could use to help understand the complex nature of human interaction within a particular social environment (Friedman, 2011). The system is defined within the specific scientific field. The term “system” first emerged in Emile Durkheim’s study of social systems; later it appeared in Talcott Parson’s work. In addition, the work of biologist Ludwig von Bertalanffy and social psychologist Uri Bronfenbrenner heavily influenced systems theory (Friedman, 2011).

“Ecological” systems are those that affect a person in more than one setting. Of particular interest within system theory is Uri Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) work, *Ecology of Human Development Model*, which is a model of systems in which humans interact in an ecological environment and how human development is affected by that environment. Bronfenbrenner stated that there are multiple environmental factors in human social systems. He referred to these collectively as the ecological environment:

The ecological environment is conceived as a set of nested structures, each inside the next, like a set of Russian dolls. At the innermost level is the immediate setting containing the developing person. ...The next step, however, already leads us off the beaten track for it requires looking beyond single settings to the relations between them. (p. 3)

Bronfenbrenner (1979, 2004) theorized that a child does not exist in isolation; rather, the child affects and is affected by the settings—family, school, community, and other environments—in which he or she spends time. A child’s development and behaviors are determined by experiences in these settings. The number and quality of connections in the environments impact a child’s development. Bronfenbrenner developed the model identifying four (he later added a fifth) nested settings that work together to influence and shape development of a child.

In this model, the child is in the center of the nested settings; each setting has the ability to directly or indirectly impact the child's behavior and interactions.

Bronfenbrenner referred to these settings as (a) the *microsystem*--the immediate setting where the child interacts (i.e., family, classroom, playground), (b) the *mesosystem*--the two microsystems interacting that the child occupies (i.e., home and school), (c) the *exosystem*--external environments the child does not occupy that impact the child indirectly (i.e., parent's workplace), and (d) the *macrosystem*--larger cultural influences (i.e., democracy or ethnicity). Bronfenbrenner (2004) later added the fifth setting, the *chronosystem*, to explain the progression of the systems over time.

A victim of a cyberbullying incident in one setting will feel its effects throughout the other environments in which he or she spends time. For example, if a cyberbullying incident occurred while the child was at home, it will impact the child not only at home but also at school and with his or her peer group. I believe it is vital to fully understand how one action can potentially impact and influence all environments in which the child spends his or her time. According to Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory, a cyberbullying incident that occurred at home has the potential to echo throughout the child's other nested settings. For example, a child receives a cyberbullying message at home from another student without the parent's knowledge (microsystem). The child then goes to school and realizes that many students at her school know what happened (mesosystem). A teacher hears about the incident and calls the child's parent. The parent becomes visibly upset at work when he talks with the teacher. The parent leaves work early to pick up his child at school (exosystem). The combination of these actions produces a negative label toward the perpetrating group that is then strengthened within the family

(macrosystem). Years later, the victim reflects on the traumatic event and recognizes how that event impacted her life (chronosystem). The virtual world, present in each of these settings, exists without visible or clear boundaries and therefore is extremely difficult to evaluate (Hiltz & Turoff, 1993).

Social Learning Theory

A second theoretical framework that helped guide and provide a foundation for this research was the social learning theory. First, Miller and Dollard's (1941) *Social Learning and Imitation* presented a behavioral model of learning in which people learn by watching what others do and by imitating those observed actions. Bandura (1977) built upon this work, adding a cognitive behavioral framework to the social learning theory. He explains:

Learning would be exceedingly laborious, not to mention hazardous, if people had to rely solely on the effects of their own actions to inform them what to do. Fortunately, most human behavior is learned observationally through modeling: from observing others one forms an idea of how new behaviors are performed, and on later occasions this coded information serves as a guide for action. Because people can learn from examples of what to do, at least in approximate form, before performing any behavior, they are spared needless errors (p. 22)

Bandura's (1977) social learning theory helps school administrators and educators understand how cyberbullying behaviors develop and are maintained among school children through a combination of vicarious learning and the lack of punishment or negative consequences. Acts of aggression performed with no punishment can form patterns when observed by others. Bandura described the effect of observing unpunished behavior: "Exposure to unpunished transgressions tends to increase prohibited behavior in observers" (p. 121). These acts may then become accepted by peer groups and may become the social norm. Irregularly unpunished behavior "has an especially weak

restraining effect on people whose range of options for securing valued rewards is limited largely to anti-social means” (Bandura, 1977, p. 121). Cyberbullying perpetrators are difficult to identify because of their anonymity, while bystanders may include many students linked electronically. The anonymity of the perpetrators often results in very minimal punishment or negative consequences. The patterns of these unpunished behaviors impact the school culture and environment of a school building (McEwan, 2003; Sousa, 2003).

The two theoretical frameworks of ecological systems and social learning helped me build a better understanding of the factors that might lead to the cyberbullying occurring with our youth in our country today and helped shape this research study. More specifically, the ecological systems theory helped with the development and direction of the research questions. The research questions aimed to understand the nested settings of a middle school student through the school principal’s perspective.

Rationale

The growing popularity of the Internet and other technologies over the last 10 years has made cyberbullying easy and common. For the most part, computers have had a positive effect on the education of all students. However, few educators were prepared for the malicious misuse of technology related to the school setting or realized the need to monitor their students’ Internet use (Chibbaro, 2007). For decades, administrators have tried to minimize the impact of traditional bullying in their schools but the serious potential consequences of cyberbullying have created new challenges for administrators (Juvonen & Gross, 2008; Tokunaga, 2010).

Previously, some researchers (Beran & Li, 2005; Li, 2007) suggested that few school administrators understood cyberbullying and how their students were being victimized. Even with increased media coverage in recent years, it is unclear how school administrators have responded to this growing phenomenon. More information may become available from upcoming research but Prensky (2001a) suggested there might be a digital divide between students and administrators. The technological language of the 21st century might be foreign to some administrators. Students are considered natives to technology, finding it easy to understand and use, while administrators are digital immigrants (Prensky, 2001a). One of the differences lies in how administrators are users of technology, whereas students identify themselves with technology, feeling its use and operation are automatic for them (Prensky, 2001b). The lack of understanding is only growing between administrators and students as technology changes and advances. With an increased understanding and knowledge of cyberbullying, administrators, mental health professionals, teachers, and students can help create safer school environments (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009a; Willard, 2007a).

Delimitations

This research was based on data collected in large, urban school districts in the western United States; only administrators of schools with grades 6 through 8 were surveyed. School psychologists, school counselors, guidance counselors, students, teachers, and parents were excluded from this study. School administrators were exclusively chosen for this study because they are the leaders of the school. Administrators working with students in grades 6-8 were specifically chosen because of the national studies reporting higher rates of bullying with students in this age group. It

is essential to understand their perspectives so other educators, teachers, and support staff can act accordingly. The study was limited to school administrators' lived experiences and perceptions. The small number of participants was a delimitation of the study (Creswell, 1998); however, according to Creswell (1998), one site is sufficient for a qualitative study.

Limitations

The sample of school administrators working with grades 6 through 8 in large Denver metropolitan schools might not be generalizable to all areas of administration. Given the differences in school policies and state laws, this study might not be comparable or generalizable to other principals' perceptions of cyberbullying. Also, participants might have answered the questions in a manner they thought would be socially acceptable rather than give an accurate portrayal of the cyberbullying in their schools.

Definition of Terms

The following definitions are provided to ensure uniformity and understanding of terms throughout the study.

Bullycide. The suicide of an individual in response to being the victim of bullying (Coloroso, 2003).

Cyberbullying. The use of information and communication technologies such as e-mail, cell phone and pager text messaging, instant messaging, defamatory personal websites, and defamatory online polling websites to support deliberate, repeated, and hostile behavior by an individual or group that is intended to harm others (Belsey, 2006).

Cyberbullying victimization. Used to identify any student who had been the target of a cyberbullying incident.

Electronic harassment. The repeated, ongoing sending of offensive messages to an individual target. Harassing messages might include messages sent through personal communication channels including e-mail, instant messaging, and text messaging (Willard, 2007a).

Netiquette. “A contraction of the words ‘net’ and ‘etiquette’ that refers to the online code of manners for using the Internet” (Limber, Kowalski, & Agatston, 2009, p. 34).

Physical bullying. Hitting, kicking, spitting, pushing, and taking personal belongings (Willard, 2007a).

Relational bullying. The spreading of rumors, manipulating social relationships, social exclusion, and extortion (Willard, 2007a).

Target. The recipient of online aggression. An individual can be considered a target even without continued cyberabuse and without a power differential.

Traditional bullying. The aggressive behavior of intentional “harm doing” by one person or a group, generally carried out repeatedly and over time and involving a power differential (Nansel et al., 2001).

Verbal bullying. Taunting, name-calling, teasing, or threats (Willard, 2007a).

Victim. “A person who is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other persons” (Olweus, 1992, p. 101).

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The previous chapter defined cyberbullying and highlighted the importance of researching the topic. Chapter II provides detailed information on (a) an overview of traditional bullying, (b) the digital age, (c) cyberbullying including its prevalence and psychological impact, (d) safe and positive learning environment, (e) the principal's role, (f) jurisdiction limits, (g) intervention and prevention programming, and (h) the role of school psychologists. Each section has been developed from an extensive review of the literature as well as an analysis of federal, state, and case laws relevant to cyberbullying.

Overview of Traditional Bullying

Bullying has been around for as long as children have been going to school. Historically, bullying was not considered a problem but rather something kids should handle themselves. This phenomenon was not systematically researched until the 1970s (Shariff, 2008). With increased research of the phenomenon, the thinking of many changed in the 1980s; bullying was considered a much more serious issue and was described as having negative characteristics (Shariff, 2008).

An act of traditional bullying occurs face to face. It involves physical, verbal, or social and emotional tactics; there is an imbalance of power; and the act is repeated over time (Hazler, 1996). Traditional bullying comes in two forms--direct and indirect (Kowalski & Limber, 2007). Direct bullying is often physical and is done to create fear

and to threaten the individual (Hinshaw & Lee, 2003). Examples of physical bullying are hitting, kicking, and shoving. Direct bullying incidents are often easier to recognize because the behaviors are observable and the impact is typically seen immediately (Snell & Hirschstein, 2005). Indirect bullying is a psychological attack intended to cause humiliation (Raskauskas & Stoltz, 2007). Examples of indirect bullying are name-calling, verbal insults, and ostracizing (Raskauskas & Stoltz, 2007).

Traditionally bullying involves three characters: the bully, the victim, and the bystander (Coloroso, 2011; Shariff, 2008). Throughout the literature, the terms “bully” and “perpetrator” were often used interchangeably. However, a bully has often been stereotyped and perceived to be unpopular and unhappy, whereas a perpetrator might be seen as a class leader (Salmivalli, Karhunen, & Lagerspetz, 1996). Perpetrators might have a false sense of strength and might have chosen leadership roles to compensate for their lack of self-esteem (Shariff, 2008). The perpetrator’s primary objective is to isolate and exclude others (Shariff, 2008). Perpetrators might choose their targets based on perceiving the target as “different” and someone who impedes their own peer group (Olweus, 2001; Shariff, 2008).

A power differential exists between the bully and victim (Craig & Pepler, 2007). This power can come from a physical advantage (i.e., size and strength), from a social advantage (i.e., popularity), or through a systematic power (i.e., racial or cultural groups, disability, economic status; Craig & Pepler, 2007). Power might also be gained from knowing the victim’s weakness or vulnerability (e.g., obesity or learning problem). Perpetrators might victimize those who are different to build their own status and gain recognition (Shariff, 2008).

A large number of people might be indirectly involved in bullying as an audience, also known as bystanders. Bystanders have three choices: defend the victim, reinforce the bully, or remain uninvolved (Poyhonen, Juvonen, & Salmivalli, 2012). Bystander actions might include standing by, not looking, encouraging the bully, or even joining in (Poyhonen et al., 2012). Bystanders might be afraid to stand up for the victim because they might be afraid of making the situation worse or even becoming the next target (Coloroso, 2011). Research has shown that bystanders who defend the victim have the will and the skill to do so, whereas those who remain uninvolved lack both (Poyhonen, Juvonen, & Salmivalli, 2012). Also, bystanders who remain uninvolved lack a sense of personal responsibility to help and the self-reliance to do anything; students who defend the victim are high in both areas (Pozzoli & Gini, 2010). Students who reinforce the bully are motivated by aggression-related thoughts, much like bullies (Andreou & Methaliidou, 2004).

Oh and Hazler (2009) surveyed 298 college students and asked about their experiences during middle school and high school as witnesses to bullying. Results indicated bystanders' personal characteristics such as gender and past experience as either a bully or a victim significantly predicted their reaction to bullying. Gender was one of the strongest personal predictors of bystanders' reactions; girls were more likely to support the victim. Girls were also more likely to use constructive resolution strategies than boys (Oh & Hazler, 2009). Bystanders who had been bullied or bully-victims demonstrated more aggressive support for the bully (Oh & Hazler, 2009). Poyhonen et al. (2012) found in a study of 6,397 Finnish children from elementary school that motivations of bystanders varied. The more efficacious students felt, the more likely they

were to defend the victim. The researchers also found that students who felt nothing good would come from defending the victim or did not care how the victim felt were more likely to reinforce the bully.

Reported prevalence rates of bullying in the United States vary significantly from study to study because of the study methodology, setting, or age groups studied; there has yet to be a consensus of the rates of occurrence of bullying. It occurs in most schools across the United States, affecting nearly 70% of all students at some point during their school years (Canter, 2005). The first U.S. study to use a national representative sample surveyed over 15,000 students in grades 6 through 10 and reported that 30% of students were involved in bullying as either a bully or victim (Nansel et al., 2001). Williams and Guerra (2007) collected data from over 3,000 middle school and high school students as part of an ongoing, statewide bullying prevention program in Colorado. Students in grades 5, 8, and 11 completed questionnaires. The results showed verbal bullying peaked in middle school and remained high--71% of the sample experienced verbal bullying. Forty percent of students experienced physical bullying--a rate that peaked in grade 8 and then declined slightly. DeVoe and Bauer (2011) surveyed 4,326 students in grades 6 through 12 across the country and found 28% had experienced traditional bullying. Wang, Iannotti, and Nansel (2009) surveyed 7,182 students in grades 6 through 10. Thirteen percent reported physically bullying others in the previous two months; 37% had verbally bullied others; and 27% had socially bullied others. Students in grades 7 and 8 were less likely to be victims of bullying compared to sixth graders (Wang et al., 2009). Girls and boys reported similar levels of bullying (Wang et al., 2009). However, boys often reported more overt and physical forms, whereas girls reported more covert,

psychological types of bullying (Craig & Pepler, 1997). The disparity might come from the way people and the media depict females and aggression (Shariff, 2008). It is clear that the prevalence of bullying is significant; yet depending on the form of bullying, the rates vary greatly. Verbal bullying appears to be much more prevalent than physical bullying.

More recently, the 2011 National Youth Risk Behavior Survey (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2012) was administered to students in grades 9 through 12 in both public and private schools across the country. The results indicated 20% of the 15,425 students surveyed experienced bullying. Schneider, O'Donnell, Stueve, and Coulter (2012) surveyed over 20,000 high school students in grades 9 through 12. They found school bullying prevalence rates were similar between genders (25.1% of females and 26.6% of males). School bullying decreased nearly by half from grade 9 (32.5%) to grade 12 (17.8%; Schneider et al., 2012). The same study also found that non-heterosexually identified youth were more likely to be victims of school bullying compared to their peers (42.3% to 24.8%, respectively).

Bullying might disrupt the social and emotional development of adolescents (Raskauskas & Stoltz, 2007). Children who were bullied were more likely to “experience comparatively low levels of mental health” (Rigby, 2005, p. 204). Problems related to bullying include lower self-esteem and social adjustment and higher levels of psychological distress (e.g., anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation; Kowalski et al., 2008; Rigby, 2005). The stress and distractions of bullying might increase the academic risk of students (Kowalski et al., 2008). Throughout the United States, more than 16,000 students miss school every day because they are fearful of bullies (Mason, 2008).

Fourteen percent of students in grades 8 through 12 felt bullying affected their ability to learn in school (Mason, 2008). A 17-year-old boy, a participant in the Raskauskas and Stoltz (2007) study, recalled his experience with bullying:

I was a victim of bullying for two years in gyms. Boys from the football team called me names like “lard ass, fat boy, and fag.” They threw things at me in class and shoved me in the hall. One day they put my head in the toilet and gave me a “swirly.” When I told the gym teacher he told me to “toughen up.” I just stopped going to gym after that. (p. 65)

Digital Age

There has been a rapid increase over the last 10 years in the number of youth utilizing computers with Internet access (McQuade & Sampat, 2008). The Kaiser Family Foundation (Rideout, Foehr, & Roberts, 2010) conducted a study called the *Generation M² Media in the Lives of 8- to-18-Year-Olds*. The study was large and comprehensive; more than 2,000 young people addressed the extent and the nature of their media use. The overall media usage of youth and young adults had increased in the last five years, and cell phone usage grew from 39% to 66% among the young people studied (Rideout et al., 2010). Cell phones have become important communication tools among teenagers; 59% of 13- through 15-year-olds and 74% of 16- and 17-year-olds reported having cell phones (National Crime Prevention Council, 2007). Of those teenagers who used cell phones, 60% of them sent text messages and 25% sent text messages during the school day (National Crime Prevention Council, 2007). Bauman (2009) reported students in grades 6 and 8 were 2.6 times more likely to have a cell phone than fifth graders; seventh graders were three times more likely.

Cox Communications (2012) conducted an online survey of 437 youth ages 10-13 and 439 of their parents. This survey used a nationally representative sample consistent

with the U.S. census. According to this survey, 55% of teenagers had a social network or micro-blogging account (i.e., Facebook, Twitter, and Tumblr) or both. Ninety-five percent of the youth reported that they accessed the Internet through their mobile phones. Students in grades 7 through 12 spent an hour and half text messaging and an hour and half on the computer outside of their school work (Rideout et al., 2010). Also, the percentage of homes with Internet has increased from 74% to 84%; youth with laptops from 12% to 29%; and Internet in the bedroom from 20% to 33% (Rideout et al., 2010). Young people ages 11-14 spent nearly four more hours using media including watching TV and playing video games than did youth ages 8-10 (Rideout et al., 2010). Girls sent e-mails and commented on blogs significantly more often than did boys (Bauman, 2009).

Rideout et al. (2010) found that half of the heavy media users (more than 16 hours of media use in a typical day) reported fair or poor grades (C's or lower) as compared to 23% of light media users (fewer than three hours of media use in a typical day). According to the parents, 92% monitored their child's Internet behavior on home computers; however, only 68% of parents monitored their child's Internet behavior on a mobile device (Cox Communications, 2012). Parents who set limits on their child's media use saw their child spend less time using media than did their peers (Rideout et al., 2010). According to Bauman (2009), fifth graders differed from students in grades 6 through 8 on prevalence rates of cyberbullying as well as technology usage. Bauman suggested that "sixth grade may be a critical period for increased involvement in technological activities and cyberbullying" (p. 825).

Cyberbullying

The definition of cyberbullying implies that some nonphysical characteristics of traditional bullying are present, yet it is exclusively carried out through electronic devices and means of communication. As stated in Chapter I, “cyberbullying” can be difficult to define in one sentence because of the various forms it can take (Kowalski et al., 2008; Willard, 2007a). Willard (2007a) developed a list of terms and definitions to describe the six most common forms of cyberbullying:

Flaming: online “fighting” using electronic messages with angry, vulgar language
Harassment: repeated, ongoing sending of offensive messages to an individual target

Denigration: distributing harmful and untrue information about an individual; information is posted on websites or sent to others via cell phones usually to spread rumors and damage someone’s reputation.

Impersonation: breaking into accounts such as e-mail or web pages, and engaging in activities while pretending to be the victim. This may include sending e-mails or posting information on their personal web pages.

Outing and Trickery: sharing personal information that is often embarrassing to others without permission; tricking a person to divulge personal information and then sharing it with others.

Cyberstalking: repetitively sending harassing messages that may include threats and can be highly offensive. (pp. 1-10).

Cyberbullying can also take the form of exclusion or ostracism through the use of computers. This can occur when someone is left out of online activities or group chats (Kowalski et al., 2008). Individuals who are victimized through exclusion and ostracism reported worsened moods and lower levels of social acceptance, self-concept, and meaningful existence (Williams, 1997, 2001). Communication technology tools and media are common to all electronic bullying and, as with traditional bullying, cyberbullying is deliberate, repeated, and exclusionary (Shariff, 2008).

Distinguishing Cyberbullying from Traditional Bullying

Bullying and cyberbullying have some similar characteristics (Pilkey, 2011).

Both bullying and cyberbullying have three characters: the bully, the victim, and bystanders. The intent to harm or agitate the victim is always present (Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004). An imbalance of power exists. The victim has less power than the bully and the victim is less able to defend himself or herself (Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004).

However, the differences between bullying and cyberbullying make cyberbullying a dangerous phenomenon (Pilkey, 2011). Combating cyberbullying has brought a new set of challenges in addition to the problems already associated with traditional bullying.

First, the perpetrators of cyberbullying have a perceived sense of anonymity (Bhat, 2008; Slonje & Smith, 2008). They are able to stay anonymous unlike traditional bullying where the perpetrator is easily identifiable. Also, cybervictims may never know who was bullying them. Kowalski et al. (2008) found that nearly 50% of more than 3,700 middle school students did not know the identity of the student cyberbullying them. Students face much more stress when they are unable to identify the individual bullying them because the perpetrator literally could be anyone in their school (Kowalski et al., 2008).

Second, cyberbullying presents the chance for an almost infinite audience (Bhat, 2008; Slonje & Smith, 2008). David Knight, a Canadian adolescent, was victimized when someone posted hurtful and untrue comments on a website about his sexuality, his personal hygiene, and his appearance. He was reported to have said, “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. Anyone with a computer can see it” (Leishman, 2005). The

incident can be forwarded and received in a variety of ways including e-mail, websites, chat rooms, blogs, cell phone texts, and instant messages. Also, the nature of cyberbullying allows the incident to exist even after the original post has been deleted. This feature of technology greatly increases the potential harm to victims because it is almost impossible to control who may see or receive the posting; traditional bullying incidents were more likely to end shortly after they occurred.

Third, the perpetrator is unable to observe the victim's reaction (Slonje & Smith, 2008). Like the traditional bully, the cyberbully intends to threaten, harm, humiliate, and instill fear in his or her victim (Storm & Storm, 2009). However, unlike a traditional bully, the cyberbully has no idea how the victim has responded to the act. This may cause a separation between the act online and any potential real life consequences (Storm & Storm, 2005; Willard, 2004). Since there is no face-to-face interaction, perpetrators may use more severe expressions than they might in a face-to-face interaction (Storm & Storm, 2005).

The last difference between bullying and cyberbullying is the endless time limit of cyberbullying (Slonje & Smith, 2008). There is no school day to constrict these behaviors. When a child was a victim of traditional bullying, he or she felt safe at home where he or she could escape from the torment of the bully (Bhat, 2008). Cyberbullies potentially have unlimited access to their victims, who may feel no reprieve from the torment, even on weekends or school vacations. Traditional bully victims only faced their bullies during school hours or on their way to or from school.

Cyberbullying Prevalence

Cyberbullying prevalence rates found throughout the literature vary greatly. This is due to the features overlapping with traditional bullying, the methodology of the survey, the setting, and the age groups studied. This section describes current research on cyberbullying and how its prevalence has been measured.

Kowalski and Limber (2007) studied experiences with electronic bullying of 3,767 students in grades 6 through 8. Their results showed 11% of students were victims only, 4% were cyberbullies, and 7% were both victims and cyberbullies (Kowalski & Limber, 2007). Agatston, Kowalski, and Limber (2007) studied focus groups of 150 middle school and high school students to explore the nature and extent of cyberbullying. The majority of females indicated cyberbullying was a problem, whereas males were less likely to agree it was a problem. The students reported cyberbullying primarily occurred outside of school except via text messaging (Agatston et al., 2007). Raskauskas and Stoltz (2007) surveyed 84 adolescents between the ages of 13 and 18 years and reported on the most common forms of electronic tools used for bullying: 32% by text messages, 16% on the Internet and websites, and 10% by pictures on cell phones.

Ybarra et al. (2007) conducted a study of 1,588 young people ages 10-15 in an online survey, "Growing Up with Media," that measured Internet harassment and school functioning. Internet harassment was defined as one of two behaviors: "using the Internet to harass or embarrass someone the youth is mad at; and making rude or nasty comments to someone online" (p. S45). Thirty-five percent of the youth reported being harassed within the last year and 8% were frequently harassed (monthly or more often). The youth who were targeted tended to be older and were less likely to be male. Patchin and

Hinduja found similar results in their 2010 study of 1,963 middle school students (mean age of 12.6 years) from one of the largest school districts in the United States.

Cyberbullying victimization was defined as an experience in the previous 30 days with at least one of the nine different forms of online aggression. *Cyberbullying offending* was defined as participation in the previous 30 days in at least one of the five different forms of online aggression. Thirty percent of the respondents reported experiencing cyberbullying as a victim and 22% experienced cyberbullying as a bully.

Bauman (2009) surveyed 221 students in grades 5 through 8 regarding their technology use and involvement in cyberbullying. Cyberbullying and victimization were assessed by asking students to indicate how often they had engaged in various behaviors (e.g., forwarded an e-mail without permission, sent an embarrassing photo, or received a mean text message). The term “cyberbullying” was not used or defined until the end of the survey. One percent of the sample was cyberbullies; 3% cybervictims; and 8.6% cyberbully-victim. These rates were low compared with other rates reported in the literature, possibly because the surveys were administrated at one school; whereas other studies used online websites with frequent Internet users (Bauman, 2009).

The National Crime Prevention Council (2007) reported 43% of teenagers had experienced some form of cyberbullying in the last year; the great incidence was in females 15-17 years old. Schneider et al. (2012) surveyed 20,406 students in grades 9 through 12 across the state of Massachusetts in the fall of 2008. Their survey used items from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s Youth Risk Behavior Survey and the Massachusetts Youth Risk Behavior Survey so comparisons could be made to other national surveys. Cyberbullying was measured with the following question, “How many

times has someone used the Internet, a phone or other electronic communication to bully, tease, or threaten you” in the past 12 months (Schneider et al., 2012, p. 172)? They found that rates of cyberbullying decreased slightly from grade 9 to grade 12 (17.2% to 13.4%). Girls reported higher rates of cyberbullying than did boys (18.3% vs. 3.2%). Researchers found no differences in overall reporting of cyberbullying by race and ethnicity. Non-heterosexual youths were far more likely to report cyberbullying as compared to heterosexual youths (33.1% vs. 14.5%). Although prevalence rates range widely by study, as with traditional bullying, it is clear that cyberbullying is a significant problem among American youth.

Traditional bullying incidents are more likely to be seen by an adult. However, the nature of cyberbullying makes it difficult for school administrators to know when and where it is occurring. Students need to be encouraged to report incidents of cyberbullying. Focus group interviews revealed that adolescents were afraid to report cyberbullying incidents for fear their parents would restrict their use of the Internet and cell phones (Kowalski et al., 2008). Slonje and Smith (2008) found 50% of victims said they did not tell anyone, 35.7% told a friend, 8.9% told a parent, and 5.4% told someone else. No one reported telling a teacher (Slonje & Smith, 2008). Bauman (2009) found 12% of students would report cyberbullying to an adult at school and 9% would tell their parents. Only 63.6% of middle school students believed adults would try to stop cyberbullying when informed (Li, 2007). Teens reported they would rather talk to a friend than to their parents or other adults (National Crime Prevention Council, 2007).

Psychological Outcomes and Effects

As with bullying, cyberbullying affects students emotionally, socially, and academically. Psychological problems were significantly elevated for respondents who reported being frequently harassed online (Ybarra et al., 2007). Patchin and Hinduja (2010) found students who experienced cyberbullying (as a victim or perpetrator) had significantly lower self-esteem than did those who had little or no experience with cyberbullying. Hinduja and Patchin also found that 20% of 1,963 students in grades 6 through 8 reported they had seriously been thinking about attempting suicide and 19% had attempted suicide. Youth who had experienced bullying or cyberbullying as either a bully or a victim scored higher on the suicidal ideation scale than did their peers who had not experienced any form of bullying (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010). Youth who were cybervictims were 1.9 times more likely to report attempting suicide and perpetrators were 1.5 times more likely to report attempting suicide (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010). Victims of cyberbullying were four times more likely to experience depressive symptoms and more than five times more likely to attempt suicide than were nonvictims (Schneider et al., 2012). Bullying is not the only reason a young person ends his or her life but it often plays a role (Coloroso, 2011).

Cyberbullying might be a significant contributing factor to negative school experiences (Schneider et al., 2012). Ybarra et al. (2007) found little evidence to suggest an overlap of online harassment and school bullying but they suggested the psychological impact caused by cyberbullying continued while students were at school. Targeted students were more likely to have school behavior problems including missing school, carrying a weapon, and detention or suspension (Ybarra et al., 2007).

Safe and Positive Learning Environment

Schools are multidimensional; they are made of their atmosphere, culture, values, resources, and social network (Anderson, 1982; Fraser, 1989). “A school environment must be conducive to learning which requires minimal conflict and an emphasis on positive students’ behaviors” (Ediger, 2007, p. 149). The school climate is measured by the perceptions of the students, teachers, and other people within the school (Brand, 2009). A safe and welcoming learning environment at school is essential for students because this is where they form positive relationships with teachers and peers (U.S. Department of Education, 1998). Research has suggested a relationship between a school’s climate and students’ academic, behavioral, and socio-emotional adjustment (Brand, 2009). A school’s climate has also been shown to have an impact on its students’ achievements (McEvoy & Welker, 2000). Schools in which students report higher levels of commitment to achievement, positive peer interactions, and teacher support also had higher levels of student self-esteem and lower levels of depression (Brand, 2009). Schools with student-reported higher levels of negative peer interactions, disciplinary harshness, and safety problems also had higher levels of delinquency and teacher-rated aggression (Brand, 2009).

