

**Cyberbullying: Emergent Concerns for Adolescents and
Challenges for School Counselors**

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Abstract

Cyberbullying is a complex and disturbing 21st century phenomena. School counselors must understand the dynamics and risks of cyberbullying in order to help students, parents, and faculty deal with this difficult issue. We examined the extent to which middle school students understand, participate, and cope with cyberbullying issues in today's technologically equipped homes and schools. Results from the study suggested that approximately 15% of the students had cyberbullied others and almost 30% were victims of cyberbullying. Additionally, 50% of the student body was aware that others had been cyberbullied. We also examined student beliefs, thoughts regarding cyberbullying, and suggestions for adults to consider.

Cyberbullying: Emergent Concerns for Adolescents and Challenges for School Counselors

The availability, convenience, extensive popularity, and daily use of technology have positive and potentially negative consequences for today's youth. One significant negative outcome is the profound effects of cyberbullying described in recent literature (Beale & Hall, 2007; Cassidy, Jackson, & Brown, 2009; Dehue, Bolman, & Vollink, 2008; Hinduga & Patchin, 2009; Kowalski & Limber, 2007; Li, 2006, 2007; Mishna, McLuckie, & Saini, 2009; Mishna, Saini, & Solomon, 2009; Slonje & Smith, 2008; Vandebosch & Van Cleemput, 2008). The impact of cyberbullying generates a complex and disturbing 21st century concern that must be addressed by school counselors, mental health counselors, psychologists, and other helping professionals as the growing trend to communicate electronically expands among school-aged populations (Cassidy et al., 2009; Li, 2007; Mishna, McLuckie, & Saini, 2009; Slonje & Smith, 2008) and youth are faced with potential dangers in cyberspace. Nonetheless, cyberbullying literature remains "scarce and characterized by a lack of conceptual clarity" (Vandebosch & Van Cleemput, 2008, p. 499).

With such a quandary in mind, this study examined cyberbullying to offer insight during the middle school years, realizing that this age is perhaps the "most inclined toward online bullying" (Cassidy et al., 2009, p. 385; Hinduja & Patchin, 2008; Kowalski & Limber, 2007; Pelligrini & Bartini, 2000; Williams & Guerra, 2007); and compared present cyberbullying findings with similar studies (Li, 2006, 2007).

Defining Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying is a form of bullying which uses technology (e.g., cell phones, MySpace, Facebook and other social networking sites, email, webcams, blogs, Internet, text messages, video games) to tease and taunt others. Cyberbullying has been described as a “new territory” (Li, 2007, p. 1778) and “a new form of aggression or bullying” (Slonje & Smith, 2008, p. 147), it may be interpreted as the new school yard. Because of the recent emergence of cyberbullying, it has not been fully researched at this time (Li, 2006, 2007; Slonje & Smith, 2008).

Cyberbullying has been portrayed as another medium for children and adolescents to “aggress against one another” (Kowalski & Limber, 2007, p. 823). Bullying has been clearly identified as a problem; and, approximately 30% of children report issues at school involving direct contact with bullying, being bullied, or a combination of both (Wang, Iannotti & Nansel, 2009). There are two school-related types of bullying. Direct bullying in schools is often physical or verbal aggression, while verbal bullying is often teasing or name calling, with the intent of causing psychological harm.

Research has shown that cyberbullying can be more far reaching and potent than traditional school bullying, for several reasons: (1) technology allows for cyberbullying to reach an “infinite audience” (Shariff, 2005, p. 469), (2) cyberbullying is frequently anonymous (Li, 2006, 2007; Shariff, 2005), (3) harassment is often an element (Li, 2006; Shariff, 2005), (4) cyberbullying “... messages and images also can be distributed quickly to a wide audience” (Kowalski & Limber, 2007, p. 823), and (5)

cyberbullying can be done “at all times and in almost all places” (Mason, 2008, p. 325), using various forms of technology (Li, 2007).

The “invisibility” and “anonymity” of cyberbullying make youth more vulnerable and susceptible to becoming victims (Slonje & Smith, 2008, p. 148), compared to more traditional school yard bullying which is acted upon in face-to-face. While on the other hand, the perceived obscurity of cyberbullying (i.e., no one can identify me) can make those that cyberbully believe they are invincible and not identifiable, thus increasing the risk that adolescents will take advantage of others. Another challenging factor is that adults may not be aware of the events associated with cyberbullying.

Cyberbullying has been found to be especially distressing during adolescence (Li, 2006, 2007) because of dangers, threats, and risks while interacting with technology. For example, one study focused on what youth encounter while online, reporting that online interactions regularly included “bullying, stalking, sexual solicitation, and exposure to pornography” (Mishna, McLuckie, & Saini, 2009, p. 111). This study also noted that youth tend to present “risky behavior” online (Mishna, McLuckie, & Saini, 2009, p. 115).

