

**Sexting: New Challenges for Schools and Professional School Counselors**

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### **Abstract**

Sexting, the practice of sending sexually explicit messages or photographs of oneself or others on digital electronic devices, presents challenges for schools and professional school counselors. The implications of sexting for schools, school counselors, students, and parents are discussed. School counselor interventions, developing school district Internet use policies, and educating students, teachers, and parents on the dangers of sexting are recommended as ways to prevent and respond to school sexting incidents.

*Keywords:* sexting, cyberbullying, text messaging, sexting behaviors

## **Sexting: New Challenges for Schools and Professional School Counselors**

The past two decades has made it easier for adolescents to expose themselves to sexually explicit material through media technologies such as cell phones, digital cameras, and the Internet (Brown & L'Engle, 2009). Sexting, or sextexting, is a relatively new teen phenomenon made popular by this technology. The term, sexting, coined by the media, refers to youth transmitting sexually explicit messages and/or sexually explicit photographs of oneself or others via electronic devices (i.e., cellular phones, tablets, and the Internet) (The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children [NCMEC]). In the past several years, local newscasts have reported incidents of sexting that have resulted in one or more teenagers being charged with child pornography. Many of these incidents occur with middle school age teens. For example, in March 2009 in Trenton, New Jersey, a 14-year-old girl was accused of child pornography for posting almost 30 nude pictures of herself on MySpace.com (Rubinkam, 2009). In January of 2009, in Falmouth, Massachusetts, an 8<sup>th</sup> grade boy sent his friend a photograph of a girl in their class exposing a breast. The photograph was forwarded to others in the class (Hewitt & Driscoll, 2009). In March 2009, a 14-year-old student attending an Orange County middle school in Los Angeles sent nude pictures of herself to a friend that were forwarded to other students using photo messaging. The students received in-house suspensions for their involvement (KABC-TV, 2009). In Greensburg, Pennsylvania, six teenagers were charged with child pornography for the creation, distribution, and possession of nude or semi-nude pictures taken by three girls (ages 14 and 15) who e-mailed them to three boys (ages 16 and 17) (Levine, 2009). In Milton, Vermont a sexting ring of 22 high school students ages 14-17 participated in sexting

activities using school issued laptops (Kirpalani, 2011). Photographs of nude and seminude adolescent girls were posted on a shared email account by a group of five boys. The adolescents indicated that they did not realize they were doing anything wrong by posting these images. No criminal charges were filed against the teens, and the school principal and district agreed that they would use this incident as an educational opportunity for students. These examples represent only a few of the incidents that have been reported across the country in news articles that report cases of teenagers who are engaging in sexting activities and who are sometimes being charged with criminal offenses (Henderson & Morgan, 2011; Wastler, 2010).

The empirical literature on sexting is scarce, and this new phenomenon warrants further study. One of the few data sources on sexting is an online survey conducted in 2008 to investigate online sexual activity of teenagers and young adults. The study revealed that of the 1,280 teen respondents between the ages of 13 and 19, 39% of them reported sending or posting sexually provocative images or messages; 48% reported receiving such messages. Twenty-two percent of the female respondents indicated they have sent or posted nude or semi-nude photos of themselves online; 11% of these were teens between the ages of 13 and 16 years old. Teen boys (18%) also reported sending or posting these types of images online (The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy & CosmoGirl.com, 2008).

In 2009, the Pew Research Center conducted a national survey on landlines and cell phones of teens ages 12-17. The survey queried teens about the use of their cell phones to send or receive sexually provocative images or videos of themselves or someone they knew (Lenhart, 2009). The findings revealed that 4% of the sampled

teens had sent sexually suggestive photographs or images of themselves to others. There were no significant gender differences, and older teens (17 years of age) were more likely than younger teens (12 years of age) to send such images.

The results of the most recent national, empirical study conducted on sexting behavior indicate that 1% of youth ages 10-17 reported appearing in or creating nude or semi-nude sexually explicit images that can legally be considered child pornography; 6.9% are involved in appearing in, creating, and receiving such images (Mitchell, Finkelhor, Jones, & Wolak, 2011). The researchers conducted telephone surveys, between August 2010 and January 2011 of a random sample of 1,500 youth and their caregivers. The Third Youth Internet Safety Survey (YISS-3) was administered to one eligible youth in each household who had used the Internet at least once a month from any location during the time period cited above. Cell phone usage for sending or receiving sexually explicit photographs was not investigated in this study.