Multiple school shootings in the 1990s altered the public’s awareness of school public policy and helped transform school safety policies (Kaplan & Cornell, 2005). The most notorious was the horrific event at Columbine High School in Colorado in 1999 where two students brought guns to school and killed 12 students, a teacher, and themselves after posting threats of violence online. A Gallup Poll (as cited in Gillespie, 2000) taken after the Columbine shooting reported that 74% of parents in the United

States believed a school shooting was somewhat likely or very likely to occur in their community. Parents are counting on schools to be safe places away from drugs, violence, and alcohol for their children. School safety has become a primary concern for administrators over the past 10 years (Rosen, 2005).

Most schools are safe places in which to learn but bullying and other school violence can inhibit the sense of safety (Rosen, 2005). The National Center for Statistics (2000) surveyed a nationally representative sample of 2,270 regular public elementary, middle, secondary, and combined schools. A third of the schools reported bullying as a serious discipline problem that occurred frequently. Bullying needs to be stopped promptly and ways to prevent bullying must be present (Rosen, 2005). Willard (2007b) stated, “A hostile environment is an educational environment for any student that is intimidating, threatening, abusive, and impairs that student’s ability to participate in or benefit from an educational program or activity” (p. 65). A victim of bullying might feel that the school he or she is attending has a hostile environment. It is the school’s responsibility to create and properly maintain a positive learning environment because a positive school climate has the potential to dramatically reduce bullying and cyberbullying behaviors (Hunley-Jenkins, 2012).

The Role of the Principal

School administrators’ roles have always been complex. Administrators need to have knowledge of the curriculum, address discipline problems within the classroom, consult with parents, provide quality leadership, and focus on instruction (Ediger, 2007). School administrators “need to be conscientious individuals who have the pupil’s interest as the focal point in teaching and learning situations” (Ediger, 2007, p. 152). Also,

school administrators must know what is going well in the school and emphasize that rather than always focusing on the negative (Rosen, 2005). Hall and George (1999) stated, “The health of environment for students and for adults in large part is determined by the principal” (p. 165). As an added complication, school administrators also face the need to eliminate drugs and violence in schools (Ehrensals, 2003).

Being an employment counselor, mental health worker, vocational curriculum advisor, academic analyst, police officer, safety expert, research reviewer, teacher evaluator, community leader, and campus administrator could easily seem to be too much of a job for anyone. (Rosen, 2005, p. 100)

However, administrators truly influence the lives of their students, which can be very satisfying.

The principal is the school’s leader; therefore, he or she must address overall behavior management at the building level (Hartzell & Petrie, 1992). School environments and areas of concern change continually. Theorists try to follow the changes but administrators are considered the best experts on school-wide discipline (Rosen, 2005). Consequently, the principal works with the student and his or her parents and expresses the importance of authority, civility, courtesy, and accountability (Hartzell & Petrie, 1992). School officials also need to address any issues of harassment in order to maintain a safe and secure learning environment (Taylor, 2008). Taylor (2008) explained how school administrators’ actions can have a great impact:

Being aware of the problem and being able to define it and heighten awareness of it for others, having a solid understanding of relevant law, applying comprehensive and specific policy, and taking appropriate and effective action will go a long way toward curbing unacceptable behavior among students in schools. (p. 62)

Schools need to determine the authority administrators have over cyberbullying (Roberts-Pittman, Slavens, & Balch, 2012). “Although the law is not their primary

responsibility, administrators must be exemplary in their efforts to be certain that the law is obeyed” (Rosen, 2005, p. 51). The authority of school administrators will mostly likely not be overturned in the courts if administrators adhere to two standards: (a) decisions are made in good faith for what is best for the school and everyone working there and (b) there is a deliberate and committed attempt to uphold all laws, policies, and rules (Rosen, 2005).

Jurisdictional Limits Relevant to Bullying and Cyberbullying

In part because of the catastrophic consequences of bullying, legislators, school districts, and administrators have recognized the grave need for policies to help maintain a safe learning environment (Kowalski et al., 2008). The U.S. Department of Education (2010) encouraged efforts to reduce bullying in schools by issuing a letter to schools to ensure that their policies regarding bullying also follow mandated federal civil rights laws. Bullying policy has been enacted in 49 states across the country. When school administrators and educators uphold specific school bullying policies, they also need to comply with the following laws: Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). All of these laws prohibit discrimination against individuals. A bullying incident might violate one or more of these laws and should be addressed accordingly. Schools need to make sure the label they use to describe an incident (e.g., bullying, hazing, teasing) does not solely dictate how they respond; administrators must also consider possible civil rights implications that may occur (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). If a bullying

incident violates a civil rights law, administrators need to take further action beyond disciplining the perpetrators (U.S. Department of Education, 2010).

Central to any cyberbullying discussion is the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution (Jacobs, 2010). In 1997, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the Internet is protected by the First Amendment (Jacobs, 2010). The First Amendment states:

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances. (Jacobs, 2010, p. 8)

People have the right to say what they would like on the Internet without facing legal constraints or censorship. This topic has been brought to and debated in court but the First Amendment holds strong.

With the heightened attention to school violence, cyberbullying has grabbed the attention of schools, school districts, and both state and federal governments. To fully understand the jurisdictional limits in the arena of cyberbullying, it necessary to understand case law that helps guide courts and school officials in making decisions. First, case law illustrates that there are no easy or fast rules that apply to its use, but some cases do provide a framework to guide the decision-making process.

The first relevant case featured two students and their right to freedom of speech. In 1908, two high school girls in Wisconsin, Hazel and Mabel Dresser, wrote a poem that ridiculed school rules and was printed in the local newspaper. The Supreme Court of Wisconsin ruled in 1908:

School authorities have the power to suspend a pupil for an offense committed outside of school hours which has a tendency to influence the conduct of other pupils, to set at naught the proper discipline of the school, impair the authority of the teachers, and bring them into ridicule and contempt. (Jacobs, 2010, p. 10)

The court went on to say, “Such power is essential to the preservation of order, decency, decorum, and good government in the public schools” (Jacobs, 2010, p. 10).

The second relevant case involved four students and their right to protest. In 1965, four Tinker children and their friend wore black armbands to school to express their opposition to the Vietnam War (Jacobs, 2010), thereby violating school policy. The students were sent home until they agreed to remove the armbands (Jacobs, 2010). In 1969, the Supreme Court ruled students maintain their constitutional rights while at school (Willard 2007b). However, in special circumstances, school officials could prohibit students’ speech if it “would substantially interfere with the work of the school or impinge upon the rights of other students, including the right to be secure” (Willard, 2007b, p. 64). Schools must be able to prove the students created substantial disruption (Willard 2007b). Both of these cases addressed the authority schools hold over the actions and behaviors of their students (Shariff, 2005; Willard 2007b).

School administrators need to understand their authority and responsibility in combating cyberbullying. “Authority” is defined by Willard (2007b) as “the legally justified right to impose formal discipline” and addresses students’ free speech and their security (p. 64). “Responsibility” is defined by Willard (2007b) as “the legal obligation to protect students” (p. 64) and includes liability under negligence or civil rights laws. School administrators have the difficult job of determining how to discipline students when the definition and conditions of cyberbullying are still evolving (Hoffman, 2010). The challenge that still exists is how to apply the Tinker case to digital forms of communication (Jacobs, 2010). If school administrators decide to take action, they might still face legal constraints from the court system. For example, even if bullies’ websites

are discovered, removing them is difficult because that action might violate their freedom of speech (Li, 2007). Schools are still unsure of how First Amendment standards apply to students' speech that occurs outside of school but is directed toward another student (Shariff, 2005; Willard, 2007b). Schools might be found liable when a cyberbully utilizes school property such as cameras, computers, and Internet (Willard, 2007b).

Two federal laws are most relevant to cyberbullying and are vital to understand. In 2008, Congress passed the Protecting Children in the 21st Century Act (as known as the Broadband Data Improvement Act). According to the act, schools are required to educate their students on topics including cyberbullying, online safety, and sexual predators (Federal Communications Commission, 2012). The Communications Decency Act of 1996 protects online users and service providers from legal action against them based on the comments of several users.

One other bill had the potential to impact cyberbullying. In 2009, Rep. Linda Sanchez (D, California) sponsored H.R. 1966, the Megan Meier Cyberbullying Prevention Act. The bill proposed to amend Chapter 41 of Title 18 of the United States Code to include a section on cyberbullying. The law would make it a crime to "cause substantial emotional distress to a person, using electronic means to support severe, repeated, and hostile behavior." This law was not enacted but some legislators are still working to get it passed.

Of the 49 states that have statewide bullying policy, 14 have laws referring to "cyberbullying" and 42 have laws referring to "electronic harassment." Some of those existing laws require public schools to develop policies prohibiting cyberbullying, to enforce discipline ranging from suspension to expulsion, to address off-campus

cyberbullying activities, and to require reporting to law enforcement officials (Jacobs, 2010). In Colorado, there is no official anti-bullying law. Colorado state lawmakers instead chose a *legislative declaration* and creation of policy. Policy can be as good as law (Bully Police USA, 2009). Schools must have a Safe School Plan, which must include “a specific policy concerning bullying prevention and education, including information related to the development and implementation of any bullying prevention programs” (Measures to Reduce the Frequency of Bullying in Schools, 2011). Bullying is defined in Colorado policy (HB 11-1254) as “any written or verbal expression, or physical or electronic act or gesture or pattern thereof, that is intended to coerce, intimidate, or cause any physical, mental, or emotional harm to any student” (Measures to Reduce the Frequency of Bullying in Schools, 2011; see Appendix A for an outline of other state laws).

Intervention and Prevention

School systems face the daunting task of figuring out which of the wide array of bullying prevention and education programs available will be effective in their schools. Research by Espelage and Swearer (2003) on bullying suggested that the focus on improving overall school climate is an important component of bullying prevention. According to Ragozzino and Utne (2009), multifaceted approaches that include school-wide, classroom, and intervention components are more likely to reduce bullying than are single-component programs. Vreeman and Carroll (2007) found in a systematic review of school-based interventions designed to prevent bullying that the most effective interventions typically used a whole-school approach and consisted of a combination of the following: school-wide rules and policies, teacher training, classroom curricula,

conflict resolution training, and individual counseling. Some commonly used programs that could be implemented include the Olweus (2001) Bullying Prevention Program (OBPP), Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS), and Steps to Respect. However, programs commonly used might or might not be the most effective ones. Research is still limited on the effectiveness of anti-bullying programs.

As stated in Chapter I, little research has been conducted on the effectiveness of anti-cyberbullying intervention and prevention programs. Popular approaches to online safety and prevention of cyberbullying have yet to be empirically supported (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010). Traditional bullying intervention methods should be expanded to address issues surrounding digital communication and should include the combined efforts of schools, teachers, students, families, law enforcement personnel, and the community (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010; Mason, 2008).

Mason (2008) recommended that cyberbullying intervention be organized into a three-tiered structure that encompasses the complexity of cyberbullying. Everyone involved with the school should be aware that cyberbullying has the potential to negatively affect each one of them. Some schools might be able to add to their existing prevention programs by including intervention strategies specific to cyberbullying. Other schools might need to begin prevention and intervention programs.

The first tier of intervention is at the universal or school level. Goals of whole-school approaches to intervention and prevention commonly include developing effective school-wide policies, increasing staff awareness and responsiveness, surveying students' experiences, and educating parents on bullying concerns (Snell & Hirschstein, 2005). To prevent bullying, schools need to (a) reduce the existing bully/victim problems among the

students, (b) prevent new bullying problems from starting, and (c) promote better peer relations and ways for students to get along (Olweus et al., 1999). School-wide bullying prevention programs are designed to improve the overall school climate (Lehr, 2005). Programs such as peaceful conflict resolution, bullying prevention, and increased school safety help improve the overall school climate (Lehr, 2005).

Nearly 90% of educators and administrators agree that bullying prevention needs to be a part of the school's curriculum (Kennedy, Russom, & Kevorkian, 2012). A school administrator's full commitment and concentrated effort to bullying prevention has been shown to be one of the most effective ways to prevent or lessen bullying (Rigby, 2000). When comparing schools with high and low bullying rates, research suggests a principal's dedication to preventing and intervening with bullying contributes to lower rates of bullying (Stephenson & Smith, 1989). The National Cyber Security Alliance (2011) surveyed a sample of administrators, teachers, and technology coordinators at K-12 private and public schools across the United States. Eighty-two percent of administrators strongly agreed that cyberethics, cybersafety, and cybersecurity should be taught in schools. However, only 67% of administrators felt they were prepared to talk about cyberbullying, about hate speech via online posts (65%), and about sexually explicit messages or photos (69%). Forty-nine percent of administrators said their educators learned about safety through school district workshops and 33% said educators learned through a professional development day dedicated to cyber related issues. However, 76% of teachers had spent fewer than three in-service hours in the last 12 months in cybersafety training provided by the school district. When administrators were

asked who was responsible for teaching children about online safety, 60% said parents were responsible and 34% said schools were responsible.

At the classroom level--the second tier, bullying prevention is designed to improve an individual classroom's social climate. A classroom-level prevention program should (a) establish classroom rules against bullying with the help of the students so they have a sense of personal responsibility, (b) have teachers provide rewards or reinforcement for good social behaviors and consequences for undesirable behaviors, and (c) hold regular classroom meetings to provide a forum for students and teachers to discuss their concerns (Center for the Study and Prevention of School Violence, 2008). A final feature of programs to improve a classroom's social climate is meeting with parents to keep them informed about anti-bullying efforts within the classroom (Center for the Study and Prevention of School Violence, 2008). The key to a good school climate is good communication (Rosen, 2005). Parents and students must all be aware of the rules contained in a school's handbook (Rosen, 2005).

The third tier of intervention targets individuals—the bullies and the victims. This level of intervention is designed to help students improve or change their behavior (Olweus et al., 1999). When a bully or a victim is identified, several key actions are required. First, a school administrator must have serious talks with the bullies and victims. Talks should be immediate and should document the student's involvement or participation in bullying, sending a clear, strong message that bullying is not acceptable. Documentation should specify consequences for the bully and support for the victim (Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence, 2008). Second, parents must be notified about any bullying incidents involving their children; meetings with all persons

involved might be necessary. Third, both bullies and victims might benefit from individualized skill building sessions to work on any deficiencies in social skills. Finally, a change of class or school might be necessary if the bullying problem persists despite these prevention measures (Center for the Study and Prevention of School Violence, 2008). At the individual student level, legal resources, mediators, law enforcement personnel, and parents might be involved (Mason, 2008).

The Role of the School Psychologist

School psychology has existed as a profession for more than 100 years. Traditionally, school psychologists' time was spent conducting individual assessments and counseling students. In the past, the school psychologist might have been involved in preventive work at the school system level but this was not common (Fagan, 2005) because school psychologists' training often revolved around assessment and clinical practices (Gutkin & Conoley, 1990). Also, school psychologists might not have been supported to widen or change their role to involve work at the school system level (Magi & Kikas, 2009). However, in the last 30 years, consultation with teachers and parents has become just as important as assessments and counseling (Fagan, 2005; Gutkin & Curtis, 1999). The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP; Fagan & Wise, 2007) expanded the roles of school psychologists to include evaluation, intervention, prevention, research and planning, and health care.

One possible barrier to expanded roles for school psychologists is the perceptions held by school administrators (Fagan, 1995). Magi and Kikas (2009) studied 107 school administrators from schools across the country of Estonia and found that 91% of administrators felt the most important role of school psychologists was to counsel

students with learning and behavioral difficulties. Forty-nine percent of administrators felt school psychologists should improve school climate by regularly consulting with school administrators and teachers. One school administrator commented on the role of the school psychologist:

A psychologist should be the kind of person to whom pupils can talk without fear. He/she should have the same function also for teachers, so that they could talk about their worries and from whom they would get advice about how to behave with youngsters and their negativism. Counseling parents should also be his/her duty. (Magi & Kikas, 2009, p. 341)

In addition, the Magi and Kikas (2009) study found very little resistance to the notion of having school psychologists working at the system level to help improve a school's climate. This research suggested that school psychologists' work at the system level might be well received and necessary.

School psychologists are well trained to help ensure all students have the opportunity to succeed academically, socially, behaviorally, and emotionally (NASP, 2010). More recently, school psychologists have been prominent in addressing school violence, promoting safe schools, and providing additional mental health services to students (Diamanduros, Downs, & Jenkins, 2008). "School psychologists are in the key positions to effect positive changes in school climate" (Lehr, 2005, p. 472). Because of their skills and training, school psychologists are also in a key position to work collaboratively with other educators to promote a positive learning environment. Also, they are able to disseminate information on the benefits of promoting a positive school climate on student outcomes. Finally, they are able to provide research on ways to measure school climate and possible effective strategies (Lehr, 2005).

Because they are trained to help create a positive school climate, school psychologists also can become leaders in combating bullying and cyberbullying. The NASP (2006) has stated that bullying and relational aggression are two forms of school violence that might interfere with the emotional well-being of students. Therefore, the NASP believes school psychologists should take active leadership roles in the promotion of safe schools and reduction of bullying. It is clear cyberbullying would fit into the realm of school psychologists' work (Diamanduros et al., 2008). However, little literature specifically discusses the role of school psychologists in the area of cyberbullying (Cook, Williams, Guerra, & Tuthill, 2007). School psychologists can promote awareness of cyberbullying and the psychological outcomes; they can also assess the prevalence and severity of cyberbullying within their schools (Diamanduros et al., 2008). Also, school psychologists can research and develop prevention programs to address cyberbullying and implement intervention and planning strategies if cyberbullying has become a problem (Diamanduros et al., 2008). Finally, school psychologists can be important team members in consultation with school officials to develop policies to manage and deal with cyberbullying within the school (Diamanduros et al., 2008).

In many school systems, the school administrator is responsible for employing a school psychologist; therefore, the administrator must clearly state his or her expectations for school psychological services (Magi & Kikas, 2009). School psychologists' training in many disciplines helps them to act competently in many diverse roles. The specific services a school needs from a school psychologist might vary from school to school.

Summary

At one time, bullying was thought of as only physical in nature; verbal actions such as teasing were not thought to have any impact on children (Shariff, 2008). However, bullying has been shown to have a significant impact on children emotionally, socially, and academically. National studies have suggested bullying affects nearly 70% of youths as either a bully, victim, or bystander at some time during their school years (Graham, 2014). Cyberbullying prevalence rates are lower than traditional bullying; however, with the frequent use of technology among so many youth, cyberbullying is becoming a more dangerous phenomenon. Cyberbullying has a significant impact on children emotionally, socially, and academically. Like the traditional bully, the cyberbully intends to threaten, harm, humiliate, and instill fear in his or her victim (Storm & Storm, 2009). Unlike traditional bullies, cyberbullies are typically anonymous, can bully their victims at any time of the day, and could possibly never see how their actions impact their victims. Students all deserve school environments conducive to learning, yet bullying and cyberbullying may prohibit this. A positive school climate helps create an academically successful school as well as one that has fewer behavior problems and higher levels of attendance (Lehr, 2005). School administrators and school staff struggle with the legal constraints and the desire to protect their students against these cyberbullying incidents. There is a need to regulate student behavior while still protecting students' rights. School psychologists' training allows them to be key players in helping combat cyberbullying within their schools given their extensive knowledge in the areas of student development, behavior, and mental health and their understanding of school systems.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine school principals' perspectives of and responses to cyberbullying in urban middle schools. Specifically, the study sought to determine school principals' perspectives on the impact of cyberbullying and on policies and laws that influence the way they handle cyberbullying incidents. Also, this study sought to determine from the principals' perspective what intervention and prevention methods are most effective in limiting cyberbullying incidents and what they believe is the school psychologist's role in these efforts. Chapter III describes and explains the research rationale for a qualitative, phenomenological methodology. Chapter III is organized into the following sections: appropriateness of research method and research design, research paradigm, researcher subjectivity, research questions, research design, and trustworthiness and rigor.

Appropriateness of Research Method and Research Design

Qualitative research has its roots in the fields of sociology and anthropology (Vidich & Lyman, 1994). Both of these fields seek to understand other people and are committed to understanding self. More recently, qualitative research has been accepted by educational researchers (Borg & Gall, 1989). Qualitative research is an overarching

concept encompassing several forms of inquiry that “help us understand and explain the meaning of social phenomena with as little disruption of the natural setting as possible” (Merriam, 1998, p. 5). Qualitative research allows the reader to step into the participant’s perspective at a given time and moment, allowing for insight through a naturalistic study and making it possible to better understand a participant’s opinions, attitudes, beliefs, and values (Patton, 2002). While qualitative research has its limitations, it does provide the most accurate picture of the participant’s perspectives and experiences (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Qualitative research includes five main research methods: ethnography, phenomenology, narrative, grounded theory, and case study (Creswell, 1998). These five methods have some common characteristics but each has its own origin and intent for the research being conducted. Qualitative inquiry provides researchers with “purposive strategies rather than methodological rules” and “inquiry approaches rather than formulas” (Patton, 2002). Specifically, phenomenology aims to describe the true meaning of a phenomenon through the experience as portrayed by the individual (Jasper, 1994).

The German philosopher Edmund Husserl is considered “the fountainhead of phenomenology in the twentieth century” (Vandenberg, 1997, p. 11). After World War I, Europe was in ruins and Husserl “sought to develop a new philosophical method which would lend absolute certainty to a disintegrating civilization” (Eagleton, 1983, p. 54). Husserl rejected the concept that objects in the external world exist independently (Vidich & Lyman, 1994). Husserl named his philosophical method “phenomenology”—the science of pure ‘phenomena’ (Eagleton, 1983, p. 55). The aim of phenomenology is to get “back to the things themselves!” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 26). The fundamental

theoretical assumption essential to this inquiry has been exemplified by Husserl's statement, "We can only know what we experience" (as cited Moustakas, 1994, p. 26). Creswell (1998) stated,

Researchers search for essentials, invariant structure (or essence) or the central underlying meaning of the experience and emphasize the intentionality of consciousness where experiences contain both the outward appearance and inward consciousness based on memory, image and meaning. (p. 52)

Phenomenology is a rigorous, critical, systematic investigation of phenomena from the participants' perspective (Streubert & Carpenter, 1999). It is also an inductive and descriptive research method. The main focus of phenomenological analysis is to understand "how the everyday, inter-subjective world is constituted" (Schwandt, 2000, p. 192) from the participants' point of view. The phenomenon is not what reality is but rather how it is perceived (Burns & Grove, 1998). Phenomenological investigation guides the researcher to a topic and questions that have both social meaning and personal significance (Moustakas, 1994). Personal history brings the core of the problem into focus (Moustakas, 1994).

For this study, I chose phenomenology to gain new insights, discover new ideas, and increase my knowledge of cyberbullying. I entered the research study with curiosity from the point of not knowing how school administrators perceive cyberbullying (Creswell, 1998). The goals of this study were to understand school principals' experiences with and perspectives about cyberbullying to help better understand and address the problem. My intent was to gather information during the study to better inform those who are responsible for prevention and intervention strategies. Further, I was able to shed new light on the school administrators' perspective of the role of the school psychologist in cyberbullying intervention.

Research Paradigm

A research paradigm is defined by Denzin and Lincoln (2000) as “a basic set of beliefs that guide action” (p. 157). The research design of this study was nested within the theoretical foundations of constructivism. The world view of constructivism is described by Creswell (2007): “Individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work. Meanings are varied and multiple, leading the researcher to look for the complexity of views, rather than to narrow the meanings into a few categories or ideas” (p. 20). The purpose of this qualitative study was to better understand the phenomenon of cyberbullying specifically from the school principal’s perspective. Because this study focused on school principals’ perspectives and their understandings of cyberbullying, I constructed meaning in an ongoing, conscious, social approach (Crotty, 1998). The theoretical framework guided the research to gain school principals’ collective perspectives on cyberbullying occurring in schools. Glaser and Strauss (1967) explained the importance of theory to the study:

[t]heory that can meet these requirements must fit the situation being researched, and work when put into use. By ‘fit’ we mean that the categories must be readily (not forcibly) applicable to and indicated by the data under study; by ‘work’ we mean that they must be meaningfully relevant to and be able to explain the behavior under study. (p. 3)

The themes encompassed in the constructivism framework were used in this study to (a) drive the phenomenological data collection of school principals’ perspectives and experiences about cyberbullying through the use of semi-structured interviews comprised of mostly open-ended questions and (b) inductively discover, analyze, comprehend, describe, and illuminate principals’ perspectives on the issue of cyberbullying.

Researcher Subjectivity

A researcher's background, knowledge, and lived experiences can "filter, skew, shape, block, transform, construe, and misconstrue what transpires from the outset of a research projected to its culmination in written statement" (Peshkin, 1988, p. 17). It is essential that a researcher recognize his or her biases and set them aside at the start of a research study so they do not interfere with the interpretation of the results. Because a researcher's bias specific to the phenomenon being studied could lead to a misconstruction of the data and inaccurate conclusions, the researcher must try to limit his or her personal biases (Creswell, 2007). Identification of the researcher's personal bias or expectations is known as "epoche" or bracketing (Creswell, 2007, p. 59). Creswell (2007) stated that although this process is difficult, "I see researchers who embrace this idea when they begin a project by describing their own experiences and bracketing out their views before proceeding with the experience of others" (p. 60). To better understand the research presented in this study, I describe my past, my knowledge of the phenomenon, and my lived experiences.

One specific reason I was interested in this research area was because, like so many people, I was a bystander to bullying as a child; I felt helpless. As I completed my undergraduate studies and while volunteering at a local children's hospital, I first encountered the area of school psychology after talking with the mother of a child at the hospital. I then decided to continue my education in the field of school psychology. I enrolled at The Citadel as an education specialist in the school's psychology program. There I met a professor who had a passion for research; I started researching with her in the area of bullying. As I completed my first year in the program, I knew I wanted to

continue my education and work toward a doctoral degree in the field of school psychology. I completed my master's degree and wrote a thesis on the nature and impacts of cyberbullying on middle school students. I then transferred to a doctoral program at the University of Northern Colorado.

Once I began my doctoral studies, I knew I wanted to continue explore the area of cyberbullying. I learned through coursework and practicum placements the structure of school systems. It became clear to me that school administrators are key individuals within schools in helping create the school climate, establishing student expectations, and acting as change agents, if necessary. My training as a school psychologist has led me to aspire to a role in schools working to combat cyberbullying. I have a strong foundation in research and evaluation. I can help schools locate and implement effective anti-cyberbullying programs. I can also help assess the nature and impact of cyberbullying in a school using my skills in assessment. I can be a member of a team that enacts policy and change in the school. Finally, I have consultation skills that allow me to communicate with parents, educators, and administrators purposively and effectively.

In summary, because of my background and experiences, I have several beliefs that should be noted:

1. Principals are key players in the battle against cyberbullying to help reduce its negative effects on students.
2. Principals' perspectives on the phenomenon of cyberbullying in the state of Colorado have yet to be explored and documented.

3. School psychologists are well trained to help principals in combating cyberbullying, yet research has not established school psychologists' roles in this area.

I have acknowledged these assumptions so I am fully aware of my biases; thus, they did not interfere with the data collection, analysis, and interpretation and my presentation of the study's findings.

When I was 10-years-old, I was overcome with fear and at a loss on how to stop bullying. With better awareness and education, children can be provided with the information and support needed to help stop bullying. I am no longer that scared 10-year-old girl. Today, I have decided to stand up against bullying and help further the research in the field of bullying with a specific focus on cyberbullying. With the knowledge I gained from this research study, I am dedicated to making a difference and working with school administrators and school districts to stand up against cyberbullying.

Research Questions

To support the purpose of this study, I posed the following research question and sub-questions to school administrators:

- Q1 How do middle school principals perceive and respond to cyberbullying?
 - Q1a Under what conditions does cyberbullying have an impact on the school's learning environment and its students?
 - Q1b What intervention and prevention strategies are most effective for reducing cyberbullying?
 - Q1c What role do school psychologists play in preventing cyberbullying and intervening to combat its effects?
 - Q1d What policies or laws guide or influence the way school principals deal with cyberbullying incidents?

Research Design

Setting and Sampling

The study was conducted in the state of Colorado and included large urban school districts. The middle schools were identified from large urban school districts with more than 30,000 students and had at least 10 middle schools (including K-8 schools) within the district. Each school's student body population was described in terms of population size, socioeconomic status, and ethnicity based on the participant's demographic questionnaire and school data information available on the Internet. In this study, school principals from these schools were the population of interest. I chose this population because I found little cyberbullying research focused in the state of Colorado specifically. It is important to look at school principals' perspectives in individual states because bullying and cyberbullying laws and policies are the responsibilities of the states.

Criterion-based purposive sampling method was used for this study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Participants were chosen based on their experiences with cyberbullying as middle school principals. Middle schools principals serving students in grades 6 through 8 in large urban school districts were identified from the Colorado Department of Education website and individual school district websites, both of which are publicly accessible on the Internet. Participants were adults and were not from any special or vulnerable populations; therefore, there was little or no risk to them during the study. The participants were selected based on the purpose of the research and whether they met the criterion of having dealt with cyberbullying as school administrators in their current schools (Babbie, 1995; Schwandt, 1997; see Appendix B for the Criterion Questionnaire).

Recruitment

I first gained permission from the University of Northern Colorado's Institutional Review Board (IRB) to conduct the study (see Appendix C). I obeyed all ethical guidelines and protocols during the research study. According to the human subject guidelines provided by the IRB, the consent form for the participants included the following information: (a) participation in this study is voluntary, (b) participants can end an interview at any time, (c) their names as well as the school's names were kept completely confidential and separate from their responses, and (d) permission to record the interview was asked prior to the interview (see Appendix D). Each participant was asked to read and sign the consent form. Prior to starting the interview, I answered any questions participants had related to the study.