Cyberbullying is one area in which many youth choose not to talk to their parents (Cassidy et al., 2009; Mishna, McLuckie, & Saini, 2009; Mishna, Saini, & Solomon, 2009; Slonje & Smith, 2008). For example, Slonje and Smith (2008) stated that 50% of the students they studied were not willing to talk to any person about the cyberbullying, while 35.7% talked to a friend, 8.9% talked to a parent or guardian, 5.4% admitted talking to another person, and no students talked to teachers. Another study, also noting the criticality and the lack of communication, stating that “children and youth rarely

mentioned obtaining support from adults, such as parents, teachers, and law enforcement personnel (Mishna, McLuckie, & Saini, 2009, p. 111). In this same light, Cassidy et al. (2009) reported that one-fourth of the students in their study would not tell anyone about cyberbullying incidents experienced.

Cyberbullying differs across gender and grade, with less consistency across studies. For example, while Slonje and Smith (2008) found no significant differences between boys and girls, Li (2006) found that boys were more likely than girls to cyberbully. Conversely, Kowalski and Limber (2007) and Dehue et al. (2008) found that girls were more likely to cyberbully than boys. When grade level was considered, Kowalski and Limber (2007) reported that seventh and eighth grade students were more prone to be engaged in cyberbullying than sixth grade students.

The percentage of students being cyberbullied has also varied across studies. For example, Slonje and Smith (2008) found that 17.6% of the students in their study were cyberbully victims. Li (2006) reported that one-fourth of the students in her study had been cyberbully victims and one-sixth of the students had chosen to cyberbully others in the past.

Researchers have identified a range of cyberbullying approaches to hurt others. Students often become victims of cyberbullying through “instant messaging, chat rooms, e-mail messages, and websites” and those that cyberbully others also use the same methods (Kowalski & Limber, 2007, p. 525). Li (2007) reported email, chat rooms, and a combination of technologies, including cell phones were used to cyberbully and victimize others, while Slonje and Smith (2008) found email and instant messages to be the most prevalent venues used to cyberbully. In a middle school study, Wright,

Burnham, Inman, and Ogorchock (2009) examined the electronic methods used by those that cyberbully and the victims. Of the cyberbully victims, over 52.9% of the middle school students surveyed indicated cyberbullying had occurred on MySpace, 50% noted that cell phones had been used, and 35% said that email had been used. Wright et al. also reported methods used by the cyberbully. MySpace was the most prevalent place to cyberbully, with over 70% reporting they had used the social networking site to bully others, followed by 47% with cell phones, 23% with virtual games, 17% with email, 11% with online videos, and 5% with chat rooms.

Cyberbullying has swiftly become an issue in schools across the U.S. With cyberbullying-related suicides stemming from school taunting (i.e., Jesse Logan [Starr, 2009], Hope Witsell [Inbar, 2009], Phoebe Prince, [McCabe, 2010; McNeil, Herbst, Mascia, & Jessen, 2010]), the need to address cyberbullying has intensified. With the current influx of cyberbullying, school counselors must be prepared to offer support and assistance. Yet, at this time, many school counselors need education and training to help students, faculty, and parents with the related dangers and risks involved with this impenetrable issue.

With this in mind such potential harm to children and adolescents, the following research questions were considered in this current study: (1) Of the students engaged in cyberbullying, are there gender differences?, (2) Of the victims of cyberbullying, are there gender differences?, (3) Are students aware when others are being cyberbullied?, (4) What are student beliefs regarding: (a) "When adults know about cyberbullying, will they try to stop it?", (b) "If you or someone you knew was cyberbullied, what would you do?", (c) "If you were cyberbullied, who would you trust to tell?", and (5) What are

student beliefs regarding: (a) “What do you feel that adults should do once you are cyberbullied?”, (b) “Is there anything that you think adults can do to prevent you from being cyberbullied?”, (c) “What is the most important thing that others should know about cyberbullying?”, and (d) “What can counselors or educators do to stop cyberbullying?”.

Method

Participants

One school system from a southeastern state in the U.S., which serves approximately 10,000 students, was chosen for this study. All five middle schools in the school system were invited and participated. This study included a range of low to high poverty schools. According to data from the school district, about 63% of the students in the school system were eligible for free or reduced lunch.