According to the study performed by Mitchell et al.,  $n = 149$  (9.6%) of the 1,500 interviewed youth disclosed they had appeared in or created nude or semi-nude images in the past year; of these  $n = 39$  (2.5%) reported appearing in or creating the images, whereas 110 (7.1%) only received images. Of the 39 who reported appearing in or creating, 61% were girls, 72% were ages 16 or 17, and 6% were ages 10-12. Of the 110 that reported only receiving images, 56% were girls, 55% were ages 16 or 17; none were younger than age 12. These are relatively low numbers of youth disclosing sexting behaviors in this study compared to previous surveys conducted by others. The researchers concluded that the prevalence rate is lower in their study compared to other sexting survey results because previous research studies have been flawed. The

researchers claim that previous studies are flawed because of the definitions of sexting used, samples included participants ages 18 and 19, and the studies did not distinguish between taking and sending an image and receiving one. The study cited above is not without limitations. The study limited participants to only those who spoke English, did not include cell phone use for sexting images, and it was a self-reported measure (Mitchell et al., 2011). Although confidentiality was assured by the researchers throughout the youth interview, the interview was conducted in the home following an interview with the parent or caregiver.

In spite of differences in the prevalence of sexting cited in the studies presented above, sexting behavior is a phenomenon that should be of concern to parents, educators, and school counselors (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010). Sexting may also take the form of cyberbullying depending on the intent of the behavior. Typically, youth caught sexting come to the attention of school officials who are often the ones who make reports to authorities. Moreover, given the role school counselors assume in schools, they will likely become involved working with the accused and victimized students, their parents, teachers, and other school personnel. The purpose of this article is to raise awareness of the practice of sexting and its effects on schools, students, and educators. The ramifications of sexting and the role of professional school counselors, who must respond with immediate and relevant interventions, will be addressed.

### **Sexting and Cyberbullying**

Sexting done with the intent to seek revenge, embarrass, denigrate, belittle, malign, threaten, and/or humiliate others is a form of cyberbullying (NCMEC, 2009). Electronic bullying, online bullying, or cyberbullying has been defined as the intentional

act of denigrating, humiliating, emotionally abusing, or physically threatening others through electronic media, such as e-mail, instant messaging, social Internet sites, chat and bash rooms, and voting booths (Beale & Hall, 2007). Approximately 20-40% of middle and high school students have been the victims of one incident of online bullying (Stover, 2006). Stover found that cellular phones are quickly becoming the newest technology for promulgating cyberbullying as adolescents send nude and sexually explicit photographs to one another. In addition, cellular phone technology is being used by adolescents to position themselves socially and in ways that are emotionally abusive and can cause potential psychological trauma to their peers (Stover, 2006).

An example of sexting as a form of cyberbullying would be when a teen seeking revenge over a broken relationship sends nude photographs of the “ex” to mutual friends or posts them on the Internet for others to view (Bauman, 2011). Teens that are dating may send photographs to one another with mutual consent as flirtatious and romantic behavior, and these would not be considered cyberbullying. However, school counselors should caution teens that one does not know when the photographs may be used by others in the future.

Digital technology allows students to place instant messages, photographs, and videos on cellular phones, blog sites, private websites, and online social and chatting networks (e.g., MySpace.com, Facebook.com) at any time (Stover, 2006). Therefore, sexting can occur during or off school hours, on or off campus. Off campus sexting becomes the concern of schools when these incidents and their ramifications are communicated to school officials by other students, parents, lawyers, or community individuals.

## **The Implications of Sexting for Students**

Students who are caught sexting can face legal, academic, and disciplinary sanctions. Legally, students can be charged with child pornography or as accomplices to child pornography, face prosecution, and be labeled as sex offenders for a period of up to 20 years (Cohen, 2003). Federal legislation under the Child Pornography Protection Act of 1996 (CPPA), P. L. 104-208, 110 Statutes 3009-26, defines child pornography in Section 2256 of the Federal Child Pornography Statute as:

Any visual depiction, including any photograph, film, video, picture, or computer-generated image or picture, whether made or produced by electronic, mechanical, or other means, of sexually explicit conduct, where-(a) the production of such visual depiction involves the use of a minor engaging in sexually explicit conduct; (b) such visual depiction is, or appears to be, of a minor engaging in sexually explicit conduct; (c) such visual depiction has been created, adapted, or modified to appear that an identifiable minor is engaging in sexually explicit conduct; or (d) such visual depiction is advertised, promoted, presented, described, or distributed in such a manner that conveys the impression that the material is or contains a visual depiction of a minor engaging in sexually explicit conduct (Cohen, 2003, p. 11-12).