School principals from the identified middle schools were contacted through their school e-mail addresses (see Appendix E). I e-mailed the letter of invitation and the criterion questionnaire to all identified principals. All potential participants were asked to answer the several questions listed on the criterion questionnaire to ensure each principal met the criterion for this study. I sent a follow-up e-mail approximately one week after the original e-mail to any principal who had not yet contacted me.

Sample Size

There are no set rules for sample sizes in qualitative research. Glaser (2000) wrote, "Qualitative data are inexpensive to collect, very rich in meaning and observation, and very rewarding to collect and analyze" (p. 7). Other researchers disagreed. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) expressed how labor-intensive and time-consuming data collection could be and researchers should consider smaller samples. According to Patton (2002),

sample sizes should depend on the following: what you want to know, the purpose of the inquiry, what is at stake, what will be useful, what will have credibility, and what can be done with the available time and resources. Boyd (2001) regarded 2 to 10 participants as sufficient to reach saturation and Creswell (1998, pp. 65, 113) recommended “long interviews with up to 10 people” for a phenomenological study. In this study, I considered Patton’s questions and collected enough data to answer the research questions and identify emerging themes given time and resources available. The size of the sample was ultimately determined by Morse’s (1994) and Streubert and Carpenter’s (1999) principle of saturation, which they described as the point at which data collection themes were repeated. Six participants were determined to be the point of saturation.

Data Collection

Qualitative research often requires more than one method of data collection to help the researcher gain a true and full understanding of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007; Patton, 2002). I used three types of data collection for this research study: (a) demographic questionnaires; (b) individual, semi-structured, open-ended interviews; and (c) vignettes.

Demographic questionnaires. Each participant was asked to complete a demographic questionnaire at the conclusion of the interview (see Appendix F). Questions included age range, number of years as a principal, number of years worked in the current position, race, gender, highest level of degree obtained, and any licensures. Next, the participants were asked to describe their schools. Topics included the number of students, number of mental health professionals, and number of students receiving free or reduced lunches. The responses from this questionnaire were used to help me

understand each participant and how these demographics influenced his or her attitudes and perspectives toward cyberbullying. These data also helped me pose more relevant questions to each participant. Possible patterns and outliers were identified as well.

Individual, semi-structured, open-ended interviews. School principals' perspectives of cyberbullying were collected using individual, semi-structured interviews composed of open-ended questions. Semi-structured interviews were used because they consisted of a suggested set of questions that allowed me to be flexible and ask additional relevant questions when appropriate to encourage participants to fully express their opinions and perceptions.

Interview questions were based on a review of literature and preliminary conversations with middle school principals I was familiar with outside the study population. The first interview was completed to determine if the elicited responses generated the data I was seeking from the targeted populations. After this first interview, I made the necessary adjustments to the questions and continued to interview the principals (see Appendix G for the interview guide).

Given the nature and ideologies of qualitative research, I met with each participant at his or her convenience. Interviews were conducted at the participants' school or a location of their choice. Given the value of school administrators' time, I used one shorter interview session. I requested one 45-minute session to conduct the interview. In the interview session, I asked the participants questions from the interview guide, follow up with questions if necessary, and the questions from the demographic questionnaire.

All interviews were digitally audio-recorded using an application on my cell phone. At the conclusion of each interview, I e-mailed an audio copy of the interview to my password-protected e-mail account. Interviews were then downloaded to my password-protected computer and deleted from my cell phone. Participants could choose to not answer any questions that might make them uncomfortable and they could end the interview at any point. Each audio recording was identified with the participant's real name and pseudonym. Participants picked their own pseudonyms to be used in data collection and reports to help ensure anonymity. The transcriptions included only the participants' pseudonyms; the identifiable audio recordings were destroyed after transcription. The audio recordings were accessible to me. Also, I was the only interviewer throughout this study to help ensure consistency and continuity of the interviews. I spent three months interviewing participants in order to accommodate principals' schedules.

In addition to the interview audio recordings, I kept field notes after each interview. I also kept a reflection journal during the entire research experience. I used these methods to help limit my opinions from entering into the data analysis phase and to ensure the authentic nature of the research being conducted (Bodgan & Biklen, 2007).

Vignettes. In addition to the interview questions, participants were asked to respond to two vignettes about hypothetical cyberbullying incidents that mirrored real-life situations. Vignettes provided "an opportunity to engage study participants actively in producing, reflecting on, and learning from the data" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p.80). I made modifications to two cyberbullying vignettes written by Patchin and Hinduja (2009b) for education instructional purposes (see Appendix H for the two modified

vignettes). The cyberbullying incidents used in the vignettes included examples of the different types of cyberbullying and different challenges that exist. Each participant was told at the beginning of the interview that the vignettes being presented might be examples of possible incidents that could occur in their middle school. Participants were asked to react to each vignette and asked to respond to the incident as if he or she were the administrator in the case.

Coding and Data Analysis

The process of coding qualitative data included making sense of the collected data, dividing the data into shared areas, labeling the shared areas, and analyzing the shared areas for overlaps and redundancy; the final step was to place the shared areas into themes (Creswell, 2002). The coding process “is an inductive process of narrowing data into a few themes” (Creswell, 2002, p. 266), which assisted in achieving the goal of this study: understanding the lived experiences of school principals and their perceptions of cyberbullying.

The purpose of data analysis was to identify emerging patterns by grouping responses into meaningful categories and themes so they could be identified, coded, categorized, classified, and labeled (Patton, 2002). For phenomenological research, “the researcher...analyzes the data by reducing the information to significant statements or quotes and combines the statements into themes” (Creswell, 2007, p. 60). From these themes, the researcher “develops a textural description of ... what the participants experienced and a structural description of ... how they experienced it in terms of conditions, situations or context” (Creswell, 2007, p. 60). The significant statements and themes “convey an overall essence of the experience” (Creswell, 2007, p. 60).

Specifically, I analyzed the data of this research study using Moustakas' (1994) "seven-step Modified van Kaam Method of Analysis of Phenomenological Data" (pp. 120-121). The seven steps of the modified van Kaam (see Table 1) were used in this study to help portray the meanings of the experiences each of the participants presented within the individual structural and textural-structural descriptions (Moustakas, 1994).

The seven-step modified van Kaam method of analysis allows researchers to analyze textual data (Moustakas, 1994). First, I listed all textual data to develop groupings or themes. Second, I reduced and eliminated the invariant themes of the phenomenon. Third, I clustered the core themes. Fourth, I checked for patterns against the interview transcripts. Fifth, I developed an individual textual description of the experience for each participant. Sixth, I created an individual structural description based upon the textual data description. Finally, I created an individual textural-structural description of the combined textual interview data. From the individual textual-structural descriptions, I developed a composite description of the meanings and essences of the experiences and used it to describe the group as a whole (Moustakas, 1994).

Table 1

Modified van Kaam Method of Analysis of Phenomenological Data

Steps	Method
Step 1. Listing and preliminary grouping	List every expression relevant to the experience. (Horizontalization)
Step 2. Reduction and elimination	To determine the invariant constituents: Test each expression for two requirements: a.) Does it contain a moment of the experience that is a necessary and sufficient constituent for understanding? b.) Is it possible to abstract and label it? If so, it is a horizon of the experience. Expressions not meeting the above requirements are eliminated. Overlapping, repetitive, and vague expressions are also eliminated or presented in more descriptive terms. The horizons that remain are the invariant constituents of the experience.
Step 3. Clustering and thematizing the invariant constituents	Cluster the invariant constituents of the experience that are related into a thematic label. The clustered and labeled constituents are the core themes of the experience.
Step 4. Final identification of the invariant constituents and themes by application	Check the invariant constituents and their accompanying theme against the complete record of the research participant. (a) Are they expressed explicitly in the complete transcription? (b) Are they compatible if not explicitly expressed? (c) If they are not explicit or compatible, they are not relevant to the co-researcher's experience and should be deleted.
Step 5. Using the relevant validated invariant constituents and themes, construct for each co-researcher an Individual Textural Description of the experience. Include verbatim examples from the transcribed interview.	Include verbatim examples from the transcribed interview.
Step 6. Construct for each co-researcher an Individual Structural Description of the experience based on the Individual Description and Imaginative Variation.	
Step 7. Construct for each research participant a Textural-Structural Description of the meanings and essences of the experience, incorporating the invariant constituents and themes.	

Trustworthiness and Rigor

To help increase the overall trustworthiness and rigor of the study, measures of credibility, transferability, confirmability, dependability and authenticity were utilized. Given that the goal of qualitative research is to explore the “individual interpretations and worldviews of complex and human-centered events,” more traditional forms of reliability and validity were not possible or appropriate (Webster & Mertova, 2007, p. 89). Webster and Mertova (2007) went on to suggest that establishing a sense of reliability and validity in this type of research is done by providing “access to reliable and trustworthy records of the stories as told by individuals” (p. 90).

Credibility

Because the nature and goals of qualitative research are to understand the phenomenon from participants’ subjective experiences, researchers must be able to accurately and authentically record, analyze, and interpret the data collected. I used triangulation, member checking, and a peer examiner for this purpose.

Triangulation. This study used three data sources--interview transcriptions, participant demographic questionnaires, and vignettes--to increase the study’s credibility. Three data sources provided a more complete understanding of principals’ perspectives about the phenomenon of cyberbullying and helped ensure that the research process accurately captured these perspectives (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Member checking. All participants were asked to review my summary of the themes from their interviews to ensure that I had properly captured the participants’ comments. I asked each participant to meet after the interviews had been transcribed but all participants chose to review their themes over e-mail. I had each participant review

the themes, patterns, and meaningful units of data. I incorporated any input or clarification the participants offered.

Peer examiner. In addition to me, a peer examiner was used to cross check the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The peer examiner was an advanced doctoral student with knowledge and experience in qualitative research, design, and analysis. The peer examiner was responsible for reviewing the textual and structural descriptions created by the researcher and comparing them to the core themes. Having two individuals review the core themes and textual-structural descriptions helped establish trustworthiness.

Transferability

Despite the lack of generalizability of qualitative research, many researchers believe that experiences learned in one setting may be pertinent to and beneficial in other similar situations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtler, 2006). The extent to which a study's findings are transferable is based upon the reader's interpretation of the thick and rich description of the research conducted (Lodico et al., 2006). The reader determines whether or not the data presented in the study are applicable to other settings. In this particular study, both the participants and I used thick and contextual descriptions to interpret the school principals' perspectives of cyberbullying within middle schools in Colorado.

Confirmability and Dependability

In qualitative research, confirmability is used to ensure the data presented by the researcher is clear and represents the participants' perspectives (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The techniques of triangulation, member checking, and the research audit trail were used to help establish confirmability.

Audit trail. I used an audit trail--a detailed description of the data collection and analysis process that allows others to know the protocol of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). An audit trail might include the following: raw data, analysis notes, reconstruction products, personal notes, and preliminary developmental information (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). My audit trail consisted of the following: (a) a research proposal, (b) participant and demographic questionnaires, (c) initial and modified interview guides, (d) cyberbullying vignettes, (e) audio-recorded interviews, (f) interview transcriptions, (g) field notes and a reflection journal, (h) a code book, (i) coding worksheets, and (j) member checking notes.

In qualitative research, dependability is defined as the degree to which the researcher records and presents the entire research process to gather and analyze data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Lodico et al., 2006). The researcher must provide the reader with enough information in a logical, traceable, and documented manner (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) so the study can be replicated. In this study, I used a research audit trail to help establish a dependable study. The audit trail included recorded interviews to ensure there was a copy of the original data and my researcher's journal to track the data collection process and record my initial insights.

Journaling /researcher log. As stated earlier in Chapter I, I bracketed my assumptions in order to avoid interfering with the participants' telling of their experiences. I did so by continually using journaling to record my thoughts, perspectives, assumptions, and beliefs throughout the research study. This helped to ensure I was aware of any biases I might have had. I was able to avoid placing any personal emotions

or thoughts onto the participants, which allowed me to gain a fuller and deeper understanding of the participants' perspectives and experiences.

Journaling also allowed me to reflect on the phenomenon throughout the research process (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2006). This particular aspect of journaling was referred to as my researcher log. The log included personal reflections, reactions to the information gathered, as well as my feelings about the entire research process. The journaling and log allowed me to keep track and organize my thoughts, feelings, and reactions during the duration of the research study. This was important to ensure I was accurate and authentic to the textual-structural descriptions I created to represent the participants' lived experiences.

Authenticity

According to Spradley (1979), the goal of authenticity in qualitative research is to match the researcher's goals to the needs of the participants. For this study, authenticity was attained by educating the participants on the nature and purpose of the research study, by explaining my intent to better understand cyberbullying through school principals' perspectives, and by emphasizing how the school principals' perspectives might help reduce the negative impact of cyberbullying on students. I shared with participants how important their participation was in the study. During data analysis, I showed authenticity by accurately documenting the perspectives of the participants through the patterns and themes that emerged from the inductive analysis.

Summary

This qualitative phenomenological research study was designed to unearth school principals' perceptions and experiences on the nature and impact of cyberbullying. I

interviewed six individuals, stopping when new themes were no longer emerging and sample saturation was achieved. The study's research phenomenological method was appropriate because the focus was on understanding the meaning of school administrators' comments. I collected data by capturing the participants' responses on audio-recorded media for transcription (Creswell, 2002). The text data were analyzed for themes that occurred in the participants' comments using Moustakas' (1994) modified van Kaam method of analysis. Trustworthiness and rigor were established by utilizing methods of credibility, transferability, confirmability, dependability, and authenticity.

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore middle school principals' perceptions and lived experiences of cyberbullying incidents that occurred at their schools. This chapter summarizes the empirical findings from the semi-structured, open-ended participant interviews, demographic questionnaires, and publically accessible school building data.

This chapter begins with a demographic description of the participants and their personal definitions of cyberbullying. Six principals participated in the study (see Appendix I for a complete chart of participant demographics). Each participant selected his or her own pseudonym. A short introduction to the participants and their schools is provided to help the reader gain a better understanding of each participant and the school they were working in at the time of the study. The chapter concludes with a detailed account of the emerging themes from the six middle school principals.

Meet the Participants

Clive Bixby

Clive Bixby is a middle school principal in a large Denver metropolitan school serving over 800 students in grades 6-8. Clive has served in his current school position for nine years and had been a school administrator for 14 years. He holds a Bachelor of

Arts degree in social sciences, a Master of Arts in educational administration, and a Ph.D. in educational leadership. The racial and ethnic breakdown of students at his school was as follows: 58% of students were White, 16% Hispanic, 14% Black, 8% Asian, 3% two or more races, and 1% Hawaii Pacific. Twenty-one percent of students received free or reduced lunches. There were four mental health workers at Clive's school: one social worker (.8 FTE), two school counselors, and one school psychologist (.2 FTE).

Clive reported that he had addressed approximately one cyberbullying incident per week in the past school year. Clive defined cyberbullying:

Harassment over any electronic device because that is what it is—it's just harassment. It would be targeted and repetitive and with a purpose and with malicious intent. The difference is the intention and repetitiveness of targeting as opposed to cyber harassment or cyber bad behavior.

Michelle

Michelle is a middle school principal in a large Denver metropolitan school serving over 800 students in grades 6-8. She has served in that position for one year and had been a school administrator for eight years. She was currently working on her Ph.D. in educational leadership. The racial and ethnic breakdown of the students at her school was as follows: 75% Hispanic, 12% White, 9% Asian/Hawaii Pacific, 2% African American, and 1% two or more races. Eighty-four percent of the students received free or reduced lunches. There were six mental health workers at Michelle's school: one full-time social worker, one full-time school counselor, three student advisors, and one part-time school psychologist.

Michelle reported she had addressed at least one cyberbullying incident weekly in the past school year. Michelle defined cyberbullying:

Any type of social media whether it is Facebook, Twitter, any of the new ones...and certainly e-mails, but I think right now in our world it's text messaging, where it happens the fastest, if not Facebook. So I think any type of continuous coming at another student for whatever reason. In this case, they typically make fun of the way each other looks. That tends to be the one. Or threatening to stay away from boyfriends or girlfriends and that sort of stuff. It wouldn't necessarily have to be continuous about the same thing, but if they continue to be threatening.

Melody

Melody is a middle school principal in a large Denver metropolitan school; her school serves over 800 students. She has held her current school position for one year and had been a school administrator for two years. Melody earned her Ph.D. in educational leadership. The racial and ethnic breakdown of the students was as follows: 32% of students were White, 31% Black, 28% Hispanic, 6% two or more races, and 3% Asian. Fifty-four percent of students received free or reduced lunches. There were two mental health workers at Melody's school: one social worker who served four days a week and a school psychologist who served one day a week.

Melody reported that she had addressed four cyberbullying incidents in the past school year. Melody defined cyberbullying as "anytime that there is abuse of power, an imbalance, that mostly happens through social media, texting, sexting, and Facebook."

Jane

Jane is a principal in a large Denver metropolitan school that serves over 600 students in grades preschool through 8. She has served in that position for four years and had been a school administrator for eight years. She holds a Bachelor of Science degree in education, a Master of Arts in school leadership, and a Ph.D. in educational leadership. The racial and ethnic breakdown of the students at her school was as follows: 38% of students were White, 26% Hispanic, 18% Black, 13% Asian, 5% two or more races, and

1% American Indian. Twenty-nine percent of students received free or reduced lunches. There were three mental health workers at Jane's school: one part-time social worker (1.5 days per week), one school counselor, and one school psychologist (1.5 days per week).

Jane reported she had addressed three to six cyberbullying incidents in the past school year. Jane defined cyberbullying:

Looking at the pure definition of bullying, anything that is mean and mean-spirited and harmful and threatening and continued, then you take that to the cyber realm. You take that to social media, you take it to phone calls, messages, instant messages, anything that uses electronic technology as your medium to do that.

Joe

Joe is a middle school principal in a large Denver metropolitan school; his school serves over 900 students. He has served in that position for seven years and had been a school administrator for 16 years. He holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in education and a Master of Arts in educational administration. The racial and ethnic breakdown of the students at his school was as follows: 38% of students were Hispanic, 28% Black, 23% White, 5% Asian, 4% two or more races, 1% American Indian, and 1% Hawaiian native. Sixty-three percent of students received free or reduced lunches. There were four mental health workers at Joe's school: one part-time social worker, two school counselors, and one school psychologist.

Joe reported he had addressed over 80 cyberbullying incidents in the past school year. Joe defined cyberbullying:

Any kind of comments that are going to make another student uncomfortable or unsafe or afraid, cyberbullying through Facebook, text messages, other social media outlets, which we seem to deal with these days, that's what we would consider cyberbullying. And it's no different than bullying; it's the same process.

Stu

Stu is a middle school principal in a large Denver metropolitan school; his school serves over 900 students in grades 7 and 8. He has served in that position for five and half years and had been a school administrator for eight and half years. He holds a Master of Arts in education administration and special education. The racial and ethnic breakdown of students at his school was as follows: 74% of students were White, 12% Hispanic, 6% Asian, 4% two or more races, 2% Black, and 1% American Indian. Ten percent of students received free or reduced lunches. There were three mental health workers at Stu's school: one social worker (.8 FTE), one school counselor, and one school psychologist.

Stu reported he had addressed about three cyberbullying incidents in the past school year. He defined cyberbullying:

I always start with bullying is bullying, and cyberbullying is simply a vehicle to perpetrate it. In my mind it has to meet these three criteria: 1) it needs to be negative and hurtful unwanted behavior, physical or verbal; 2) it has to be ongoing or repeated; and 3) it has to have an imbalance of power, which gets very, very tricky. And then the cyberbullying part is that it is electronic, social media. The finer definition would include the medium being used because if it is text messages direct to the person or Facebook page or Instagram page, you have to go there to read them. The medium is then what defines it from being so unique and a nuisance. It is difficult in the context today, but I maintain the same general definition as for bullying.

Sources of Data

All participants were currently serving as school principals working with middle school students. Their schools were all located in the Denver metropolitan area.

Participants were sought from the Colorado Department of Education website's school district listing. As noted in Chapter III, I recruited participants by e-mail solicitation for participation. I e-mailed 85 principals in the Denver metropolitan area; of those 85

principals, 12 responded and four declined to participate. Participants responded to one of two e-mails sent out over a period of six weeks. I asked participants if they met the criteria for the study (see Appendix B); if so, I set up an interview where I also reminded them that their participation was voluntary. To further protect each participant's identity, I summarized their demographics and ensured that they could not be identified by their pseudonyms. The individual interviews ($N = 6$) were completed between May 2013 and July 2013. At the start of the interviews, all participants signed the informed consent forms (see Appendix D) and were given the opportunity to ask any clarifying questions about the research study. All six interviews were conducted in person at a location chosen by the participant. Five participants chose to be interviewed in their offices and one participant chose to be interviewed at his home. The interviews varied in length from 16 minutes to 37 minutes, with a median length of 30 minutes. During the interview, I read two scenarios to all six participants (see Appendix H). The participants were asked to explain their investigation processes using the scenarios as examples. Some participants gave answers that were very specific to the scenarios; others gave more general answers.

Researcher's Bracket

I used bracketing to explore my own experience with cyberbullying in order to recognize and set aside my judgments about it (Creswell, 2007). Although this process is difficult, some "researchers embrace this idea when they begin a project by describing their own experiences and bracketing out their views before proceeding with the experience of others" (Creswell, 2007, p. 60). Following the principle of bracketing, I

explored my personal experiences (presented below) to help minimize their impact on the interpretation of the findings.

Before this study, I had spent six years studying and researching the phenomena of bullying and cyberbullying. I had written a master's thesis on the nature and impacts of cyberbullying on middle school students and conducted a doctoral level research study on principals' perspectives on bullying. I learned about the structure of school systems through practicum and internship placements. It became clear to me that school administrators are key individuals within schools in helping create the school climate, establishing student expectations, and acting as change agents, if necessary. My training as a school psychologist has led me to aspire to a role in schools working to combat cyberbullying. I have a strong foundation in research and evaluation. I can help schools locate and implement effective anti-cyberbullying programs. I can help assess the nature and impact of cyberbullying in a school using my skills in assessment. I can be a member of a team that enacts policy and change in the school. Finally, I have consultation skills that allow me to communicate purposively and effectively with parents, educators, and administrators.

Based on my personal experiences and research, I entered the study with several biases and assumptions. I expected principals to lead the battle against cyberbullying to help reduce its negative effects on students. Before I began this study, I learned that principals' perspectives on the phenomenon of cyberbullying in the state of Colorado had yet to be explored and documented. Finally, I found that school psychologists are well trained to help principals in combating cyberbullying; yet research has not established school psychologists' roles in this area.

Steps to Control for Researcher Bias

To control for my biases and assumptions throughout the study, I maintained a journal. I recorded my thoughts and reactions to interviews, additional research, and feedback from my auditor and my advisor. Keeping the journal helped me be aware of my own reactions throughout the research study. I used an auditor to support the trustworthiness of this research study. The auditor was an advanced graduate student in the school psychology program who had studied qualitative research methods and had conducted qualitative research. She provided feedback on the coding, analysis, and interpretation of the participants' responses. Finally, I used a member checking process in which participants were provided with transcripts of their interviews and a summary of the emerging themes. All participants confirmed the accuracy of the transcripts and the appropriateness of the themes I identified. I have acknowledged and stated my biases and assumptions for this study to help minimize any interference with the collection, analysis, interpretation, and presentation of the study's findings.

Data Analysis Procedures

As explained in Chapter III, participants were asked to articulate their perspectives about cyberbullying occurring in their schools via semi-structured, open-ended questions (see Appendix G). I analyzed participant responses to these questions, demographic questionnaires, and other building questions to discover the emergent themes. The modified Van Kaam method of analysis (Moustakas, 1994) provided the framework for the data analysis process. Moustakas' (1994) method provides a sequential and logical way to identify and categorize participants' responses and perceptions. Engaging in the seven steps of analysis allowed for "a composite

description of the meanings and essences of the experience, representing the group as a whole” (Moustakas, 1994, pp. 120-121). A detailed description of the seven steps of the analysis is provided as follows.

Listing and Grouping Responses

The first step of the modified van Kaam method of data analysis was to “list every expression relevant to the experience” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 120). I began the process by evaluating the demographic information and interview transcripts. I grouped individual interview responses (Moustakas, 1994) based initially on the interview questions.

Reducing and Eliminating Responses

The second step of data analysis, data reduction and elimination, revealed the “invariant constituents” (Moustakas, 1994, p.121). I eliminated participants’ responses not relevant to the research topic and questions and reduced extraneous information.

Clustering and Developing Themes

After the data had been reduced, the next step was “clustering and thematizing” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 121). I analyzed the interview responses and clustered the content and information into themes. All coding and categorization was done manually. Next, I identified and categorized the overarching themes of the participants’ experiences. These larger categories led to the emerging “core themes of the experience” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 121).

Individual Textural Descriptions

The fourth step of the modified van Kaam data analysis method was the creation of the individual textural descriptions (Moustakas, 1994). The individual textural

descriptions used both “verbatim examples” from the participants and the final core themes I identified (Moustakas, 1994, p. 121).

Individual Structural Descriptions

The fifth step was to develop the individual structural descriptions. This was done by using the individual textural descriptions and “imaginative variation” as recommended by Moustakas (1994, p. 121).

Textural-Structural Descriptions

The sixth step, textural-structural description, is a “description of the meanings and essences of the experience” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 121). The textural-structural descriptions involved “incorporating the invariant constituents or themes” (Moustakas, 1994, p.121). The textural-structural descriptions assisted in developing the composite description of the experiences.

Composite Descriptions

The seventh step in the data analysis process involved incorporating information from all of the previous steps to create the composite description and the discovery of the essence of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). The composite description for each participant consisted of the “meanings and essence of the experience” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 121).

Additionally, to ensure authenticity of the emergent themes from this study, the summaries that follow include direct quotes, some of which have been edited to protect participant anonymity. However, great care was taken to ensure that participant responses were not distorted during the editing process by providing as much of the

participants' statements as necessary to articulate their perspectives in their own words. Sentences were edited to correct grammatical errors and/or left out words.

Themes

I synthesized and extrapolated the data into the following five major emergent themes: (a) First, Gather the Facts; (b) Addressing the Incident; (c) Barriers to Preventing Cyberbullying, (d) Developing Partnerships; and (e) Building Safe Schools. The main theme of First, Gather the Facts included the following subthemes: (a) investigation process, (b) nexus to school, and (c) bullying versus conflict. The main themes of Addressing the Incident included the following subthemes: (a) supporting the victim and (b) discipline. The main theme of Developing Partnerships included the following subthemes: (a) with the police, (b) with the parents, and (c) with the mental health professionals. The main themes of Building Safe Schools included the following subthemes: (a) system for reporting, (b) policy on cyberbullying, (c) programming, (d) data driven, and (e) positive school climate.

First, Gather the Facts

Investigation process. All participants stressed the need to collect information from multiple sources and validate the accuracy of that information. Participants gathered information from all parties involved including from the reporting student and bystanders. Both Jane and Joe emphasized the need to collect as much information as possible from the student who reported on behalf of the victim. Joe also gathered evidence such as text or Facebook messages. Clive followed his standard procedure for handling bullying incidents and asked his dean of students to interview the students and determine the facts. The goal of the investigation was to figure out who was involved

and what aspects of the incident could be proved and validated. Michelle commented, “What ends up happening now is a huge investigation into why it is happening and how do we make it stop.” Michelle collected statements from the alleged perpetrators and saw if anyone would confess to the cyberbullying. Stu, Melody, and Michelle all emphasized the many hours it took to investigate since an investigation involved talking to many people, looking at websites, and seeking to understand the validity of those concerns. Melody described an investigation of a cyberbullying via Facebook. Her first step was addressing the class and saying, “If you get any emails from this person, just delete them immediately, do not pass them on, do not forward them, and know that they are not from the victim, and that the victim needs to be protected and respected.” Police detectives also helped interview students; it took nearly nine months to determine who the perpetrator was.

Nexus to school. Three of the six participants used the phrase *nexus to school* to describe how they determined the extent of their role in addressing the incident. Three participants discussed whether the incident had occurred off campus; if it had but it also had an impact on the school environment, they properly addressed the incident. Stu believed the incident must be “causing a significant, or potentially causing a significant disruption to the school” before he would intervene. Stu described his role at his school:

I see myself as a shepherd of my kids. I care about all of them whether they are victims or perpetrators. So obviously if I’m aware of something going on and it truly meets the context of bullying and it’s not having a nexus or an impact on my learning environment I will almost always reach out to the parents and have that conversation.

Jane reported she that tended to see most of the cyberbullying happening outside of school but still having an impact at school. Jane asked the questions: “Is it happening at school, and is it impacting someone at school?”

Joe did not use the term *nexus to school* but he felt strongly about handling all cyberbullying incidents--whether the incident originated on campus or off:

It’s the same (whether cyberbullying is occurring on campus or off), whether it is text messages in the building or whether it happened on the weekend and has been brought back. It’s the same process. We are going to deal with it like any other bullying situation. We deal with it immediately.

For Clive, if no nexus to the school could be identified after his investigation, he advised that parents speak with the police. Clive expressed that typically he could find a nexus to the school but occasionally he could not. Jane emphasized that even if she discovered no nexus to the school, these were still inappropriate exchanges for her students to have. Jane went on to say:

I have heard that some people have taken the hard line, if it’s not happening here it’s not my problem. We really try to help with that as much as we can... There are a lot things happening outside of school that we can’t monitor and police everything there is, yet we want to be helpful... And of course if it’s happening here at school, then our response is a little more immediate and a little different.