A convenience sample (based on principal input at each school) of approximately 450 students in Grades 7 and 8 from all five middle schools in one school system were recruited to take an adaptation of Li’s Cyberbullying Survey (2007), which served as the quantitative aspect of this study. Of the potential students with written parental consent, 115 assented, although one dissented. Of the students, 114 took the survey (25% return rate). The 114 students included: 64 females and 50 males, 41 were in 7th grade and 73 were in 8th grade). The racial backgrounds of the students were: 33 White students, 67 African American students, 3 Hispanic/Latino students, 2 Asian American students. Nine students did not identify their racial background.

For the focus groups (i.e., the qualitative aspect of the study), a convenience sample of students was selected from two middle schools. Of the potential students with

written parental consent, all assented to be a part of the study. The participants were in Grades 7 and 8, at two middle schools. There were 14 students (7 males and 7 females). The racial backgrounds of the students were: 5 White students, 8 African American students, and 1 Hispanic/Latino student.

Instrument

The quantitative instrument used in this study was Li's (2007) Cyberbullying Survey. Li gave written permission to use the survey. Before using the survey in five middle schools, several cyberbullying questions were added. There were 8 demographic questions on the Cyberbullying Survey and 17 questions related specifically to cyberbullying (e.g., "I have cyberbullied others," "I was cyberbullied by..."). The questions ranged from multiple choice and "yes/no" options to open-ended questions.

Two of the five schools (one low poverty; one high poverty) were selected for focus group discussions to ensure a diverse representation of students. Data from the focus groups were used to add clarification, feedback, and additional insight about cyberbullying. To ensure consistency across the two schools, a focus group guide was designed and followed (approved by the Internal Review Board committee prior to use). The focus group discussions were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim. Using constant comparative analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), the researchers independently read and re-read the transcribed responses and made notes of repeating themes. Following this independent review, the researchers met and discussed their individual interpretations and noted emergent common themes and responses from the focus group sessions.

Common responses to four specific focus group questions about adult relationships (i.e., parents, educators) were examined.

Procedure

IRB approval was given to the researchers before this study was initiated. With IRB permission, the researchers contacted school administrative system officials to seek approval for the study. Once school system approval was in place, the researchers contacted the principals at five middle schools in the school district. Parental consent forms were given to a convenience sample of students in Grades 7 and 8 at the five schools. Students were asked to bring the consent forms back to their respective homeroom teachers. The teachers were asked to keep the signed consent forms in a confidential place until the researchers returned. The researchers were given the consent forms on the day the survey was administered. The researchers ensured that there was no identifiable information related to a student's name or school and the surveys and consent forms were stored in a locked file to maintain confidentiality.

For the quantitative study, students assented to taking the survey in their respective classrooms. On the day of the survey administration, the researchers read the directions to the survey aloud and then walked around the room to ensure that questions were answered. The students were allowed to stop during the survey, without penalty. Once the surveys were completed, they were given to one of the researchers. For the qualitative study, students also assented to be in the focus groups. On the day of the focus groups, the researchers read the directions aloud, handed out paper for writing down thoughts, and asked open-ended questions found in the focus group

guide. Exact procedures were followed at each school. A university faculty member, trained in counseling, administered or supervised data collection.

For both aspects of the study, procedures were in place to refer students to the school counselor, if a student became upset, or wanted to talk to someone after the survey. No students were referred to the school counselor during or after the survey administration or focus groups.

Results

To prepare school counselors to address cyberbullying, this study focused on methods for school counselors to recognize and understand cyberbullying during the middle school years. Quantitative data offered information about cyberbullying perpetrators and victims and their beliefs and attitudes, while the qualitative data further informed the researchers how students view cyberbullying, steps toward the prevention of cyberbullying, and how adults can prevent cyberbullying. Additionally, these data were compared to the findings of Li (2006, 2007), the author of the Cyberbullying Survey, to note patterns and changes in cyberbullying over the past years.

Quantitative Results About Cyberbullying

This study investigated how 114 students were affected by cyberbullying (i.e., engaged in cyberbullying, victims of cyberbullying, and awareness of cyberbullying). The 114 students answered either “yes” or “no” to the three statements given in Table 1. For the first statement, “I have cyberbullied others,” 17 students (9 girls and 8 boys) reported that they had cyberbullied others, while 97 students (55 girls and 42 boys) stated that they had not cyberbullied others. Of the total students, 14.9% had engaged in cyberbullying. The second statement examined the students who were considered

cyberbullying victims in this study (i.e., “I have been cyberbullied”). Of the students, 34 (16 girls and 18 boys) reported that they had been cyberbullied and 80 students (48 girls and 32 boys) reported that they had not been cyberbullied by others. Of the total students, 29.8% were victims of cyberbullying. The third statement explored student awareness of cyberbullying. Of the students, 52 students (28 girls and 24 boys) reported that they knew of others being cyberbullied (i.e., 45.6% of the total student body were aware of others being cyberbullied). See Table 1 for more details.