In most state jurisdictions, child pornography laws apply to anyone under the age of 18, regardless of the age of sexual consent. Consequently, students need to know that

creating pornography or any form of exploitation for the purpose of child pornography is illegal (Cohen, 2003).

Students have been charged with such acts in a number of states across the country (e.g., Pennsylvania, Ohio, Massachusetts, and Florida). In Orlando, Florida, an 18-year-old student was found guilty and placed on five years of probation and required by Florida law to be labeled as a sex offender for sending a naked photograph of his 16-year-old girlfriend to dozens of her friends and family members following an argument (Feyerick & Steffen, 2009). This student will be labeled as a sex offender until the age of 43; he has been dismissed from college, cannot travel out of the country without notifying and getting approval from his probation officer, and faces difficulty finding employment because of his conviction status.

In Allentown, Pennsylvania, 13-year-old girls were taking semi-nude photographs of each other and sending them to other students' (ages 11 to 17) cellular phones. The girls' phones were confiscated by school officials, the students were reported to the police, and prosecutors filed charges. The students were not prosecuted, but mandated to take a sexual harassment class. Seventeen students accepted the mandate from prosecutors, but the parents of three of the students decided to take legal action instead. In a lawsuit filed by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) on behalf of the girls, it is claimed the students did not consent to having the pictures distributed, and that these photographs should not be considered pornography (Rubinkam, 2009). The treatment of the Pennsylvania incident cited above depicts the controversial nature of charging teens with child pornography for sexting. Some believe that sexting is a normal and natural activity for teenagers as it is part of the culture of using the Internet

(Feyerick & Steffen, 2009). In addition, the laws appear to lag behind technology use, and prosecuting minors as child pornographers and sexual offenders has seemed to be the only most legally appropriate consequence for this behavior. Recognizing the severity of the penalty for sexting, some state lawmakers, such as in Vermont, have enacted or are in the process of enacting laws to decriminalize or reduce penalties for sexting behaviors, especially for first offenders (Sacco, Argudin, Maquire, Tallon, 2010). However, changes in state legislation would not affect current federal child pornography laws.

Students caught sending sexting messages can also be subject to academic disciplinary actions that can have long-term effects on their academic grade point average, college applications, and attending the colleges of their choice. Students must report on college applications any arrests and indictments against them and become subject to facing college judicial review prior to admissions. Similarly, school counselors must report, on the Secondary School Report, disciplinary violations of students that transpired from the 9<sup>th</sup> grade forward. Academic misconduct or behavioral misconduct that resulted in the applicant's probation, suspension, removal, dismissal, or expulsion must be reported along with any knowledge of a student's conviction of a misdemeanor, felony, or other crime (Secondary School Report, 2008-2009).

Further, placing personal information and photographs of questionable content on social Internet sites such as Facebook and MySpace can have potential negative implications for college admissions if admissions officers go online to check applicants' profiles (Bardwell, 2008). Therefore, it is critical for counselors to inform students that they should always present themselves positively and appropriately online.

Sexting can have emotional effects on students. Twenty-one percent of students appearing in, or creating sexually explicit images, and 25% of students receiving such images have reported feeling very upset, embarrassed, or afraid as a result of their involvement (Mitchell et al., 2011). Students who are victims of sexting may feel isolated, fearful, and discouraged about school, causing them to be absent more often, withdraw from school activities, and decrease their academic performance (Stover, 2006). Students who are victims of sexting may be more prone to engage in school fights and other risky behaviors (Bradshaw, O'Brennan, & Sawyer, 2008). Many also feel ostracized, labeled, depressed, and suicidal as was the case of an 18-year old high school senior in Cincinnati, Ohio who committed suicide after her nude photograph was sent to students at other schools (Feyerick & Steffen, 2009).