Bullying versus conflict. Several principals expressed that much of what they saw at their school was much more conflict than true (cyber)bullying and emphasized the need to differentiate between the two. As cited earlier in Chapter II, traditional bullying is aggressive, intentional harm done by one person or a group, generally carried out repeatedly over time, and involving a power differential (Nansel et al., 2001). Cyberbullying is the use of information and communication technologies such as e-mail, cell phone and pager text messaging, instant messaging, defamatory personal websites, and defamatory online polling websites to support deliberate, repeated, and hostile

behavior by an individual or group with the intent to harm others (Belsey, 2006).

Conflict (n.d.) is defined as a “strong disagreement between people, groups, etc. that results in often angry argument.”

Clive, Stu, and Melody felt as though many of the incidents did not constitute true bullying but rather were actually conflicts. According to Clive, “Usually what you get is this: it’s unhealthy human social dynamics, and the kid who is bullied in one instance is the bully the next day.” Both Stu and Melody felt once they had heard both sides of the story, it was typically conflict, not bullying. According to Melody, her students were using adult words to express things that did not feel right to them. She said, “I think a lot of the conflict we see is through texts. If the kids have a relationship, they are just in the confused, hurt, sad place.” Melody described what might have seemed like cyberbullying but when looking at it from both sides, she considered it conflict. She went on to describe the incidents:

These incidents may not always be true bullying in terms of power imbalance, often times it is conflict, where both parties are contributing to the incident and neither feels good about it. Both parties want to call it bullying, but the students don’t realize their own contributions to the incident.

The participants also expressed how they handled conflict differently from bullying. In Melody’s experience, the two students involved in the conflict were often friends; “We can tap into that. There was a positive relationship there, then we do a lot of the restorative approach.” This is when Melody checked in with the students and helped educate students about the power their words could have, what trigger points were, what escalation meant, and how they could de-escalate situations. Then students had better tools to handle conflicts on their own. Joe stated that if the incident turned out to involve more conflict or “trading barbs back and forth,” the best approach was to have the

individuals involved referred to a counselor for mediation. Stu commented on handling conflict incidents that might first present as bullying or cyberbullying:

What's frustrating and difficult from the administrator's point of view is that you know real and hurtful bullying and cyberbullying happens, and you want to be effective in dealing with it and eliminating it the best you can. But it's like a lot of things because so much of what gets brought up as cyberbullying isn't in fact bullying at all. It is like the boy who cried wolf situation. So that's what's frustrating, because it desensitizes me and my staff, unfortunately, to the real cyberbullying cases out there.

Despite the difference between bullying and conflict, Melody commented on the impact continuous conflict could still have on her students:

You can go in and out of conflict multiple times and come out just fine unless you become targeted and you can't find your way out. I think that's why we definitely felt a responsibility to address it proactively, but I think the greater impact is the one-on-one in rooms, helping them process the impact it's having on them, helping them recognize their role.

Addressing the Incident

Supporting the victim. During the investigation, all participants stated that they provided support to the victim. All participants talked with the victim to determine the facts of the case as well his or her state of mind. Jane found out how this was impacting the victim at school and what support the school could provide. Michelle conducted some type of assessment, e.g., a threat assessment or suicide assessment to see if the victim showed any warning signs of concern. Melody also had a regular check-in system in place for all victims of bullying. Students rated their day--a great day got a five, a horrible day got a zero. For any rating below a three, she or a staff member would have a more in-depth conversation with the student. Melody also helped the victim block or secure his or her e-mail, Facebook account, and phone so people could not use those means. Stu expressed to the victim that this behavior was unacceptable and that he would

do everything he could to help stop it. Stu wanted to hear from the victim directly and gathered evidence and information to figure out what happened and who was responsible. Both Michelle and Melody contacted the victim's parents to help ensure they were aware of the situation and described the support system. Stu would likely invite the parents to be a part of that conversation also.

Discipline. All participants had the same main message for their students: *the bullying must stop*. Michelle, Melody, and Stu emphasized using the restorative approach. At first, Melody and her staff helped to restore the relationship through the restorative approach. Based on the specific incident, Stu would decide whether he thought the restorative process would work or if he needed to use another type of discipline. Michelle further described the restorative approach used at her school. It was usually led by a counselor or student advisor. The goal of the restorative approach was to see if the two parties involved could work out their differences. Michelle concluded with an emphasis on monitoring the parties involved. Teachers were responsible for monitoring the students in the classroom and were made aware of the expectations for behaviors of the parties involved. However, at some point, Michelle stopped trying to use the restorative approach because either the students continued to have conflicts or they were not invested in fixing their friendship. Then she took a more punitive approach. The message "this has to stop" was clearly relayed to everyone involved. A containment plan was also put into place. Michelle and her staff changed students' schedules, separated them, and gave space to the student who had been targeted. Students were explicitly told the consequences if they continued to participate in bullying behaviors.

Clive and Joe both stated that discipline really depended on the situation at hand. Clive disciplined the perpetrators of the bullying incident as much as he could. Clive said: “We always do something. We don’t just let it go at all. We just have to be careful with what we can prove because that determines what we can do. I can’t suspend a kid just because I think they were cyberbullying.” Clive also stated that this was when he involved parents, hoping they were on his side. Joe emphasized the importance of relaying the message to his students that the bullying needed to stop; they were also told the consequences if it did not. Joe assigned consequences as necessary and appropriate for the specific cyberbullying incident.

Barriers to Preventing Cyberbullying

Several principals described barriers to the prevention of cyberbullying at their school: technology, location, and anonymity. One of the greatest barriers to preventing or stopping cyberbullying was technology itself. Several principals mentioned different aspects of technology and how they made it harder to stop cyberbullying from occurring. Michelle commented:

Kids can delete what they say. It can look very one-sided. In our major cyberbullying incident the little girl would post from her phone and as soon as everyone saw it she would delete it. And she was like, “I didn’t say that, I didn’t do that.” One little girl happened to be on her computer when it happened, she was home sick, she printed it before it got deleted. She brought it in. I thought that was smart. So some of our challenge is that the technology is faster than we are, a lot faster.

Getting the actual textual evidence of what was being said or posted was most important for Stu. He felt as though having evidence was necessary to determine if there was truly a victim, if the incident constituted bullying, and the level and nature of it. Otherwise, it could be very difficult to get accurate information. Stu said he could spend six hours

instead of 16 hours conducting an investigation: “When a parent comes in and says, ‘I have the phone with all the texts on it’ or ‘I printed them off,’ that really helps me immediately.” In addition to those aspects of technology, accessibility to all the social media accounts could inhibit prevention efforts. Jane noted, “Our kids just have access to technology and sometimes they shouldn’t.... Kids are not developmentally ready and are not even responsible enough to know how to use it right.” The parents might not know to check all the technology and the features of some the technology.

Another huge barrier to combating cyberbullying was the anonymity kids felt when online. According to Michelle, the anonymity allowed students to use a lot of aggressive, sexual language. Michelle said, “When people are anonymous they certainly can say a lot more things than they can face to face.” Michelle went on to say that “the world is like a stage, they can be whoever they want and say whatever they want, without really being held accountable.” Stu shared a very similar sentiment:

It is ridiculous what kids will say on the internet, they would never say that in person... It’s almost like they get addicted and lured in, it’s the gateway to saying stupid things, snarky things in text messages.... But the damage that be caused in the hands of these kids is something that can get out of control pretty quickly.

One of the greatest barriers Michelle faced at her school was the location of most of the cyberbullying; “We would love to be able to say that this will never happen to your kid if they come here, but the reality is most of it is happening in homes and not even on campus.” That was one of the greatest challenges for Michelle’s school.

A barrier for Jane was working with those students who really did lack empathy and did not see that their actions were hurtful to somebody else. Regardless of the consequences, some of these students might or might not change their behavior. All she could do then was to continue to increase the level of the intervention. A barrier for Stu

was understanding the perceptions of all sides of the situation. Stu thought that determining the true nature of the situation was difficult. Trying to learn the truth could be difficult as it could change over time.

Interestingly, what Joe saw as a weapon to fight cyberbullying was what the others had listed as a barrier. Joe explained, “The one thing about cyberbullying that assists us in solving the problem is evidence. Sometimes it is easier to know that cyberbullying is happening, compared to regular incidents of bullying, because there is documentation.” Joe saw this as a help in dealing with the cyberbullying incidents. He did not list any barriers to him combating cyberbullying.

Developing Partnerships

With the police. All the participants stated that they would involve the police (student resource officer) when a threat was made by a student. If Stu thought there was any imminent or direct danger, he would contact the student resource officer. Jane said, “Certainly kids don’t understand their culpability, and they don’t understand that statements they make that appear to be threatening can be taken as threats, and it can be considered harassment.” According to Clive, “Depending on how bad the threats got, we might involve the police. That is a real quick way to get things to calm down with the cyberbullying: bring in the cops.” Clive went on to comment on the role of his school resource officer: “He is here part time and he will come over if we call him. And sometimes we will notify him because it is more of a police legal matter than a school matter.” Melody has had to go to the police with previous cyberbullying incidents because there were threats of physical violence. Joe simply stated that if it was harassment, the student resource officer would be involved. According to Michelle, the

involvement of police would depend “on how malicious the threats are. If it’s more one sided, often times we will bring in the SRO (student resource officer). It really depends on what the truth is, is that really the intention or is it a scare technique, and how much of the threat is viable.

Michelle and Jane also asked the police for additional support. Michelle contacted the student resource officer to help shut down any e-mails or websites being used to carry out the cyberbullying if there was enough evidence to warrant that action. It can be difficult to get some pages, such as Facebook, shut down. At a previous school, Jane had a specialist from the sheriff’s department talk to parents about incidents at the school and how they could help monitor and respond to cyberbullying incidents. The school also partnered with the county sheriff’s department. The resource officer taught the Youth Empowerment Support Services (YESS; 2012) curriculum, which is about empowerment and includes lessons describing bullying, cyberbullying, and their impacts.

With the parents. Four of the six principals emphasized the need to work collaboratively with parents to protect kids. Clive expressed the need for parent support, saying, “The biggest thing for our buck for us is contact with parents.” He has contacted parents to notify them of fake e-mail accounts and messages their kids were sending: “Most parents will make sure the kids destroy what’s left. We had that with fake Facebook pages. We just had to bring it to parents’ attention, and they killed it.” Clive believed he might have a unique relationship with many of his parents. The parents had gotten to know him well over the years because he was the one to open the school. He also maintained “a total open door policy. They know they can call me directly. Most of them have my cell phone number. So I’m probably more available to hear about it.” Joe

expressed how important it was to have conversations with parents and involve them in the investigation and the resolutions. Michelle also contacted and involved the parents of the perpetrators. Both Melody and Jane shared similar sentiments about helping parents combat cyberbullying and being a support for them. While Melody encouraged the parents, she is also a mother and she knows how difficult restricting her own kids' technology use can be. Melody said, "It's hard for me. My kids are in their older teens now... but they didn't want my husband or me invading their privacy. They didn't want to be the kids without phones." She told the parents it is important to set ground rules with technology, especially with cell phones: expect the kids to "keep it clean" and if they do not, they need to be held responsible. It is important to make parents aware of incidents. In Jane's experience, sometimes parents were aware but most of time, they were not. Jane commented:

Sometimes parents have access to it (social media accounts), sometimes they don't, sometimes you know they (students) will create a dummy account so parents can see one and think they are really plugged into what's going on, and they got the real one that kids interact with friends with.

Melody and Jane both expressed their desire to have greater parent involvement. Melody would like to be able to provide more resources for parents on dealing with and recognizing cyberbullying. She had previously communicated to parents using a newsletter about cyberbullying. She held one meeting for parents on bullying at which they briefly discussed cyberbullying; 15 parents were there. For Jane, parent involvement was unpredictable. Jane thought it would be helpful to provide resources and education for parents but did not think many would attend her presentation. Jane and Melody both expressed the need for more resources for parents to assist them in dealing with cyberbullying. Melody further commented on her role:

I just see our roles as educators as extension parents. We are part of the larger network of what it takes to raise a child, and this electronic media that is only increasing in terms what they have access to, we need to help them just like everything else in their life, so that's my role I guess.

Jane summarized the difficult situations parents face, including herself: "I am a parent and I get that we are at a disadvantage in about every way there is because kids are about 10 steps ahead of us all of the time." Even as a school principal, she still felt it was difficult to know what her kids were always doing. She continued, "So if you have a parent who is not aware of those things, they really are at a disadvantage in both ways. They can have a kid who is a full-on bully, or they could have a kid who is a full-on victim, and not be aware of any of it." Again both Jane and Melody stressed the need to educate parents in order to help stop cyberbullying. Jane said what was important was the "understanding of what it (cyberbullying) is and what it isn't." Jane felt she was responsible for helping people, usually parents, understand and recognize the difference between "what is bullying and what is mean and inappropriate behavior that could be stopped before it becomes bullying." Melody stated that it was difficult to handle cyberbullying incidents when one student stopped the contact but the other student continued. At that time, Melody called the parents. She encouraged them to help end the incident by blocking the numbers or taking away texts. Melody found educating parents to be very difficult and was frustrated with parents enabling the misuse of technology

With the mental health professionals. As shown in the participants' demographics section, the schools varied greatly by the number of mental health professionals they had been allocated. Participants described the partnerships they had with their mental health professionals for handling cyberbullying incidents. Stu summarized just how the allocations worked and the impact they had:

And again you will find at most schools there are always unique resource allocations and factors that come to bear in these conversations at the individual building level. Because my middle school has a site-based or center-based program for severe affective SED kids, it came with some additional FTE attached to that. That's why I have both a psychologist and a social worker. One is .8 and the other .9. In effect they are full time... I have been in other situations where the school psychologist is heavily involved in tri-annuals and testing, and that compromises their ability to be more involved, absolutely. I am very fortunate to have all these mental health professionals and that they are very assertive.

Overall, school counselors, school psychologists, and social workers made up the schools' mental health teams. However, there was a lack of cohesive partnerships with mental health professionals. A few of the participants made some general comments about their mental health teams. Jane noted that much of the work to stop bullying and cyberbullying was done by the dean of students, assistant principal, and principal since the social worker and school psychologist were not always available. According to Stu, the mental health professionals primarily were the first level of support for the victim by addressing the victim's immediate emotional concerns. Stu described their roles at his school:

They are pretty aggressive about pursuing the scenario to decide what's going on here. They are also diligent about and very protective of the culture of the school. They take a pretty assertive role in helping me investigate it. They help me make contact with parents and call our resource officer.

Jane felt as though mental health professionals could work with the students who were not understanding or responding to school-wide intervention efforts. She felt that when students were lashing out or bullying (whether it was cyberbullying or face-to-face), "it's a symptom of something else." In the school setting, the mental health professionals could help educate a bully about what constitute appropriate social behaviors. Those social skills need to be built, practiced, and rewarded. Michelle felt her mental health

professionals were essential personnel after the major cyberbullying incident at her school; they helped with the restorative circle and were available to all students who needed to talk.

The participants described their partnerships with their school counselors when addressing cyberbullying. At Clive's school, he had the school counselor meet with the victims of cyberbullying "just to start working on the issues...offer support, kindness, and love." Clive further described the counselors as people who educate bullies and victims on how to deal with conflict and emphasize getting along with one another. He used both counselors and social workers in this capacity. Clive's counselors and dean of students were the professionals who dealt "with the cyberbullying stuff." Joe first turned to his school counselors if there was a cyberbullying incident. The school counselors would try to find out about these types of incidents before they escalated into something bigger. They utilized mediation and restorative justice.

The participants also described their partnerships with school psychologists. Michelle's school psychologist, who works part-time at her school, was able to work full-time when they had a major cyberbullying incident. Her school psychologist played a role in combating cyberbullying. Michelle said, "I recommend kids go talk to her. She is able to provide them with resources and check-in with students.... She does play a huge role." Melody's school psychologist was available only on a very limited basis (one day a week), whereas the social worker was there full-time. Melody said, "Our school psychologist is absolutely great, but she does mostly mental health minutes with our students with individualized education programs (IEPs). She has very little time beyond that." The school psychologist did assist in a week-long curriculum on suicide and

conducted suicide assessments. She was highly involved in crises but not in the planning of mental health programming. Clive's school psychologist was only at the school one day a week. Clive further commented, "It's how you use your mental health people. I think the mental health expertise is much more valued away from cyberbullying. You guys (school psychologists) are freaking smart, and I don't know that I would waste you on cyberbullying." At Jane's school, the main responsibilities of the school psychologist were IEPs and meeting IEP goals because she was only at the school 1.5 days a week. The school psychologist's role in Joe's school was predominantly in the area of special education support. He had been involved with cyberbullying cases but on rare occasions. The school psychologist also led support groups for the victims of cyberbullying and bullying and offered support to individual victims. If the incident was determined to be conflict, Joe had his counselors or school psychologist lead social skills and friendship skill building groups.

Social workers were also part of many of the schools' mental health teams. Melody described the role of her social worker to be "education, education of parents, education of kids, and empathy building." Melody also used her social worker to help students realize what effect words had on them and what effect their words could have on others. The social worker conducted the threat assessment if one was needed. Clive's social worker worked four days a week. This social worker did not do a lot of the cyberbullying intervention because "she helps us navigate kids that are really struggling with behavior, such as autism; she helps us with our severely impacted kids." Jane reported that her school did have a school counselor but only one counselor for nine grades. To properly support victims of cyberbullying, Jane used all her resources

including the dean of students, the school psychologist, and “more likely our school social worker who has a background in clinical therapy kinds of things.”

Building Safe Schools

A system for reporting. Four of the five principals who reported on this theme stated that most cyberbullying incidents were reported by students but teachers, staff, and parents also made reports. They all emphasized the need to have both a concrete plan for reporting including what cyberbullying is and a variety of safe ways for people to make reports. For example, Jane expected her students to report incidents of bullying and cyberbullying. To ensure students would do so, she educated them on what was a safe way to report, how to know adults would step in and listen, and when to report. Jane provided students with this message: “We do take it seriously. So when we say we are here to help, they (the students) really do believe we are here to help.” Jane provided students with several different ways of reporting incidents.

In Joe’s experience, most cyberbullying incidents were reported by students. The school had a “safe-to-tell” process; both kids and parents were using that method. However, in Jane’s experience, students did not use the “safe-to-tell” message procedure or “text-to-tell.” At Joe’s school, most of the student reporting was made to a counselor, teacher, or administrator. Melody reported her kids went to the teachers to report cyberbullying incidents. Jane said students with a close relationship with a teacher or staff member often felt safe telling him or her of an incident. Her students reported both their own incidents and those of others. At Jane’s school, teachers were quick to intervene: “Our teachers in this building are outstanding, and they really have their finger on the pulse of where kids are. They don’t look toward somebody else to fix it.”

Michelle, a first-year principal, met at the beginning of the school year with students in each grade level, introduced herself, and described her expectations of anti-bullying, bullying prevention, being a friend, and taking care of each other. She also implemented a bully box system. A box was placed outside the student advisor's office and students could report bullying at any time. Michelle said, "That seems to be working better than I thought that it would. After the situation in March, we definitely saw it (notes in bully box) increase." Michelle sent this message to her staff after the major cyberbullying incident: "Open your ears, be alert, be vigilant." Michelle also received reports of cyberbullying from teachers, staff, and parents: "I think everyone feels like they are on guard."

In contrast to the others, Clive experienced more parents reporting the cyberbullying incidents. This surprised him. He went on to say most other concerns were reported by the kids but he did not understand why parents usually were the ones to report cyberbullying. He thought that maybe "kids are p-----d off enough that they go tell their parents, and the parents go make the phone call." He also commented on his open-door policy and the close relationship he had with many of the parents. Parents might have felt more comfortable reporting incidents directly to him. Melody and Jane also heard from parents who were concerned about their children being bullied. Melody noted that parents called the school when their kids got really sad and reported the texts that were being sent to them.

Policy on cyberbullying. The participants were asked to share their knowledge of the state policy on cyberbullying. To reiterate, the policy (HB 11-1254) for the state of Colorado (Measures to reduce, 2011) is as follows: Schools must have a Safe School

Plan, which must include “a specific policy concerning bullying prevention and education, including information related to the development and implementation of any bullying prevention programs.” Bullying is defined in Colorado policy as “any written or verbal expression, or physical or electronic act or gesture or pattern thereof, that is intended to coerce, intimidate, or cause any physical, mental, or emotional harm to any student” (Measures to reduce, 2011).

Some of the participants were unaware of what the state policy said. I provided them with a short summary to help them better comment on how the policy impacted their work. Melody, Stu, and Clive said they were not familiar with the state policy on cyberbullying. Still, Melody ensured that her school was addressing bullying and specifically cyberbullying. Stu knew that a policy existed but did not know its content. He believed it came after an increase in community awareness of the problem: “In my mind it was being driven by Oprah and the rest of the media stories that were catching a lot of attention. My work was certainly impacted.” Stu believed by formally adopting the Olweus (1992) *Bullying Prevention Program* and training his staff, he was complying with the state law: “That’s about the extent of my concern with the state law.” When Clive was asked about his knowledge of the extent of state policy on cyberbullying, he commented:

Well that certainly isn’t that helpful for us. We are guided more by school board policy in Colorado. You know they can make all the state laws they want and that’s really nifty, but in the end it has to get translated into board policy. And so when we see the board policy changes or there is a different emphasis in board policy, that gets our attention.... Our board came up pretty strongly against it (cyberbullying and electronic harassment). We know we had better pay attention to it and take care of it. Parents can quote that board policy right back to me, and they do.

Michelle and Joe both use the state policy to help guide their practice as principals.

Michelle said she and her staff, including school resource officers, use the state policy. It helps her “kids understand that what they are doing could be a crime, so when we talk to a student, it could be really serious, it is not just picking on another kid on the playground.” In Joe’s school district, the state policy guides the district policy, which Joe follows directly. It helps provide the process to ensure the safety of the students. Joe said, “It definitely helps with the language and what we can and can’t do.”

Jane felt differently than the other participants and explained why a policy on cyberbullying just did not work at this point. She felt as though policy on cyberbullying was

like shifting sand quite honestly. Any kind of policy around electronic technology and so any kinds of policies on cyberbullying really shift almost looking for landmark cases. It is new, it’s unfamiliar territory in the legal realm for the most part, there is not a lot of policy around it, there is not a lot of law around it, and you know there is a lot of public response to it.

Jane further expressed: “The word ‘bullying’ often is the first response for people when there is a problem. When there is an issue, it’s bullying, and it’s a hot topic.”

Programming. Each participant described in detail the programs he or she used to help prevent and intervene with cyberbullying. Three participants discussed the schools’ use of Positive Behavior Intervention Support (PBIS; U.S. Department of Education, 1998) as their main framework for creating positive school environments. Two participants spoke specifically of the Olweus (1992) *Bullying Prevention Program* implemented at their schools. Several participants also used various non-evidence-based practices to help with prevention and intervention of bullying.

Positive behavior intervention support. The PBIS (U.S. Department of Education, 1998) system was used by three of the principals. The PBIS has been used at Jane's school since it opened seven years ago. Jane said PBIS was engrained in the fabric of what they did--it was in the classrooms, it was in the hallways, and it was in the cafeteria. Jane further described PBIS at her school:

We've got 650 kids here, and on any given day you and I could just walk randomly into any classroom in this building and you would see positive behavior support in place. You would see kids engaged, you would see teachers teaching, you wouldn't see kids sitting in the hall for being disciplined. I'm not saying we have perfect children, but they do respond to the positive part of positive behavior, and they do respond to the intervention part of PBIS.

Jane also emphasized anti-bullying practices within her PBIS program. The students were educated on what bullying was, what it looked like when a student was being bullied, and what it looked like when the student was the bully. At Joe's school, they also used the PBIS program as a framework for prevention efforts including cyberbullying prevention. Joe spoke of the acronym (acronym cannot be disclosed because it might help identify the school) used at the school to represent the behaviors expected from his students. The acronym encompassed valuing education, working hard, helping others, taking responsibility, and respect of self, others, and school. Students earned tickets for demonstrating these behaviors and could use the tickets to buy items from the school store.

Melody spoke of a conversation she had had earlier that day with people from the school district; they were pushing the use of both PBIS and bullying prevention. Melody really felt the focus in her school should be on PBIS, which included community building and strengthening relationships rather than focusing on bullying prevention. Melody went on to say:

I feel like when kids are well connected in their communities and they have a supportive adult and they have peers, a lot of this stuff gets nipped in the bud really early on. When you don't have that, when they are disengaged and distant from the franchise, it is easier to bully or become a victim. I am putting a lot of eggs in the relationship basket. We will address the others as it comes up.

Prevention. Many of the principals used non-evidence-based practices to help educate students on bully prevention and building safe communities. Jane's school policy stated that students could not use their cell phones during the day. According to Jane, the students had a great deal of access to technology but were highly supervised to ensure they were unable to access Facebook or use other social media websites during the day.

Clive, Michelle, and Melody took time from academics to facilitate conversations with their students. One of the campaigns Clive used in his school was *Pause Before You Post* (2014). This program helped educate students about being smart and making the right decisions. Clive tried to gather his students in small groups to have conversations about expectations for behavior while at school, usually at the beginning of the year and half way through. He had his dean of students and assistant principal facilitate these conversations:

That's when we talk about the cyberbullying stuff and talk a lot to kids about what they post and being careful about what they post and what information they give out. Be nice to each other; be kind, think about other people before you post, think about how you would feel. We talk to kids a lot about that in those meetings. What you don't want to do is go in and tell them not to post bad things about people on Facebook. It's the conversation we have. And most of them get it.

Michelle's school started a student support group to help stop bullying and to give kids an opportunity to voice some of their concerns. In addition, the students started a letter-writing campaign. Michelle received well over 150 letters from students about their

concerns and ways to make their school more positive. Michelle trained her faculty to recognize bully behaviors, diffuse them, and learn the different roles kids play in bullying incidents. Melody showed the 6th graders the *Bully* (Lowen & Hirsch, 2011) movie and held a discussion with her students about bullying and the roles students might or might not take.

Stu, Joe, and Michelle also used various curricula throughout the school year to help educate their students on technology, bullying behaviors, and respecting self and others. Specifically, the health education standards course was one of the most impactful and meaningful programs at Stu's school. The school also partnered with the county sheriff's department. The resource officer taught the YESS (2012) curriculum, which includes empowerment, discussions about bullying and cyberbullying, and the impact of bullying behavior. At Joe's school, he used a bully-proof prevention program that included cyberbullying. The counselors went into the classrooms at the beginning of each school year and educated students on the prevention program. All of Michelle's students were taught a cyberbullying unit in their technology classes. It emphasized that what you posted and how you presented yourself to the world online would be out there forever.

In addition to other programs, Jane's was a *No Place for Hate* (Anti-Defamation League, 2006) school, which was an initiative presented by an anti-defamation league. Its focus was how we should treat each other. Michelle also led a week against hate, providing activities throughout the week to help educate students about being kind and treating others with respect. Following the suggestion of a student, Michelle and her school would be participating in *Rachel's Challenge* (n.d.). Rachel was the first student

killed at Columbine High School in 1999. Michelle said, “It’s almost as though she had foreshadowed what was going to happen to her through her writing.” Rachel wrote about “the pay it forward idea of why can’t we just be nice to each other, why can’t we get along...It’s a challenge to the human race, basically.”

Two of the principals chose to use the evidence-based Olweus (1992) *Bullying Prevention Program*. Stu did a great deal of research before choosing the program and truly believed in its ability to direct his school culture:

The Olweus program foundationally is built on how all the adults are to respond, to react, to deal with the situation as we see it. As soon as they thank the bystanders who intervened and helped resolve the situation, they get the name of the potential bully and safely deal with the victim. Then they give that information to me, one of my assistant principals, the school psychologist, or the school counselor.

Melody had proactively addressed bullying by implementing the Olweus (1992) *Bullying Prevention Program* during the students advisory periods.

Intervention. After students were involved in cyberbullying incidents, participants would monitor these students to help ensure it did not continue. Michelle’s school conducted a restorative circle where all the students were asked questions and all group members had an opportunity to express themselves. Sample questions included the following: How do you feel about what happened? What was your role? What is your role in stopping it from happening again? and How will you act in the future? Michelle said, “Kids seemed to really respond to that approach.” The school also continued with the anti-bullying programming they already had in place.

A powerful tool Jane discovered while working in another district was the *Let’s Get Real* (Kim & Logan, 2004) curriculum. The curriculum includes a video, workbook activities, and assignments to help build students’ awareness. Jane considered this the

most targeted type of intervention. She felt that most kids would learn from whole-school intervention methods. For those who did not, she used this curriculum:

They either don't see the impact it is having on others, they lack that empathy, whatever it is that is impacting them and causing them to behave in that way. That is instead of leaping straight to a suspension, like you're out for two days, it may come to that, it may come to getting police involved, but that (curriculum) is the way we try to intervene as well. So somebody may be spending 4, 5, or 6 lunches with my assistant principal, with me, with my dean, watching some of these (movies) and responding.

Jane ended her discussion on programming with this thought:

And I have to say, I have been in education for a very long time, and I have seen aspects of bullying and anti-bullying campaigns in different schools and districts. Quite often it is focused on if you are bullied and not so often on so what if you are (a bully). What if you are the bully because someone has to be? You better recognize it. When we work with staff around this and when we work with kids around this, there is often the question, can you remember a time you were bullied? Probably there isn't a human being alive, or not many anyway, that couldn't remember a time when they felt there was excessive name calling or felt full-on bullying. Whatever it was, most of us would raise our hand in response to that. When I talk to kids, I talk about have you ever been one? Can you think of a time maybe you were one (bully) or when you witnessed bullying and didn't step in?