Table 1

How Students Are Affected by Cyberbullying

	Total Girls Endorsing “Yes”	Total Boys Endorsing “Yes”	Total Girls Endorsing “No ”	Total Boys Endorsing “No”	Overall Total of “Yes” Endorsements for All Students
Engaged in cyberbullying (i.e., I have cyberbullied others.)	9 (7.9%)	8 (7.0%)	55 (48.2%)	42 (37.0%)	17 (14.9%)
Cyberbullying victim (i.e., I have been cyberbullied.)	16 (14.0%)	18 (15.7%)	48 (42.1%)	32 (28.0%)	34 (29.8 %)
Aware of cyberbullying (i.e., I know someone who has been cyberbullied.)	28 (25.0%)	24 (21.0%)	9 (7.8%)	16 (14.0%)	52 (45.6%)

The 17 students who endorsed “yes” to “I have cyberbullied others” and the 34 students who endorsed “yes” to “I have been cyberbullied” were examined more closely in Table 2. Gender differences and the amount of incidences were disaggregated in Table 2. The students who were engaged in cyberbullying (i.e., the perpetrators) were examined first. Of the 17 students who reported that they had cyberbullied others, 9 (52.8%) were girls. Of the girls, 8 reported less than four cyberbullying incidences, while

one indicated incidences between 4-10 times. Of the boys, 8 (47.0%) reported that they had been cyberbullied, with six reporting incidences of less than four times, 1 with 4-10 incidences, and 1 with over 10 incidences.

Table 2

Cyberbullying Incidences of the Students Who Endorsed “Yes” in Table 1

	Less Than 4 Times	Between 4-10 Times	Over 10 Times	Total/ Percentage
Girls engaged in cyberbullying (i.e., I have cyberbullied others.)	8 (47.0%)	1 (5.8%)	0 (0%)	*9 of 17 (52.8%)
Boys engaged in cyberbullying (i.e., I have cyberbullied others.)	6 (35.3%)	1 (5.8%)	1 (5.8%)	*8 of 17 (47.0%)
Girl victims of cyberbullying (i.e., I have been cyberbullied.)	14 (41.1%)	1 (2.9%)	1 (2.9%)	**16 of 34 (47.0%)
Boy victims of cyberbullying (i.e., I have been cyberbullied.)	11 (32.3%)	3 (8.8%)	4 (11.8%)	**18 of 34 (52.9%)

Note. *Table 1 shows that 17 of the total number of 114 students stated that they had cyberbullied others.

**Table 1 shows that 34 of the total number of 114 students stated that they were cyberbullying victims.

The cyberbullying victims were also reported in Table 2. Of the 34 cyberbullying victims, 16 were girls (47.0%) and 18 were boys (52.9%). Of the girls, 14 reported less than four incidences, while one reported 4-10 times, and one over 10 times. Of the boys, 11 reported less than four incidences, while three reported 4-10 times, and 4 over 10 times.

Males were more likely to be perpetrators and victims of cyberbullying than females (see Table 2). The survey also analyzed whether or not the cyberbully victims

were more likely to cyberbully others. Of the 17 students who reported that they had cyberbullied others, 15 (88.2%) had been victims as well. Of the 34 victims of cyberbullying, 15 (44.1%) reported that they had cyberbullied others, while 19 (55.9%) reported that they had not cyberbullied others.

Similar to Table 2, the 17 students who endorsed “yes” to “I have cyberbullied others” and the 34 students who endorsed “yes” to “I have been cyberbullied” were examined again in Table 3. In Table 3, the Internet use by cyberbullies and victims of cyberbullying across gender was investigated. Of the 17 students who reported that they had cyberbullied others, seven (41.2%) were on the Internet daily or 3-5 times per week. The boys who stated they cyberbullied others had a higher frequency of time on the computer than the girls. As far as gender effects, more of the boys (47.0%) than the girls (29.4%) reported that they had cyberbullied others.

Table 3

Internet Use by Gender and Cyberbullying/Victim Status

	Daily	3-5 times a week	At least 4 times per month	1-3 times per month	Less than once month	Rarely	Total
Girls cyberbullying (i.e., I have cyberbullied others.)	0 (0%)	2 (11.8%)	0 (0%)	1 (5.8%)	0 (0%)	2 (11.8%)	5 of 17 (29.4%)
Boys cyberbullying (i.e., I have cyberbullied others.)	3 (17.6%)	2 (11.8%)	1 (5.8%)	1 (5.8%)	1 (5.8%)	0 (0%)	8 of 17 (47.0%)
Girl victims of cyberbullying (i.e., I have been cyberbullied.)	4 (11.8%)	6 (17.6%)	0 (0%)	1 (2.9%)	1 (2.9%)	4 (11.8%)	16 of 34 (47.0%)

Table 3 (continued)*Internet Use by Gender and Cyberbullying/Victim Status*

	Daily	3-5 times a week	At least 4 times per month	1-3 times per month	Less than once month	Rarely	Total
Boy victims of cyberbullying (i.e., I have been cyberbullied.)	4 (11.8%)	7 (20.6%)	3 (8.8%)	2 (5.8%)	1 (2.9%)	1 (2.9%)	18 of 34 (52.9%)

Note. *Table 1 shows that 17 of the total number of 114 students stated that they had cyberbullied others.