For today's teenagers, sexting is part of their sexual culture as the majority of them have grown up being exposed to sex and sexually provocative acts readily available through a variety of media sources (e.g., reality television, sexually explicit websites) (Clark-Flory, 2009). Sometimes, teenagers believe that engaging in this type of behavior is a form of entertainment when bored, (NCMEC, 2009). Students who get into trouble for sexting may already have been at risk for other reasons, such as having experienced abuse at home, living in economically disadvantaged conditions, having prior academic, social, and emotional problems (Levine, 2009; Willard, 2007), or lacking close and positive relationships with significant adults (McAdams, 2007). However, although 73% of the teenagers surveyed online believe sexting can have serious consequences, 22% think that sending sexually provocative content is "no big deal" (Albert & Crabbe, 2008, p. 2).

## **The Effect on Schools**

Schools may enter a crisis mode when incidents of sexting occur, and school officials must deal with law enforcement officers, attorneys for the accused and victimized, media reporters, parents of accused and victimized students, other students affected by the incidents, upper administration, teachers, and other school building personnel. In cases of sexting that result in school violence (e.g., physical fights resulting in serious harm, suicide), crisis teams must be mobilized and brought in to help students and school personnel work through the initial grieving process (DoDEA Education Directorate and Office of Safety and Security, 2007).

### **School Policies**

If there is evidence of students committing acts of sexting, whether the intent is to intimidate or harass unwilling recipients or send a sexually explicit photograph for flirtatious reasons, and there are clear links between the acts and schools, school administrators can respond and take disciplinary action (Stover, 2006). It is imperative that interventions and preventative measures be instituted in schools, and school administrators create positive school communities that include proactive approaches to ensure that students feel safe and free from intimidation when coming to school (Beale & Hall, 2007). This includes intimidation and cyberbullying that can occur on mobile phones.

School districts are taking proactive approaches and are engaging schools and district personnel in drafting acceptable use policies (AUPs) (Hummell, 2007). For example, the following school boards have adopted sexting and cyberbullying policies:

(a) The Bradley School Board, Cleveland, Tennessee, (b) The Indianapolis School

Board, Indianapolis, Indiana, (c) The Kelso School Board, Columbia, South Carolina, (d) The Miami Dade County School Board, Miami, Florida, (e) The Orange County School Board, Orlando, Florida, and (f) The Seattle School Board, Seattle, Washington. All of these school districts address in their policies, definitions of sexting and cyberbullying, legal ramifications, consequences for students (and employees, in some policies), educational activities for teachers, parents and families, and student curricula for awareness and prevention purposes (Bradley County Public Schools, 2010; Indianapolis Public Schools, 2009; Kelso Public School, 2011; Miami Dade County Public Schools, 2010; Orange County Public Schools, 2010; Seattle Public Schools, 2010).

Sexting policies should provide guidelines and procedures on appropriate and inappropriate uses of computers and the Internet. They should be designed to identify the rights of users as well as consequences for inappropriate use. Policies should address: (a) protection of personal information and expectation of privacy, (b) inappropriate, unacceptable, and unlawful communication and electronic activities, and (c) requirements for reporting incidents of cyberbullying and sexting (Willard, 2007). Schools may choose to ban the use of cellular phones during school hours and require students to submit a signed permission form from parents allowing them to carry cellular phones on campus (Beale & Hall, 2007). Schools must provide a way for students to report anonymously, without fear of reprisal, incidents of sexting, bullying, and cyberthreats. Policy makers should seek input from students, parents, teachers, and counselors when developing policies. A task force with representatives from various factions, including community law enforcement, can be formed to provide

recommendations. AUPs should be distributed throughout the school, posted on the school website, and distributed to parents (Bauman, 2011). In developing policies, there needs to be awareness and recognition that although sexting may occur off school grounds, it will have an impact on the school environment. Websites that can provide resources to counselors are found in the Appendix.

### **The Role of School Counselors**

Sexting challenges professional school counselors to assume critical roles in preventing and responding to sexting incidents. Counselors can take lead roles working with school administrators and teachers in developing school prevention programs. Prevention of sexting is likely to be most effective when school personnel, parents and guardians, students, and members of the law enforcement and legal community work together (The Youth Online Safety Working Group [YOSWG], 2009). School counselors can assist in organizing these teams, and should follow the ASCA National Model to develop programs that prevent sexting and to provide responsive services when school sexting incidents occur (American School Counselor Association [ASCA], 2005, 2004).