Driven by data. When participants were asked how they measured the success of their prevention and intervention efforts, they gave a variety of responses. Melody and Jane both used surveys to help assess the bullying situation at their schools. Melody conducted the Olweus (2001) pre- and post-bullying survey but had yet to see the post-survey results. She will use that data to measure the success of her efforts. Jane looked at several sets of data to measure the extent of bullying in her school. One set of data came from the climate survey taken by all students. She also looked at the discipline data. The school staff members tried to accurately label the bullying incidents so there was a clear picture of what was happening at school. The data showed the location, time of day, and specific student involvement for each incident. The school staff members

then used that data to help build specific interventions for particular students or groups of students. Jane valued the relationships she had built with her students, especially those students who might be making the choice to bully: “We have to really work with some kids who are bullies and do some additional kinds of interventions with them.” In addition to the data, Jane’s staff provided a map of the school to each student and had them mark where they felt safe and where they did not. This helped ensure staff members were acting proactively and provided the right amount of supervision in certain areas. Jane also administered an adult climate survey to her staff to gain additional insight into what was happening around the school. Joe collects data for his school at the end of every year. They have records on the disciplinary infractions and cyberbullying is one of them. He looked at the data and determined whether cyberbullying had increased or decreased.

Clive emphasized his measurement of the cyberbullying situation was not quantitative; he said quantifying the data was difficult. Clive commented, “For us if we see an uptick then we know we’ve got a problem. Which leads to another meeting about it. When we admit we have had an uptick, that’s how we get an even bigger uptick.” Clive really tries to keep the focus on a positive, healthy school climate. Again, he emphasized that what you promote is what you get. Melody shared a similar sentiment: “The anecdotal evidence from the sixth graders just makes me smile, ‘I didn’t realize we had such a bullying problem, but since we talk about it all the time we must have a really big one.’ We are planting seeds of what this really is.”

Stu echoed Clive’s difficulties with measuring prevention and intervention efforts. Stu believed cyberbullying could be a very difficult thing to measure because often after

he investigated, it turned out to be a conflict instead. Stu believed that true bullying occurred rarely. The resource officer also did more anecdotal, qualitative data collection. No longitudinal study had been done to see if cyberbullying decreased at Stu's school.

Importance of positive school climate. Three of the six principals emphasized the importance of establishing a positive school climate. Clive believed the school climate drove everything:

I spend 99 percent of my time keeping the culture and climate here healthy. That's my main focus. This is going to sound crazy, but the best thing we can do as a school is to have a healthy and positive adult culture and climate. If you have healthy, positive adults who are kind and who really model that kindness and respect, then you're going to have fewer issues with kids.

Clive believed his school environment contributed to lower rates of bullying: "I will tell you the kids here don't bully as much as I have seen in other schools because it's such a kind environment." Clive went on to describe his school climate in more detail:

I don't have a single teacher who is burnt out or grumpy. They are happy every day they come to school. They love the kids and they love to have fun, so we don't deal with a lot of negative. So the best thing you can do to keep (cyberbullying/bullying) from killing your climate is to have healthy and happy adults, and when it does happen, get on it.

Clive strongly believed cyberbullying incidents needed to be dealt with immediately:

"You can't ignore it (cyberbullying). Once again you would just trash your climate. You wouldn't ignore a kid whose parents are getting a divorce. You know it's just such a screwed up dynamic."

A major cyberbullying incident occurred at Michelle's school earlier in the year. After the incident, when the news media continually portrayed the school "as this girl-fight-girl place, kids started getting protective of their school," Michelle said. Kids stood up and said, "This is not now who we are. We are good kids, and we need to change

this.” According to Michelle, that “started building some of that school support, and the climate started to change for the positive within the student body. So that was kind of cool to see.” Michelle has seen a change in school climate since the incident: “It’s a calmer place. Kids are a lot more thoughtful of each other.... So there is no doubt that it has left an impact on the student body.” When the major cyberbullying incident happened, Michelle pulled her staff together and let them know “people don’t get to define who we are; we define that. And we need to protect our kids and be the first line of defense for them.”

Melody clearly understood the importance of maintaining a positive school climate for all of her students:

I put student learning as my center idea of the school. That is why we are here, that is what we are about. But I am very aware of the mental and emotional needs of kids, the air they breathe. If they can’t breathe healthy clean air, then they can’t do the work needed to help their cognitive skills.

Melody worked hard on helping build relationships with both peers and teachers. If something was interfering with those relationships such as physical, social, or verbal bullying or cyberbullying and was taking away from what they are here for, which was learning, Melody addressed it immediately. She told all of her students: “One of our values here at school is empathy. What would this be like if you were in his shoes?” Part of her push for relationship building was the fact that her students chose the school so students came from a large area. They came from over 50 elementary schools; the students did not know each other at the beginning of the year. Immediately they got busy in classrooms and did not have an opportunity to get to know each other. Melody commented, “I think that some felt a little bit on the outs, but you don’t know others are

feeling on the outs. I don't know if that compounds it, or delays it, or it might delay it for a while. But it's here, it is real."

Summary

In this section, I summarize the responses I received when I posed the main research question and the four research sub-questions to the research study participants.

Main Research Question

How do middle school principals perceive and respond to cyberbullying?

Principals described the investigations they conducted to determine the nature and extent of cyberbullying incidents at their schools. Aspects of the investigations included the following: talking with the victim, providing support for the victim, gathering information, determining accuracy of the information, validating the student making the report, contacting the victim's parents and involving them if necessary, collecting statements from perpetrators and contacting their parents, and contacting the student resource officer for their assistance. One crucial part of the investigation was the determination of the nexus to the school. If the cyberbullying incident originated off-campus, the principals determined if the school's learning environment was affected. Most of the principals felt as though they could usually find a nexus and therefore continued with discipline and consequences. If no nexus to the school was identified, then often speaking with parents and advising them to go to the police if the bullying continued was a typical next step.

When they discussed the consequences of cyberbullying incidents, especially for the perpetrators, several principals emphasized utilizing the restorative approach as a step to try to rebuild relationships. Based on the specific incident, Stu decided whether he

thought the restorative process would work or if he needed to administer another type of discipline. Michelle, however, at some point stopped trying to use the restorative approach, either because either the students continued to have conflicts or because they were not invested in the outcome of restoration. Then she took a more punitive approach. Clive and Joe both stated discipline depended on the situation at hand. Clive disciplined the perpetrators of the bullying incident as much as he could. Joe assigned consequences as necessary and appropriate for the specific cyberbullying incident.

Michelle, Jane, and Stu saw cyberbullying occurring more with girls than with boys. Stu expressed that he had seen the girls be more malicious, unrelenting, and threatening. Michelle also saw cyberbullying with her younger girls. Both Jane and Stu experienced only a few isolated cases of cyberbullying. Joe had seen cyberbullying becoming more of a problem. He thought it was increasing because of the way young people communicated—they engaged in fewer face-to-face conversations and used more text and Facebook messages. Melody had heard her students talk about bullying but she was unsure if there had been an increase in number of occurrences.

Research Sub-question 1a

Under what conditions does cyberbullying have an impact on the school's learning environment and its students?

Clive expressed strongly how his school's positive environment contributed to lower rates of bullying. Clive believed cyberbullying incidents needed to be dealt with immediately or they would ruin his school's climate. Melody clearly understood the importance of maintaining a positive school climate for all of her students. She saw the academic impact when students struggled with their mental health and emotions. Melody worked hard to build strong positive relationships—both with students and teachers. If

incidents such as (cyber) bullying were interfering with these relationships and impacting the learning environment, she addressed them immediately. Michelle saw the negative impact of cyberbullying when the news media painted a horrific picture of her school after a major cyberbullying incident. She was able to use that incident to help make her school's climate more positive.

Research Sub-Question 1b

What intervention and prevention strategies are most effective for reducing cyberbullying?

All of the principals used prevention and intervention programs to combat cyberbullying. Some schools used programs with more general frameworks such as Positive Behavior Intervention Support (PBIS, U.S. Department of Education, 1998), while other schools used much more specific practices such as the Olweus (1992) *Bullying Prevention Program*. Stu used the Olweus program as the primary program to direct his school culture. Melody used the Olweus program and the *Bully* movie to help students see what bullying looked like. Clive utilized the *Pause Before You Post* (2014) program. Jane's school is a *No Place for Hate* (Anti-Defamation League, 2006) school, which is an initiative through an anti-defamation league. Stu's school utilized several different programs to help educate students in advocacy, self-esteem, and communication skills including the YESS (2012) curriculum to help empower students. Michelle stated that she would implement the *Rachel's Challenge* (n.d.) program into her school the following year. Jane used the *Let's Get Real* curriculum (Kim & Logan, 2004) as a top-tier intervention. The curriculum includes a video, workbook activities, and assignments to help kids build awareness.

Research Sub-question 1c

What role do school psychologists play in preventing cyberbullying and intervening to combat its effects?

School psychologists played different roles at different schools, depending on the need and their available time. Several school psychologists were only available at their schools on a very limited basis. School psychologist roles specific to handling cyberbullying incidents varied from school to school and were described by the principals as serving students with social-emotional minutes on their IEPs, suicide prevention, and assessment; crisis situations; leading groups and supporting victims of (cyber) bullying; and doing check-ins with students.

Research Sub-question 1d

What policies or laws guide or influence the way school principals deal with cyberbullying incidents?

Michelle and Joe both stated that the state policy helped guide their practice as a principal. Michelle said she and her staff had utilized the state policy. In Joe's school district, the state policy guided the district policy, which Joe followed directly. Three of the participants--Melody, Stu, and Clive--were unaware of what the state policy said. Melody ensured that her school was addressing bullying and specifically cyberbullying. Although Stu was not familiar with the state policy, he knew one existed. Stu believed that by formally adopting the Olweus (1992) *Bullying Prevention Program* and training his staff, he was complying with the state law. Clive expressed that his school was guided more by school board policy than by Colorado state laws. Jane felt differently than the other participants and went on to explain why policy and cyberbullying just did not work at this point. She felt as though the focus should be on landmark cases.

Chapter V provides the current research on the merging themes presented by the six participants. The chapter also presents the implications and limitations faced in the research study and recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

A great deal of cyberbullying research addressed the prevalence rates. However, there was very little research on how school administrators perceived this problem and, subsequently, responded or intervened in instances of cyberbullying. The intent of this research study was to gather qualitative data that could be used by key stakeholders to take potential action. There was a need to understand school administrators' perspectives of cyberbullying occurring in their schools so other professionals, specifically school psychologists, could better help combat cyberbullying.

This qualitative study explored the perspectives of principals in large mid-western, urban school districts about how they perceived and responded to cyberbullying. In this study, a purposive, criterion-based sampling method was used to identify a target population of middle school principals. Through an in-depth analysis of the semi-structured, open-ended interviews, field notes, and demographic questionnaires, five major themes emerged: (a) First, Gathering the Facts; (b) Addressing the Incident; (c) Barriers to Preventing Cyberbullying; (d) Developing Partnerships; and (e) Building Safe Schools. A brief summary of the emergent themes is presented below. These five emergent themes were then regrouped into the following themes to better discuss the main findings in light of the current literature: addressing conflict in middle schools, integrating programming efforts, and policy and participation of stakeholders in

cyberbullying prevention and intervention. A discussion of the limitations of the study and suggestions for future research are also presented. Finally, I reflect on the research and the impact it might have on my practice as an early practicing school psychologist.

Summary of Emergent Themes

First, Gather the Facts

All participants stressed the need to collect information from multiple sources and validate the accuracy of that information. Participants gathered information from all parties involved including from the reporting student and bystanders. The goal of the investigation was to figure out who was involved and what aspects of the incident could be proved and validated.

Three of the six participants used the phrase *nexus to school* to describe how they determined the extent of their role in addressing the incident. Three participants discussed whether the incident had occurred off campus; if it had but it also had an impact on the school environment, they properly addressed the incident. One of the principals did not use the term *nexus to school* but he felt strongly about handling all cyberbullying incidents--whether the incident originated on campus or off.

Several principals expressed that much of what they saw at their school was more conflict than true (cyber) bullying and emphasized the need to differentiate between the two. The participants also expressed how they handled conflict differently from bullying. They felt students needed better tools to handle conflicts on their own.

Addressing the Incident

During the investigation, all participants stated that they provided support to the victim. All principals talked with the victim to determine the facts of the case as well his

or her state of mind. Principals found out how this was impacting the victim at school and what support the school could provide. They also conducted a threat assessment or suicide assessment if necessary, did regular check-ins with victims of bullying, and brought in the parents of the victim.

All of the principals had the same main message for their students: *the bullying must stop*. Three of the principals emphasized using the restorative approach; if possible, the staff tried to restore the relationship. Students were explicitly told the consequences if they continued to participate in bullying behaviors. Two of the principals both stated that discipline really depended on the situation at hand; regardless, the perpetrators of the bullying incident would be appropriately disciplined.

Barriers to Preventing Cyberbullying

Several principals described barriers to the prevention of cyberbullying at their school: technology, location, and anonymity. One of the greatest barriers to preventing or stopping cyberbullying was the technology. Several principals mentioned different aspects of technology and how it made it harder to stop cyberbullying from occurring. Getting the actual textual evidence of what was being said or posted was often challenging. Another huge barrier to combating cyberbullying was the anonymity kids felt when online. The anonymity allowed students to use lot of aggressive, sexual language. One of the other greatest barriers was the location--most of the cyberbullying occurred outside of the school.

Developing Partnerships

All the participants stated that they would involve the police (student resource officer) when a threat was made by a student, especially if there was any imminent or

direct danger. Two of the principals also asked the police for additional support, to help shut down any e-mails or websites being used to carry out the cyberbullying, and to help educate students and parents about the law.

Four of the six principals emphasized the need to work collaboratively with parents to protect kids. They stated it was important to have conversations with parents and involve them in the investigation and the resolutions. The principals also contacted and involved the parents of the perpetrators. Two of the principals expressed their desire to have greater parent involvement, the need for more resources for parents to assist them in dealing with cyberbullying, and educating them to help stop cyberbullying.

Overall, school counselors, school psychologists, and social workers made up the schools' mental health teams. However, there was a lack of cohesive partnerships with mental health professionals. As shown in the participants' demographics section, the schools varied greatly by the number of mental health professionals they had been allocated. Typically, the mental health professionals primarily were the first level of support for the victim by addressing the victim's immediate emotional concerns.

The participants described their partnerships with their school counselors when addressing cyberbullying. Typically, school counselors supported the victims of bullying and utilized mediation and restorative justice when appropriate. Social workers were also part of many of the schools' mental health teams. The role of the social worker typically included educating parents and kids and conducting a threat assessment. Not all schools used their social worker to help address cyberbullying incidents. The principals also described their partnerships with school psychologists. The school psychologists often worked at the schools on a more limited basis when compared to the other mental health

professionals. Overall, the school psychologist might have conducted threat and suicide assessments and supported victims of cyberbullying.

Building Safe Schools

Four of the five principals who reported on this theme stated that most cyberbullying incidents were reported by students but teachers, staff, and parents also made reports. They all emphasized the need to have both a concrete plan for reporting, including what cyberbullying is, and a variety of safe ways for people to make reports.

The participants were asked to share their knowledge of the state policy on cyberbullying. Some of the participants were unaware of what the state policy said. I provided them with a short summary to help them better comment on how the policy impacted their work. Three of the principals said they were not familiar with the state policy on cyberbullying. Despite not knowing the policy, the principals felt as though their schools were adequately addressing cyberbullying. Two of the principals used the state policy to guide their practice as principals.

Each participant described in detail the programs he or she used to help prevent and intervene with cyberbullying. Three participants discussed the schools' use of Positive Behavior Intervention Support (Agatston et al., 2007) as their main framework for creating positive school environments. Two principals spoke specifically of the Olweus (1992) *Bullying Prevention Program* implemented at their schools. Several participants also used various non-evidence-based practices to help with prevention and intervention of bullying: *Pause Before You Post* (2014), YESS (2012) curriculum, the *Bully* (Lowen & Hirsch, 2011) movie, *A No Place for Hate School* (Anti-Defamation League, 2006), and *Rachel's Challenge* (n.d.). After students were involved in

cyberbullying incidents, principals monitored these students to help ensure it did not continue; one program suggested for this type of targeted intervention was the *Let's Get Real* (Kim & Logan 2004) curriculum.

When participants were asked how they measured the success of their prevention and intervention efforts, they gave a variety of responses. Two of the principals used surveys to help assess the bullying situation at their schools and one principal collected data for his school at the end of every year. They had records on the disciplinary infractions and cyberbullying was one of them. Two of the principals expressed difficulties with measuring prevention and intervention efforts, especially quantitatively.

Three of the six principals emphasized the importance of establishing a positive school climate. One principal believed his school environment contributed to lower rates of bullying. These principals understood the importance of maintaining a positive school climate for all of the students. Within the positive school climate was the importance of building and maintaining relationships with both peers and teachers.

Interpretation of Findings

Addressing Conflict in Middle Schools

The research study revealed that conflict as defined within this study--when two or more students had an argument or traded insults back and forth--appeared just as concerning as, and possibly more, prominent than cyberbullying with middle school students. Several of the principals expressed that much of what they saw at their school was more conflict than true (cyber) bullying, especially when the principals discovered both sides of the incident. Stopbullying.gov (n.d.) listed several aggressive types of behavior that do not meet definition of bullying such as peer conflict, hazing, dating

violence, and stalking; however, these behaviors are still considered serious and should be properly addressed. Stopbullying.gov suggested that these behaviors need to be handled differently than bullying. Specifically, Stopbullying.gov referred to peer conflict: “It is not bullying when two kids with no perceived power imbalance fight, have an argument, or disagree” (p. 1).

One of the greatest areas of concern was with students who were in continuous conflict with others. Principals expressed the need to proactively address conflict and help students understand their role within their conflicts. Yacco and Smith (2010) stated that “resolving conflict constructively can provide students in school settings opportunities to practice communication skills and improve relationships” (p. 1). The research on the impact of conflict was similar to the bullying research, which indicated unresolved conflict could have a negative impact on student learning (Daunic & Smith, 2010). However, the principals indicated addressing conflict should be handled differently than handling bullying incidents. As stated on the Stopbullying.gov website (n.d.), “Bullying is not a conflict; it is a form of victimization. Like those who experience child abuse or domestic violence, children who are bullied are victimized.” This is an important point to make. Bullying and conflict should be handled differently; conflict resolution and peer mediation are not appropriate interventions for bullying incidents (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). Rather, these strategies are supported for use when the students are both equally at fault for the incident or conflict at hand.

According to several of the principals, students need to be given the tools to handle conflicts on their own. Joe stated that if the incident turned out to be conflict, the best approach was to have the individuals involved referred to a counselor for mediation.

Punitive strategies such as detention and suspension (used more with bullying behaviors) did not help teach students to handle conflict (Polsgrove & Smith, 2004). School administrators are seeking new ways of preventing these conflicts through programs like conflict resolution and peer mediation (Yacco & Smith, 2010): “Conflict resolution programs and peer mediation strategies can empower middle school students...by offering training and experiences in resolving their conflicts in a constructive way” (p. 1). Adolescents are at the age where they are beginning to engage in higher levels of cognition such as abstract thinking and self-reflection (Akos, 2005); therefore, adolescents have the ability to develop and master skills taught by these programs to better handle conflict (Yacco & Smith, 2010).

The principals in this study did not comment specifically on conflict resolution or peer mediation programs but they did talk extensively on the use of the restorative approach to help strengthen relationships and connections within their schools. Restorative practices were derived from the criminal justice system’s use of restorative justice. According to Costello, Wachtel, and Watchel (2009), “To be restorative means to believe that decisions are best made and conflicts are best resolved by those most directly involved in them” (p. 7). The double-edge sword of living in a society is there are benefits from social interactions but there is also conflict. These conflicts result when people perceive things differently, fail to do the right thing, and end up hurting one another. The laws and leaders of a society are there to help mediate and protect all individuals. This concept is no different in schools, with rules and administrators. “But in the face of increasingly challenging behavior in the form on incivility, misconduct,

bullying, and even violence, many schools are struggling to fulfill the societal obligation” (Costello et al., 2009, p. 49).

Use of the restorative process in schools helps build more positive relationships and restore the sense of community. Costello et al. (2009) reported, “With the push for academic achievement and accountability there seem to be many new mandates imposed on classroom teachers and school administrators, leaving less time for building relationships and connections with students” (p. 8). However, without the focus on building positive relationships, students feel less connected to the school and are less likely to succeed in school. Costello et al. ended with this sentiment:

Running a school is a complex task. Learning outcomes, safety, standardized test performance, teacher retention, building maintenance, budgets and strategic plans are only a few of the challenges a school administrator faces.... The field of restorative practices offers a framework for implementing school wide change while at the same time engaging all of the stakeholders. (p. 81)

Several of the principals spoke of the importance of building and sustaining positive relationships within schools among students, teachers, and parents. If incidents such as (cyber) bullying were interfering with these relationships and impacting the learning environment, principals addressed them immediately.

Integrating Programming Efforts

Olweus was one of the first leading bullying researchers to suggest bullying is a systemic problem and therefore intervention efforts should be implemented across the entire school and not just targeted at individual bullies and victims (Smith, Schneider, Smith, & Ananiadou, 2004). Olweus et al. (1999) indicated that bullying prevention programs with a focus of positive school climate and consistent, school-wide programming tended to be more effective than the targeted classroom only intervention

efforts that just addressed the bullies and victims. One possible reason for this difference was the integrity and fidelity in which these stand-alone bullying curriculums were implemented; often the staff felt overwhelmed, were not well trained, and doubted the effectiveness of these programs (Biggs, Vernverg, Twemlow, Fonagy, & Dill, 2008).

The U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS; 2013) issued this message with regards to bullying prevention:

There is no one-size-fits-all or simple solution for addressing bullying behavior. Rather, efforts to prevent and address bullying behavior should be embedded within a comprehensive, multitiered behavioral framework used to establish a positive school environment, set high academic and behavioral expectations for all students, and guide delivery of evidence-based instruction and interventions that address the needs of students, including students with disabilities. (p. 1)

The current research in bullying prevention also promotes this multi-tiered system consisting of three levels: universal level, targeted level, and intensive level (U.S. Department of Education, 2014).

Of great importance in this research study was the use of a framework of prevention for (cyber) bullying by several of the principals. The principals stated the use of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS; U.S. Department of Education, 1998) and the Olweus (1992) *Bullying Prevention Program*. It was clear these programs used by principals fit into the multi-tiered system of prevention; yet none of them spoke specifically of the tiered system. To best understand the levels of interventions within all the principals' schools, the findings are presented at each tier of the multi-tiered system--universal, targeted, and intensive. This also helped to identify areas for improvement in the prevention efforts for several of the principals.

There has yet to be empirically supported approaches to online safety and prevention of cyberbullying (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010); therefore, the traditional bullying intervention methods should be expanded to address the issues surrounding digital communication and should include the combined efforts of schools, teachers, students, families, law enforcement personnel, and the community (Feinberg & Robey, 2010; Hinduja & Patchin, 2010; Mason, 2008). The principals in this research study also did not differentiate between bullying and cyberbullying programming for prevention and intervention. At times, the principals provided specific strategies (i.e., *Pause before You Post*, 2012) to target cyberbullying and these were done within their bullying prevention and intervention efforts.

Universal level. The first tier of intervention is at the universal or school level. Goals of whole-school approaches to intervention and prevention commonly include developing effective school-wide policies, increasing staff awareness and responsiveness, surveying students' experiences, and educating parents on bullying concerns (Snell & Hirschstein, 2005). The principals of this study provided an overwhelming amount of information they used at the universal level to help combat (cyber) bullying including programs such as PBIS (U.S. Department of Education, 1998) and the Olweus (1992) *Bullying Prevention Program*.

Ross and Horner (2009) conducted a single-subject, multiple baseline design with six students and three elementary schools to examine the effectiveness of incorporating bullying prevention into PBIS (U.S. Department of Education, 1998). They found decreased incidents of bullying for all six students observed and in the social responses from victims and bystanders. The school staff also rated the program as being effective

and efficient. The majority of the principals emphasized the importance of establishing a positive school climate; two of the principals spoke of specifically using PBIS to help create a positive school climate. Also, within their PBIS programs, several of the principals targeted anti- (cyber) bullying practices. Overall, several of the principals were in agreement that a positive school climate contributed to lower rates of bullying and maintaining the social/emotional well-being of their students. School-wide bullying prevention programs are designed to improve the overall school climate (Lehr, 2005).

Current bullying research suggests the use of the following evidence-based programs for middle school is effective: Olweus (1992) *Bullying Prevention Program* (BPP), *Bully Proofing Your School* (BPYS; National Center for School Engagement, 1992) and *Second Step* (Committee for Children, 2014). The principals discussed the specific programs and campaigns they used to target anti- (cyber) bullying incidents: Olweus *Bullying Prevention Program*, *A No Place for Hate School* (Anti-Defamation League, 2006), *Pause Before You Post* (2014), *Rachel' Challenge* (n.d.), and the YESS (2012) curriculum. Several of these programs were incorporated into their PBIS programming and helped target building a positive school climate as well as specific cyberbullying practices.

At the core of concepts like PBIS and positive school environments are strong established relationships. Mishna (2012) spoke of the importance of having that positive relationship: "Positive relationships with parents, peers and teachers are invaluable protective factors, which can counter the effects of negative occurrences and challenges. The adult-child relationship influences children's ability to manage in many areas, including bullying situations" (p. 15). Two of the principals in particular worked really

hard on building positive relationships with their students and staff. Having these positive relationships helped the principals better understand the needs of the students and facilitated with intervening quickly with any incidents of cyberbullying.

The lack of empirically supported, school-based bullying prevention programs makes it important for schools to collect and use their own data to evaluate their own prevention efforts (Swearer, Espelage, & Napolitano, 2009). It is vital to make data-based decisions when it comes to planning and evaluating bullying prevention and intervention (Swearer et al., 2009). Numerous surveys with varied focus are available to measure bullying behaviors; thus it is important for school personnel to critically select a measure or measures that match with their schools' unique characteristics and needs (Swearer et al., 2009). These surveys can measure specific topics such as frequency and types, adult and peer response, locations including "hot spots," staff perceptions and attitudes about bullying, aspects of the school or community that may support or help stop it, and student perception of safety and school climate (Stopbullying.gov, n.d.). Several of the principals conducted climate and bullying assessment data. Surveys used included the Olweus (1992) pre- and post-bullying survey, adult climate surveys, and disciplinary infractions. Data are essential for school administrators, staff, parents, and students to understand the severity and impact of cyberbullying at their school. Several additional surveys and assessments that could be used by the schools to measure their climate and bullying include American Institutes for Research's (2012) *Conditions for Learning Survey*, *Perceived School Experiences Scales* (Anderson-Butcher, Amorose, Iachini, & Ball, 2011), *Effective School Battery* (Gottfredson, 2011), *Children's Social*

Behavior Scale-Self Report (Bosworth, Espelage, & Simon, 2011), and Victimization Scale (Safe Supportive Learning, 2011; Hamburger, Basile & Vivolo, 2011).

Targeted level. Targeted level practices should include group counseling, service type of activities, and classroom level programs. A classroom-level prevention program should (a) establish classroom rules against bullying with the help of the students so they have a sense of personal responsibility; (b) have teachers provide rewards or reinforcement for good social behaviors and consequences for undesirable behaviors; and (c) hold regular classroom meetings to provide a forum for students and teachers to discuss their concerns (Center for the Study and Prevention of School Violence, 2008). Only one principal in this study was very specific on the targeted practices she used. She created a student support group to help stop bullying and to give the kids an opportunity to voice some of their concerns. Her school also conducted a restorative circle where all the kids were asked questions and everyone in the group had an opportunity to express themselves. The other principals did not provide details about their types of targeted level practices to combat cyberbullying. This would be the greatest area of improvement for school principals. Individual classrooms need to be encouraged to support school-wide bullying prevention efforts and teachers need to be well trained. Groups of students also need to be identified who could benefit from more targeted interventions such as group counseling and service learning projects to help support victims and deter perpetrators.

Intensive level. The intensive level of intervention targets the individuals—the bullies and the victims. This level of intervention is designed to help students improve or change their behavior (Olweus et al., 2009). When a bully or a victim is identified,

several key actions are required. First, a school administrator must have serious talks with the bullies and victims. Talks should be immediate and should document the student's involvement or participation in bullying by sending a clear, strong message that bullying is not acceptable. Documentation should specify consequences for the bully and support for the victim (Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence, 2008). Second, parents must be notified about any bullying incidents involving their children; meetings with all persons involved may be necessary. Third, both bullies and victims might benefit from individualized skill building sessions to work on any deficiencies in social skills. Finally, a change of class or school might be necessary if the bullying problem persists despite these prevention measures (Center for the Study and Prevention of School Violence, 2008). One of the principals used a top level intervention, *Let's Get Real* curriculum (Kim & Logan, 2004), to help students who lacked empathy and needed more explicit teaching. The curriculum included a video, workbook activities, and assignments to help kids build awareness. The principal expressed that most kids would get these lessons at the whole-school intervention level; however, there were the few who did not. The Olweus *Bullying Prevention Program* (1992) included intensive levels of support; yet the principals in this study did not specifically speak of them. All of the principals spoke with victims of cyberbullying and helped direct the mental health support the victims needed. An area for growth for the principals would include better supporting perpetrators to help educate them and identify their areas of improvement.

Summary. A multi-tiered framework for (cyber) bullying prevention and intervention is necessary to help reduce bullying behaviors and establish a positive school climate. This multi-tiered system consists of three levels: universal level, targeted level,

and intensive level. Programs such as PBIS (U.S. Department of Education, 1998) and Olweus (1992) *Bullying Prevention Program* used by several of the principals fit into the multi-tiered system of prevention; yet none of them spoke specifically of the tiered system. The lack of empirically supported approaches to online safety and prevention of cyberbullying creates the need for traditional bullying intervention methods to be expanded to address the issues surrounding digital communication. In this research study, the principals did not explicitly differentiate between the bullying and cyberbullying programming they used for prevention and intervention.