**Table 1 shows that 34 of the total number of 114 students stated that they were cyberbullying victims

The results from students who were cyberbullied were also analyzed in Table 3. Of the 34 students who indicated that they had been cyberbullied (i.e., victims of cyberbullying), 16 were girls and 18 were boys. Of the cyberbullied students, 61.8% reported that they were on the Internet daily or between 3-5 times a week. However, in contrast, 20.5% of those who were cyberbullied were on the computer rarely to less than once a month.

The Cyberbullying Survey (Li 2006, 2007) also shed light on student beliefs and attitudes toward cyberbullying. Of the students, 72.8% believed that when adults know about cyberbullying, they would attempt to stop it. Sixty percent of the males and 82.8% of the females believed that adults would intervene and curtail cyberbullying. When asked, "If you or someone you knew was cyberbullied, what would you do?", 71% would tell an adult and 12% would not talk to anyone. Other options offered for this question included: avoidance, reciprocating the cyberbullying, and avoiding the site or the cyberbully. When asked, "If you were cyberbullied, who would you trust to tell?",

approximately 60% trusted their parents enough to talk to them, while 25% trusted friends, and 15% trusted school personnel, including counselors and teachers.

Qualitative Results About Cyberbullying

Qualitative data were also collected to consider additional information about middle school students' views of cyberbullying. Data included what middle school students perceive adults should do to deal with cyberbullying, prevention, middle school knowledge of cyberbullying, and how adults can stop cyberbullying. Following the researchers' reading and re-reading of the focus group transcriptions, the following data reflect the most common comments made by the middle school students.

Focus Group Questions

Four open-ended focus group questions were used to consider new perspectives about cyberbullying among middle school students. The questions followed by student responses were:

1. "What do you feel that adults should do once you are cyberbullied?" In general, the middle school students wanted adults to be reasonable, a common theme throughout the focus group conversations. Over one-half of the students answered that parents "...should not lash out at them. The students preferred to be encouraged to stop going to the places where cyberbullying occurred. Other student responses included, "They should block the person," "Report the person," and "Talk to the bully.
2. "Is there anything that you think adults can do to prevent you from being cyberbullied?" Student answers varied but referred to boundaries as they

suggested that parents should "...take away technology," "should restrict the site," or "monitor the sites you visit."

3. In answering the question, "What is the most important thing that others should know about cyberbullying?," most of the middle school students indicated an overall awareness of cyberbullying prevention and coping. The students responded with statements such as, "Just don't do it! Stop," "Act like it does not bother you," "Tell parents, teachers, or the counselor," "Try not to be a target," "Don't take it into you own hands," and "Gossiping leads to cyberbullying," "That it is not worth it... Just ignore it," and "Don't take it personally..."
4. "What can counselors or educators do to stop cyberbullying?" The overarching theme in the responses to this question was that the students wanted and needed ongoing assistance and help in dealing with cyberbullying. Five students responded with the following thoughts, while the majority acknowledged (nodded/agreed) with these thoughts in the focus groups. The answers were "find out who is doing cyberbullying," "find out where cyberbullying occurs," "warn you that it may happen; give you a few ways to effectively deal with it," "educate students about cyberbullying," and "get someone who can help us when we need it."

Discussion

The quantitative intent of this study was to gain insight about middle school students and cyberbullying through the use of the Cyberbullying Survey (Li, 2006, 2007) and to compare results of this study to Li (2006, 2007). This aspect of the study focused

on cyberbullying perpetrators, victims, and whether or not students were aware of cyberbullying, as well as investigating student beliefs about cyberbullying.