To prevent sexting incidents on school campuses, students, parents, and teachers need education about sexting, specifically what it is, and the consequences of this behavior. In a study by YOSWG (2009), teenagers actually expressed interest in learning about sexting. They voiced that they would have preferred to start learning about it as early as middle school-either from parents, health classes, or other programs. Education can be incorporated into the comprehensive school guidance curriculum and provided through large classroom guidance lessons, psycho-educational groups, and school-wide assemblies aimed at educating students about the legal,

emotional, and career implications of sexting. The competencies and indicators under Standard C: Students will understand safety and survival skills and acquire personal safety skills, of the ASCA National Standards (ASCA, 2004) can be followed to plan and develop educational sessions and guidance lessons.

In addition, students must be apprised of the legal ramifications if caught sexting and need to know that they can face prosecution if their actions fall under the following:

(a) making threats of violence to others or their property, (b) forcing someone to commit an act they do not want to commit, (c) making obscene telephone calls which includes sending text messaging, (d) harassing or stalking others, (e) committing acts of hate or bias, (f) creating or sending sexually explicit images of teens, (g) sexual exploitation, and (h) taking a photo of someone where privacy is expected (i.e., bathroom or locker room) (Willard, 2007, p. 10).

Students must have information and should engage in discussions on: (a) what constitutes socially inappropriate behavior on the Internet and on cellular phones, (b) behavioral and disciplinary consequences of such, (c) how to respond to this behavior, and (d) how to report incidents if they are being victimized or if they have knowledge of others being bullied (Hummell, 2007). Furthermore, counselors must inform students that sexually provocative images can be saved, copied, and forwarded to others at any time. These pictures could also be used against them as a form of revenge if they get into fights with friends or break up with their partners (Friedrichs, 2009). Finally, school counselors must teach students pro-social behaviors that include active listening, respecting, and having empathy for others' perspectives and opinions (McAdams, 2007).

Parents must also be educated about the potential damaging effects that sexting can have on their children. Parents are often unaware of the dangers of sexting and social-networking sites, and some parents do not even know these forms of communication exist. One study shows that 38% of parents have never seen their children's MySpace profile; 43% of parents are unaware of how often their children use sites such as MySpace.com; and 62% have never spoken to their children about using social-networking sites (Duncan, 2007). Parents often lag behind their children in knowledge of the digital world, which makes it very difficult for them to protect their children from the potential dangers therein.

They need information on how to become aware if their children are perpetrators or victims, the academic implications and legal consequences of the behavior, and strategies for prevention (Willard, 2007). ASCA has recommended that counselors conduct parent training workshops through the Parent, Teacher, Student Association (PTSA) or after school (ASCA, 2005). To increase parental knowledge and involvement, counselors can create websites that provide information and resources, and send newsletters and brochures by mail to parents' homes. Parents should learn how to access their teenager's profile(s) (Facebook, MySpace) online and be advised to check periodically the links their children are accessing. Parents can use Internet search engines to search for their children's names to see if they appear on any websites, or ask their children to search themselves and report any findings. They can also require access to their children's on-line profiles to check what is being posted and who they are accepting as "friends." If students know that parents are monitoring their online behavior it may prevent inappropriate uses of the Internet.

Cellular phones can now be blocked by parents to prevent children from visiting or posting personal information on inappropriate sites. Parents must communicate to their adolescents that they should not post anything publicly that others should not be seeing, as it may affect their future college aspirations and career. Further, children need to understand that sexual predators and pornographers also have access to information posted online (Kingsland, 2009).

One of the most important things parents can do is be open and comfortable when it comes to discussing sexuality issues, and in this particular case, sexting. Keeping open communication with adolescents about sexting can deter them from engaging in risky behavior (American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry [AACAP], 2005). It is suggested that parents be direct and proactive—parents should ask children if they have ever engaged in sexting behaviors, or if they have ever received sexually explicit material via text messaging or another form of electronic communication (Duncan, 2007; YOSWG, 2009). When this line of communication is open between parents and their children, teens will know that this subject is always on the table. They will be more likely to feel that they can approach their parents about such issues if they are ever faced with them (AACAP, 2005; The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, 2000).

When incidents of cyberbullying occur, counselors can provide responsive services to support victims and to engage these students in counseling experiences that can include: (a) teaching assertiveness skills, (b) fostering self-esteem, and (c) building self-confidence (McEachern, Kenny, Blake, & Aluede, 2005). Brief solution-focused counseling has been recommended and found to have positive outcomes in schools

with both victims and bullies (Bauman, 2011; Young & Holdorf, 2003). Peer helpers, under supervision, can be assigned to victimized students to provide friendship and emotional support. Counselors must make themselves available to consult with parents of victims who have questions and concerns about the safety of their children. Support groups can be created for parents and students who have been affected.