The first tier of intervention, universal level, commonly includes developing effective school-wide policies, increasing staff awareness and responsiveness, surveying students' experiences, and educating parents on bullying concerns. The principals of this study provided an overwhelming amount of information they used at the universal level to help combat (cyber) bullying including programs such as PBIS (U.S. Department of Education, 1998) and Olweus (1992) *Bullying Prevention Program*. Several of the principals were in agreement that a positive school climate contributed to lower rates of bullying and maintaining the social-emotional well-being of their students. Two of the principals in particular worked really hard on building positive relationships with their students and staff. The lack of empirically supported, school-based bullying prevention programs made it important for schools to collect and use their own data to evaluate their own prevention efforts. Several of the principals conducted climate and bullying assessment surveys.

The targeted level of intervention typically includes group counseling, service type of activities, and classroom level programs. This would be the greatest area of

improvement for school principals. Individual classrooms need to be encouraged to support school-wide bullying prevention efforts. Groups of students also need to be identified who could benefit from more targeted interventions such as group counseling and service learning projects to help support victims and deter perpetrators.

The intensive level of intervention targets the individuals—the bullies and the victims. One of the principals used a top level intervention, *Let's Get Real* curriculum (Kim & Logan, 2004), to help students who lacked empathy and needed more explicit teaching. The Olweus (1992) *Bullying Prevention Program* includes intensive levels of support; yet the principals in this study did not specifically speak of them. All of the principals spoke with victims of cyberbullying and helped direct the mental health support the victims needed. An area for growth for the principals would include better supporting perpetrators to help educate them and identify their areas of improvement.

Policy

In part because of the catastrophic consequences of bullying, legislators, school districts, and administrators have recognized the grave need for policies to help maintain a safe learning environment (Kowalski et al., 2008). The public has also put pressure on both the state governments and local school districts to find effective solutions for handling (cyber) bullying (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). The U.S. Department of Education's Letter to Colleagues (2010) highlighted the importance of utilizing state policy:

Though laws are only a part of the cure for bullying, the adoption, publication, and enforcement of a clear and effective anti-bullying policy sends a message that all incidents of bullying must be addressed immediately and effectively, and that such behavior will not be tolerated. State laws, and their related district- and school-level policies, cannot work in isolation, however. When responding to bullying incidents, schools and districts should remember that maintenance of a

safe and equitable learning environment for all students, including both victims and perpetrators of bullying, often requires a more comprehensive approach. (p. 1)

Bullying policy has been enacted in 49 states across the country. Of the 49 states that have statewide bullying policy, 14 have laws referring to “cyberbullying” and 42 have laws referring to “electronic harassment.” Some of those existing laws require public schools to develop policies prohibiting cyberbullying, to enforce discipline ranging from suspension to expulsion, to address off-campus cyberbullying activities, and to require reporting to law enforcement officials (Jacobs, 2010). The *Analysis of State Bullying Laws and Policies* report (U.S. Department of Education, 2011) focused on documenting the policy across the states. The U.S. Department of Education (2011) recognized that “these policies may not benefit schools or students unless they can be successfully implemented” (p. 80). The next phase of the examined the feasibility of the implementation procedures “such as reporting requirements, investigation, and procedures for implementing the sanction (e.g., expulsion)” (p .80).

As written earlier, in Colorado, there is no official anti-bullying law. Colorado state lawmakers instead chose a "legislative declaration" and creation of policy. Schools must have a Safe School Plan that must include “a specific policy concerning bullying prevention and education, including information related to the development and implementation of any bullying prevention programs” (Center for the Study and Prevention of School Violence, 2008). Bullying is defined in Colorado policy as “any written or verbal expression, or physical or electronic act or gesture...” (Measures to Reduce the Frequency, 2011). The *Analysis of State Bullying Laws and Policies* report” (U.S. Department of Education, 2011) noted that Colorado had “the least expansive state

law within the study sample with regard to school district policy expectations, whereas the district policy from Colorado is rated as one of the most broadly defined and detailed” (p. 77). Pennsylvania and Texas were two other states in the study that had similar differences between the state laws and district policies; districts choose to cover more components “in substantially greater breadth and depth than is required under law” (U.S. Department of Education, 2011, p. 77). The report suggested that local district policy might have been influenced by factors other than the legislative expectations.

Each of the principals was asked to share his/her knowledge on the state policy on cyberbullying and the influence the policy had on their practice. Three of the principals were unaware of what the state policy said but were confident their school was adequately addressing bullying. Several of the principals relied on school board policy at the district level to direct their school’s policy on bullying prevention and intervention. Overall, the majority of the principals did not utilize the state policy to help in their intervention and prevention efforts but looked toward the district to help guide their actions as a principal. This finding is consistent with the school district analyzed in the U.S. Department Education’s (2011) *Analysis of State Bullying Laws and Policies*.

Participation of Stakeholders in Cyberbullying Prevention and Intervention

Throughout this research study, it became clear school principals need more support to help their students navigate middle school and stop cyberbullying.

Large problems are complex, multiply-determined, and differentially reinforced. The solutions to stopping bullying behaviors must be framed from a social ecological perspective if we are to have any hope of truly stopping bullying in North America schools. (Swearer et al., 2009, p. 3)

Espelage and Swearer (2003) recommended the key to bullying prevention is the focus of the school climate and the relationships within the school including teachers and partnerships with families. In order to prevent and intervene with cyberbullying, principals need support from individual students, families, peers, other school personnel, and the community. Swearer et al. (2009) viewed bullying as a breakdown of social-relationships; therefore, “the relationships that school and families forge become paramount in effective bullying prevention and intervention” (p. 86). This study presented findings specifically on working with school mental health professionals, parents, and the police.

Mental health professionals. Mental health is important in schools.

Children and adolescents come to school each day with a number of life factors and barriers that affect their learning, behavior, and development, including family stress, academic difficulties, peer conflicts, health issues, cultural differences, as well as community concern. (Christner, Mennuti, & Whitaker, 2009, p. 4)

Schools have long played an important role in the health and safety of students; thus, when cyberbullying occurs, schools play a crucial role even if the bullying occurred off-campus (Stewart & Fritsch, 2011). Cyberbullying incidents can “undermine school climate, interfere with victims’ school functioning, and put some students at risk for serious mental health and safety problems” (Feinberg & Robey, 2008, p. 10). Also, as the research stated earlier, a safe and positive school climate helps decrease bullying and its effects while increasing academic achievement.

School counselors, social workers, and school psychologists are typically the ones to address most mental health issues in schools (Center for Mental Health in Schools, 2006). However, schools are more unique in the sense that other educators such as

teachers, administrators, and paraprofessionals may also play “an important and prominent role in the implementation and maintenance of these services” (Christner et al., 2009, p. 6). Principals in this study expressed that they, along with their vice principals and dean of students, also worked hard to support their students’ social/emotional needs to really help students be ready to learn and work hard while at school. Use of the schools’ mental health professionals in combating cyberbullying varied greatly as described by each of the principals. All the principals had their mental health professionals addressing some aspect of the cyberbullying incidents. However, a lack of cohesion existed for the partnerships between schools and mental health professionals because of the varying hours allocated to each of these professionals. It is essential for mental health professionals in the schools to be consulting and collaborating at all tiers of the multi-tiered framework of prevention and intervention because of the grave impact cyberbullying can have on the school system and individual students. Each of the mental health professionals’ roles is detailed as follows, starting with the school psychologist and followed by the school counselor and school social worker.

School psychologists are “ideally positioned” to support efforts at all levels of the multi-tiered framework of (cyber) bullying prevention and intervention “given their broad range of skills in data-based decision making, collaboration and consultation, mental health, school-wide reform, and program evaluation” (Rossen & Cowan, 2012, p. 6). School psychologists are uniquely trained across many disciplines, which allows them to act competently in many diverse roles to help students “succeed academically, socially, behaviorally, and emotionally” (Rossen & Cowan, 2012, p. 5). The National Association of School Psychologists (2010) model for comprehensive and integrated

school psychological services describes “the broad-based role of school psychologists, as well as the range of competencies they possess” (Rossen & Cowan, 2012, p. 5). More recently, school psychologists have been prominent in addressing school violence, promoting safe schools, and providing additional mental health services to students (Diamanduros et al., 2008). The specific services a school needs from a school psychologist might vary from school to school. In many school systems, the school administrator is responsible for employing a school psychologist; therefore, the administrator must clearly state his or her expectations for school psychological services (Magi & Kikas, 2009).

Despite a lack of literature specifically discussing the role of school psychologists in the area of cyberbullying (Cook et al., 2007), there is a great deal of research detailing the role of a school psychologist in bullying prevention and intervention. As stated earlier, the principals in this study did not differentiate prevention and intervention efforts between bullying and cyberbullying; therefore, this study expanded the prevention and intervention efforts to include cyberbullying. School psychologists provide a unique perspective in schools given their broad understanding of school systems, knowledge of student development, and students’ academically and social-emotion needs (Rossen & Cowan, 2012). Specifically, school psychologists have a great deal of training and knowledge in area of evidence-based research, program evaluation, and data-based decision- making at both the individual and systems levels (Diamanduros et al., 2008; Rossen & Cowan, 2012). This set of skills allows school psychologists to help lead efforts to collect data through progress monitoring and surveys, evaluate and interpret data, and direct further action for prevention and intervention efforts. School

psychologists have also been trained in counseling, positive behavior interventions, and supports to help students navigate and deal with bullying types of behaviors. Their consultation skills allow school psychologists to work collaboratively with educators, families, and other stakeholders; therefore, school psychologists should serve on school safety teams and advisory boards.

According to the principals in this research study, the school psychologist worked at the schools on a more limited basis when compared to school counselors and social workers. One of the principals felt particularly strongly that he would not have the school psychologist be involved in cyberbullying incidents because he felt school psychologists were too “smart” to spending time on these types of incidents. Given the high stakes of (cyber) bullying, school psychologists should be essential members of the prevention and intervention efforts. It could be possible that this particular principal was thinking school psychologists should not be working on conflict types of incidents, which as reported earlier by the principals is more prominent than true cyberbullying incidents. Other schools called in the school psychologist as needed to help with more serious cases; they helped with the restorative circle, supported the victims, provided resources to the students, and conducted suicide assessments if necessary. The principals stated that the school psychologists’ time was typically spent serving students with mental health minutes on their IEPs. Based on the principals’ perspectives, school psychologists did not play an active role in helping prevent cyberbullying and played a small role intervening.

School counselors have traditionally helped students develop academically, professionally, and socially (Herr, 2003). A shift occurred when both teachers and

students were expected to perform to higher state expectations. School counselors, along with the other educators, were now expected to focus on helping students achieve to the higher standards (Ostvik-de Wilde, Park, & Lee, 2013). Given the link between academics and mental health, school counselors' focus needs to remain with helping students with their social/emotional needs. Research over the last couple of decades has emphasized that when students' social and psychological needs are supported, then the students' success academically increases including standardized tests (Anderson, Houser, & Howland, 2010; Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011; Fleming et al., 2005; Wentzel, 1993). The principals in this research study supported the notion that academics were connected to students' social/emotional wellbeing; yet most of the work from their mental health professionals, including school counselors, was reactive in nature. The primary roles of the school counselors' in handling cyberbullying incident were consistent across schools and were to support the victims after a (cyber) bullying incident; however, preventive efforts were not typically a part of school counselors' jobs.

In addition to school counselors, school social workers might be key personnel for helping address cyberbullying because of their home-school-community relationships (Slovak & Singer, 2011). School social workers should also work with their school administrators to help develop more effective policies and norms to combat cyberbullying within their schools (Slovak & Singer, 2011). In the Slovak and Singer (2011) study, only one in five school social workers believed their school had an effective policy on cyberbullying. In the current research study, social workers had similar roles as school counselors but some of the principals suggested social workers also worked in other

capacities. They worked with the more severely impacted kids and helped educate parents and kids on the dangers of cyberbullying.

The mental health professionals all shared the common goal of creating a positive and safe learning environment so students can achieve academically. Given some of the shared responsibilities, school psychologists, school counselors, and school social workers have, it might be best to divide and conquer the multi-tier system of prevention and intervention to serve all students. The school principal would have to work on building a strong partnership and team among all the mental health professionals within the school. A possible framework for this division of work might look like this: the school psychologist works at the universal level with data and decision- making, especially given the time constraints some psychologist have; the school counselors work supporting the classroom teachers' prevention and intervention efforts as well as individual students who may be bullies and/or victims; and the social workers work as a liaison with the community and parents.

Parents. The key to a good school climate is good communication (Rosen, 2005). This communication must include parents. Students should experience their parents having a positive healthy relationship with the school, not one full of conflict. Parents and students must all be aware of the rules contained in a school's handbook (Rosen, 2005). Parents should be kept informed about anti-bullying efforts within the classroom (Center for the Study and Prevention of School Violence, 2008).

Creating a positive connection between families and schools helps create healthy relationships among students, parents, and schools. In turn, this sets the stage for fostering positive relationships and for eliminating the conditions that allow bullying behaviors to occur. (Swearer et al., 2009, p. 87)

The majority of principals spoke of the need to work collaboratively with parents to protect kids.

A 2011 survey by the American Osteopathic Association found more than 85% of the parents with teenagers ages 13 to 17 reported their children had social media accounts. Of those parents, more than 52% said they were concerned about their kids being the victim of harassment or teasing over social media. One in six of the parents surveyed reported their child had been cyberbullied or teased online. Three-quarters of the parents reported they had discussed cyberbullying with their children and 86% had taken steps to monitor their technology use. According to the principals, parents could help shut down accounts and help block the cyberbullying messages. The principals also stated the need to involve the parents of the perpetrators.

A 2009 survey (Netsmartz411, 2010) indicated that 84% of parents did not know how to respond to cyberbullying incidents. Some of the reasons for parents' lack of knowledge in how to deal with cyberbullying included their unfamiliarity with new technology and current online etiquette. Similar to the research, several of the principals expressed the need for more resources to provide to parents to assist them in dealing with cyberbullying. The principals also expressed their desire to have greater parent involvement; it was typically difficult to get parent involvement at training seminars. Hannah (2010) stated despite the parents' lack of knowledge with cyberspace and technology, parents should use the skills "they have used since time immemorial: nurture and connect with your child; provide structure for your child's activities; and join your child in their learning adventure online, learning as they do" (p. 536). By raising children this way, they learn to be good citizens both online and off (Hannah, 2010). As stated

earlier, parent involvement is an essential component of the multi-tiered system for prevention and intervention. It was clear the principals had a desire to better educate and include parents in prevention and intervention efforts. Going back to the relationship mental health professionals, especially social workers, often build with parents, this relationship should be built upon to include these (cyber) bullying prevention and intervention efforts.

Police. The police's extensive knowledge of the laws and safety issues allows them to be very valuable educators in the schools (Thaxter, 2010). In order to determine the jurisdiction in a case by case basis, a partnership should be developed between school administration and law enforcement; this partnership will help allow for the exchange of information (Thaxter, 2010). The police play various roles with regard to helping preventing and combating cyberbullying. First, the police can help educate students, parents, and schools about the risks and dangers associated with cyberbullying in hopes of preventing it (Palladino, Nocentini, & Menesini, 2012). Second, the police can help detect cyberbullying incidents. Third, the police can be involved in ongoing cyberbullying cases by identifying perpetrators and supporting the victims (Vandebosch, Beirens, D'Haese, Wegge, & Pabin, 2012).

According to the principals in this research study, they contacted police or their student resource officer if a threat was made; how malicious the threat was and the threat of imminent danger often dictated the administrator's actions. Additionally, the police might provide additional support to investigations, help shut down any e-mails or websites being used to carry out the cyberbullying, and talk to parents about the things that were going on and how they could help monitor and respond to cyberbullying

incidents. The research suggested police play a more proactive use when addressing cyberbullying prevention and intervention efforts:

The role of the juvenile police officer in a post Columbine era has changed from reactive to proactive. Addressing the problem of cyber bullying through early education and intervention, as opposed to adjudication after the fact, is vital in securing a safe school environment. (Thaxter, 2010, p. 531)

The police or student resource officer is another key stakeholder who could be better utilized in the multi-tiered systems approach. They should not just be used in a limited capacity when a threat is made; rather, they should be used to their fullest capacity and help educate students on the law to help prevent cyber (bullying).

Limitations

A qualitative research design provided the framework for this study. The study provided rich information regarding principal perspectives about cyberbullying in large urban school districts. Qualitative research has limitations inherent to its design and the potential limitations of the research study must be taken into consideration when interpreting the results.

One central limitation to the qualitative design was the lack of generalizability. Due to the small size of the sample and the criterion-based sampling of a group of principals who were recruited from the Colorado Department of Education, the results should be interpreted with some caution as they might not generalize to other settings. The sample included both males and females but the sample was not ethnically diverse. Therefore, the reader must decide if the findings of this research study would apply to their unique situation and setting.

Despite the rich information, the sample was limited to school principals in several large school districts. As such, these findings might not lend themselves to being

generalized to other school districts settings such as small urban or rural school districts. Thick descriptions of the principals' experiences were given to help the reader form his/her own interpretations about whether or how these findings could be generalized to another setting.

The main tool used for data collection was face-to-face interviews with semi-structured questions, which allowed the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the principals' perspectives on how they would react and respond to cyberbullying incidents occurring in their schools. However, social pressures exist when conducting face-to-face interviews and the principals might have felt the need to provide more socially acceptable answers. In real-life situations, principals might respond in ways that might not be as socially accepted.

Two vignettes were also used as part of the data collection because they helped to “standardize the social stimulus across respondents and at the same time make the decision-making situation more real” (Alexander & Becker, 1978, p. 103). The use of vignettes might have provided some limitations. It is possible that when presented with a real-life situation with a similar cyberbullying incident, the principals might respond differently once they took into account the possible environmental and personal variables that actually influenced them at the time of the incidents. It is difficult for principals when reading and reacting to vignettes to know how they might actually think and feel at the time of a real incident.

Implications for Practice and Future Research

It was clear from previous research that cyberbullying has a negative effect on the students involved as well as the entire school climate (Feinberg & Robey, 2008; Stewart

& Fritsch, 2011). It is essential that all school personnel know their roles in the prevention and intervention efforts of cyberbullying. Principals are the leaders of their school and key individuals to direct (cyber) bullying programming in their schools. This study provided some initial insight in how middle school principals responded to cyberbullying incidents. Further, the findings of this study might be used to shift cyberbullying research from awareness to action:

1. Help students and educators understand the differences between peer conflict and (cyber) bullying
2. Build a systematic multi-tiered approach to frame (cyber) bullying prevention and intervention efforts. This could also help direct key stakeholders (i.e., mental health professionals, police and parents) in their roles.
3. Given the state policy lack of depth and direction, district policy needs to help dictate the direction schools should take with their (cyber) bullying prevention and intervention efforts.

With respect to future research, this study could also be conducted with other school personnel, students, parents, and community members to understand their experiences and perspectives with handling cyberbullying incidents. That would help support the need for all stakeholders to take action to effectively make changes with the way cyberbullying is intervened. Another area for future research is addressing district policy and the feasibility of implementing aspects of policy within the school and their resources.

School, parents, police, and communities are all aware that cyberbullying is an important concern in our public middle schools. Past research has focused on finding prevalence rates but now the focus needs to shift from prevalence rates to prevention and intervention. Principals in this research study used a variety of programming but it lacked structure and consistent use of staff skills and state policy. A future research study should examine the effectiveness of programming in public middle schools by using data schools collect to evaluate their programs.

Researcher's Reflection

My participation in this study has and will continue to greatly impact the way I practice as a school psychologist and work to combat cyberbullying. I have been studying cyberbullying for the last six years but I still feel as though I have such a narrow focus on the cyberbullying issue. I think I had become one of those individuals fixated on the prevalence of cyberbullying in our schools without looking at the larger picture. The larger picture included how to best prevent and intervene with cyberbullying, how our children interact with one another, and how to build positive healthy relationships. I still ask the question: how can schools better support children in building healthy positive relationships with others? It should start at home and continue throughout the student's academic career. All professionals in addition to the students themselves and their parents must work together to help children grow and develop into successful young adults. That work has to include helping students overcome obstacles such as cyberbullying.

Given the nature of this research study, I would like to take a step of action as well. It is my goal that the findings and recommendations from this study will be

published in a peer-reviewed journal, presented at national conferences, and shared with principals and their local school districts. A one page summary of the study will be presented to the principals as well as a list of resources to help support their efforts in combatting (cyber) bullying in their schools.

Conclusion

The current study sought to gain the perspective of middle school principals who responded to incidents of cyberbullying. This chapter discussed the main findings in light of the current literature. The research study revealed conflict appeared just as concerning as and possibly more prominent than cyberbullying with middle school students. Several of the principals expressed that much of what they saw at their school was more conflict than true (cyber) bullying. The principals within this research study incorporated aspects of cyberbullying intervention into their already existing bullying prevention programs. None of the principals spoke of a framework or multi-tiered system of prevention to ensure these efforts were being done consistently. Despite the fact that the principals did not explicitly state the use of multi-tiered system, they were using programming at each of the levels. Throughout this research study, it became clear school principals need more support to help their students navigate middle school and stop cyberbullying. To prevent and intervene with cyberbullying, principals need support from individual students, families, peers, other school personnel, and the community.

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APPENDIX A
STATE CYBERBULLYING LAWS

STATES WITH CYBERBULLYING LAWS								
State	Bullying Law	Update or Law Proposed	Include "Cyberbullying" ¹	Includes Electronic Harassment	Criminal Sanction	School Section	Requires School Policy	Include off campus behaviors? ²
Alabama	Yes	Proposed	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	No
Alaska	Yes	Proposed	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	No
Arizona	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
Arkansas	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
California	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
Colorado	Yes	No	No	Yes	Proposed	Yes	Yes	No
Connecticut	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Delaware	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
Florida	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
Georgia	Yes	Proposed	Proposed	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Proposed
Hawaii	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Proposed	Yes	Yes	No
Idaho	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Illinois	Yes	No	Proposed	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
Indiana	Yes	Proposed	No	Proposed	No	Yes	Yes	No
Iowa	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
Kansas	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
Kentucky	Yes	Proposed	Proposed	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Louisiana	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Maine	Yes	Proposed	Proposed	Proposed	No	Yes	Yes	No
Maryland	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
Massachusetts	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Michigan	Yes	No	No	Yes	Proposed	No	Yes	No
Minnesota	Yes	Proposed	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
Mississippi	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Missouri	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Montana	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	No
Nebraska	Yes	Proposed	Proposed	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Proposed
Nevada	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No
New Hampshire	Yes	Proposed	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes

State	Bullying Law	Update or Law Proposed	Include Cyberbullying	Includes Electronic Harassment	Criminal Sanction	School Section	Requires School Policy	Includes off campus behaviors?
New Jersey	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
New Mexico	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
New York	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Proposed	Yes	Yes	Yes
North Carolina	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
North Dakota	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Ohio	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
Oklahoma	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	No
Oregon	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
Pennsylvania	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
Rhode Island	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
South Carolina	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
South Dakota	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Tennessee	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Texas	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
Utah	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
Vermont	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Virginia	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
Washington	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
West Virginia	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
Wisconsin	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Wyoming	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
State Totals	49	11	16	47	12	43	49	10
Federal	No	2009	Proposed	Proposed	Proposed	No	No	No
Washington DC	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes

¹Indicates laws that actually include the terms “cyberbullying” or “cyber-bullying” This is compared to states that simply refer to electronic harassment or bullying using electronic means. See actual law for more details.

²Federal case law allows school to discipline students for off-campus behaviors that results in a substantial disruption of the learning environment at school. These states have simply codified that standard in state statute.

Source: Hinduja, S., & Patchin, J. (2013). Cyberbullying Research. Retrieved from <http://cyberbullying.us>

APPENDIX B
CRITERION QUESTIONNAIRE

This questionnaire is designed to assess whether or not you meet the criteria to be a participant in this research study. Please answer each question below.

1. Are you a school principal working with students in grades 6-8?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
2. Have you dealt/handled at least one cyberbullying incident in your current school administrator position?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

APPENDIX C

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

UNIVERSITY of
NORTHERN COLORADO



Institutional Review Board

DATE: April 19, 2013

TO: Sara Knippenberg, MA

FROM: University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB

PROJECT TITLE: [442000-2] A Phenomenological Exploration of Middle School Principals' Perspectives and Responses to Cyberbullying

SUBMISSION TYPE: Revision

ACTION: APPROVAL/VERIFICATION OF EXEMPT STATUS

DECISION DATE: April 18, 2013

Thank you for your submission of Revision materials for this project. The University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB approves this project and verifies its status as EXEMPT according to federal IRB regulations.

Hello Sara,

Thank you for submitting the requested changes. I am recommending that this project be approved. I wish you the best on this project.

Sincerely,

Wendy Highby

We will retain a copy of this correspondence within our records for a duration of 4 years.

If you have any questions, please contact Sherry May at 970-351-1910 or Sherry.May@unco.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB's records.

APPENDIX D

**CONSENT FORM FOR HUMAN PARTICIPANTS
IN RESEARCH**



CONSENT FORM FOR HUMAN PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH
UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

Project Title: A Phenomenological Exploration of Middle School Principals' Perceptions on Cyberbullying
 Researcher: Sara Knippenberg, MA., Psychology
 Phone: E-mail: knip7430@bears.unco.edu
 Research Advisor: Dr. Hak, Ph.D.
 Phone: 970-351-1603 E-mail: katherine.hak@unco.edu

Purpose and Description: The primary purpose of this study is to explore the middle school principals' perceptions about the cyberbullying occurring in schools today.

Participants will be asked to sit down for one in-depth interview concerning their perceptions about bullying. The interview will take approximately 45 minutes and will be audio recorded. Participants will have the choice to answer any questions they feel comfortable doing so and may end the interview at any point.

At the end of the interviews, we would be happy to share your data with you at your request. The audio recordings will be stored on a locked computer by the lead investigator until the transcriptions have all been completed. We will take every precaution in order to protect your anonymity. We will assign a pseudonym to you. Only the lead investigator will know the name connected with a pseudonym and when we report data, your name will not be used. Data collected and analyzed for this study will only be accessible by the researcher and research assistants.

In this research study there are no foreseeable risks. Subjects do not stand to benefit directly from their participation in this research study. No costs or compensations will be accrued.

Participation is voluntary. You may decide not to participate in this study and if you begin participation you may still decide to stop and withdraw at any time. Your decision will be respected and will not result in loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Having read the above and having had an opportunity to ask any questions, please sign below if you would like to participate in this research. A copy of this form will be given to you to retain for future reference. If you have any concerns about your selection or treatment as a research participant, please contact the Office of Sponsored Programs, Kepner Hall, University of Northern Colorado Greeley, CO 80639; 970-351-2161.

Subject's Signature

Date

Researcher's Signature

Date

APPENDIX E

SAMPLE RECRUITMENT E-MAIL

Dear Principal,

My name is Sara Knippenberg and as a doctoral student at University of Northern Colorado, I am writing to invite you to participate in my graduate research study entitled: A Phenomenological Exploration of Middle School Principals' Perspectives and Responses to Cyberbullying:

The purpose of this study is to increase the understanding of cyberbullying from the principal perspective. Specifically, how it affects student learning in their buildings', the policy and laws utilized to help decrease cyberbullying, intervention and prevention methods and the role school psychologists may play in the intervention. Your perspective will add practical depth and knowledge to anticyberbullying practices. Your participation in this study will also add to the limited research about principal perspectives on cyberbullying in the state of Colorado.

I would be extremely grateful for your decision to participate in this study because your input is absolutely critical and essential to this research. If you decide to participate in this study, you will complete one short demographic questionnaire through e-mail, one 45-minute interview, and a follow-up review of the main themes from your interview. Additionally, I would like to audiotape your interview for the purpose of note taking accuracy and authenticity. You and your school identities will be kept confidential and your responses will remain anonymous throughout the duration and conclusion of this study.

Attached is the approval letter for this study from the IRB for your review.

Please note that your participation in this research project is completely voluntary. If you would like to participate or have any questions about the study, please email or contact me at 508-564-2815 or knip7430@bears.unco.edu. I look forward to working with you.

Most sincerely,

Sara Knippenberg

APPENDIX F

DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

Demographic Questionnaire

Number of students in your school:

Racial/Ethnic breakdown of students:

Number of students on free and reduced lunches:

Number of mental health workers at your school:
(Include social workers, school counselors, and school psychologists)

Length of time in your current school position:

Length of time as a school administrator:

Degree held:

Approximately how many cyberbullying incidents have you addressed in the current school year?

APPENDIX G

INTERVIEW QUESTION GUIDE

Interview Question Guide

1. How would you describe your role as a school administrator?
2. To what extent is technology used in your school?
 - a. Any limitations for students?
3. Would you describe your school culture and/or climate?
4. How would you define cyberbullying?
5. How have you perceived or responded to cyberbullying in your current position?
6. To what extent have you dealt with cyberbullying in schools?
7. How severe of an issue is cyberbullying at your school?
8. How often does it occur?
 - a. Frequent/sporadic?
9. Has cyberbullying disrupted student learning at your school?
 - a. If so, how?
10. Does your school have any policies or programs intended to decrease cyberbullying?
 - a. If so, please describe and how long has it been in place?
 - b. If not, are you developing any?
11. How has the state policy on cyberbullying be helpful in your mission of educating each student in your school building?
 - a. Please explain.
12. How do you address cyberbullying incidents in your school?
13. How do you address cyberbullying incidents that originate off-campus but negatively affect students learning at your school?
 - a. What do you see as the limits of your authority
 - b. What is the threshold event that must occur in order for you to intervene in off-campus cyberbullying incidents?
14. Does your school have, or are you developing, any programming that would address negative behavior such as cyberbullying? Examples include character education programs, empathy training, etc.?
15. How do you the mental health professionals in your school help in the combating the fight against cyberbullying?
 - a. Specifically, what role do school psychologists play?
16. What barriers if any do you perceive to be present when dealing/intervening with cyberbullying?
17. Anything else you would like to add?