The first aim of the study was to consider gender differences among students engaged in cyberbullying. In one study, Li (2006) found that 22% of the boys and 12% of the girls were engaged in cyberbullying behaviors. Unlike Li (2006), this study had a slightly higher percentage of cyberbullying behaviors among the girls (7.9%) than the boys (7.0%), and a lower total percentage (14.9%). As described earlier, gender differences with cyberbullying have been ambiguous across studies. For example, Slonje and Smith (2008) found no significant gender differences, while two studies found that girls were more likely to cyberbully than boys (Dehue et al., 2008; Kowalski & Limber, 2007). Taken as a whole, this aspect of the study indicated less cyberbullying than expected. While Cassidy et al. [2008] and Li [2007] reported approximately 25% of the students were found to cyberbully others, this study reported nearly 15%. Thus, even though gender remains inconsistent across cyberbullying studies, this study as well as other studies, (i.e., Cassidy et al., 2008; Li, 2007), alert school counselors to consider that approximately 15% to 25% of the student body are likely to cyberbully others.

The second aim of this study was to consider gender differences among the victims of cyberbullying. Fifty-four percent of the students in Li's study (2007) had been victims of cyberbullying. In contrast, this study had significantly less cyberbullying victims, at about 30%. However, from the data, it was concluded that almost twice as many students were willing to admit being victims than cyberbully perpetrators (i.e.,

14.9% cyberbullies, 29.8% victims). Again, this information can be helpful for school counselors and other school personnel who observe and work youth.

When the results related to victims were compared to Li (2006), the girls in this study reported less victimization (i.e., Li reported 25% for girls, this study reported 14.0%). With boys, Li (2006) described 25% of boys as victims, by comparison this study reported 15.7% of the boys as victims. Overall, while Li (2006) found that approximately 25% of the student body was victims of cyberbullying, this study had a higher percentage (29.8%). Similar to Li (2006), we reported a slightly higher proportion of boys as victims of cyberbullying than girls. The fact that boys are cyberbully victims more than girls should be noted. Such results show a need for intervention for both genders, but potentially more for boys. This is another area for school counselors to be keenly watchful.

The third aim of this study was to assess whether or not students were aware of cyberbullying. While Li (2006) found that 55.6% of the boys and 54.5% of the girls were aware of others being cyberbullied, this study found that 21.0% of the boys and 25.0% of the girls acknowledged awareness. Compared to Li (2006), the students in this study reported less awareness of cyberbullying issues, with girls showing slightly more than boys. Approximately 50% of the students in the study knew others who had been cyberbullied. This suggests that students may be able to help adults identify cyberbullies or victims. Yet, at the same time, we are reminded that students often fail to communicate about cyberbullying incidents either known to them or experienced by others (Cassidy et al., 2009; Slonje & Smith, 2008) and unfortunately, we believe that some adolescents who participated in the study were more aware of cyberbullying than

they initially admitted. Also, these findings may indicate that some students may cyberbully others or may be victims of cyberbullying without their full awareness of this phenomenon. This speaks to the need for school counselors to educate and raise awareness about the nature and consequences of cyberbullying (Wright et al., 2009).

The fourth aim of this study was to review student beliefs regarding three specific cyberbullying-related questions. The questions were: (a) “When adults know about cyberbullying, will they try to stop it?”, (b) “If you or someone you knew was cyberbullied, what would you do?”, and (c) “If you were cyberbullied, who would you trust to tell?”. The questions were addressed separately to offer information to counselors.

For the first question in the series, the students differed somewhat from what has been reported in prior studies. While Li (2007) reported that 67% of students believed adults would attempt to stop cyberbullying, vast studies have shown youths’ unwillingness to talk about cyberbullying issues with their parents (Cassidy et al., 2009; Mishna, McLuckie, & Saini, 2009; Mishna, Saini, & Solomon, 2009; Slonje & Smith, 2008). Thus, similar to Li (2007) and in contrast to previous studies, the students in this study reported an increased amount of confidence in adults. Approximately 72.8% of the students believed that adults would assist with cyberbullying concerns.

The second question in this series prompted a variety of comments among the students. Li (2007) reported that 54% of the students were aware of cyberbullying of others, yet posited that most students elect to be “bystanders of cyberbullying” (p. 1787). In this study, over 70% stated that they would do something, possibly suggesting a lessened amount of passive witnessing by this group of students. Of the students,

71% stated that they would tell an adult, 12% would not talk to anyone, and the remaining suggested that they would counter the cyberbully, avoid the site, or avoid the cyberbully.

For the third question in the series, approximately 60% of the students trusted their parents enough to talk to them, while 25% trusted friends, and 15% trusted school personnel, including counselors and teachers. While trust in adults has varied across cyberbullying research (Cassidy et al., 2009; Slonje & Smith, 2008), this study revealed more trustworthiness in adults. Overall, the answers to the three questions were encouraging and positive. The results suggest that school counselors and other helping professionals have the potential to utilize positive role models among the students to enhance preventative cyberbullying measures and to approach some students about supporting and assisting their peers. However, on the other hand, the focus group interviews revealed that some students experienced disengagement with teachers, similar to what Cassidy et al. (2009) and Mishna, McLuckie, and Saini (2009) described, suggesting that confidence in their teachers' interest in them had been shaken. With severed communication lines with teachers, the school counselor's resourcefulness and assistance becomes even more essential and the need to "be there" for students must take precedence.