### **How One High School Dealt with a Sexting Incident**

An incident of sexting occurred at a South Florida high school, known to the author. The incident involved a student sending a photograph of herself in her undergarments to a male student, a friend, who then disseminated the photograph to other students in the school. Teachers overheard students discussing the sexting incident, and they reported it to school administrators. There was no malicious intent by the male student to denigrate the female student; therefore, this incident would not be considered cyberbullying. However, this sexting incident was taken seriously by the school administration who took immediate steps to handle the situation. First, the principal alerted higher school administrators. Parents of both the victim and the students involved in disseminating the photographs to others were notified. The principal consulted with school counselors regarding the students involved to discuss possible interventions. The counselors provided brief, supportive counseling, made outside referrals for therapy, and followed-up to ensure the students were receiving mental health services in the community. Two mandatory school-wide assemblies were conducted, one for girls and the other for boys. An assembly with similar content was held the same evening for parents. During the assemblies, an attorney, a police officer, and a psychologist made presentations on the legal, criminal, and emotional

ramifications of sexting. Because this was the first time the school had faced any incidents of this nature, disciplinary sanctions were not imposed. Instead, the students participated in counseling. The school regarded the incident as a learning experience for all involved, and school officials took the opportunity to educate school personnel, students, and parents about the serious implications of sending sexually explicit images and messages on the Internet.

### **Conclusion**

Sexting can have serious ramifications on schools, perpetrators, and victims. Professional school counselors are in unique positions to help school administrators, students, teachers, and parents deal with the consequences of cyberbullying and sexting behaviors. Counselors can take leadership roles in helping to create positive, caring school communities that aim to prevent incidents of this sort through education and the development of sound policies on the appropriate uses of Internet and electronic devices. In so doing, students can be given the guidance, attention, information, and protection they need. More research on sexting is needed in order to examine: (a) the incidence and prevalence of this behavior in schools, (b) the effect it can have on students and parents, (c) the beliefs, attitudes, and feelings students hold about this practice, (d) how schools and school districts are dealing with sexting incidents, and (e) school district policies and procedures that may be in place to prevent and react to sexting incidents.

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*Appendix*

## Sexting and Cyberbullying Links

[www.prevnet.ca](http://www.prevnet.ca)

<http://www.ncpc.org/cyberbullying>

<http://www.cyberbullying.us/>

<http://www.thatshotcool.com>

<http://www.kidsafenetwork.com/page.htm?pageID=statutes>

<http://im.about.com/od/sexting/g/coloradosexting.htm>

<http://www.webwisekids.org>

## **Biographical Statements**

Adriana G. McEachern is the associate dean for Academic Affairs in the College of Education and an associate professor and clinical coordinator of the Counselor Education programs in the College of Education at Florida International University. Dr. McEachern received her doctorate in counselor education from the University of Florida in 1989. She is a nationally certified counselor, a nationally certified rehabilitation counselor, and a licensed mental health counselor in Florida. She is the past chair of the American Counseling Association Southern Region, past president of the Florida Counseling Association, the Florida Association for Counselor Education and Supervision, and the Dade Counseling Association. She is the founder and faculty advisor of the FIU Delta Iota Chapter of the counseling honor society, Chi Sigma Iota International. Dr. McEachern has published numerous book chapters and articles in peer-reviewed journals, such as the *Journal of Counseling and Development* and the *Professional School Counseling Journal*, on issues of child abuse and emotional maltreatment, exceptional student education, learning disabilities, and other mental health topics.

Renee McEachern-Ciattoni received her Master of Science Degree from Florida International University in Counselor Education with an emphasis in Mental Health Counseling. Additionally, she holds a Certification by the State of Florida in Guidance and Counseling (K-12). She has worked as a College and Guidance Counselor at Gulliver Pinecrest Preparatory for seven years where she counsels students on academic, career, and personal issues.

Filomena Martin is a graduate assistant in the College of Education at Florida International University (FIU) in Miami, Florida. She earned her bachelor's degree in child development at Florida State University, with an emphasis in psychology, and is now working on her specialist's degree in school psychology. Her area of specialization is in developmental psychology and her research interests include social and emotional development of children, development of attachment, child abuse/neglect and child sexual abuse, and providing quality education to children in poverty and children of color.