APPENDIX H

VIGNETTES

Vignettes

Vignette 1¹

Two female sixth graders, Katie and Tracey, are exchanging malicious instant messages back and forth because of a misunderstanding involving a boy named Jacob. Tracey escalated these messages in viciousness from trivial name-calling to very vicious and inflammatory statements, including death threats.

How do you handle this case? Should the police be contacted? What might a school psychologist's role be?

Vignette 2

James is frustrated and saddened by the comments his middle school peers are making about his sexuality. Furthermore, it appears a group of male students are creating fake-email accounts at Yahoo.com and are sending love notes to other male students as if they came from James- who is mortified at the thought of what is happening.

If you were the school administrator within the school, what would you do if another student approached you concerned about James? Walk me through the steps you would take.

¹Both vignettes were modified from:

Hinduja, S., & Patchin, J. (2009). *Cyberbullying scenarios: Talking to youth about Internet harassment*. Cyberbullying Research Center. Retrieved from http://www.cyberbullying.us/Cyberbullying_Scenarios.pdf

APPENDIX I

PARTICIPANT AND SCHOOL DEMOGRAPHICS

Participant and School Demographics

Participant pseudonym	Gender	Number of Years as Principal in Current Building	Number of years as a school principal	Race and Ethnicity of Students	Free and Reduced Lunch	Total Mental Health Workers
Clive	Male	9	14	58% White; 16% Hispanic; 14% Black; 8% Asian; 3% two or more races; and 1% Hawaii Pacific	21%	4
Jane	Female	4	8	38% White; 26% Hispanic; 18% Black; 13% Asian; 5% two or more races; and 1% American Indian	29%	3
Joe	Male	7	16	38% Hispanic; 28% Black; 23% White; 5% Asian; 4% two or more races; 1% American Indian; and 1% Hawaiian native	63%	4
Melody	Female	1	2	32% White; 31% Black; 28% Hispanic; 6% two or more races; and 3% Asian	54%	2
Michelle	Female	1	8	75% Hispanic; 12% White; 9% Asian/Hawaii Pacific; 2% African American; and 1% two or more races	84%	6
Stu	Male	5.5	8.5	74% White; 12% Hispanic; 6% Asian; 4% two or more races; 2% Black; and 1% American Indian	10%	3

APPENDIX J
POLICY UPDATE

Colorado Cyberbullying Act, House Bill 14-1131

On March 12, 2014, the Colorado House passed House Bill 14-1131, concerning harassment against a minor by using an interactive computer service. As written, the bill would criminalize cyberbullying of a minor as defined in the bill as

any person who knowingly through the use of social media posts or adds any statement, photograph, video, or other information about or pertaining to a minor with the intent to cause the minor to suffer serious emotional distress, or makes a credible threat against a minor that the actor knows or reasonably should know will be communicated to or viewed by the minor, commits cyberbullying if the conduct results in serious emotional distress to any minor.

The term serious emotional distress is not well defined in the bill; therefore caution may need to be taken. According to the bill, no professional treatment or counseling is needed to determine serious emotional distress. This could potentially cause a wide range of actions to be classified as cyberbullying of a minor and therefore be considered criminal conduct. In addition, it is important to remember the First Amendment may protect speech even if it has the intent to cause serious emotional distress.

With regard to the present study, half of the principals were unaware of the state policy (HB-11-1254) relating to cyberbullying and the majority of principals did not use the state policy to guide their practice when addressing cyberbullying in their schools. Principals turned to their school district policy. Further attention should be taken to see how the Colorado Senate responds to the bill. At this point, it is unclear what impact HB-14-1131 could potentially have on public schools and their principals' practices.

Retrieved from http://www.leg.state.co.us/clics/clics2014a/csl.nsf/fsbillcont/9F6D1A968E19084587257C360075E1EF?Open&file=1131_ren.pdf

APPENDIX K
MANUSCRIPT

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL EXPLORATION OF THE MIDDLE SCHOOL
PRINCIPAL'S JOURNEY TO BUILD A SAFE SCHOOL
WHILE COMBATING CYBERBULLYING

Abstract

This study explored the perspectives and responses of school principals to cyberbullying incidents occurring at their schools. This was accomplished by qualitative methods of data collection and analysis, namely through in-depth interviews of six school principals working in large school districts in the Denver-metro area. The seven steps of the modified van Kaam method (Moustakas, 1994) were used in this study to help portray the meanings of each participant's experiences. The data were synthesized and extrapolated into the following five major emergent themes: (a) First, Gather the Facts; (b) Addressing the Incident; (c) Barriers to Preventing Cyberbullying, (d) Developing Partnerships; and (e) Building Safe Schools. Within the First, Gather the Facts theme, the principals stressed the need to collect information from multiple sources and validate the accuracy of that information by determining the nexus to the school and if the incident was truly cyberbullying and not just conflict. In the second emerging theme, Addressing the Incident, the principals expressed that during the investigation they provided support to the victim and sent the main message to their students--the bullying must stop. Within the Barriers to Prevention Cyberbullying theme, principals described the greatest barriers: technology, location, and anonymity. In the fourth emerging theme, Developing Partnerships, principals stressed the importance of working collaboratively with police, parents, and mental health professionals to better prevent and intervene with cyberbullying. Within the final emerging theme, Building Safe Schools, principals discussed how cyberbullying was mostly reported by students, state bullying policy was not a driving force in most of the principals' actions, and all principals used a variety of

programming for both intervention and prevention of cyberbullying. However, data based decisions were not commonly used to direct those efforts and all principals expressed the need to establish and maintain a positive school climate.

Keywords Cyberbullying. Principals. Middle School. School Psychologists. Bullying intervention. Prevention.

Introduction

Bullying has become a global phenomenon and has been studied since the 1970s (Li, 2006; Mason, 2008). Bullying had previously been considered a rite of passage or an experience children must survive (Swearer & Espelage, 2004). Bullying was minimally regarded or overlooked as a serious problem even though educators knew students need a safe learning environment in order to flourish (Olweus, Limber, & Mihalic, 1999). However, in the last 20 years, researchers have found the significant impact bullying truly has on students emotionally, socially, and academically. Nansel et al. (2001) defined bullying as “a specific type of aggression in which (a) the behavior is intended to harm or disturb, (b) the behavior occurs repeatedly over time, and (c) there is an imbalance of power” (p. 2094). According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (2011), 28% of students ages 12-18 reported they were victims of bullying in school during the 2008-2009 school year. Because almost one-third of students face bullying at school, it is important to understand the impact bullying may have on students. Traditional bullying has been linked to

- Disrupted social and emotional development of adolescents (Raskauskas & Stoltz, 2007).

- Lowered self-esteem and higher levels of anxiety (Kowalski, Limber, & Agatston, 2008).
- Increased academic risk caused by the stress and distractions of bullying (Kowalski et al., 2008).

Traditional bullying has been transformed and extended with the use of technology. The National Center for Education Statistics (2000) reported that 99% of public schools in America have computers with Internet access (as cited in Writ et al., 2002). Cox Communications (2012) reported in their *Tween Internet Safety Survey* that 77% of parents (with tweens ages 10-13) said Internet safety was of major concern. Half of the parents reported they could not control everything their tween did and saw online (Cox Communications, 2012). With the increased use of computers and the likelihood that total supervision is impossible, cyberbullying has quickly developed into a dangerous new phenomenon (Hinduja & Patchin, 2008).

The 2008-2009 *School Crime Supplement* surveyed 4, 326 students in grades 6 through 12 across the country and found that 6% had experienced some form of electronic bullying (DeVoe & Bauer, 2011). However, other national studies found prevalence rates ranging from 9% to 75% (Hinduja & Patchin, 2008; Juvonen & Gross, 2008; National Crime Prevention Council, 2007). These large differences might be due to a number of factors including the survey instruments and the method of assessment (i.e., telephone interviews, paper and pencil surveys, and online surveys). Hinduja and Patchin (2013) discussed the methodologies of several of their research studies. The first two studies included only online teenagers who voluntarily participated and who had higher prevalence rates of cyberbullying as compared to further studies that included

random samples of known populations in schools. In addition to the methodological differences, the varying operational definitions of cyberbullying used in the studies might have contributed to the variance in prevalence rates.

Despite the lack of a consistent definition, cyberbullying has brought new challenges to school administrators and educators in addition to the problems associated with traditional bullying. The characteristics of cyberbullying make it harder for school officials to intervene. Cyberbullying differs from bullying in four main ways: (a) the perpetrators have a perceived sense of anonymity; (b) the size of the audience (number of bystanders) might be unlimited; (c) the perpetrator is unable to observe the victim's reaction; and (d) victims are available to their perpetrators 24 hours a day. The research that exists about the effects of cyberbullying suggests that they are similar to those of traditional bullying (Kowalski et al., 2008). Victims might withdraw from school activities and might become sick, depressed, and possibly suicidal (Willard, 2007). Raskauskas and Stoltz (2007) asked participants open-ended questions to identify effects of cyberbullying. In that study, the participants who had been cyberbullied felt they had been negatively affected. The most common effects were emotional and social disruptions to their lives and feelings of sadness, hopelessness, and powerlessness. In extreme cases, cyberbullying has been linked to adolescent suicide (Raskauskas & Stoltz, 2007). Hinduja and Patchin's (2010) study of middle-school students in a large school district in the United States found the students who had experienced traditional bullying or cyberbullying as either the bully or victim had more suicidal thoughts and were more likely to attempt suicide than those who had not experienced any forms of bullying. Also, victims of bullying were more likely to have suicidal thoughts than the bullies.

“Cyberbullying is emerging as one of the most challenging issues facing parents and school personnel as students embrace the Internet and other mobile communication technologies” (Beale & Hall, 2007, p.12). Social, emotional, and academic impacts and even suicidal ideation can be attributed to cyberbullying. The most serious consequence of cyberbullying, suicide, has taken the lives of several young students. The effects of cyberbullying incidents occurring while students are at home can bleed into the school environment, impacting students emotionally and academically. Students need an environment free of harassment and violence to reach their learning goals (Ubban & Hughes, 1997). Cyberbullying incidents can “undermine school climate, interfere with victims’ school functioning, and put some students at risk for serious mental health and safety problems” (Feinberg & Robey, 2008, p. 10). Schools have long played an important role in the health and safety of students; thus, when cyberbullying occurs, schools play a crucial role even if the bullying has occurred off-campus (Stewart & Fritsch, 2011).

Research on cyberbullying is still in the exploratory stages; there are gaps that must be filled to generate more information on the phenomenon and its widespread effects (Kowalski et al., 2008; Patchin & Hinduja, 2006; Tokunaga, 2010). While a great deal of research addressed the prevalence of cyberbullying, there was very little research on how school administrators perceived this problem and, subsequently, responded or intervened in instances of cyberbullying. Administrators have long been called to intervene with bullying, but cyberbullying has presented new difficulties. Also, the issue of how to intervene with cyberbullying that has occurred off school grounds is a topic of heated debate. With regard to cyberbullying,

“there is no empirical evidence that exists to validate effective prevention or intervention measures; therefore, research into these areas is warranted.

Nevertheless traditional...bullying research will provide the foundation for cyberbullying prevention and intervention recommendation. (Mason, 2008, p. 333)

There is a need to understand school administrators’ perspectives of cyberbullying occurring in their schools so other professionals, specifically school psychologists, can better help combat cyberbullying. In-depth qualitative research is lacking across the entire genre of bullying research but particularly lacking is an understanding of how cyberbullying is being combated from the principal’s perspective.

The purpose of this study was to examine school principals’ perspectives of and responses to cyberbullying in urban middle schools. The following main research question was addressed: How do middle school principals perceive and respond to cyberbullying? Four research sub questions were also addressed:

1. Under what conditions does cyberbullying have an impact on the school’s learning environment and its students?
2. What intervention and prevention strategies are most effective for reducing cyberbullying?
3. What role do school psychologists play in preventing cyberbullying and intervening to combat its effects?
4. What policies or laws guide or influence the way school principals deal with cyberbullying incidents?

Research Design and Methodology

Research Approach and Design

Qualitative research has its roots in the fields of sociology and anthropology (Vidich & Lyman, 1994). Both of these fields seek to understand other people and are committed to understanding self. More recently, qualitative research has been accepted by educational researchers (Borg & Gall, 1989). Qualitative research is an overarching concept encompassing several forms of inquiry that “help us understand and explain the meaning of social phenomena with as little disruption of the natural setting as possible” (Merriam, 1998, p. 5). Qualitative research allows the reader to step into the participant’s perspective at a given time and moment, allowing for insight through a naturalistic study and making it possible to better understand a participant’s opinions, attitudes, beliefs, and values (Patton, 2002). Qualitative inquiry provides researchers with purposive strategies rather than methodological rules and inquiry approaches rather than formulas (Patton, 2002).

Phenomenology is a rigorous, critical, systematic investigation of phenomena from the participants’ perspective (Streubert & Carpenter, 1999). It is also an inductive and descriptive research method. The main focus of phenomenological analysis is to understand how the everyday, inter-subjective world is constituted (Schwandt, 2000) from the participants' point of view. The phenomenon is not what reality is but rather how it is perceived (Burns & Grove, 1998). Phenomenological investigation guides the researcher to a topic and questions that have both social meaning and personal significance (Moustakas, 1994). Personal history brings the core of the problem into focus (Moustakas, 1994).

For this study, I chose phenomenology to gain new insights, discover new ideas, and increase my knowledge of cyberbullying. I entered the research study with curiosity from the point of not knowing how school administrators perceive cyberbullying (Creswell, 1998). The goals of this study were to understand school principals' experiences with and perspectives about cyberbullying to help better understand and address the problem. My intent was to gather information during the study to better inform those who are responsible for prevention and intervention strategies. Further, I have been able to shed new light on the school administrators' perspective of the role of the school psychologist in cyberbullying intervention.

Selection of Participants

The study was conducted in the state of Colorado and included large, urban school districts. The schools were identified from large urban school districts with more than 30,000 students and had at least 10 middle schools (including K-8 schools) within the district. Each school's student body population was described in terms of population size, socioeconomic status, and ethnicity based on the participant's demographic questionnaire and school data information available on the Internet. In this study, school principals from these schools were the population of interest. I chose this population because I found little cyberbullying research was focused in the state of Colorado specifically. It was important to look at school principals' perspectives in individual states because bullying and cyberbullying laws and policies are the responsibilities of the states.

Criterion-based, purposive sampling method was used for this study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Participants were chosen based on their experiences with cyberbullying as

middle school principals. Schools principals serving students in grades 6 through 8 in large urban school districts were identified from the Colorado Department of Education website and individual school district websites, both of which are publicly accessible on the Internet. Participants were adults and were not from any special or vulnerable populations; therefore, there was little or no risk to them during the study. The participants were selected based on the purpose of the research and whether they met the criterion of having dealt with cyberbullying as school administrators in their current schools (Babbie, 1995; Schwandt, 1997).

Data Collection and Analysis

Qualitative research often requires more than one method of data collection to help the researcher gain a true and full understanding of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007; Patton, 2002). For this research study, I used three types of data collection: (a) individual, semi-structured, open-ended interviews; (b) vignettes; and (c) demographic questionnaires.

Individual, semi-structured, open-ended interviews. School principals' perspectives of cyberbullying were collected using individual, semi-structured interviews composed of open-ended questions. Interview questions were based on a review of literature and preliminary conversations with middle school principals with whom I was familiar outside the study population.

Given the nature and ideologies of qualitative research, I met with each participant at his or her convenience. Interviews were conducted at the participants' school or a location of their choice. Given the value of school administrators' time, I used one shorter interview session. I requested one 45-minute session to conduct the

interview. In the interview session, I asked the participants questions from the interview protocol, followed up with questions if necessary, and asked the questions from the demographic questionnaire.

In addition to the audio recordings of the interviews, I kept fieldnotes after each interview. I also kept a reflection journal during the entire research experience. I used these methods to help limit my opinions from entering into the data analysis phase and to ensure the authentic nature of the research being conducted (Bodgan & Biklen, 2007).

Vignettes. In addition to the interview questions, participants were asked to respond to two vignettes about hypothetical cyberbullying incidents that mirrored real-life situations. Vignettes provided “an opportunity to engage study participants actively in producing, reflecting on, and learning from the data” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 80). I made modifications to two cyberbullying vignettes written by Hinduja and Patchin (2009) for education instructional purposes. The cyberbullying incidents used in the vignettes included examples of the different types of cyberbullying and different challenges that exist. Each participant was told at the beginning of the interview that the vignettes being presented might be examples of possible incidents that might occur in their middle school. Participants were asked to react to each vignette and respond to the incident as if he or she were the administrator in the case.

Demographic questionnaires. Each participant was asked to complete a demographic questionnaire at the end of the interview. Questions included age range, number of years as a principal, number of years worked in the current position, race, gender, highest level of degree obtained, and any licensures. Next, the participants were asked to describe their schools. Topics included the number of students, number of

mental health professionals, and number of students receiving free or reduced lunches. The responses from this questionnaire were used to understand each participant and how these demographics influenced his or her attitudes and perspectives toward cyberbullying.

Data Analysis

The purpose of data analysis was to identify emerging patterns by grouping responses into meaningful categories and themes so they could be identified, coded, categorized, classified, and labeled (Patton, 2002). Specifically, I analyzed the data of this research study using Moustakas' (1994) seven-step modified van Kaam method of analysis of phenomenological data (pp. 120-121). The seven steps of the modified van Kaam, were used in this study to help portray the meanings of the experiences each of the participants presented within the individual structural and textural-structural descriptions (Moustakas, 1994). First, I listed all textual data to develop groupings or themes. Second, I reduced and eliminated the invariant themes of the phenomenon. Third, I clustered the core themes. Fourth, I checked for patterns against the interview transcripts. Fifth, I developed an individual textual description of the experience for each participant. Sixth, I created an individual structural description based upon the textual data description. Finally, I created an individual textural-structural description of the combined textual interview data. From the individual textual-structural descriptions, I developed a composite description of the meanings and essences of the experiences and used it to describe the group as a whole (Moustakas, 1994).

Findings and Discussion

Through in-depth analysis of the semi-structured, open-ended interviews, field notes, and demographic questionnaires, five major themes were identified: (a) First, Gathering the Facts; (b) Addressing the Incident; (c) Barriers to preventing Cyberbullying; (d) Developing Partnerships; and (e) Building Safe Schools. The five emergent themes were then regrouped into the following themes to adequately discuss the main findings in light of the current literature: addressing conflict in middle schools, integrating programming efforts, and policy and participation of stakeholders in cyberbullying prevention and intervention.

Meet the Participants

Clive Bixby

Clive Bixby is a middle school principal in a large Denver metropolitan school serving over 800 students in grades 6-8. Clive has served in his current school position for nine years and had been a school administrator for 14 years. He holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in social sciences, a Master of Arts in educational administration, and a Ph.D. in educational leadership. The racial and ethnic breakdown of students at his school is as follows: 58% White, 16% Hispanic, 14% Black, 8% Asian, 3% two or more races, and 1% Hawaii Pacific. Twenty-one percent of students receive free or reduced lunches. There were four mental health workers at Clive's school: one social worker (.8 FTE), two school counselors, and one school psychologist (.2 FTE).

Clive reported that he had addressed approximately one cyberbullying incident per week in the past school year. Clive defined cyberbullying:

Harassment over any electronic device because that is what it is—it's just harassment. It would be targeted and repetitive and with a purpose and with malicious intent. The difference is the intention and repetitiveness of targeting as opposed to cyber harassment or cyber bad behavior.

Michelle

Michelle is a middle school principal in a large Denver metropolitan school serving over 800 students in grades 6-8. She has served in that position for one year and had been a school administrator for eight years. She is currently working on her Ph.D. in educational leadership. The racial and ethnic breakdown of the students at her school are as follows: 75% Hispanic, 12% White, 9% Asian/Hawaii Pacific, 2% African American, and 1% two or more races. Eighty-four percent of the students receive free or reduced lunches. There are six mental health workers at Michelle's school: one full-time social worker, one full-time school counselor, three student advisors, and one part-time school psychologist.

Michelle reported she had addressed at least one cyberbullying incident weekly in the past school year. Michelle defined cyberbullying:

Any type of social media whether it is Facebook, Twitter, any of the new ones...and certainly e-mails, but I think right now in our world it's text messaging, where it happens the fastest, if not Facebook. So I think any type of continuous coming at another student for whatever reason. In this case, they typically make fun of the way each other looks. That tends to be the one. Or threatening to stay away from boyfriends or girlfriends and that sort of stuff. It

wouldn't necessarily have to be continuous about the same thing, but if they continue to be threatening.

Melody

Melody is a middle school principal in a large Denver metropolitan school district; her school serves over 800 students. She has held her current school position for one year and had been a school administrator for two years. Melody earned her Ph.D. in educational leadership. The racial and ethnic breakdown of the students is as follows: 32% White, 31% Black, 28% Hispanic, 6% two or more races, and 3% Asian. Fifty-four percent of students receive free or reduced lunches. There are two mental health workers at Melody's school: one social worker who serves four days a week and a school psychologist who serves one day a week.

Melody reported that she had addressed four cyberbullying incidents in the past school year. Melody defined cyberbullying as "anytime that there is abuse of power, an imbalance that mostly happens through social media, texting, sexting, and Facebook."

Jane

Jane is principal in a large Denver metropolitan school that serves over 600 students in grades preschool through 8. She has served in that position for four years and had been a school administrator for eight years. She holds a Bachelor of Science degree in education, a Master of Arts in school leadership, and a Ph.D. in educational leadership. The racial and ethnic breakdown of the students at her school is as follows: 38% White, 26% Hispanic, 18% Black, 13% Asian, 5% two or more races, and 1% American Indian. Twenty-nine percent of students receive free or reduced lunches. There are three mental

health workers at Jane's school: one part-time social worker (1.5 days per week), one school counselor, and one school psychologist (1.5 days per week).

Jane reported she had addressed three to six cyberbullying incidents in the past school year. Jane defined cyberbullying:

Looking at the pure definition of bullying, anything that is mean and mean-spirited and harmful and threatening and continued, then you take that to the cyber realm. You take that to social media, you take it to phone calls, messages, instant messages, anything that uses electronic technology as your medium to do that.

Joe

Joe is a middle school principal in a large Denver metropolitan school district; his school serves over 900 students. He has served in that position for seven years and had been a school administrator for 16 years. He holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in education and a Master of Arts in educational administration. The racial and ethnic breakdown of the students at his school is as follows: 38% Hispanic, 28% Black, 23% White, 5% Asian, 4% two or more races, 1% American Indian, and 1% Hawaiian native. Sixty-three percent of students receive free or reduced lunches. There are four mental health workers at Joe's school: one part-time social worker, two school counselors, and one school psychologist.

Joe reported he had addressed over 80 cyberbullying incidents in the past school year. Joe defined cyberbullying:

Any kind of comments that are going to make another student uncomfortable or unsafe or afraid, cyberbullying through Facebook, text messages, other social

media outlets, which we seem to deal with these days, that's what we would consider cyberbullying. And it's no different than bullying; it's the same process.

Stu

Stu is a middle school principal in a large Denver metropolitan school district; his school serves over 900 students in grades 7 and 8. He has served in that position for five and half years and had been a school administrator for eight and half years. He holds a Master of Arts in education administration and special education. The racial and ethnic breakdown of students at his school is as follows: 74% White, 12% Hispanic, 6% Asian, 4% two or more races, 2% Black, and 1% American Indian. Ten percent of students receive free or reduced lunches. There were three mental health workers at Stu's school: one social worker (.8 FTE), one school counselor, and one school psychologist.

Stu reported he had addressed about three cyberbullying incidents in the past school year. He defined cyberbullying:

I always start with bullying is bullying, and cyberbullying is simply a vehicle to perpetrate it. In my mind it has to meet these three criteria: 1) it needs to be negative and hurtful unwanted behavior, physical or verbal; 2) it has to be ongoing or repeated; and 3) it has to have an imbalance of power, which gets very, very tricky. And then the cyberbullying part is that it is electronic, social media. The finer definition would include the medium being used because if it is text messages direct to the person or Facebook page or Instagram page, you have to go there to read them. The medium is then what defines it from being so unique and a nuisance. It is difficult in the context today, but I maintain the same general definition as for bullying.

Emergent Themes

First, Gather the Facts

All participants stressed the need to collect information from multiple sources and validate the accuracy of that information. Participants gathered information from all parties involved including from the reporting student and bystanders. The goal of the investigation was to figure out who was involved and what aspects of the incident could be proved and validated.

Three of the six participants used the phrase *nexus to school* to describe how they determined the extent of their role in addressing the incident. Three participants discussed whether the incident had occurred off campus; if it had but it also had an impact on the school environment, they properly addressed the incident. One of the principals did not use the term *nexus to school*, but he felt strongly about handling all cyberbullying incidents whether the incident originated on or off campus.

Several principals expressed that much of what they saw at their school was more conflict than true (cyber) bullying and emphasized the need to differentiate between the two. The participants also expressed how they handled conflict differently from bullying. They felt students needed better tools to handle conflicts on their own.

Addressing the Incident

During the investigation, all participants stated they provided support to the victim. All principals talked with the victim to determine the facts of the case as well his or her state of mind. Principals found out how this was impacting the victim at school and what support the school could provide. They also conducted a threat assessment or

suicide assessment if necessary, did regular check-ins with victims of bullying, and brought in the parents of the victim.

All of the principals had the same main message for their students: *the bullying must stop*. Three of the principals emphasized using the restorative approach to restore the relationship. Students would be explicitly told the consequences if they continued to participate in bullying behaviors. Two of the principals both stated that discipline really depended on the situation at hand and the perpetrators of the bullying incident was appropriately disciplined.

Barriers to Preventing Cyberbullying

Several principals described barriers to the prevention of cyberbullying at their school: technology, location, and anonymity. One of the greatest barriers to preventing or stopping cyberbullying was technology itself. Several principals mentioned different aspects of technology and how they made it harder to stop cyberbullying from occurring. Getting the actual textual evidence of what was being said or posted was often challenging. Another huge barrier to combating cyberbullying was the anonymity kids felt when online. The anonymity allowed students to use lot of aggressive, sexual language. One of the other greatest barriers was the location of most of the cyberbullying occurring outside of the school.

Developing Partnerships

All the participants stated that they involved the police (student resource officer) when a threat was made by a student, especially if there was any imminent or direct danger. Two of the principals also asked the police for additional support to help shut

down any e-mails or websites being used to carry out the cyberbullying and to help educate students and parents on the law.

Four of the six principals emphasized the need to work collaboratively with parents to protect kids. They stated it was important to have conversations with parents and involve them in the investigation and the resolutions. The principals also contacted and involved the parents of the perpetrators. Two of the principals expressed their desire to have greater parent involvement, the need for more resources for parents to assist them in dealing with cyberbullying, and educating them to help stop cyberbullying.

Overall, school counselors, school psychologists, and social workers made up the schools' mental health teams. However, there was a lack of cohesive partnerships with mental health professionals. As shown in the participants' demographics section, the schools varied greatly by the number of mental health professionals they were allocated. Typically, the mental health professionals were the first level of support for the victim by addressing the victim's immediate emotional concerns.

The participants described their partnerships with their school counselors when addressing cyberbullying. Typically, school counselors supported the victims of bullying and utilized mediation and restorative justice when appropriate. Social workers were also part of many of the schools' mental health teams. The role of the social worker typically included educating parents and kids and conducting the threat assessment. Not all schools used their social worker to help address cyberbullying incidents. The principals also described their partnerships with school psychologists. The school psychologists often worked at the schools on a more limited basis as compared to the other mental

health professionals. Overall, the school psychologist conducted threat and suicide assessments and supported victims of cyberbullying.

Building Safe Schools

Four of the five principals who reported on this theme stated that most cyberbullying incidents were reported by students but teachers, staff, and parents also made reports. They all emphasized the need to have both a concrete plan for reporting including what cyberbullying is and a variety of safe ways for people to make reports.

The participants were asked to share their knowledge of the state policy on cyberbullying. Some of the participants were unaware of what the state policy said. I provided them with a short summary to help them better comment on how the policy impacted their work. Three of the principals said they were not familiar with the state policy on cyberbullying. Despite not knowing the policy, the principals felt as though their schools were adequately addressing cyberbullying. Two of the principals used the state policy to help guide their practice as principals.

Each participant described in detail the programs he or she used to help prevent and intervene with cyberbullying. Three participants discussed the schools' use of Positive Behavior Intervention Support (PBIS; Agatston, Kowalski, & Limber, 2007) as their main framework for creating positive school environments. Two principals spoke specifically of the Olweus (1992) *Bullying Prevention Program* implemented at their schools. Several participants also used various non-evidence-based practices to help with prevention and intervention of bullying: *Pause Before You Post* (2014), Youth Empowerment Support Services (YESS; 2012) curriculum, the *Bully* (Lowen & Hirsch, 2011) movie, *A No Place for Hate School* (Anti-Defamation League, 2006), and *Rachel's*

Challenge (n.d.). After students were involved in cyberbullying incidents, principals monitored these students to help ensure it did not continue; one program suggested for this type of targeted intervention was the *Let's Get Real* (Kim & Logan 2004) curriculum.

When participants were asked how they measured the success of their prevention and intervention efforts, they gave a variety of responses. Two of the principals used surveys to help assess the bullying situation at their schools and one principal collected data for his school at the end of every year. They had records on disciplinary infractions and cyberbullying was one of them. Two of the principals expressed difficulties with measuring prevention and intervention efforts, especially quantitatively.