The qualitative intent of this study was to assess what adolescents need from adults when cyberbullying occurs. The questions asked were: (a) "What do you feel that adults should do once you are cyberbullied?", (b) "Is there anything that you think adults can do to prevent you from being cyberbullied?", (c) "What is the most important thing that others should know about cyberbullying?", and (d) "What can counselors or

educators do to stop cyberbullying?”. Several themes emerged from the student responses that are worth noting.

The first question explored what students want from adults after cyberbullying had occurred. The students were mature in their responses and endorsed Kowalski and Limber’s (2007) view that adults “should be proactive in discussing” cyberbullying (p. 529). Based on the remarks from the focus groups, students want supportive parents who are willing to work with them. They prefer contemplative help from adults, rather than the often-illustrated overreactions (e.g., parents “overreact or lash out at them” rather than problem-solve). Based on the focus group interactions, excessive measures taken by parents inhibit communication. In other words, parents need to work judiciously, fairly, and logically after an infraction so that adolescents will return to them when future problems transpire.

Regarding the question about what adults can do to prevent students from being cyberbullied; students were mature with their responses. The students expected parents to restrict and monitor the websites they visited. Students discussed the need for parental involvement and monitoring when problems occur, preferring parents to react sensibly and listen “... to the ... cyber predicaments and to help them problem solve their situation” (Mishna, McLuckie, and Saini, 2009, p. 116). The students wanted a balance of boundaries and a level of autonomy and trust from their parents.

When asked about the most important thing that others should know about cyberbullying, students included: ignoring (“Act like it does not bother you,” “Don’t take it into your own hands”), talking to adults (“Tell parents, teachers, or the counselor”), avoiding (“Try not to be a target”), and acknowledging one reason cyberbullying ignites

in middle school (“Gossiping leads to cyberbullying”). The answers appeared to reveal a level of progress with cyberbullying awareness because the students verbalized proper steps to take against cyberbullying. Nonetheless, school counselors, teachers, and other school personnel, as well as stakeholders and parents must continually reinforce the responsible steps the students outlined. Developmentally speaking, even when adolescents know correct measures (described in our interactions), they still respond impulsively and incorrectly at times, and cyberbullying concerns are no exception to this rule.

The last question offered students an opportunity to tell counselors and educators how to improve our quest to stop cyberbullying. The emerging theme reflected several types of assistance. The adolescents told us that they want adults to help find the perpetrators, to be knowledgeable about where cyberbullying occurs, and to warn that cyberbullying happens. They also want adult assistance individually (e.g., “listen when we need to talk”) and collectively (e.g., “educate students about cyberbullying,” “give you a few ways to effectively deal with it,” and “get someone who can help us when we need it”). Overall, the assistance requested by the adolescents was insightful. Based on their responses, much of their needs can be provided through counseling services traditionally offered in schools (i.e., methods to assist include individual counseling, small group counseling, and classroom guidance). Knowledge of what adolescents need in terms of help from adults should reassure and guide school counselors as they attempt to ensure safety for all students.

There were several limitations to this study. The students represented one school district in one state, thus limiting generalizability. Like Dehue et al. (2008), we believe

that some students responded to the survey and the focus groups with “socially desirable answers,” resulting in an “underestimated” (p. 221) account of cyberbullying. We also believe that some who did not agree to participate may have declined to avoid discussing a potentially sensitive issue.

Implications and Directions for Future Research

This preliminary study on cyberbullying in middle school offers insight to school counselors and other helping professionals who assist adolescents. First, this study emphasizes that a joint effort by a diverse group of professional educators (with school counselors at the forefront) is needed to combat cyberbullying. We believe, as Li (2006) illustrated, that “education dealing with cyberbullying related issues should be a joint endeavor of schools, families, communities and the whole society” (p. 167). Second, school counselors must be well informed and educated about cyberbullying. School counselors, as leaders, should consider three goals in relation to cyberbullying. The goals are to: (1) educate and raise awareness about cyberbullying to all (students, parents, school personnel, community stakeholders) (Wright et al., 2009), (2) inform parents and teachers about youths’ resistance to talking about cyberbullying issues (Cassidy et al., 2009; Mishna, McLuckie, & Saini, 2009; Mishna, Saini, & Solomon, 2009; Slonje & Smith, 2008) and how their own dynamics (i.e., overreaction or lack of interest) can amplify the potential breakdown in communication, and (3) move schools and communities toward cyberbullying intervention and prevention plans. As technology continues to grow exponentially, school counselors must “develop appropriate preventive and intervention strategies to ensure safety of all students” (Li, 2007, p. 1780).