Three of the six principals emphasized the importance of establishing a positive school climate. One principal believed his school environment contributed to lower rates of bullying. These principals understood the importance of maintaining a positive school climate for all of the students. Within the positive school climate was the importance of building and maintaining relationships with both peers and teachers.

Interpretation of Findings

Addressing Conflict in Middle Schools

The research study revealed that conflict as defined within this study was when two or more students had an argument or traded insults back and forth; this appeared just as concerning as and possibly more prominent than cyberbullying with middle school students. Several of the principals expressed that much of what they saw at their school was conflict rather than true (cyber) bullying, especially when the principals discovered both sides of the incident. Stopbullying.gov lists several aggressive types of behavior

that do not meet definition of bullying: peer conflict, hazing, dating violence, and stalking. However, these behaviors are still considered serious and should be properly addressed. Stopbullying.gov suggests that these behaviors need to be handled differently than bullying. Specifically, Stopbullying.gov refers to peer conflict as follows: “It is not bullying when two kids with no perceived power imbalance fight, have an argument, or disagree.” Peer mediation and conflict resolution are suggested ways to address peer conflict in schools.

One of the greatest areas of concern was students who were in continuous conflict with others. Principals expressed the need to proactively address conflict and help students understand their role within their conflicts. Yacco and Smith (2010) stated that “resolving conflict constructively can provide students in school settings opportunities to practice communication skills and improve relationships” (p. 1). Research on the impact of conflict is similar to the bullying research that unresolved conflict can have a negative impact on student learning (Daunic & Smith, 2010). National studies have found prevalence rates of cyberbullying ranging from 9% to 75% (Hinduja & Patchin, 2008; Juvonen & Gross, 2008; National Crime Prevention Council, 2007). These large differences might be due to a number of factors including the survey instruments and the method of assessment (i.e., telephone interviews, paper and pencil surveys, and online surveys). Hinduja and Patchin (2013) discussed the methodologies of several of their research studies. The first two studies they conducted included only online teenagers who voluntarily participated; these studies had higher prevalence rates of cyberbullying as compared to further studies that included random samples of known populations in schools. In addition to the methodological differences, the varying operational

definitions of cyberbullying used in the studies might have contributed to the variance in prevalence rates. This variance in the operation definition might allow students to report what was actually conflict to be thought of as cyberbullying.

However, the principals expressed addressing conflict should be handled differently than bullying incidents. As stated on the Stopbullying.gov website, “bullying is not a conflict; it is a form of victimization. Like those who experience child abuse or domestic violence, children who are bullied are victimized.” This is an important point to make. Bullying and conflict should be handled differently; conflict resolution and peer mediation are not appropriate interventions for bullying incidents (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). Rather, these strategies are supported for use when the students are both equally at fault for the incident or conflict at hand. According to several of the principals, students need to be given the tools to handle conflicts on their own. Joe stated that if the incident turned out to be more conflict, the best approach is to have the individuals involved referred to a counselor for mediation. Punitive strategies such as detention and suspension, used more with bullying behaviors, do not help teach students to handle conflict (Polsgrove & Smith, 2004). School administrators are seeking new ways of preventing these conflicts through programs like conflict resolution and peer mediation (Yacco & Smith, 2010). “Conflict resolution programs and peer mediation strategies can empower middle school students...by offering training and experiences in resolving their conflicts in a constructive way (Yacco & Smith, 2010, p. 1). Adolescents are at the age where they are beginning to engage in higher levels of cognition such as abstract thinking and self-reflection (Akos, 2005); therefore, adolescents have the ability

to develop and master skills taught by these programs to better handle conflict (Yacco & Smith, 2010).

The principals in this study did not comment specifically on conflict resolution or peer mediation programs but they did talk extensively on the use of the restorative approach to help strengthen relationships and connections within their schools.

Restorative practices were derived from the criminal justice systems' use of restorative justice. According to Costello, Wachtel, and Watchel (2009), "to be restorative means to believe that decisions are best made and conflicts are best resolved by those most directly involved in them" (p. 7). The double edge sword of living in a society is there are benefits from social interactions but there is also conflict. These conflicts result when people perceive things differently, fail to do the right thing, and end up hurting one another. The laws and leaders of a society are there to help mediate and protect all individuals. This concept is no different in schools with rules and administrators. "But in the face of increasingly challenging behavior in the form on incivility, misconduct, bullying, and even violence, many schools are struggling to fulfill the societal obligation" (Costello et al., 2009, p.49).

The use of the restorative process in schools helps build more positive relationships and restore the sense of community. Costello et al. (2009) reported, "With the push for academic achievement and accountability, there seem to be many new mandates imposed on classroom teachers and school administrators, leaving less time for building relationships and connections with students" (p. 8). However, without the focus on building positive relationships, students feel less connected to the school and are less likely to succeed in school. Costello et al. ended with this sentiment:

Running a school is a complex task. Learning outcomes, safety, standardized test performance, teacher retention, building maintenance, budgets and strategic plans are only a few of the challenges a school administrator faces.... The field of restorative practices offers a framework for implementing school wide change while at the same time engaging all of the stakeholders. (p. 81)

Several of the principals spoke of the importance of building and sustaining positive relationships within schools among students, teachers, and parents. If incidents such as (cyber) bullying were interfering with these relationships and impacting the learning environment, principals addressed them immediately.

Integrating Programming

Olweus was one of the first leading bullying researchers to suggest bullying is a systemic problem and therefore intervention efforts should be implemented across the entire school and not just targeted at individual bullies and victims (Smith, Schneider, Smith, & Ananiadou, 2004). Olweus et al. (1999) stated that bullying prevention programs with a focus of positive school climate and consistent, school-wide programming tended to be more effective than the targeted classroom only intervention efforts that just address the bullies and victims. One possible reason for this difference is the integrity and fidelity in which these stand-alone bullying curriculums are implemented; often staff feel overwhelmed, are not trained well, and doubt the effectiveness of these programs (Biggs, Vernberg, Twemlow, Fonagy, & Dill, 2008).

The U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS; 2013) issued this message with regard to bullying prevention:

There is no one-size-fits-all or simple solution for addressing bullying behavior. Rather, efforts to prevent and address bullying behavior should be embedded within a comprehensive, multitiered behavioral framework used to establish a positive school environment, set high academic and behavioral expectations for all students, and guide delivery of evidence-based instruction and interventions that address the needs of students, including students with disabilities.

Current research in bullying prevention also promotes this multi-tiered system consisting of three levels: universal, targeted, and intensive (U.S. Department of Education, 2014).

Of great importance in this research study was the use of a framework of prevention for (cyber) bullying by several of the principals. They stated the use of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) and the Olweus *Bullying Prevention Program*. It was clear these programs used by principals fit into the multi-tiered system of prevention; however, none of them spoke specifically of the tiered system. To best understand the levels of interventions within all the principals' schools, the findings were presented at each of the multi-tiered systems--universal, targeted, and intensive. This also helped identify areas for improvement in the prevention efforts for several of the principals.

There have yet to be empirically supported approaches to online safety and prevention of cyberbullying (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010); therefore, traditional bullying intervention methods should be expanded to address the issues surrounding digital communication and should include the combined efforts of schools, teachers, students, families, law enforcement personnel, and the community (Feinberg & Robey, 2010; Hinduja & Patchin, 2010; Mason, 2008). The principals in this research study also did

not differentiate between bullying and cyberbullying programming for prevention and intervention. At times, the principals provided specific strategies (i.e., *Pause before You Post*, 2014) they used to target cyberbullying; these were done within their bullying prevention and intervention efforts.

Universal level. The first tier of intervention is at the universal or school level. Goals of whole-school approaches to intervention and prevention commonly include developing effective school-wide policies, increasing staff awareness and responsiveness, surveying students' experiences, and educating parents on bullying concerns (Snell & Hirschstein, 2005). The principals in this study provided an overwhelming amount of information they used at the universal level to help combat (cyber) bullying including programs such as PBIS and Olweus (1992) *Bullying Prevention Program*.

Ross and Horner (2009) conducted a single-subject, multiple baseline design across six students and three elementary schools to examine the effectiveness of incorporating bullying prevention into PBIS. They found decreased incidents of bullying for all six students observed and in the social responses from victims and bystanders. The school staff also rated the program as being effective and efficient. The majority of the principals emphasized the importance of establishing a positive school climate. Two of the principals spoke specifically of using PBIS to help create a positive school climate. Also, within their PBIS programs, several of the principals targeted anti- (cyber) bullying practices. Overall, several of the principals were in agreement that a positive school climate contributed to lower rates of bullying and maintained the social/emotional well-being of their students.

School-wide bullying prevention programs are designed to improve the overall school climate (Lehr, 2005). Current bullying research suggests the use of the following evidence-based programs for middle school: Olweus (1992) *Bullying Prevention Program (BPP)*, *Bully Proofing Your School* (BPYS; National Center for School Engagement, 1992) and *Second Step* (Committee for Children, 2014). The principals discussed the specific programs and campaigns they used to target anti- (cyber) bullying incidents. These programs were Olweus (1992) *Bullying Prevention Program*, *A No Place for Hate School* (Anti-Defamation League, 2006), *Pause Before You Post* (2014), *Rachel' Challenge* (n.d.), and the YESS (2012) curriculum. Several of these programs were incorporated into their PBIS programming and helped build a positive school climate as well as specific cyberbullying practices.

At the core of concepts like PBIS and positive school environments are strong established relationships. Mishna (2012) spoke of the importance of having that positive relationship:

Positive relationships with parents, peers and teachers are invaluable protective factors, which can counter the effects of negative occurrences and challenges. The adult-child relationship influences children's ability to manage in many areas, including bullying situations. (p. 1)

Two of the principals in particular worked very hard on building positive relationships with their students and staff. Having these positive relationships helped the principals better understand the needs of the students and facilitated intervening quickly with any incidents of cyberbullying.

The lack of empirically supported school-based bullying prevention programs makes it important for schools to collect and use their own data to evaluate their own prevention efforts (Swearer, Espelage, & Napolitano, 2009). It is vital to make data-based decisions when it comes to planning and evaluating bullying prevention and intervention (Swearer, Espelage, & Napolitano, 2009). Numerous surveys with varied foci are available to measure bullying behaviors; thus, it is important for school personnel to critically select a measure or measures that match their schools' unique characteristics and needs (Swearer et al., 2009). These surveys can measure specific topics such as frequency and types, adult and peer response, locations including "hot spots," staff perceptions and attitudes about bullying, aspects of the school or community that might support or help stop it, and student perceptions of safety and school climate (Stopbullying.gov). Several of the principals collected climate and bullying assessment data. Surveys used included the Olweus (1992) pre- and post-bullying survey, adult climate surveys, and disciplinary infractions. Data are essential for school administrators, staff, parents, and students to understand the severity and impact of cyberbullying at their school. Several additional surveys and assessments that could be used by the schools to measure their climate and bullying include American Institutes for Research's (2012) *Conditions for Learning Survey*, *Perceived School Experiences Scales* (Anderson-Butcher, Amorose, Iachini, & Ball, 2011), *Effective School Battery* (Gottfredson, 2011), *Children's Social Behavior Scale-Self Report* (Bosworth, Espelage, & Simon, 2011), and *Victimization Scale* (Safe Supportive Learning, 2011).

Targeted level. Targeted level practices should include group counseling, service type of activities, and classroom level programs. A classroom-level prevention program

should (a) establish classroom rules against bullying with the help of the students so they have a sense of personal responsibility; (b) have teachers provide rewards or reinforcement for good social behaviors and consequences for undesirable behaviors; and (c) hold regular classroom meetings to provide a forum for students and teachers to discuss their concerns (Center for the Study and Prevention of School Violence, 2008).

Only one principal in this study was very specific on the targeted practices she used. She created a student support group to help stop bullying and gave the kids an opportunity to voice some of their concerns. Her school also conducted a restorative circle where all the kids were asked questions and everyone in the group had an opportunity to express themselves. The other principals did not provide details about their types of targeted level practices to combat cyberbullying. This would be the greatest area of improvement for school principals. Individual classrooms need to support school-wide bullying prevention efforts and teachers need to be well trained. Groups of students also need to be identified who could benefit from more targeted interventions such as group counseling and service learning projects to help support victims and deter perpetrators.

Intensive level. The intensive level of intervention targets the individuals—the bullies and the victims. This level of intervention is designed to help students improve or change their behavior (Olweus et al., 2009). When a bully or a victim is identified, several key actions are required. First, a school administrator must have serious talks with the bullies and victims. Talks should be immediate and should document the student's involvement or participation in bullying, sending a clear, strong message that bullying is not acceptable. Documentation should specify consequences for the bully and support for the victim (Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence, 2008). Second,

parents must be notified about any bullying incidents involving their children; meetings with all persons involved might be necessary. Third, both bullies and victims might benefit from individualized skill building sessions to work on any deficiencies in social skills. Finally, a change of class or school might be necessary if the bullying problem persists despite prevention measures (Center for the Study and Prevention of School Violence, 2008). One of the principals used a top level intervention, *Let's Get Real* (Kim & Logan, 2004) curriculum, to help students who lack empathy and need more explicit teaching. The curriculum includes a video, workbook activities, and assignments to help kids build awareness. The principal expressed that most kids would get these lessons at the whole-school intervention level; however, there were the few who did not. The Olweus (1992) *Bullying Prevention Program* includes intensive levels of support, yet the principals in this study did not specifically speak of them. All of the principals spoke with victims of cyberbullying and helped direct the mental health support the victims needed. An area for growth for the principals would include supporting perpetrators to help educate them and identify their areas of improvement.

Policy

In part because of the catastrophic consequences of bullying, legislators, school districts, and administrators have recognized the grave need for policies to help maintain a safe learning environment (Kowalski et al., 2008). Bullying policy has been enacted in 49 states across the country. Of the 49 states that have statewide bullying policy, 14 have laws referring to “cyberbullying” and 42 have laws referring to “electronic harassment.” Some of those existing laws require public schools to develop policies prohibiting cyberbullying, to enforce discipline ranging from suspension to expulsion, to address off-

campus cyberbullying activities, and to require reporting to law enforcement officials (Jacobs, 2010).

In Colorado, there is no official anti-bullying law. Colorado state lawmakers instead chose a "legislative declaration" and creation of policy. Each of the principals was asked to share their knowledge of the state policy on cyberbullying and the influence the policy had on their practice. Melody, Stu, and Clive said they were not familiar with the state policy on cyberbullying. Still, Melody ensured that her school was addressing bullying and specifically cyberbullying. Stu knew that a policy existed but did not know its content. He believed it came after an increase in community awareness of the problem: "In my mind it was being driven by Oprah and the rest of the media stories that were catching a lot of attention. My work was certainly impacted." Stu believed by formally adopting the Olweus (1992) *Bullying Prevention Program* and training his staff, he was complying with the state law: "That's about the extent of my concern with the state law."

Michelle and Joe both used the state policy to help guide their practice as principals. Michelle said she and her staff, including school resource officers, used the state policy. It helped her "kids understand that what they are doing could be a crime, so when we talk to a student, it could be really serious, it is not just picking on another kid on the playground." In Joe's school district, the state policy guided the district policy, which Joe followed directly. It helped provide the process to ensure the safety of the students. Joe said, "It definitely helps with the language and what we can and can't do."

Jane felt differently than the other participants and explained why a policy on cyberbullying just did not work at this point. She felt as though policy on cyberbullying

could not keep up with the technology; instead, she turned to case law. Jane further expressed, “The word ‘bullying’ often is the first response for people when there is a problem. When there is an issue, it’s bullying, and it’s a hot topic.”

Participation of Stakeholders in Cyberbullying Prevention and Intervention

Throughout this research study, it became clear school principals needed more support to help their students navigate middle school and stop cyberbullying.

Large problems are complex, multiply-determined, and differentially reinforced.

The solutions to stopping bullying behaviors must be framed from a social ecological perspective if we are to have any hope of truly stopping bullying in North America schools. (Swearer & Espelage, 2004, p. 3)

To prevent and intervene with cyberbullying, principals need support from individual students, families, peers, other school personnel, and the community. Swearer et al. (2009) viewed bullying as a breakdown of social-relationships; therefore “the relationships that school and families forge become paramount in effective bullying prevention and intervention” (p. 86). This study presented findings specifically on working with school mental health professionals, parents, and the police.

Mental health professionals. Mental health is very important in schools.

Children and adolescents come to school each day with a number of life factors and barriers that affect their learning, behavior, and development, including family stress, academic difficulties, peer conflicts, health issues, cultural differences, as well as community concern. (Christner, Mennuti, & Whittaker, 2009, p. 4)

Pupil service professionals (e.g., school counselors, social workers, and school psychologists) are typically the ones to address most mental health issues in schools (Center for Mental Health in Schools, 2006). However, schools are more unique in the sense that other educators such as teachers, administrators, and paraprofessionals might also play “an important and prominent role in the implementation and maintenance of these services” (Christner et al., 2009, p. 6). Principals in this study expressed that they, along with their vice principals and dean of students, also work hard to support their students’ social/emotional needs to really help students be ready to learn and work hard while at school.

Schools have long played an important role in the health and safety of students; thus, when cyberbullying occurs, schools play a crucial role even if the bullying has occurred off-campus (Stewart & Fritsch, 2011). Cyberbullying incidents can “undermine school climate, interfere with victims’ school functioning, and put some students at risk for serious mental health and safety problems” (Feinberg & Robey, 2008, p. 10). The use of mental health professionals in combating cyberbullying varied greatly across the principals’ perspectives. All the principals had their mental health professionals (i.e., school counselors, social workers, a school psychologist, and behavioral interventionist) addressing some aspect of cyberbullying incidents. However, a lack of cohesion existed for the partnerships between schools and mental health professionals because of the varying hours allocated to each for these professionals. It is essential for mental health professionals in the school to be working with victims of cyberbullying because of the grave impact cyberbullying can have. Jane felt as though mental health professionals could work with the students who are not understanding or responding to school-wide

intervention efforts. She felt that when students were lashing out or bullying (whether it was cyberbullying or face-to-face), “it’s a symptom of something else.” In the school setting, mental health professionals could help educate a bully about appropriate social behaviors. Those social skills need to be built, practiced, and rewarded. Michelle felt her mental health professionals were essential personnel after the major cyberbullying incident at her school; they helped with the restorative circle and were available to all students who needed to talk.

School counselors have traditionally helped students develop academically, professionally, and socially (Herr, 2003). A shift occurred when both teachers and students were expected to perform at higher levels. School counselors, along with the other educators, were now expected to focus on helping students achieve higher standards (Ostvik-de Wile, Park, & Lee, 2013). Given the link between academics and mental health, school counselors’ focus needs to remain with helping students with their social-emotional needs. Anderson, Houser, and Howland (2010) emphasized that when a student’s social and psychological needs are supported, then the student’s success academically increases. The principals in this research study supported the research. The primary roles of the school counselors’ in handling cyberbullying incident were pretty consistent across schools and were to support the victims.

School social workers are key personnel for helping address cyberbullying because of their home-school-community relationships (Slovak & Singer, 2011). School social workers should also work with their school administrators to help develop more effective policies and norms to combat cyberbullying within their schools (Slovak & Singer, 2011). In the Slovak and Singer (2011) study, only one in five school social

workers believed their school had an effective policy on cyberbullying. In the current research study, social workers had similar roles as school counselors but some of the principals suggested social workers also worked in other capacities, e.g., they worked with the more severely impacted kids and helped educate parents and kids on the dangers of cyberbullying.

In many school systems, the school administrator is responsible for employing a school psychologist; therefore, the administrator must clearly state his or her expectations for school psychological services (Magi & Kikas, 2009). School psychologists' training in many disciplines helps them act competently in many diverse roles. The specific services a school needs from a school psychologist might vary from school to school. More recently, school psychologists have been prominent in addressing school violence, promoting safe schools, and providing additional mental health services to students (Diamanduros, Downs, & Jenkins, 2008). Because they are trained to help create a positive school climate, school psychologists also can become leaders in combating bullying and cyberbullying. However, little literature specifically discussed the role of school psychologists in the area of cyberbullying (Cook, Williams, Guerra, & Tuthill, 2007). School psychologists can promote awareness of cyberbullying and the psychological outcomes; they can also assess the prevalence and severity of cyberbullying within their schools (Diamanduros et al., 2008). Also, school psychologists can research and develop prevention programs to address cyberbullying and implement intervention and planning strategies if cyberbullying becomes a problem. Finally, school psychologists can be important team members in consultation with school

officials to develop policies to manage and deal with cyberbullying within the school (Diamanduros et al., 2008).

The participants also described their partnerships with school psychologists. Michelle's school psychologist, who works part-time at her school, was able to work full-time when they had a major cyberbullying incident. Her school psychologist plays a role in combating cyberbullying. Michelle said, "I recommend kids go talk to her. She is able to provide them with resources and check-in with students...She does play a huge role." Melody's school psychologist was available only on a very limited basis (one day a week); whereas the social worker was there full-time. Melody said, "Our school psychologist is absolutely great, but she does mostly mental health minutes with our students with IEPs. She has very little time beyond that." The school psychologist assisted in a week-long curriculum on suicide and conducted suicide assessments. She was highly involved in crises but not in the planning of mental health programming. Clive's school psychologist was only at the school one day a week. Clive further commented, "It's how you use your mental health people. I think the mental health expertise is much more valued away from cyberbullying. You guys (school psychologists) are freaking smart, and I don't know that I would waste you on cyberbullying." At Jane's school, the main responsibilities of the school psychologist were IEPs and meeting IEP goals because she was only at the school 1.5 days a week. The school psychologist's role in Joe's school was predominantly in the area of special education support. He had been involved with cyberbullying cases but on rare occasions. The school psychologist also led support groups for the victims of cyberbullying and bullying and offered support to individual victims. If the incident was determined to be

conflict, Joe had his counselors or school psychologist lead social skills and friendship skill building groups.

Parents. The key to a good school climate is good communication (Rosen, 2005). This communication must include parents. Students should experience their parents having a positive healthy relationship with the school, not one full of conflict. Parents and students must all be aware of the rules contained in a school's handbook (Rosen, 2005). Parents should be kept informed about anti-bullying efforts within the classroom (Center for the Study and Prevention of School Violence, 2008).

Creating a positive connection between families and schools helps create healthy relationships among students, parents, and schools. In turn, this sets the stage for fostering positive relationships and for eliminating the conditions that allow bullying behaviors to occur. (Swearer et al., 2009, p. 87)

Four of the six principals emphasized the need to work collaboratively with parents to protect children. Clive expressed the need for parent support: "The biggest thing for our buck for us is contact with parents." He has contacted parents to notify them of fake e-mail accounts and messages their kids are sending: "Most parents will make sure the kids destroy what's left. We had that with fake Facebook pages. We just had to bring it to parents' attention, and they killed it." Clive believed he might have a unique relationship with many of his parents. The parents have gotten to know him well over the years because he was the one to open the school. He also maintains "a total open door policy. They know they can call me directly. Most of them have my cell phone number. So I'm probably more available to hear about it." Joe expressed how important it is to have conversations with parents and involve them in the investigation and the resolutions.

Michelle also contacted and involved the parents of the perpetrators. Both Melody and Jane shared similar sentiments about helping parents to combat cyberbullying and being a support for them. While Melody encouraged the parents, she is also a mother and she knows how difficult restricting her own kids' technology use can be. Melody said, "It's hard for me. My kids are in their older teens now... but they didn't want my husband or me invading their privacy. They didn't want to be the kids without phones." She tells the parents it is important to set ground rules with technology, especially with cell phones: expect the kids to "keep it clean" and if they do not, they need to be held responsible. It is important to make parents aware of incidents. In Jane's experience, sometimes parents were aware, but most of time they were not.

A 2011 survey by the American Osteopathic Association found more than 85% of the parents with teenagers (ages 13 to 17) reported their children had social media accounts. Of those parents, more than 52% said they were concerned about their kids being the victim of harassment or teasing over social media. One in six of the parents surveyed reported their child had been cyberbullied or teased online. Three-quarters of the parents reported they had discussed cyberbullying with their children and 86% had taken steps to monitor their technology use. According to the principals, parents could help shut down accounts and help block cyberbullying messages. The principals also stated the need to involve the parents of the perpetrators. Again, both Jane and Melody stressed the need to educate parents to stop cyberbullying. Jane said what is important is the "understanding of what it (cyberbullying) is and what it isn't." Jane felt she is responsible for helping people, usually parents, understand and recognize the difference between "what is bullying and what is mean and inappropriate behavior that could be

stopped before it becomes bullying.” Melody stated that it is difficult to handle cyberbullying incidents when one student stops the contact but the other student continues. At this time, Melody calls the parents. She encourages them to help end the incident by blocking the numbers or taking away texts. Melody finds educating parents to be very difficult and is frustrated with parents enabling the misuse of technology.

A 2009 survey (Netsmartz411, 2010) indicated that 84% of parents did not know how to respond to cyberbullying incidents. Some of the reasons for parents’ lack of knowledge in how to deal with cyberbullying include their unfamiliarity with new technology and current online etiquette. Similar to the research, several of the principals expressed the need for more resources to assist parents in dealing with cyberbullying. Melody and Jane both expressed their desire to have greater parent involvement. Melody would like to be able to provide more resources for parents on dealing with and recognizing cyberbullying. She had previously communicated to parents using a newsletter about cyberbullying. She held one meeting for parents on bullying at which they briefly discussed cyberbullying; 15 parents attended. For Jane, parent involvement was unpredictable. Jane thought it would be helpful to provide resources and education for parents but did not think many would attend her presentation. Jane and Melody both expressed the need for more resources to assist parents in dealing with cyberbullying. Hannah (2010) stated despite the parents’ lack of knowledge with cyberspace and technology, parents should use the skills “they have used since time immemorial: nurture and connect with your child; provide structure for your child’s activities and join your child in their learning adventure online, learning as they do” (p. 536). By raising children this way, they will learn to be good citizens both online and off (Hannah, 2010).

Police. The police's extensive knowledge of the laws and safety issues allows them to be very valuable educators in the schools (Thaxter, 2010). To determine the jurisdiction in a case by case basis, a partnership should be developed between school administration and law enforcement; this partnership allows for the exchange of information (Thaxter, 2010). The police can play various roles with regard to helping prevent and combat cyberbullying. First, the police can help educate students, parents, and schools about the risks and dangers associated with cyberbullying in hopes of preventing it (Palladino, Nocentini, & Menesini, 2012). Second, the police can help detect cyberbullying incidents. Third, the police can be involved in ongoing cyberbullying cases by identifying perpetrators and supporting the victims (Vandebosch, Beirens, D'Haese, Wegge, & Pabin, 2012).

All the participants stated they involved the police (student resource officer) when a threat was made by a student. If Stu thought there was any imminent or direct danger, he contacted the student resource officer. Jane said, "Certainly kids don't understand their culpability, and they don't understand that statements they make that appear to be threatening can be taken as threats, and it can be considered harassment." According to Clive, "Depending on how bad the threats got, we might involve the police. That is a real quick way to get things to calm down with the cyberbullying: bring in the cops." Clive went on to comment on the role of his school resource officer: "He is here part time and he will come over if we call him. And sometimes we will notify him because it is more of a police legal matter than a school matter." Melody has had to go to the police with previous cyberbullying incidents because there were threats of physical violence. Joe simply stated that if it was harassment, the student resource officer would be involved.

Additionally, the police might provide additional support to investigations, help shut down any e-mails or websites being used to carry out the cyberbullying, and talk to parents about the things going on and how they could monitor and respond to cyberbullying incidents. The research suggested police played a more proactive use when addressing cyberbullying prevention and intervention efforts:

The role of the juvenile police officer in a post Columbine era has changed from reactive to proactive. Addressing the problem of cyber bullying through early education and intervention, as opposed to adjudication after the fact, is vital in securing a safe school environment. (Thaxter, 2010, p. 531)

Implications for Practice and Future Research

It is clear from previous research that cyberbullying has a negative effect on the students involved as well as the entire school climate. It is essential that all school personnel know how to effectively prevent and intervene with cyberbullying. Principals are the leaders of their school and key individuals to direct (cyber) bullying programming at their schools. This study has provided great insight in how middle school principals responded to cyberbullying incidents. This study has helped shift cyberbullying research from awareness to action, yet there is still room for additional studies. This study could also be conducted with other school personnel, students, parents, and community members to understand their experiences and perspectives with handling cyberbullying incidents. That would help support the need for all stakeholders to take action to effectively change the way cyberbullying is addressed.

The mental health of students at school has been linked to their academic performance. It must be taken seriously in our schools. Perhaps a deeper examination of mental health support being provided to middle schools should be undertaken. With the current study, it was clear mental health professionals were working hard to support our

students but there was a lack of cohesion or clear job roles for mental health professionals across the school districts. It necessary to ensure all mental health professionals in school systems are working together to adequately address the needs of all of our students.

School, parents, police, and communities are all aware that cyberbullying is an important concern in our public middle schools. Research in the past has focused on finding prevalence rates, but now the focus needs to shift from prevalence rates to prevention and intervention. Principals in this research study used a variety of programming but it lacked structure and consistency. A future research study could examine the effectiveness of programming in public middle schools.

Conclusion

The current study sought to gain the perspective of school principals who had responded to incidents of cyberbullying and discussed the main findings in light of the current literature. The research study revealed that conflict appeared just as concerning as and possibly more prominent than cyberbullying with middle school students. Several of the principals expressed that much of what they saw at their school was more conflict than true (cyber) bullying. The principals within this research study incorporated aspects of cyberbullying intervention into their already existing bullying prevention programs. None of the principals spoke of a framework or multi-tiered system of prevention to ensure these efforts were being done consistently. Despite the fact that the principals did not explicitly state the use of multi-tiered system, they were using programming at each of the levels. Throughout this research study, it became clear school principals need more support to help their students navigate middle school and stop cyberbullying. In

order to prevent and intervene with cyberbullying, principals need support from individual students, families, peers, other school personnel, and the community.

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