We believe that the adolescents in this study were open to talking to trusted adults, more than what was found in previous studies. Second, the study reminds adults about the importance of communication with youth, and the need to take the first steps toward communication, since young people often do not initiate consultation. The literature (Cassidy et al., 2009; Mishna, McLuckie, & Saini, 2009; Mishna, Saini, & Solomon, 2009; Slonje & Smith, 2008) repeats that youth often talk more to peers than adults. Third, in this study the adolescents verbalized correct actions to avoid cyberbullying or to keep it from escalating. Fourth, the focus groups underlined and reverberated a simplistic, but important discovery for all school counselors to hear -- the essentiality to listen to students, especially when today's teachers are often engaged with educational tasks that divert them from reaching out to students and parents are not available for innumerable reasons. Fifth, with cyberbullying, like many other complex issues that adolescents face, school counselors must listen empathically, build and maintain trust, and take appropriate actions when crises occur. School counselors must not only intervene, but they must put cyberbullying prevention in motion for the school and community. Table 4 defines cyberbullying and offers thoughts for school counselors to consider from the literature.

Table 4

Cyberbullying Defined

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1. may not occur on school grounds, but the effects spread into the classroom and across the school campus. Based on recent estimations (Cassidy et al., 2008; Li, 2007), as well as this study, one could speculate that up to 25% of your student body could be cyberbullies and up to 25% could be cyberbully victims.
 2. effects are more detrimental than they appear. Numerous cyberbullying-related suicides resulted in 2009 and 2010 after taunting at school became overwhelming (i.e., Jesse Logan [Starr, 2009], Hope Witsell [Inbar, 2009], Phoebe Prince, [McCabe, 2010; McNeil, Herbst, Mascia, & Jessen, 2010]).

Table 4 (continued)*Cyberbullying Defined*

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3. can be a covert form of bullying. Teachers, parents, and other adults must be educated, alert, and aware of their youth's behaviors (Wright et al., 2009).
 4. is most likely to occur during the middle school years. This age is the "most inclined toward online bullying" (Cassidy et al., 2009, p. 385; Hinduja & Patchin, 2008; Kowalski & Limber, 2007; Pelligrini & Bartini, 2000; Williams & Guerra, 2007).
 5. is not a topic that youth discuss openly with their parents (Cassidy et al., 2009; Mishna, McLuckie, & Saini, 2009; Mishna, Saini, & Solomon, 2009; Slonje & Smith, 2008). Adults should not wait for adolescents to come to them with cyberbullying issues, instead adults must be "proactive in discussions" with youth (Kowalski & Limber, 2007, p. 529).
 6. occurs through a variety of methods, including cell phones, instant messaging, emails, chat rooms, texting, and video games (Kowalski & Limber, 2007; Li, 2007; Slonje and Smith, 2008; Wright et al., 2009).
 7. utilizes technologies many adolescents consider adults to be unaware and uninformed. It is important for adults to be aware and educated on the technologies used to cyberbullying (Wright et al., 2009).
 8. is not a topic youth often discuss with teachers (Cassidy et al., 2009; Mishna, McLuckie, & Saini, 2009; Slonje & Smith, 2008). Over-reactions or a lack of interest could amplify this lack of communication in the future.
 9. will likely occur at some point with youth. When it happens, "listen to the...cyber predicaments and ... help them problem solve their situation" (Mishna, McLuckie, & Saini, 2008, p. 116).
 10. "related issues should be a joint endeavor of schools, families, communities, and the whole society" (Li, 2006, p. 167).
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Further research on cyberbullying is indicated and needed. As offered earlier, cyberbullying literature remains "scarce and characterized by a lack of conceptual clarity" (Vandebosch & Van Cleemput, 2008, p. 499). Cyberbullying researchers should pay attention to the call of Vandebosch and Van Cleemput. While this present study was a preliminary examination of cyberbullying, it offered some validation of previous work and also disputed certain findings in the literature (e.g., lower amount of cyberbullies, gender differences). Such disparities in this study, as well as in other studies, underline the need for future cyberbullying research. While this study revealed

that strides in the struggle against cyberbullying have occurred, significant challenges remain.

With technology's widespread pervasiveness, issues related to cyberbullying will likely continue to expand across schools and communities in the future. Thus, as researchers are summoned to continue their investigations of cyberbullying, school counselors must strive to be educated, prepared, and ready to assist with the cyberbullying issues present in their schools today and tomorrow.

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